

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

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# Introduction





# The Study Days

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The Study Days are a development of the *Seminar for Missionary Animation and Formation* organised for many years now by the SDB and FMA Missions Departments. Unlike the Seminar, however, the Study Days are not intended to be an occasion for the animation and formation of missionaries. They are meant rather to foster reflective discussions and a deeper contextualised reflection on the **initial proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar** in order to arrive at a more profound understanding of the challenges and to achieve new insights and perspectives focused on rediscovering the relevance of this proclamation today. Hence, the Study Days are directed primarily to Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with a certain level of either theological, missiological, anthropological or academic formation.

For this six-year period *initial proclamation*, as the start of the rich, dynamic, and complex process of evangelisation, was chosen as the overriding theme of the SDB-FMA Study Days in all continents. These Study Days build on the *Seminars on Missionary Animation and Formation* in 2004, *Mission 'Ad Gentes' Today in Africa* (Nairobi) and *Les Défis de la Mission 'Ad Gentes' en Afrique* (Kinshasa).

**Is the topic on initial proclamation still relevant in Africa and Madagascar today?** *Redemptoris Missio* insists that initial proclamation “**is the permanent priority of mission.**” It “has a central and irreplaceable role” in the Church’s mission because “all forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation” (n. 44). Joseph Gevaert points out that the **recipients of Initial Proclamation** are not only those considered to be “non-Christians” but “**those who do not know Christ**” because it includes the **unbaptised as well as the baptised** who do not personally know Jesus Christ.

The Church feels “the urgency of proclaiming the Good News to the millions of people in Africa who are not yet evangelised” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 47). This way it could “recover the ardour of the beginnings of the evangelisation of the African continent” (*Africae Munus*, 164) and “bring about this overwhelming and exhilarating experience of Jesus Christ who calls each one to follow him in an adventure of faith” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 57).

*Initial proclamation* has as its goal “stirring up” an interest in Jesus Christ in view of a personal adhesion or a revitalisation of faith in Christ. Without this initial conversion and initial personal faith catechesis risks becoming sterile. Initial proclamation, then, leads to the next stage of the evangelisation process that is the *catechumenate* and the consequent Rites of Christian Initiation, and continues through catechesis and sacramental life (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21-24).

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

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

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

Besides Sr. Maike Loes FMA and Fr. Alfred Maravilla SDB as moderators of the Study Days, Sr. Ruth del Pilar Mora FMA and Fr. Alexius Mulongu SDB, as facilitators, had the crucial task 1) of collating the situation reports of participants and presenting their synthesis at the start of the Study Days, 2) of synthesising the discussions each day and pointing out emerging insights and views expressed by the different perspectives of the participants 3) and of formulating a final synthesis of the entire event outlining the challenges as well as new missiological and theological insights and perspectives regarding initial proclamation in Africa and Madagascar.

The Acts of the Study Days are published with various activity sheets to facilitate the use of these materials by the local communities (even those in other contexts) for the on-going formation of their members and, hence, to foster a deeper and wider reception of the new perspectives and insights emerging from these Study Days among Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Africa and Madagascar.

# Welcome message

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Sr. Roberta Tomasi, FMA  
*Provincial superior of the Salesian Sisters of Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan - AES*

I welcome you dear Sisters and Confreres to Addis Ababa, the city where the members of the African Union hold important meetings of common interest for all the African Countries. There is a kind of “African Union” in this room today and for the next few days.

Praying about this meeting, I asked myself one question: “What makes my life meaningful for the reality in which I am called to live?” It is not what I do but who I am! I want to live my life and my baptismal, religious, missionary and Salesian vocation without compromise, I want to live my commitment with my community, and with the people I meet every day.

We can build big schools. We can write projects. We can look for benefactors, but let us not forget that those who meet us are expecting a smile, a kind word... a piece of our heart.

At times, too much work and too few members in the community make us to forget that “to do” is a consequence of “to be” and that “I” is important only if it is inserted in a “we” that is the Salesian community. We are called to give testimony of people who are not afraid of working but who are attentive to the person. We are called to give testimony of people who are happy to live together, of people who work as community and who communicate an experience rather than an idea.

I hope that during these days of reflection we may also look for convincing ways to be Religious and Salesians who live an experience that cannot keep be kept silent and which is visible through our way of being among us and with others.



# And you, what do you say of me?

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

Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

This is a beautiful, precious opportunity to meet with you as you begin the *Study Days on the **Salesian Mission and the First Proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar today.***

*“When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples: ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And you, who do you say I am?” (Mt 16: 13-20).*

These are two interesting questions that reveal Jesus’ interest. They show His curiosity in getting to know the opinion people have about him, and what His disciples think about him. These are two questions that follow one another logically beginning from the actual context. I think that these, and other similar questions, will accompany us during these days and will be an inspiration to us.

What does an Africa with increasingly plural cultures, religions, intellectual, and human sensitivity say about Jesus of Nazareth? About the God of Jesus who is playing a significant role in the construction of Africa and Madagascar? About the interests of men of women searching for meaning, truth, and eternal life? If so, under what conditions?

These are interesting questions that raise new interests.

In the scenario of this epochal change in which we are all involved, Jesus asks each of us: *and you, what do you say of me?*

What new meaning of life do we discover in Him here in the “today” of our existence?

The person of Jesus and His message of freedom and hope for all touch us deeply. Our faith in Him and our trust in believing that Jesus is renewing our lives and those of others challenge us.

It enables us to be able to give an account of our faith and hope in

language that is understandable to the people, because we are with them. In so doing, our preference is for simple, practical ways, embodied in the story of the people, with its frailty and human achievement.

Perhaps we have to *be born again*, like Nicodemus, to discover the surprises of God, the breath of the Spirit, the diverse, mysterious ways He manifests His interest in us.

*“Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above”. (...) “That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. 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 born of the Spirit” (cf. Jn 3:3-8).*

We are aware that in the past we took the knowledge of Jesus for granted. The family, the environment, the school, the parish, all pastoral and catechetical activity presupposed it. Today, some scholars consider the proclamation of Jesus to be a forgotten link in the chain. Today, we are faced with the second and third generation of young people, born after 1968, who are *apart from God* because no one has helped them to meet Him. As we face the young immigrants belonging to other religions or professing other faiths, we need once again to bring to birth the hope and surprises of God. We need small *Christian missionary communities* who live the discovery of the signs of the times, reflecting on the **first proclamation of Jesus** so as to be able to announce it through their gestures and words (cf. EE, nn. 46, 50).

Today many churches and diocesan communities are becoming more aware of this urgency and need, as you have been able to see in your research.

*An Africa that advances in a joyful and living manner manifests the glory of God, as St. Irenaeus tells us: “The glory of God is man who is fully alive”. But he immediately adds: “The life of man is the vision of God”. For this reason, even today, the essential task of the Church is that of bringing the message of the Gospel to the heart of African society, of leading it toward the vision of God. Just as salt gives flavor to food, this message will create persons who live it through authentic witness. How many grow in this way, becoming capable of reconciling themselves in Jesus Christ! They become light for their brothers and sisters. So it is that with the Fathers of the Synod, I invite “the Church in Africa to be wit-*

nesses in the service of reconciliation, justice, and peace, like the ‘salt of the earth’ and the ‘light of the world’” so that its life may respond to this appeal: “Arise, Church in Africa, family of God, because your heavenly Father is calling you”<sup>1</sup>. It is in this existential place that we desire to **propose this first proclamation of Jesus.**

In the situation of Africa today, the Church is called to make the voice of Christ heard. This call is to follow the recommendation of Jesus to Nicodemus who asked about the possibility of re-birth: “You must be born from on High” (Jn 3:7). Missionaries have proposed to the African people this new birth “from water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5), the Good News that every person has the right to hear so as to be able to fully carry out his/her vocation. The Church in Africa lives this inheritance. Because of Christ and fidelity to His life lesson, it feels urged to be present there, where humanity knows suffering, and to make of itself an echo of the silent cry of innocent people who are persecuted, or of people whose rulers mortgage the present and the future in the name of personal interest. With its capacity to recognize the face of Christ in that child, that invalid, the person who is suffering or in need, the Church contributes toward slowly but solidly forging a new Africa. In its prophetic role, every time the people cry out: “Sentinel, how much is left of the night?” (Is 21:11), the Church wants to be ready to give reason to the hope that it carries in self (cf. 1 Pt 3:15), because a new dawn rises on the horizon (cf. Ap 22:5). Only the refusal to accept the dehumanization and compromise of the person, even with the fear of facing martyrdom, will serve the cause of the Gospel and of truth. “In the world”, Christ tells us, “you will have tribulations, but have courage, I have conquered the world!” (Jn 16:33). Real peace comes from Christ (cf. Jn 14:27).

It is not the result of negotiations or of diplomatic agreements based on personal interests. It is the peace of a humanity reconciled with itself in God, and of which the Church is the sacrament<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* of his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace - 19 November 2011, n. 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Africae Munus*, n. 30

We know by faith that the Spirit is working in African and Malagasy lands. The call to be signs of God's love must come from the African and Malagasy reality and no other. Today Africa and Madagascar are the Galilee of the Gentiles where the Lord sends us - **"Go"** because there He awaits us. **We are faced with a mystery of grace, gift, and responsibility.**

We find ourselves here, as representatives of Africa and Madagascar we find ourselves here to learn, dialogue, and share together on the *first proclamation of Jesus in the actual context* in which we find ourselves.

We have chosen the small group format to facilitate dialogue and meeting. The topic has required prayer, seeking, reflection, and discernment. It is from this perspective that we want to live these days full of faith and still bearers of abundant hope, discovering and allowing ourselves to be surprised by the Spirit of the Lord in the practicality of life and of our mission.

We want to face the approach to the *first proclamation* of Jesus in today's Africa and Madagascar:

- ✓ from the perspective of the incarnation: ***The center of the proclamation is Jesus of Nazareth, the God with a human face, the most surprising sign of love*** (cf. Eph 3:18-19), ***of God***. He witnessed to and proclaimed that God is in constant rapport with humanity and the cosmos. He made God's mission visible'
- ✓ in a ***Church that is constantly being re-born when it allows itself to be pushed toward "others" by the Spirit, toward the new frontiers of mission. It is a Church that is formed by small Christian communities that tend toward communion***; they are people on a journey, open to dialogue, and in service to the poor, making themselves poor. It is a pilgrim Church, participating in ***God's mission*** (cf. LG, AG<sup>3</sup>; RM, 1, 4, 7, 22, 23, 32)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The Ad Gentes of the Vatican provides in first place a strong and coherent reason, of considerable theological depth, of this nature: the Church is in mission because it was, by grace, assumed in the *missio Dei*, the very mission of God, in creation, in redemption, and in continual sanctification.

<sup>4</sup> "The Church cannot certainly abandon the fundamental experience of Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate, the Son of God who came into the world for the salvation of all. In virtue of its vocation, the Church feels bound to the obligation to proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior. At the same time, however, a Church that lives in a pluralistic world cannot neg-



Born in Vatican II, this Church is always becoming more aware that the mission of God cannot be realized by itself. We know by tradition<sup>5</sup> and faith that God, through His Spirit, today continues His saving/freeing presence in the world in a surprising, unknown way “in the hearts of men/women of good will, working invisibly through grace”, says GS n. 22, RM, 6, 10, 28; 56.

God is involved in history and therefore the signs of His work are visible.

Because of this we see a positive attitude of trust and hope in human existence, in the experience of individuals, in the practical situations of “other, distant” young people (who are different because of faith, ethnicity, culture, sensitivity), of the evolution of history and science. And there is more. This reality requires new persons, with a more personal, adult faith that allows for *the discerning and critical confrontation of self with others*, to glimpse the signs of God’s action.

During these days, the center, the priority of our sharing will be *the first proclamation of Jesus*. This priority is to be considered in relationship and interdependence with the other dimensions of the mission. The proclamation cannot forget the commitment to create Christian communities in the process of interculturalization of the Gospel, the commitment for justice, peace, intercultural, the rights of people, the practice of inter-religious dialogue and the reconciliation between persons and peoples. *The mission of the Church today is pluri-dimensional* because it is traversed by difference elements that are similar and interdependent. Furthermore, we know that *witness and the proclamation of Jesus are inseparable*. Paul VI wrote that the first means of evangelization is the witness of a life that is authentically Christian (cf. EN, 41). We read in the document that *Dialogue and Proclamation* it is the foundation, the center, and the highest point of Evangelization. As for Jesus, His mission was characterized by both words and works that explained one another. His parables

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lect 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.

<sup>5</sup> Ireneus speaks of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit as the two hands of God. This signifies that God places Himself in direct rapport with the work both in Christ and in the Spirit. God is involved in the history of the world through the working of the Holy Spirit and the incarnation of the Son.

and teaching were prophetic pronouncements that frequently contradicted the tendency of wisdom and religious practice that were commonly accepted at the time; His healings and exorcisms were parables in action, and His practice of including among the disciples and welcoming at his table those who were on the margins of society, was a powerful testimony of the validity of his teaching<sup>6</sup>.

The act of proclaiming, like that of witnessing to the person and message of Jesus both on the personal level and that of the individual communities and institutions, takes the *context* seriously. The history of the mission shows the need to narrate, to communicate faith in Jesus with the new understandings and emphasis required by the era and geographic and cultural area. In times of colonization and exploitation, the Gospel had to include a clear word on the humanity of all people. In the era of globalization, the gospel must recognize the anthropological value of the local culture and contexts and side decisively with the victims and with justice.

***In a post-modern world, particular attention must be given to the proclamation of Jesus as the only true Savior of the world, notwithstanding the real validity of other religious ways.***

In a complex work that is attentive to human rights and aware of the truth found in all religions, we could be tempted to weaken the influence and impact of the prophetic tradition of the *first proclamation of Jesus*, by merely satisfying ourselves with a hidden, private witness that could end up by assuming postmodern causes, a consumer society and capitalist game, or emptying ourselves of faith in Jesus of Nazareth. “*When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*” (cf. Lk 18:8).

Furthermore, in a world marked by growing religious violence and by new religious phenomena, a few of which are sectarian and fluid, we could be tempted to choose a style of witness and proclamation of Jesus that could be too vigorous, invasive, and presumptuous, and neglect the values of tolerance, secularism, freedom, and dialogue that modern times have given us as a precious heritage.

At all costs, the mission of proclaiming/witnessing to Jesus must be one of *dialogue*, because in the ultimate analysis it is nothing more than

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<sup>6</sup> Dialogue and the Proclamation. Reflections and guidelines on inter-religious dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ 1991, nn. 56-57.

the participation in the dialoguing nature of God, one in three, of His Mission. However, it must also be *prophetic because* essentially there can be no real dialogue when the *truth, Jesus of Nazareth*, is not expressed and articulated clearly and without compromise.

By proclaiming and witnessing to Jesus and to the Kingdom of the Father in prophetic dialogue that is *daring and humble*, the Church in Africa and Madagascar will today be creatively faithful and significant, *even though it is a minority. It will be salt and light* in the world.

At the same time, we are convinced that carrying out the witness/proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth in a new way in educational practices and in daily life while in dialogue with the socio/cultural/religious situations of young people and adults, will contribute toward the strengthening of the Preventive System in Africa, making it ever more meaningful and present.

To us is left the *joy and struggle of interpreting*, of understanding what God is telling us through the words, the conversations of men and women of these times: *What are people saying of me?* What words are placed on our lips to communicate Jesus, His eternal Word, and the Kingdom that He witnessed to in words and works? Discovering the gift of God in others and offering that which we have received is ultimately a reciprocal witness/proclamation.

The *First Proclamation* is a task entrusted to us as a grace and responsibility in keeping with the continuity of Christian tradition. From this follows the urgency of getting to know the documents of the Universal and diocesan Church, of the experiences of individuals/institutions that we know, beginning from the depths of our being and our formation as Salesians acting on the threshold or frontier, seeking, however, *to avoid abstractions and paths already traveled*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> On the new signs of hope, Fr. Mauro Johri OFMA Union of Superiors General, said: "I am very pleased to know that here and there, my brothers are working hard to get out of this impasse. I refer for example to the Capuchin Franciscan at the Festival of Emilia Romagna, who, last fall during a weekend, brought the Word to the streets of Reggio Emilia. (...) The Franciscans of Poland did the same on the occasion of the celebration of the 'eighth centenary of the *Proto* rule: they went two by two to the square to meet the people speaking to them of Jesus. The first fruit of their act was to discover that this was possible and that there are people willing to listen".

May Mary continue to indicate the new ways of listening to the Spirit for the life, joy, and hope of Africa and Madagascar, especially among the young people most in need.

I wish you a good experience of dialogue, of seeking together, of communion and of a *First Proclamation*. Thank you!

# To become ever more and more missionaries!

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Fr. Václav Klement, SDB  
*Councillor for the missions*

How are you? I am coming from Rome, after one week in Japan and two months in Argentina. In few days, I experienced four different continents but with the same basic challenge of all disciples of Jesus: to become ever more and more HIS missionaries!

First, I bring you heartfelt greetings from the Father of the Salesian Family, the Rector Major, Fr. Pascual Chávez Villanueva, just few days after his participation with other 15 SDB and FMA in the Synod about the 'New Evangelisation'. I bring his warm greetings and blessings to all of you.

It is a **great gift of God to live as Catholic Christians in Africa**. The youngest and ever-growing Catholic communities of Africa contribute in many ways to the worldwide Catholic Church. Every time I am in Africa, the family spirit, dynamic faith and outreaching Christian communities committed to the Gospel, give me a deep sense of joy and hope!

During these days, we are called to **re-discover the dynamics of the initial proclamation of the Gospel**. It is about the first step in the life-long journey of faith, which the whole SDB Congregation pays attention to the coming years. Indeed the topic of the Salesian Mission Day 2013 is focused on the JOURNEY OF FAITH in Africa. These Study Days will help us to make the best of the 2013 Salesian Mission Day dynamics as well.

After many months of preparation, we are together here in Addis Ababa: Salesians of Don Bosco and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from almost all African Provinces. It is already the **third Regional Missionary Formation event since 1999**. As in other continents each 6 years the Salesians and Salesian Sisters shared together a formation opportunity on themes: Project Africa - between the challenges of first evangelization and consolidation (Yaoundé May 1999, Nairobi May 2000) and

Mission Ad Gentes today in Africa (Kinshasa, Nairobi - November 2004. After the GC26 of the SDB (2008) this opportunity is called 'Mission Study Days' and the focus is not so much on formation of many missionaries, but it's more an occasion to reflect deeply on some dynamics in the whole evangelising mission.

Regarding the theme of **the initial proclamation of Jesus**, for us Salesians it means to question the missionary action of the Church and of the Congregation. It is a crucial question for the whole path of evangelisation and education. At the start of these Study Days, I invite you to consider some important elements:

1. All of us are in touch with some young people who are not Christian, hence we are called to **discover the opportunities and dynamics** of initial proclamation in our daily life;
2. We are called to **confirm the importance of the family and family ministry** as a privileged place for the initial proclamation of the Gospel. A presence of some Salesian Co-operator amongst us would be a wonderful inspiration for consecrated Salesians;
3. At the end, we are **called to share our own experience of God with others**, trying to get into the dynamics of the 'First Asian Missionary Congress' (Chiang Mai, 2006) which is also the topic of the Salesian Mission Day 2012. John Paul II invited the Catholics of Asia to 'Tell the story of Jesus' as the best way of Gospel proclamation. In this sense we try to encourage 'storytelling' as the best way of sharing own experience of faith.
4. In Africa, we are still a young Congregation(s) with few years of history. Probably it is very important **to learn from the very rich and dynamic experience of the Local Churches** in our countries.

The whole Church is by its nature missionary and our contribution as Salesian Family to the Church's mission is mainly in the field of education. Our way of living and sharing the Gospel is the way of the Preventive System of Don Bosco.

We are immersed in our busy daily life and mission, and often we lack time to reflect on our own actions and convictions. These Study Days offer us the chance to reflect together more deeply regarding our evangelising mission.

By utilising as many means of social communication as possible, we hope to offer the fruits of our reflection and our intuitions to our many brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family in Africa - Madagascar, one of the three most vibrant Salesian regions worldwide.

I entrust our stay to Mary, Mother of the Church and Help of Christians who was present in the Cenacle with Jesus' disciples before the first Pentecost. Let us pray together:

***Mary, Mother of the Church,***

*We give you thanks for your Yes to God and for your journey of faith as first disciple and missionary of Jesus.*

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

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

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

***Amen.***





# An Overview on the Topic of Study Days: from Prague to Addis Ababa

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Fr. Alfred Maravilla, SDB

Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* insists that initial proclamation "is the permanent priority of mission" and that it "has a central and irreplaceable role" in the Church's mission because "all forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation" (n. 44). Thus, during this six-year period, the SDB Missions department and the FMA area of Missions *inter/ad gentes* had chosen to foster a deeper reflection regarding initial proclamation through the Study Days in the different regions of our Congregations.

This choice turned out to be providential and extremely relevant: In April 2010 the Rector Major invited Salesians to reflect on "the need for an initial proclamation or a renewed proclamation of the Gospel" so that our youth ministry becomes more missionary (*Salesian Youth Ministry*, 2.3. AGC 407). Cardinal Filoni, the Prefect for the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, recently explained that the *Propaganda Fide* will celebrate the Year of Faith from the perspective of initial proclamation (*30 Giorni*, May 2012). Similarly, the Synod on the New Evangelisation last month (October 7-28, 2012) insisted on the importance of initial proclamation<sup>8</sup>.

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

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<sup>8</sup> Proposition no. 9 on the new evangelisation and initial proclamation emphasises the continuity between catechesis and the initial proclamation: systematic teaching of *kerygma* in Scripture and Tradition; teachings and quotes from missionary saints and martyrs, and formation of Catholic evangelisers today.

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

During the **Study Days on *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of South Asia*** (Kolkata, August 7-11, 2011) and on ***The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in the Three-fold Context of East Asia*** (Sampran, August 14-18, 2011) discussions led to deeper reflection on the need to see initial proclamation in the light of Asia's three-fold context: rich cultures, ancient religions and oppressive poverty (FABC 1, *Evangelisation in Asia Today*). In a context where the majority of young people in our educative settings are followers of other religions and are poorer, dialogue life, human promotion and development through outreach programs and work for youth at risk become important opportunities of initial proclamation. This is seen as the beginning of the process of integral evangelisation. In East Asia the need to better understand traditional religions, major East Asia religions like Buddhism and Confucianism as well as a variety of cultures was discussed. In this context, storytelling was considered as a way of introducing people step-by step to the mystery of Christ (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 20) which is at the same time respectful of their freedom of conscience.

In Oceania the Study Days on ***The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Oceania in the Context of Traditional Religions and Cultures and Cultures in the Process of Secularisation*** (Port Moresby, August 21-25, 2011) reflected on the challenge of new evangelisation in the context of traditional religions and cultures, as well as the modern process of secularisation taking place in Australia and New Zealand which is also transmitted to other countries by the media. These certainly pose great challenges, but they also open new horizons (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 17, 20).

Discussions initially centred on whether the topic on initial proclamation is relevant in Oceania where a great majority are baptised Christians. The presentation of speakers and deeper reflection brought to light that at baptism the child received the *habitus* of the faith (the capacity to believe), but not the personal act of faith (the firm commitment to orient one's own

life according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ). Yet, in the context of Oceania's traditional societies and secularised cultures today, the initial proclamation a child receives in the family is often not adequate to become the foundation of a robust faith. Without this initial conversion and initial personal faith, catechesis risks becoming sterile. In this light, even Oceania's Catholics who frequent our parishes and Religious Education classes in our schools as well as other Christians who frequent our youth centres all need initial proclamation of the Gospel in view of developing their faith and personal adhesion to Christ. It is crucial, then, to rediscover the importance of initial proclamation as the first and necessary step towards a new evangelisation in Oceania (*Ecclesia in Oceania*, 18). This initial proclamation, however, cannot be seen in isolation but is necessarily linked and oriented to the next stage in the process of evangelisation, which is the catechumenate and the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults (*RCIA*).

The last Study Days on *Salesian Presence among Muslims* (Rome, July 30 - August 4, 2012) reflected on our presences not only in Islamic contexts but also in traditionally Christian areas where there is a growing number of Muslims (e.g. Europe). Similarly, Muslims too are present in many Salesian works in all continents. The discussions led to a deeper reflection on the importance in these situations of prophetic witness of life of every Christian, of the Salesian community and of the whole Christian community. Where explicit proclamation is either prohibited or not possible it is *witness* of life that leads to credibility (*Porta Fidei*, 9). An authentic Christian life engenders a clear witness of love and service (*Redemptoris Missio*, 23). This, in turn, is always an invitation and a challenge to the interlocutor to ask existential questions and search for answers in a more conscious, in a more personalised and in a more profound manner.

During these days we shall reflect on *the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar* which, hopefully, will help us rediscover "the ardour of the beginnings of the evangelization of the African continent" (*Africae Munus*, 164). In line with the topic of the Study Days, **our discussions these coming days will centre precisely on how we can foster initial proclamation in our educative and pastoral initiatives**, thus becoming a concrete expression of our missionary dimension of our Salesian charism.



Part I

## **Analysis of the Situation**



# Study Days: Situation... Analysis; Reflection and Way Ahead...

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Sr. Ruth del Pilar Mora, FMA and Fr. Alexius Mulongo, SDB

## **The Situation and Analysis (Includes the Challenges and opportunities)**

- The presence of a majority of young people who are open and receptive highlights the challenge we, Salesians, face in being available and taking the first step in approaching them. We are therefore drawn to **the awareness of the need to understand that the school and oratory are for us places of initial proclamation.**
- The rich African values of religious celebrations and life, the strong communitarian sense and the value of story-telling, proverbs and aphorisms are to be appreciated and understood. In order to promote dialogue between cultures and religions Salesians themselves need to appreciate the positive elements in local cultures and respect the traditional values as a way of enhancing dialogue which is the ambient for initial proclamation.
- The Social-economic situation of the people calls for our response in terms of human empowerment, through Health, and educational projects. These are also moments to witness to Christian love and Solidarity, care and concern through love that is gratuitously shared.
- Entering into the Weltanschauung of the people requires knowledge of the cultures; and in this area language as one element of transmitting culture is a requirement. However, there is lack of familiarity with the local cultures due to the frequent changes in personnel. **Lack of Serious reflection and ultimate understanding of African Religion.**
- The perplexing reality of some African Christians who seem to live a double standard especially when faced with challenges of life, like suffering and Death. They may come to Church and at the same time

they consult the traditional diviners on the serious issues of life. **The Knowledge of Gospel values remains merely on the intellectual level; hence there is no serious personal commitment. We therefore face the challenge of Syncretism.**

- The rapid urbanization and technological advancement has strongly influenced our young people. They are growing without roots, neither belonging to the traditional cultures nor to the global culture created by the Media. A striking example of this are the many **media created celebrities or stars in today's world** and the obvious lack of **real heroes and heroines as viable examples for young people. The phenomena of youth culture and its dynamics is also worthy of note. This reality includes the challenges associated with the rural-urban migration where the traditional catholic structures of proclamation are no longer relevant.**
- The challenge of living Prophetic Community life, i.e. fraternal living as Christians and as Religious. We appear fragmented in our living and approach...witnessing aspect to Community living lacking which could be clear...proclamation... "See how they love one another". Lack of enthusiasm and deep conviction when it comes to the spirit of sacrifice and proclamation of the message of Christ.
- In many African societies, there exists a process of initiating young people in learning a particular skill through a structured apprenticeship. This is a slow process where skills like blacksmithing, are acquired through staying/being with the master until the skill is perfected.
- The richness of the Preventive System not only as a spirituality but as a humanistic system blends in well with the African values for life; celebrations; spontaneity, aesthetics and availability. (Confer, *Africae Munus*, no. 7).

## Reflections...

1. Here there are many points for reflection: 1) the understanding of what Initial Proclamation is in relation to Catechesis; Evangelization and New Evangelization, 2) the meaning of Initial Proclamation as



the process of stirring up interest in those who do not know Christ or who have abandoned him. All this **involves but is not limited** to the following:

- The way of life of the announcer...in relation to the person of Jesus Christ.
  - Serious reflection on the fundamental option for Jesus Christ as a choice. Its goal is to stir up interest and questions about the person of Jesus Christ.
  - It is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit where we ultimately have no control “The Spirit blows wherever it wills” (*Jn* 3; Jesus and Nicodemus)... Ref. The Meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the well of Jacob; *Jn* 4: 1–42. The need to **give room to the aspect of Mystery... to unveil...**Jesus is the protagonist; the image of John the Baptist pointing out; “**Behold the Lamb of God**”.
  - It is Primary Proclamation... that sets in motion the entire process of Catechesis.
2. Initial Proclamation includes our style of life as Individual Salesians/FMA; Communities; and as Congregations. Ultimately Initial proclamation involves the entire Christian Community. ***The key aspect in Initial proclamation for us Salesians is not where (space) one does proclamation, but where does one find the young.*** Initial proclamation is done where the young are and in their milieu.
  3. The concept of “Schizophrenic Christians”: In midst of the serious issues of life... our people turn to their traditions...The challenge here is serious reflection on how initial proclamation was done; was it merely conversion, without personal encounter with Christ... which is the first step in the process of encountering the Person of Jesus Christ?
  4. Initial Proclamation, can mainly be fostered by considering African Perspectives about **Life and Death** that are very much in line with the Pascal Mystery. For example, among the Sukuma people of Western Tanzania the phenomenon of life and death in their society is explained as follows: The initial plan God had for them was that they would live forever and never die. One day, God called the Chameleon and gave her the message of life with the intention that she go to *the*

*Sukuma people and explain to them that they were to live forever. In the meantime the snake was hiding nearby and heard the message given to the Chameleon and hence decided to go to the people with the message before the chameleon did. The snake informed the people that according to the plan of God they were to die. So they started dying and burying one another. They consequently got used to death, or rather, death became theirs!!! After millions of years, the Chameleon arrived in the Sukuma society with the message of life!!! She delivered the message, **THAT FROM THE BEGINNING, THE PLAN OF THEIR GOD IS THAT THEY LIVE FOREVER!!!** The sukuma people got angry with the chameleon, and they killed her; the Messenger of life!!!*

A deeper understanding of these aphorisms and ways of thinking and acting are key in presenting the person and message of Christ to the people. The Need to enter the **Weltanschauung** or the **Conceptual framework** or **sitz im leben** or **Mtazamo wa Kimaisha** or **Paradigm** of the people is key to entering into dialogue with a people. In this case, proclamation as witness begins on the horizontal level of the people and is a gradual process. How can Jesus Christ be understood above and beyond their own cultural heroes and heroines? Among the pastoral community of the Maasai, a hero is the one who killed a lion; defends the community; has many cows and many wives!!!

## **The way ahead**

1. There is a need for an African context in understanding the reality of African Religion in relation to the Christian message. A relevant example for initial proclamation in an African framework follows: *In the art of blacksmithing, in the African understanding taken as “bubasi” or “burumbi”, or even going further than blacksmithing, that is, to the area of initiation (circumcision), “bukhebi”, is that the common characteristic is that one was **initiated into it**, through apprenticeship so that slowly but surely one became **possessed with that spirit of blacksmithing etc.** Because of this the one that possesses the*

gift always understood that it was a gift, **actually an unmerited gift that humbles the possessor who becomes actually a servant, dispensing the fruits of that gift.** Among the Bukusu sub-tribe of the Luhya community (Kenya), the circumcisers of the boys i.e. the surgeons or in Kiluhya “Bakhebi” were not taught in school, but were confirmed into it when they showed that **the particular spirit of the trade dwelt in him/her.** This was evident during the circumcision season or before when the one possessed by the particular trade was seen shaking or trembling literally. In such events, the person was **inducted** into the trade through the giving of the tools of the trade, and then there followed a period of apprenticeship with one of the masters of the trade. One learnt the trade by **being** with the master, and began by carrying the tools of the trade, then graduated to becoming an assistant of the master. Such considerations are needed in the initiation into Christian life.

2. There is need on the part of us, Salesians, to apply ourselves in the ministry of the local Church, so that we don’t develop a mentality of superiority but rather of humility with an earnest willingness to learn from the local Church. There is a strong need for “openness and profound humility”. There is a strong need to insert ourselves in the mission of the local Church.
3. The formation process of our African confreres and sisters needs to consider the cultural milieu: We must form them to value and affirm their Africanness, as African Christians who assimilate the Salesian charism. The openness of local people to their pastors is very much proportional to how they are able to communicate on their own level, that is, in their own terms and way of seeing things. [Formation to dialogue, ref. *Optatum Totius*, nos. 14 and 15]. This calls for formation in African religion and cultures, with the consequent need to allow Gospel values to challenge the negative aspects of African cultures.



# Initial Proclamation: Rediscovering its Meaning and Relevance for Africa

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Fr. Alfred Maravilla, SDB\*

What is impressive of the history of the Church in Africa is the apostolic zeal of the early missionaries to proclaim Christ to those who were not Christians. In fact, this zeal for initial proclamation is what makes the Church truly missionary. **Initial proclamation is the best expression of the Church's mission *ad gentes*** (*Redemptoris Missio*, 34) that is why Pope John Paul II insisted that it «has a central and irreplaceable role» (*Redemptoris Missio*, 44) in the Church's missionary activity. Recently, Pope Benedict XVI also invited the Church in Africa to «recover the ardour of the beginnings of the evangelisation of the African continent» (*Africae Munus*, 164). It seems necessary, therefore, to rediscover the meaning and relevance of initial proclamation for Africa today.

## Looking at Scriptures

Initial proclamation is a term that is essentially rooted in the New Testament, which shows us that Christians felt the duty to proclaim with boldness that Jesus is Lord, and Saviour, even in the face of persecution (*Acts* 4-5). In most cases, however, proclamation took place in the context of Christians' ordinary daily life by witnessing a new way of living together (*Acts* 4:32).

The *kerygma* was a response to the memory of Jesus whose kernel consisted of his life, teachings and resurrection. This was pondered upon, accurately formulated, proclaimed, celebrated, and lived as testified by

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various formulae found in the New Testament (*Mt* 28:6; *Mk* 16:6; *Lk* 24:6.34; *Acts* 2:24; *1 Th* 4:14). Inversely, there cannot be any *kerygma* without the narration of the memory of the person, life and teachings of Jesus Christ. This kerygmatic narrative is, actually, a confluence of the story of Jesus, the sharing of the narrator's personal faith experience and the hopes and expectations of the listener in the human search for meaning in life. When these converge a relationship develops between the proclaimer and the listener which fosters the experience of the Lord's presence which could stir up interest to know more the person of Jesus which, ultimately, could give birth to faith (*Rm* 10:17) with its consequent radical conversion, *metanoia*, (*Acts* 5:31; 11:18) and commitment to follow and imitate him (*Fil* 2:1-11)<sup>9</sup>.

## What is Initial Proclamation?

Thanks to Ubaldo Montisci's presentation during the *Study Days on Initial Proclamation of Christ in Europe* (2010)<sup>10</sup>, a common understanding was arrived at that, initial proclamation is at the start of the complex process of evangelisation described in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 24) and in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (n. 47-49). Montisci pointed out that as a moment in the evangelisation process, initial proclamation plays a decisive role because its goal is to stir up interest in knowing the person of Jesus Christ that ultimately leads to faith and an initial adhesion or a revitalisation of faith in him. As such, it is the beginning and the foundation of the evangelisation process.

Initial proclamation, therefore, is more than a method. It takes various forms depending on the culture, context, and rhythm of life and socio-his-

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<sup>9</sup> Jean Audussean, Xavier Léon-Dufour, «Prêcher», eds., Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Vocabulaire de Théologie Biblique* Second ed., (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 1106-1011; Cesare Bissoli, «Il Primo Annuncio nella Comunità Cristiana delle Origini», ed., Cettina Cacciato, *Il Primo Annuncio tra "Kerigma" e Catechesi* (Turin: Elledici, 2010), 13-22; Colin Brown, «Proclamation», ed. Collin Brown, *New Testament Theology*, III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corporation, 1978), 44-68.

<sup>10</sup> The *Acts* are in preparation for publication; hence, his presentation is not cited directly here.

torical situations of those to whom it is directed. It is a free and respectful invitation to the interlocutor who freely decides to accept or reject such invitation exemplified by the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (*Jn* 4:3-42). Indeed, neither an ethical choice, nor a doctrinal discourse nor an argumentative presentation of the faith is able to stir up the desire to know Jesus Christ. Only «the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction» (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1) could lead to an initiation of the evangelisation process.

Initial proclamation is primarily a style of life of individual Christians in the context of daily life and of the whole Christian community. Hence, the witness of life of individual Christians, of the Christian family, the style of life of SDBs and FMAs, of religious communities and of the whole Christian community as well as the institutional and collective image of the Congregation and of the Church in all its public events are all forms of initial proclamation or, unfortunately, a hindrance to it<sup>11</sup>.

## To whom is it directed?

Montisci's presentation helped us to identify that initial proclamation, by its very nature, is directed primarily 1) to those who do not know Jesus Christ (those who are not Christians); 2) to those who search for Someone or something whom they sense but cannot name; 3) to those who go through daily life deprived of any sense, 4) as well as to those who, after having known him, have abandoned him; 5) and to those who believing that they have already known him enough, live their faith in a routine manner<sup>12</sup>. Since then, these have been kept in mind in the subsequent Study Days.

It is not surprising if one would ask whether contexts where there is an

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<sup>11</sup> André Fossion, «Proposta della Fede e Primo Annuncio» *Catechesi* 78, no. 4 (2008-2009): 29-34; 30; Luca Bressan, «Quali Esperienze di Annuncio Proporre?» *Notiziario dell'Ufficio Catechistico Nazionale* 36, no. 1 (2007), 61-68; Xavier Morlans, *El Primer Anuncio. El Eslabon Perdido* (Madrid: PPC, 2009), 29.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Gevaert, *Prima Evangelizzazione* (Leumann, Turin: LDC, 1990), 68-71, 80-84; Benedict XVI, «Ubicumque et Semper» *L'Osservatore Romano* (October 13, 2010), 4.

abandonment of the faith or where it is lived in a routine manner really need new evangelisation and not initial proclamation. In such contexts, the initial proclamation that one receives in the family is often not adequate to become the foundation of a robust faith. Without this initial conversion and initial personal faith, catechesis risks becoming sterile. Hence, the *General Directory for Catechesis* insists that Christians who have abandoned the practice of their faith as well as those who live their faith out of habit all need initial proclamation of the Gospel in view of fostering their personal adhesion to Christ<sup>13</sup>. In this light initial proclamation is considered as the first and necessary step towards a new evangelisation<sup>14</sup>.

## When could it be done?

Although initial proclamation is the beginning of the evangelisation process, it should not be understood, however, in a strictly chronological terms. It is that unplanned moment when the Spirit stirs up and opens the desire in the heart and mind of a person to know Jesus Christ. It could be likened to that ‘click’ which finally lights the fire. The discernment of the right moment and the most appropriate method of fostering initial proclamation are crucial for its effectiveness. Since it is primarily a style of life, it takes place at every opportunity, in season and out of season (2 *Tm* 4:2), especially in the context of ordinary daily life as well as in the context of cultural expressions of important moments of human existence. In this light, Montisci stressed that particular attention must be given to what could be termed as “traditional” pastoral activity (celebration of the sacraments especially of baptism and matrimony, pilgrimages, popular religiosity), to the possibilities and challenges offered by new frontiers (e.g. migration, multicultural and multi-religious settings), as well as to new situations brought about by cultural changes (e.g. individualism, fluidity, secularism). What is important is to find and create occasions or places of

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<sup>13</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Synod on the New Evangelisation*, Proposition no. 9 on the new evangelisation and initial proclamation emphasises the continuity between catechesis and the initial proclamation: systematic teaching of *kerygma* in Scripture and Tradition; teachings and quotes from missionary saints and martyrs, and formation of Catholic evangelisers today.



encounter where one could feel free to talk about existential and religious questions and feel listened to and understood<sup>15</sup>.

This means that initial proclamation renders every Christian to be in the constant *state of mission*, like a sentinel ever ready to give reasons for his or her hope (*Africae Munus*, 30) whenever and wherever the Spirit opens the door to make a brief, intelligible and respectful invitation to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Initial proclamation's acceptance, however, has no formal visibility because it takes place in the inner recesses of the human conscience through the action of the Holy Spirit who works in persons and cultures as shown by their innate desire «even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death» (*Redemptoris Missio*, 44)<sup>16</sup>.

## How is it done?

Initial proclamation demands that importance be given to personal contact, interpersonal relationship and dialogue as preparatory steps. The insistence on «respect and esteem» (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 47, 66) underlines that initial proclamation rejects any shade of a relationship of coercion or conquest, imposition or proselytism. Instead, it is patiently progressive because it takes seriously cultural, religious and social realities and the receptivity and ability to assimilate the mystery of faith of each person.

The possibilities of initial proclamation are innumerable. However, I would like to present for our consideration three mutually interpenetrating ways, which I feel, are relevant to the theme of our study these days: witness of life, witness of action and storytelling.

### 1. Witness of life

The witness of sincere and mutual love of every Christian (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 77) as well as the service of reconciliation, justice and peace

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Gevaert, *La Proposta del Vangelo a Chi non Conosce Cristo* (Leumann, Turin: LDC, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Ubaldo Montisci, «Pastoral Juvenil y Primer Anuncio», *Misión Joven* vol. 51, 414-415 (2011): 63-66.

(*Africae Munus*, 163) are indispensable in initial proclamation. Witness is founded on the initial attitude of respect and appreciation of the human and religious values of one's friends and neighbours who do not know Christ. This, in turn, presupposes that «the ray of that truth which enlightens all» (*Nostra Aetate*, 2) is already present, though in a hidden manner, in their cultures and religious traditions.

The witness of an authentic Christian life as well as the commitment to Christian love and service are initial proclamation because they are a constant invitation and challenge to the other person to go back to one's self in a more conscious, personalised and profound manner that could trigger asking existential questions.

## **2. Witness of action**

Any form of initial proclamation is intimately connected to and followed by the service of reconciliation, justice and peace (*Africae Munus*, 15) expressed through the concern for the oppressed, the voiceless, the marginalised, care for the sick and the suffering, the struggle for peace and justice, and the commitment for integral human development, reconciliation and the construction of a more human society (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 44-45, 68). The act of proclaiming too is in itself and by itself an act of charity because the Christian stirs up gratuitously the interest of the 'other' to know the best that he can offer which is the knowledge of God's love in Christ for everyone. This, in turn, leads to a more authentic Christian witness of love and service especially through preferential presence and activity among the poor.

These various forms of witness of action (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 21) foster a dialogue of mind and heart that becomes the foundation of enduring human encounter in order to patiently, discerningly and skilfully respond to the needs of those who are honestly willing to be led by the Spirit into faith. It becomes initial proclamation when it becomes a communication of one's own experience of the Divine which is expressed in the commitment towards genuine human liberation and development, pursued with faith, hope and love which, in turn, are mediated through prayer.

### 3. Storytelling

The narration of the story of Jesus and the parables he used are akin to the style of stories and folklores of Africa and Madagascar. Unlike direct proclamation that risks appearing as a culturally insensitive and religiously disrespectful monologue, storytelling is a gradual and dialogical pedagogy of sharing the Christian faith. The fact that one could narrate to someone implies that a personal relationship and a receptive attitude have been established previously. Storytelling is, in fact, a dialogue of the narrator and the listener. It takes place in the context of ordinary daily life and its web of relationship as friends and neighbours, without any thought of forcing it on the listeners. This telling and retelling of the story of Jesus and one's own faith-journey, while at the same time allowing oneself to be enriched in one's own faith by attentively listening to the faith-journeys of the other person in his or her own culture or religious traditions, deepen this relationship and receptive attitude between narrator and listener.

Storytelling becomes initial proclamation when the storyteller narrates his or her own personal experience of Christ or another's experiences as codified in the story and weaves it with the search for meaning in life of the listeners which inspires them hope and strength to face their struggles in daily life. Through the Holy Spirit, who works in the depths of every conscience (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 21), storytelling could trigger the raising of existential questions which could lead to the unveiling of the truth and values profoundly longed for by the human heart and spark an interest in the person of Jesus Christ<sup>17</sup>.

The witness of an authentic Christian life as well as the witness of action render the story of Jesus and one's own faith experience transparent in the narrator's life and, hence, more credible.

### Oriented towards the Catechumenate

Without initial proclamation followed by conversion and initial personal faith, catechesis risks becoming sterile. It is, therefore, indispen-

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<sup>17</sup> Ricardo Tonelli, *La Narrazione nella Catechesi e nella Pastorale Giovanile* (Torino, Leuman: LDC, 2002), 54-64; Johann Baptist Metz, «Breve Apologia del Narrare,» *Concilium* 5 (1973): 864-868.

sable. Since initial proclamation is just the start of the evangelisation process, it is oriented towards the next stage of opting to start the journey of Christian initiation or catechumenate – or re-initiation for lapsed Christians – that leads to baptism and, ultimately, the commitment to live the Christian faith and share it with others<sup>18</sup>.

## Our Task

Today we are gathered here in Addis Ababa to reflect and study *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar*. Our gathering here ought to be seen as a continuation and deepening of the themes discussed at the Missionary Animation Seminars on the *Church - Communion and Mutual Missionary Relationship* - Addis Ababa (1997); *Le Projet-Afrique face au Défi de la Première Evangelisation et de la Phase de Consolidation* - Yaounde-Mbealmayo (1999); *Project Africa Between the Challenges of First Evangelization and the Phase of Consolidation* - Nairobi (2001); *Les Défis de la Mission Ad Gentes en Afrique* - Kinshasa and *Challenges to Mission Ad Gentes Today in Africa* - Nairobi (2004).

We are here to study together in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the challenges of initial proclamation and to discover new insights on the topic. With the missionary heart of Don Bosco, we seek ways of stirring up interest in Jesus Christ in Africans who do not know him, as well as in those who have become lukewarm in their faith. Don Bosco's missionary zeal also opens our eyes to the over 25 million Chinese in this region, many of whom do not know Christ. Yet, here we have all the possibilities – which the Church in China does not have – to make an initial proclamation at least among the young Chinese who come to our centres and oratories! Certainly, rediscovering the meaning and relevance of initial proclamation is one important expression of *Da mihi Animas* in Africa today!

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<sup>18</sup> Enzo Biemmi, *Il Secondo Annuncio. La Grazia di Ricominciare* (Bologna: Dehoniane, 2011), 33-36, 41.

Part II

**Study and Reflection**



# Initial Proclamation and Dialogue with Cultures, Traditional Religion and Urban Societies of Africa and Madagascar

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Fr. Innocent Maganya, M.af<sup>\*</sup>

## Introduction

I am greatly honoured to have been invited to participate at these STUDY DAYS. The nature of the study is quite appealing. We have just concluded a synod of Bishops that dealt exclusively with the theme of New Evangelisation, and here you want to reflect on **Initial Evangelisation** and **Dialogue** with **African Religion** and **cultures**. By doing so, you clearly position yourselves in line with the teaching of John Paul II who clearly stated that the *Missio ad Gentes* is far from being over (cf. RM). Even when we talk about New Evangelisation, we should not forget about the mandate we have to proclaim the Good News of Our Lord Jesus Christ to all those who do not know him. (See the *Synod on New Evangelisation*, proposition 9)

Since Vatican II, we have come to a wider understanding of what is the mission of the Church, or better, what the missionary work consist of. The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, in Chapter II mentions witness as the first form of Evangelisation. This will be repeated in all subsequent documents of the Church. In second place comes the preaching of the Gospel and the assembling of the people of God, and lastly the forming of the Christian community. (AG, 10-18). However, the same document carefully cautions that the missionary activity of the Church does not end with the establishment of the community. It says, “The obligation to carry-on the work devolves on the particular churches already constituted, an obligation to preach the Gospel to all who are still

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outside (AG, 6). Each time there is a new situation, the Church is called to re-evaluate the pertinence of her missionary presence.

Ten years after Vatican II, Paul VI wrote *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in which he expanded the understanding of the work of evangelisation. With the rise of liberation theology in Latin America, there was a danger of narrowing the understanding of the mission of the Church to human promotion only. In the document, the pope presents evangelisation as a “complex and dynamic reality”. It includes witness, initial proclamation, catechesis, human promotion. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reaffirms the importance of witness, but stresses the fact that “There is no true evangelisation if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed” (EN, 21). The complexity of mission was again reaffirmed by John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* (RM, 41). Nevertheless, proclamation remains the “permanent priority of mission. It has a central and irreplaceable role” (RM, 44). One of the aim of the encyclical was to clarify the relationship between *Missio ad Gentes* and Inter-religious dialogue. At the time of *Redemptoris Missio*, there were already some voices in the Church that wanted to narrow the understanding of mission to inter-religious dialogue. Though he greatly valued the dialogue with other religions, the pope strongly affirmed “proclamation as the permanent priority of Mission”. That is why the title of the encyclical already sets the tone: It is about the permanent validity of the missionary activity of the Church. It says yes to dialogue but proclamation remains essential. *Redemptoris Missio* defines three concrete situations in which the mission of the Church is carried out.

## **Missio ad Gentes**

Directed to “peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature” (RM, 33). Furthermore, it is directed to “peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ, who are far from Christ, in whom the Church has not yet taken root, and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel” (RM, 34). We could refer to this as primary evangelisation or initial proclamation.



## Pastoral Care

Directed towards “Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures who are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission” (RM, 33).

## New Evangelisation or Re-Evangelisation

Directed to “countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally to the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptised have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel” (RM, 33).

Since the mid 80’s there has been a great concern about the decline of Christian practice, especially in the Western Christian world, but also in our mega cities. I would say, even before Vatican II, some theologians considered Europe as a missionary continent. The recently concluded Synod of Bishops had as its objective to see how to revive the Christian faith and practice in a world that is becoming more and more secular. We must remember however, as John Paul II mentions in *Redemptoris Missio*, that initial proclamation, pastoral care and new evangelisation are interconnected. They are interdependent (RM, 34).

As far as we are concerned, in line with the theme of these study days, the question is how to reconcile the necessity of initial proclamation and the urgency of dialogue with other religions, as in our case dialogue with African cultures and Religion? What is the relationship between Dialogue and Mission<sup>19</sup> or Dialogue and Proclamation?<sup>20</sup> Where is the role

<sup>19</sup> The Secretariat for Non - Christian Religions produced in 1984 a document called: “The Attitude of the Church Towards followers of other religions. Reflection and Orientation on Dialogue and Mission”.

<sup>20</sup> In 1991, The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) together with the Congregation for Evangelisation of Peoples and the Propaganda Fide, published “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”.

of Christ and of the Church?<sup>21</sup> What is the role of other religions in the universal salvific plan of God? What should be our approach to African Religion as we commit ourselves to the work of evangelisation in Africa? How far should we take cultural realities seriously?

This complex reality of mission, dialogue or interreligious dialogue is seen as part of the mission of the Church. Vatican II initiated this dialogue. Proclamation is defined as, “the communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realised by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the community of believers, which is the Church... Proclamation is the foundation, centre and summit of evangelisation” (DP 10). Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder see the mission of the Church as a prophetic dialogue. They see the idea of prophetic dialogue as a synthesis of the theologies of mission as articulated in the last half of the twentieth century:

- Mission as Participation in the mission of the Triune God (*Missio Dei*).
- Mission as liberating service of the Reign of God.
- Mission as proclamation of Jesus as universal Saviour.

Admittedly, they recognise that there are many challenges and questions that are raised:

“How, for example, can one engage in sincere dialogue, particularly in interreligious dialogue, while also being prophetic in the articulation of one’s beliefs? Is not prophetic dialogue really a contradiction, and so impossible to practice?”<sup>22</sup>

You have set clearly the objectives of these study days. You want “to arrive at a deeper understanding of the challenges and discover new insights and perspectives in view of renewed missionary praxis”.

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<sup>21</sup> In 2000, The Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith (CDF), under Cardinal Ratzinger published *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen B. Bevans - Schroeder, Roger P., *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, 2-3

It is my intent to articulate three points:

1. Conciliar and Post Conciliar understanding of Mission
2. Mission as dialogue with African Religion and African cultures
3. Pastoral implications.

## 1. Conciliar and Post Conciliar Understanding of Mission

We have just inaugurated the Year of Faith, which marks the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of Vatican II. As we celebrate the golden jubilee of the beginning of the Council, there are various schools of interpretations of this prophetic event. I am not going to venture into the debate about the interpretation of the Council. Some say that Vatican II was in strict continuity with previous Councils while others see Vatican as discontinuity<sup>23</sup>. This is not the object of our present consideration. As far as our study is concerned, we are interested in five major documents of the Council, namely, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, (*Lumen Gentium*), The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church (*Ad Gentes*), The Pastoral Constitution on the Church (*Gaudium et Spes*), the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) and the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*).

Vatican II opened new roads to missiological reflection, especially on the concepts of mission (AG, chaps. 1-2), the values and functions of local churches (AG, chap. 3), the meaning of cultures (GS, 53-63), the fundamentals of interreligious dialogue (NA, 2)...<sup>24</sup>.

I would like to situate the debate and the relevance of your Study days within the context of conciliar teachings. We could not have imagined the possibility of dialogue with religions and cultures before the Council. Fr. Thomas Ryan points out four areas where the Council made a significant<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> See O' Malley, "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?" Theological Studies, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> F.A. Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology*.

<sup>25</sup> See T. Ryan "Catholic Perspectives on Interreligious Relations" *Current Dialogue* 44, 19-20 see also L. Magesa, *Rethinking Mission: Evangelisation in Africa in a New Era*, 31-32.

- There can be salvation outside the Church.
- There authentic God-given values in different cultures.
- The Church can use the positive values of the local culture to spread the Gospel.
- The acceptance of positive values, whatever their source, is for the Church the basis of its respect for cultures and religions.

All these affirmations are still a challenge to us today. As Church, we have not yet internalised the teaching of the council on these subjects. The reception of the council is always very slow. One of the recommendations would be to get familiar with the teaching of the council. We cannot re-invent the wheel. As Benedict XVI insists, during this year of faith we have to rediscover the spirit of the council. We are going to refer only to key texts that are in line with our topic.

### ***1.1. The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church***

We read in AG 1:

“Having been divinely sent to the nations that she might be **“The universal sacrament of the salvation”** the Church, in obedience to the command of her founder (*Mt 16:15*), and because of it is demanded by her own essential universality, **strives to preach the Gospel to all men**”.

Here we have a new understanding of the mission of the Church which somehow breaks away with the axiom of “*Extra Ecclesiam nulla Salus*”, that is outside the Church there is no salvation. Now the Church defines herself as a sacrament of the universal plan of God to save all humanity. The same decree affirms that the whole Church shares and participates in the Mission of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (AG, 2). As Christ has been sent by the Father, so Jesus sends the Church to continue the same work of salvation through the power of the Holy Spirit. We all participate in this mission.

The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church acknowledges that the circumstances in which the exercise of this mission is carried out varies, and the mission might not be exercised in the same way (AG, 6). It is important to take into consideration the context in which we find ourselves. “In each situation and circumstance a proper line of action and effective means should be adopted”. We cannot apply the same method

everywhere. This is very much in line with the whole teaching of the Council, which calls for respect of individual groups and cultures. This is more important as we step into new territories or encounter groups that have never heard of the Gospel of Christ. These are like sacred territories in which we have to enter with reverence and respect. As the Sociologist Max Warren would say: “we have to remove our shoes because we are on a holy ground”.

Chapter II of AG defines what this missionary work consists of. There are three ways of Evangelising. The first form is witness. This has been repeated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN, 41) and *Redemptoris Missio* (RM, 42). We know how much the Church has been shaken by all the scandals for the past few years. The lack of authentic witness is the biggest obstacle to the work of evangelisation. Christian witness is paramount in the work of evangelisation. This witness implies “Establishing relationships of respect and love, being part and parcel of the social and cultural life of the community, be familiar with their national and religious traditions of the people” (AG, 11).

These are guiding principles for Christians. However, in the same line, the Council gives some requirements for priestly training. The Council says that the mind of students must be opened and redefined so that they will better understand and appreciate the culture of their own people. The Council recommends that philosophical and theological studies should help seminarians examine the relationship between the traditions and the religion of their own people and Christianity. It also recommends that studies for the priesthood should be undertaken in close contact with the way of life of their own people (AG, 16). One of your confreres is researching on the inculturation of the Salesian formation. I hope he will discover some concrete material that could help you move forward in this line. AG 22 is even more explicit when it encourages undertaking theological investigations in the words revealed by God in different cultures. The Council acknowledges that there is no incompatibility between local customs, concept of life and social structures and divine revelation. Reconciliation between the two is possible (AG, 22). This is very important for our topic. We are talking about initial proclamation and the dialogue with African religion and cultures. “Every time and every culture has to reflect on faith on its own terms, and needs to

use its own lens to interpret Scripture, past doctrinal formulations, ethical practices, and liturgical customs”<sup>26</sup>. We cannot dissociate initial proclamation with what we call inculturation.

### **1.2. *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church***

As we have seen, the Council positively values human culture. It states that whenever there is a question of human life, nature and culture are intimately linked together (GS, 53). *Gaudium et Spes* dedicates the entire second chapter to the understanding of culture. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* says that what matters in evangelisation is

“to evangelise man’s culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*, always taking the person as one’s starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God” (EN, 20).

The Council also called for dialogue between all men. This dialogue requires from the side of the Church some attitudes such as mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, acknowledging all legitimate diversity (GS, 92). I would like to refer to two articles of GS that I find relevant to our topic of study.

→ The first article refers to the role of the Holy Spirit in cultures:

“Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (GS, 22).

What is striking in this text is the reference to **all**, which is repeated three times. This all is inclusive and does not refer only to Catholics. Then there is the universal role of the Holy Spirit, through which we are all made partners in the paschal mystery. We can deduce that, African religion and cultures are implicitly recognised in this partnership. Partnership implies respect, dialogue, collaboration, though each partner keeps to what is singular and particular to him. Therefore, as we encounter

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen B. Bevans - Schroeder P. Roger, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 70.

African religion or African cultures we encounter them as partners in dialogue. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This partnership is well expressed in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (LG, 16).

→ The second text refers to relation between culture and the Good News of Christ.

There are many links between the message of salvation and culture. In his self-revelation to his people culminating in the fullness of manifestation in his incarnate Son, God spoke according to the culture proper to each age. Similarly, the Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilised the resources of different cultures in its preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in various aspects of the life of the faithful (GS, 58).

### **1.3. Declaration on the Relationship with Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)**

In very explicit terms, *Nostra Aetate* recognises that outside the Catholic there are other groups that have a high religious sense and whose lives are “imbued with a deep religious sense”. In NA 2, the Council affirms that the “Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions” These words are of high significance as we approach African Religion. We can no longer look at African Religion and culture as a virgin land to conquer for Christ. African Religion deserves the same attitude and respect that we have towards Islam and Judaism. As *Nostra Aetate* says, the Church “has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth that enlightens all men” (NA, 2).

### **1.4. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)**

“The plan of salvation includes those also who acknowledge the Creator... together with us, adore the one and merciful God who will judge mankind on the last day. Nor is God far from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God; for He gives to life and breath to all men and to all things. As Saviour, he desires all men to be saved. For those also can attain eternal salvation who without fault on their part do not

know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, but seek God with a sincere heart, and under the influence of grace endeavour to do His will as recognised through the promptings of their conscience” (LG, 16).

This text is fundamental. It refers primarily to the Muslims who acknowledge the Creator and adore the one merciful God. As we shall see, African Religion recognises God as the creator. It is a monotheistic religion. Can we say today that the adherents to African Religion, “together with us”, adore the one and merciful God? This is the partnership of which we are speaking.

## **2. Mission as Dialogue with African Religion and African cultures**

As we have seen, Vatican II has a respect for non-Christian religions. Even though the Council does not mention African Religion specifically, we can deduce as we have said, that it opened the way for a positive consideration of African Religion and cultures. This does not mean, however, that we have embraced this new positive outlook of the Council on African Religion and culture. Before we engage in any form of dialogue we must get rid of all the misconceptions or misrepresentation and prejudices about African Religion. “These misconceptions or prejudices are well known, but because they are so deeply seated among many, they are very difficult to do away with”<sup>27</sup>. My experience as a lecturer in African Theology has shown me how it is difficult, especially with our African students.

The earliest missionaries to Africa did not have the opportunity to get all the information we have today from Anthropology, Ethnology, History, Geography and even the theology of the Mission. The result was that the adherents of ATR were dismissed as pagans, animists, pantheists, superstitious people, magicians, even devil worshippers. The first catechism book I ever read has ATR worship as the first in the list of mortal sins<sup>28</sup>.

**The first remark is about the reference to African Religion as Traditional.** As you might have realised I have avoided the word “Tradi-

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<sup>27</sup> L. Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Denis Isizoh Chidi, “Christian Motivation for Dialogue with followers of African Tradition Religion” [www.afrikaworld.net](http://www.afrikaworld.net)



tional". The question: is what do we understand by "traditional. This seems, apparently, a nice and polite way of referring to the religiosity of Africans, but still hides the more expressive negative conceptions such as: primitive, savage, fetishism, juju, heathenism, paganism, animism, idolatry and polytheism. It has been argued by anthropologists, and by some missionaries who solely relied on the work of these anthropologists, that African Religion be considered primitive. Actually, they had to invent, to construct, and raise African beliefs to the status of religion, thus creating an inferiority complex or depreciation of African religious values. This inferiority complex is deeply engraved in the mind of even eminent African intellectuals, including some of my own students. As if one would say, "nothing good can come from Africa". It is very easy to associate the word "traditional" with "backwardness" or old fashion, "uncivilised". This attitude has not yet disappeared. Magesa points out that the saddest thing that emerges is that an increasing number of African themselves have internalised very thoroughly this misconception about themselves and their culture. That is why Laurenti Magesa says that it is anachronistic to refer to African Religion as Traditional. Let us look at each of these derogatory terms by which we associate the African Religion.

**African Religion as heathen and Pagan Religion:** these are used almost as synonymous terms. They refer to those who do not believe in one of the major religions namely, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. They also refer to people who do not know God. How can we call AR a pagan religion when Africans are notoriously religious<sup>29</sup> and have a strong belief in one God as Creator? Strictly speaking, there are no pagans in Africa because "the presence of God permeates all the life of an African" (*Africae Terrarum*, 8).

**African Religion as a fetish and animist religion:** Fetishes refer to objects or articles. Africans were called animists because it was said that they believe that objects and animals have souls or spirits-*anima*. Here is what Paul VI says about African Religion:

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<sup>29</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*.

Here we have more than the so-called “animistic” concept, in the sense given to this term in the history of religions at the end of last century. We have a deeper, broader and more universal concept, which considers all living beings and visible nature itself as linked with the world of the invisible and the spirit (*Africae Terrarum*, 8).

**African Religion and idol worship:** In Africa there is a clear distinction between God, ancestors, lesser gods, spirits and so on. There is a certain hierarchy. When Africans sacrifice, they do not sacrifice to idols. They sacrifice to the One Supreme God, the Creator. Even the reference to African Religion as ancestor-worship does not qualify for the same reasons. Never have the Africans ever deified ancestors. Ancestors are not God.

**African Religion as Polytheistic religion:** Across Africa God is revered as Creator and Source of life. He is the same God who is worshipped in different African Cultures. It is not because there is a multiplicity of cultures that there is a multiplicity of gods. In fact, today African Religion is recognised as a monotheistic religion. Here I can refer to the most recent book of John Mbiti: *Concepts of God in Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. He says, “Being the voice of different peoples, these *Concepts* of God portray a clear monotheism as the central point of reference in African Religion. This seems to have originated from ancient times, as many names of God bear witness”<sup>30</sup>.

We find the same derogatory attitude about African Religion in the pre-Vatican II Church official documents. I will just mention a few of these attitudes: In *Catholicae Ecclesiae*, Leo XIII gives instruction to missionaries in Africa in the following terms: **“bathe those inhabitants living in darkness and blind superstition with the light of divine truth, by which they can become co-heirs with us of the Kingdom of God”**. (*Catholicae Ecclesiae*, 3). Benedict XV in *Maximum Illud*, speaks of **“the numberless heathen who are still sitting in the shadows of death. According to recent statistics their number accounts to a thousand million”**. The role of the bishops was **“to light the torch for those sitting in the shadows of death, and open the gate of heaven to those who rush to their destruction”**. To Religious superiors and heads of Congregations engaged in missionary work were requested after having

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<sup>30</sup> J.S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 14.

“successfully accomplished their task and converted some nations from unhallowed superstition to Christian faith and have founded there a church with sufficient prospects, they should transfer them, as Christ’s forlorn hope, to some other nation to snatch them from Satan’s grasp. Pius the XI says that it is an act of charity to withdraw “the pagans from the darkness of superstition”. He refers to non-Christians as savage and barbarians<sup>31</sup>.

Therefore, we should not take for granted that we know what we are talking about, when we speak about the dialogue with African Religion. There is a need for decolonising our minds, so that we might appreciate the African Religion for what it really is. There will never be an effective evangelisation, if our initial proclamation does not take account of the religiosity of the African people. We are not preaching a new God to them. They already know him.

“The better ATR is understood by the heralds of the Gospel, the more suitable will be the presentation of Christianity to Africans. By a study of ATR the underlying felt-need of Africans will be identified so that it will become clear how Christianity can meet such needs. In this way, the Church will be more and more at home in Africa, and Africans will be more and more at home in the Church”<sup>32</sup>.

**Secondly, should we refer to the religion of Africans in singular or in plural?** Should we speak of African Religions or African Religion? For me this should not be a subject of debate if we accept the principle of “unity in diversity”. This is also the point of View of Magesa who is astonished that some African scholars still refer to African Religion in plural form. In spite of the diversities of African people and cultures, there are commonalties that allow us to speak of African Religion, in singular. More and more theologians are using African Religion in singular. As Magesa says, “Varieties in African Religion must not be taken to mean a diversity of fundamental beliefs”<sup>33</sup>. For me there are advantages to con-

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<sup>31</sup> Denis Chidi Isizoh, Dialogue with African Traditional Religion in Sub-Sahara Africa: A changing Attitude of the Catholic Church [www.afrikaworld.net](http://www.afrikaworld.net).

<sup>32</sup> Pastoral Attention to African Traditional Religion: A letter from the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, (March 25, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> L. Magesa, African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life, 17.

sider Africa as a single geographical and religious entity. I think we need to rediscover the concept of Pan-Africanism of Nkwameh Nkrumah. To speak of Africa as one, despite of the plurality of languages and cultures, will have far-reaching political and social consequences.

**Thirdly, is African Religion a World Religion or not?** Vatican II carefully avoids mentioning African Religion alongside Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. There are at least three objections that are made to disqualify African Religion as a World Religion.

- African Religion has no written scriptures.
- African Religion is not a revealed religion.
- African Religion does not engage itself in proselytism.

All this depend on the understanding of what religion is and the way that God reveals himself to humanity. I would like to emphasise the distinction between the revealed and so-called natural religion. When we talk about revealed religion, we refer mainly to the People of the Book, as Islam calls them, that is, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Evans Pritchard says that the dichotomy between natural and revealed religion is false and makes obscurity. He says that there is a good sense in which it may be said that all religions are religions of revelation. The world around them and their reason have everywhere revealed to men something of the divine and of their nature and destiny<sup>34</sup>. He quotes St Augustine who said that “What is now called the Christian religion, has existed among the ancients, and was not absent from the beginning of the human race, until Christ came in the flesh: from which time the true religion, which existed already, began to be called Christian”. This is in line with what the letter to the Hebrews says, “In former times God spoke to us through our ancestors... but in recent days he has spoken to us through his only Son”.

**Fourthly, it is now common to hear that, in this era of globalisation, African religion is dead,** or if it is not dead, it will disappear with the advancement of science and technology. We can find a similar remark with Max Müller who in 1878 wrote: “Every day, every week, every month, every quarter, the most widely read journal seem just now to vie

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<sup>34</sup> E. Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religions*, 2-3 see also L. Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, 25.

with each other in telling us that the time for religion is past, that faith is hallucination or an infantile disease, that the gods have at last been found out and exploded..." or Crawley who in 1905 said about the enemies of religion: "the opinion is everywhere gaining ground that religion is a mere survival from a primitive and mythopoeic age, and its extinction only a matter of time". Evans Pritchard warns against such quick dismissal of the Africa Religion and beliefs. Three aspects must be considered before one can claim that African Religion is a thing of the past:

- The first one is the question of the number of those who adhere to the African Religion.
- The second one is that traditional world-view is continually reflected in the thoughts and attitudes of many Africans.
- We can debate about the third point that he makes namely, the rejection of Western systems of thought by African intellectuals. This might have been true at the time of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Léon Gontran Damas with the Négritude Movement, or the time of Nkwameh Nkrumah and the Pan-African movement or even at the time of Vincent Mulago and "les prêtres noirs s'interrogent".

However, Evans Pritchard is right when he says that today this rejection is largely repressed because, the African intellectual has repressed this rejection, and has superficially accepted the Western Scientific point of view and the advantages of modern technology<sup>35</sup>. Magesa says that it is too hasty to assert the disappearance of African religion. There are two negative consequences:

- Because of the assumption that African Religion is dying people do not take it seriously enough.
- It makes practitioners of African Religion ashamed of adhering to a perceived "dying" faith, and this feeling inhibits them from engaging in a mature dialogue with members of other faiths.

We call to take African Religion seriously. An easy dismissal of this reality has far more disastrous consequences than we think.

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<sup>35</sup> See J.V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion*, 20-21.

### 3. Pastoral Implications

For an effective evangelisation of Africa, we need a change of attitudes in the way we approach African Religion.

- The condition for proper dialogue is change of attitude from mutual distrust to mutual trust<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, since Vatican II there has been a tremendous change in the attitudes of the Catholic Church towards African religion. The first Pope to refer to African Religion in positive terms is Paul VI during his visit to Kampala.
- The second attitude is that of openness and profound humility. Paul Knitter sees this openness at three levels<sup>37</sup>:
  - At the theological: while Christians can and must continue to announce Jesus of Nazareth as one in whom the reality and saving power of God is incarnate and available, they will be also open to the possibility/ probability that there are others whom Christians can recognise as sons and daughters of God.
  - At the personal level: It requires Christians to be fully committed to Christ but at the same time genuinely open to others who may be carrying out similar and equally important roles.
  - At the ecclesial level: It means that the churches will go forth into the whole world with a message that is universally relevant and urgent, but at the same time will be ready to hear other messages from very different sources that may also be universally meaningful and important. In the same line, David Bosch talks about “bold humility or humble boldness”<sup>38</sup>.
- The third attitude is that of respect: adherents of African traditional religions should therefore be treated with great respect and esteem, and all inaccurate and disrespectful language should be avoided. For this purpose, suitable courses in African traditional religion should be given in houses of formation for priests and religious (EAF).

Actually, the big challenge we have today is to respect African religion in the same way we respect our Muslim brothers. When we meet

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<sup>36</sup> L. Magesa, *African Religion in Dialogue Debate*, 182.

<sup>37</sup> P. Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489.

with them, we do not talk about converting them to Christianity. All the principles of interreligious dialogue should be applied in the same way to African religion.

## Conclusion

I do not know if I have met your expectations. The language of dialogue is not an easy language because it challenges our attitudes and calls us to think “outside the box”. For evangelisation to take root in Africa, we have to take African cultures and religion seriously, more than ever before. It is only through dialogue that we can achieve this. “How do we maintain a balance between being both missionary and dialogical? How do we combine faith in God as revealed uniquely in Jesus Christ with the confession that God has not left himself without a witness?”<sup>39</sup>

At the end of this presentation, we can only agree with David Bosch, that the language of dialogue is a new language and we do not have all the answers.

“Such language boils down to an admission that we do not have all the answers and are prepared to live within the framework of penultimate knowledge, that we regard our involvement in dialogue and mission as an adventure, are prepared to take risks, and are anticipating surprises as the Holy Spirit guides us into fuller understanding. This is not an option for agnosticism, but for humility. It is however a bold humility – or a humble humility. We know only in part, but we do know. We believe that the faith we profess is both true and just, and should be proclaimed. We do this, however, not as judges or lawyers, but as witnesses, not as soldiers, but as envoys of peace, not as high-pressure sales-persons, but as servants of the Lord”<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 488.

<sup>40</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 489.





# A Response to Innocent Maganya

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Br. Paolo Vaschetto, SDB

After hearing the input of Fr. Innocent Maganya about “Initial proclamation and dialogue with cultures, traditional religions and urban societies of Africa and Madagascar”, I proposed some points of reflection relating to our Salesian context:

- **Impact of personal and community witness in the initial proclamation.** The letter of the Rector Major formally announcing the 27<sup>th</sup> General Chapter reminds us to be mystics in the Spirit, prophets of communion and servants to the young. Since last General Chapter, there is an insistence on personal and community conversion in order to be effective in our mission with the young. Is my personal and community witness an avenue for fostering the initial acceptance of Christ?
- **“Missio ad gentes”.** Can we consider our Provinces and works still “missionary”? Does our Organic Provincial Plan focus on expanding our works in area of initial proclamation (see Msgr. Moreschi’s experience in Gambella), or does personnel shortage force us to direct all our efforts to maintaining our complex houses?
- **Respect of individual groups and cultures.** “Every culture has to reflect on faith on its own terms and needs to use its own lenses to interpret Scripture, ethical practises and liturgical customs” (S. Bevans, *Prophetic dialogue*, 70). Do we put these words into practice in our daily ministry or are we at least aware of their importance? As a missionary, has it ever happened to you that when you arrive in a new place you begin your Salesian ministry of administration or pastoral work immediately, on the spot, without any preparation related to understanding the local culture? The first missionaries of Africa Project had a little more time of preparation according to what I hear. Now, however, we assume that is possible to learn everything on the run,

that is, simultaneously while we are in ministry, without time for reflection. Sometimes vocational fragility follows as a result.

- **Language of dialogue.** “Prophetic dialogue”. Returning to the importance of community witness, the question emerges, “Are our communities “living witnesses” of a harmonious mixing of different cultures? Are we truly international communities? Are our schools, oratories, parishes, etc. workshops of peace, reconciliation, acceptance of different cultures in the spirit of dialogue?”
- **Human promotion.** Are our projects for development a help or a hindrance to initial proclamation?

# Initial Proclamation in the Educative Environment

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Bp. Lisane-Christos Matheos Semahun\*

## Initial Proclamation

I would like to make this presentation based on your working definition of Initial Proclamation during your Study Days: the start of the rich, dynamic, and complex process of integral evangelisation which introduces people step by step to the mystery of Christ to enable them to personally encounter Christ as their personal Saviour. It is directed not only towards those who do not know Christ but also to the baptised and who have abandoned the practice of their Catholic faith, to those who are living their faith with cultural and sociological understanding of Christianity, to those who practice the Christian faith occasionally, and to those who practice their faith out of habit.

Initial Proclamation is the witness and explicit, contextualised presentation of Christ and his Good News to individuals and the wider community which stirs up their interest to a personal encounter, conversion and fundamental choice for Christ (*1 Cor* 12:17; *Eph* 5:23). It is founded on our quality of witness of life and friendly relationship. In this presentation when I use the word ‘evangelisation’ or ‘religious education’ I imply also Initial Proclamation as understood above.

## Evangelization and Catholic Schools

Throughout the centuries, the Church has developed many ways, many methods for evangelising, for sharing God’s saving message and

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grace. One of the most effective methods of evangelisation is the Catholic School which, by its nature and structure, is equipped with the necessary tools for proclaiming the Gospel and ensuring that its students have every opportunity to accept this ineffable gift. This is why the Church spends significant resources to build schools and ensure that these are well staffed and funded, that they excel academically and that they foster the students' integral formation so that they might respond better to God's love and ultimately share it with a world that needs it so desperately.

Here in Africa young Catholics are constantly confronted by values hostile to those of the Church. These cause tension within young people who are already struggling with issues of self-identity and looking for meaning in their lives. The Catholic School is perfectly positioned to provide the spiritual guidance that young people so greatly need and which they desperately seek. When a Catholic School fails in its mission to help students grow in love of God and others<sup>41</sup>, the consequences can be disastrous. In this light the defining aspect of a Catholic School, which distinguishes it from every other kind of educational institution or enterprise is its Catholic identity, not funding, academic excellence, nor success in extracurricular activities.

## **The five Essential Mark of the Catholic Schools**

I would like to present to you these benchmarks of Catholic Schools 1 to help you in your discussions during these Study Days on Initial Proclamation in Educative Environments here in Africa and Madagascar.

### **1. Inspired by a Supernatural Vision**

The Church sees education as a process that, in light of man's transcendent destiny, forms the whole child and seeks to fix his or her gaze to heaven.

Parents, educators, and all who dedicate themselves to the education

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<sup>41</sup> J. Michael Miller, *The Holy See's Teaching on the Catholic Schools*. (Manchester, Sophia Institute Press: 2001).

apostolate need to keep in mind the specific purpose of a Catholic education which is the formation of young people who have their eyes on heaven by being good citizens of this world, loving God and neighbour and enriching society with the leaven of the Gospel, and at the same time strive to be citizens of the world to come, by striving to become saints.

## 2. Founded on a Christian Anthropology

Catholic theology teaches that grace builds on nature. Because of this complementarity of the natural and the supernatural, Catholic educators need to have a sound understanding of the human person that addresses the requirements of both the natural and the supernatural perfection of the children entrusted to their care. It calls for the fullest development of all that is human which are in all dimensions of being images of God (cf. *Gen* 1:26-27).

This also implies that the Catholic school must be founded on Jesus Christ as the centre, fulcrum and vital principle of the entire educative enterprise, not an appendix, nor ‘fitted in’ nor an add-on to Catholic educational philosophy. Indeed, “Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others”<sup>42</sup>. Thus, there should be regular Catechism class as well as faith formation and preparation of Catholic students for the First Communion and Confirmation.

## 3. Animated by Communion and Community

Since the Church is “the home and the school of communion,” the Catholic School, as a community of persons, ought to be “a genuine community of faith” which is an alternative model for an individualistic society. It becomes truly a community when there is *teamwork* among all those involved; *cooperation* between educators and bishops; *interaction* among students with teachers; and the *school’s physical environment*<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> John Paul II, *Message to the National Catholic Educational Association* (1979).

<sup>43</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988).

### **a. Teamwork**

Teamwork will become a reality when there is a warm and intimate family atmosphere where educators, administrators, parents, and bishops guide the school to foster the appreciation of the various charisms and vocations that build up a genuine school community, strengthen solidarity, mutual assistance, participation, and foster explicit Christian witness, thus overcome individualistic self-promotion, competition, marginalisation, indifference.

### **b. Cooperation between Educators and Bishops**

The bishop's pastoral leadership is pivotal in supporting and enhancing the ministry of Catholic Schools under his pastoral care and in ensuring their catholicity. He has a twofold responsibility:

- Integrate the Catholic School into his diocese's pastoral program;
- Oversee that education in Catholic schools (even schools established or directed by members of religious institutes) is based on the principles of Catholic doctrine.

### **c. Interaction of Students and Teachers**

The Catholic philosophy of education has always paid special attention to the quality of interpersonal relations in the school community, especially those between teachers and students. Effort must be made to establish personal relationship where there is dialogue and mutual relationship and a prudent combination of familiarity and distance. This ensures that the student is seen as a person whose intellectual growth is harmonised with spiritual, religious, emotional, and social growth. Authentic formation of young people also requires the personalised accompaniment of a teacher because, as St. John Bosco said, "education is a thing of the heart".

### **d. Physical Environment**

The school's physical environment and adequate equipment create a pleasant and family atmosphere so that when a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, an environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom, illumined by the light of faith and suffused with a delight in the sacramental<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> *Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 25.

Catholic Schools express physically and visibly their identity through external signs which embody Catholic culture and ethos like images, symbols, icons, and other objects of traditional devotion. For example the sign board with the name of the centre or the School should clearly mention ‘Catholic’. A chapel, classroom crucifixes and statues, liturgical celebrations, and other sacramental reminders of Catholic life, including prayer as a normal part of the school day, regular celebration of the Eucharist with the participation of students and teachers as well as similar acts of religion that belong to everyday ecclesial life. Religious clubs, movements and associations should be allowed and encouraged in the school.

#### **4. Imbued with a Catholic Worldview throughout its Curriculum**

While Catholic Schools conform to government-mandated curricula, they also implement their programs with an overall religious orientation. Here we need to take special care to avoid the error that a Catholic school’s distinctiveness rests solely on the shoulders of its religious-education program. An authentically Catholic *worldview* which foster love for wisdom and truth, and integrate faith, culture, and life permeates the entire curriculum both in its content and methodology. In this light, Catholic education is integral, that is, intentionally directed to the development of every student’s intellectual, physical, psychological, moral, and religious capacities. This includes the development of all the human faculties of the students, their preparation for professional life, their ethical and social formation, their education in the intellectual and moral virtues, a clear idea of the meaning of life, and religious education so that they may be formed as strong and responsible individuals, who are capable of making free and correct choices<sup>45</sup>.

In an age of information overload, Catholic Schools must be especially attentive not only to convey information to passive students because knowledge and understanding are far more than the accumulation of information. They aim at teaching each student love for wisdom, the desire for continued self-learning and to uphold that truth is “that fundamental value without which freedom, justice, and human dignity are ex-

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<sup>45</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), 31.

tinguished”<sup>46</sup>, hence, the necessity to make judgments about what is true and what is false.

The Catholic worldview is expressed in the educational philosophy that seeks to prepare students to live their Catholic faith in their particular culture. The synthesis between culture and faith is the most significant elements of its educational project as shown in their capacity to make judgments based on religious and moral truths in a way appropriate to their age. The integration of culture with faith and of faith with life produces holiness among the members of the school community<sup>47</sup>!

## **5. Sustained by Gospel Witness**

A final indicator of a school’s authentic catholicity is the vital witness of its teachers and administrators. Teaching is not only a profession. It is a vocation and a participation in the Church’s evangelising mission. Teachers as individuals and as a community have the primary responsibility of creating a Christian school climate. Indeed, the achievement of the Catholic school’s purpose depends chiefly on them.

To fulfil their mission and responsibility it is indispensable that educators in Catholic Schools, with very few exceptions, should be practicing Catholics who are committed to the Church, are living her sacramental life and are enthusiastically committed to the Catholic School’s distinctive ethos. Principals, pastors, school-board members, parents, and bishops share in the serious duty of hiring teachers who meet the standards of doctrine and integrity of life essential to a flourishing Catholic School. I am aware of the difficulties this implies, but it is important that those responsible for hiring teachers must see to it that these criteria are met. When such a policy is ignored, it is inevitable that children will absorb, even if they are not explicitly taught, a soft indifferentism that will sustain neither their practice of the faith nor their ability to imbue society with Christian values.

The witness of Christian life of adults in the school community is a vital part of the Catholic School’s identity. The same can be said about their witness to the Church’s teaching on the sanctity of marriage and the sacredness

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<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Millennium* (1997).



of human life. In fact, Children will pick up far more by the example of their educators than by masterful pedagogical techniques, especially in the practice of Christian virtues. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI:

“The central figure in the work of educating, and especially in education in the faith, which is the summit of the person’s formation and is his or her most appropriate horizon, is specifically the form of witness. This witness becomes a proper reference point to the extent that the person can account for the hope that nourishes his life (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*) and is personally involved in the truth that he proposes”<sup>48</sup>.

The prophetic words of Pope Paul VI ring as true today as they did more than thirty years ago: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”<sup>49</sup>. What educators do and how they act are more significant than what they say – inside and outside the classroom. This is how the Church evangelizes.

## Difficulties of Initial Proclamation

I would like to conclude my presentation by mentioning some of factors which make Initial Proclamation difficult in our Catholic Schools here in Ethiopia:

- Ethiopia is by tradition a Christian country, so some people do not feel the need for Initial Proclamation,
- Our Catholic Christians are threatened,
- The wrong understanding of “proselytism” make some Catholic afraid to foster Initial Proclamation,
- The wrong understanding of “discrimination m” make some Catholic afraid to foster Initial Proclamation,
- The effort to avoid discrimination of other religions leads to the tendency to discriminate Catholics,
- The ignorance of our religious freedom in this country.

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<sup>48</sup> Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention in Rome*, (June 6, 2005).

<sup>49</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 41.



# From Initial Proclamation to the Catechumenate

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Sr. Patricia Finn, FMA

**Topic:** The journey of Christian Initiation from Pre-Evangelisation to the Catechumenate in order to ‘recover the ardour of the beginnings of Evangelisation of the African continent’.

## Introduction

When one thinks of Africa, one is immediately confronted by its vastness, diversities, complexities as well as its mysteriousness. The Catholic Church in Africa is wrapped up in these factors, which need to be unpacked before anyone can understand the reality of the Church on the African Continent.

### 1. Cultural and Geographical Diversities

When we speak of Africa, we have to remember that North Africa is completely different from Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, each of the regions: Eastern, Western, Central, and Southern differ significantly from each other. Linguistically, Africa is even more complex. Leaving all the dialects aside, we may count about 2,000 different languages and therefore one can imagine the enormous problem of communication facing 62 African nation states today. As one travels from one country to another, the way of life may differ considerably in the livelihood of people, their culture and even their staple food.

It is also important to recall that Evangelisation entered the continent of Africa much earlier than the colonial interests. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles 8:26-40, it was the Apostle Philip who baptized the first Ethiopian Christian.

Therefore, the Evangelizing Mission of the Church in Africa and the means of carrying it out may very well differ from place to place. However, the reality is the same. The questions that we pose are the same: How must the Church carry out her Evangelizing Mission? How can African Christians become ever more faithful witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ?

## **2. The Baptismal Catechumenate as the Inspiration for all Catechesis**

When referring to catechesis and the model of the Baptismal Catechumenate it is essential that we understand what we are speaking about so as to put into perspective the process by which the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, changed the way in which we do catechesis.

**2.1. *Constitution on the Liturgy*:** In this document Vatican II was asking that “the catechumenate for adults, comprising several distinct steps, be restored and to be taken into use at the discretion of the local ordinary. This means that the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of suitable instruction, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time” (#64).

**2.2. *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (#14)*:** “Those who, through the Church, have accepted from God a belief in Christ are admitted to the catechumenate by liturgical rites. The catechumenate is not a mere expounding of doctrines and precepts, but a training period in the whole Christian life, and an apprenticeship, during which disciples are joined to Christ their Teacher. Therefore, catechumens should be properly instructed in the mystery of salvation and in the practice of Gospel morality, and by sacred rites which are to be held at successive intervals, they should be introduced into the life of faith, of liturgy, and of love, which is led by the People of God [...] Finally, the juridical status of catechumens should be clearly defined in the new code of Canon law. For since they are joined to the Church, they are already of the household of Christ, and not seldom they are already leading a life of faith, hope, and charity”.

**2.3. *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*:** In its Decree of 1972, the Congregation for Divine Worship had this to say, “The Second Vatican Council prescribed the revision of the rite of baptism of adults and

decreed that the catechumenate for adults, divided into several steps, should be restored. By this means the time of the catechumenate, which is intended as a period of well-suited instruction, would be sanctified by liturgical rites to be celebrated at successive intervals of time. The Council likewise decreed that both the solemn and simple rites of adult baptism should be revised, with proper attention to the restored catechumenate. (Congregation for Divine Worship - January 6, 1972).

**2.4. *The Revised General Directory for Catechesis states:*** “Given that the mission ad gentes is the paradigm of all the Church’s missionary activity, the baptismal catechumenate, which is joined to it, is the model of its catechizing activity. It is therefore helpful to underline those elements of the catechumenate which must inspire contemporary catechesis and its significance”.

The Directory points out that there is a fundamental difference between pre-baptismal catechesis and post-baptismal catechesis and in the light of this substantial difference, some elements of the baptismal catechumenate are to be considered as the source of inspiration for post-baptismal catechesis (GDC 1997 #90).

The Directory then proceeds to expand on which elements of pre-baptismal catechesis are to be considered the norm for post-baptismal catechesis.

- The Pastoral care of Christian Initiation is vital for every particular Church.
- The baptismal catechumenate is the responsibility of the entire Christian community.
- The baptismal catechumenate is completely permeated by the Paschal Mystery.
- The baptismal catechumenate is also an initial place of inculturation.
- The concept of the baptismal catechumenate as a process of formation and as a true school of the faith offers post-baptismal catechesis dynamic and particular characteristics:
  - Comprehensiveness and integrity of formation
  - Its gradual character expressed in definite stages
  - Its connection with meaningful rites
  - The use of symbols, biblical and liturgical signs
  - Its constant references to the Christian community.

The Directory concludes this Chapter with a paragraph that states that, if taken seriously, this vision of catechesis will change the way in which we catechise children and young people:

“Post-baptismal catechesis, without slavishly imitating the structure of the baptismal catechumenate, and recognising in those to be catechized the reality of their Baptism, does well, however, to draw inspiration from ‘this preparatory school for the Christian life’, and to allow itself to be enriched by those principal elements which characterize the catechumenate” (GDC, 91).

### **3. Catechesis in the Process of Evangelisation**

#### ***3.1. Initial Proclamation of Christ***

The General Directory for Catechesis<sup>50</sup> (#61) says, “Primary proclamation is addressed to non-believers and those living in religious indifference. Its functions are to proclaim the Gospel and to call to conversion”. It is not only directed towards those who do not yet know Christ but also towards the baptised who have abandoned the practice of their Christian faith; to those who live in indifference; to those who only practice the Christian faith occasionally and at certain times during the Liturgical Year. Those who practice their faith out of habit.

Basically, primary proclamation, evangelisation and new evangelisation seek to achieve the same aim: to bring people to an encounter with Jesus. The Church desires that the first stage in the catechetical process be dedicated to ensuring conversion to Christ (CT, 19; GDC, 61). It is true to say that initial proclamation is the beginning of the process of a life-long journey of Faith and conversion. Without initial conversion and initial personal faith catechesis risks becoming sterile.

In *Redemptoris Missio* Pope John Paul II insists that initial proclamation “is the permanent priority of mission” which has a central and irreplaceable role to play in the Church’s missionary activity (n. 44).

#### ***3.2. The Period of pre-Catechumenate***

This is the starting point, the time of initial conversion. It is a time to check out what the Church is about as well as a time to discern whether

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<sup>50</sup> From now on to be referred to as GDC.

the Catholic Church is able to offer meaning and direction for life. In the Journey of Christian Initiation, this period lasts for as long as it may take the person to come to accept and believe in Jesus Christ and to want to live faith in him as a member of our Church.

What is the advantage of the pre-catechumenate? It is a period for evangelisation – an appeal to the heart, the beginning of the person’s affective conversion. It is a time to respond to the initial questions with which people come to the Church, and removing initial stumbling blocks of misconceptions that can be easily resolved. It is a time for them to reflect on their own journey that God is leading them on, and also to hear the stories and testimonies of others. It is good to be flexible and respond to the needs of the pre-catechumens. The more systematic content comes in the Catechumenate.

This is what the RCIA has to say about the period of the pre-catechumenate: “The whole period of the pre-catechumenate is set aside for this evangelisation, so that the genuine will to follow Christ and seek baptism may mature” (#36).

Before the Rite of Acceptance is celebrated “sufficient and necessary time, as required in each case, should be set aside to evaluate and, if necessary, to purify the candidates motives and dispositions (RCIA # 43).

**Reflect:** As catechists, what do we do to ensure that children and young people have been evangelised before we bring them to catechesis?

| Groups Requiring New Evangelisation                | Identifying Characteristics   |
|--|---|
| “non-practicing Christians”                        | Those who have been baptized but lead lives divorced from Christianity  |
| “simple people”                                    | Those who express their deep faith in popular devotions but know little of its fundamental principles   |
| “highly educated” but poorly catechized Christians | Those whose religious formation never advanced beyond that which they received in childhood   |
| Reticent Christians                                | Those who, for one reason or another, are reticent in public “to give explicit and courageous witness in their lives to the faith of Jesus Christ”. |

### ***3.3. The Period of the Catechumenate***

Number 75 of the Ordo, states clearly that “the catechumenate is an extended period during which the candidates are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. In this way, the dispositions manifested at their acceptance into the catechumenate are brought to maturity. This is achieved in four ways:

**3.3.1.** A suitable catechesis is provided, planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year and solidly supported by celebrations of the word [...]

**3.3.2.** [...] the catechumens and candidates are helped and supported by sponsors, godparents and the entire Christian community. The catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspirations in their deeds and to practice love of neighbour, even at the cost of self-renunciation. Thus formed, the newly converted set out on a spiritual journey [...]

**3.3.3.** The Church, like a mother, helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God’s blessing [...]

**3.3.4.** Since the Church’s life is apostolic, catechumens should also learn how to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith”.

## **4. Fundamental Relationship between Evangelisation and Catechesis**

All Christians are responsible for catechesis. This is particularly true because of the responsibility of every Baptised person to be part of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church. This principle is re-echoed when the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “it is vital that parish leaders collaborate with one another in catechetical activities at all levels, and collaborate with parents and families in their work with children and youth, for parents are the first educators of their children” (CCC, 2223).

Of all the ministries and services that the Church performs “its mission of evangelisation, [and] catechesis occupies a position of importance” (GDC, 219).



Catechesis is a service “performed jointly by priests, deacons, religious and laity, in communion with the Bishop” (GDC, 219). For this to become a reality there needs to be a stronger conviction among Catholics that catechesis is not something that is the responsibility of a select few. The entire Christian Community is called to be involved in this process.

The words of Jesus continue to give meaning to the Christian life: “I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last” (*Jn* 15:16). One of the stumbling blocks towards implementing a catechumenal approach to catechesis is that often the task and responsibility of catechesis falls to a small group of willing and dedicated people.

Evangelisation has been given many definitions, but the most simple yet comprehensive is the definition given by Pope Paul VI: “Evangelisation is bringing the Good News to the whole community and, through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new” (EN, 18).

Pope John Paul II understood catechesis “as a very remarkable moment in the evangelisation process” (CT, 18). Evangelisation and catechesis are interrelated, yet they cannot be identified with each other. Although the content of catechesis carries the same message as evangelisation, which is the Good News of Salvation, the ‘moment’ of catechesis is the period in which conversion to Jesus Christ is formalized and provides the basis for adherence to Christ (CT, 26).

Whether catechesis is understood as part of the introductory process of arousing faith in unbelievers, which, hopefully, will lead to incorporation into the Church, or whether it is understood as part of the process that helps the faith of children, young people and adults mature, it always takes place within the context of evangelisation (GDC, 49). Those who have been evangelized and catechized, in their turn, are called to become evangelizers.

Catechesis is thus the necessary link between missionary activity which calls to faith and pastoral activity which continually nourishes the Christian Community. [...] Catechesis is fundamental for building up the personality of the individual disciple” (GDC, 81).

| Element                                     | Objective  | Structures  | Characteristics   |
|---|--|---|---|
| Pre-catechumenate/<br>Evangelisation        | Conversion and initial faith                       | “Ad gentes”, a “pre-catechesis”, new evangelisation, “kerygmatic catechesis”  | Proclaims the Gospel; calls to conversion; prepares individuals for the catechumenate; begins the catechetical process  |
| Catechumenate                               | Preparation for Sacraments of Christian Initiation | The baptismal catechumenate, which links proclamation to pastoral activity within the community   | Offers comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith; provides instruction as well as apprenticeship in Christian living; centres on basic doctrines and essential gospel values  |
| Mystagogia / Ongoing formation in the Faith | Growth in faith/continual conversion               | Integration of the initiated into the life of the community; fostering love of God, love of neighbour, and a commitment to evangelisation | Study of Scripture (especially <i>Lectio Divina</i> ); “a Christian reading of events”; Catholic social teaching; liturgical catechesis; occasional catechesis centred on particular circumstances/events; initiatives that reinforce commitment, open new perspectives, and encourage perseverance (e.g. days of recollection, retreats) |

#### ***4.1. The Word of God as the Source of Catechesis***

The GDC dedicates a whole chapter to the norms and criteria for presenting the Gospel message in catechesis. This means that “at the heart of catechesis, we find, in essence, a person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth” (#98).

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* Pope Benedict XVI refers to the biblical dimension of catechesis which he considers to be “an important aspect of the Church’s pastoral work which, if used wisely, can help in rediscovering the centrality of God’s word in catechesis [...]” (VD, 74).

#### ***4.2. The Mission in the Church after Vatican II***

The witness to the values of the Kingdom on the part of the Baptized and Christian Communities is the first proclamation of the Risen Jesus or the kerygma (AG, 20; EN, 28, 49, 80; RM, 32, 48-49; 72). It is different from catechesis. The evangelizer is a person possessed by the passion for Jesus Christ. A passion that flows from a heart that is convinced that Jesus is Lord and Saviour.

The beneficiaries of first evangelisation are the non-Christians and non-believers: peoples, groups, socio-cultural contexts where Christ and his Gospel are unknown and where there is lack of sufficiently mature Christian communities about to incarnate the faith in their own environment and to announce it to other groups and to promote the values of the Kingdom. (cf. AG, 4, 5, 6; RM, 33-34)

The mission *ad gentes* commits us to promote the human development by educating the consciences.

All the particular Churches are called to the mission *ad gentes*, which is the primary missionary activity of the Church, without which the very missionary dimension would be deprived of its fundamental significance and of its exemplary fulfilment. (RM, 34, 37; 52-58)

In the Council's document on Liturgical Renewal (SC) and in *Ad Gentes*, the document on the missionary nature of the church, a vision of evangelisation, catechumenal formation and liturgical celebration was elaborated as the privileged way to revitalize the church's initiatory efforts.

This renewal has been given flesh in magisterial documents of the past 25-30 years that have gradually elaborated the Council's vision. Documents on Liturgical Reform, Roman Congregations, Papal Encyclicals, Episcopal Synods, and lesser documents from various departments of the Holy See and individual Episcopal Conferences around the world have sought to implement the Council's mandates in ways faithful to the Spirit-led vision of Vatican II.

As Salesian Educators, our task is one of Christian Initiation rather than Religious Education. Christian Initiation is the agenda set before us.

#### **4.3. *Christian Initiation***

To be initiated in the Church presupposes there is a community that holds within itself a mystery, or a special knowledge. The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults assumes that the Church is such a community.

Any kind of Christian Initiation has to do with a process of being absorbed into and bonded to a group. Those being initiated take on a new identity. In any context, initiation has as its goal to make and form individuals and communities who are committed to the history, symbols, values and celebration of the group. Any community committed to Chris-

tian Initiation expects conversion to its way of life as a basic criterion for membership.

#### **4.4. *Suitable Catechesis***

At Number 75, the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults<sup>51</sup> states clearly that the period of the Catechumenate is a time for “pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training [the catechumens] in the Christian life” (RCIA, 75).

The four parts of this major section in the Ordo touch on the essence of how suitable catechesis is to be carried out.

**4.4.1.** Catechesis during the period of the Catechumenate “is gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebrations of the word. This catechesis leads the catechumens not only to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas and precepts but also to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they are to participate” (75.1). The point is that all catechesis is an experience of the mystery of God and results in a growing desire of those being catechized for a deeper participation in that mysterious experience.

**4.4.2.** The second part of number 75 of the Ordo gives us insight into how the initiation process is carried forward: “*As they become familiar with the Christian way of life and are helped by the example and support of sponsors, godparents, and the entire Christian community, the catechumens learn to turn more readily to God in prayer, to bear witness to the faith, in all things to keep their hopes set on Christ, to follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds, and to practice love of neighbour, even at the cost of self-renunciation. Thus formed, the newly converted set out on a spiritual journey*” (75.2).

Children and young people are initiated more effectively by following a community’s way of life than by learning about a variety of religious truths.

**4.4.3.** The third part of section 75 of the Ordo describes the importance of ritual experience in the process of initiation: showing by example how to live a life of apostolic witness. The initiation called for here is a

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<sup>51</sup> The *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* will from now on be referred to as the *Ordo*.

process of forming deeply in love for the work of the Gospel. Caring for the marginalized, political action for justice, readiness to share publicly the reasons for one's faith, a sense of empowerment for mission rooted in baptism – these are the characteristics of the “way of life” into which our young people should be initiated.

We see in number 75 of the *Ordo* a powerful summary of the vision of Christian Initiation that should bring about a “paradigm shift” of how Christian initiation of adults, young people and children, at the levels of pre-baptismal catechumenate and post-baptismal catechumenate should take place.

A community that truly understands the meaning of Christian Initiation has conversion as its agenda, community as its context, and discipleship as its goal.

## **5. Catechesis Understood as a Life-long Journey of Conversion and Faith towards Communion and Intimacy with Jesus Christ (GDC 80)**

Pope Paul VI stressed the need for authentic catechesis to be “organic and systematic because of the tendency in various quarters to minimize its importance” (CT, 21).

Initiatory catechesis is more than passing on knowledge of the faith. It initiates and follows the style of the adult baptismal catechumenate that incorporates “into the community, which lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith” (GDC, 68).

Pope Benedict XVI stressed in his first encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est.* that “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with ... a person [Jesus Christ] which gives life a new horizon and a definitive direction”.

Properly renewed catechesis is centred on the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, all catechetical efforts must be oriented toward communion with Jesus Christ. If the Christian faith is about an encounter with the person of Jesus, then teaching of the faith must move beyond commandments and rules into something that introduces more directly into knowledge of Jesus, the person. Catechetical renewal in the church must focus on a transformed relationship with Jesus within a believing, sacramental faith community.

The GDC (#80) stresses that “the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ”.

This personal relationship with Jesus is not a vague association, but rather, a developed and mature Christian faith that requires basic knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. “Catechetical work always entails approaching Scripture in faith and in the Church’s Tradition” (VD, 74).

When Pope Benedict XVI refers to catechesis as “permeated by the mind-set of the Gospel through assiduous contact with the texts themselves”, (VD, 74), he is referring to the fact that the Word of God must inspire every dimension of the life of the Church.

The disciple of Christ needs to be constantly nourished by the Word of God in order to grow in the Christian life and deeper faith. “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the Word of Christ (*Rom 10:17*).

### ***5.1. Post Baptismal Catechesis is modelled on the Baptismal Catechumenate: an ongoing journey of conversion and faith***

Fifty years ago, Vatican II put before the Church the vision of Catechesis understood as an ongoing journey of faith; a process of initiation into the life and mission of Christ. The newness of this vision is based on the restoration of an ancient practice of initiating unbaptized adults into the church (RCIA, pp. xiv-xviii).

The RCIA involves more than instruction in knowledge of the faith. It embraces a long process, or journey of faith, marked out by specific rites of passage, celebrations of the Word, anointing and laying on of hands.

This preparation culminates in the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation and insertion into a faith-filled Christian Community who are aware of and committed to their Evangelizing Mission in the Church. All forms of Catechesis are therefore to be understood as an apprenticeship in the faith (GDC, 67).

The restoration of the Baptismal Catechumenate requires adaptation to the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity, social and ecclesial conditions among those for whom it is intended (GDC, 170).

## ***5.2. How to model all post-baptismal catechesis on the Baptismal Catechumenate***

Post Baptismal Catechesis for children and adolescents that is modelled on the baptismal catechumenate is a comprehensive and systematic formation in the faith that normally begins with a period of evangelisation or re-evangelisation.

**5.2.1.** All catechesis is gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year and solidly supported by celebrations of the Word.

**5.2.2.** It encourages accompaniment of individuals by sponsors, godparents and the entire Christian community. It is a process that takes place within the Christian Community.

**5.2.3.** It promotes the celebration of appropriate liturgical celebrations throughout the various stages and phases of catechesis. It takes time and cannot be rushed.

**5.2.4.** It recommends that suitable opportunities be provided for active apostolic involvement suited to age, culture and circumstances (RCIA, 75).

**5.2.5.** It includes more than instruction; it is an apprenticeship in the faith that promotes an authentic following of Christ, focused on His person. It also helps the disciple of Christ to accept the responsibilities assumed at baptism and to profess the faith from the 'heart' (CT, 29).

**5.2.6.** It presents a type of catechesis that is permeated by a climate of prayer.

**5.2.7.** It inserts those preparing for Christian Initiation into a faith community that lives, celebrates and bears witness to the faith.

**5.2.8.** It prepares for and is open to the mission of the Church (GDC, 67-68).

**5.2.9.** The Sacrament of Confirmation completes the initiation process by making people full members of the Church as they personally commit themselves to continuing the mission of Jesus.

**5.2.10.** After the reception of the Sacraments of Christian Initiation there is a period Mystagogy or deepening of the faith, which aims at helping the person to be inserted into the Community as an active member of Christ's body.

## **6. The Essential Elements or Tasks of Catechesis**

Catechesis is always inspired by the way in which Jesus formed his disciples: He taught them about the Kingdom; He impressed on them evangelical attitudes; He taught them to pray; He prepared and sent them out on mission.

There are essential elements or tasks in the process of catechesis. The GDC calls these elements the “fundamental tasks” (GDC, 85) of catechesis and states that “when catechesis omits one of these elements, the Christian faith does not attain full development” (GDC, 87).

The fundamental tasks of catechesis are expressed as follows:

### ***6.1. Promoting knowledge of the faith***

Catechesis must lead those being catechized not only to a gradual knowledge and understanding of the faith but also equip them to be capable of articulating their faith

### ***6.2. Liturgical formation***

All the faithful need to be brought to a full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy. Part of catechesis is therefore the task of promoting a knowledge of and understanding of the meaning of the liturgy and the sacraments.

### ***6.3. Moral formation***

Catechesis transmits the attitudes of Jesus himself and encourages those being catechized to embark on a journey of interior transformation. The Sermon on the Mount is an indispensable point of reference for the moral formation that is so important in the lives of our young people today.

### ***6.4. Prayer formation***

If the aim of all catechesis is intimacy and communion with Jesus, then those being catechized have to be formed in the different aspects of Christian prayer: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, filial confidence, supplication and awe. All these sentiments are summed up in the Lord’s Prayer that is the model of all Christian prayer. Catechesis needs to be permeated by a climate of prayer.



### ***6.5. Initiation into community life***

Catechesis prepares those being catechized to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church. Part of this initiation into community life is encouraging fraternal attitudes towards members of other Christian churches and ecclesial communities.

### ***6.6. Missionary initiation***

Catechesis seeks to equip the disciples of Jesus to be present as Christians in society through their professional, cultural and social lives. Catechesis instils the same evangelical attitudes that Jesus taught his disciples: seek out the lost, proclaim and heal, be poor in spirit. Catechesis also has to educate towards meaningful communication with men and women of other religions and be capable of acknowledging the many seeds of the Word that God has sown in these religions (GDC, 81-87).

Each of these elements must be present in the life of a mature, committed Christian. They must also be in relationship with each other on a permanent basis. Their interaction is the heart of the growth formula for a Christian (GDC, 31; 87).

If one or more of these elements is entirely missing from the life of a Christian, it means that a fundamental formation/conversion experience has not been followed. (GDC, 22; 53-57). While many people associate catechesis with ministry to children or with pre-sacramental preparation programs, the GDC clarifies the fact that Catechesis is a life-long process or journey of conversion and faith for all believers (GDC, 51-57).



# A Response to Patricia Finn

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Fr. Joy Sebastian, SDB

Thanks for the challenging and wealth of thoughts. To recover and to re-launch the ardour of the beginnings of Evangelisation in the African Continent, as from Ethiopia of old! The real question is how do I become an ever more faithful proclaimer-witness to our Lord Jesus Christ?

Sr. Patricia gave a very detailed yet clear presentation of the General Directory for Catechesis. She presented six basic points:

- The Catechumenate as a training period more than indoctrination period! (Ch. 2)
- An encounter with Jesus at the pre Catechumenate = evangelisation (initial proclamation) (Ch. 3)
- Since parents are the first educators (Ch. 4). How do we help/form them (and the entire community) to be evangelising educators? (Family ministry was the call of the Pope to the Salesians at GC, 26!)
- The call to bring the Good news to the whole community and through it, from within, transforming humanity anew (EN, 18).
- Pre-catechumenate → Catechumenate/catechesis (as apprenticeship) → evangelisers - as a continuous and deepening process.
- Rediscovering the centrality of God's Word

The affirmation that as Salesian Educators our task is Christian initiation, not religious education makes me ask whether we are not deviating from/or “partial-ising” DB's vision. Evangelisation and re-evangelisation (new evangelisation) lead to religious education! For us it means ‘honest citizens and good Christians’!

- Christian initiation has conversion as its agenda, community as its context, and discipleship as its goal! I find this as quite a radical statement
- 10 points for modelling catechesis on catechumenate and the fundamental tasks of (Ch. 5, 6) catechesis as a life long journey of conversion and faith leading to communion / intimacy...

### **Some questionings arising in my mind:**

Was there ever a period of great enthusiasm to evangelise the continent of Africa? On the other hand, was it just the colonies of the West along the Mediterranean? The 19th Century efforts of Comboni, Lav-igerie, Oblates of Mary Immaculate and others was significant. Is the growth of Salesians due to the fact that they went into initial proclamation more than remaining on 'safe ground' among migrants with catechesis or new evangelisation?

Is there a clear difference in the Eastern culture and schools of evangelisation (Asia, Africa), perhaps a more quiet, lived proclamation in the midst of the community around! Less militant, but long-suffering in proclamation? Witness of life but slower growth/spread of the Christian faith?

Project Africa in the 1980s seems to have imbued many Salesians with an adventurous evangelising spirit. Is it now dying out?

How can the Catechumenate – Catechesis model help us in our work of animation as Salesian Missionaries?

## Part III

# **Formulation of Conclusions**



# Challenges and Opportunities for SDB and FMA in Africa and Madagascar regarding Initial Proclamation/Evangelisation

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Fr. Joseph Minja SDB\*

**I would like to start my brief presentation by reflecting on a few questions:**

1. What is the reality regarding the population of our Catholic Church in Africa today?
2. Who are the groups that are already working as evangelisers in the African Catholic Church?
3. As a Christian, priest, religious or lay person, what is my actual role in proclaiming the good news so that people may come to know Christ and may strengthen their faith?
4. As SDBs, FMAs....
  - a. Where is our place in the Catholic Church in Africa?
  - b. Have we been active ministers in initial evangelisation?
  - c. Do we follow the footsteps of Don Bosco in seeking to be enthusiastic evangelisers?
  - d. What are we doing to strengthen and encourage those who are already initially evangelised?
  - e. Is the Educational system (Preventive System) of Don Bosco effective in the proclamation of the faith in today's Africa?

The following data on the Catholic Church in Africa and on Religions in Africa can help us to focus on where we are and where we are going regarding evangelisation. This can then be a springboard for proposals and a plan of action.

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\* He has a licentiate in Spirituality from the Salesian Pontifical University, Rome. He was the director of Makalala Catechetical Centre (Iringa). At present he is in-charge of the prenoviciate of the AFE Province.

# AFRICA - CATHOLIC CHURCH GENERAL DATA<sup>1</sup>

|     | Countries         | Population | Catholic number | Catholics % | Ecclesiastical circumscription | Priests Diocesan | Priests Religious | Priests Total | Brothers | Sisters | Catechists | Major seminarians |
|-----|-------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------|---------|------------|-------------------|
| 1.  | Algeria           | 35,423,500 | 4,163           | 0.01        | 4                              | 38               | 57                | 95            | 20       | 184     | 2          | 5                 |
| 2.  | Angola            | 18,999,500 | 10,560,053      | 55.58       | 18                             | 443              | 351               | 794           | 98       | 2,178   | 30,934     | 1,236             |
| 3.  | Benin             | 9,184,800  | 2,532,785       | 27.58       | 10                             | 558              | 138               | 696           | 139      | 1,188   | 12,705     | 555               |
| 4.  | Botswana          | 2,030,000  | 90,625          | 4.46        | 2                              | 26               | 42                | 68            | 5        | 69      | 404        | 25                |
| 5.  | Burkina Faso      | 16,337,200 | 2,201,90        | 13.48       | 13                             | 662              | 154               | 816           | 229      | 1,401   | 10,428     | 412               |
| 6.  | Burundi           | 8,540,700  | 5,894,749       | 69.02       | 7                              | 462              | 98                | 560           | 197      | 1,287   | 4,390      | 488               |
| 7.  | Cameroon          | 19,948,500 | 5,318,868       | 26.66       | 24                             | 1,226            | 621               | 1,847         | 288      | 2,190   | 18,722     | 1,361             |
| 8.  | Cape Verde        | 513,500    | 487,774         | 94.99       | 2                              | 16               | 42                | 58            | 7        | 127     | 4,550      | 25                |
| 9.  | C. A. Republic    | 4,483,600  | 1,045,622       | 23.32       | 9                              | 184              | 135               | 319           | 29       | 342     | 4,863      | 252               |
| 10. | Chad              | 11,513,600 | 1,114,746       | 9.68        | 8                              | 158              | 101               | 259           | 52       | 364     | 6,606      | 131               |
| 11. | Comoros           | 769,296    | 5,495           | 0.71        | 1                              | 0                | 3                 | 3             | 2        | 4       | 20         | 0                 |
| 12. | Congo Brazzaville | 4,076,000  | 2,325,023       | 57.04       | 7                              | 285              | 136               | 421           | 71       | 433     | 5,282      | 324               |
| 13. | D. R. Congo       | 70,623,600 | 37,366,410      | 52.91       | 47                             | 3,141            | 1,841             | 4,982         | 1,458    | 8,278   | 69,433     | 3,081             |
| 14. | Djibouti          | 916,200    | 8,472           | 0.93        | 1                              | 1                | 2                 | 3             | 6        | 24      | 15         | 1                 |
| 15. | Egypt             | 84,494,000 | 216,679         | 0.26        | 15                             | 225              | 153               | 378           | 55       | 1,156   | 1,896      | 117               |
| 16. | Equatorial Guinea | 709,800    | 661,963         | 93.26       | 3                              | 70               | 57                | 127           | 34       | 220     | 1,686      | 56                |
| 17. | Eritrea           | 5,258,100  | 163,316         | 3.11        | 3                              | 87               | 312               | 399           | 90       | 652     | 201        | 356               |
| 18. | Ethiopia          | 84,952,800 | 663,754         | 0.78        | 10                             | 238              | 307               | 545           | 83       | 711     | 2,489      | 324               |
| 19. | Gabon             | 1,537,500  | 767,222         | 49.90       | 6                              | 75               | 83                | 158           | 18       | 169     | 1,550      | 92                |
| 20. | Gambia            | 1,764,600  | 46,524          | 2.64        | 1                              | 17               | 12                | 29            | 11       | 50      | 48         | 9                 |
| 21. | Ghana             | 24,299,800 | 3,009,437       | 12.39       | 20                             | 1,050            | 227               | 1,277         | 209      | 971     | 7,462      | 694               |
| 22. | Guinea            | 10,332,300 | 265,165         | 2.57        | 3                              | 101              | 20                | 121           | 28       | 120     | 782        | 42                |
| 23. | Guinea-Bissau     | 1,635,200  | 214,339         | 13.11       | 2                              | 22               | 58                | 80            | 12       | 136     | 950        | 63                |
| 24. | Ivory Coast       | 21,585,300 | 3,907,131       | 18.10       | 15                             | 1,001            | 299               | 1,300         | 363      | 1,019   | 16,075     | 337               |
| 25. | Kenya             | 40,834,800 | 10,251,534      | 25.11       | 26                             | 1,340            | 799               | 2,139         | 730      | 4,333   | 10,772     | 1,671             |
| 26. | Lesotho           | 2,118,900  | 1,092,974       | 51.58       | 4                              | 77               | 86                | 163           | 41       | 642     | 1,545      | 73                |
| 27. | Liberia           | 4,164,000  | 345,411         | 8.30        | 3                              | 44               | 18                | 62            | 14       | 54      | 878        | 41                |
| 28. | Libya             | 6,528,000  | 109,143         | 1.67        | 4                              | 1                | 10                | 11            | 0        | 63      | 23         | 1                 |
| 29. | Madagascar        | 20,129,200 | 5,955,715       | 29.59       | 21                             | 612              | 695               | 1,307         | 401      | 4,464   | 20,862     | 987               |

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Church's Annuario Ecclesiae (ASE) 2007. (New People No. 127 July-August, special Edition p. 34, 2010).



|     |                     |               |             |       |     |        |        |        |       |        |         |        |
|-----|---------------------|---------------|-------------|-------|-----|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|---------|--------|
| 30. | Malawi              | 15,728,400    | 4,636,241   | 29,48 | 7   | 313    | 100    | 413    | 84    | 788    | 2,386   | 356    |
| 31. | Mali                | 13,312,200    | 224,308     | 1.69  | 6   | 103    | 69     | 172    | 19    | 232    | 1,232   | 68     |
| 32. | Mauritania          | 3,379,200     | 5,264       | 0.16  | 3   | 9      | 6      | 9      | 1     | 37     | 18      | 2      |
| 33. | Mauritius           | 1,309,100     | 326,236     | 24,92 | 2   | 53     | 47     | 100    | 31    | 228    | 1,523   | 12     |
| 34. | Morocco             | 32,384,000    | 28,352      | 0.09  | 2   | 6      | 35     | 41     | 12    | 219    | 0       | 1      |
| 35. | Mozambique          | 22,812,900    | 4,955,668   | 21,72 | 12  | 212    | 364    | 576    | 98    | 1,121  | 42,898  | 358    |
| 36. | Namibia             | 2,279,200     | 392,700     | 17,23 | 3   | 19     | 78     | 97     | 19    | 514    | 1,339   | 23     |
| 37. | Niger               | 15,896,700    | 22,436      | 0.14  | 2   | 22     | 24     | 46     | 4     | 91     | 255     | 9      |
| 38. | Nigeria             | 158,258,100   | 23,968,133  | 15,15 | 52  | 4,308  | 865    | 5,173  | 442   | 4,420  | 31,106  | 5,829  |
| 39. | Rwanda              | 10,270,000    | 5,004,557   | 48,73 | 9   | 462    | 143    | 605    | 203   | 1,523  | 4,617   | 503    |
| 40. | Sao Tome & Principe | 218,360       | 157,783     | 72,26 | 1   | 5      | 7      | 12     | 3     | 38     | 601     | 7      |
| 41. | Senegal             | 12,825,000    | 634,328     | 4,95  | 7   | 302    | 124    | 426    | 145   | 808    | 2,691   | 159    |
| 42. | Seychelles          | 100,900       | 85,468      | 84,71 | 1   | 8      | 10     | 18     | 3     | 53     | 368     | 3      |
| 43. | Sierra Leone        | 5,583,900     | 272,109     | 4,65  | 3   | 87     | 58     | 145    | 36    | 63     | 696     | 48     |
| 44. | Somalia             | 9,309,300     | 115         | 0.00  | 1   | 1      | 2      | 3      | 0     | 4      | 1       | 0      |
| 45. | South Africa        | 50,601,000    | 3,530,081   | 6,98  | 27  | 549    | 657    | 1,206  | 173   | 2,240  | 13,294  | 472    |
| 46. | Sudan               | 43,230,600    | 6,702,410   | 15,50 | 10  | 260    | 136    | 396    | 85    | 334    | 5,280   | 208    |
| 47. | Swaziland           | 1,215,600     | 58,183      | 4,79  | 1   | 12     | 22     | 34     | 3     | 59     | 200     | 15     |
| 48. | Tanzania            | 44,967,300    | 13,442,316  | 29,89 | 31  | 1,653  | 742    | 2,395  | 857   | 8,981  | 15,427  | 1,119  |
| 49. | Togo                | 6,765,000     | 1,986,214   | 29,36 | 7   | 426    | 141    | 567    | 167   | 844    | 5,549   | 420    |
| 50. | Tunisia             | 10,403,000    | 21,355      | 0.21  | 1   | 15     | 22     | 37     | 6     | 118    | 0       | 0      |
| 51. | Uganda              | 33,779,100    | 15,085,208  | 44,66 | 20  | 1,303  | 309    | 1,812  | 537   | 3,134  | 13,647  | 1,129  |
| 52. | Western Sahara      | 416,340       | 104         | 0.03  | 1   | 0      | 3      | 3      | 0     | 0      | 0       | 0      |
| 53. | Zambia              | 13,209,600    | 4,335,486   | 32,82 | 10  | 382    | 396    | 778    | 174   | 1,846  | 8,949   | 478    |
| 54. | Zimbabwe            | 12,537,500    | 1,323,268   | 10,55 | 8   | 231    | 225    | 456    | 116   | 1,067  | 9,388   | 468    |
|     | TOTAL               | 1,034,766,396 | 183,825,322 | 17,76 | 514 | 23,095 | 11,442 | 34,537 | 7,908 | 61,591 | 397,038 | 24,716 |

# RELIGIONS GENERAL DATA<sup>2</sup>

|     | Countries         | Population | Catholics  | Catholics | Non Catholic Christians | Non Catholic Christians | Muslims    | Muslims | Traditional Religion |       |
|-----|-------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------|---------|----------------------|-------|
|     |                   |            | Number     | %         | Number                  | %                       | Number     | %       | Number               | %     |
| 1.  | Algeria           | 35,423,500 | 4,163      | 0.01      | 35,424                  | 0.10                    | 34,715,030 | 98.00   | 668,884              | 1.89  |
| 2.  | Angola            | 18,999,500 | 10,560,063 | 55.58     | 2,279,940               | 12.00                   | 2,279,940  | 0.13    | 6,134,808            | 32.29 |
| 3.  | Benin             | 9,184,800  | 2,532,785  | 27.58     | 156,142                 | 1.70                    | 1,262,910  | 13.75   | 5,232,963            | 56.97 |
| 4.  | Botswana          | 2,030,000  | 90,625     | 4.46      | 540,995                 | 26.65                   | 2,436      | 0.12    | 1,395,944            | 68.77 |
| 5.  | Burkina Faso      | 16,337,200 | 2,201,90   | 13.48     | 98,023                  | 0.60                    | 4,084,300  | 25.00   | 9,952,970            | 60.92 |
| 6.  | Burundi           | 8,540,700  | 5,894,749  | 69.02     | 567,102                 | 6.64                    | 85,407     | 1.00    | 1,993,441            | 23.34 |
| 7.  | Cameroon          | 19,948,500 | 5,318,868  | 26.66     | 2,786,805               | 13.97                   | 3,989,700  | 20.00   | 7,853,127            | 39.37 |
| 8.  | Cape Verde        | 513,500    | 487,774    | 94.99     | 0                       | 0.00                    | 0          | 0.00    | 25,726               | 5.01  |
| 9   | C. A. Republic    | 4,483,600  | 1,045,622  | 23.32     | 480,194                 | 10.71                   | 179,344    | 4.00    | 2,778,441            | 61.97 |
| 10. | Chad              | 11,513,600 | 1,114,746  | 9.68      | 437,517                 | 3.80                    | 5,756,800  | 50.00   | 4,204,537            | 36.52 |
| 11. | Comoros           | 769,296    | 5,495      | 0.71      | 385                     | 0.05                    | 761,603    | 99.00   | 1,813                | 0.24  |
| 12. | Congo Brazzaville | 4,076,000  | 2,325,023  | 57.04     | 623,220                 | 15.29                   | 122,280    | 3.00    | 1,005,476            | 24.67 |
| 13. | D. R. Congo       | 70,623,600 | 37,366,410 | 52.91     | 8,827,950               | 12.50                   | 564,989    | 0.80    | 23,864,252           | 33.79 |
| 14. | Djibouti          | 916,200    | 8,472      | 0.93      | 2,749                   | 0.30                    | 870,390    | 95.00   | 34,589               | 3.78  |
| 15. | Egypt             | 84,494,000 | 216,679    | 0.26      | 8,871,870               | 10.50                   | 74,354,720 | 88.00   | 1,050,731            | 1.24  |
| 16. | Equatorial Guinea | 709,800    | 661,963    | 93.26     | 21,294                  | 3.00                    | 0          | 0.00    | 26,543               | 3.74  |
| 17. | Eritrea           | 5,258,100  | 163,316    | 3.11      | 2,629,050               | 50.00                   | 2,366,145  | 45.00   | 99,589               | 1.89  |
| 18. | Ethiopia          | 84,952,800 | 663,754    | 0.78      | 42,476,400              | 50.00                   | 38,228,760 | 45.00   | 3,583,886            | 4.22  |
| 19. | Gabon             | 1,537,500  | 767,222    | 49.90     | 169,125                 | 11.00                   | 15,375     | 1.00    | 585,778              | 38.10 |
| 20. | Gambia            | 1,764,600  | 46,524     | 2.64      | 114,699                 | 6.50                    | 1,411,680  | 80.00   | 191,697              | 10.86 |
| 21. | Ghana             | 24,299,800 | 3,009,437  | 12.39     | 7,046,942               | 29.00                   | 2,915,976  | 12.00   | 11,327,445           | 46.62 |
| 22. | Guinea            | 10,332,300 | 265,165    | 2.57      | 10,332                  | 0.10                    | 7,232,610  | 70.00   | 2,824,192            | 27.33 |
| 23. | Guinea-Bissau     | 1,635,200  | 214,339    | 13.11     | 0                       | 0.00                    | 605,024    | 37.00   | 815,837              | 49.89 |
| 24. | Ivory Coast       | 21,585,300 | 3,907,131  | 18.10     | 755,486                 | 3.50                    | 5,180,472  | 24.00   | 11,742,211           | 54.40 |
| 25. | Kenya             | 40,834,800 | 10,251,534 | 25.11     | 18,375,660              | 45.00                   | 4,083,480  | 10.00   | 8,124,126            | 19.90 |
| 26. | Lesotho           | 2,118,900  | 1,092,974  | 51.58     | 741,615                 | 35.00                   | 636        | 0.03    | 283,675              | 13.39 |
| 27. | Liberia           | 4,164,000  | 345,411    | 8.30      | 458,040                 | 11.00                   | 416,400    | 10.00   | 2,944,149            | 70.71 |
| 28. | Libya             | 6,528,000  | 109,143    | 1.67      | 6,528                   | 0.10                    | 6,397,440  | 98.00   | 14,889               | 0.23  |
| 29. | Madagascar        | 20,129,200 | 5,955,715  | 29.59     | 4,025,840               | 20.00                   | 402,584    | 2.00    | 9,745,061            | 48.41 |

<sup>2</sup> Mundo Negro Magazine, April-May 2010. (New People No. 127 July-August, special Edition p. 34, 2010).

|       |                     |               |             |       |             |       |             |       |             |       |
|-------|---------------------|---------------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------|
| 30.   | Malawi              | 15,728,400    | 4,636,241   | 29.48 | 2,831,112   | 18.00 | 1,190,640   | 7.57  | 7,070,407   | 44.95 |
| 31.   | Mali                | 13,112,200    | 224,308     | 1.69  | 42,598      | 0.32  | 8,652,800   | 65.00 | 4,392,293   | 33.00 |
| 32.   | Mauritania          | 3,379,200     | 5,264       | 0.16  | 0           | 0.00  | 3,345,408   | 99.00 | 28,528      | 0.84  |
| 33.   | Mauritius           | 1,309,100     | 326,236     | 24.92 | 22,255      | 1.70  | 222,547     | 17.00 | 738,062     | 56.38 |
| 34.   | Morocco             | 32,384,000    | 28,352      | 0.09  | 9,715       | 0.03  | 32,060,160  | 99.00 | 285,773     | 0.88  |
| 35.   | Mozambique          | 22,812,900    | 4,955,668   | 21.72 | 866,890     | 3.80  | 2,509,419   | 11.00 | 14,480,923  | 63.48 |
| 36.   | Namibia             | 2,279,200     | 392,700     | 17.23 | 1,025,640   | 45.00 | 0           | 0.00  | 860,860     | 37.77 |
| 37.   | Niger               | 15,896,700    | 22,436      | 0.14  | 1,590       | 0.01  | 13,035,394  | 82.00 | 2,837,380   | 17.85 |
| 38.   | Nigeria             | 158,258,100   | 23,968,133  | 15.15 | 36,399,363  | 23.00 | 75,963,888  | 48.00 | 21,926,716  | 13.86 |
| 39.   | Rwanda              | 10,270,000    | 5,004,557   | 48.73 | 1,232,400   | 12.00 | 102,700     | 1.00  | 3,930,343   | 38.27 |
| 40.   | Sao Tome & Principe | 218,360       | 157,783     | 72.26 | 2,184       | 1.00  | 0           | 0.00  | 58,394      | 26.74 |
| 41.   | Senegal             | 12,825,000    | 634,328     | 4.95  | 5,130       | 0.04  | 10,901,250  | 85.00 | 1,284,292   | 10.01 |
| 42.   | Seychelles          | 100,900       | 85,468      | 84.71 | 5,045       | 5.00  | 0           | 0.00  | 10,387      | 10.29 |
| 43.   | Sierra Leone        | 5,583,900     | 272,109     | 4.65  | 175,617     | 3.00  | 2,926,950   | 50.00 | 2,479,224   | 42.35 |
| 44.   | Somalia             | 9,209,300     | 115         | 0.00  | 0           | 0.00  | 9216,207    | 99.00 | 92,978      | 1.00  |
| 45.   | South Africa        | 50,601,000    | 3,530,081   | 6.98  | 25,300,500  | 50.00 | 506,010     | 1.00  | 21,264,409  | 42.02 |
| 46.   | Sudan               | 43,230,600    | 6,702,410   | 15.50 | 432,306     | 1.00  | 25,938,360  | 60.00 | 10,157,524  | 23.50 |
| 47.   | Swaziland           | 1,215,600     | 58,183      | 4.79  | 486,240     | 40.00 | 0           | 0.00  | 671,177     | 55.21 |
| 48.   | Tanzania            | 44,967,300    | 13,442,316  | 29.89 | 4,047,057   | 9.00  | 13,490,190  | 30.00 | 13,987,737  | 31.11 |
| 49.   | Togo                | 6,765,000     | 1,986,214   | 29.36 | 473,550     | 7.00  | 608,850     | 9.00  | 3,696,386   | 54.64 |
| 50.   | Tunisia             | 10,403,000    | 21,355      | 0.21  | 3,121       | 0.03  | 10,298,970  | 99.00 | 79,554      | 0.77  |
| 51.   | Uganda              | 33,779,100    | 15,085,208  | 44.66 | 5,742,447   | 17.00 | 1,513,304   | 4.48  | 11,438,141  | 33.86 |
| 52.   | Western Sahara      | 416,340       | 104         | 0.03  | 0           | 0.00  | 416,049     | 99.93 | 187         | 0.05  |
| 53.   | Zambia              | 13,209,600    | 4,335,486   | 32.82 | 1,651,200   | 12.50 | 13,210      | 0.10  | 7,209,704   | 54.58 |
| 54.   | Zimbabwe            | 12,537,500    | 1,323,268   | 10.55 | 1,880,625   | 15.00 | 0           | 0.00  | 9,333,607   | 74.45 |
| TOTAL |                     | 1,034,766,396 | 183,825,322 | 17.76 | 185,175,912 | 17.90 | 408,343,396 | 39.52 | 256,821,766 | 24.82 |

## Challenges

1. **HIV/AIDS.** According to UNAIDS, three quarters of all deaths due to AIDS worldwide in 2007 were in sub-Saharan Africa, where 22 million people are infected with HIV. Since in Africa the majority of the population is young, we can then logically conclude that many who suffer from HIV AIDS are young. What can we do to assist this afflicted group?
2. **Modernisation and Secularisation:** Nowadays, many African countries are experiencing the negative effects of modernisation and secularisation and the African family is facing great challenges in raising children with solid religious values. There is a noticeable decline in commitment to religious values and to a salutary fear of God.
3. **Multiplication of Religious Sects:** In Kenya, for instance, we have the following groups:
  - Baha'i Faith: Present in Kenya from 1945, the religion grew to an estimated of 308,000.
  - The Portuguese brought Christianity to Kenya in the fifteenth century. Colonisers caused it to spread rapidly during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Christian denominations in Kenya make up to 52.73% of the population. They include the Anglican Church of Kenya and the Reformed Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran and Pentecostal Churches.
  - The Roman Catholic Church represents about 23.4% of the population.
  - In Kenya there are also significant non-Catholic and non-Protestant communities including the Eastern Orthodox Church.
  - Apostolic Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, United Pentecostal Church International and Brahmanism.
  - Islam is the religion of approximately 11.2% of Kenya's population.
  - Other Religions, including Hinduism
  - No Religion group, which forms about 2.4%
  - Traditional African religion is usually based on natural phenomena and reverence of ancestors.

The above situation remains a challenge to us SDBs and the FMAs,

because each group tries to pull people to its side. Regarding the conversion of young people from different religious backgrounds, sometimes they partially fit into our formation style (Preventive System) but there is no assurance that they will remain faithful to the good practices that they learnt<sup>52</sup>.

4. **Lack of books and scripture reading:** As Salesians who are trying to foster initial evangelisation, we realise that it is very expensive to get instructional material such as books and the Holy Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and other books. It is therefore not easy for many people to do individual reading to deepen their knowledge about Church doctrine. Generally, people will only rely on someone who reads, understands and is available for sharing.
5. **Presence of many different languages:** The continent of Africa and Madagascar is blessed with many different languages. There has been, however, a big struggle in trying to translate, interpret, and make exegesis available both at the scientific and at the popular level. Ongoing effort in this regard is essential.
6. **Culture/Inculturation:** Since the Church is a communion where there is unity in diversity and, since it is present throughout the world, it assumes whatever it finds positive in all cultures. Inculturation, however, goes much further, as it signifies an interior transformation of cultural values through integration with Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures<sup>53</sup>.
7. **Conflicts and war situations:** Our African continent is still torn apart because of many conflicts (family, zones, regions, within one country, between one country and another). People are not at peace with one another. God seem to be far away and not present among the African people!

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<sup>52</sup> From *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Martin O'Reilly, *The Challenge of being Religious in Africa Today*: AMECEA Gaba Publications Spearhead Nos. 142-144, 2001, pg. 50.

- 8. Natural calamities:** We have natural calamities such as draughts, floods, sicknesses that leave people devastated and unable to recover sufficiently from the ensuing consequences even after a long period of time.
- 9. Free lifestyle among the youth:** Careless attitude, laziness, lack of commitment, reluctance, waste of time, an easy way of life, among other things are becoming the ordinary way of life for the young. It seems likely that this lifestyle is taking root in our young people and will lead to the further diminishment of family life, to less committed citizens, to the lukewarm practice of the faith, to *laissez-faire* leadership and to other negative consequences.
- 10. Declining and lack of vocations:** Some causes are,
- Lack of a genuine motivation or spiritual depth in making a vocational choice.
  - Some spiritual guides/directors judge candidates unsuitable for the priesthood or religious life.
  - Pressure to economically sustain one's own family.
  - Inability to live the demands of evangelical counsels and community life.
- 11. Inability to collaborate with the laity or with other members of the Salesian Family (Co-operators, Past Pupils, Volunteers).** Looking at the African situation, the number of religious and priests is very small. We are therefore challenged to work together in the area of initial proclamation and evangelisation.

## Opportunities

- 1. Social Justice:** We are invited to work for social justice and fight hunger and disease, poverty, unemployment, economic and political injustice that afflict millions in the continent. The Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya (AFE) is a good example of just such an effort. The camp is situated in the far northwestern part of Kenya and serves

refugees from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and the Congo. The Salesian run the Parish, substation, vocational training centre, oratory and seminars. In all these endeavours, we evangelise by educating.

2. **Hospital, Health Care Centers and Clinics:** Many people in Africa who are suffering not only physical illnesses but also other health problems such as neurosis, psychosis and sicknesses resulting from HIV/AIDS, malaria, typhoid. These infirmities could be treated in well-functioning hospitals or dispensaries that could be run by FMA/SDBs. The focus would be to give hope to the suffering with the underlining aim that the sick encounter God in their suffering.
3. **Inter Religious Dialogue:** as SDBs and FMAs, we could take on more initiatives promoting dialogue between Christians and other faith groups in order to find a way forward regarding the moral formation of the youth.
4. **The use of the Preventive System in forming the conscience of the young people:** Since we, SDB and FMA, have many chances of encountering the young in schools, youth centres, parishes, refugee camps, and in the family setting, we could make greater use of the values of the Preventive System, reason, religion and kindness, to help young people take their life commitment seriously.
5. **Printing, editing, translating and writing of books and scriptural materials:** Like Don Bosco who was able to read and study the signs of his times, we Salesians and FMA working in Africa today, could intervene and venture more into this area. It was the aim of Don Bosco to print good materials to nurture, strengthen and defend the Catholic faith.
6. **Training of the Catechists:** As Salesians working in Africa, we, at present, administer only one Catechetical Training Centre. This is the Makalala Catechetical Centre in the Iringa Diocese in Tanzania. Could we open other such centres?

The following activities take place at the Centre:

- Classes are held on the Bible, morality, church teachings /Documents of Vatican II, some Psychology and Methodology, Mathematics, Civics, Swahili the national language (Kiswahili), English, Music, Sacraments, and Liturgy.
- There are also seminars conducted every semester on various topics (Small Christian Communities, the new Generation, Youth Animation, and Youth Pastoral.
- The students do participate in pastoral field activities such as the teaching of Religious Studies in primary schools that are under Mafinga Parish, visiting the sick, Sunday apostolate/oratory.
- On an informal level, we have talks, narratives about the lives of the Saints, goodnights, homilies and group sharing.

### ***For us Salesians:***

Evangelisation and Catechesis: SDB Constitutions Art. 34. “This Society had its beginning in a simple catechism lesson”. For us too evangelising and catechising are the fundamental characteristics of our mission.

Like Don Bosco, we are called to be educators of the faith at every opportunity. Our highest knowledge therefore is to know Jesus Christ, and our greatest delight is to reveal to all people the unfathomable riches of his mystery.

We walk side by side with the young to lead them to the risen Lord. In him and in his Gospel the young will discover the deepest meaning of their own lives and they will grow into the “new person”.

The Virgin Mary is present in this process as a mother. “We make her known and loved as the one who believed, who helps and who infuses hope”.

Reflecting on this article and seeing the present situation in African continent, how much are we actually doing for first proclamation/ evangelisation? With the many challenges that surround us today, can we say that it is easy to employ the same methods used by the early missionaries in many parts of our continent? Let us consider a few examples of what has been done:

**7. Salesian Presence (FMA/SDB).** What impact do our centres (schools, parishes, youth centres, etc.) have on first proclamation/ evangelisation?



8. **Use of Mass Media.** Nowadays information can reach a great number of people very quickly thanks to the internet. We can organise seminars to make use of technology to reach as many people as possible, both directly and indirectly, we can organise seminars and make use of technology on relevant topics, on catechetics and on Church doctrine. We should try to qualify our own SDB/FMAs in mass media so that they can work with the laity in this field so to have a greater impact on initial proclamation/evangelisation in our African countries.
9. **Education and Ongoing Formation for Catechists.** Initial proclamation/evangelisation should be fostered with the help of catechists whose role is becoming increasingly important especially in areas where priests (and sisters) are not available.
10. **Association of Catholic Teachers.** Empowered Catholic teachers are our important resources for initial proclamation/evangelisation. They already have acquired a teaching methodology and they have teaching experience. Secondly, if they are invited to teach Religion they could follow-up non-baptised children/youth and have a strong positive influence on them.
11. **Youth Groups (YCS - Young Christian/Catholic Students).** Fortunately, we SDB/ FMAs have the opportunity of meeting, animating and collaborating with different youth groups of all ages. Do we utilise these opportunities to form the young so that they themselves become life-giving instruments for initial proclamation/evangelisation?

Ref. *Africae Munus* no. 165 - “If this effort is to be more effective, the *missio ad gentes* must keep pace with the **new evangelisation**. In Africa too, situations demanding a new presentation of the Gospel, “new in its ardour, methods and expression”, are not rare. In particular, the new evangelisation needs to integrate the intellectual dimension of the faith into the living experience of the encounter with Jesus Christ present and at work in the ecclesial community. Being Christian is born not of an ethical decision or a lofty ideal, but an encounter with an event, a person,

which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Catechesis must therefore integrate its theoretical dimension, which deals with concepts to be learned by heart, and its practical dimension, which is experienced at the liturgical, spiritual, ecclesial, cultural and charitable levels, in order that the seed of God's word, once fallen on fertile ground, can sink deep roots and grow to maturity”.

## TONJ - SUDAN: AN EXAMPLE

### Situation

The area is about 80 km square and is highly populated. In 2003, the whole of Tonj had about 76 catechists. They did not have enough primary education. They could hardly teach catechism effectively. Fr. John Peter, SDB, initiated a ministry method that he called an *Apostolic Group*. It consisted of a group of boys interested in proclaiming the Good News. Fr. John Peter would meet them twice in a week (Wednesdays and Thursdays) for catechism classes. These classes were preparation classes so that the boys could then go out and teach the same content to the children, young people and adults in the six nearby villages.

The methodology used by these young people was that of the Oratory. The lessons would be scheduled at a time convenient for all. The young catechists would start with games, then they would invite the people to be seated and teach them Catechism the way Don Bosco did. The local people received this practice with great enthusiasm. Later on, the Catholic Diocese of Rumbek asked if the method could be adopted in their Diocese.

In 2003 when this practice was introduced, about 820 children and young people received the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Holy Eucharist and Confirmation). Bp. Ceasar Mazzollari, then Bishop of **Rumbek Catholic Diocese**, went to Tonj Mission himself to confirm the youth.

In 2005, during the long holidays, Fr. John Peter organised the Apostolic Group to go and stay with some catechist in their homes. During this time, Fr. John Peter bought some food items for the young catechists and arranged with the local catechists to visit them now with the intention of

assisting and evaluating the way they were teaching catechism to the people. Since the distances to be covered by the young catechists were long, Fr. John Peter provided some bicycles for them to use to facilitate travelling.

Ref. *Africae Munus* no. 164 - “The proclamation of the Gospel must recover the ardour of the beginnings of the evangelisation of the African continent, attributed to the evangelist Mark and carried on by “countless saints, martyrs, confessors and virgins”. There is a need gratefully to remember and imitate the enthusiasm of so many missionaries who, over the course of several centuries, sacrificed their lives to bring the Good News to their brothers and sisters in Africa. In recent years, the Church in different countries has commemorated the hundredth anniversary of evangelisation. She has rightly renewed her commitment to bring the Gospel to those who do not yet know the name of Jesus Christ”.

## **ANOTHER EXAMPLE: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FAITH JOURNEY IN IRINGA DIOCESE**

### **The Start of Initial Proclamation/Evangelisation**

The Iringa diocese received the first seed of evangelisation, the Word of God in October 1896 from the Benedictine missionaries of Saint Otilia from Germany. The first places to be reached by these missionaries were Tosamaganga and Madibira. These missionaries were under the jurisdiction of the Superior of the Diocese of Southern Zanzibar with headquarter in Dar es Salaam.

Due to the First World War (1914-1918), the missionaries encountered many difficulties and finally had to leave the area when they were sent to the Pugu prison. When the War ended these Benedictine Missionaries did not return to Iringa.

### **Iringa Diocese Under the Consolata Missionaries**

After the Second World War 1919, the Superior of Dar es Salam diocese asked Bishop Filippo Perlo of Nyeri diocese in Kenya to send some missionaries (Missionary Fathers of the Virgin Mary Consolata) to his

Diocese. Four priests were sent, namely: Fr. Gaudensio Panelatti, IMC, Fr. Giovanni Ciravegna, IMC, Fr. Dominico Vignoli, IMC and Fr. Giacomo Cavallo, IMC. They reached in Iringa in 1919.

In 1922, the Iringa diocese formed the Apostolic Prefecture under the leadership of Bishop Francesco Cagliari, IMC, who died in car accident on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1935 at Mdandu, Njombe-Iringa. He had served in the diocese for 12 years. One of his works in Iringa was the foundation of the local Missionary Sisters of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus. In 1936, Mons. Attilio Beltramino, IMC, succeeded Mons. Francesco Cagliari. On 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1948 he was ordained Bishop of Tosamaganga Church. While Iringa remained an Apostolic Vicariate, on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1956 Pope Pius XII announced that all the missionary churches would become dioceses. Bishop Beltramino, IMC, then became the first Bishop of the Iringa Diocese. He worked hard to build up the Diocese spiritually and physically.

## The Local Bishops

When Bishop Beltramino died (3rd October 1965), the first local bishop Mario A. Mgulunde was appointed in 1969 and was consecrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1970. The big responsibility of this first local bishop was to put into implementation the decisions of Vatican Council II. In 1982, he courageously announced the first Synod of the Diocese with the theme “... seek what is above, where Christ is ...” (*Col. 3:1*).

All the synod preparations were created and given out in 1984. Before the implementation of the synod’s decisions were implemented, Mons. Mario A. Mgulunde was appointed Archbishop of Tabora Archdiocese in 1985. Thus, Bishop Norbert Wendelin Mtega who led the Iringa Diocese from 1985 until 1992 put the Synod’s implementations into practice. Since 10<sup>th</sup> January 1993, the Iringa Diocese has been under Bishop Tarcisius J.M. Ngalalekumtwa. He is a local diocesan Bishop. He has been working with the help of the missionary and local priests, religious men and women, lay people and men of good will who sacrifice their energy, talents, wealth and their vocation for building up the faith for all people.

The above narration demonstrates that initial proclamation/evangelisation of the Iringa Diocese took place from 1896-1996. It took 100 years to introduce the Christian faith to the local people.

From 1996 to 2011 and onwards, the second evangelisation is taking place. The major challenge in the Diocese today is getting enough priests to lead the existing parishes. This is due to the decreasing number of vocation to the priesthood/religious life. This scarcity of vocation is not an isolated problem of the Iringa diocese but is also shared by the neighbouring dioceses of Songea, Mbeya, Njombe, Dar es Salaam and Morogoro. To facilitate catechesis, the above-mentioned dioceses, have come up with the strategy of working more closely with the laity. Makalala Catechists Training Centre was established, as a response to the urgent need of preparing lay catechists to minister effectively in various parishes and substations of the Iringa Diocese as well as in other dioceses in Tanzania.

These dioceses cover a vast area, making it a challenging to reach different places for evangelization or for following up the on-going formation of Christians. If the catechists are well prepared, they can be a big help in nurturing the growth of the faith-life of the local people. The Makalala Catechetical Training Centre which is now run by the Salesians with the collaboration of the Teresina Sisters of the Child Jesus (local Sisters of the Iringa Diocese), is located in Mufindi district, which has its headquarters at Mafinga town.

The aim of the programs is to form the catechists as spiritual leaders capable of helping the village inhabitants understand the Bible and Christian faith and morals. The Centre forms young men and woman intellectually, spiritually and pastorally, so that they can become leaders and evangelisers in the local church. At the Centre, they are prepared to strengthen and deepen the faith of the baptised, and then to spread the message of the Good News to those who have not heard it.

Our aim is to help them to be catechists and primary evangelisers. They should be able to do the work of pre-evangelisation, evangelisation and catechetical ministry with confidence. They are expected to be leaders of community prayer and animators of Small Christian Communities.

To achieve this aim, qualified teachers hold formal classes, in Bible, morality, church teachings, psychology and methodology, Mathematics, Civics, Swahili the national language (Kiswahili) and English. We also organise seminars on various topics of relevance and importance.

## 12. Education on the Human and Spiritual Values

While reading the documents of Vatican Council II on human life, I found the following statement: “At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. [...] we are entitled then to speak of a real social and cultural transformation whose repercussions are felt too on the religious level”<sup>54</sup>.

While reflecting on these words I concluded that it is impossible to talk about education and catechesis to the young without considering the human being holistically, specifically regarding his/her material needs, his faith and spiritual life. Presently in my ministry, I am becoming more and more aware of the vast field of animation in our Congregations. I believe that, most probably I will continue meeting young people in social crisis or needing assistance in spiritual matters. Logically then it is the young who are at the centre of this presentation – youth who are both body and soul. Family poverty, natural disasters such as droughts and floods and war situations could result in the lack of basic material goods like food, water, clothing, and shelter. These dire circumstances may force a young person to leave the family and seek a better life elsewhere, as was the case for Bartholomew Garelli during the early years of Don Bosco’s priestly life<sup>55</sup>. Perhaps, such situations of material poverty are found more frequently in developing and war affected countries today. When someone is in extreme poverty certainly one does not easily think about attending catechism classes or being educated. First basic material needs are to be met. We then can gradually accompany the young person in his/her faith formation. Where do we begin and what is the basis of their on-going faith formation, we may ask? Why do we worry at all about the faith or spiritual life of our young people? After all, is religion important in the life of the young? Most probably, we will find many various answers to the above question. Richard J. Gehman in his book ‘African Traditional Religion’ states, “man has been defined as the incur-

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<sup>54</sup> Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II, and Post Conciliar Documents* Bombay: St Paul Publications, 1992, 796.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Juan E. Vecchi. pg. 108.

ably religious animal'. "For everywhere and in every age he has professed some belief in supernatural powers which aid him in life"<sup>56</sup>.

If religion, therefore, gives one hope in this life and in the world to come, does it then not follow that religion is essential for young people on their life's journey towards sanctity? I am convinced that we should always challenge the young to aim high. Having a vibrant sense of hope is essential for the young and this thought should encourage us in our youth ministry.

Regarding evangelisation and education, our Rector Major has stated that as Salesians we carry out our mission of evangelisation by educating and that we educate by evangelising. These words express the strict bond between evangelisation and education. Education is authentic when it respects every dimension of the child, the teenager, the young man or woman. Education should be clearly oriented towards the complete formation of the individual, opening him or her to transcendence. Evangelisation has in itself a strong educational value, precisely because it aims at the transformation of the mind and heart, the creation of a new person – the result of being configured to Christ<sup>57</sup>.

### **13. Vocation Orientation in the Spirit of Don Bosco (Vocation to Religious life SDB, FMA)**

Don Bosco was led by the Holy Spirit to begin ministering to poor and abandoned youngsters. As he started taking care of them and passing time with them, he found that he could not do much for them by himself. Though he received valid help from the laity, he was also convinced that more could be accomplished by those who would freely offer their lives to God in the religious life. He therefore nurtured and supported vocational growth in the very first youngsters<sup>58</sup> who joined him. He also

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<sup>56</sup> Dr. Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, Kijabe - Kenya: Kesho Publications, 1989, 32.

<sup>57</sup> Salesians 2011 (English edition), December 8, 2010. Rome. pg. 5.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Morand Wirth, *Don Bosco and the Salesians*, Don Bosco Publications, New York, 1982, pg. 39. [from the same page we read that: He wanted to prepare a great many assistants for the future; priests and clerics who would help him with his project. The scarcity of candidates for the priesthood, a new phenomenon in Piedmont due to the political changes, also worried him very much.]

formed and directed some of his boys to the diocesan seminary<sup>59</sup>. This enthusiasm for the vocation ministry is also important for us, SDB/FMAs, today. We are challenged to continue accepting and accompanying vocations sent to us by God so that they grow and mature. We must be open to the signs of the times and realise that these genuine vocations will be useful for our Congregations and for the Church<sup>60</sup>.

### **13.1. Recruiting**

Where did Don Bosco get vocations? Do we have vocations at the present time? We are told that during Don Bosco's time he received boys from different backgrounds and circumstances. He accepted as apprentices those boys who were orphaned of both parents. They were poor and abandoned and between twelve and eighteen years of age. As students in his schools he accepted boys who had finished primary school, were intellectually capable and of good moral character. They were accepted for two months at a time at twenty-four lire per month<sup>61</sup>. From these groups he identified those who seemed to be good vocation possibilities and invited<sup>62</sup> them to consider becoming religious or priests. He then accompanied them carefully. Today, I believe that we still have the same categories of boys and girls in our ministries. It is up to us to open our eyes of faith to recognise and to nurture these vocations.

### **13.2. Accompaniment of vocations**

I believe that every vocation is a gift that comes from God to us. A vocation grows from deep within the heart of a person and touches the

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Arthur J. Lenti, *Don Bosco His Pope and His Bishop*, Libreria Ateneo Salesiano LAS Roma, 2006 pg. 109.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Arthur J. Lenti, pg. 109 [...the Turin seminary had been closed at the time of the liberal revolution and remained closed until 1863. During this time Don Bosco's Oratory functioned as a seminary, and while making a significant contribution to the diocese Don Bosco had enjoyed considerable freedom of action.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Teresio Bosco. pg. 268.

<sup>62</sup> Giovanni B. Lemoyne, *Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*, Vol. III, 1847-1849. (English ed.), Salesiana Publishers, INC. New York, 1966, pg. 385. To see that he suggested to them we are told ... Don Bosco called together Buzzetti, Gastini, Bellia, and Reviglio, and said to them, "I need your help at the Oratory. Would you be willing?" ... "First, I will prepare you by teaching you elementary school subjects, then, I'll start you on Latin. If it is God's will, some day you may be priests..."



whole being of an individual. One has to struggle to realise this fact. God takes the initiative in the vocational call and it is the task of the individual to freely respond. This vocational journey made by the individual and spiritual guides who help him/her to discover his/her vocation is what I mean by the term *accompaniment*<sup>63</sup>. How do we accompany? I believe that we need to form a group/team of people who are prepared and willing to journey with those discerning a religious or priestly vocation. Members of this group/team must strongly believe that it is the grace of God that leads them in accompanying the young on their journey of formation and maturing in their vocation.

In our formation houses we need to be prepared and ready to accompany the young whom we will gradually get to know on a deeper level. By living with these young people one gets the chance of knowing each individual and of developing different methods to help each one. True accompaniment creates an atmosphere of trust and love towards the one who is the spiritual guide. The young people should feel free to share their experiences, worries and difficulties in life. In order to have more and better vocations in our Congregations, I suggest that we seriously focus on preparing quality personnel and on forming viable formation teams.

### 13.3. *Witnesses*

I have seen the term *witness*, used in, “Salesian Spirituality of the New Evangelisation” (1990) and in the presentation of the Strenna for 2008. In these documents, the word seems to mean “a person who sees an event taking place and is therefore able to describe it to others, confirm that it took place among others”<sup>64</sup>. Could the term have another meaning? I feel that it could also mean the joy of the birth of our Saviour and His mission that the Rector Major has reminded us about in the Strenna of 2008: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty

<sup>63</sup> Pascual Chávez, Fundamental Aspects of the Strenna 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Johathan Crowther, Ed. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1998. 1371.

those who are oppressed, to proclaim the accepted year of the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19). To us, SDB/FMA witness should also mean our daily faith-filled presence among the youngsters, our desire of becoming saints, of meeting Jesus and others in our celebrating of the Eucharist and in our daily commitments. Witness also means forgiving one another, tolerating each other’s defects and living our vows happily. If we live this type of witness as explained above, we will attract others, as in the days of Don Bosco, to join our Salesian life<sup>65</sup>.

## Conclusion

In reviewing the challenges and opportunities for Initial Proclamation that we have as SDB/FMA in Africa and Madagascar I conclude that:

1. We have very much documentation on the challenges and the way forward regarding initial proclamation/evangelisation in Africa and this is beneficial yet the question presents itself, “How much effort is being exerted in implementing these proposals? Recently I came across the book which resulted from the *Seminar on Missionary Animation and Formation* “**Project Africa:** between the challenges of first evangelisation and the phase of consolidation”, (Nairobi, 1<sup>st</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> May 2000). This Seminar produced a wealth of material. How have we used or how have we worked on the proposals it presented? Are we going to do the same thing during these Study Days? Perhaps we should come up with some practical resolutions (one, two, or three) which each Province can work on concretely regarding specific areas of Initial Proclamation.
2. It has not been an easy task for me to reflect on and to present the challenges and opportunities for initial proclamation/evangelisation for these study days. I was able to share some thoughts because of my experience, though limited, and because of some research that I have done. It is my hope and trust that during these days of sharing, we shall be able to explore other aspects of initial proclamation/evangelisation that I was unable to touch upon in my presentation. May God

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Morand Wirth, pg. 98.

help all of us to build upon and to deepen what many others have already done regarding initial proclamation/evangelisation in Africa and Madagascar.

### ***Analysis of the Challenges of First Evangelisation in the Context of English speaking Africa***

The following questions were directed to Salesian Missionaries in the English speaking African countries where we work, namely: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

#### **1. What signs of inculturation of the gospel do we discover in the contest in which we work?**

In the liturgy there are many signs of inculturation beginning with the use of the local language in the Mass, in the conferring of the Sacraments, especially Baptism and Matrimony, and in commentaries on the liturgy. Cultural dances and music as well as hymns in the local language have also enhanced the liturgy. In most places, the Bible is available in the local language.

Most importantly life-styles are becoming more imbued with Gospel values including, respect for persons and property, honesty, purity of life and personal commitment to Christ. In some instances, there has been a lack of consistent follow-up and support for the newly evangelised with a resultant falling back into previous non-Christian life-styles.

#### ***Kenya***

There is a general openness to the Gospel message that is proclaimed in a culturally sensitive manner. Liturgies are more African. There is an increase in the number of small Christian communities and there is a growing desire for the spiritual. There are more marriages in the Church and the assuming of Christian responsibility along with the desire and willingness to form good Christian families. There is also more committed Church leadership. Christian communities are increasing.

#### ***Ethiopia***

Ethiopian culture is a Christian culture and religious feasts are national holidays. There is a great devotion and love for the Cross-that is a

very visible sign of Christianity. Recently there has been an increase in the number Catholics.

### ***Southern Africa***

Much inculturation is taking place through language, music, and dance. Inculturation regarding Theology is not yet a high priority. At present, there is emphasis on ‘Africanisation’ to the detriment of inculturation. Where different cultures live together inculturation becomes more difficult.

Emphasis in some areas is on inculturation of the Eucharist, which is very challenging and which can be very controversial. A “Black Priest Forum” has been formed with the aim of advancing the Africanisation of the Church. Inculturation of the Gospel is often overshadowed by the inculturation of the Sacraments which is mostly only on a superficial level.

### ***Tanzania***

Liturgical celebrations are more inculturated. The Church is seen more and more as a family that is a strong African value. Small Christian Communities are also increasing.

## **2. What signs of “conversion/change of life” do we see in the environment where we work?**

There is a strong sense of belonging to the Church and the number of Baptisms and local vocations is growing. More marriages are being regularised. The “Preventive System” is being better understood and valued. The role of the family in the Church is being given more value and importance. Salesian Co-operators are more committed to their mission in the local Church. Other groups (Legion of Mary, Sacred Heart Groups and other Salesian Groups and Movements are also more active. Use of the means of Social Communication in initial proclamation/evangelisation is increasing.

### ***Kenya***

There is greater preparation for Baptism and Marriage and an increased participation of the laity in the liturgy, sacramental life, community service and in providing care for the sick and disabled. There is also

a greater awareness and appreciation for Justice and Peace issues, the sacrament of Reconciliation and the dignity of women. Church leaders are seeking to grow in servant-leadership and there is generally a greater openness to ministering to the needs of others in our small Christian Communities.

### ***Ethiopia***

There is improvement in the moral behaviour of the young as they grow in the living of their faith. More marriages are being blessed in the Church and irregular marriage situation are being abandoned in order to receive the sacrament of Baptism.

### ***Tanzania***

There is a deeper longing for the Word of God and the sacrament of reconciliation is more understood, valued and received. Church groups and movements are more active and there is a gradual deepening of the Christian life.

## **3. In these difficult times, do you see “new opportunities” for proclaiming the Lord Jesus?**

New technology and the mass media is definitely a new opportunity for proclaiming the Lord Jesus. Daily life situations also offer many opportunities for the practice of Gospel values. Family life offers yet another setting for proclamation. Formation of the laity is imperative with emphasis on youth formation so that they young will be become witnesses as convinced and committed Christians and Church leaders of the future. Finally, Church groups and movements need to be directed, encouraged and supported. All the above are new opportunities at the present time.

### ***Kenya***

New opportunities are present in Seminars, Meetings, Crusades, and Formative moments that are frequently available. Education is the key to preparing the ground for proclamation/ evangelisation so classes are given on the following topics: mass media, peace and justice, respect for girls/women and traditions and the value of the person (e.g. Dowry

System). The present economic crisis could be a springboard for growth in solidarity and faith. We also feel challenged to train and form the laity for responsibility in the Church and in society. Finally we see new opportunities to consolidate the work/initiatives/programmes that already exist and to strengthen the quality of our Salesian presence among the people.

### ***Ethiopia***

In Ethiopia, we see new opportunities in the broad field of Education and formation of the young and the strengthening of all groups within the Salesian Family. Specifically our focus is on empowering Salesian Co-operators, catechists, teachers and all members of the educating community, our past-pupils and the young who are discerning their vocational calling.

### ***Tanzania***

New opportunities are present since in general people are disillusioned with the political and economic situation in our country and are longing for a viable Christian/African moral life where the individual is appreciated and esteemed. A true education to freedom is needed. Leaders need to be formed who have a strong social commitment, that is, who are willing to work for the true good of the people.

# A Response to Joseph Minja

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Charlotte Greer, FMA

*“All that matters is that in any and every way,  
Christ is being proclaimed!  
That is what brings me joy”.*  
(Phil 1:18)

I would like to begin by thanking Fr. Joseph for giving us a practical vision of the challenges and opportunities facing us as Salesian Family in our work of evangelization in Africa and Madagascar.

Like the missionaries that have come before us, we have a daunting task. The challenges Father mentions are: AIDS, modernity and secularization, the multiplication of religious sects each pulling their own direction, the lack of material for instruction, the variety of languages and cultures implicit in authentic enculturation, the conflicts, wars and natural calamities, the apathy of the youth we serve, the decline in vocations, and the difficulties of working together with laity in the Salesian Family. These are enough to make most people turn around and go home. We, however, have a long line of Salesian saints, courageous missionaries, who continue to inspire and push us to face the issues of our times as they did.

Offering a vision of the challenges that lay ahead, Father advises us to continue to work for social justice, health care, interreligious dialogue, to use the Preventive System effectively with the young, to print the materials needed for instructing ourselves, to review the impact of our current presences, to train some to work in mass media in order to reach more youth, to provide education and ongoing formation for catechists, to utilize the experience of Catholic school teachers, and to revitalize our youth groups. By doing this we will be doing as Don Bosco did. We can further form the young to help other youth to encounter the person of Jesus, speaking to them in a way that they will understand.

Putting this vision in context, Father Joseph also offers us the examples of the good work already done in Sudan and the Iringa Diocese in Tanzania. He challenges us to take to heart the vital importance of education in the work of evangelization. With urgency, we are to **yearn** for vocations, using our creativity to recruit, accompany and witness to the youth the joy of living our own vocation.

Fr. Joseph concludes by asking us if we have put into practice the proposals of the past. Then adding a critical question, will we put into practice the proposals from this encounter. In this way, he encourages us to propose realistic means to reach our goals. Finally, to stress this point, we are given the group reports of the challenges of first evangelization from an encounter on Project Africa that took place back in May of 2000, allowing us to analyse and compare the needs and aims of that time with those of the present. Again, I would like to thank Fr. Joseph for his practical vision and the urgency with which he calls us to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century African youth.

Many of these points find a resonance in *Africae Munus*, and I would like to regroup them under the umbrella of some of the major themes put forth in this document. Focusing first on **social justice**, *Africae Munus* immediately identifies the need to build a just society in which everyone, especially the abandoned, can live with dignity. “It [Africa] must, however, begin by introducing within itself, with determination, political, social and administrative justice, elements of the political culture necessary for development and peace”<sup>66</sup>. Essential to this development are what Benedict XVI refers to as the principle fields of apostolate: the Church as the presence of Christ, the world of education, the world of health and the world of information and communication.

The **Church**, as the Body of Christ, is an essential element of society because the presence of Christians, “in as much as they are disciples of the community of Christ, can make visible and communicate the love of God”<sup>67</sup>. Often called the “domestic Church”, the **family** is an important nucleus that is “the place of faith, of prayer, and of loving preoccupation

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<sup>66</sup> Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus* (November 19, 2011), 27.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.



for the true and lasting good of each member”<sup>68</sup>. The witness of the united family today is a fertile ground of **vocations** and a strong foundation of society. As such, the fidelity and love evident in the family can create an opportunity for an encounter with the person of Christ, that is, an **initial proclamation**.

Addressing **education** in Africa, Benedict XVI labels illiteracy and ignorance an educational crisis and compares the damage it inflicts on society to any pandemic. He stresses the need for “an educative program that unites faith and reason so as to prepare children and youth for adult life”<sup>69</sup>. The Pope calls on “the community and Catholic institutions to respond generously to this great challenge”<sup>70</sup>. Education is one of the most precious tools for lifting the **youth** out of their **apathy** and transforming cultural values. Educating to the faith presents the opportunity for the development of catechetical programs, and the **ongoing formation of catechists**. This can also form the backdrop for **youth groups** and programs for **youth evangelizing other youth**. As Salesians, perhaps our greatest asset is the full use of the **Preventive System** both as spirituality and an educational method so that by becoming signs of God’s love for the young, our very educative style and presence becomes the occasion for **initial proclamation** and makes young people eager to be guided to the meet the true Christ whom many have never known.

Referring to the need for adequate **health care**, the Pope draws example “from Christ himself who, after having proclaimed the Word and healed the sick, entrusted to his disciples the same authority so that they could heal ‘every sickness and every infirmity’. (*Mt* 10:1; cf. 14:35; *Mk* 1:32-34; 6:13-55)”<sup>71</sup>. While Benedict XVI empathizes with the growing number of difficulties facing health care workers, he makes it clear that “the Church is resolutely committed in the fight against infirmity, sickness, and pandemics”<sup>72</sup>.

In certain places of the Salesian apostolate, our help might be needed

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 133. [Benedict XVI, *Homily at Nazareth* (May 14, 2009): AAS 101 (2009), 480].

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 139.

to begin and/or administer **hospitals, health care centres or clinics** for the primary good of the people. Care should be taken, however, to discern each situation well so as not to drift too far from our educative charism.

Regarding mass communication, Benedict XVI continues the thought of John Paul II who, in *Ecclesia Africa*, had considered media as a means of *evangelization*<sup>73</sup>. “They must offer an authentic communication that is a priority in Africa, in as much as they are an important lever for the development of the Continent and for evangelization”<sup>74</sup>. Media and technology contain the language the young people speak. It would be good to **train some religious and/or laity in this field** so as to reach more youth, and to **train the youth** so they, too, can be an influence in evangelization. “The Church must be a greater presence in the media with the end of making it not only an instrument of spreading the Gospel but also a useful means for the formation of the African people to reconciliation in the truth, to the promotion of justice and to peace”<sup>75</sup>. A well-formed Catholic media would “permit this Continent to participate in the actual development of the world”<sup>76</sup>.

Another topic of great concern in the presentation was the need to work for vocations. While *Africae Munus* does not directly address vocations, when writing to consecrated persons, Benedict XVI calls living a vowed life a prophetic witness, living a community life “manifests that it is possible to live as brothers or as sisters and to be united, even there where ethnic origins and races are diverse. (cf. *Sal* 133:1)”<sup>77</sup>. He also reminds us that monastic life began in Africa. “Africa is the cradle of the contemplative life. Ever present in Northern Africa e particularly in Egypt and in Ethiopia, it put down roots in sub-Saharan Africa in the past century”<sup>78</sup>. There is significant evidence that we must stir up our ardour and **develop programs to attract, follow, and guide new vocations** to priestly and religious life. Setting aside funds and appointing personnel is

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* (September 14, 1995), 124: AAS 88 (1996), 72-73.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 119.

the first serious sign that we are committed to nurturing those whom the Lord is calling, helping them to hear his voice (in what might be considered a “second initial proclamation”), and respond YES to follow the person, Jesus Christ.

Finally, Benedict XVI gives us encouragement in *Africae Munus*, when addressing the problems and issues of the African continent as a whole. “Therefore the Synod Fathers saw that the difficulties encountered in the countries and the particular Churches in Africa do not constitute insurmountable obstacles, but rather challenge that which is best in us: our imagination, our intelligence, our vocation to follow without reserve the footsteps of Jesus Christ, to seek God, who is “Eternal Love and absolute Truth”<sup>79-80</sup>.

The Egyptians are a people that wear their religion aloud! In Egypt, belonging to a religion is very important. One can tell if another is a Muslim or Christian by their name, the words they use as they greet, and even physically by a black mark on the forehead of a Muslim man, the veil worn by the woman, or by a tattooed cross on the hand of each Christian. In each one’s religion, participation in the prayers, fasting and acts of charity toward the poor during feast days are a normal way of life for children as for adults. In addition, the intense emotions of the struggle during these times of political crisis give rise, especially in the young, to a need to show one is willing to be martyred for one’s own religion. The pride in one’s religion closely resembles a political pride. It seems to this observer of just over three years that there is a lot of religion but not a much-lived faith.

As Pier Giorgio Gianazza, SDB, confirms when addressing the new evangelization in the Middle East, [Bear in mind that Egypt is geographically part of Africa and culturally part of the Middle East]. “It’s clear that evangelization is already accomplished, be it as *kerygma* or *primo annuncio*, or by a deepening of the faith. Nor can we speak of needing a re-evangelization in the sense of initiating again a process of evangelization, given that Christianity is neither abandoned, secularized, or indif-

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<sup>79</sup> Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), 1: AAS 101 (2009), 641.

<sup>80</sup> Op. cit., 12.

ferent...The challenge for a new evangelization in the Middle East... calls for a reawakening, a renewal, a new zeal, and new depth”<sup>81</sup>.

There is a story of a man walking along the shore of the sea. On the sand before him lay thousands of starfish, washed ashore in the high tide and now stranded on the sand drying up in the sun without water. The man began to pick up each starfish one at a time and to throw it back into the sea. Awhile later, another man walked along the shore and saw the man trying to save the starfish from dying. He stood amazed and confused and said, “But this is absurd! There is no way you can save all these starfish! There are thousands! You might as well stop and save your energy for doing something that will make a difference!” The man continued to bend down, pick up each starfish and throw it back into the water. Agitated, the second man shouted, “How can you possibly think you’re making a difference?” As the first man threw the next starfish in the sea, he said, “Well, it made a difference to THAT one!”

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<sup>81</sup> Pier Giorgio Gianazza, SDB, “*Una Nuova Evangelizzazione per il Medio Oriente*”, *Rivista di Scienza dell’Educazione*, Anno L, Numero 1 (Gennaio/Aprile 2012): 94.

# Emerging Insights and Perspectives during the Study Days in View of a Renewed Missionary Praxis in Africa and Madagascar

Sr. Ruth del Pilar Mora, FMA and Fr. Alexius Mulongo, SDB

## Introduction

During our study days on the initial proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar; we, SDBs and FMAs, guided by the Word of God and the teachings of the Magisterium and the African protection of the ancestral world; aware of the following challenges and opportunities in the African - Madagascar context; we affirm in the Spirit to follow Christ our elder Brother; and inspired by **the way familiar to African informal education of apprenticeship** explained as follows:

*In the art of blacksmithing, in the African understanding taken as “bubasi” or “burumbi”, or even taken further than blacksmithing to the area of initiation (circumcision), “bukhebi”, the common characteristic among all these trades is that one was **initiated into it**, through apprenticeship so that slowly but surely one became **possessed with that spirit of blacksmithing**. Because of this, the one that possesses the gift always understood that it is a gift, **actually an un-merited gift that humbles the possessor who becomes actually a servant, dispensing the fruits of that gift**. Among the Bukusu sub-tribe of the Luhya community (Kenya), the circumcisers of the boys i.e. the surgeons or in Kiluhya “Bakhebi” were not taught in school, but the one was confirmed into it when he showed that **the particular spirit of the trade dwelt in him/her**. This was evident during the circumcision season or before when the one possessed by the particular trade was seen shaking or trembling literally. In such events, the person was **inducted** into the trade through the giving of the tools of the trade, and then there followed a period of apprenticeship with one of*

*the masters of the trade. One learnt the trade by **being** with the master, started by carrying the tools of the trade, then graduated to being, maybe, an assistant of the master. (The different and important aspects of this African initiation / apprenticeship story will be revisited in different parts of this document).*

The Holy Father, Benedict XVI, in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, recognises the African richness in these terms:

*A precious treasure is to be found in the soul of Africa, where I perceive a 'spiritual lung' for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope', on account of the extraordinary human and spiritual riches of its children, its variegated cultures, its soil and subsoil of abundant resources. However, if it is to stand erect with dignity, Africa needs to hear the voice of Christ who today proclaims love of neighbour, love even of one's enemies, to the point of laying down one's life: the voice of Christ who prays for the unity and communion of all people in God (Jn 17:20-21). (Africae Munus, 13).*

During these Study Days we have realised through the Word of God, that proclamation is a divine initiative and we remain only God's instruments (*Acts* 8: 26-40).

In the light of the above, we have arrived at the understanding of initial proclamation as:

- *The process of stirring up interest in those who do not know Christ or who have abandoned him.*
- *A journey that is inspired by the Holy Spirit who blows wherever He wills. We realise that by our way of life, we announce the Person of Christ and thus we facilitate the beginning of the process of discovering Him and of making appropriate choices.*

We are aware that initial proclamation encompasses individual Salesians and FMAs; our communities and our Congregations at large inserted into the Local Church. However, for us SDBs and FMAs the **key aspect is not only where (space) one does proclamation, but where does one find the young.**

As catechetical Congregations, we affirm that initial proclamation is the key moment that sets in motion conversion and the life long journey of faith (catechesis).

## **Initial Proclamation Today: the Africa - Madagascar Context**

The emerging challenges could be seen as external and internal factors that are affecting our mission in Africa-Madagascar. While the opportunities present us with greater avenues for entering more into the African context by sharing the Gospel message of Christ. The new intuitions point out how the Spirit continues to inspire us.

### **External Challenges**

The rapid urbanisation and technological advancement has influenced strongly the African and Madagascar cultures where the young people have hybrid culture; neither belonging to the African cultures nor to the global culture created by the media hence, growing without genuine roots. In this way, essential values are at risk of being wiped out e.g. communitarian sense, respect for life, the sense of the sacred and care for the environment.

The reality is many African Christians seem to live in the double world especially when faced with challenges of life, like suffering and death. They may come to Church and at the same time consult the traditional diviners on these issues of life. This shows that the Gospel values have not penetrated important aspects of the cultures, hence no serious personal commitment leading to the challenge of syncretism.

In some of the countries where we work, there are political conflicts and militia groups that pose a dangerous scenario to initial proclamation. The alarming gap between the poor and the rich creates a worrying social situation for the continent.

### **Internal Challenges**

As SDBs and FMAs, we feel challenged when it comes to having necessary comprehension of the African worldview which is holistic in approach. Lack of serious reflection pertaining to understanding of African Religion, the concept of sin in its individual and collective form,

the rites of purification and expiation, the cosmological perspective i.e. the inorganic, and organic world, the living-living, the living dead, the ancestors and the spirits. These inform the whole of an African person.

In the initial and ongoing formation, enough attention is not given to the understanding and demands of initial proclamation and the catechetical process of the Church. For example, lack or shallow knowledge of the catechetical materials of the Church. This seems to condition the change of mentality on our part.

The challenge is to become prophetic in our community life, i.e. fraternal life as Christians and as religious. We appear fragmented in our living and approach to mission. Community life, if well lived becomes a powerful tool for initial proclamation “See how they love one another” (Tertullian, *Apology*, 39). There is a lack of enthusiasm and deep conviction when it comes to the spirit of sacrifice and proclamation of the message of Christ.

The challenge is how to accompany the families in order to become settings for the itinerary of faith, as a school for Christian initiation and following of Christ... (*Africae Munus*, 46).

Many of the FMAs and SDBs are concerned more with their managerial tasks than with being among the young (*One learnt the trade by being with the master*).

## Opportunities

1. In Africa/Madagascar, demographically, the majority are the young people who are open and receptive to the promptings of life. The challenge on the part of SDBs and FMAs is how to approach them and propose Christ as the secret of true freedom. The Holy Father reminds us; “[...] If Christ is presented to young people as he really is, they experience him as an answer that is convincing and they can accept his message, even when it is demanding and bears the mark of the Cross.” (*Africae Munus*, 60). The educative centres at our disposal constitute the privileged places for horizontal growth (i.e. where proper relationships grow; fundamental questions of life are raised) and the vertical orientations are fostered.



2. The value of religious celebrations and life... e.g. the strong communitarian sense and the value of storytelling, proverbs and aphorisms. In order to promote dialogue between cultures and religions SDBs and FMAs themselves need to appreciate the positive elements in those cultures and respect their values as a way of enhancing dialogue as the ambient for initial proclamation. These include moments of celebrations like, weddings; births and even sorrowful moments like sickness; death and calamities.
3. In many of the African societies, there exists a process of initiating young people in the particular skill through the process of apprenticeship. This is a slow process where one acquires the skills required like of blacksmithing, through staying/being with the master of the skill until he acquired one. This can be extended to the understanding of initiation as an important rite of passage, i.e. from childhood to adulthood where responsibilities are given and one claims his/her place in the community. The richness of Preventive System as a spirituality and a humanistic system blends well with the African values for life, celebrations, spontaneity, aesthetics and availability (*Africae Munus*, no. 7).

## New Insights and Intuitions

1. A firm realisation that openness to the Spirit of God moves our hearts to the new frontiers, where we can propose initial proclamation. The new frontiers for us in this case, include developing rapport with people, with their culture and with the new avenues of communication e.g. social networks, i.e. twitter; Facebook, **education, and health**.
2. A realisation on the part of SDBs and FMAs of the need to work closely with the local Church so that we do not develop a mentality of superiority but that of humility with a willingness to learn from the local Church. We need “openness and profound humility”. (*And because of this the one that possesses the gift always understood that it is a gift, actually un-merited gift that humbles the possessor who becomes actually a servant, dispensing the fruits of that gift*).

3. That formation procedures of our African confreres and sisters need to consider our cultural milieu: They need to be formed to value and to affirm their Africanness, as African Christians, assimilating the Salesian charism. In order for proclamation to be well rooted for both the announcer and the recipient, the cultural medium is important. [Formation to dialogue with culture, *Optatum Totius*, nos. 14 and 15]. This implies formation in the African Religion and cultures, where the Gospel values are allowed to challenge the negative aspects of the African cultures (**the African process of possessing the art of blacksmithing**).

## Way Ahead

1. Sensitisation of the communities regarding the necessity of proper Initial Proclamation before engaging in Catechesis (the common characteristic among all these trades is that one was **initiated into it**, through apprenticeship so that slowly but surely one became **possessed with that spirit of blacksmithing**).
2. Need to start a catechetical office at the level of the Province and participation in the catechetical initiatives of the local church.
3. The need to establish an *Ongoing Formation Centre for Salesians in Africa*. In such a venue, the formation of the laity could take place.

# Practical Proposals for FMA and SDB

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*FMA and SDB conclusions during the Study Days in view of a renewed missionary praxis in Africa and Madagascar*

For the FMA the conclusions of the Study Days can be summarized this way:

- a. To transmit with enthusiasm the contents of these days to the whole Province, in agreement with the Provincial;
- b. To converge all efforts on Initial Proclamation, on this Year of Faith;
- c. To review the aspect of evangelisation in the provincial planning;
- d. To organise community moments on Initial Proclamation in order to carry out missionary animation in every reality;
- e. To insist on the quality of our personal and community witnessing which is fundamental to Initial Proclamation.

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

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

For the SDB these conclusion remarks are based on the reality of each of the 17 participants from 11 Provinces of the Region of Africa and Madagascar.

## **1. On a practical level, what can we take back to our respective Provinces?**

- a. For SDB formation and animation regarding ‘**Initial proclamation awareness,**’ we can use the tools already available in our Provinces

(Newsletter, Salesian Bulletin, Missionary animation bulletins). We can also focus on one aspect of the dynamics of Initial Proclamation each month. Finally, the upcoming Provincial Chapter in our Provinces is an excellent occasion to raise awareness about Initial Proclamation by using some concrete suggestions on how to foster it in the different sectors of our ministry.

- b. The **Year of Faith** or **Salesian Mission Day 2013 celebrations** are opportunities to promote awareness of the importance and relevance of Initial Proclamation. We can share experiences of Initial Proclamation in our educative and pastoral settings with the youth and adults in our ministry (parishes, oratories, social works, schools - animators, catechists, parents, teachers, educators, volunteers, and missionary groups). We can also prepare a celebration with Initial Proclamation as its theme. The push for Initial Proclamation could be a good starting point for renewed missionary animation in all Provinces in the region since it is appealing and stirs up a lot of missionary enthusiasm.
- c. **We can produce some simple materials** on Initial Proclamation to use with our lay collaborators or young people. Printed material could include a practical definition of Initial Proclamation and examples of how Initial Proclamation is accomplished. Some simple formation materials that focus on promoting Initial Proclamation both as a lifestyle and as *praxis* (breaking down the concepts to daily life in a simple, very practical way) can also be created. Since all of us are working in many different contexts (parish, formation, social communication, rural or urban mission stations), an exchange of produced materials might be very helpful as inspiration.

## **2. Regarding Initial Proclamation, how do we reinforce networking among the participants, within our Provinces and in the Congregation?**

- a. **Ongoing Missionary Formation** We endorse the idea that developed during these Study Days on the need to launch the concept of a possible future 'Regional Centre' for Ongoing Formation or at least to start the formation of a **Reflection Group** of three African SDB from

each language zone who would promote a critical reflection on our African cultures and study the inculturation of the Gospel and of our charism. We, as a group of Province Delegates for Missionary Animation, need to network with the already two working commissions of CIVAM (Formation - Youth Ministry) and with the CONFORM (Ongoing Formation Commission).

- b. **Networking** among the Study Days' participants could be facilitated by email communication with each other. Because of intermittent internet connectivity in many cases, it is best if all materials are saved on the Province server with access facilitation (uploading or downloading through links). A BLOG of missionary animation or a Facebook page could be created.
- c. The Radio is an important means for Initial Proclamation. Possible networking might be enriching for the already existing **Salesian Radio Stations**, Internet Radio Broadcasting, Radio Don Bosco (MDG), Sudan Tonj (AFE), etc.



## **Closing Remarks**





# Three Words to Remember this Meeting

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Sr. Alaïde Deretti, FMA

A thank you and three brief points in conclusion.

## **1. Return to Jesus of Nazareth, Son of the Living God**

May the Spirit continue to work in us so that we may become renewed every day.

May the person of Jesus, His attitudes, His actions, His style of approaching everyone, especially the most marginalized be for us:

- a constant journey of conversion, and spiritual growth;
- a criteria of discernment for our actions and ministries;
- the way, the life, and the truth.

## **2. Community witness**

May we become new communities, new missionaries, because we attract and welcome all, because we are an expression of God's love for everyone.

May we become communities in dialogue, creating bridges "between differences", and between socio-cultural groups of different faiths and sensitivities. May no one be excluded!

May we become communities that are committed to "breathe" Jesus and His Kingdom, promoting the dignity of each person made in the image of God.

May we become communities familiar with the different Christian denominations and religious sensitivities.

## **3. The educational passion integral in every work and activity**

Through Education in intercultural dialogue and the dialogue ad intra and ad extra we bring out the best in each person and propose that all become "honest citizens." The invitation and challenge to become "true

Christians” is extended to those who are called to the Christian faith through the catechumenate and Christian initiation.

The proclamation of the Good News brings new expressions to birth in the Church, terminology suited to the needs of the times, cultures, and expectations of the people. The Holy Spirit does not fail to arouse men and women in Africa and Madagascar, who, united in different associations, movements, and communities, consecrate their lives to spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is in according with the exhortation of the Apostle of the Gentiles: “Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesy, test everything, and retain what is good” (*1Thes* 5:19–21)

*May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Word of God and Our Lady of Africa, continue to accompany the whole Church [and also the Salesian Family] with her intercession and her invitation to do all that her Son will tell us [cf. Jn 2:5]. May the prayer of Mary, Queen of Peace, whose heart is always directed toward God’s Will, support every commitment to conversion, consolidate every initiative of reconciliation, and render efficacious every effort in favour of peace in a world that hungers and thirsts for justice [cf. Matt 5:6] (cf. Africae Munus, n. 175).*

May Africa, through the proclamation and acceptance of the first announcement of Christ, be *one of the first spiritual lungs of humanity, and may it become each day more a blessing for the whole world* (cf. *Africm*, n. 177).

May the Trinity accompany and bless our mission of proclaiming Jesus, first by our personal and community witness, then also with our words.

Thank you!

# A Renewed Commitment to Initial Proclamation

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Fr. Václav Klement, SDB

**Thanks to all who had contributed to the Study Days** and to those who were already mentioned by Sr. Alaide Deretti, FMA - Councillor for the Missions. In a special way, I am grateful to all Provincials of CIVAM for sending their well-prepared (and new) Delegates of missionary animation. I cannot forget all those who helped in the translations both for the written texts of the resource persons and the simultaneous translations during the sharing sessions in the official languages: French, English, Portuguese and Italian.

**These days have brought us into the heart of the Church of Christ.** We are educators to the faith of the youth in 43 African countries (some 1400+ SDB and 500+ FMA) who are Christians or of other denominations or followers of other religions. It makes us experience with Don Bosco to be really in the heart of the missionary Church today. In many ways, we contribute to the initial proclamation of Christ in our local Churches with the Preventive System of Don Bosco. On the other side, we recognise our challenge to walk more closely with the local Church in each country!

**What is the reason for a special appraisal of these African Study Days?** Without doubt, Africa is **the youngest** of the eight Salesian Regions worldwide. It has many confreres well prepared on the intellectual level and also the **highest concentration of the missionaries *ad gentes, ad extra and ad vitam*** in the whole Congregation. During these days, we experienced this double blessing. Probably among the five Mission Study Days (Europe, South Asia, East Asia, Oceania, Africa) this experience was the most vibrant, with a forward vision, a very honest and serious reflection.

**The reason to be more deeply committed in the initial proclamation of Christ.** Three basic reasons were shared by the Rector Major in the conclusions of GC26-2008: They are (1) **The command of Jesus** to

go to the whole world and preach His Good News to all the nations (Mt 28: 18-20); (2) **Our faith in the Gospel** which purifies, perfects and transforms all cultures without exception – hence also all cultures of Africa. In order to be more human we need the presence of God amidst our cultures, (3) the pastoral **heart of Don Bosco**, a heart that is open to all young people of the world, especially those who have never met Jesus. Our effort to help the whole Church be more in the state of mission is expressed mainly in this: our Christian lifestyle’ as initial proclamation.

Together with the Japanese ‘Faith journey’ scroll drawn by Sr. Rosa, FMA I would like to introduce also the **‘American Triptych of Aparecida’** (a gift of the Pope Benedict XVI) which is one of the most visible icons of a lifestyle as initial proclamation. At the centre is Jesus’ ascension to heaven - sending his disciples to all nations. On the right side are three Gospel events of listening the Word of God and on the left side are three witnessing episodes of Gospel proclamation. It is good for all of us!

Finally, I want to share some specific points that need to be highlighted:

1. Many of us stressed the great importance of **lay people’s missionary witness as the initial proclamation**. Concluding our Mission Study days during the Fourth World Congress of the Salesian Co-operators (Rome, November 8-11) we cannot forget our Lay Mission Partners, catechists, parents as the first agents of initial formation.
2. I hope that some of you have watched the film *‘Des hommes et des dieux* – “Of Gods and Men”, a real story of the presence of a religious community among the Muslims in Algeria. **The most significant message for us Salesians** is the wonderful community witness and dialogue of life lived amongst the Muslims and a serious community discernment, which touches the reasons for missionary presence. The community witness was highlighted by the intervention of Fr. Guillermo Basaños at the Second African Synod (2009). He shared the witness of one ZMB **multi-cultural community in Malawi** (four SDB from four different countries) as an icon of true ‘reconciliation and peace’.
3. Moreover, the Provincials (and their Councils) are called to share our Study Days experiences with the **Delegates of Formation and Youth Ministry and their Team**. I hope that our enthusiasm and reflections

also reach especially the youth ministry through of your passionate to share.

I conclude with a glimpse of the **future of the Initial Proclamation** that is deeply connected to life witness (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*). The forthcoming 27<sup>th</sup> General Chapter was convened with the theme: ‘**Witnesses to the Radical Approach to the Gospel**’. It is a response to the signs of our times that makes us understand the lack of credibility, visibility and consistency of our life and mission. The three icons of the Chapter journey is the invitation of the Rector Major to become more and more (1) **mystics** and to seek God with all our heart, (2) **authentic prophets** especially by our fraternal life lived in our communities and (3) **servants of the young** especially the poorest in our mission as educators and pastors.

I hope that your courageous, patient and authentic witness, rooted in deep missionary spirituality will help the whole Salesian Congregation launch into the journey indicated in the letter of convocation of the GC27 (Letter of the Rector Major, ACG 413).

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



# **The Study Days in the Light of the Word of God**

Every session opened with a biblical reflection

by Sr. Maria Ko Ha Fong FMA\*

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## “Get up!”

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**“Get up!”** It is the Spirit who impels the Church to an enthusiastic re-birth, looking for new ways to bring love and hope to the world, facilitating new encounters with Jesus. During the *Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops*, held in October 2009, “Courage! Get up, He is echoed calling you “(*Mk* 10:49)”, You are forgiven your sins. [...] Get up! “(*Lk* 5:20.24),” Stand up, take up your mat and walk! “(*Jn* 5:8) (cf. *Africae munus*, nn. 15, 31, 148, 172, 173) echoed repeatedly in the Synod Hall and was uttered in different circumstances. The Pope too, took note of it, and, at the conclusion of the Synod, spoke the same words as an energetic and incisive invitation: “Get up, Church in Africa, family of God [...]. Embark on the journey of a new evangelization with the courage that comes from the Holy Spirit “(Homily at the Mass for the conclusion of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, October 25, 2009).

This invitation is not limited to the Church in Africa, but can be extended to the universal Church, who in this historical moment, is called to undertake a new evangelization, to respond more fully to the Lord’s mandate and to share more effectively the joy and the hope that Christianity brings as gifts, with the contemporary world.

The invitation, “Get up!” is also addressed to the members of the Salesian Family today. The Rector Major states that there is a strong need to enkindle the hearts of the Salesian Family to live our mission among the young with joy and enthusiasm. Already in its letter to the GC 26 he warned of the danger of a kind of inertia. “We are in a stalemate. We seem to be under the tyranny of the “status quo”. There is resistance to change, which is more unconscious than intentional”. Now in light of the upcoming CG 27 he continues to insist on the need to “light the fire of spiritual and pastoral passion”, to give witness of evangelical radicality and to inspire hope in the world.

For our biblical reflection of these days, we chose some texts that contain this imperative: “Get up!” and from which we can receive inspiration and strength for our commitment to the “first announcement” of Christ.

1. **“Get up, take up your mat and walk”** (*Jn* 5:8): is the command of Jesus to the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda.
2. **“Take courage! Get up, he is calling you”** (*Mk* 10:49): is the invitation from the people to the blind Bartimaeus following the words of Jesus.
3. **“Arise, and go on the deserted road”** (*Acts* 8:26): it is God’s call to Philip at the beginning of a new stage of the Church’s mission.
4. **“Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country”** (*Lk* 1:39): it is the attitude of Mary, the first to be evangelized and the first evangelizer.

## “Stand up, take up your mat and walk” (Jn 5:8)

*In Jerusalem at the Sheep Gate, there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda, with five porticoes. In these lay a great number of ill, blind, lame, and crippled and among them was a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been ill for a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am on my way, someone else gets down before me”. Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your mat and walk”. Immediately the man was healed: took up his mat and walked. (Jn 5:2-9)*

Thirty-eight years! Thirty-eight years of immobility. Thirty-eight years of empty waiting: it is frightening just to think about it. This is the fate of our unfortunate sick-lying on a bed as dirty and worn as his poor body, with languid and sad eyes fixed on the pool. His whole world was reduced to this. His living space was all there, reduced to a horizon that never went beyond the waters of the pool of Bethesda.

The pool was close to the temple in Jerusalem. It was at the sheep gate, a place reserved to purify the animals destined for sacrifice. Today it is well situated by archaeological excavations and accessible to visitors and pilgrims in Jerusalem. It carried the good name of Bethesda, which in Hebrew means “house of mercy”, but in reality there was more misery present there than mercy. Already that place had turned into a “parking lot” for the outcasts of society. There under five magnificent arcades, still evoking the days of Herod and his delusions of grandeur buildings, lay a large number of ill, blind, lame, paralytic and hopeless sick cases without a future. They were a multitude, degraded by pain yet still clinging frantically to any miraculous hope. A popular tradition, which in fact was the remnant of pagan healing gods’ worship, had developed around waters containing healing substances. This, in turn, gave rise to the rumour that the water was stirred by an angel and had the power to heal the first sick person that was immersed in it.

Our man was part of this bleak scenario. He was there, day after day,

for nearly 14,000 days. His days were always the same-opened by a dawn without promise and closed by a sunset without anything new. By that time his waiting had become insipid, empty. The excitement, the anxiety, the hope of earlier days had quickly gone and now there were only resignation, laziness, boredom, disappointment, bitterness.

Around him there was a multitude of sufferers, but common pain does not automatically create company or community, let alone communion or and mutual compassion. These were isolated individuals, each with his/her own problem, with his/her disappointments, and each was closed in him/herself. Hostile faces, cold glances, shrivelled spirits, hardened hearts. Never the shadow of a smile or a gesture of sympathy, never a sincere interest or a friendly communication, never a gesture of goodness. It was hell, surrounded by five beautiful arcades and in the middle, still water; hell containing a despairing crowd "contending" for a dreamed of miracle.

Far from being friends and brothers, the people who were there were each other's rivals. Everyone that was added reduced the possibility of a miracle for the others and so was considered a competitor, a threat, a danger, an enemy, a cause for resentment.

In this "race" towards the miracle, our man was a loser. He always arrived too late. He could never get in fast enough when the water stirred. There was always someone who went ahead of him without scruple, without regard and without mercy. Being a paralytic, he was totally dependent on the help of others, and in thirty-eight years, among the large number of people who walked past him, there had never been anyone willing to lend him a hand at the right time.

He had resigned himself: "I have no one". Every day that passed strengthened his conviction that he never had anyone to help him in the past, at the present or in the future. His fate is black. Nothing will change. There is nothing he could do. He had already given up and had decided to find himself a corner in that hell so to make it more familiar; he was trying to become insensitive so to finish the years or days that he was still going to live, undisturbed and closed in his loneliness.

However, the man had made a big mistake. Saying, "I have no one" he did not account for someone, the only one who could help him, the only one who could change his desperate situation. The miracle did not come from the pool, but from him, the Lord. His salvation did not depend

on the healthful source from which the water flowed intermittently, but from the one who was the inexhaustible source of life and love.

“Do you want to be healed?” Jesus’ sudden question did not shake the still water of the pool, but had the power to upset the whole being of that man. The miracle came to meet him from a new direction. Never suspected, salvation broke in his life, through Jesus.

“Do you want to be healed?” The question may have seemed unnecessary and the answer obvious. What was he doing there if he did not want to be healed? Yet after 38 years of futile waiting the “want” had lost power and the word “heal”, too worn out by the many years of nostalgic dreams and vague desires, had become devoid of meaning and content. But now this simple question out of the mouth of Jesus reappeared real, full of life and hope.

Jesus’ “Do you want to be healed?” recalled the question that God spoke to Abraham many centuries before: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (*Gen* 18:14). This question echoed Isaiah: “Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear so hard that it cannot hear” (*Isa* 59:1). “For nothing is impossible with God” (*Lk* 1:37), repeats the angel Gabriel to Mary.

For God nothing is inevitably lost. Even after thirty-eight years, healing is possible; the divine touch can yet stir the still waters of a closed heart and produce endless waves.

With the coming of Jesus, no one can say anymore, “I have no one”, because God has made himself “someone who is close” to each one, “someone” who saves, who wakes us up from a long lethargy, who holds out a hand at the right time, who performs even the “impossible”.

“Stand up, take up your mat and walk!”

Yes, Lord, right away. I jump to my feet, leave my corner, I walk away from the pool that blocked my vision for too long, I leave behind me the arcades that have long obscured the horizon of my hope; with the mat on my back I walk towards new life. What does it matter if today is Saturday?

## **From *Africae Munus***

148. The fifth chapter of Saint John’s Gospel presents a striking scene: the pool of Bethesda, with its five porticoes in which “lay many invalids –

blind, lame, and paralyzed” (v. 3). This is the setting for the healing about to take place. “One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years” (v. 5), but had no one to put him into the pool. Then Jesus walks into his life. Everything changes as soon as Jesus says to him “Stand up, take your mat and walk!” (v. 8). “At once”, the evangelist tells us, “the man was healed” (v. 9). He no longer needed the water of the pool.

149. By accepting Jesus, Africa can receive incomparably effective and deep healing. Echoing the Apostle Peter in the *Acts of the Apostles* (3:6), I repeat: what Africa needs most is neither gold nor silver; she wants to stand up, like the man at the pool of Bethesda; she wants to have confidence in herself and in her dignity as a people loved by her God. It is this encounter with Jesus that the Church must offer to bruised and wounded hearts yearning for reconciliation and peace, and thirsting for justice. We must provide and proclaim the word of Christ that heals, sets free and reconciles.

## **From *Spe Salvi***

Man’s great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God — God who has loved us and who continues to love us “to the end”, until all “is accomplished” (cf. *Jn* 13:1 and 19:30). Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what “life” really is. (27)

We need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. However, these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end—each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world that by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is “truly” life. (31)

## “Take courage, get up, He is calling you!” (Mk 10: 49)

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*They came to Jericho. As Jesus was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a good crowd of people, a blind man, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me”. And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more. “Son of David, have pity on me”. Jesus stopped and said, “Call him”. So they called the blind man, saying to him, “**Take courage, get up, he is calling you**”. He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him: “Master I want to see”. Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you”. Immediately he received the sight and followed him on the way. (Mk 10: 46-52)*

Jesus is surrounded by the disciples and the crowds. They are leaving Jericho: the long and steep road that opens up in front of them, leads to Jerusalem. It is there that Jesus will offer Himself on the cross. In Mark’s Gospel Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem takes place between the healing of two blind men. They form like a frame around the journey, giving a sandwich effect, which is characteristically Mark.

The following is the geographical structure of Mark’s Gospel. On this structure he builds another deeper one: Theological and Catechetical. On the outline of the journey, Mark gives us an insight into his Christology and the presentation of his Gospel.

|    |                                       |                  |
|----|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| A  | In the desert                         | (1: 2-13)        |
| B  | In GALILEE                            | (1: 14-8, 21)    |
|    | Healing of the blind man of Bethsaida | (8: 22-26)       |
| C  | On the way to Jerusalem               | (8: 27-10, 45)   |
|    | Healing of the blind man of Jericho   | (10: 46-52)      |
| B’ | In Jerusalem                          | (11: 1 – 15: 39) |
| A’ | At the tomb                           | (15: 40 – 16: 8) |

***The healing of the blind man at Bethsaida*** (8:22-26): A town in Galilee is the background of the miracle. This is linked to the previous passage (8:15-18) where Jesus was telling His disciples that they have eyes but they cannot see. The blind man healed is then the “figure” of the healing of the disciples. The healing took place in two moments; it prepares Peter’s profession of faith (8:27-30), that also happened in stages, following Jesus’ two questions. The disciples will be healed of their blindness gradually and in stages, just as the mystery of the Man-Jesus unfolds before them.

***The healing of the blind man of Jericho*** (10:46-52): Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. As He was leaving Jericho, he healed Bartimaeus who now is following him. The mentioning of “on the way”, recalls 10, 32, and 11, 1 that speaks of a “way” to Jerusalem. In order to follow Jesus in the last events of His life and mission, one needs to be healed of his/her “blindness”.

## Synoptic view of the two passages

| <b>The blind man from Bethsaida (8:22-26)</b> | <b>The blind man from Jericho (10:46-52)</b> |
|---|--|
| Without name                                  | His name is underlined                       |
| Without social status                         | He is a beggar                               |
| He does not call on to Jesus                  | He calls Jesus                               |
| Others take him to Jesus                      | He overcomes obstacles to reach Jesus        |
| Private healing                               | He is healed in public                       |
| Jesus uses a therapy (a sign)                 | He does not have therapy                     |
| The healing is in stages                      | The healing takes place at once              |
| Faith is not mentioned                        | He believes, therefore he is healed          |
| He is told not to tell anyone                 | He is not stopped from speaking              |
| The healed man does not show any feeling      | The man follows Jesus                        |

Mark’s main concern is not so much to tell about the healing that took place; rather he wants to tell us that people’s blindness can be cured, can be healed. In as much as a person follows Jesus, stays with Him and accepts His leadership, he/she can enter more deeply into the mystery of His person and His mission. Let us now focus more deeply on *Mk* 10:46-52.



## 1. The blind Bartimaeus and his interaction with Jesus

- **The blind is the center of the episode**, of which we have a lot of information: “*Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, blind, was sitting along the road, begging*”. (The only case in Mark’s Gospel). He is not on the road, but at the side, he is on the boarder of life, and he hears this “life” passing by, and feels cut off from it. His blindness prevents him from seeing where he has to go. Who will be able to help him to find a way to life? Begging, asking and stretching out a hand in search of help are humiliating, because it seems that a person has no right to live. To beg is to recognise your poverty, your incapacity to survive and that your life depends on others. It is an experience of marginalisation, of slavery and of death that together with blindness, cuts the person off from the joy of “seeing” the light.
- The man though is dynamic and enterprising, he wants to live. ***He is determined to do everything he can to attract Jesus’ attention.*** This man’s hope becomes: ears to listen, awareness of Jesus presence, voice to speak, feet to walk, hands to throw off the coat and last, but not least, his hope becomes eyes to see and to follow Jesus. The starting point of all this is the awareness of his poverty, his misery; the way is his calling out for mercy and the culmination of all is the “light” he receives that allows him to see Jesus.
- Bartimaeus hears that it is “Jesus the Nazarene” that passes by. The people are excited and tell everyone that Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. There is a cacophony of noise and excitement, because a great number of people come and go and among them there are his disciples, the sick, and all kind of followers. He does not get direct information about the passing of Jesus, yet what he heard is enough for him to call out “***Son of David, have mercy on me*”!** In fact, he accepts the passing of Jesus as a proclamation of the Good News. Bartimaeus accepts this good news in his heart as hope of salvation. People around want to silence him, but he shouts louder for Jesus to hear him and this call is his prayer. He insists on calling out to Jesus. He does not mind that the people are telling him to keep quiet. This blind man is the only one to use the name “***Jesus*”**, (after the demons), but he uses it in a different way (1:24; 5:7). What is to be

underlined though is that the man adds another name: “*son of David*”. This is a prelude of the entry into Jerusalem when they will welcome Jesus and the coming of “the kingdom of our father David” (11:10), and the discussion that Mark will mention further on is based on the question of how can Jesus be at the same time, “Lord and son of David (12:35-37). All this leads us to think that we are dealing with a Messianic Profession of Faith.

- When he hears the man calling him more than once, the **first reaction of Jesus** is to stop. Nothing else will stop Him on His journey to Jerusalem, only the desperate calling of the unfortunate blind person. Jesus stops and this allows the blind man to walk towards Him. Jesus says three words, just as the blind did. The first word is addressed to the people: “*Call him*”! When the man is in front of him, Jesus asks: “*What do you want me to do for you*”? This is the same question he asked the sons of Zebedee (10:36). Jesus wants the man to say clearly what he wants; he must make up his mind with a clear statement. It is as if He is asking the blind “do you want to be healed”? As in John 5:2-9. It is imperative that the blind man expresses his faith very clearly. In fact his answer is ready and clear: “Rabbi that I may see!” is accepted by Jesus, while it was not so for the sons of Zebedee. Jesus does not perform any ritual, He does not touch the man’s eyes, or does he says any specific formula. He just says to him “*Go, your faith has saved you*”. This imperative form of the verb “Go”, is found 12 times in Mark’s Gospel, used every time by Jesus (except in 16:7) and in a healing context this verb always has a positive meaning, (1:44; 2:11; 5:19-34; 7:29). Jesus always gives healing of body and freedom.
- Mark does not only record the great desire the blind man had of healing, but he tells us what he did in order to get closer to Jesus: “*He threw off his cloak, stood up and came to Jesus*”. The throwing off of the coat is a very symbolic gesture. A little while before that, it was used when speaking of disciples that “*have left everything and followed*” Jesus. (10:28). This gesture could have a double meaning: the following of Jesus requires giving up everything; the Catechesis of the early Church emphasised the leaving the “old man”, or “old ways” (cf. *Rom* 13:12; *Eph* 4:22-25; *Col* 3:8; *Heb* 12:1; *1Pt* 2:1). Leaving everything behind, Bartimeaus “*jumped up*”, agile and free.

- When the blind man finds himself in front of Jesus who heard his cry and asks him “*What do you want me to do for you?*” the man’s prayer comes to the fore immediately and clearly: “*Rabbouni that I may see*”. This title “*Rabbouni*”, which was replaced by “*son of David*”, does not have a royal meaning anymore. It is found again in John 20:16, when Mary of Magdala is near the tomb after the Resurrection. This title expresses profound respect, personal encounter and intimacy. In this way, the praying is not a general request, but a specific request: “*that I may see*”. He speaks in a very confidential and bold manner.
- After been healed, Bartimeaus follows Jesus. His request to be healed: “*that I may see*”, was followed by “*and he immediately received his sight*”, was the conclusion of the meeting he had with Jesus. Once the blindness is healed by the Word of Jesus, Bartimeaus is ready to follow Jesus and he does it for real. He decides to do so, and it comes from his faith. This is the result of that faith that prompted him to ask for healing and throw off his cloak while running to him. Now it makes him understand the gift of sight he received. The desire to have back his sight, now urges him to be with Jesus. As He walks towards Jerusalem and to the Cross, Jesus now has a new follower with eyes wide open and full of faith. There is a contrast in the entire story. At the beginning the blind man was “sitting at the side of the road”, then he started “following Him on the road”, not just any road, but Jesus’ road.
- Bartimeaus is the only one that follows Jesus after been healed. He was not invited but he freely makes this decision. He was healed, as Jesus says, because of the faith he had. Often Jesus connects faith and salvation (healing). Faith is an unlimited trust in God and in His Son Jesus. The blind man has shown all this and it brought him healing and salvation. The use of the word “salvation”, instead of “healing”, helps us to understand the profound meaning of the story: the healing of the blind man is symbol of salvation.
- On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus’ main concern was the instruction of the disciples. He was preparing them for what would happen to him once they reached Jerusalem. He instructed them about what it means

to follow him and in response He got only misunderstanding and reluctance. At the end of this journey, a stranger appears. He is blind and a beggar. He lives from what others give him. Jesus journey is marked not so much by the presence and relationship with his disciples, but rather by what this blind man did. He is a person who firmly believes in Jesus. With confidence he has asked Jesus, what is most necessary in life. **It is through him that we see what the disciples need:** to believe in Jesus and to pray to him in the right manner. Only in this way will Jesus help us to see clearly, not with our own eyes, but with His own. Then we can walk with Him on the journey that God has planned for us.

## 2. “The disciples and the crowd” and their interaction with Jesus and the blind man

- At the beginning of the Gospel passage, we read that Jesus is leaving Jericho *“together with a group of disciples and a large group of other followers”*. Therefore with Jesus and Bartimeaus there is a group whose function is to be mediators between the Saviour and those who suffer. Further on there will be no distinction between disciples and the people. This group occurs three times in this story:
  - a. To inform Bartimeaus that *“He is Jesus, the Nazarene”*, this is **neutral** information;
  - b. A **negative** attitude towards the man, almost hostile: *“They shouted at him to keep him quiet”*. In so doing, these people behaved as if Jesus was their “property”, as if He belonged only to them, thus giving the wrong message about the real Jesus and His Mission. They think that is not necessary for Jesus to interrupt His journey to pay attention to an insignificant blind man who is a beggar. (In 10:13 the disciples also wanted to prevent the children from approaching Jesus).
  - c. Bartimeaus determination supersedes them and Jesus hears his loud cry and instead of going to him, he asks those around: *“Call him”*! So that the people who were an obstacle, a barrier between him and Jesus, become the intermediaries. Jesus changes the order of things and their attitude towards a suffering person; he is seen not any-

more as a nuance, but worthy of their attention now. They assume a more *positive* attitude, encouraging: “*Courage! Get up, He is calling you!*” This transformation of the people is intended to be a clear message for the Christian Community to whom the story is addressed.

- The “first proclamation” of the Gospel is to bring the people who want “to see Jesus”, to a meeting with Him, and tell them: “*Take courage! Get up, He is calling you*”. All this demands a change of attitude and conversion on the part of the evangelising Church, and all of us: we must be courageous before we can demand it from others. We have to be able to “get up” before we tell others to do it. We must be intimately united with Christ and be able to recognise His voice before we can ever think of bringing others to Him. “A fire can be lit only by something that is itself on fire”. (*Ecclesia in Asia*, 23). St. Ambrose says, “The one who is not near a burning fire cannot feel the warmth and the one who has no Christ cannot warm himself”.
- For this to happen “the transmission of the faith, must not consider responses as a matter of researching an effective plan of communication and even less analytically concentrating on the hearers, for example, the young. Instead, these responses must be seen as **something that concerns the one called to perform this spiritual work**. It must become what the Church is by her nature” (*Lineamenta* - XIII Synod of Bishops on The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith, 2).
- A man shouting and blocking the road may be seen as someone who brings disruption, or as something that interferes with the routine we are used to. The normal reaction would be to stop the person from disrupting the routine. Instead, Jesus stops, shows interest, and accepts the challenge. Today “We are living in a particularly significant, historic moment of change, of tension and of a loss of equilibrium and points of reference... Evangelisation is facing new challenges which are putting accepted practices in question and are weakening customary, well-established ways of doing things. In a word, the situation is requiring the Church to consider, in an entirely new way, how she proclaims and transmits the faith” (*Lineamenta*, 3).

- The cry is of one who suffers. This attracts the attention of Jesus and touches his heart of the Good Shepherd, as happens in many circumstances related in the Gospel. “For the sake of Christ and in fidelity to the lesson of life which he taught us, she feels the duty to be present wherever human suffering exists and to make heard the silent cry of the innocent who suffer persecution, or of peoples whose governments mortgage the present and the future for personal interests. Through her ability to see the face of Christ on the face of children, the sick, the needy and those who suffer, the Church is slowly but surely helping to forge a new Africa. In her prophetic role, whenever peoples cry out to her “Watchman, what of the night?” (*Is* 21:11), the Church wants to be ready to give a reason for the hope she bears within her (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15), because a new dawn is breaking on the horizon (cf. *Rev* 22:5)” (*Africae Munus*, 30).

## “Get up and take the desert route” (Ac 8: 26-40)

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

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

On the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, a man, seated on his chariot, was reading the 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 fi-

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

## 1. Get up and take the desert route

Our passage is to be found at a turning point in the general plan of the *Acts*. 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” (*Ac* 8:1). However, 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” (*Ac* 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. Therefore, we see Philip who begins his mission in Samaria.

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

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 moun-



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

The road indicated by the Lord seems to be a desert but in reality it is a launching pad. During his homily at the Mass to open the Year of Faith, 11 Oct. 2012, Pope Benedict XVI spoke expressly about a progressive spiritual “desertification of our world, of a widespread emptiness at the heart of our contemporaries. This must not cause discouragement; it is really a challenge, an invitation to hope: As the Holy Father says: “But it is in starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us, men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today’s world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, with their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive”.

## **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 pas-

sion 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 whom 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 evangelizers 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 Apollo’s and what is Paul’s? 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, there was a man, 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 his questions to Philip, we can catch his desire to discover the key to divine revelation. He would feel at home in what Benedict XVI calls the Courtyard of the Gentiles among people who know God only from afar, who are satisfied with

their rites and myths, who want what is Pure and Great, even if God remains for them the “unknown God. (Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia 21 December 2009). Even if they have a vague and confused idea of the divinity, they are awaiting the one God who is holy, The God who is truth and love, and they want to pray to him. They feel attracted to this God even when they are not expressly searching for him. However when they find some link they are quick to grasp it.

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

#### **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. 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.

Philip began the dialogue with a Socratic type of question “Do you understand what you are reading?” and thus establishes an interactive relationship. This approach to people was often used by Jesus as well. For example, one can think of the questions: “What are you looking for?” (*Jn* 1:38); “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” (*Lk* 10:26); “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” (*Mk* 3:33); “Why do you call me good?” (*Mc* 10:17); “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith yet?” (*Mk* 4:40); “Do you know what I have done to you?” (*Jn* 13:12); “Why are you crying?” (*Jn* 20:13).

This dialogue methodology that respects the other’s condition is particularly significant in the Salesian tradition. Remember the meeting of Don Bosco with Bartholomew Garelli?

The Ethiopian is happy to meet someone who recognizes his deep longing and he invites Philip “to get into the carriage and sit beside him” (v. 31). At first Philip was just curious. He ran to catch up with the carriage, but now he gets closer, he sits beside his friend and chats with him, with frankness, admiration and cordiality about the things of God. The word of God creates communion and harmony of heart. The transmission of the Gospel is not brought about by a theoretical discourse or an abstract speculation, but rather through an experience of love and mutual respect, in a simple exchange of views, dialogue and friendship. It is in this sense that the Guidelines of the Synod on New Evangelisation recommends the Church must not fail to be seen as a “domestic Church” and “The People of God”; not to lose “her capacity of remaining close to people in their daily lives so as to announce in that very place the life-giving message of the Gospel” (n. 9). Furthermore, “The sign of a well-founded, mature faith is the natural way we communicate it to others (n. 12).

In the Acts, Luke presents the first Christian community that lives everyday life in simplicity, totally part of the local population. Externally they are no different to the common people, but because of the integrity

of their lives they “enjoy the good will of all the people”. They have a serene and cordial relationship with other people. The preaching to the crowds, in particular to the pagans, usually arouses a lot of enthusiasm. Their experience of Christ has made them authentically human, optimistic; they are interested in everything and easily succeed in discovering the good, the beautiful and the true in the persons they meet. Luke often underlines often the trust and sincere reciprocal openness between the ones who proclaim the Gospel and the gentiles who are easily touch to the heart by the word of God (*At* 2:37-41).

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

## 5. Philip proclaimed Jesus to him

“Philip began to tell him the Good News of Jesus, using this text of Scripture as his starting point” (*Ac* 8:35). The climax of the whole episode is in verse 35: «euēggelísato autō ton Iēsún», namely “Jesus evangelised him.” Luke states that the announcement is not a doctrine, but a person, and a person who brings joy and hope.

Of course, a friendly climate, wise accompaniment, the art of arousing deep questions and keeping the search alive, the witness of the life of the Evangelist and the whole church community: all this is finalized in one end - the meeting and communion with Christ. Paul VI affirms very clearly the need for an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ, “Even the finest witness will prove ineffective in the long run if it is not explained, justified – what Peter called always having “your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that everyone has” – and made explicit by a clear and unequivocal proclamation of the Lord Jesus. The Good News proclaimed by the witness of life eventually has to be proclaimed by the Word of life. There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 22). Benedict XVI never tires of repeating on different occasions:

“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” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1).

At the root of the new language and approaches promoted by the New Evangelisation, there is the eternal newness of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. “The Gospel is the ever new proclamation of the salvation brought about by Christ to allow humanity to share in the mystery of God and his life of love and to open it to a future of strong, confident hope, says Benedict XVI in his talk to members of the newly formed office for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, united for their first plenary session: “To proclaim Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, today seems more difficult than in the past; but our duty remains the same as at the origin of our history. Our mission is not changed, so also the enthusiasm and courage that moved the apostles and first disciples must not change”.

## **6. 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 the 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” (*Ac* 5:41). At every stage of the spread of the Gospel, Luke always remarks on the joyful reaction, both of those who proclaim it and in those who receive it with sincere hearts. After having listened to the preaching of Paul “it made the gentiles very happy to hear this and they gave thanks to the Lord for his message” (13:48). Paul and Barnabas too, full of joy and emotion, enthusiastically told of the conversion of the pagans, “this news was received with the greatest satisfaction by all the brothers” (15:3).

The Gospel is a proclamation of joy: the joy of human persons who receive the gift of salvation, the joy of God who gives it. To the joy of God’s gratuitous giving, humans respond with the joy of sincere grati-

tude. 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 evangelizer does not establish a relationship of dependency. He can disappear, but the seed of the faith continues to develop, the fire lit continues to burn, the love of God continues to transform life and joy continues to sustain one on the journey.

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

We conclude by quoting the last paragraph the *Guidelines* of the Synod on the *New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian faith* that carries a splendid page of Paul VI on the joy of evangelizing: “We therefore approach the new evangelization with a sense of enthusiasm. We will learn the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing, even

at times when proclamation might seem like a seed sown among tears (cf. Ps 126:6). *'May it mean for us – as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church's history – an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world'* (Evangelii Nuntiandi, 80).



## “Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country” (Lk 1:39)

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*In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord”. Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord...”*

In Luke’s account the episode of the Annunciation and the Visitation are connected in continuity. “And the angel departed from her” and Mary “arose and went with haste” (Lk 1:38-39). The Christian tradition, with great insight, has kept a sealed unit between the two events in the prayer Hail Mary. We praise Mary with the words of the angel: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you” joined to those of Elizabeth: “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb”. After the reception of the divine, Mary moves towards others. The first evangelised becomes the first evangeliser.

The image of Mary on the journey has always been a focus of rich reflection in Church History. The Conciliar and contemporary Mariology has continued to emphasize this “itinerancy” of Mary, recognizing in it a permanent model for the whole Church. As the figure of Jesus, the one of Mary in the Gospel is very dynamic. Jesus was born on the roadway, He died on the roadway and his missionary life is always “on the road”. Not only. He himself is “the Way” (John 14:6). Even his mother is often found on a journey. Her frequent trips: Nazareth, Ain Karim, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Egypt, etc..., are accompanied by a much more intense interior movement. Her whole life is a journey, a “pilgrimage of faith” (*Lumen*

*Gentium*, 58). Mary also is the way, the way that leads to Christ, the way that leads to “the Way”. She is the Odighitria, the one who shows the way. In the passage of the visitation we have the emblematic image of this her being on the way and being the way.

As she moves quickly through the winding pathways of the mountain, there unfolds in her an inner journey of faith matures in her. It runs from the docile adhesion of the *fiat* to the joyous explosion of the *Magnificat*, from being visited by God to being God’s visit to others. Maria combines the highest contemplation in her encounter with the mystery to the very concrete action in the experience of service. She harmoniously blends the greatest transport regarding God and the greatest realism relating to the world and to history.

## 1. A journey under the “sign” of God

Mary sets off after a “sign” given to her by the angel: “See, even your cousin Elizabeth in her old age has conceived a son” (*Lk* 1:36). In the modest house of the priest Zacharias, the elderly Elizabeth waits for the child given to her through amazing grace. This should be for Mary a proof of the power of God for whom “nothing is impossible” (*Lk* 1:37).

When Sarah, Abraham’s wife, laughed in disbelief at the thought of being able to give birth in her old age, the Lord asked this question: “Is anything impossible for the Lord?” (*Gen* 18:14). Isaiah invites the people discouraged and overwhelmed by suffering to trust in the one who can do anything: “Behold, the hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear so hard that cannot hear” (*Isaiah* 59:1). Likewise, the prophet Zephaniah announces: “The Lord your God is in your midst, with saving power” (*Zep* 3:17).

Mary walks towards the mountain animated by faith in God. As she will say later in the *Magnificat* explosion of joy, the Lord for her is “Saviour”, “the Almighty”, a God who “remembers his mercy” and extends it “from generation to generation to those who fear him”.

The confidence of Mary is reinforced by the “sign” offered to her by God, but in reality, Mary herself is a sign of God given to humanity, “a sign of hope and consolation” (LG, 68). In fact, Mary marks the dawn that precedes the rising of the sun. She marks the “bursting-in” in the history of salvation according to the prophecy of Isaiah: “Behold a virgin

shall conceive, and bear a son" (*Isaiah* 7:14), whose existence represents "the fullness of time" (*Gal* 4:4), is the "fixed term of the eternal counsel" (Dante, *Paradiso*).

As Isaac, the child of Sarah and John, Elizabeth's son, bring the message that God can do anything; the child of Mary is the God who can do all things, the almighty God made man, weak and concealed.

## 2. A missionary journey

The eagerness of the journey to Ain Karim, as the concern at the wedding at Cana, shows the active, enterprising, determined and creative style of Mary. What fills her heart gives wings to her feet.

From Galilee to Judea Mary treads the stretch of road that Jesus would later travel. Hers is a missionary journey. Walking quickly towards the mountain Mary evokes the famous prophetic text: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news ..." (*Is* 52:7).

Mary, the first to be evangelised, is now the first evangeliser, the prototype of all the missionaries of the Gospel. Her going fast is the image of the Church, who immediately after Pentecost, sets off, driven by the Spirit, to spread the Good News. Paul knows this haste and interprets it thus: "the love of Christ impels us" (*2 Cor* 5:14). "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (*1 Cor* 9:16). He asks for prayer so that through his service of evangelisation, "the word of God may speed ahead and be well received" (*2 Thess* 3:1). Luke also likes to use the image of the "race of the word" or "growth of the word" (cf. *Acts* 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20; etc.). The word of God cannot be contained, cannot be stagnant, it must break free. It is always dynamic, always working. When the Church carries out her evangelizing mission with zeal and solicitude, it is the same word that runs and grows.

The Church Fathers are in agreement with these considerations. Origen, reflecting on the journey of Mary at the Visitation, comes out with these words: "Jesus, who was in her womb, was in a hurry to sanctify John, who was in the womb". Likewise Ambrose writes: "The grace of the Holy Spirit doesn't know long delays". The missionary Church has a model in Mary, and must adjust her pace to the rhythm of Mary and to the force that pushes her from within.

### 3. A diaconal trip

The liturgy of the Feast of the Visitation highlights the service and charity of Mary. The prayer over the gifts states: “O God, who accepted and blessed the act of charity of Mary, Mother of your only Son ... “The Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* sees in this festivity a celebration “in which the liturgy recalls the Blessed Virgin Mary, who bears in her womb the Son, and who goes to Elizabeth to offer her charitable assistance and to proclaim God the saviour’s mercy” (7).

Mary, the “handmaid of the Lord” (*Lk* 1:38), now becomes the servant of all. She does not look at the distances or at the inconveniences or risks involved. She does not calculate the time. She does not measure the effort. She walks uncomfortable paths and reaches out to “the other” in her house. Mary reveals God’s way: free giving, service, lowering oneself and solidarity with those in need. Mary’s “setting off”, “up the mountain”, “in haste,” attune her with her Son, who “came not to be served but to serve, giving his life” (*Matthew* 20:28).

The hidden God reveals himself in Mary’s charity. The witness of charity is a very effective way to bring the “unknown God” (cf. *Acts* 17:23) to those who await him. Mary, the Virgin of the Visitation, is the shining example of the Church who reveals the hidden God not only with proclamation and teaching, but also by love, and the service of solidarity to those in need.

### 4. A journey from fiat to magnificat

The external journey reflects an inner journey. As she moves quickly through the winding pathways of the mountain, there unfolds in her an inner journey of faith that runs from the docile adhesion of the fiat to the joyous explosion of the Magnificat, from being visited by God to being God’s visit to others. Climbing the mountain Mary does not feel alone. The Son of God is present, hidden in her. The angel’s greeting in Nazareth: “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you” (*Lk* 1:28), that Mary was struggling to understand fully, now becomes lived experience and profound conviction.

In this uphill journey Origen sees the symbol of Mary’s inner journey to the peaks of perfection. “It was necessary that Mary, who was all the

more worthy of being the mother of the Son of God, ascended the mountain after talking with the angel, and dwell on the heights.” With the guidance of the Holy Spirit Mary travels her transforming journey of configuration to Christ rapidly, magnifying, or making the divine image larger within her.

The journey from Nazareth to Ain Karim, from *fiat* to *Magnificat*, is a symbol of the itinerary of every Christian who makes his/her pilgrimage of faith from the initial adhesion to God’s plan to the full enjoyment of the beauty of this project. It is a journey that is a gradual climb: to the Mount of the Beatitudes to hear Jesus, to Tabor to contemplate his glory, up to Calvary to share in his passion, to the mountain in Galilee to receive his missionary mandate, and to the upper room to welcome his Spirit.

## 5. A journey that combines contemplation and action

The journey of Mary is a journey of staying with the Lord, a “setting off” with him, a dwelling in him, and a journey of bringing him within. In Mary is the inner life that moves, directs, and gives meaning to the external action. It is the silence that matures the word. The fecundity and beauty of the *Magnificat* arise from her profound meditation on the journey to the mountain.

In the journey from Nazareth to Ain Karim, Maria combines the highest contemplation in encountering the mystery to the experience of service in daily activity. She blends harmoniously blends the greatest transport regarding God and the greatest realism regarding the world and history.

The Church must learn from Mary the secret of unification between inner life and action, between being and doing, between believing and acting, between memory and creativity, between concentration and spreading the word of God, between “keeping all in the heart” (*Lk* 2:19.52) and “walking fast,” between receiving God’s gift and being God’s gift to others.

## 6. A journey that culminates in a meeting

The only passage in the New Testament where we find only female figures mentioned is that of the Visitation, the meeting between Elizabeth

and Mary (*Lk* 1:39-56). The scene is simple: two women meet; the background is a house, an environment of ordinary domestic life. Yet there is a fascinating beauty, there is an atmosphere of mystery which portends something big, something wonderful.

Elizabeth and Mary: two pregnant women who are directed towards the future by whom they carry in their womb. Two women holding within themselves an ineffable mystery, a wonderful miracle, a sheer joy. In addition to the relationship of family and friendship, a much deeper bond links them to one another. The awareness of being made the object of a special favour from God unites them. The common mission of working with God for a big project excites them and makes them explode into a song of praise. The experience of their prodigious motherhood unites them.

The two women communicate with few words. To Mary's greeting, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, responds with a blessing: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb", a confession of faith: "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" and a beatitude: "Blessed is she who believed in the words of the Lord." Mary, in turn, gives praise to God by singing the *Magnificat*. Between these two women there is a deep communion that goes beyond words and transcends concrete actions.

The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth makes us think of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. In the old widow of Israel and in the young daughter of Moab meet two peoples, two cultures, and two generations. Yet love unites them deeply. Their mutual support becomes the space of a miracle where God does great things, where God is communicated, delivered, given from one to another. "Your God will be my God" (*Ruth* 1:16).

God, who lives in the intra-Trinitarian communion, loves to be reveal himself in inter-personal communion. He loves to be discovered in the mutual love among his sons and his daughters.

Even at Ain Karem God becomes present in the solidarity and friendship between two women, and then even in a more beautiful and real way. The meeting between Mary and Elizabeth occurs actually on the thresholds between the Old Testament and the New, between the time when God speaks through signs and wonders, through prophets and saints, and

the time in which he manifests himself directly in His son-made-man. In the two mothers meet the two children inside their womb: Jesus and John the Baptist, who is his precursor, his witness (*Jn* 1:7). John is the small glowing light which guides to the true light of the world (*Jn* 5:35). John dances in the womb at the presence of Jesus, as he himself says later: the friend of the bridegroom rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice (*Jn* 3:29).

Contemplating this evocative scene and re-listening to the words of blessing, praise, thanksgiving and awe we are more aware of this: the Christian faith has an aesthetic dimension: not only is it true and good. It is beautiful! The beauty of faith breaks in especially in the encounter between people who love each other.

### **Prayer to Mary, Mother of the Church**

John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*

O Mary, Mother of God  
and Mother of the Church,  
thanks to you, on the day of the Annunciation,  
at the dawn of the new era,  
the whole human race with its cultures  
rejoiced in recognizing itself  
ready for the Gospel.  
On the eve of a new Pentecost  
for the Church in Africa, Madagascar  
and the adjacent Islands,  
the People of God with its Pastors  
turns to you and with you fervently prays:  
May the outpouring of the Holy Spirit  
make of the cultures of Africa  
places of communion in diversity,  
fashioning the peoples  
of this great Continent  
into generous sons and daughters  
of the Church

which is the Family of the Father,  
the Brotherhood of the Son,  
the Image of the Trinity,  
the seed and beginning on earth  
of the eternal Kingdom  
which will come to its perfection  
in the City that has God as its Builder:  
the City of justice, love and peace.



## **Sharing of Experiences**



## Introduction

Context of the Mission in Touba, Mali.

It is a rural mission in the Diocese of SAN. The population is in great majority bwa – the tribe that occupies the east of Mali and the Northeast of Burkina Faso. There are a great number of Christians there and the parish has more than a hundred villages among which are 80 Christian communities.

This is a brief reflection on my experience of fifteen years of missionary life in this community of Touba. My presentation will have three parts:

Jesus teaches us the steps in the proclamation of the Kingdom:

1. His coming among us and His incarnation (Go to them).
2. His hidden life at Nazareth where he learned to be a man (Stay with them).
3. The proclamation itself, inseparable from the formation and accompaniment of the disciples (Journey with them).

### 1. Go to them

We arrived in Touba, Mali, in 1985. We were warmly welcomed in the diocese, in the parish and in the protestant community by the people. This unforgettable day was a great sign for us. We are there for the people. They opened the doors of their houses and most importantly, they opened their hearts to share their life with us.

Go to them with the humble spirit described in Philippians 2:5-8 – to listen, to learn. An elderly White Father, the first missionary of the area told us to open our eyes and ears, to look, to listen and to speak very

little. Silence is the necessary element to accept the other and his reality, the other and his culture, the other in his own context.

Go to them with great respect, without authority, without any desire to be in control, without offending the attitudes and customs that are yet unknown.

## **2. Stay with them**

A true evangelizing work must persevere over time. The missionary must know how to deal with the time element. Only after five years in Touba did I begin to understand where I really was. Jesus himself lived for a long time in Nazareth (*Lk* 2:39-40; 51-52).

We spent a year beginning to live this new life: learning the ABCs of the local language, their code of behaviour, their eating habits, and their manner of building relationships. After many mistakes, we learned not to judge by basing ourselves only on our own culture and life patterns.

If, at the start of our mission, we give priority to the construction of buildings, to drilling deep wells, to the literacy programs, to the classes, to the cooperatives, etc., there is a great risk that we will be seen as any other NGO that delivers a good service but that does not live in the spirit of evangelization. To work for the poor and to defend their rights is good but to live with them, to share their life, to build community with them and to celebrate with them is very different and much more profound. This is the only way to touch the cultural roots of a people.

## **3. Journey with them**

Inculturation is not simple nor is it a short and easy process. The Good News must penetrate the human heart, which is the centre of all conscious and deliberate actions. The missionary is a mediator between the Good News and those willing to accept it. The natives themselves are the ones who must determine the pace. Our vision, which is often hurried and superficial, may lead us to make parallelisms and impulsive actions that may result in dangerous syncretism.

In Touba, Mali, we have a native bishop and native diocesan priests. Our parish priest, in fact, is a Salesian from this very place. The person in charge of our community is a Salesian Sister. It is a joy for me to reflect

with these people, to listen to them and to share with them our interpretations of the signs in our everyday life. It is an enriching discovery. I think I have made some small steps on the path that leads to making a real experience of life in another culture.

***Lk 24:13-35 and Jer 43:1-7***

These passages show how sometimes, accompaniment may be slow, complex and seemingly against all logic (from Jerusalem to Emmaus; from the land of Israel to the land of slavery – Egypt).

The Good News is a seed that comes from God, destined to sprout and grow into a tree (*Mt* 13:31-32). We are mediators and it is up to us to keep watch and to accompany, to keep the community steadfast in hope. A courageous and patient effort must be made to announce and to denounce (LG, 35a). Acceptance is a free response to the Gospel on the part of the indigenous people. Thus, they will be able to transform themselves into leaven for the Kingdom. Their cultural and social fabric will be transformed into a new humanity according to Jesus (*Eph* 4:13).

May the Lord grant that, first of all, we ourselves may be open and available to accept the Good News so that we may then proclaim it with joy, courage and fidelity.



# SDB - Burkina Faso: Pastoral Experience of Initial Proclamation

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Fr. Albert Kabuge, SDB

Thank you for this opportunity to share my brief experience in Burkina Faso where I am now as a missionary.

When I look at Burkina Faso or the situation of the AFO Province, I realise that we are in an area of great diversity in the manner of living and in believing in God. I say this because:

- *There are very rich and very poor people living in contrasting situations...How could we go ahead with our mission in this situation? We are in an area where the population is suffering a lot, where it is possible to extend a helping hand...*
- *Then, the problem of religion.... How could one be a brother to these young people, in the world where we live? Muslims, animists, Christians (Catholics, Protestants, sects).*

How can we make the initial proclamation among Muslims and animists “traditional religion”?

When I arrived in Burkina Faso, I look at the neighbourhood where we live and I realised that the Oratory was filled with many young people, and that some of them came from Muslim families. How can we live with youth who are Muslims in *Don Bosco Oratory*? We found some difficulties in launching our activities because initially the parents did not allow their children to play with us, nor to come to our Oratory on Saturdays. There were youth and parents who, before coming to our place, would first ask questions such as “Is this meeting or these games only for Christians? Can Muslims come as well to play with Christians?” We responded by saying, “Come, here we are family!” This place where we live is a place where there are persons; young people who do not know God and who have never met Jesus or Mary. Having contact with us, with the few prayers we say with the young, after a few months some of these young people started to ask us where our strength comes from, who Don Bosco is, who sent Don Bosco here.

## Proclaim with life

Our way of living, is by itself proclamation. However, we have also used some methods in order to speak about Jesus, and about biblical characters.

- We have used drawing as a method. We would take a character from the Bible, for example John the Baptist. We would give papers with the image of Bible characters on them and ask the children to colour them and to find out the name of the character. Everyone would gladly do it, even the parents were happy. We also used word puzzles. We asked the children to arrange the words in order. Sometimes the children are asked to spell Biblical words or phrases. We also have Salesian Mission Day. We try to be present during particular significant days in Muslim families. For example, on the day marking the end of Ramadan, the Bishop participates in prayer with the Muslims. This year at the end of Ramadan, I was able to be present to pray with our Muslim neighbours. My presence touched many children and parents and I will not tell you how much food I received that day from Muslims!
- In moments of sickness, we go to visit our boys.
- With the organisation of our Lenten Mission project, we were able to join the youth in the parish in visiting the sick and abandoned children. Our young people had gone ahead of us to bring little things to brighten the lives of others. This project has helped our young people to realise that we should love our own people and then reach out to others too.
  - At the end of two years we have seen that the Muslim boys in our area want to learn everything from us. They pray well and sing with enthusiasm. We can say that these Muslims are not radicals. They are very open to all.

## The Challenges and Opportunities

- Regarding initial proclamation, I see a great opportunity in the openness of our Muslim children and parents. We are invited and chal-



lenced to live ‘immersion in mission’ – two cultures meeting, accepting each other and wanting to live together. In this environment, inculturation can take place.

- We are challenged to **be without prejudice** before meeting people. Let God be the guide of his boat. Do not come to a place with a mental framework that is previously built from afar. As we begin our mission, we are tempted to see and to analyse the place with our own mind-set.
- Our Provinces should think about the **preparation and formation of confreres** who must meet the Muslims or those of traditional religion.
- We must be able **to proclaim by witness and be prepared to foster the dialogue of life through the experience of living together** in our neighbourhood.
- We must be able to **welcome all persons without considering their religion** and to meet God in our brothers and sisters.
- Our Congregation must send **confreres on mission who are able to live** with the locals.
- **Our life must stir up questions** among those who meet us in our missionary journey.

I thank all as well as the Missions Department for giving me this opportunity to share with you a little about our life in Burkina Faso. I ask you to pray for us!



# **Activity Sheets for Community Meetings of Ongoing Formation**

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



## “Church in Africa, Rise Up!”

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“Rise up!” It is the Spirit who impels the Church to an enthusiastic re-birth in seeking new ways to bring love and hope to the world so as to facilitate new encounters with Jesus. During the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, held in October 2009, the call of Jesus pronounced in different occasions resonated repeatedly: “Courage! Rise up! He is echoed calling you” (*Mk* 10:49), “Your sins are forgiven. [...] Rise up!” (*Luke* 5:20.24), “Rise up, take up your mat and walk!” (*Jn* 5:8). The Pope took note of it, and, at the conclusion of the Synod, spoke the same words as an energetic and all-inclusive invitation: “Rise up, Church in Africa, family of God [...]. Embark on the journey of a new evangelization with the courage that comes from the Holy Spirit” (Homily at the Mass for the conclusion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, October 25, 2009).

This invitation is not limited to the Church in Africa, but can be extended to the universal Church, who in this historical moment, is called to undertake a new evangelization, to respond more fully to the Lord’s mandate and to more effectively share with the contemporary world, the joy and the hope that Christianity brings as gift.

*(Sr. Maria Ko – Introduction to the Biblical Reflections  
during the Study Days on the Salesian Mission  
and the Initial Proclamation of Christ  
in Africa and Madagascar, Addis Ababa,  
Ethiopia, November 5, 2012)*

## **Invocation to the Holy Spirit**

*(Song or Prayer)*

### **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

*by Pope Paul VI*

Come, O Holy Spirit  
and grant me a pure heart,  
ready to love Christ the Lord  
with the fullness, the depth and the joy  
that you alone can infuse.  
Grant me a pure heart,  
like that of a child who does not know evil  
except to fight it and to flee from it.  
Come, O Holy Spirit  
And grant me a magnanimous heart,  
open to your inspiring word  
and closed to every petty ambition.  
Grant me a heart that is magnanimous and strong  
capable of loving everyone,  
determined to bear every trial,  
annoyance and tiredness,  
every disappointment and offense for them.  
Grant me a magnanimous heart,  
strong and constant to the point of sacrifice,  
content only to throb with the heart of Christ  
and to humbly, faithfully and courageously fulfil  
the will of God. Amen.

### **Discover**

1. Are you already acquainted with Initial Proclamation? Have you read something on this topic? When? Where?
  2. What were your thoughts on Initial Proclamation the first time you heard the topic discussed?
  3. What does Initial Proclamation mean to you today?
- *Reflect and share your understanding of Initial Proclamation.*

## Reflect

**“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. “Evangelization will always contain-as the foundation, center 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”. **All forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation**, which reveals and gives access to the mystery hidden for ages and made known in Christ (cf. *Eph* 3:3-9; *Col* 1:25-29), the mystery which lies at the heart of the Church’s mission and life, as the hinge on which all evangelization turns.

In the complex reality of mission, **initial proclamation has a central and irreplaceable role**, since it introduces man “into the mystery of the love of God, who invites him to enter into a personal relationship with himself in Christ” and opens the way to conversion. **Faith is born of preaching**, and every ecclesial community draws its origin and life from the personal response of each believer to that preaching” (RM, 44).

## Take Action

1. What challenges does the African continent face regarding Initial Proclamation?
2. As a permanent priority in mission, how can Initial Proclamation become practical in your given reality?
3. On a personal and community level, what attitudes are needed to facilitate and carry out Initial Proclamation?

→ *Dialogue and Sharing*

## Celebrate

“Initial Proclamation is at the start of the complex process of evangelisation described in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (n. 24) and in the General Directory for Catechesis (n. 47-49). [...] In the evangelisation process, initial proclamation plays a decisive role because its goal is to stir up interest in knowing the person of Jesus Christ that ultimately leads to faith

and an initial adhesion or a revitalisation of faith in him. As such, it is the beginning and the foundation of the evangelisation process”.

*(Alfred Maravilla - Initial Proclamation:  
Rediscovering its Meaning and Relevance for Africa,  
Study Days on the Salesian Mission  
and the Initial Proclamation of Christ  
in Africa and Madagascar;  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, November 5, 2012)*

“Initial Proclamation is the proclamation of the Gospel with the aim of leading a person to an encounter with Jesus in the ecclesial community and to undertaking a journey of conversion. This concise definition makes us understand that Initial Proclamation leads to an initial adhesion of faith that is at the same time act, content and belief”.

*(Enzo Biemmi - Il “Primo annuncio”.  
Breve mappa per orientarsi)*

→ *As a group, chose and sing a song on the theme of Initial Proclamation.*



# “Church in Africa, Rise Up!”

## Give witness to your faith

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“The proclamation of the Gospel must recover the ardour of the beginnings of the evangelisation of the African continent, attributed to the evangelist Mark and carried on by “countless saints, martyrs, confessors and virgins”. There is a need to gratefully remember and imitate the enthusiasm of so many missionaries who, over the course of several centuries, sacrificed their lives to bring the Good News to their brothers and sisters in Africa”.

*(Africae Munus n. 164)*

### **Invocation to the Holy Spirit**

*(Song or Prayer)*

### **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

*by Pope John Paul II*

Come, Holy Spirit,  
come Consoler Spirit,  
come and console the heart of every person  
who cries tears of desperation.

Come, Holy Spirit,  
come Spirit of light,  
come and free the heart of every person  
from the darkness of sin.

Come, Holy Spirit,  
come Spirit of truth and of love,  
come and fill the heart of every person  
who cannot live  
without love and truth.

Come, Holy Spirit,

come Spirit of life and of joy,  
come and grant every person  
complete communion with you,  
with the Father and with the Son,  
in this life and in eternal joy,  
for which he was created and for which he is destined.  
Amen

## Discover

1. Do you remember having had a personal experience of Initial Proclamation? How did it happen? Who proclaimed Jesus to you? In what manner did it occur and what were the particular circumstances of your life?
2. Who spoke to you of Him and what feelings did it evoke in you? What stirred within you from that moment onward?

→ *Reflect on and share your personal experience of Initial Proclamation.*

## Reflect

**“The subject of proclamation is Christ** who was crucified, died and is risen [...]. This is the “Good News” which changes man and his history, and which all peoples have a right to hear. **This proclamation is to be made within the context of the lives of the individuals and peoples who receive it.** It is to be made with an attitude of love and esteem toward those who hear it, in language which is practical and adapted to the situation” (RM, 44).

“Proclamation, because it is made in union with the entire ecclesial community, is never a merely personal act. The missionary is present and carries out his work by virtue of a mandate he has received; even if he finds himself alone, he remains joined by invisible but profound bonds to the evangelizing activity of the whole Church. Sooner or later, his hearers come to recognize in him the community which sent him and which supports him” (RM, 45).

“As we learned in the traditional catechism, Initial Proclamation is actualised in a multiplicity of forms that are certainly founded on catech-

esis, but first of all and even more on witness (implicit and explicit), on the combination of significant experiences, on taking part in liturgical celebrations and on experiencing charity.

It is simplistic to imagine Initial Proclamation as a simply verbal announcement of the Gospel. Many people do not accept faith and do not come back to it because of a discussion or presentation. The above is fundamental, but often useless if it is not accompanied by witness and personal experience.

Regarding language, Initial Proclamation recovers all the languages of faith, in particular the narrative form (focused on human experience and on the Word of God), that which is symbolic (their rites), that which deals with beauty (art, poetry...) that which is argumentative (the ability to deal with doubts and the questions people ask), that which is experimental (complete emersion in ecclesial life)".

*(Enzo Biemmi – Il “Primo annuncio”.  
Breve mappa per orientarsi)*

## Take Action

1. What would be the most efficacious way to speak of Jesus to the hearts of those who are listening to you?
2. What “languages” are best understood by your people when you present Jesus to them? Think of your present reality, of the young people, of their parents, of teachers, of the baptised, of those “far” from the Church, of those who have not yet heard anyone speak to them of Jesus... (add more categories of people according to your local context).
3. How do you proclaim Jesus and His Gospel to your people? How do your methods differ according to the categories mentioned above?

→ *Dialogue and sharing*

## Celebrate

Let us turn to the Father with our intercessions, asking Him for the gift of a heart that is open to the Gospel and courageous in proclaiming Jesus. Let us pray (or sing) together: **Hear us, O Lord!**

- **For the Africa Continent**, so that accepting Jesus it may daily give witness to reconciliation, justice and peace, let us pray:
- **For the Church in Africa**, so that it may promote a proclamation that reaches every person, shapes the community and profoundly influences others through the witness of evangelical values in society and in the African culture, let us pray:
- **For all Christians**, so that in them word and witness of life walk hand in hand. May their witness be enlighten, justified and explicit with a clear and unmistakable proclamation of Jesus and of his Gospel, let us pray:
- **So that the meeting of cultures** in the African Continent be permeated with harmony, with a peaceful coexistence and that the message of Christ may reach every culture, let us pray:
- **For the young**, so that they are guided to desire and to live their encounter with Jesus as adults, witnesses and teachers and so that they may thus become authentic and credible proclaimers to other young people, let us pray:

*(spontaneous intercessions)*

- *Recall the names of missionaries/acquaintances, those who have given or who continue to give their lives for the African continent.*
- *Close this session with an appropriate prayer or song.*

## “Church in Africa, Rise Up!” Journey with those who search...

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“The proclamation of the Gospel requires the witness of the one who proclaim it and the readiness to accompany and assist the person showing openness to Gospel values. It is not enough to proclaim or even to give witness to one’s belief in the one God, only once. It is also necessary to help to eliminate and to overcome the obstacles that this same faith encounters. With those who are responsive and interested, it is necessary to be ready to journey together on a stretch of the road, more or less long, more or less arduous, as did Jesus Christ on the road to Emmaus”.

*(Joseph Gevaert – O Primeiro Anúncio:  
finalidade, destinatários, conteúdos,  
modalidade de presença. Paulinas, São Paulo 2009)*

### **Invocation to the Holy Spirit**

*(Song or Prayer)*

### **Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

*by Frère Pierre-Yves of Taizé*

Spirit that hovers on the waters,  
calm within us the discords,  
the agitated waves, the sound of words,  
the whirlwinds of vanity,  
and in silence give rise  
to the Word that creates us anew.  
Spirit that in a sigh whispers  
to our spirit the Name of the Father,  
come and gather all our desires,  
make them grow in a beam of light  
that is a response to your light,  
the Word of the new Day.

Spirit of God, vitality of love  
from the immense tree on which we are grafted,  
grant that all our brothers and sisters  
are valued as gift in the vast Mystical Body  
in which matures the Word of unity and communion.

## Discover

“Two religious sisters once told me they were amazed by the fact that their 24 year-old nephew, unexpectedly converted to a Pentecostal religion. This nephew was an exemplary young man, living a good life and well-employed, however, until that moment had never manifested his personal religious choice. After some contacts with the leader of a faith community, the young man actually fell in love with and began to profess the faith with the enthusiasm of a neophyte. When his aunts asked him the reason for his conversion, he stated: “no one has ever announced Jesus Christ to me!” More than four years have gone by since then and the young man continues to be faithful to his choice of religion”.

*(Joseph Gevaert – O Primeiro Anúncio:  
finalidade, destinatários, conteúdos,  
modalidade de presença. Paulinas, São Paulo 2009)*

1. Do you remember some experience of Initial Proclamation in which you spoke about the person of Jesus (with words/with actions)? To whom was this Initial Proclamation directed? How did the person react? What happened next? Did something change in you, in the other person...?
2. Have you tried speaking about Jesus to someone who refused to listen to you? What were the consequences that you and the other person faced because of this refusal?

→ *Reflect on and share some details of this experience.*

## Reflect

On the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza, a man, seated on his chariot, was reading the Sacred Scripture. He was not a Hebrew,

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

*(Sr. Maria Ko – Biblical Reflection on Acts 8:26-40  
during the Study Days on the Salesian Mission  
and the Initial Proclamation of Christ  
in Africa and Madagascar, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,  
November 8, 2012)*

## Take Action

We therefore approach the new evangelization with a sense of enthusiasm. We will learn the sweet and comforting joy of evangelizing, even at times when proclamation might seem like a seed sown among tears (cf. *Ps* 126:6). “May it mean for us – as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelizers all through the Church’s history – an interior enthusiasm that nobody and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes with anguish, sometimes with hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelizers who are dejected, discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervor, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the Kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the midst of the world”.

*(The New Evangelization for the Transmission  
of the Christian Faith –  
LINEAMENTA n. 169)*

1. What should change in our way of living, personally and in community, so that we may become joyful evangelisers, proclaimers and credible witnesses?
  2. How do you plan to implement Initial Evangelisation from now on?
- *Reflect and share.*

### **Celebrate**

- *Think of a symbol or gesture that synthesises your understanding of initial proclamation and present it to the people with whom you are sharing this moment of reflection and prayer.*
- *Conclude with a suitable song (or dance) that demonstrates the joy of proclaiming Jesus.*



# “Church in Africa, Rise Up!”

## God is present in your culture

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“Once they encounter the Gospel of Jesus Christ, persons of whatever religion or culture realize that in some way aspects, values and experiences exist in their own culture that lead to the God of the Bible, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. [...] in encountering the Gospel, in the light of evangelical message, in a variety of way we discover entirely positive, particular experiences and values present in our own culture.

A typical example could be an African one. In the encounter with the Gospel one discovers that his/her own innate sense of community seems to point precisely in the direction of that more vast and invincible community that God desires to achieve among all human beings in Christ Jesus”.

*(Joseph Gevaert – O Primeiro Anúncio:  
finalidade, destinatários, conteúdos,  
modalidade de presença. Paulinas, São Paulo 2009)*

### **Invocation to the Holy Spirit**

*(Song or Prayer)*

**All:** Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your Love.

Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

### **Discover**

#### ***Who are the recipients of Initial Proclamation?***

In the strict sense of the word, the recipients of Initial Proclamation are those who do not know Jesus and have not been baptized. But Initial Evangelisation is also directed to children and to those adults who have received baptism but have forgotten about it (or who have never accepted it personally).

Ultimately, all believers need Initial Proclamation because faith can become obscured or compromised under trial. Initial Proclamation is always necessary to justify and explain the hope that is in us.

*(Enzo Biemmi – Il “Primo annuncio”.  
Breve mappa per orientarsi)*

- *Identify the recipients of initial proclamation in your missionary reality and share this information with the person who is next to you. Recall specific names of young people, adults, educators...*

## Reflect

It is therefore essential that “the new evangelization should be centred on a transforming encounter with the living person of Christ”. “The first proclamation ought to bring about this overwhelming and exhilarating experience of Jesus Christ who calls each one to follow him in an adventure of faith”. This task is made all the easier because “the African believes in God the Creator from his traditional life and religion and thus is also open to the full and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, God with us, Word made flesh. Jesus, the Good News, is God who saves the African ... from oppression and slavery”.

*(Ecclesia in Africa n. 57)*

## Take Action

1. What traits in the local African culture indicate that **God exists and is present**, that **God acts in human history**?
2. What are the means and the most effective strategies for initial proclamation in Africa, particularly in the area where your community is located? Which of these means are already present in your mission?

- *Sharing*

## Celebrate

- *The group is invited to make spontaneous prayers regarding the recipients of Initial Proclamation in their specific reality.*
- *Conclude with an appropriate song.*

# “Church in Africa, Rise Up!”

## For you life is Christ

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What do we mean when we use the term ‘Initial Proclamation’? To explicitly proclaim Jesus Christ to all people, that is to proclaim the name of Jesus, Son of God, and the salvific actions of God attained through Christ’s Paschal Sacrifice. In Initial Proclamation what is important is the proclamation of the core message of the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ, or to those who knew him but turned away from him, or to those who think that they know him but live a Christian life routinely, without any positive influence on those with whom they live. The goal of Initial Proclamation is aimed at evoking a special and singular interest in Jesus Christ, that leads to a vibrant life in him and that helps one to discover the true meaning of life so that one’s own “house” is built on Rock. “The rains fell, the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it did not fall because it was founded on rock” (*Matt* 7: 25).

### **Invocation to the Holy Spirit**

*(Song or Prayer)*

### **COME, COME, SPIRIT OF LOVE**

Come, come, Spirit of love,  
to teach us the things of God.  
Come, come, Spirit of peace,  
to help us recall the things that He has told us.

We invoke you, Spirit of Christ,  
Come within us, change our eyes  
that we may see the goodness God has towards us.

Come, O Spirit, of the four winds,  
and breathe on those who do not have life.  
Come, O Spirit, and breathe on us,  
that we, too, may have renewed life.

Teach us to hope, teach us to love,  
teach us to give praise to God.  
teach us to pray, teach us the way,  
You, Yourself, teach us unity.

## Discover

The phase of Initial Proclamation leads to a first conversion and to an initial faith in Jesus Christ. This is expressed in an overall concern to live like Jesus Christ and to belong to a Christian community. This phase could be completed when a person asks to be baptized.

***“I will bring, this, my treasure, to Africa!”***

To enter and thus become “part of God’s life”? “A marvelous thing. Marvellous”. Willy Ouemba will soon be 30 years old. He has a bachelor’s degree in economics and a master’s degree in management. Tonight in Trento, Italy, he will also bring his story to the baptismal font. His was a childhood marked by illness in Cameroon and the present is marred by the disappearance of his father just one month ago in his hometown of Douala. Willy came to Italy eight years ago to study but now he is ready to return to Africa to share or to “give back” the skills acquired at the University. From Trento he will also bring with him a new Bible he rediscovered in the catechumenate. “My parents had faith, says Willy, but I left it behind me. In time however, despite my distance from the faith, I sensed the presence of Someone and also the desire to confront my doubts. But I did not want to do so alone”.

An encounter with a disabled man from Trento, Piergiorgio Cattani, who had a degree in philosophy, proved to be providential. Willy often accompanied him as he moved about in the city in his wheelchair. A friendship was born and also the idea of preparing for Baptism along with an Albanian colleague, Klarita. For over a year and a half at the Cattani

home, in agreement with the parish priest, Don Renzo Caserotti and diocesan representatives, they “broke” the Word together in an atmosphere of fraternal research. “If one does not learn to read the Bible in order to profoundly delve into its content, one is left with too many doubts, reflects Willy. In these encounters of preparation I found the right road: God helps us to understand who we are and where we are going”. Then the African economist focuses his attention on in the book of Ecclesiastes: “Teach us how to be humble, how not to be attached to material things. Yes, we must know how to find joy in the beauty that surrounds us, but we must also know that beauty is not an end in itself”. Finally Willy asks himself how to involve the young in the faith process: “We invited our friends who were non-believers to our Baptism. After all, up to a year and a half ago, I was one of them”.

*(Avvenire - April 7, 2012)*

1. Do you recall a person you have known – young person or an adult – who has asked for the sacrament of Baptism? How was this desire expressed? What happened next? How is this person living the Christian life today?

## Reflect

“... no medium can or should replace personal contact, verbal proclamation and the witness of an authentic Christian life. Such personal contact and verbal proclamation need to express a living faith which engages and transforms one’s life, as well as the love of God which reaches and touches everyone just as he or she is”.

*(Africae Munus n. 166)*

“Initial Proclamation is not only the chronological beginning but is also the very centre of faith. It is not only a “time” that requires following stages, but is the core value that must be present in every evangelical process, in ministry as its backbone, in life and in the action of the Church. Initial Proclamation has to be the transversal inspiration that in-

spires the entire life of the Church. We must continue “to return to Initial Proclamation,” so that the value of our faith may not lose its splendour”.

*(Enzo Biemmi - Il “Primo Annuncio”.  
Breve mappa per orientarsi)*

## **Take Action**

1. How can I improve my personal commitment to radically live my baptism so that others may be challenged to live as “children of God”?
2. What are the traits or attitudes of our community that make others understand that we live as Christians and Evangelisers?

→ *Share your reflections.*

## **Celebrate**

Young people expect us to proclaim the good news of Jesus. Initial Proclamation is the duty of every baptised person. We must actuate this in our missionary endeavours. A Christian is another Christ: he/she must be ready to proclaim Jesus with his/her actions and words.

- *Suggest a symbol to the group that best represents for you the theme of Initial Proclamation.*
- *Conclude with a joyful song that demonstrates your gratitude for your personal experience of encountering Jesus.*

# Sharing the Word

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## Opening

*Start with a Song or Prayer to the Holy Spirit*

## Introduction

We start our Bible Sharing reading an excerpt from the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* no. 151 of Pope Benedict XVI. This is followed by a brief moment of silence for personal reflection:

“Each member of Christ’s faithful should grow accustomed to reading the Bible daily! An attentive reading of the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* can provide some useful pastoral indications. Care should be taken to initiate the faithful into the ancient and fruitful tradition of *lectio divina*. The word of God can lead to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and bring about conversions which produce reconciliation, since it is able to sift “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (*Heb 4:12*). The Synod Fathers encouraged Christian parish communities, SCCs, families and associations and ecclesial movements to set aside times for sharing the word of God. In this way, they will increas-

### Seven Steps Bible Sharing

#### **FIRST STEP: We invite the Lord**

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

#### **SECOND STEP: We read the text**

The guide invites someone to volunteer to read the text aloud. A moment of silence follows, and 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 times the word or words (only short phrases or individual words) that have impressed them.

#### **FOURTH STEP: We are quiet**

The guide invites someone to read the reflection on the text. This is 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 each other what we have heard in our hearts so that our faith may be strengthened and enriched.

#### **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.

ingly become places where God's word, which builds up the community of Christ's disciples, is read, meditated-on and celebrated. This word constantly enlivens fraternal communion (cf. *1 Pet* 1:22-25)".

### **The Word of God**

Choose a passage from the texts used during the Study Days.

### **Reflection**

For the third step, take the *Biblical Reflections* of Sr. Maria Ko on the chosen text. Each one reads silently.



# An Overwhelming and Exhilarating Experience

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## The Concept of Initial Proclamation

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

“Initial proclamation, therefore, is more than a method. It takes various forms depending on the culture, context, rhythm of life and socio-historical situations of those to whom it is directed. It is a free and respectful invitation to the interlocutor who freely decides to accept or reject such invitation exemplified by the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (*Jn* 4:3-42). ... Initial proclamation is primarily a style of life of individual Christians in the context of daily life and of the whole Christian community. Hence, the witness of life of individual Christians, of the Christian family, the style of life of SDBs and FMAs, of religious communities and of the whole Christian community as well as the institutional and collective image of the Congregation and of the Church in all its public events are all forms of initial proclamation or, unfortunately, a hindrance to it”.

The discernment of the right moment and the most appropriate method of making initial proclamation are crucial for its effectiveness. Since it is primarily a style of life, it takes place at every opportunity, in season and out of season (2 *Tm* 4:2), especially in the context of ordinary daily life as well as in the context of cultural expressions of important moments of human existence. In this light, Montisci stressed that particular attention must be given to what could be termed as “traditional” pastoral activity (celebration of the sacraments especially of baptism and matrimony, pilgrimages, popular religiosity), to the possibilities and challenges offered by new frontiers (e.g. migration, multicultural and multi-religious settings), as well as to new situations brought about by cultural

changes (e.g. individualism, fluidity, secularism). What is important is to find and create occasions or places of encounter where one could feel free to talk about existential and religious questions and feel being listened to and understood.

This means that initial proclamation renders every Christian to be in the constant *state of mission*, like a sentinel ever ready to give reasons for his or her hope (*Africae Munus*, 30) whenever and wherever the Spirit opens the door to make a brief, intelligible and respectful invitation to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Initial proclamation's acceptance, however, has no formal visibility because it takes place in the inner recesses of the human conscience through the action of the Holy Spirit who works in persons and cultures as shown by their innate desire "even if an unconscious one, of knowing the truth about God, about man, and about how we are to be set free from sin and death" (*Redemptoris Missio* 44).

*(Initial Proclamation: Rediscovering its Meaning  
and Relevance for Africa)*

## **Initial Proclamation in Africa**

The guide asks someone to read the text below from the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* no. 57 of St. John Paul II. This is followed by a brief moment of silence:

"The Synod recalls that to evangelise is to proclaim by word and witness of life the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified, died and risen, the Way, the Truth and the Life. ... Initial proclamation ought to bring about this overwhelming and exhilarating experience of Jesus Christ who calls each one to follow him in an adventure of faith. This task is made all the easier because the African believes in God the Creator from his traditional life and religion and thus is also open to the full and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ, God with us, Word made flesh. Jesus, the Good News, is God who saves the African ... from oppression and slavery".

*(Ecclesia in Africa, 57)*

## Deepening

Has the Bishops' Conference in your own context made any statement about initial proclamation? If it has, please read a part of the statement.

## Sharing

- What was your understanding of Initial Proclamation before? What is your understanding now? What shift in understanding do you have regarding Initial Proclamation?
- How can we foster Initial Proclamation (as start of the evangelisation process) especially with the young people in our context?
- In what way does the style of life of each member and of the whole community contribute to initial proclamation among the people we meet and work with everyday?
- What are the challenges and opportunities of Initial Proclamation for our religious community?

## Our Experiences

Share positive examples or experiences of Initial Proclamation.

## Pray

We conclude with spontaneous prayer that embraces all our hopes and fears in responding to the challenges and opportunities of Initial Proclamation in our given reality.



# Witnessing who we are

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## Two life experiences

“When I arrived in Burkina Faso, I surveyed our neighbourhood and I realised that the Oratory was filled with many young people and that some of them came from Muslim families... How can we live with youth who are Muslims in *Don Bosco Oratory*? We found some difficulties in launching our activities because initially the parents did not allow their children to interact with us, nor come to our Oratory on Saturdays. There were parents and young people who, before coming to our place, would first ask questions such as, “Is this meeting or these games only for Christians? Can Muslims come as well to play with Christians?” Our response was, “Come among us! We are family!”

There are many young people in our area who do not know about God, about Jesus or about Mary. By being with us and by listening and taking part in our short moments of prayer, after a few months some of these young people begin to wonder and to ask questions: “Where does your strength come from? Who is Don Bosco? Who sent Don Bosco here?”

*(Fr. Albert Kabuge, Congolese missionary in Burkina Faso)*

“The area is about 80 km square and is highly populated. In 2003, the whole of Tonj had about 76 catechists. They did not have enough primary education and could hardly teach catechism effectively. Fr. John Peter, SDB, initiated one method of formation that he called the *Apostolic Group*. This group was composed of boys interested in proclaiming the good news.

Fr. John Peter would meet them twice a week (Wednesdays and Thursdays) for catechism classes, thus preparing them to present the same classes to the people in six nearby villages. Children, youth and adults were all invited to attend the lessons presented by these young people.

The methodology that these young instructors used was that of the Oratory. They would go out and schedule the catechism classes when the local people were available. They would start with games and later on, they would gather the people to teach them catechism the way Don Bosco did. The people of the villages received this program with enthusiasm and later on the Catholic Diocese of Rumbek asked to adopt the program in the Diocese.

In 2003 when this program started about 820 children and young people received the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Holy Eucharist and Confirmation). Bishop Caesar Mazzollari, then Bishop of Rumbek Catholic Diocese, went to Tonj Mission himself to confirm the youth.

In 2005, during the long holidays, Fr. John Peter organised the *Apostolic Group* to go out and stay with some catechist in their homes. During this time Fr. John Peter gave them some food and made arrangements with the local catechists to visit them occasionally with the intention of assisting and supporting them as well as evaluating the way they were teaching catechism to the people”.

*(Challenges and Opportunities for SDB and FMA  
in Africa and Madagascar Regarding Initial Proclamation)*

## **The Church teaches**

“The proclamation of the Gospel must recover the ardour of the beginnings of the evangelisation of the African continent, attributed to the evangelist Mark and carried on by “countless saints, martyrs, confessors and virgins”. There is a need gratefully to remember and imitate the enthusiasm of so many missionaries who, over the course of several centuries, sacrificed their lives to bring the Good News to their brothers and sisters in Africa. In recent years, the Church in different countries has commemorated the hundredth anniversary of evangelisation. She has rightly renewed her commitment to bring the Gospel to those who do not yet know the name of Jesus Christ”.

*(Africae Munus, 164)*

“Genuine witness by believers is essential to the authentic proclamation of the faith in Africa today. In particular they should show the witness of sincere mutual love”. ‘This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent’ (*Jn* 17:3). The ultimate purpose of mission is to enable people to share in the communion that exists between the Father and the Son. The disciples are to live in unity with one another, remaining in the Father and the Son, so that the world may know and believe (cf. *Jn* 17:21-23). This is a very important missionary text. It makes us understand that we are missionaries above all because of *what we are*, a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries *in word and deed*”.

(*Ecclesia in Africa*, 77)

## **Our own life experience**

What has helped you foster the initial proclamation of Jesus Christ in your own context?

## **Our challenge**

We are challenged to carry out the initial proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth in the various moments of daily life, in dialogue with the social, cultural, and religious situation of young people and adults through the Preventive System, thus making it become ever more relevant in Africa and Madagascar.

## **Questions for reflection and sharing**

1. In our own particular cultural context, what do we need to emphasise in order to foster the Initial Proclaim of Jesus?
2. What elements in the culture of our young people could become opportunities for initial proclamation? How could Initial Proclamation actually take place among the young people with whom we work?





# Our cultural and spiritual soil

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## Opening

*We start with a Song or Prayer*

## Our Text

“The Church lives daily alongside the followers of traditional African religions. With their reference to ancestors and to a form of mediation between man and Immanence, these religions are the cultural and spiritual soil from which most Christian converts spring and with which they continue to have daily contact. It is worth singling out knowledgeable individual converts, who could provide the Church with guidance in gaining a deeper and more accurate knowledge of the traditions, the culture and the traditional religions. This would make it easier to identify points of real divergence. It would also help to clarify the vital distinction between culture and cult and to discard those magical elements that cause division and ruin for families and societies. ... It would help to manifest the treasures of the Church’s sacramental life and spirituality in all their depth and to pass them on more effectively in catechesis, if the Church were to carry out a theological study of those elements of the traditional African cultures in conformity with Christ’s teaching”.

*(Africae Munus, 92)*

## A Story

Vincent Donovan narrates this beautiful story how a Masai leader’s explanation in the context of his traditional culture helped him better understand what is faith. The Masai leader told him:

*“For a man really to believe is like a lion going after its prey. His nose, eyes, and ears pick up the prey. His legs give him the terrible death leap and single blow to the neck with the front paw, the blow actually kills. As*

*the animal goes down the lion envelops it in its arms (the Africans refer to the front legs of an animal as its arms), pulls it to himself and makes it part of himself. This is the way a lion kills. This is the way a man believes. This is what faith is.*

*I looked at the elder in silence and amazement. Faith understood in this way would explain why, when my own was gone, I ached in every fiber of my being. However, my wise old teacher was not finished yet.*

*'We did not search you out, Padre,' he said to me. 'We did not even want you to come to us. You searched us out. You followed us away from your house into the bush, into the plains, into the steppes where our cattle are, into the hills where we take our cattle for water, into our villages, into our homes. You told us of the High God, how we must search for him. We, ourselves, have not done this. We have not left our land. We have not searched for him. He has searched for us. He has searched us out and found us. All the time we think we are the lion. In the end, the lion is God'.*

(Vincent Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*,  
Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978)

## **For our reflection**

“For an effective evangelisation of Africa we need a change of attitudes in the way we approach African Religion. ... Actually, the big challenge we have today is to respect the African Religion in the same way we respect our Muslim brothers. When we meet with them, we do not talk about converting them to Christianity. All the principles of interreligious dialogue should be applied in the same way to African religion”.

(*Initial Proclamation and Dialogue with Cultures,  
Traditional Religions and Urban Societies  
of Africa and Madagascar*)

“As SDBs and FMAs, we feel challenged when it comes to having necessary comprehension of the African worldview which is holistic in approach. Lack of serious reflection pertaining to understanding of African Religion, the concept of sin in its individual and collective form,

the rites of purification and expiation, the cosmological perspective i.e. the inorganic, and organic world, the living-living, the living dead, the ancestors and the spirits. These inform the whole of an African person”.

*(Emerging Insights and Perspectives during the Study Days)*

## **Reflect**

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

## **Share**

After some moments of silent reflections, share your insights with the members of the group.

## **Food for thought**

We carry out the initial proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth in the various moments of ordinary daily life, in dialogue with the traditional cultural and religious beliefs of young people and adults.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude with a song.



# Our ‘Courtyard for the Gentiles’

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## The Catholic School

“While Catholic schools conform to government-mandated curricula, they implement their programs with an overall religious orientation. We need to take special care to avoid the error that a Catholic school’s distinctiveness rests solely on the shoulders of its religious-education program. An authentically Catholic *worldview* that fosters love for wisdom and truth, and integrate faith, culture, and life permeates the entire curriculum both in its content and in methodology. In this light, Catholic education is integral, that is, intentionally directed to the development of every student’s intellectual, physical, psychological, moral, and religious capacities. This includes the development of all the human faculties of the students, their preparation for professional life, their ethical and social formation, their education in the intellectual and moral virtues, a clear idea of the meaning of life, and religious education so that they may be formed as strong and responsible individuals, who are capable of making free and correct choices.

In the age of information overload, Catholic schools must be especially attentive not only to convey information to passive students because knowledge and understanding are far more than the accumulation of information. Catholic schools teach each student love for wisdom, the desire to continue self-learning and to uphold truth, which is “that fundamental value without which freedom, justice, and human dignity are extinguished,” (the necessity to be able to make judgments about what is true and what is false).

The Catholic worldview is expressed in the educational philosophy that seeks to prepare students live their Catholic faith in the context of their particular culture. This synthesis between culture and faith is the most significant elements of its educational project that is shown in their capacity to make judgments based on religious and moral truths in a way appropriate to their age. The integration of culture with faith and of faith with life cannot but produce holiness among the members of the school community!”

*(Initial Proclamation in the Educative Environment)*

## **The Courtyard**

Reflecting on his pilgrimage to the Czech Republic during his pre-Christmas address to the Roman Curia in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI reflected on the words Jesus quoted from Isaiah, that the Temple “must be a house of prayer for all the nations” (*Is* 56:7; *Mk* 11:17). “Jesus”, the Pope said, “was thinking of the so-called ‘Courtyard of the Gentiles’ which he cleared of extraneous affairs so that it could be a free space for the Gentiles who wished to pray there to the one God, even if they could not take part in the mystery for whose service the inner part of the Temple was reserved”. Benedict XVI said that there are many who “know God, so to speak, only from afar; who are dissatisfied with their own gods, rites and myths; who desire the Pure and the Great, even if God remains for them the ‘unknown God’” referred to by St. Paul in his speech at the Athenian Areopagus. “I think that also today the Church should open a sort of ‘Courtyard of the Gentiles’, in which people might in some way latch on to God, without knowing him and before gaining access to his mystery ... who nevertheless do not want to be left merely Godless, but rather to draw near to him, albeit as the Unknown”.

The Salesian School too is a ‘courtyard’ a place of encounter and dialogue where mutual relationships based on genuine affection, openness, acceptance of others and the common search for Truth are fostered. In a multicultural and multireligious contexts the Salesian School is, in a certain sense, our ‘Courtyard for the Gentiles’ which welcomes friends with joy and prepares them for life while, at the same time, offers endless opportunities and tremendous possibilities for initial proclamation to stir up the student’ interest to know Jesus Christ personally and follow him more closely.

## **Formation in African and Gospel Values**

“Catholic schools are a precious resource for learning from childhood how to create bonds of peace and harmony in society, since they train children in the African values that are taken up by those of the Gospel. I encourage bishops and institutes of consecrated persons to enable children of the proper age to receive schooling: this is a matter of justice for each child and indeed the future of Africa depends on it. Christians and young people

in particular, should study the educational sciences with a view to passing down knowledge full of truth: not mere information but genuine knowledge of life, inspired by a Christian consciousness shaped by the Church's social doctrine. It will also be fitting to ensure that personnel in the Church's educational institutions, and indeed all Church personnel, receive just remuneration, in order to strengthen the Church's credibility".

*(Africae Munus, 134)*

## Discover

Has the Conference of Bishops in your country made any statement regarding Catholic education or Catholic Schools? If it has, can you read important parts of it?

## Reflect

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

## Share

Share your reflections and enrich your community.

## Celebrate

(Form a circle together with all the participants)

- Hymn
- Opening Prayer
- Gospel: *Jn* 12:20-21
- Intercessions (participants express their own intentions)
- Our Father (sung)
- Conclusion

## Remember

"We evangelise by educating, educate by evangelising!"





# List of Participants

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## **FMA**

1. Sr. Alaide DERETTI (General Concillor)
2. Sr. Maïke LOES (RCG - Missions Sector)
3. Sr. Maria KO (RMA - Missions Sector)
4. Sr. Roberta TOMASI (AES)
5. Sr. Ruth del Pilar MORA (AES)
6. Sr. Rita VARINI (AES)
7. Sr. Enintsoa RANIVOARIFARA (MDG)
8. Sr. Marie JOSÉ LUNGO (FRC)
9. Sr. Maria da Graça LINO (MOZ)
10. Sr. Susan FERNANDES (AFE)
11. Sr. Charlotte GREER (MOR)
12. Sr. Lucia CAMPEROS (AFC)
13. Sr. Adriana PERTUSI (AFO)
14. Sr. Elizabeth GEZAHEGN ASREGDEW (AES)
15. Sr. Lucia CARGNONI (AEC)
16. Sr. Maria Irene ARANGO (ANG)
17. Sr. Patricia FINN (AFM)

## **SDB**

18. Fr. Vaclav KLEMENT (Councillor for the Missions)
19. Fr. Alfred MARAVILLA (RMG - Missions Department)
20. Fr. Antonio BARRIENTOS (ZMB)
21. Br. Cesare BULLO (AET)
22. Fr. Marco PORFIRIO DÍAZ (ATE)
23. Fr. Albert KABUGE (AFO )
24. Fr. Luigi DI LIBERALI (ANG)
25. Fr. Lambert MALUNGU (AFC)
26. Fr. Alexius MULONGO (AFE)
27. Fr. Joseph MINJA (AFE)
28. Fr. André KAZEMBE NKOMBA (MOZ)
29. Fr. Jean Bosco NTIRENGANYA (AGL)
30. Fr. Angelo REGAZZO (AET)
31. Fr. Joy SEBASTIAN (AFM)
32. Fr. Sileshi TAKELE (AET)
33. Br. Paolo VASCHETTO (AFW)
34. Br. Weldeyohannes YIRGALEM (AET)



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58. *Study Days on the Salesian Presence Among Muslims* (2013) - ENG, ITA, FRA
59. *Study days on the Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Oceania in the Context of Traditional Religions and Cultures and Cultures in the Process of Secularisation* - Port Moresby (2013)
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63. *The Salesian Mission and the Initial Proclamation of Christ in Africa and Madagascar* (2014) - ENG, FRA, POR

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