



# DEIVERBUM

**Catholic Biblical Federation**

**BULLETIN**

## **Lectio Divina**

The Rediscovery of the  
Prayerful Reading of Scripture

## **Discipleship in the Gospels**

CELAM General Assembly  
in Aparecida

## **On the Way to Dar es Salaam**

CBF's Seventh Plenary Assembly



N° 84/85  
3-4/2007



**English Edition**



*BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* is a quarterly publication in English, French, German and Spanish.

**Editors**

Alexander M. Schweitzer  
Claudio Ettl

**Assistant to the editors**

Dorothee Knabe

**Production and layout**

bm-projekte, 70771 Leinf.-Echterdingen

A subscription for one year consists of four issues beginning the quarter payment is received. Please indicate in which language you wish to receive the *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM*.

**Subscription rates**

- Ordinary subscription: US\$ 20 / € 20
- Supporting subscription: US\$ 34 / € 34
- Third World countries: US\$ 14 / € 14
- Students: US\$ 14 / € 14

Air mail delivery: US\$ 7 / € 7 extra

In order to cover production costs we recommend a supporting subscription. For members of the Catholic Biblical Federation the subscription fee is included in the annual membership fee.

**Banking details**

General Secretariat  
(Address as indicated below)  
LIGA Bank, Stuttgart  
Account No. 64 59 820  
IBAN-No. DE 28 7509 0300 0006 4598 20  
BIC Code GENODEF1M05  
Or per check to the General Secretariat.  
We also accept payment by credit card (VISA, MasterCard).

**Reproduction of articles**

We invite our members to reproduce in their own publications any articles printed in the *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* indicating the source, unless a statement to the contrary is given.

Opinions expressed in the articles are those of the authors, not necessarily of the Federation as such.

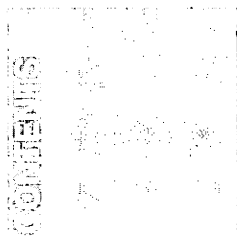


**CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION**

General Secretariat  
Postfach 10 52 22  
70045 Stuttgart  
Germany

Tel.: +49-(0)711-1 69 24-0  
Fax: +49-(0)711-1 69 24-24  
E-mail: [bdv@c-b-f.org](mailto:bdv@c-b-f.org)  
[www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org)

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is an "International Catholic Organization of a public character" according to Canon Law (CIC can. 312 §1 n.1).



**Lectio Divina: The Rediscovery of the Prayerful Reading of Scripture**

**What is Lectio Divina? A Short Introduction** 4

**Prayerful Reading and Faithful Exegesis**  
Bruna Costacurta 5

**Dialogue, Contemplation and Prophecy**  
Bruno Secondin 8

**On the Way to Dar es Salaam: CBF's Seventh Plenary Assembly**

**Tanzania – Host Country of the Next CBF Plenary Assembly**  
Titus Amigu 12

**The Origins of Bible-Sharing: East and South African Roots of a Biblical Pastoral Method**  
Klaus Vellguth 19

**CELAM General Assembly in Aparecida**

**Listening and Witnessing to the Word: Discipleship in the Gospels**  
Santiago Guijarro Oporto 26

**Life of the Federation**

**Tanzania: BICAM Workshop on Bible and Social Issues in Africa** 35

**New Members** 36

**Newsflash** 38

**From the Fields**

**The Amos Programme – Reading the Bible in the Context of Modern Life**  
Gabriel Afagbegee,svd/Chrysostome Kiyala, svd 40

**For Discussion**

**Ardent Testimony on Jesus: On the book *Jesus of Nazareth* by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI**  
Carlo Maria Martini 44

**Pope Benedict Announces the Pauline Year** 47

**Dear Readers:**

*A sower went out to sow ... That the path from knowledge to action is not always the shortest is something we know all too well from the experience of our own lives. The dilemma seems not to have escaped the attention of Jesus as well. At least this is what the parable of the sower suggests,*

which the Gospel of Mark hands on to us (Mk 4:3-9), and which the Evangelist has expanded through a detailed allegorical interpretation (Mk 4:13-20): the seed of the Word is indeed abundantly sown, but it does not always come up, and even less often does it reach full bloom or go on to become fully ripe fruit.

Mark names the most important reasons that explain this lack of crop production performance, as we would say today: they reside in the external, structural order – parasitism (ravenous birds), bad soil quality (stones), unfavorable climate conditions (heat) – as well as in the internal, psychological realm – lack of perseverance (root-depth deficiency), lack of concentration (allurement of Satan), false inner attitudes (worldly cares, relentless greed for wealth), etc.

The parable of the sower thus describes in a graphic way the commission that belongs to us as Christians in a general way and in particular to the CBF as advocate of the Bible: to see to it that the Word of God can come to fruition in the world of today. To make every effort to insure that it not remain at the stage of the hearing of the Word, but that this hearing have consequences. That knowledge – gained from an analysis and interpretation of the real world – be followed by action as well.

This journey in three steps from *hearing* through *knowledge* to action is also the theme that runs like a leitmotif through the articles of this issue of the *Bulletin Dei Verbum*. The spectrum goes then from *lectio divina* – that tradition-rich method of Bible-reading which has recently been gaining renewed and more focused attention – through that “discipleship and the following of Jesus” – which marked the Fifth CELAM General

Assembly in Aparecida, Brazil – to a review of the Pope’s recently published book on Jesus of Nazareth. Under the rubric “From the Field” you will also find a model of Bible-sharing which seeks to read the Bible in the context of concrete social and political life situations. And of course the work of preparation for the next Plenary Assembly moves forward, now with a detailed report on the host country Tanzania and an historical investigation on the African origins of Bible-sharing.

*Then the servants of the sower came and helped their master. They swept together the grains of wheat that had fallen along the way. They picked up the grains that had fallen on rocky soil. They pulled up all the briars and cultivated the ground. Then the plants all bore fruit; the crop grew mightily and bore thirtyfold, yes, even sixty and a hundredfold. And Jesus said: He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

One might thus pick up and continue the parable of Jesus in our time – and so bring into the story not only God’s decisive action, but also our own human activity as preachers and ministers of the Word. This would be no more than a biblical version of the task assigned by the Second Vatican Council, of absolute centrality for the self-understanding of the CBF, to provide everyone on earth with easy access to the Word of God (cf. DV 22).

In this spirit, I wish you a stimulating reading and send you warm greetings from the General Secretariat.

Claudio Ettl



## What Is *lectio divina*?

### A Short Introduction

The Bible is the Word of God which is always alive and active, always new. *Lectio divina* is a traditional way of praying the Scriptures so that the Word of God may penetrate our hearts and that we may grow in an intimate relationship with the Lord. It is a very natural way of prayer and was developed and practiced by the early monks and thus came to the first Carmelite hermits.

For some centuries reading the Bible in one's own language was rather frowned upon and this led to a lessening of the practice of *lectio divina*. Thankfully in recent years, the whole Church has rediscovered the importance of *lectio divina* as a privileged way of growing in the relationship with Jesus Christ. Through the practice of *lectio divina*, as individuals and as community, we leave space for God's Word to transform us so that we may begin to look upon our world as it were with the eyes of God and to love what we see with the heart of God.

*Lectio divina*, a Latin term, means "divine reading" and describes a way of reading the Scriptures whereby we gradually let go of our own agenda and open ourselves to what God wants to say to us. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of *lectio divina*. There are various ways of practicing *lectio divina* either individually or in groups but Guigo's description remains fundamental.

- He said that the first stage is *lectio* (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us. Any passage of Scripture can be used for this way of prayer but the passage should not be too long.
- The second stage is *meditatio* (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.
- The third stage is *oratio* (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.
- The final stage of *lectio divina* is *contemplatio* (rest) where we let go not only of our own ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within

us with a still small voice. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. Obviously this transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live and the way we live is the test of the authenticity of our prayer. We must take what we read in the Word of God into our daily lives.

These stages of *lectio divina* are not fixed rules of procedure but simply guidelines as to how the prayer normally develops. Its natural movement is towards greater simplicity, with less and less talking and more listening. Gradually the words of Scripture begin to dissolve and the Word is revealed before the eyes of our heart. How much time should be given to each stage depends very much on whether it is used individually or in a group. If *lectio divina* is used for group prayer, obviously more structure is needed than for individual use. In group prayer, much will depend on the type of group. *Lectio divina* may involve discussing the implications of the Word of God for daily life but it cannot be reduced to this. The movement of the prayer is towards silence. If the group is comfortable with silence, more time could be spent resting in the Word.

The practice of *lectio divina* as a way of praying the Scriptures has been a fruitful source of growing in relationship with Christ for many centuries and in our own day is being rediscovered by many individuals and groups. The Word of God is alive and active and will transform each of us if we open ourselves to receive what God wants to give us.

(Taken with friendly permission from the Carmelite website on *lectio divina*: <http://www.ocarm.org/lectio/lecteng.htm>) ■



## Prayerful Reading and Faithful Exegesis On the Relationship between *lectio divina* and Biblical Scholarship

Bruna Costacurta



*Bruna Costacurta holds a licenciante in Sacred Scripture and a doctorate in Biblical Sciences from the Pontifical Biblical Institute. A professor of Old Testament Exegesis on the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical Gregorian University.*

### The rediscovery of faithful reading

The theme of this article on the “rediscovery of the faithful reading” is set within the framework of a broader, more general topic, which regards the relationship with Holy Scripture as “Word of God in human words”. It is on this precise characteristic of Scripture that “faithful reading” is based and it is on this aspect that I would like to dwell, not to suggest methodologies or practical applications of this kind of reading, but rather to reflect briefly on the hermeneutical implications of such an act.

### Divine Word and human words

Interest in the Bible and its “faithful reading” experienced a new blossoming in the wake of the Council. The renewed and more explicit awareness of the divine reality which underlies the text and is actively present in it, the summons to faith that is inherent in God’s revelation of Himself in those human words, the newly acknowledged power of the Spirit at work in them have led individual believers and entire ecclesial and religious communities to an approach to Scripture that is increasingly respectful of its truth as “Word of God in human words”. The well-known statement of the *Dei Verbum* on the fact that “Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same spirit in which it was written” in order to extract its true meaning (*DV 12*), has become the foundation stone, the point of departure for a faithful and prayerful reading of the Bible, capable of nourishing the faith of God’s people and of expressing itself in a journey of hope and of love.

The forms that this kind of reading has taken are many: the use of the technical expression “*lectio divina*” has become a generic term and it has come to refer to a variety of ways of reading the sacred text, with different methodologies and developments. But the feature that all of these procedures have in common is their recognition of the text as the Word of God, which must therefore be read in a perspective of faith and in the context

of prayer. This accounts for the expressions “faithful reading” and “prayerful reading”.

I do believe that a reading of this kind is always necessary, because it is demanded by the very nature of the biblical text as such. This text does indeed have a particular constitution, which is not reducible to the Word of God alone, or to human words alone, but rather is to be understood to result from an inseparable fusion of these two dimensions, in a kind of real “incarnation” of the Divine Word, unique, eternal and immutable, which becomes *human words*, multiple, conditioned and contingent.<sup>1</sup> A reading that is respectful of the biblical text requires that one hold these two realities together, that one obeys both dimensions, within a perspective of faith, which thus becomes indispensable.



Among the various directives it offers for a correct interpretation of Scripture, *Dei Verbum* also insists that “attention should be given, among other things, to ‘literary forms’” (*DV 12*). But, in an analogous way, one could say that the whole of Scripture belongs to a particular “literary genre”, or better to a particular “genre of literature”, which is precisely that of being Word of God in human words. To be able to read Scripture in a way that is adequate to its nature, one must therefore respect this twofold truth it embodies. And only in faith is this possible.

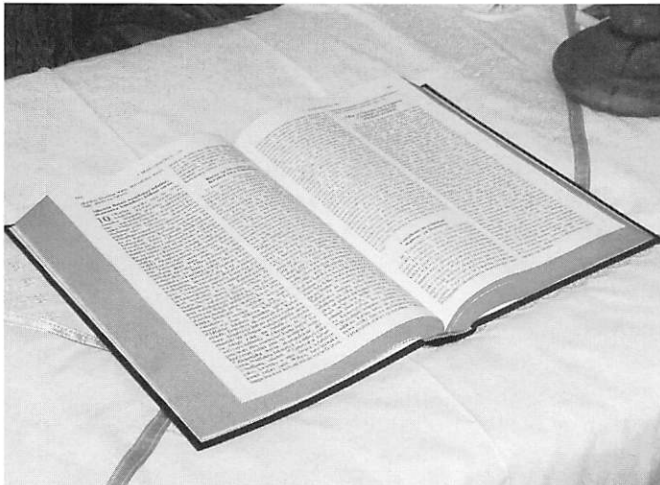
A work of literature, with all the peculiarities and conditionings of a writing tied to specific places and times,



the biblical text is nevertheless also and at the same time revelation of God, an “inspired” work, bearer of an absolute dimension which makes it the ultimate and definitive pronouncement on reality, the vital and primary point of reference for every hope of salvation.

### Faithful exegesis

As a book born of faith, written in faith and given for the faith of the people of God, the Bible must necessarily be read with faith. Read, but also – I would add as a biblicist – studied with faith.



Because if the epistemological principle well expressed by the philosopher and theologian Romano Guardini is true, namely, that no object of study can be understood except through a mode of knowledge that is adequate to its object, then there can be no serious and scientific study of the biblical text except with an approach that respects its twofold reality and behaves accordingly. An approach, therefore, that would investigate its historical and literary dimension, study its lexical and stylistic peculiarities, its modalities of transmission and cultural adaptations, but always from within a “believing” perspective, with explicit reference to faith and in an attitude of prayer.

Biblical exegesis, to be truly what it is meant to be, should derive from, and be continuously accompanied by, obedience to the Word which it studies; it should emanate from a prayerful and worshipful desire to understand the human expressivity which mediates the divine discourse, the latter being the true and only point of reference for the entire life of the biblical exegete in its most profound dimension.<sup>2</sup>

The technical act of analysis and of the penetration of the meaning of the text thus changes and biblical exegesis adopts a constitutional stance different from that which informs and determines the study of other textual realities. Linguistic, historical and literary research opens itself to valences that transcend its own hori-

zons; sustained by a radical attitude of obedient faith, it becomes an assiduous and ardent search for God.

But if the study of Sacred Scripture must be explicitly accompanied by faith, in order to respect its reality as Word of God, “faithful” reading must at the same time be explicitly accompanied by study, in order to respect the indispensable mediation of the human words in which the Divine Word is incarnated. The two dimensions are mutually dependent and one cannot exclude the other. This is a point which I consider important and which I would like to further underscore, because it is sometimes undervalued.

### Prayerful reading

In the so-called *lectio divina*, by comparison to exegesis, some technical aspects (e.g. when using theological dictionaries and commentaries) are omitted and one approaches interpretation in a less mediated manner. The approach is less analytical; more importance is given to application and praxis and more space to explicit prayer. If exegesis is primarily research, objective, communicable, universally valid understanding, *lectio* is strongly marked by a more personal dimension. The Word is tasted, relished; one opens oneself to contemplation and attempts to actualize the Word in one’s life. But in order for prayer and praxis to be fruitful, the patient hearing that pauses on the words, studies their signification, strives to understand is most helpful. For *lectio*, too, as well as for exegesis, the need to understand the text in depth, respecting its literary reality, is an absolutely primary and indispensable element. Without this there is no adequate and authentic hearing of the Word.

The fact is that God has chosen, in His self-revelation, the way of incarnation. His Word, eternal and sovereignly efficacious, has assumed the opaque density of the human word conditioned by history, by the concrete idiom in which human beings express themselves, by the contingent situations in which the words themselves are pronounced and written. The Divine Word, addressed though it is to all human beings, is nevertheless spoken in a language comprehensible only to a few (for everyone else, translations are required), with cultural references that are not generic, but linked to a particular and specific conceptual world about which one must have the patience to learn, and which can be entered only if one has the humility to allow oneself to be converted.

“Faithful reading” must take all of this into account – and must be obedient to all of this. The antithesis often made between *lectio divina* and exegesis is based on a distorted concept of exegesis, understood as a strictly neutral study, often arid, lacking soul because not animated by the Spirit. But if exegesis is truly “biblical” and



for this reason, as we said earlier, necessarily “believing”, then between *lectio divina* and exegesis there will be differences to be sure, with particular emphases on one or the other aspect, but there will be no opposition; on the contrary, the two will mutually support each other, in a profitable exchange which will lead, at the end of the road, to an encounter capable of generating a new reality: that of the faithful reader who does exegesis, and the exegete who reads and interprets the biblical text in faith and in prayer. Scientific hearing and faith hearing are complementary realities, which require a degree of interaction and even superimposition, in the same search for God and in the same desire of obedience to His Word of life.

In this way, the Word of God continues to resound in the story of human beings. Deciphered and understood in its twofold reality, Sacred Scripture opens its treasures of revelation and of grace. In the words of the book the believing community encounters the Word of the Lord and, understanding and interiorizing it in faith and under the guidance of the Spirit, actualizes it, and in a way “re-incarnates” it in its own reality and in its own history. Thus the “Word” become sacred book comes to be heard, contemplated and then re-uttered, handed down in the words of the people of every time and every place; “words” are re-made, continually repeated and every time renewed, in the life of the Church, for the salvation of all.

But these words, in accordance with Semitic understanding, are also deeds, events, actions. The heard,

studied, desired, meditated and obeyed Word, the Word which, like Mary, the believer treasures in his heart, transforms human action, revealing thereby its inexorably regenerative efficacy. *Lectio divina*, made of prayerful exegesis, thus becomes *actio*, at once divine and human, a decisive event that opens time and human language to the divine life, thus allowing the power of the Word to break forth, become flesh again – to manifest, as the Magnificat sings, the “great things” which the Almighty can do through the littleness and humility of his praying servants.

(Translation: L. Maluf) ■

<sup>1</sup> As *Dei Verbum* puts it: “For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men” (DV 13). Cf. also Pope John Paul II, Address on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, no. 6, *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, April 28, 1993, pp. 3, 4, 6, reprinted in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, Pauline Books & Media, Boston, MA, p.11ff. The address was originally given in French.

<sup>2</sup> “...it is obviously necessary that the exegete himself perceive the Divine Word in the texts. He can do this only if his intellectual work is sustained by a vigorous spiritual life. Without this support, exegetical research remains incomplete; it loses sight of its main purpose and is confined to secondary tasks” (Pope John Paul II, Address on *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, no. 9).

## Pope Benedikt XVI on the Importance of the *lectio divina*

“In this connection, I would like especially to recall and to recommend the ancient tradition of *lectio divina*: the assiduous reading of Holy Scripture accompanied by prayer realizes that intimate colloquy where, by reading, we listen to God who speaks and, in prayer, we respond to Him with confident openness of heart (cf. DV 25). This practice, if effectively promoted, will bring to the Church – of this I am convinced – a new spiritual spring. As a firm point of biblical pastoral ministry, *lectio divina* should for this reason be further encouraged, through the use, too, of new methods, carefully considered, that are fully up-to-date. We ought never to forget that the Word of God is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (cf. Ps 118/119:105).” (Message to the participants of the international Dei Verbum Congress, 16 September 2005) ■



Pope Benedict XVI addressing participants of the international Dei Verbum Congress 2005



# Dialogue, Contemplation and Prophecy

## A Prayerful Reading of the Word

Bruno Secondin



*Bruno Secondin, o.carm, earned his doctorate in Theology with a specialization in spirituality from the Pontifical Gregorian University. He also studied at various German universities and at the École Biblique in Jerusalem. He is professor of the History of Modern Spirituality and of Spiritual Theology at the Institute of Spirituality at the Pontifical Gregorian University.*

My intention is to approach the general topic from the perspective of the prayerful reading of the Word. With this expression I wish to associate myself with the great Patristic and monastic current of *lectio divina*. Today, people speak of *lectio divina* in a thousand different ways, and at times, in my opinion, the term is used in a way that is quite equivocal and vague. The magisterium is likewise fond of employing this technical expression (*lectio divina*), often with the addition of brief explanatory comments, which help to convey what it is and what practical goals people have in mind when they make it part of their lived experience.

The word “practical” is in fact readily associated with the technical expression *lectio divina*. People thus speak of the practice of *lectio divina*. I would advise against the use of this expression; it too readily evokes the pious exercises (or “popular devotions”) mentioned by the Second Vatican Council, which is concerned that such exercises not be lost sight of (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 13). *Lectio divina*, or as I prefer to call it, prayerful reading of the Word, cannot be identified as simply a popular devotion, like for example the rosary, the stations of the cross, Eucharistic adoration, a penitential liturgy, or even adult catechesis. There can, of course, be connections, and in certain circumstances points of contact here. But there are also substantial differences, as we shall see.

The spiritual and pastoral program of *lectio divina* has had an enormous diffusion in some dioceses – thanks to the impulse given it by enlightened bishops (as a representative example, I cite the teaching of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini in Milan) – or throughout entire continental areas, as in Latin America, with the project “Palabra Vida” (in the 1990s). I would like to pause for a moment on the presence of the term *lectio divina* in official texts, where I would point out that besides the material use of the term, one often finds a general description of the experience and, especially in the

more recent documents, an inexplicable reticence even in the use of the term *lectio divina* itself. There is tangible proof of this, for example, in the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* 65 and in the instruction for consecrated persons *Starting Afresh from Christ (Ripartire da Cristo)* 24, where the terminology of *lectio* is carefully avoided, even where its specific content is being discussed.

### 1. The traces in recent magisterial teaching

The insistence of the pontifical magisterium on *lectio divina* is an interesting line to follow, but it has not shown much creativity thus far. We can begin with the statement in *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992): “An essential element of spiritual formation is the prayerful and meditated reading of the Word of God (*lectio divina*), a humble and loving listening to him who speaks” (47). We might then continue with the text of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992): “The *lectio divina*, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer, is thus rooted in the liturgical celebration” (1177). And finally, to the text of the Pontifical Biblical Commission: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993): “*Lectio divina* is a reading, on an individual or communal level, of a more or less lengthy passage of Scripture, received as the Word of God and leading, at the prompting of the Spirit, to meditation, prayer and contemplation” (IV,C,2).

We find an extensive reference later on in the apostolic exhortation *Vita consecrata* (1996): “This is why *lectio divina* (...) has received the highest possible regard. Thanks to it, the Word of God is translated into life, on which it projects the light of wisdom, which is a gift of the Spirit (...) Of great value is the practice of meditation on the Bible in community. When realized according to the possibilities and circumstances of community life, it leads to the joyous sharing of riches drawn from the Word of God, thanks to which brothers and sisters grow together and help each other to progress in the spiritual life (...) From meditation on the Word of God, and in particular on the mysteries of Christ, intensity of contemplation and ardor of apostolic activity are born, as the spiritual tradition teaches” (94). More brief is the reference in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001): “It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life-giving encounter, in the ancient and ever valid tradition of *lectio divina*, which draws





from the biblical text the living word which questions, directs and shapes our lives" (39).

The reference in the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Oceania* (2001) has a certain originality: "Acquaintance with the Scriptures is required of all the faithful, but particularly of seminarians, priests and religious. They are to be encouraged to engage in *lectio divina*, that quiet and prayerful meditation on the Scripture that allows the Word of God to speak to the human heart. This form of prayer, privately or in groups, will deepen their love for the Bible and make it an essential and life-giving element of their daily lives" (38). Finally, a brief citation from the post-synodal exhortation *Pastores Gregis* (2003): "In the realm of meditation and *lectio*, the heart which has already received the word opens itself to the contemplation of God's work and, consequently, to a conversion of thoughts and life to him, accompanied by a heartfelt request for His forgiveness and grace" (15).

## 2. Reasons for the difference between *lectio divina* and *pia exercitia*

We began by noting the difference between *lectio divina* and *pia exercitia*. Let us deepen the perspective by bringing the discourse to more universal levels. The difference is substantial, and is due primarily to the sacramental nature of the biblical Word, which is intrinsically endowed with a virtuality of grace and of revelation, which no other devotional exercise has ever claimed to possess. I limit myself to recalling but a few indispensable elements that help to clarify this difference.

The theology of the Word should come into play in this experience in all its amplitude: what we have here is a true and real presence of God who communicates and summons: "For the Sacred Scriptures contain the Word of God and since they are inspired really are the Word of God" (DV 24). This Word is the very being of God in all of its activity. We would say more: it is God Himself inasmuch as He acts and speaks *ad extra*, in as much as He summons to communion and grants this communion through the Word, by which He creates and shapes for himself a community of hearers. The Word creates community, just as for an authentic hearing, full and fruitful, one must have a vibrant and believing community – that is, a communion of stories and destinies, of hope and awareness.

In the second place the Word of Sacred Scripture is the fruit of multiple convergences: not only do these Scriptures contain the life-giving communication of God, which has been inscribed in the hearts of the hearers, but they also report the reaction, the re-reading, the existential response of the protagonists, often refashioned, too, by those who preserved their memory. The Scriptures then constitute the most intimate

structure of God's self-revelation and of the corresponding reception of the people, in reciprocal interplay. They are not therefore an *a priori* product – which the people come to at a second moment. Rather, they are the expression, in the fullest meaning of the term, of the ethos of the people generated and convoked by the Word, which takes on the commitment to proclaim, in their minds and in writing, the great deeds of God, so that it can derive its very life from them.



In the third place the Word contains a truth of a Semitic type. That is, it is not the instantaneous photo shot, but the attempt to fix the inexpressible, constantly rethinking it from new angles, with adjustments, integrations, new idioms, new verbalized emotions. The genetic progression of the Word follows these tracks: from incandescent experience, to spontaneous oral tradition, to translation into more elaborated linguistic expressions adapted to new contexts and finally to codification in writing, which in time arrives at a fixed and unalterable state. But the progression of hermeneutics should make this trip in reverse: from the book now closed and unchangeable, to the itinerary of the transmission of the text with all its variants, and finally to the originating moment of the source. Only thus does the written Word recover its transformative and creative power: in the original incandescent nucleus we reach the ultimate meaning; but it is also in its capacity to set our hearts on fire *today* that the Word attains its true theological and spiritual identity. It is Word of life if it continues to transmit life, if it serves as a provocation for life. Not only life, but also contemplative search for the tracks of God in our history, because God still speaks to us in multiple ways: nature, the signs of the times, collective utopias, tragedies and traumas.

All of this is guided by a protagonist: the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who delivers and transforms – through the work of charismatic writers, rooted in the memory of the people and guided by it – what is said and what is experienced, into written Word – so that in time the "mar-



vels” accomplished by God through His goodness might be recorded, and continue to generate meaning and perspectives, as the generations change, through his faithfulness and His everlasting love (cf. Is 54:8). Without the activity of the Spirit “hermeneut” our interpretation would be sterile, from the point of view of faith and of the experience of salvation. But also without an attitude of faith, of communion, of commitment to dialogue, of trusting obedience, of prayerful response, the letter would be sterile, or hysterical, or merely emotional.



The justification then of the summons to the prayerful dimension of the hearing of the Word – hence the prayerful reading of the Word – does not derive from the fact that the reading thereby becomes also the incentive for a dialogue of “prayer” with the One who speaks. By “prayerful” I intend something of far greater density than this: namely, the dialogue of a person in love with the One who speaks to us with love, reminds us of the ways of a faithful and suppliant love, and continues to have for us thoughts of peace and salvation. So to speak of “prayerful reading” (also “prayerful hearing”, or “prayer-dialogue”), means in effect to prioritize the movement of response with one’s whole being to a dialogue which God, too, engages with His whole being, through the Word. It is a question of being abundantly inhabited by the Word (cf. Col 3:16), by its intrinsic dynamism of salvation and covenant, consolation and hope. And of verbalizing a reaction that becomes dialogue and supplication, doxology and thanksgiving, intercession and confession, song and tears.

### 3. How then are we to do a prayerful reading?

From these premises, which are at once perspectives and indispensable exigencies, there follows also a certain way of acting and above all of living this prayerful reading or “prayerful hearing of the Word”. It is not a matter of us giving to the Word a new force and efficacy with our reflections and our applications. The Word possesses already within itself a *dynamis* of revelation, of judgment, of transfiguration, of fermentation and of liberation: what we must do is simply to expose ourselves to this *dynamis*, as we expose ourselves to fire

or to the sun when we wish to get warm. This is the meaning of the *hypakoë* of the Fathers and the monks: an *ob-audire* with humble and contrite heart (cf. Is 66:2).

And it is not a matter of a merely individual self-exposure, or one that is selective, based on ideological visions that most appeal to us. But of an experience that is communal and integral: because it is precisely the believing community that constitutes the most adequate hermeneutical context to awaken the ephiphanic avenues of the Word and to release its power to make new times blossom among the faithful. The hearing community is not a secondary circumstance. It is the privileged context – as noted, too, by Saint Gregory the Great – for restoring to the Word its full and vital signification. It is in the community that the existential summons resounds with the greatest force.

For this reason the interpretive tradition of the Carthusian monk Guigo II with his work *Scala claustralium*, on the four grades or moments of *lectio divina* – *lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio* – when it has been adopted as a rigid schema, to be conducted at the level of the individual – has become an artificial project of uncertain outcome. He had in mind primarily the solitary life of the monk, and an “interpreting community” was of no concern to him at all, because at his time ecclesial consciousness was understood in a way that is quite different from our church-communion. Everything was channeled through emphasis on the individual. Indeed, the century of Guigo II (c.1150) is characterized by the “rediscovery of the individual”.

And even the resumption of the *lectio* method, in the wake of Guigo II, was unable – yet – to shake that individualistic framework; so much so, that some experts continue to insist on the clearly “individual” nature of *lectio divina*. This explains why there has been a certain resistance, for example on the part of monks and exegetes, to *lectio divina* done in common: for fear that things might get out of hand – in the direction of hasty, accommodated, moralistic or pious interpretations.

In my personal experience, I have seen the fruitfulness of *lectio divina* in community as an experience of common hearing and sharing of the rich insights reached in the heard and shared Word. But I also have observed that a prayerful, communal listening requires a few adaptations of the classical schemas of Guigo II, taking into account the diversity of methods and the various levels of biblical sophistication, as well as the spiritual and ecclesial status of each participant. For this reason – and here I rely on my own experience<sup>1</sup> – a number of elements have been introduced to create an appropriate atmosphere: this is the case with symbols (mostly icons and sacred objects such as vigil lights, incense, lectern), the sung meditative refrain which highlights a



verse or a concept of the biblical text, the offering of a prayerful response adhering even literally to the meditated text, a worshiping and reflective silence, the sharing of resonances and practical applications after a prolonged and meditative hearing, brief musical interludes whose object is to create a pause between the different passages, symbolic gestures like dance, standing, kissing the Bible, etc.

An element I have observed to be particularly fruitful is the link with liturgical celebration. This means that the biblical text is chosen from among the readings of the nearest Sunday liturgy; even in the meditative reflection reference is made to the consonance with the other readings proper to that Sunday. This also highlights the continuity of the movement from Word to celebration, which is also facilitated by the surroundings, which is in fact the Church of the Sunday assembly. When the same text is listened to again in the mass, and when its explanation is heard in the homily, one who has participated in the *lectio divina* can enter into an even greater (spiritual and mystagogical) profundity, in spite of the vagueness that often characterizes the preacher's word.

### In conclusion

The prayerful reading of the Word becomes with time something quite different from the pious exercise, because it arouses a thirst for dialogue with God, illuminates the criteria of discernment and stimulates us to an existential, and not merely moralistic conversion. But at the same time it is an exigent procedure, which requires constancy and perseverance, a passionate love for the Word as the pure and perennial fount of holiness and of prayerful dialogue. To do it with the people one must make the effort always to enter as "people" into the secret of the Word: barefooted before that burning bush, with head bowed in the presence of the *debir* where the glory dwells. It is not a matter of teaching something to the assembly of believers, but of

living together an adventure that is at once risky and transfiguring, transforming and worshiping, as we allow ourselves to be "educated" by God (cf. Hos 11:1-4).

It is not easy for one who is an "expert" of the Word to put himself in sync with the uncertain and at times muddled faith of the people: the danger is that he will impose his own theory, his own explanation, his own application. Only when one listens to the Word with a loving heart, so as to be able truly to share it and to listen again with astonished heart and contemplative gaze together with the people, does the prayerful reading become truly prayerful listening, prayerful dialogue, contemplation and prophecy which rends the veils of an opaque history, and opens our precarious lives to vast and splendid illumination.

(Translation: L. Maluf) ■

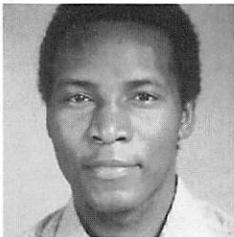
<sup>1</sup> I refer the reader, for an understanding of the concrete experience of which I am speaking, to the books of the series "Rotem" of the Edizioni Messaggero di Padova. In particular the books: C. Mesters, *Far ardere il cuore, Introduzione alla lettura orante della Parola*, Padova 2003; B. Secondin, *Lettura orante della Parola. Lectio divina sui Vangeli di Marco e Luca*, Padova 2003, especially p.13-47. Various types of colored posters and bookmarks with scenes derived from the *lectio* are also the fruit of experience.





## Tanzania – Host Country of the Next CBF Plenary Assembly

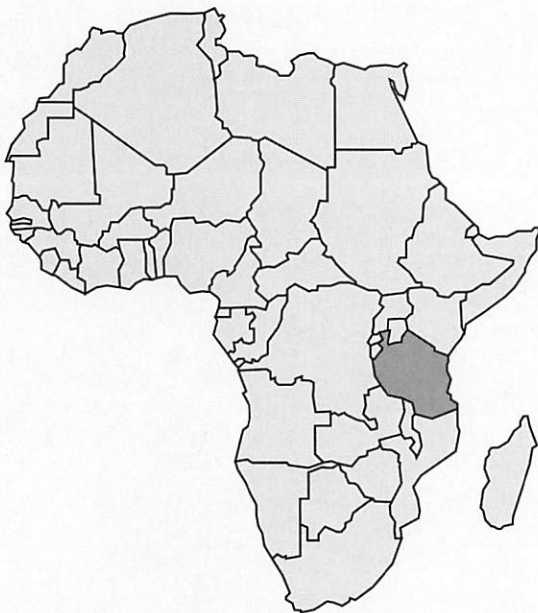
*Titus Amigu*



*Titus H. Amigu received his licenciante in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. Since 1996, he has been teaching New Testament, New Testament Greek and Biblical Hebrew at Peramiho Major Seminary in Tanzania and in 2000 was appointed Rector of the Seminary. Since 2003 he has also been the national coordinator of the biblical apostolate in Tanzania.*

### I. Geography

Tanzania, East Africa's largest country, covers 945,087 km<sup>2</sup> (364,875 mi<sup>2</sup>). The country consists of Tanzania mainland and four islands: Ukerewe, Mafia, Unguja and Pemba (the two last-mentioned build the archipelago Zanzibar). There are four major cities: Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Mbeya and Arusha. Dar es Salaam for all practical purposes is the capital as Dodoma, the proposed political capital, is still under construction. Nevertheless, the 323 member parliament sits here. But the state house, many ministerial offices and many offices of parliamentary committees are still hosted by Dar es Salaam. Actually, Dar es Salaam is the country's busiest port and the terminus of three main railway lines: the southern line to Zambia, the western line with branches to the shores of Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika and the northern line to Kenya.



Tanzania is a United Republic formed on April 26, 1964 by the union of the states of Tanganyika on the East African mainland and Zanzibar (the Indian Ocean islands of Unguja and Pemba). Mainland Tanzania became independent on December 9, 1961. It was a German colony before it was passed to the British by the end of the First World War in 1918. Zanzibar became independent on January 12, 1964 after overthrowing the Sultan of Oman.

Covering a very big area, Tanzania has varied climatic conditions varying from the very humid tropical coastal region to the dry central plateau, semi-temperate mountains, grasslands, bush and semi-desert. Temperatures vary substantially. Highlands have cool or cold temperatures whereas lowlands, especially the coast of the Indian Ocean have hot and humid temperatures, so altogether temperatures vary from below 0° to approx. 38° C. As expected, the low lying archipelago Zanzibar has a tropical climate suitable for the production of spices for export and the bulk of the world's cloves comes from the Pemba Island plantations.

The Indian Ocean lies to the east of mainland Tanzania (Tanganyika); to the north is Lake Victoria, Kenya and Uganda. To the west lie Rwanda and Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) across Lake Tanganyika and to the south lie Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. This considerable topographical variety is accounted for by volcanic activity and faults associated with the rift valley which have given mainland Tanzania the highest and lowest points of Africa. The highest point in Africa is Mount Kilimanjaro with a permanent ice-cap at 5,950 metres above sea level and opposite to Mount Kilimanjaro is the floor of Lake Tanganyika which is 358 metres below sea level.

Tanzania has several rivers both seasonal and perennial; among the latter ones are Rufiji, Ruaha, Ruvuma, Ruvu, Malagarasi and Pangani. The largest river, Rufiji, has considerable potential for irrigation and hydroelectric power. Power is generated at Mtera and Kihansi on Ruaha River, Nyumba ya Mungu on Pangani River and at Kidatu on Rufiji. Rufiji is one of the major rivers draining into the Indian Ocean. Other rivers drain into the interior basins of lakes Tanganyika, Victoria and Malawi.



Tanzania is divided into two rainfall patterns: one-season and two-season rainfall regimes. In the southern, south-western, central and western regions, there is the one-season rainfall regime from November or December to April. Two-season rainfall regime occurs over the coast north of Mafia and its hinterland, the islands of Unguja and Pemba, the north-eastern highlands and Lake Victoria basin. The long rains fall between March and May while the short rains fall between September and December.

## II. Economy

Tanzania's economy is growing at present. Since 1964 there has been a marked contrast between Tanzania's economic problems and its political achievements, although some of the economic problems can be ascribed to President Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere's political decisions. He committed the country to African socialism (Ujamaa) and rural development and gave massive economic power to the state. The consequences included corruption and inefficiency. Rigid state marketing policies and low prices discouraged many large scale producers, and production of many cash crops declined.

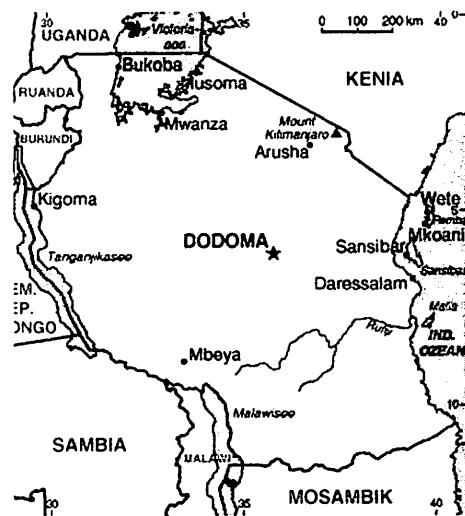
The country depends heavily on farming. Yet there are very few plantations and so it depends on small scale farmers and peasants. More than 85 percent of Tanzanians are peasants living in rural villages, cultivating crops to feed the country and cash crops for export. Principal exports are coffee, cotton, tobacco, tea, cloves, diamonds and cashew nuts. Pastoralists, especially the Wamasai and the Wasukuma keep cattle, goats and sheep. The contribution of livestock keeping is yet to be encouraged as the country has not benefited very much from it.

Tourism is a chief foreign currency earner in Tanzania. The country is blessed with many tourist attractions ranging from Mount Kilimanjaro to the beaches of Zanzibar. There are big game reserves, including Selous and famous national parks Serengeti being the most well-known.

Upon gaining independence Tanzania was self-sufficient food-wise and remained so even during the First Five-Year Plan (1964 to 1969). In those days agricultural production grew faster than the population. Unfortunately, in the course of time, political decisions, drought and rampant economic mismanagement by many state-run companies have changed the situation. Consequently, Tanzania is forced to import cereals like rice and wheat to meet the needs of its quickly rising population. In the same environment, there have been embarrassing problems in the production of major export crops, compounded by falling world prices, free

market and globalization. As expected, the decline in cash crops production causes a serious shortage of foreign currency earnings and the problems caused by this shortage are felt by every Tanzanian.

History has it that in the late 1970's economic problems and the cost of the war against Idi Amin of Uganda led to a crisis in Tanzania. It is to be admitted that for many years the economy has not grown



to meet the needs of the people and Tanzania has failed to solve its problems without outside financial and technological assistance. There were problems of shortage of foreign currency, mounting trade deficits, inflation, high

level of international debt and very slow economic growth. To start solving these problems the government devalued its currency. It also imposed austerity measures and began negotiating with the big international financial bodies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, but at first, Tanzania hesitated to meet IMF conditions especially austerity measures and liberalization of the economy.

It was only in 1986 that an agreement was reached. Thereafter, Tanzania devalued its money, checked official expenditure and gave incentives to private producers of export crops. It also strengthened the private sector, though at the expense of the public sector. These steps and decisions seemed to pay good dividends. The country was rewarded firstly by easier servicing and repayment of its international debt, secondly by substantial foreign aid and thirdly by debt cancellation by some friendly countries. Due to these developments the economic recovery programme started working from the late 1980's on; mining and agriculture picked up and exports rose.

Being one of the developing countries, the mining and industrial sectors are very small. For many years, diamonds, mostly from the Williamson Mine, Mwadui, Shinyanga Region, were an important export. Right now there are gold mining activities going on in Kahama and Geita Districts but how much Tanzania gains from them remains to be seen. Iron and coal reserves are yet to be exploited. Gas deposits have been discovered and gas is already helping to gener-



ate power for Lindi and Mtwara Regions as well as for the national grid. Recent prospecting fills Tanzanians with great hope. It may lead to the discovery of rich oil and mineral deposits worth developing for eradication of poverty. Due to privatization, the limited industrial sector was working far below capacity. There were two reasons for the poor performance: serious lack of foreign capital to buy necessary equipment and the inefficiency and dogmatism of officials in state-run industries. Of late, foreign companies have been welcomed to invest in the country. With its peace and security, Tanzania is right now known as a heaven of investment. Still, simple citizens wait for change in their day-to-day life. What is claimed in the mass media has yet to filter down to the common people.



*Dar es Salaam*

### III. The people

The population is estimated at 38,300,000. It is a mere estimation for the last census was held five years ago. Tanzania has 120 Bantu ethnic groups, and scores of Nilotes, Shirazi, Arabs and Indians besides. Harmony reigns among these groups. No single group is as large as to attempt to dominate the others. Tanzania is one of the very few African states which have not experienced tribal rivalries. Though its people are aware of tribal distinctions, they tend to put their nation first. Tribute to this rather unusual fact should be made to the first President, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere whose deliberate efforts to unite his people through education, national service program and the use of Kiswahili as a common first or second language successfully managed to soften the differences among the Tanzanians.

In Zanzibar, there are more non-Bantu ethnic groups. There are three groups of people on the islands: Arabs, "mainlanders" and Indians. Arabs are the

descendants of Arab immigrants whose ancestors came from Shiraz in Persia and who ran the slave trade before its abolition in 1880's. The "mainlanders" are descendants of the slaves plus more recent immigrants from the mainland. Lastly, there are people of Asian descent, especially Indians, who entered the county mainly as traders.

English and Swahili are the official languages, but each ethnic group has its own mother tongue.

Dominant religions in Tanzania are Christianity (43%) and Islam (40%). The majority of the rest (17%) are followers of traditional religions but have no official organisation. Hinduism is the religion of Indians and some other Asians practise Buddhism. With exception of some religious skirmishes caused by some Moslem fundamentalists and fanatics from 1986 to 1995, Tanzanians live in a committed religious harmony and mutual tolerance. By constitution, Tanzania is a secular republic. It has no state religion but its citizens are free to join and practise any religion of their choice.

Just like in many other countries in the world, in Tanzania Christians are divided. The majority are Catholics, followed by Lutherans and Anglicans. Pentecostal Churches have been "prolific" as elsewhere. Among them, more than 200 sects can be located mainly in five metropolitans: Dar es Salaam, Songea, Tabora, Mwanza and Arusha. The Episcopal Conference is well organised and it runs its activities through a secretariat seated in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania Episcopal Conference Centre, Kurasini. It is at this Centre the 7<sup>th</sup> CBF Plenary Assembly is going to take place from June 24 to July 4, 2008.

Moslems are not free of divisions, either. The majority are Sunnites, followed by Shiites. Together with them, there are some followers of much smaller groups such as the Ahmadiyya and the Ismailiya. The Sunnites are usually peaceful Moslems, that is, most probably, another reason why so far religious differences have caused no special problems in Tanzania. Some radicals, however, seek confrontation between Moslems and Christians. Radical Moslems formed groups to circulate in the country. In response, radical young Christians formed their own team called "Biblia ni Jibu" to work in the same fashion. All official bodies of both religions do not support the activities of these people, as they sow hatred and intolerance among, otherwise, peaceful believers.

Christian denominations, as it were, are competing for followers. The Catholic Church is trying her level best to keep her flock together through preaching, and to the radio station "Radio Maria" as well as through diocesan radio programs and the national Catholic weekly, *Kiongozi*.



*The Episcopal Conference Centre in Dar es Salaam*

#### **IV. Political situation**

Tanzania is a democracy and since 1995 a multi-party republic although it was a single-party republic till then. The present head of state is President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete who won the multiparty elections held on December 14, 2005. According to the constitution, a president is brought to power for a five-year term, but he is allowed to run for a second term. In Tanzania, the President does not rule alone but with the help of two ruling bodies: the Cabinet and the National Assembly. The system is somehow different in Zanzibar whereby the ruling bodies are the Supreme Revolutionary Council of Zanzibar and the House of Representatives. President Jakaya Kikwete is the fourth president of the Republic, his predecessors were the Father of the Nation, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1962-1985), Ali Hassan Mwinyi (1985-1995) and Benjamin William Mkapa (1995-2005).

At present the ruling party is Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) which – in a way – has been ruling since independence was brought about. Alongside CCM, there exist seventeen other registered political parties e.g. Civic United Front (CUF) and Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA). The opposition is, however, still very young and inexperienced.

Despite economic problems, outlined above, Tanzania has been in many ways a model of political and social stability. So far it has experienced very little tension in its life history. There was very little effective opposition to Presidents Julius Kambarage Nyerere and Ali Hassan Mwinyi. Usually, there is a very peaceful power transition. Only in Zanzibar due to its own history and culture, have there been some serious political upheavals. The island retained its own government under a Revolutionary Council and a president who is

also vice-president of Tanzania. What is more, Zanzibar has been allowed to share the revenues which are principally generated by resources located mainly on mainland Tanzania.

Information on Tanzania cannot be complete without giving President Julius Nyerere his due. During the 1960's and 1970's the history of Tanzania was dominated by him and his commitment to African socialism. Through his plans TANU became the only legal political party on mainland Tanzania in 1965. In 1967, the Arusha Declaration was announced. This declaration advocated the principles of egalitarianism and self-reliance and was followed by a novelty: the nationalization of schools, hospitals, banks and major industries which was accompanied by the construction of state run schools, hospitals, factories and the creation of community or co-operative farms (Ujamaa). Four years afterwards came the Dar es Salaam Declaration (1971) which called for political education and a people's militia. National service was compulsory for all college and high school leavers. Again, President Julius Nyerere championed decentralization and resolved to move the capital from Dar es Salaam to Dodoma.

In 1975, the National Assembly granted TANU legal supremacy as the only national political party. Following the formation of CCM (1977), a union between the TANU and the Afro-Shirazi-Party (ASP), as a means to strengthen the union, President Nyerere reshuffled his cabinet and picked a tireless follower, Edward Moringe Sokoine for Prime Minister Office (1977-80). President Nyerere was re-elected with massive support in 1980. But the fact that many members of the National Assembly lost their seats in the elections is interpreted by political analysts as a display of voters' anger at corruption, inefficiency and shortages. Some planned to stage a revolution in early 1983. Following its discovery, Julius Nyerere made Edward Sokoine Prime Minister again and declared a series of purges against corruption, smuggling and the black



*Zanzibar attracts many tourists*



market. The war waged against evil was tense and Prime Minister Edward Sokoine died before it ended.

In 1985 President Nyerere resigned the presidency but continued to influence the country through his position as the Chairman of the CCM. After Nyerere, matters took a different course. Under his successor, President Ali Hassan Mwinyi, Tanzania started to open the door to a more liberal path. Ex-President Nyerere and the party ideologists were not very happy at the move away from socialism, however, they admitted that economic problems had forced the country to modify its socialist position.

Tanzania has not remained an island to avoid its role in the international arena. In foreign affairs it has played a recommendable role. On his part, President Nyerere was one of the leading spokesmen for Third World and African causes. Tanzania was a front-line state to advance the liberation of countries like Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.



*Julius Kambarage Nyerere*

Nyerere believed his country would not enjoy its freedom unless its neighbours were also free. Again, as a member of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADC) Tanzania was a strong campaigner against racist policy in South Africa, the Apartheid. There were, however, two problems dwarfing Tanzania's influence in the world: its own

internal economic problems and problems with its neighbours.

Nyerere was among the first leaders to propose one African unified government. He differed with the then President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, in the sense that he wanted gradual unification of the states. Kwame Nkrumah wanted instant unification. This problem resurfaced in this year's AU (African Union) meeting in Accra, Ghana. The African leaders were again divided between the two positions.

In the 1970's East Africa tried to think and live as a bloc. When Julius Nyerere led his country to independence he was wholeheartedly committed to serious cooperation with Kenya and Uganda. The three countries joined to establish the East African Community in 1967. With Kenya adhering to capitalism and Tanzania advocating Nyerere's African socialism quarrels issued leading to the closure of the border in 1976. In 1979, when Idi Amin of Uganda occupied Kagera area, even greater tension between Tanzania and Uganda broke open. President Nyerere who had given refuge and support to President Emilton Obote after he was ousted by Idi Amin Dada in 1971 had no

other option but to fight against Amin. This is one of the factors accounting for some economic problems which Tanzania has so far not managed to solve. To the uninformed audience, the mass media suggested that Tanzania was at war with Uganda just to help Ugandan dissidents to overthrow Amin (1979) and reinstate the ousted President. The real reason, however, was territorial occupation provoked by Idi Amin.

The East African Community collapsed in 1977 due to differences in outlook among the three countries. The page of the Community closed, it took a number of years to sort out the division of the assets and liabilities. To the west of Tanzania, there are two countries, Burundi and Rwanda, with deplorable history. In both countries, the Tutsi and the Hutu are struggling for supremacy. History has it that in early 1973 political relations with Burundi were very much strained after 342 tribal massacres. The massacres drove many people out of the country leading to an influx of refugees into Tanzania and to open battles on the border between Tanzanian and Burundi troops. Other influxes of refugees took place following genocide in Rwanda (1994) and civil war in the then Zaire (1996). Peace has been brought about and wounds substantially healed with the passage of time. That is why the borders with Kenya were reopened in 1983. Political and economic relations with Uganda have improved under the presidency of Yoweri Kaguta Museveni since January 1986. The East African Community is partially revived. It has its parliamentary seat and headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. What is more, now the three countries are dreaming and planning of an East African Federation by 2015.

To conclude this short description of the position and situation of Tanzania, it can safely be admitted that Tanzania and its leaders made some mistakes in some options. To implement the idea of African socialism, President Nyerere took for granted his people's conviction and readiness to collaborate. As such the hasty implementation of doctrinaire policies by socialist idealists created a good number of internal and external opponents. Open opposition and sabotage ultimately made the people suffer and national growth failed to keep up with the rapid population growth. All the same, politically and socially, Tanzania has given its people recommendable stability and has saved itself from the horrors of military coups and civil war so common in other African countries. Tribute to the ideas of the ex-President, Julius Nyerere! Obviously, he now earns the respect and gratitude of his people, despite his mistakes.

Under his successors, Presidents Ali Hassan Mwinyi, Benjamin Mkapa and Jakaya Kikwete, seemingly more pragmatic policies have led to a higher standard of living for Tanzanians. One sees new tarmac road proj-





*Jakaya Kikwete*

challenges of poverty, illness and ignorance are still haunting their families.

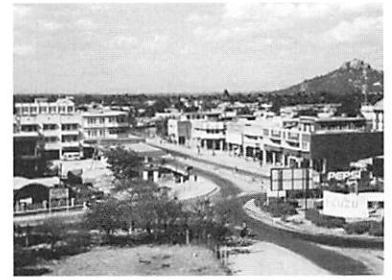
Problems of poverty, illness and ignorance are rampant in the developing countries, not only in Tanzania. The three cause and feed diseases and diseases cause and feed them, which is a vicious cycle. Indeed, developing countries are afflicted in every way and from every direction. The root causes of their problems are not only poor politics and mistakes committed by their people. In fact there are both internal and external causes accounting for their problems. Among internal causes there are such things as corruption, poor governance, selfish ambition and struggle for power, poor planning, laziness, disease, ignorance etc. but also among external causes there are political and economic interference, unfair world market, sabotage of political and economic plans, sales of arms, imposition of leaders preferred by powerful nations etc. This is to say: unjust world market, exploitation, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and globalization are also to blame. Which country among the developing countries has really been left alone without foreign interference?



*Dodoma, seat of the Tanzanian parliament*

Right now, there is no level playing ground for all countries. Free market is preached, but this is not essential for poor countries. To put developing countries on the right track, it is fair trade which is required instead of free market. How will the countries in question develop if they are only asked and helped to buy and never helped to produce or manufacture goods to sell? Can

a "market" turn into an economic power? Can a buyer, who doesn't sell anything valuable to others become rich? Is it not an unattainable dream to achieve the millennium development goals by 2015?



*Dodoma, capital of Tanzania*

African countries are considered a profitable market and so they have never been helped to become genuine trade partners. Right now, there is a second scramble for Africa in process. On the continent, Western countries, USA and Japan are battling to ward off new economies. South Korea, Russia, Turkey, India, Brazil, Malaysia and Thailand are new but very aggressive economies. As a sheer market African countries are flooded with cheap goods as well as second-hand ware ranging from underwear to mobile phones and cars. In this situation, greed is fanned in the continent just to enhance the market of guns, bombs and other arms. Wars are destabilizing poor countries and are producing thousands of refugees. There isn't any desire and deliberation to give the developing countries any substantial technological input. For cruel business magnates even suffering and disease of the people in the developing countries are a blessing for they open the market of medicines and other articles required for treatment.

Quite honestly, assistance to curb AIDS, malaria and other diseases and sporadic financial assistance here and there, even though required and appreciated now, will not take Africa to any appropriate levels of development. Technological input would have taken developing countries in that direction.

There is no problem the effects of which remain within a fenced area. The problems of Africa are spilling over to affect even the developed countries. This is seen in



*Mount Kilimanjaro*



the numbers of Africans and others from poor countries who stowaway to enter European countries and USA. To check these illegal refugees and immigrants, new laws and restrictions are being established.

Finally, what is happening in poor countries, right now, is also a failure of the Gospel, Christianity and all sister religions. Is the love we proclaim totally and sincerely put into action? The answer must surely be no. We have thus to continue appealing to the consciences of all Christians and human beings in general and of whichever faith to translate their words into action. The neighbour is yet to be loved in practice. Only sincere love and fair play will curb economic injustice in the world and extinguish the fires of globalisation which are burning down the developing countries at present. The Catholic Biblical Federation comes to hold its 7<sup>th</sup> Plenary Assembly on a suffering country and in a suffering continent, what will its contribution be towards the alleviation of the problems of the people? ■

## Tanzania



### Size:

945,087 km<sup>2</sup>/364,875 mi<sup>2</sup>

### State form:

United Republic

### Population:

38,3 Mio. (estimated)

### Languages:

Swahili, English, 127 local languages

### Religion:

43 % Christians, 40 % Moslems, 17 % others

### Capital:

location of legislature: Dodoma (pop. 300,000);

traditional capital: Dar es Salaam (pop. about 3 Mio.)

### Major Cities:

Dar es Salaam, Mwanza, Mbeya, Arusha

### Highest Point:

Kilimanjaro (19,340 ft/5,895 m)

### Currency: Tanzanian shilling (TZS);

rate of exchange: 1 USD = 1,175 TZS;

1 EUR = 1,734 TZS (Nov. 2007)

### Special thanks go to the following persons and institutions for their photos:

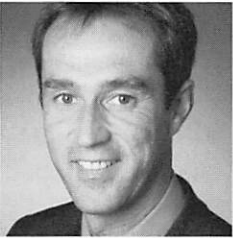
Gabriel Afagbegee, svd (p. 40), Titus Amigu (p. 12), Bruno Costacurta (p. 5), Emmanuel Gunanto, osu (p. 38), Chrysostome Kiyala, svd (p. 40), Bruno Secondin (p. 8), Klaus Vellguth (p. 18), www.ankawa.com (p. 39); all other photos: CBF archives.



## The Origins of Bible-Sharing

### East and South African Roots of a Biblical Pastoral Method

Klaus Vellguth



*Klaus Vellguth holds a doctorate in Theology and a diploma in Religious Education. He is head of the department for media at the funding agency Missio Aachen, Germany, and also editor of the pastoral periodical, Anzeiger fuer die Seelsorge.*

In 1975 Bishop Oswald Hirmer came to the Lumko Institute, where he set up the "Gospel Group Department". Two years later, in 1977, the Southern Africa Bishops' Conference (SACBC) appointed him as National Director of the World Catholic Federation for the Biblical Apostolate (now Catholic Biblical Federation) in the thirty dioceses that belong to the Conference. Hirmer first posed the question as to what persons he should settle on as a target group in his planning. The answer to this question emerged from a conversation with his friend, Bishop Fritz Lobinger. About this conversation Hirmer writes: "During a short walk after lunch in Lumko (...) the question came up as to who should really be the target group for the biblical apostolate? Teachers? Catechists? Preachers? Individual Bible readers? Sisters? Fritz Lobinger pointed to the small dwellings of nearby Xhosadorf and commented: 'Priests and catechists have enough biblical material. But the people in these small dwellings have to fend for themselves. These are the people we should be helping'".<sup>1</sup> So the professed goal was that easier access to the Bible should be provided for the faithful. In this way, a central demand of the Second Vatican Council would be implemented: "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful" (DV 22).



Bishop Oswald Hirmer

At the Lumko Institute, intensive discussions continued as to how one might do justice to the mandate of the South African Bishops' Conference. Oswald Hirmer writes on the outcome of these reflections: "After a number of attempts and numerous reflections it became clear to us that the spread of the Bible should not simply be one other exercise in the life of a

parish (...). Bible studies should be the inspirational force for all pastoral activities in the process of building up the local Church, which we treat as a community of communities."<sup>2</sup>

At the Lumko Institute a Bible picture program emerged thereupon. Bishop Hubert Bucher, who until his appointment as Bishop of Bethlehem in Oranje Freistaat (South African Republic) had for a short time himself belonged to the Lumko team, invited Hirmer to help make this program for Bible studies developed at the Lumko Institute accessible to the Christians in his Bethlehem diocese. So in 1978 Hirmer made the trip to the diocese of Bethlehem with two Xhosa Sisters and two Xhosa catechists to try out the program in four different parishes. This trip is generally regarded in Germany as the birth of Gospel-sharing.<sup>3</sup>

#### The origin of the "four-step-method"

Fairly accurate descriptions of this "birth of Gospel-sharing" are available. On the trip to Bethlehem the five Lumko collaborators were reflecting on how the Bible picture program could now be implemented in practice. The catechist Stanley Nkabinde suggested that they not start immediately with the picture program, but rather begin with a four-step procedure. First the Bible text should be read aloud. Then the text should be reproduced in one's own words (not recited in the meditative form of a *ruminatio* from memory, as this would later be practiced in the second step). In a third step, a period of silence should follow before the fourth step, in which all the participants would discuss the text. The suggestion of the catechist was accepted by all. They wrote down the four steps and translated them into Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho. Later, in the Bethlehem bishop's residence, they made copies of these directions for the four steps.

At this point the five co-workers split up and made their visits to the different parishes. When they met again two weeks later in Bethlehem, they discussed their experiences and observed that in the context of their catechesis they had had similar experiences. Oswald Hirmer writes about this: "We never even got to the picture program. The communities had enthusiastically participated in the four steps, which had really been intended only as a launch for the picture program. There was general agreement, too, in the stories about difficulties



encountered in the second step. Most participants had found it difficult to reproduce from memory, in their own words, the text they had just heard read.”<sup>4</sup>

In spite of these difficulties everyone was impressed with the unexpected success of a form of Bible meeting in four steps which had come into being almost by accident. The success was viewed, writes Hirmer retrospectively, as a tip from on high, and at the same time, as a “‘sign of the times’ from above”<sup>5</sup>. In November of 1978 Anselm Prior, then director of the Department of Religious Education in the Diocese of Dundee (South African Republic), organized a conference in the La Verna Retreat Center in Transvaal on the various practiced forms of Gospel-sharing, which brought together 25 participants from South Africa, including Fritz Lobinger and Oswald Hirmer.

In 1979 the Lumko Institute invited representatives from all the dioceses in South Africa, Swaziland, Namibia and Lesotho to a meeting. The goal was, in the framework of this meeting, to exchange information and ideas on the different experiences with Bible studies in groups. The response to the invitation was remarkable and the result was that approximately fifty participants from all parts of South Africa came together. At this conference the four steps of Gospel-sharing that had thus far been practiced was further developed into the form of the seven-step method, which later became known in Germany, too, as “Bible-sharing”.

It is no accident that this method was developed right in Africa. It is a specifically African contribution to Bible encounter and evangelization. Lobinger notes that under the headword evangelization in the “old” Churches, people had in mind something in the line of lectures or literature, whereas in the young Churches it is usually “palaver” that is selected as a method – though the dialogue sessions are often structured and thoroughly thought through in advance.

After this promising prelude the Diocese of Johannesburg invited the Lumko team to a seminar on Gospel-sharing. In the framework of an introductory course, seventy women and men had themselves initiated into the practice of this spiritual form of Bible-reading. Further seminars were conducted, first in Soweto, in other residential areas of Johannesburg and in neighboring Pretoria. Thus was laid the foundation stone for an extensive seminar activity. By the end of the 1980s more than 150 seminars on Gospel-sharing had taken place.

The seven-step method of Gospel-sharing took its lead from the guidelines of the South African Bishops’ Conference and initially pursued the goal of enabling Christian groups in the rural areas, or in the sprawling black suburbs to live from Holy Scripture. A pastoral

presupposition here was that this had to be made possible for people who had no theologically trained personnel on the spot. Oswald Hirmer writes on the reflection at the time: “We reminded ourselves of Jesus. He invited in the crowds of people and the little country folk and entered into a personal, loving relationship with them. He taught them by his word and his life. But he did not expect, even from the Twelve, let alone from the crowds of simple folk, that everything he said would immediately be grasped! The important thing for Jesus was that people could meet him in person and that they chose to follow him as a community of disciples.”<sup>6</sup>

### Early beginnings of Gospel-sharing/Bible-sharing

Introductions to the origin of Gospel-sharing published in Germany usually focus exclusively on the work of the Lumko Institute, which is therefore assumed to be the place where Gospel-sharing first saw the light of day. This presentation of the genesis of the movement is, however, tenable only insofar as the form of Gospel-sharing with its later variations, was fixed in writing at the Lumko Institute in 1978, and was able to be implemented in an African (and later in an Asian) context, finding wide diffusion in practice, not least in Germany. But all of this overlooks the fact that in East Africa and South Africa even before 1978 there had already been a great variety of forms of Gospel- (or Bible-) sharing, which were presented in the framework of the AMECEA study session in 1976, in which Fritz Lobinger also took part, and published in East Africa in the following year. Since these forms of Gospel-sharing were absorbed and documented at the AMECEA Pastoral Institute of Gaba, which with the Lumko Institute was one of the two most important pastoral institutes of Africa, they had been well known also at the Lumko Institute.

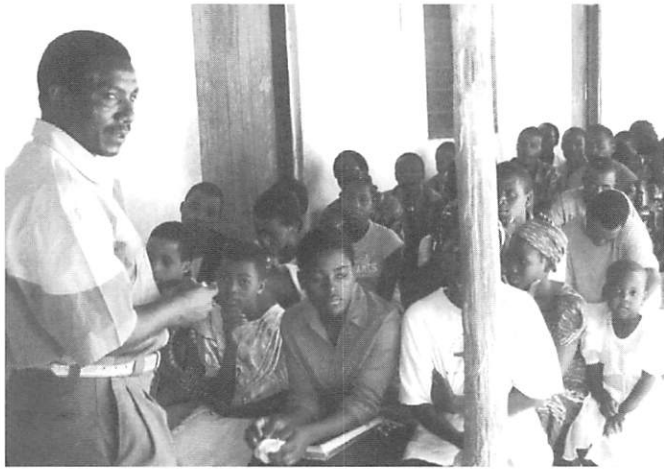
### Bible-sharing in Zambia

In his case study *Building Community: A Case Study from Lusaka*, Andrew Edele presented the formation and the development of Christian communities in the two parishes of St. Charles Lwanga and The Holy Family in the context of the AMECEA study session in Nairobi in 1976.<sup>7</sup> He shows that there, in 1973, a process began that continued in the following phases:

Those in charge of the project began with a discussion of existing pastoral community models in Europe, which could not, of course, be simply adopted, given the differences in the social contexts, but which provided an invaluable stimulus to thought. In a second step, Christians, who at the time were living largely in isolation from each other within the parish territory, were contacted and invited to a first meeting. This first meeting was followed by a series of eight further meetings, all of which had a thematic focus,<sup>8</sup> which concluded with a common celebration of the Eucharist. Then an “elder” was appointed as community leader, and a vari-



ety of offices were established which were to care for the sick and the poor, instruct catechumens in the faith, provide catechetical instruction for Catholic children, welcome newcomers to the parish, provide companionship for the youth, mediate family conflicts or manage community funds.



In the framework of the case study Edele named a variety of pastoral challenges, to which Lobinger and Hirmer also allude in their reflections: for one thing, the necessity to establish a close network system between the Small Christian Communities themselves, as well as between them and their local parishes; for another, the task of providing training for the “elders”, or community leaders. In this connection Edele mentions his repeated experiences in the past with “elders” who had had too little experience with Bible-sharing: “We soon realised that the majority of elected elders, through no fault of their own, were unable to guide the communities, probably due to the lack of leadership training and experience in Bible-sharing when confronted with certain difficulties, such as the low attendance of men at meetings, and they were unable to find the answer on their own.”<sup>9</sup> This problem report is clear evidence of the fact that in Lusaka there were moves to construct Small Christian Communities, to which a form of Bible-sharing also belonged. Unfortunately, there are no published reports that set forth how this Bible-sharing was concretely practiced in Zambia.

### **Gospel-sharing in Rulenge/Tanzania**

Another bit of evidence of earlier forms of Gospel-sharing is provided by Marie Giblin, who in February 1976 published her *Reflection on Experiences in the Village Apostolate*<sup>10</sup> in an Ujamaa village.<sup>11</sup> In this book, the author refers above all to her experiences in the Buhorono parish in the Tanzanian diocese of Rulenge. In Tanzania the bishops had taken up the option of the AMECEA-declaration of 1973 and announced that the formation of Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo<sup>12</sup> was to be a pastoral priority. In the diocese of Rulenge Bishop

Christopher Mwoleka championed the idea of up to twelve families coming together to form Small Christian Communities. In doing so, he was treating the Ujamaa movement as an opportunity for Christians of his diocese to discover Christian values outside of the established Church and to acquire a self-conscious identity as a Christian faith community of Christian/charitable responsibility. The reflection of Marie Giblin on the developments in the Buhorore parish are all the more important as they were echoed by Mary Salat a few months later – likewise in the context of the AMECEA study conference in Nairobi – in her article *Case Study of Ntobeye Christian Community*.<sup>13</sup>

Already three months before the study conference Marie Giblin mentions in her article on the village apostolate in a Ujamaa village that local Christian communities were being assembled there and that in these groups forms of Gospel-sharing were being practiced. She writes: “Finally, we are encouraging the implementation of the parish plan for neighborhood Gospel prayer groups: small groups, open to all, that meet each week at the home of one of the neighbours, to read and reflect on the meaning of the Gospel in our daily lives. These Gospel prayer groups are a way of beginning the long-range plan for Small Christian Communities that is being encouraged by all the AMECEA bishops. These groups are intended to encourage deeper commitment to Christ, fellowship with one another, and the shouldering of responsibility.”<sup>14</sup>

In the framework of the AMECEA study conference Mary Salat takes up the reflections of Marie Giblin and, while taking the differences into account, presents in her case study the origin and development of Small Christian Communities in the Buhororo parish. Already in the context of her sociological analysis she notes that the parish had decided in 1974 to promote the formation of Small Christian Communities in which Gospel-sharing groups were to be established in the individual villages<sup>15</sup>. Important is the ecclesiological context that can here be construed: the form of Gospel-sharing practiced in the parish will be regarded as an appropriate tool (or method) to enable Small Christian Communities to arise. Mary Salat describes in detail the community meetings of the Gospel-prayer groups. This description is particularly valuable in the framework of the research presented here, because it will offer the material for a synoptic comparison on the one hand of the form of Gospel-sharing already practiced in Tanzania in 1974 and on the other, the form developed at the Lumko Institute in 1977. Mary Salat writes:

“The groups meet once a week at someone’s house. The Gospel of the following Sunday is read and reflections are shared by the group. Songs, petitions and spontaneous prayers are offered. Questions are posed by the leader to help translate the Gospel into the con-



text of lived experience. Problems are faced together and frequently there is concrete action to help someone in need. At present there are about 35 active groups in the parish. All the groups are not equally active and some have stopped meeting, but those that have a nucleus of committed members persevere through difficulties. Membership in the individual groups ranges from six to fifty. Though the pastoral workers realize the necessity of meetings, seminars and instructions for the formation and animation of leaders, these are not held with as much regularity and are not as well attended as could be hoped for.”<sup>16</sup> As her case study proceeds, Mary Salat describes further details of the form of Gospel-sharing practiced, and with reference to the regular meetings of the Gospel-sharing groups she adds: “At these meetings each member was encouraged to participate in some way – a spontaneous prayer, a petition, a personal reflection on the Gospel, some insight into their daily life situation.”<sup>17</sup>

Reporting on a seminar devoted to the theme “Small Christian Communities. The Church and Villagization in Tanzania”, which took place in March 1975 in the diocese of Rulenge, Marie Giblin provides further evidence of the early praxis of Gospel-sharing in the diocese of Rulenge. In this report, she writes: “One way that is proving valuable for deepening relationships and building communities striving to orientate their lives to the Gospel is the Gospel-Sharing groups which were begun during the past year. The first group to be started consists of neighbouring Catholics who are regular in their participation in the Sunday service and join in the Christian activities. The second group are also neighbours but generally not active and regular as the former group. Also among them are a few Protestants. The third group in another part of the village are mostly Mungu Mwema as well as a very active Protestant family.”<sup>18</sup>

The best and most systematic overview of the praxis of Gospel-sharing in the diocese of Rulenge comes from Joseph G. Healey, who as AMECEA collaborator in the 1970s likewise had close contacts with the Ujamaa communities of this diocese. This overview, however, is in reference to a somewhat later praxis, after 1976. It is obvious that the form of Bible studies presented by Healey, which he himself describes as central to the life of the roughly three thousand Small Christian Communities in Rulenge, shows strong parallels to the seven-step method which was published by the Lumko Institute. Joseph Healey writes: “Through these seminars over three thousand SCCs were established in Rulenge Diocese. The heart of the small community is the weekly Bible service, which follows this general outline:

1. Opening song or prayer.
2. Short introduction of the liturgical theme.

3. Reading of the Gospel of the following Sunday (or another Scripture reading related to the liturgical season, marriage, thanksgiving, reconciliation, death, etc.).
4. Silent reflection.
5. Reading of the Gospel for the second time.
6. Sharing of reflections and thoughts on the Gospel.
7. Petitions (general intercessions).
8. Selection of some concrete practical action to be carried out during the following week.
9. Closing song or prayer.”<sup>19</sup>

The parallels in this form of Bible study with respect to the seven-step method published by the Lumko Institute are evident. And Healey in fact writes that the Small Christian Communities, which practiced this form of Bible study, were coming into being already in 1976. Nevertheless, based on statements he makes in his book *A Fifth Gospel*, one cannot confidently assume that the here described form of Bible study was already being practiced in the Small Christian Communities of Rulenge Diocese before 1977. Such an early origin is of course suggested by the data, but ultimately it cannot be sufficiently substantiated, as Healey did not publish the above mentioned description till 1981. For this reason, the following synoptic comparison of the form of Gospel-sharing practiced in Rulenge with the seven-step method published at the Lumko Institute will not draw on this overview but rather on the descriptions of Marie Giblin and Mary Salat.

### Gospel-sharing in Arusha/Tanzania

Still another form of Gospel-sharing is mentioned by Brian Hearne, a long-time collaborator of the AMECEA Pastoral Institute in Gaba, in a work published in 1979.<sup>20</sup> This reference is interesting in the context of the present reflection, since Hearne mentions that he learned this form of Gospel-sharing already in 1977 in Tanzanian Arusha. Hearne mentions that the leaders of the Small Christian Communities of the parish celebrat-



*Church of the AMECEA Pastoral Institute*



ed Holy Mass one Sunday with the Bishop. In the course of the ceremony each of the community leaders placed his hand on the Bible and made a pledge of loyalty to the Christian community. These leaders of the Small Christian Community constituted the parish council in the town parish of Arusha. On the Gospel-sharing itself Hearne writes in retrospect:

“Small Christian communities are supposed to meet at least once a week. At their get-togethers they pray and sing hymns of praise. The only regular part of their meeting however is always the reading aloud of a Bible passage, a period of quiet reflection on it, and then the re-reading of the text, followed by a discussion on the text and its application. But the problems of the group are also discussed in the process, and possible solutions are sought. The people are all given the specifics on a division of labor which is to be implemented in the upcoming week – examples of which would include mutual assistance of communities for the establishment of a pharmacy for the poor, church activities, instruction in religion and good morals, visiting services for the sick, etc.”<sup>21</sup>

**A synoptic comparison**

The two case studies presented in 1976 in the framework of the AMECEA study conference in Nairobi and the description of the Gospel-sharing praxis from Arusha are evidence of the fact that already in the first half of the 1970s forms of Gospel, or Bible-sharing were being practiced in East Africa and South Africa and that Gospel-sharing was viewed as a tool for building and developing Small Christian Communities. This observation raises the question then as to whether it is really permissible to describe Gospel-sharing as a method that originated in the second half of the 1970s at the South African Lumko Institute. And in consequence, even the question as to whether we may perhaps be witnessing a “colonialist style arrangement” when the reception and presentation of the history of the development of Gospel-sharing in Germany always begins with the observation that it was two German missionaries (working together with a black catechist and some black sisters) who invented Gospel-sharing at an African pastoral institute. What is ultimately overlooked in this scenario is the fact that there had already been a tradition of Gospel-sharing prior to its “discovery” by German priests in Africa.

These two questions should be pursued in the framework of a synoptic comparison. In a first step, this will enable a comparison of the sequence of the form of Gospel-sharing practiced in Rulenge with the four-step, or seven-step method developed at the Lumko Institute. A comparison follows, in a second step, between the form of Gospel-sharing practiced in Arusha and the methods that originated at the Lumko

Institute. Firstly, however, a comparative overview on the form of Gospel-sharing that was practiced in Rulenge and that which was later developed at the Lumko Institute:

	Rulenge/Tanzania	original Lumko version	seven-step method
first phase	“Songs, petitions and spontaneous prayers are offered.”		“We invite the Lord”: Prayer as introduction to Gospel-sharing
second phase	Reading aloud of the Bible text (It is assumed that the text will be read by the leader of the assembly)	Reading aloud of the Bible text	“We read the text”: Reading of the Bible text
third phase		Reproduction of the text in one’s own words	“We pick out words and meditate on them”: Pause in the form of a <i>ruminatio</i>
fourth phase	Reading aloud of the Bible text (It is assumed that the text will be read by the leader of the assembly)	Period of silence	“We let God speak to us in silence”: Silence
fifth phase	“A personal reflection on the Gospel”	Exchange of ideas on the Bible text	“We share what we have heard in our hearts”: Exchange about experience with the Bible text
sixth phase	“Problems are faced together and frequently there is concrete action to help someone in need.”		“We discuss any task which our group is called to do”: Reflection, what task results from Bible text
seventh phase			“We pray together spontaneously”: prayer

Noteworthy in this initial comparison is first of all the fact that there really are striking agreements between the forms of Gospel-sharing practiced in Tanzania and the seven-step method. In both cases Gospel-sharing consists in prayer (first and sixth phases), the reading aloud of the Bible text (second phase), discussion of the Bible text (fifth phase), and a reflection on concrete action options (sixth phase). This would suggest first of all that the seven-step method did not originally spring into existence at Lumko-Institute, but that it developed out of the method being practiced in Rulenge.

With reference to the history of the development of the seven-step method it must, however, be noted that the seven steps developed at Lumko Institute out of a four-step method. When one compares these four steps with the form of Gospel-sharing at home in Rulenge it is obvious that there is now agreement in only two of the



phases. Both in the form of Gospel-sharing at home in Tanzania and in the original four steps of the Gospel-sharing that came out of the Lumko Institute the Bible text is read aloud (second phase) and reflected upon (fifth phase). Neither of these two elements, however, can be regarded as characteristic of a specific form of Bible study, since they are ultimately constitutive elements of any Bible- or text-work. The agreement between these two phases does not therefore yet demonstrate that the four-step method must have emerged from the earlier Tanzanian form of Gospel-sharing.

But when, with the later development of the four-step method into the seven-step method, we now arrive at the above named evident agreements with the form of Bible study practiced in Rulenge, we may indeed conclude that in the context of the further development of the four-step method into the seven-step method the earlier forms of Gospel-sharing may well have been incorporated into the Lumko method.

In the step that now follows, the form of Gospel-sharing practiced in Arusha will be compared with the method developed at the Lumko Institute:

	Arusha/Tanzania	original Lumko-version	seven-step method
first phase	"They pray and sing hymns"		"We invite the Lord": prayer as introduction to Gospel-sharing
second phase	"Reading of a passage from Scripture"	Reading aloud of the Bible text	"We read the text": reading of the Bible text
third phase	"Re-reading of the passage"	Reproduction of the text in one's own words	"We pick out words and meditate on them": pause in the form of a <i>ruminatio</i>
fourth phase	"Silent reflection on it"	Period of silence	"We let God speak to us in silence": silence
fifth phase	"Discussion on it and its application"	Exchange of ideas on the Bible text	"We share what we have heard in our hearts": exchange about experience with the Bible text
sixth phase	"Group's problems are also discussed"; "Division of work is explained"		"We discuss any task which our group is called to do": reflection, what tasks result from the Bible text
seventh phase	"They pray and sing hymns"		"We pray together spontaneously": prayer

Comparing the four-step method originally developed at the Lumko Institute with the form of Gospel-sharing practiced in Arusha a number of significant parallels are immediately evident at all four steps. Besides the reading aloud of the Bible text (as an integral part of all Bible study), the subsequent steps will begin with a re-reading of the Bible text, and then will follow a period of silence and a discussion of the Bible text. The three steps that were added later likewise show clear agreements with the form of Gospel-sharing already being practiced in Arusha in 1977. The groups pray and sing together. They address problems of the day in the framework of Gospel-sharing and they reflect on what concrete action options result (from the meditated text) for the group members.

### Conclusion

It can thus be said that even prior to the existence of the seven-step method there were various traditions of Gospel-sharing in East Africa and in southern Africa. The handing on of the Gospel-sharing traditions emanating from Arusha shows that the four-step method does not differ substantially from these traditions. It is possible that the reason for this is that what we have in the four-step method of Gospel-sharing is an obvious form of meditative Bible study in a community in which many people have a deeper relationship to the spoken language than to the written word. But it is strikingly clear that the three later added steps show numerous parallels to the Gospel-sharing traditions in East Africa (to the praxis in Arusha, as well as in Rulenge). This can be explained by the fact that the four-step method was further developed into the seven-step method in the framework of the meeting mentioned by Prior and Hirmer with representatives of various dioceses of South Africa, Swaziland, Namibia and Lesotho. No later than at this time, in the course of a reflective process, experiences from other already practiced forms of Gospel-sharing entered into the method that later spread from the Lumko Institute into many countries of Africa, as well as to Asia, Australia, Europe and America.

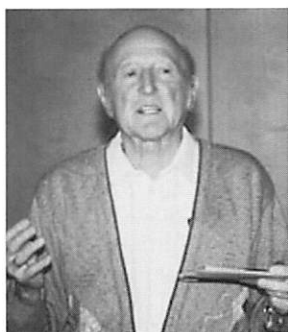
The result of the synoptic comparison allows us now to answer the question as to whether we can really speak of the "birth of Gospel-sharing" at the Lumko Institute, in view of these earlier forms of Gospel-sharing. It does seem problematic in view of this history of origins, but nevertheless thoroughly legitimate, to speak of a "birth of Gospel-sharing" in the form of a four-step, or seven-step method at the Lumko Institute. But when we do so, the earlier beginnings of Gospel-sharing ought not to be overlooked. It would be desirable, then, that when surveying the history of origins of Gospel-sharing we not leave unmentioned the fact that this birth was itself preceded by a conception and a pregnancy: if it is true to say that the seven-step method in its ultimate version did indeed see the light of day for the first time at the





Lumko Institute, it is also the case that already in the early 1970s related forms of Gospel-sharing had come into being and matured.

The great accomplishment of Fritz Lobinger and Oswald Hirmer consists in the fact that in line with a contextualized pastoral practice sensitive to the demands of inculturation, they did not create their own method to introduce into South Africa as non-African missionaries. Instead, they latched onto a variety of already existing African traditions of Gospel-sharing and, together with the Christians of South Africa, further developed them in such a workable form that the method ultimately became widespread in South Africa, and even far beyond the borders of South Africa.



Bishop Fritz Lobinger

(Translation: L. Maluf)

<sup>1</sup> O. Hirmer in O. Hirmer/G. Steins, *Gemeinschaft im Wort, Werkbuch zum Bibel-Teilen*, Munich 1999, p.9.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. on the origin of Gospel-sharing O. Hirmer, "Wie die Sieben Schritte entstanden", in: *Bibel Teilen, Bekannte Texte neu erleben*, Aachen 1998, p. 54f. Cf. O. Hirmer, "The Pastoral Use of the Bible: The Biblical Apostolate in South Africa", in: *Catechetical Liturgical Biblical Review*, Colombo 1994, 31ff.

<sup>4</sup> O. Hirmer, "Wie die Sieben Schritte entstanden", in: *Bibel Teilen, Bekannte Texte neu erleben*, Aachen 1998, p. 54f.

<sup>5</sup> O. Hirmer in: O. Hirmer/G. Steins, "Gemeinschaft im Wort, Werkbuch zum Bibel-Teilen", (see note 1), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Edele, "Building Community: A Case Study from Lusaka", in: *African Ecclesiastical Review* 19 (1977) 2, p. 90-100.

<sup>8</sup> The themes of these eight meetings were as follows: "the Meaning of Christian Community", "The First Christian Communities" (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35), "The Church as Instrument of Salvation", "The Role of the Clans in Daily Life", "The Church as Clan of God", "Born into God's Clan through Baptism", "The Eucharist as 'Community Meal'".

<sup>9</sup> A. Edele, "Building Community: A Case Study from Lusaka" (see note 7), p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> M. Giblin, "Reflection on Experiences in the Village Apostolate", in *African Ecclesiastical Review* 18 (1976) 1, p. 145-153. The article appeared under the title "Ujamaa Village Apostolate" three years later in C. Mwoleka/J. Healey, (eds.), *Ujamaa and Christian Communities*, Spearhead 45, Eldoret 1976, p. 43-49. Cf. also J. Healey, "Why I Want to Live in an Ujamaa Village in Tanzania", in: C. Mwoleka/J. Healey, Joseph (eds.) op. Cit. P. 57-59. B. Hearne, "The Small Christian Communities as Basic Cell of the Church", in: *The Community Called Church*, Volume 5 of an Experimental Source-Book for Religious Education, Spearhead 60, AMECEA Pastoral Institute (ed.), Eldoret 1979, p. 16-27.

<sup>11</sup> Ujamaa villages (Swahili: family, community) are cooperatively organized agrarian settlements in Tanzania, which arose on the initiative of President Julius Nyerere from the end of the 1960s into the late 1970s in the framework of a national resettlement program.

<sup>12</sup> "Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo" is the Swahili term for "small communities".

<sup>13</sup> M. Salat, "Case Study of Ntobehe Christian Community", in: *African Ecclesiastical Review* 19 (1977) 3, p. 130-147.

<sup>14</sup> M. Giblin, "Reflection on Experience in the Village Apostolate", in: *African Ecclesiastical Review* 18 (1976) 1, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. M. Salat, "Case Study of Ntobeye Christian Community" (see note 13), p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., P. 132.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., S. 138.

<sup>18</sup> M. Giblin, *Small Christian Communities: The Church and Villagization in Tanzania, A Seminar Held In Rulenge Diocese 4.-6. March 1975*, unpublished report, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> J.G. Healey, Joseph, *A Fifth Gospel, The Experience of Black Christian Values*, New York 1981, p. 108.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. B. Hearne, *Pastoral Anthropology and the Church* (see note 10), p. 46-67.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p 67.

<sup>22</sup> Fritz Lobinger wrote on this: "We were all agreed that the major steps with all the groups that had been practicing Gospel-sharing up till that time were the same: reading, silent period, discussion, action. These steps are indeed so natural that they do not require much reflection. Many people, however, had felt the need to slip in a step between the reading of the text, the period of silence and the discussion/exchange. We were agreed that this one place was important for this intermediate step, which however had not found a convincing solution. It was at this point that Oswald worked out the present third step. This third step is really the only one that can be regarded as a creation of Lumko. It certainly cannot be said that we were the 'father' of Gospel-sharing. The moment of birth was not with us. We were enthusiastic propagators, but not inventors." F. Lobinger, e-mail of July 22, 2004.



## Listening and Witnessing to the Word

### Discipleship in the Gospels\*

Santiago Guijarro Oporto



*Santiago Guijarro Oporto holds a licenciante in Theology and Philology as well as a doctoral degree in Biblical Theology from the Pontifical University of Salamanca. He also earned a licenciante with specialization in Sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. He teaches New Testament at the Pontifical University of Salamanca.*

### I. Discipleship in the Gospels

The Fifth Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean bishops held from 13-31 May at Aparecida (Brasil) was convened under the title “Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ: so that our people may have life in him.” The task that I now am going to undertake is that of presenting, in the clearest and most honest way possible, what the Gospels say about this first experience of discipleship.

I would like to say from the very beginning that we should not approach that experience attempting to reproduce it in all of its details, because in some ways it is unrepeatable. Our desire is to learn from it. For Christians of all times the Jesus movement and its first disciples is a normative reference; it is a historical reference, one tied to a situation and concrete circumstances different from ours. While we ourselves cannot prescind from the social conditions nor from the different cultural contexts in which we live out our faith, we can put into them the newness and freshness of that first experience of discipleship of those who knew Jesus and closely followed him, sharing in his work of announcing the arrival of God’s Reign.

#### 1. Uniqueness and Importance of following Jesus

I would like to start my presentation underlining the centrality of discipleship in the Jesus movement in all its diverse phases. In the first moment, that is, the Jesus movement before his death, what stands out, above all, is the uniqueness of the experience of discipleship lived out in the circle of his closest followers.

Jesus’ world knew many types of disciple relations. Perhaps the two most readily known to us due to their mention in the Gospels are the relations among the disciples of John the Baptist and among those of the

scribes and Pharisees. John the Baptist gathered around himself a group of disciples preparing for God’s final intervention in history.

The scribes and Pharisees also had their groups of disciples, to whom they taught the Mosaic Law and its correct interpretation.<sup>1</sup> It follows that discipleship was not something unknown to Jesus’ world; it was a relatively frequent occurrence that a teacher or a prophet would invite others to follow him. In fact, some traces of these existing contemporary forms of discipleship are also found in the Jesus movement, but the relationship that Jesus established with his followers has a series of unique characteristics. Even though I will speak more about them later on, right now I would like to point out two. The first is the concentration on Jesus. The goal of Jesus’ call was not for the disciples to prepare themselves for God’s intervention in history, nor to learn how to interpret the Law, but “to follow Jesus.” The second characteristic is that Jesus called them to be his collaborators and to participate in his same mission. These two characteristics make manifest the uniqueness of the discipleship experience as lived out in the Jesus movement before his death.<sup>2</sup>

After Jesus’ resurrection, his group of disciples did not dissolve, as was the case with other disciple groups. The Book of Acts tells us how the Pharisee Gamaliel, when speaking before the Sanhedrin, referred to various chieftains whose disciples dispersed after their deaths (Acts 5:34-39). In Jesus’ case, it did not happen that way, but his group of disciples continued on with new energies the project begun by him. The narrative of Acts, which gives a leading role to Peter and the Twelve in the birth of the Church in Jerusalem, responds to a historically reliable fact: the closest disciples continued the work of Jesus. It is rather surprising to see that the first addressees of his preaching, the rural Galilean population to whom he spoke his parables and whose sickness he healed, did not have a relevant role in the continuation of the movement begun by him. It was rather his closest disciples and the homes that received and supported him that continued on with his work. This important role played by the group of closest disciples gave to the nascent Christian movement a style that can be clearly called “disciple.”<sup>3</sup>



The centrality of discipleship in the Jesus movement makes “following him” a constitutive element for the Christian community and justifies our efforts to know better that primitive experience lived out by Jesus’ disciples.

## 2. Discipleship in the Jesus movement

The Gospels allow us a window through which we can see Jesus walking around Galilee together with his disciples. The vision is sometimes blurry but one can still make out the contours of the initial experience of following Jesus. We see Jesus and his closest disciples surrounded by other followers and sympathizers, and the crowds, which sometimes do not even let them rest or eat (Mk 6:31). They are part of a bigger movement which started when Jesus began to proclaim that the Reign of God was beginning to arrive (Mk 1:15). This is the framework in which that first experience of discipleship must be understood.

In looking at the human map of the Jesus movement we can distinguish three concentric circles. In the widest outer one, we find the rural residents of towns and villages, who gleefully listen to his teaching and are captivated by the signs that he performs. In this sense the movement begun by Jesus can be seen as a movement of the rural masses. Sociologically speaking, a movement is something more enduring than an uprising or a protest, and less than an organized party. It is a “mass movement” when it goes beyond extended family and village boundaries. And it is rural when the greater part of its members works the land. In agrarian societies they constitute the greater majority of the population.<sup>4</sup> The leaders of these types of movements, however, are not from the rural populace, but from a higher social stratum. They are artisans, priests or functionaries, people capable of planning and setting goals that go beyond their own subsistence.<sup>5</sup> As a matter of fact, Jesus was an artisan (Mk 6:3) and did not till the land, and many of his closest disciples, rather than being of rural stock, were functionaries (Levi) or small scale entrepreneurs, capable of executing a complex work as fishermen on Lake Galilee, spending a good part of their year transporting merchandise from one side of the lake to the other and capable of dealing with different peoples. These were the people who formed the closest circle to Jesus and shared with him in the work of announcing the good news to everyone.

In the middle circle is found the relatively largest group of disciples. Some of them have left everything behind to follow Jesus and more closely accompany him, as in the case of the two candidates who were proposed to replace Judas (Acts 1:21f.) or the women who attended to him while he was in Galilee and accompanied him to Jerusalem (Mk 15:40f.; Lk 8:1-3). Others are movement sympathizers; they have accepted

Jesus’ announcement and support his project without abandoning their homes or their daily occupations. Among them are Pharisees such as Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10), members of the Sanhedrin such as Joseph of Arimathea (Mk 15:42-47) or the family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, who housed them in Bethany whenever they went to Jerusalem (Jn 12:1-8; Lk 10:39-42). These sympathizers formed a network of families linked to the Jesus cause who lent him both support and hospitality.<sup>6</sup>



*Rembrandt: Jesus and his disciples*

Finally, we find the innermost circle, formed by the disciples who have left all to follow Jesus. Here is the group of the Twelve, which had a decisive importance in the Jesus movement before his death and in the stage immediately following his resurrection. The election and establishment of this group (Mk 3:13-19 par.) had a symbolic character for Jesus, as the number twelve makes clear reference to the twelve patriarchs and to the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus’ intention in forming this type of group around him was to show in a concrete way his intention to call Israel together before God’s imminent intervention in history. Jesus assigned these Twelve a central function in the movement he began: to be his collaborators in his mission of announcing the arrival of the Reign of God, performing the same types of signs that he did (Mk 10:7-13 and Q 10:1-12).<sup>7</sup>

Those who formed these three circles around Jesus can be considered his disciples, although in different ways. Jesus’ preaching and actions principally targeted those of the widest circle, the people, whom the circle of the closest disciples, the Twelve, served in a leadership function. To both the Twelve and the group formed by the intermediate circle of disciples and sympathizers, Jesus addressed a particular teaching. These teachings about the life style of a disciple and his/her relationship with Jesus were faithfully conserved by them after Jesus’ death, as these contain



guidelines on how to carry forward the movement he had begun. After his death the Jesus movement became a “disciple movement” that gave great importance to the teaching of Jesus about discipleship. Since then the community of Jesus’ disciples is a community of followers: those who follow after him, sharing in both his life and his destiny.

### 3. To be a disciple means “following after” Jesus

After viewing this human map in which three concentric circles have formed around Jesus, we now look at his teaching about discipleship. This is especially found in the words he addresses to his closest circles: that of the disciples and sympathizers, and that of the Twelve.

The first thing that we would like to be aware of in examining these words is that the origin of discipleship is found in Jesus’ call. The variety and the antiquity of the vocational accounts (Q, Mk and Jn) show that we are treating of an element that was characteristic for the Jesus movement. Thanks to these accounts we know that, in the majority of cases, it was Jesus who took the initiative, who called his disciples with an uncommon authority, and his call meant an intense attachment to him.<sup>8</sup> Jesus’ call was first and foremost an invitation to follow him (Lk 9:60; Mk 1:18; 10:28), to follow after him (Mk 1:17, 20). Consequentially in the discipleship traditions these expressions have a very rich meaning that includes the physical following but also goes beyond that dimension.

The Gospels reflect in a spontaneous way this first dimension of the following of Jesus, since the disciples literally accompany Jesus the whole time. Different from other types of discipleship at that time, discipleship with Jesus meant constant companionship. His disciples had not only to learn his teachings, but be witnesses to the actions in which God’s Reign, announced by Jesus, was being made present. This first dimension of discipleship also appears in the sayings tradition, principally in one of the beatitudes of Q: “Blessed are the eyes which see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it” (Lk 10:23 par.). To see and to hear was the disciples’ first task.

At the first level of following Jesus we can distinguish three aspects which help us to define the disciple relationship. In the first place the disciples are witnesses of the signs that Jesus performs and of how he conducts himself with those who seek him out. They do not do this as neutral or indifferent witnesses, but rather as his followers who are in this way learning how to act by accepting Jesus as their model and guide. In fact, Jesus not only commanded them to perform the same signs that he did, but he even instructed them as to how to perform them (Mk 9:28f.).

Secondly, the disciples listen to Jesus’ teaching and they themselves become the addressees of a unique teaching by accepting Jesus as their teacher. In almost all the scenes in which Jesus speaks to the crowds or instructs them, his closest disciples are by his side, functioning as witnesses of what he teaches and says to the crowds. In other scenes, they alone are the addressees of Jesus’ teaching, one generally related to the demands and consequences of following after him (Q 6:20; Mk 4:10-12; 9:33-37; 10:10f.).

Thirdly, Jesus initiates his disciples into the experience of God. Less attention has been given to this third aspect, but it is important because Jesus did not only speak to them about the importance of prayer and teach them how they had to pray (Mt 6:5-15, par.), but he also introduced them into the experience of an encounter with God, as the Transfiguration account readily reveals (Mk 9:1-8).<sup>9</sup>

Discipleship is defined on this first level as an intense and continual relationship with Jesus that implies recognizing him as model, teacher and mystagogue.

### 4. Whoever follows Jesus has to share his life style

To follow Jesus, to walk behind him, is also an existential attitude which means sharing in his life style, living as he lived. We should put on this level the demands of discipleship that appear in the vocation narratives as requirements for responding to his call. These demands are not determined by an ascetic ideal, nor are they in and of themselves a life program, but they are consequences of the fact of being invited to collaborate with Jesus. In order to share in his mission, it is necessary to share in his life style.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear in the vocation narratives that Jesus put some extremely radical conditions on his disciples. The most important of these was, without a doubt, breaking ties with home and family. Leaving their nets, abandoning their father, leaving behind their boat (Mk 1:16-20), standing apart from the tax collector’s booth (Mk 2:14), selling off properties (Mk 10:17-22), or living without a fixed residence or not even burying one’s own parent (Lk 9:57-60 par.) are all attitudes that point in the same direction: breaking ties with home. In Jesus’ world this existential rupture was very important, since home and family were the basic reference group, giving identity to the individual and conferring on him/her a place in society. His closest disciples are invited to abandon this reference group and substitute it with another, the group of disciples, which the Gospels at times describe as a “new family” (Mk 3:31-35; 10:28-30). In this new family the disciples will adopt a new life style, whose model will be Jesus’ life style.

The Gospels have preserved some of the characteristics of this life style, which provoked scandal and



rejection in his contemporaries: conflicts with his own family (Mk 3:20f., 31-35); its itinerant nature having no fixed domicile (Lk 9:58 par.), meals shared with publicans and sinners (Mk 2:15-17), lack of respect for some of the norms and religious practices such as fasting (Mk 2:18-20), Sabbath rest (Mk 2:23-28), or certain norms of ritual purity (Mk 7:1-15). This life style which Mark has brought together in a narrative form, also appears in the sayings tradition, in which we find some of the insults that the adversaries directed at Jesus because of his conduct (Mt 10:28; Lk 7:34 par.; Mt 19:12).

The Gospels also show how the closest disciples were acting in that same way. They had an itinerant life, following in his footsteps (Mk 1:18, 20; 2:14); they accompanied him in his meals with publicans and sinners (Mk 2:15); and, just as he did, they transgressed certain Jewish norms about religious practices (Mk 2:18, 23f.; Mk 7:2, 5). This way of acting frequently instigated negative reactions. The collections of controversies, such as the one found at the beginning of Mark's Gospel (Mk 2:1-3:6), bring together some of these reactions which placed the disciples in a socially uncomfortable position. The words of Jesus which invite them to put all their trust in God are well understood in this context (Lk 12:22-34 par.).

In Jesus' teaching these demands of discipleship and life style for his followers have a positive sense. It is not a matter of arbitrary impositions, but one of imitating God's way of acting.<sup>11</sup> Many of them invite a break with the structures of this world (family, religious group) to inaugurate a new life style more in accord with the imminent arrival of the Reign of God. The group of disciples thus becomes the seedling and anticipation of the Reign of God that Jesus was announcing. The novelty of this Reign is such that it is not possible to live according to its criteria without breaking with the structures of this world, since "no one can serve two masters" (Lk 16:13). The break with home and the other manifestations of Jesus and his disciples' countercultural behavior are in service of this goal: to incarnate prophetically the newness of the Reign of God.

##### **5. The disciples are called to share Jesus' mission**

From the very moment in which they were called by Jesus, the closest disciples knew that the ultimate finality of the call was to associate them with his own mission: "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mk 1:17). The time spent with him, sharing in his life style, was thus understood as a preparation stage for them to be able later to collaborate in the work of announcing God's Reign and making it present. In this way the mission is a constitutive element of the call and for the following of Jesus. But, how did Jesus understand this mission for which he sought out help from some of his disciples?

The sending forth of the disciples, as it currently appears in the Gospels, reflects in part the preoccupations of the communities that wrote them, while at the same time conserving a very ancient tradition that goes back to Jesus. This tradition was principally taken up in two groupings of independent sayings that have various instructions about the mission (Mk 6:7-13 and Q 10:1-12).<sup>12</sup> Even though the sayings contained in them were very probably pronounced in diverse circumstances, when they are brought together they reflect very well what Jesus' invitation to share in his mission implied. The breadth and meaning of this invitation can be glimpsed by observing the terms with which he designated those he sent forth, the images used to describe the mission entrusted to them, and who were the targeted recipients for this mission.<sup>13</sup>

The terms that Jesus used to refer to those that he sent did not come from either the religious or civil offices of his time, but from every day tasks. The disciples are called to be fishers (Mk 1:17), laborers (Mt 9:38) or pastors (Mt 9:36). These facts make the newness and originality of the Jesus movement manifest. For their part the images that describe the mission of the disciples (the harvest: Mt 9:37ff.; Mt 13:24-70; Rev 14:15; the catch: Mk 1:17; Jer 16:16) contain intense eschatological connotations and evoke an urgent mission with the definitive intervention of God in history as its horizon.

When he sent out the disciples, Jesus wanted the good news that God's promises were being brought to fulfillment to reach Israel. Matthew's Gospel is the one which most clearly limits the pre-Easter mission to the limits of Israel (Mt 10:5f., 23), but this same perspective is implicit in the importance that the Twelve had among Jesus' disciples. This group represented the seedling for the restoration of Israel. Within Israel, the preferential addressees of this mission were society's marginalized sectors, as is seen in their empowerment to perform exorcisms and healings. This way of understanding the mission supposes in actuality a break with the most rooted social boundaries. In their content and in their form, the mission charged by Jesus to his disciples has an inclusive character, which facilitated the first Christians welcome of non-Jews into their communities.

The element that brings together all of these features in the mission Jesus entrusted to his disciples is their relation to the imminent arrival of God's Reign. The urgency to make this message reach all of Israel through words and signs would explain why Jesus would count on the collaboration of his disciples; it would also explain the images that were used to speak about the mission. Finally, the inclusive nature of this Reign would justify the marginalized as the preferential addressees for this message.



Jesus sent out his disciples to make this good news present not only in their words, but principally by the way they acted. The mission instructions refer to three actions performed by the disciples which had special significance in Jesus' life: the casting out of devils, the healing of the sick and the sharing of his table (Mk 6:7-13; Lk 10:4-12). It was not enough to announce that God's Reign had drawn near but it had to be made visibly and concretely present. The actual casting out of demons, for example, was a sign of the accomplished victory over Satan, that God's Reign had begun to arrive (Mt 9:32-34; 12:22-30; Mk 3:22-27; Lk 11:14f., 17-23). For this reason the exorcisms as well as the healings and Jesus' open table fellowship hold such an important place in Jesus' action and in the sending out of his disciples.<sup>14</sup>

### 6. Whoever follows Jesus will share in his destiny

The disciples bonding with Jesus has its ultimate expression in the invitation to share in his own destiny. This dimension of discipleship is actually a consequence of the previous ones, since the fact that living as Jesus lived and announcing what Jesus announced would provoke the same opposition and rejection that he himself provoked.

The opposition to Jesus and his disciples appears in different forms in the Gospels. During his Galilee activity Jesus is in constant conflict with the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, who criticize his way of acting, his closeness to sinners, or the fact that he does not observe the Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples appear in these Galilean controversies as intimately united. In some cases the adversaries ask the disciples to explain Jesus' conduct (Mk 2:16: "Why does your teacher eat with sinners and tax collectors?") and in others that ask Jesus about the disciples' conduct (Mk 2:18: "Why do your disciples not fast?"). Jesus and his disciples appear united in a way of acting which identifies them and in the opposition that this way of acting unleashes.<sup>15</sup>

Opposition grew as the movement spread and it reached its most radical expression in Jerusalem. The ones who opposed it there were principally the chief priests who accused him of being irreverent toward the Temple and of even having announced its destruction (Mk 11:27-33; 14:45-65). This opposition and the discomfort it caused the governing authorities (Lk 13:31-33; Mk 15:1-15) led up to a death that in some way Jesus in the last stage of his life could have foreseen.

The temptations for a disciple are traced out in this horizon of failure and life threatening danger that test the strength of their discipleship. Jesus does not hide from them that to follow him they must accept his same destiny. The instructions that follow immediately upon

the passion announcements clearly explain to them the ultimate consequences of discipleship (Mk 8:34-38; 9:35-37; 10:41-45).<sup>16</sup> With them as well as the exhortation to become the servant and slave to others, he speaks about losing their own life and taking up the cross. The last of these sayings explicitly brings the two together, as he explains that the greatest service consists in handing over one's very life for others: "for the Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for all" (Mk 10:45). These demands of discipleship, like those of their initial response, are not arbitrary impositions, but consequences of following Jesus, only understood from their motivating choice: to "follow after" Jesus.

### 7. Some broad strokes about a Church of followers

We have intended to draw closer to that first experience of discipleship, guided by a well defined motivation: to learn from it in order to renew the life of our own communities. We already said at the beginning that it is not a matter of trying to reproduce an unrepeatable experience but of learning from it. For this reason we will conclude with some reflections in broad strokes about a church of followers.

In the first place, we have been able to establish the centrality of discipleship for the Jesus movement. This means that "discipleship" is the constitutive element of the Church and the "following after," the basic attitude of its members. But we have also seen that discipleship can be lived out in different ways. As a matter of fact, we can recognize in our own communities the same three concentric circles that we identified in the Jesus movement.



*Jesus heals a blind man (Codex Sinopensis)*

There is that wider circle of sympathizers who are interested in the Christian message and life style, although their commitment is weak and vacillating. There is a closer circle of more ardent, committed and constant followers. And finally, the circle of the closest and most committed followers, who dedicate themselves with great zeal to the pastoral task and exercise a function of leadership within our communities. Whoever forms part of these three circles can consider themselves disciples of Jesus, although in differing ways and degrees.

Secondly, we have seen that Christian discipleship expresses itself in dynamic terms. It consists of following after Jesus, an existential attitude in whose origin we find a call and whose destiny is a mission. The fact



that the beginning of discipleship starts with a call from God, reminds us that it is gift, placing it in the horizon of grace, far from any form of self will. At the same time, the fact that discipleship has the mission as its goal, makes us aware that “following after” Jesus can never be reduced to a narcissistic experience that closes us in upon ourselves, but we follow after him to share in his very mission.

Thirdly, we have established that following after Jesus implies an intimate relationship with him. To follow after him means to hear his teachings, contemplate his signs and allow oneself to be initiated into the experience of God. It also implies sharing in his life style. This is very characteristic of Christian discipleship, giving expression to its two axes: union with Jesus and surrender to the Reign that he announces. This configuration with Jesus (this is what it primordially means, to share in Jesus’ life style) is necessary in order to share in his mission, and both aspects make our Christian communities alive.

This configuring of their lives to that of Jesus will reach its ultimate consequences when the disciple comes to share in his destiny. Listen attentively to the question Jesus asks: “Do you also want to leave?” This identification tests our perseverance and reveals to us the real meaning of Jesus’ words to the disciples which invite them to deny themselves and take up the cross.

The Church is a community of the followers of Jesus. It is a pilgrim community, still in process. As disciples of Jesus, we are always on that road following after him. He is still alive today and continues to guide his community of disciples. If we have taken a closer look at this first experience of discipleship, it has only been to learn to recognize its tracks which continue to mark out for us today the way to the Reign of God and invite us to share with him in the precious task of making it present in our world.

## II. Disciples as hearers of the Word

We will continue now with our reflection about discipleship, but now from a particular perspective. We are going to stay with an aspect that is closely related to our commitment as agents in the biblical pastoral movement. The Participation Document for the Fifth CELAM Assembly mentions “listening” as an appropriate attitude for the disciple:

“The election and call of Christ ask for the ears of a disciple (cf. Is 50:4), that is with ears ready to listen and prompt to obey. In a society such as ours where the most noisy slogans go contrary to listening and obeying, the call of Christ is an invitation to center all of our

attention on Him, to invoke the Lord from our heart as Samuel did, ‘Speak, your servant is listening’ (1Sam 3:10), to perceive in the depths of our hearts the call that invites us to follow him” (no. 49).

The listening spoken about here is most of all the listening to the call. But, once a disciple has responded to it, and exactly for this very reason, he/she must become an attentive and assiduous hearer of Jesus’ word.

The connotations of a “disciple’s listening” in the Gospel narratives are both varied and rich. In each stage and in every situation this fundamental attitude acquires its own tonality. It is this richness that we would like to discover, since we know that our witness has always to be preceded by an attentive, contemplative listening. We are not the bearers of a news that belongs to us, but one that we receive in our listening. Paraphrasing the well know maxim of Saint Thomas (*Summa* II - II, 188, a. 6: *contemplata aliis tradere*), we can say that our mission as ministers of the Word consists in transmitting to others what we ourselves have already heard (*audita aliis tradere*).

To reflect the richness of the disciple’s own listening, such as it appears in the Gospels, I have selected four significant Gospel passages that form part of more ample instructions addressed to the disciples. Each one of them is taken from a different Gospel and each one of them underlines a particular aspect. I present them in an order that describes, in a certain way, a process:

In the first place, listening requires an “asceticism”, a certain renouncing of other things in order to give our full attention to Jesus (Lk 10:38-42)

Secondly, listening leads us to commitment in such a way that, should it be lacking, we cannot say that there has been a true listening (Mt 7:24-27)

Thirdly, listening frequently produces a disturbance in the disciple that leads him to conversion (Mk 9:30-37)

Finally, listening, in its deepest sense, consists in a spiritual discernment: it is a listening to the Spirit (Jn 14:25f.).

Next I am going to offer some hints for reflecting upon these different attitudes related to listening.

### 1. Lk 10:38-42: Listening as an ascetic act

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, “Lord, do you not care that my*



*sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”*

This passage belongs to the so called “journey section” in Luke’s Gospel. It is commonly accepted as the most original composition of this evangelist, in which he drew from various traditions (Mk, Q, SpLk). It is not about a physical journey but a spiritual path, a process of maturing. On it, Jesus instructs his disciples about diverse aspects of Christian life (the path). Jesus’ instruction refers principally to the Reign of God, its announcement, its realization in the midst of this world and its definite coming. The great metaphor for this Reign is the banquet to which all are invited (Lk 14). All throughout this long instruction, Jesus invites his disciples to listen to his word. In the selected passage this invitation is translated into a narrative piece in which we can find reflected the intended Gospel audience (as well as ourselves).

At the center of the scene we find the figure of Mary, seated at the feet of Jesus and listening to his word. Her attitude is criticized by her sister, but Jesus explains to her that “Mary has chosen the better part.” This passage has frequently been interpreted as the contraposition between the active and the contemplative life, but it really does not have anything to do with that. Mary represents the ascetic effort of someone who is able to grow in freedom from the ties of daily chores and worries in order to listen to the word of Jesus. It is a liberating asceticism, which requires a great personal freedom. What Jesus reproaches Martha about is her inability to free herself from her daily chores for even a moment to listen to the Word and in this way to be able to contextualize her daily occupations in another horizon.

This account is found only in Luke’s Gospel and reflects very well his community’s situation, harried by life’s many worries, with few spaces “to listen to the Word of Jesus.” It is a community that has inserted itself into the world, taking on its structures, and it runs the risk of losing Jesus’ Word as its fundamental reference. The exhortation to listen to this Word is a constant for this Gospel, but only here is it transposed into an account that has an enormous evocative force.

How does the exhortation that Luke makes in this narrative to his community resound in us?

What convictions can be deduced from it for our task as biblical promoting the listening to the Word?

## **2. Mt 7:24-27: Listening as commitment**

*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his*

*house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!*

This comparison is found at the closing of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). This long discourse, the first of Matthew’s Gospel, brings together diverse teachings of Jesus addressed to his disciples and to the crowds (Mt 5:1f.). Matthew composed it from a shorter collection of Jesus’ teaching, also known to Luke (Lk 6:20-49), and which probably comes from an older composition known as the “Q Document.” This ancient document had the form of a wisdom instruction. It began with a promise of blessing (the beatitudes), and continued on presenting the wise man or teacher’s instructions, and then concluded with an exhortation to put these teachings into practice. Matthew greatly enlarged this instruction because his community was living in a situation which required new teachings and explanations (especially as to how to interpret the Mosaic Law), but he kept the conclusion, putting “listening” in the horizon of commitment.

The context of this exhortation in Matthew’s Gospel to put Jesus’ teachings into practice is polemical. The disciples are invited to stand out over against the scribes and the Pharisees precisely in this aspect: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach” (Mt 23:2f.). Disciples that only listen to Jesus’ teachings can fall into the same trap. Their “listening” can make them experts, well versed in that teaching, but if they do not put it into practice, all their “listening” will not have served any useful end; they will become like the house built upon sand, which collapses when assailed by winds or rain.

The exhortation to put Jesus’ teachings into practice appears constantly in Matthew’s Gospel, probably because the community that he addresses had the temptation to listen without committing themselves. We find a similar exhortation in the letter of James (Jas 1:19-27) probably reflecting the same type of problematic. “Listening” without committing ourselves is, in fact, a real temptation for Christians of any time.

Do we find ourselves today facing this same temptation? How does this concretely present itself to us today?

What convictions can be deduced from this exhortation for our service as biblical animators promoting the listening to the Word?





### 3. Mk 9:30-37: Listening as the “way” to conversion

*They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”*

This teaching is part of a larger instruction in which Jesus shows the disciples the ultimate consequences of following in his footsteps. The way to Jerusalem is to suffer there his passion and, in this horizon, discipleship is defined as the “way” to the cross. Mk 8:27-10:52 is built up around three announcements of the passion, which beat out the rhythm for the walk to Jerusalem. After each announcement, the evangelist takes up the disciples’ reaction, one of upset, lack of understanding and even rejection. This reaction is quickly countered by Jesus with a more detailed instruction which does not speak of Jesus’ path but that of the disciples, that is, the attitudes that they must adopt as long as they are his followers. It is interesting to observe that the addressees for these teachings are the Twelve, his closest group of disciples. As responsible leaders for the community, he instructs them about service, self-forgetfulness and giving up of their own lives.

We especially look at the reaction of the disciples after hearing Jesus’ passion announcement: *“But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.”* This is a frequent reaction for a disciple who listens to Jesus’ Word with an open heart and does not try to manipulate it. This was an experience well known to Jeremiah and other prophets. The Word of the Lord can be bothersome because it changes plans, reformulates expectations, demands the denial of self, and in some cases, becomes unbearable. In John’s Gospel, after listening to the bread of life discourse, many of his disciples exclaimed *“This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?”* (Jn 6:60). It was so difficult for them that *“many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him”* (Jn 6:66). Listening reveals to the disciples God’s plans, and frequently, these are different from their own. Listening opens the disciple to a project that comes from outside of them.

It is not about an interior conversation, about weighing one’s thoughts and projects, but something that comes from outside and questions, disturbs and invites to conversion, to give a new orientation to one’s own life.

Do we hear such an invitation when we listen to the Word of God?

What should be the quality of our listening to avoid becoming comfortable? How can we move from comfort to obedience in listening to the Word?

### 4. Jn 14:25f.: Listening as spiritual discernment

*I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.*

John’s Gospel presents another important dimension in the act of listening. Whenever a disciple listens to the Word of Jesus, he or she is not alone. They are accompanied by the Spirit, the inner teacher, who “reminds” them and “explains” to them what Jesus has taught.

This saying of Jesus forms part of what is known as the “announcements of the Paraclete,” a series of pronouncements in which Jesus promises his disciples the aid and presence of the Spirit, who will be their defender, their support and their teacher. These announcements form part of the “farewell discourse” (Jn 13-17) which precedes the passion narrative. These chapters, somewhat Jesus’ spiritual “last will and testament,” contain teachings and recommendations which the disciples should keep very much in mind when he is no longer with them. His absence, however, will not be total because the Father will send the Holy Spirit in his name, one of whose functions will be to remind and explain what Jesus had taught them.

The community of disciples addressed by John’s Gospel was convinced of the deep teaching contained in Jesus’ words and actions. They knew that it was necessary to mull them over, return to listen to them in the light of recent events, to understand them in all of their depth. At the beginning of the Gospel, when Jesus chased the merchants out of the temple and announced its destruction and subsequent reconstruction, the evangelist comments: *“After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.”* (Jn 2:22). The memory of the disciples is guided by the Spirit. It is a “spiritual memory.” Every listening to the Word is a remembering in the Spirit, who leads the disciple into a deeper understanding. For this reason the Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* affirms that the tradition of the



words of Jesus that was received by the apostles “develops in the Church through the assistance of the Holy Spirit” (DV 8).

The secular practice of *lectio divina* has placed in the forefront this spiritual dimension of listening. The entire process that leads from reading to meditation, from meditation to prayer and from prayer to contemplation, happens under the guidance of the Spirit, the true inner teacher. This means that a disciple’s act of listening is not an enclosed interior self-centered act, but an openness to the Spirit who reminds us and shows us its meaning for the here and now. Thanks to the listening to this Word in the Spirit, the disciple can discover here light for life’s changing situations. The *colatio*, the conversation in which the monks would share the *lectio divina* that they did individually, reminds us that the Spirit is better listened to in the context of community, something so eloquently expressed in the practice of shared community readings done in a group or in ecclesial base communities (CEB’s).

What convictions do we gain when we realize that the Spirit promised to us by Jesus is the one who guides our listening to the Word?

(Translation: G. Banks)

\* Lecture given at the Fifth Biblical Pastoral Meeting of the CBF sub-region of Latin America and the Caribbean. The meeting which took place in Panama from July 11-15, 2006 was held in preparation of CELAM’s Fifth General Assembly at Aparecida.

<sup>1</sup> About different forms of discipleship in the world of Jesus, see: M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and his Followers*, Philadelphia 1977, p. 31-57.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Hengel, *Charismatic Leader ...* (see note 1), p. 76-108.

<sup>3</sup> On the nature of the Jesus movement and the role of the group of close disciples and the homes that received them for their work of continuity, see: S. Guijarro Oporto, “La familia en el movimiento de Jesús”, in: *Estudios Bíblicos* 61 (2003) p. 65-83.

<sup>4</sup> The external witnesses (Tacitus, Ann. 15,44; Flavius Josephus, Ant. 18,63), as well as the internal (the canonical Gospels) coincide in that the followers of Jesus were many and from different geographical areas.

<sup>5</sup> On the type of leadership Jesus exercised, see the excellent study by D. Fiensy, “Leaders of Mass Movements and the Leader of the Jesus Movement”, in: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 74 (1999) p. 3-27.

<sup>6</sup> A detailed exposition on the composition of this intermediate circle of Jesus disciples can be found in: J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus Volume Three: Companions and Competitors*. New York, 2001, p. 47-163.

<sup>7</sup> Although the existence of the Twelve as a group before Easter has sometimes been doubted, there are more conclusive arguments to illustrate this point. The initial horizon of the Jesus project is his relation to Israel. It is very possible that these were not the only recipients of the missionary charge, as Luke in fact recognizes when he relates these traditions with the Twelve (Lk 9:1-6) and another with a wider group of apostles (Lk 10:1-12). An ample and

pondered exposition about this and other problems raised by the traditions that refer to the Twelve can be found in: J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew...* (see note 6 p. 125-163).

<sup>8</sup> S. Guijarro Oporto, “Vocación”, in: F. Fernández Ramos (dir.), *Diccionario de Jesús de Nazaret*, Burgos 2001, p. 1303-1313.

<sup>9</sup> It cannot be forgotten that Jesus had an intense experience of God that he transmitted to his disciples. The religious experiences that the disciples had after Easter were understandable to them because Jesus had initiated them into this experience of God. There is more about this in chapter 2, entitled “La experiencia religiosa de Jesús” (p. 37-52) in my book *Jesús y el comienzo de los evangelios*, Estella 2006.

<sup>10</sup> About the life style that Jesus also shared with his closest disciples, see: S. Guijarro Oporto, *Fidelidades en conflicto. La ruptura con la familia por causa del discipulado y de la misión en la tradición sinóptica*, Salamanca 1998, p. 322-330.

<sup>11</sup> *Imitatio patris* (imitation of the father), which was in that society the most characteristic behavior pattern for a son to follow, is a recurring motif in the motivation of Jesus’ teachings to his disciples and the justification for his countercultural behavior; see: S. Guijarro Oporto, “Dios Padre en la actuación de Jesús”, in: *Estudios Trinitarios* 34 (2000) 33-69, p. 60-62.

<sup>12</sup> Various traditions about the post-Easter sending forth of the disciples exist (Mt 28:16-20; Lk 24:44-48; Jn 20:21), but reflected in them are the understanding that the evangelists’ communities had of their missionary task.

<sup>13</sup> The exposition that follows is based upon an analysis of the traditions that can be found in: S. Guijarro Oporto, “La misión de los discípulos de Jesús”, in: *Seminarios* 165 (2002) 333-355.

<sup>14</sup> About these three characteristic ways in which Jesus acted, see chapter 4, entitled “La actuación de Jesús” (p. 71-86), in my book *Jesús y el comienzo de los evangelios*, Estella 2006.

<sup>15</sup> For the hostility and dangers of following Jesus see: J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew...* (see note 6), p. 55-73.

<sup>16</sup> In their current form these passion announcements are a Christian composition. However, the second, the shortest to them all (Mk 9:31) could contain the Jesus’ word from which the other two develop; see J. Jeremias, *Theology of the New Testament: Jesus Preaching*, New York, p.125-327.



## Life of the Federation

### AFRICA

#### Tanzania: BICAM Workshop on Bible and Social Issues in Africa

From July 30 to August 3, 2007 the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) organized a Continental Biblical Apostolate Workshop in Dar Es Salaam at the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference (TEC) Secretariat.

Invited to the workshop were the national and regional coordinators for biblical apostolate, among them four archbishops and bishops as well as the contact persons of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) in Africa. Also present were the General Secretary of the CBF, Alexander M. Schweitzer, the Assistant to the General Secretary, Claudio Ettl, and members of the preparatory committee for the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the CBF from Latin America, Asia and Europe.

The theme "Bible and Social Issues in Africa" with the biblical motto: "Where is your brother...?" (Gen 4:9) focused on three major forthcoming events of the Catholic Church within the next two years: the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the CBF in Dar es Salaam in June/July 2008, the Bishops' Synod in Rome in October 2008 and the Second African Synod in Rome in October 2009.

Three papers were presented to help address the social issues in Africa in the light of the Word of God and prepare the above-mentioned events: "Cain and Abel had a Brother : a Reading of Genesis 4" by Fr. José Mokoto, pss, "Reconciliation in Biblical Perspective: the case of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25-33)", by Fr. Alfred Agyenta, and "Human Dignity in Biblical Perspective", by Fr. Henry Terwase Akaabiam.

Besides papers, reports – among others on the questionnaire for BICAM members regarding the *Lineamenta* for the Synod on the Word of God – and discussions in panel and in groups much attention was given to spiritual and liturgical activities. The opening mass was presided over by Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam. Each day began with a *lectio divina*, followed by a morning prayer and a mass. Bible-sharing and vespers marked the evening. A Lumko methodological input, the "Amos Programme" (see separate report within this BDV issue), turned out to be a very enriching experience as it carefully treated social issues in the spirit of the Gospel and the Church's teaching.



At the end of the workshop the participants put together their resolutions, commitments and recommendations. These form a kind of action plan towards the three upcoming Church events, the core of which reads as follows:

BICAM  
Fr. Moïse Adekambi  
SECAM Secretariat  
P.O.Box 9156 KA  
4 Senchi St.  
Airport Residential Area  
Accra  
Ghana  
Tel: +233-21-77 88 73;  
77 88 67/68  
Fax: +233-21-77 25 48  
E-mail: bicam\_gh@yahoo.com



### **On the forthcoming Church events relating to Africa in 2008 and 2009**

*The three great forthcoming events of the Church being a kairos for our local Churches, we the participants commit ourselves to the following:*

- ❑ *to consider the time before the Second African Synod (August 2007 to October 2009) years of the Bible, with intensive biblical pastoral ministry in our dioceses, including concrete actions such as: workshops, conferences, Bible-week, Bible-day, enthronement of the Bible, ecumenical Biblical meetings, etc.;*
- ❑ *to sensitize the faithful – bishops, priests, religious men and women, laity – about the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the CBF, the Synod on the Word of God in 2008 and the Second African Synod in 2009;*
- ❑ *to emphasize the centrality of the Word of God as a common and basic theme of the three events;*
- ❑ *to mobilize the people and get them involved in the Biblical Apostolate, with the families as target groups;*
- ❑ *to circulate and study the Lineamenta in the countries, dioceses, religious congregations and parishes;*
- ❑ *to translate the Lineamenta into local languages;*
- ❑ *to encourage Bible-sharing groups and the use of these three Bible-sharing methods: Amos Programme, Look-Listen-Love, and Life-Bible-Notes;*
- ❑ *to embark on a wide distribution of the Bible, in liaison with our National Episcopal Conferences, with the slogan: “One Christian, one Bible”.*

The Final Statement of the BICAM workshop can be found in full-length on the CBF homepage [www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org).

*Report: Moïse Adeniran Adekambi*

## **New Members**

The following new members recently joined the Federation:

### **Full Members**

#### **Conférence Épiscopale du Gabon**

Commission Biblique

B.P. 2146

Libreville

Gabon

Tel.: +241-72 20 73

Contact person: Bishop Mathieu Madega

#### **Conférence Épiscopale du Mali**

Secrétariat de l'Apostolat Biblique

B.P. 298

Bamako

Mali

Tel. +223-636 70 45

E-mail: [cyriaquediarra59@hotmail.com](mailto:cyriaquediarra59@hotmail.com)

Contact person: Fr. Cyriaque Diarra



### **Bishops' Conference of Scotland**

General Secretariat  
64 Aitken Street  
Airdrie  
Lanarkshire ML6 6LT  
Great Britain  
Tel: +44-1236-76 40 61  
Fax: +44-123-76 24 89  
E-mail: [gensec@bpsconfscot.com](mailto:gensec@bpsconfscot.com);  
Website: [www.bpsconfscot.com](http://www.bpsconfscot.com)

### **Associate Members**

#### **Irish School of Evangelisation (ISOE)**

'Oikos'  
9A Wyattville Park  
Dun Loaghaire  
Co. Dublin  
Ireland  
Tel.: +353-1-282 76 58  
E-mail: [isoe@exatclear.ie](mailto:isoe@exatclear.ie)  
Website: [www.esatclear.ie/~isoe](http://www.esatclear.ie/~isoe)

The Irish School of Evangelisation (ISOE) started in 1994. Its aim is to respond to the call for a New Evangelisation in the Catholic Church. Its mission is to promote and facilitate initiatives of Evangelisation in Ireland and "to bring people to a new or renewed living relationship with Jesus Christ". ISOE has its roots in the Charismatic Renewal Movement and runs various centres throughout Ireland offering retreats, courses, presentations and seminars.

#### **Centro BibliAteca San José del Amazonas (BibliAteca SJA) – Peru**

Apartado 216  
Iquitos  
Peru

The Center "BibliAteca SJA" offers among other things biblical literature for popular use and a thematic catalogue. The promotion of the Word of God is the main focus in the pastoral plan of the Vicariate San José del Amazonas and effects all areas, such as inculturation, indigenous pastoral ministry, Small Christian Communities, catechesis, family ministry, social ministry, religious education and biblical formation. The Center offers study materials for Sunday homilies (especially for parishes without permanent priests); it has started a CD service (biblical songs) and, in the near future, it will support a Catholic radio station in its daily programs.

#### **Anugraha Renewal Center – India**

Vazhoor P.O.  
Kottayam  
Kerala 686 504  
India  
Tel.: +91-481-245 62 17; 245 66 11  
E-mail: [anugrahaktm@sancharnet.in](mailto:anugrahaktm@sancharnet.in)

The Anugraha Renewal Center is a pioneer project of the Department of Pastoral Ministry and Evangelization of the Congregation of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), St.





Joseph Province in Kottayam, India. It fosters the holistic renewal of the people of God through a variety of residential programs, such as spiritual retreats, renewal programs of varying duration, academic seminars, theological and biblical courses, professional updating programs for those committed to serving society, health awareness programs as well as other cultural and interreligious events. ■

## Newsflash

- **The Mother of Life Center**, Quezon, Philippines celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. This Center offers training for catechists, Bible seminars, bibliodrama sessions etc. and has been a CBF associate member since 1987.
- The German northern and southern provinces of the Missionaries of the Divine Word, CBF associate members since 1974 resp. 1985, have united, with **Fr Bernd Werle, svd**, former head of the northern province now in charge of the entire province. There are 15 SVD religious houses in Germany with 364 inhabitants altogether, central administration is at St Augustin, Bonn.
- **Bischof Alberto Ablondi**, CBF President from 1984 to 1996, celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the priesthood on May 31, 2007. See hereto also the acknowledgment on the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in BDV 78, 2006, p. 24f.
- The international funding agency, **MISSIO**, celebrated the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their Aachen office on September 29-30, 2007. There were many celebrations held in honour of the occasion all over Germany, with events and campaigns tying up with this anniversary.
- On October 7 the **Marianists** celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their foundation in Austria in their church at Greisinghof, Tragwein and at the same time a celebratory mass was held in honour of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of their church at Greisinghof. The Marianists have been CF associate members since 1982.
- **The archdiocese of Bamberg**, CBF associate member since 1992, celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary by way of one whole anniversary year from November 1, 2006 to November 1, 2007. Celebratory masses and many and various events with spiritual impulses took place throughout the year.

**Sr Emma Gunanto, osu**, celebrated her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday on September 15, 2007. Sr. Emma has kept close bonds with the CBF since she attended a Dei Verbum course at Nemi in 1988. She founded the Angela Merici Biblical Center at Bandung, Indonesia after having attended this course. Sr. Emma is CBF coordinator for the subregion of South East Asia – thanks to her untiring service one of CBF's very active subregions. Many representatives of CBF members around the world know Sr. Emma from four CBF Plenary Assemblies and from the active exchange of information on the new website of this subregion <http://cbfsea.wordpress.com>. We greet Sr. Emma with our hearty congratulations and wish her good health and God's blessing!





## Positive News from Iraq: Award Goes to Iraqi Catholic Magazine; Fr. Pios Affas Released by Kidnappers

In July 2007 the Catholic press organ UCIP awarded the Catholic magazine *Al-Fikr Al-Masih* (Christian Thought) their gold medal, a prize awarded only every three years to an editor or to the editorial staff of a publication dedicated to “expressing freedom of speech in an outstanding manner”.

UCIP accorded this award stating that *Al-Fikr Al-Masih* was the most prominent example of the expression of freedom of speech in Iraq as the publication stands for “the voice of freedom and the promotion of universal human values”. The magazine was first published in 1964 and Fr. Pios Affas, Director of the Biblical Centre at Mossul, a CBF member, has been its editor for the last 30 years. UCIP brought to attention the fact that the editorial staff of *Al-Fikr Al-Masih* had promoted the cause of freedom of speech from their first issue on and “this in an atmosphere not generally conducive to such principles”.

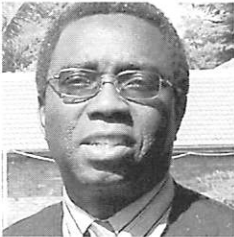
All the more shocking then the news on October 13 that Fr. Pios and another Syro-Catholic priest had been kidnapped in Mossul on their way home from a funeral. Thus a time of hope and prayer began for the world-wide family of CBF until on October 21 we received the news that both priests had been released by their captors. Our prayers had been answered and we all had reason to give thanks to God once again for His mercy. These dramatic events document once more the suffering of the Iraqi people and the very difficult circumstances in which Christians have to live in Mesopotamia. ■





## The Amos Programme – Reading the Bible in the Context of Modern Life

*Gabriel Afagbegee, svd/Chrysostome Kiyala, svd*



*Gabriel Lionel Afagbegee, svd, a native of Ghana, was parish priest in Botswana from 1983 to 1991. After having spent three years in the Philippines he took up the responsibility of Director of Kanamo Centre in Botswana in 1994. In 2001 he was appointed Director of the Lumko Institute, South Africa.*

*Jean Chrysostome Kiyala Kimbuku, svd, from the Democratic Republic of Congo holds BA degrees in Philosophy and Theology from the Urbaniana, Rome and from Tangaza College, Nairobi, Kenya. At present he is a parish priest in the diocese of Tzaneen, South Africa, and at the same time part-time student studying for an MA degree in Religious Education with specialization in pastoral theology at St. Augustine College of South Africa.*



*Amos was a prophet of Israel who, inspired by God's Spirit, stood up against the injustice of his time. In the same way, the Amos Programme aims at waking up Christian communities and helping them to solve the concrete problems of daily life which are tormenting them.*

*The Amos Programme was developed by the LUMKO Institute, a long-time CBF member, and is meanwhile practised all over Africa by Small Christian Communities and other socially active groups. This method of Gospel Sharing should be used by groups which are familiar with the well-known basic Seven Step Method; it is also appropriate for youth groups and religious education at schools.*

### I. Introduction: Amos and our reality

#### Amos and his time

Amos was a shepherd in the country of Judah who was called by Yahweh to "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (Amos 7:15). Amos, born in the Southern Kingdom, was sent by God to prophesy in the Northern Kingdom.

The kingdom of David and Solomon had been divided into two parts: The Northern Kingdom called Israel and its capital Samaria, the Southern Kingdom called Judah and its capital Jerusalem. At the time of Amos (about

760-750 BC) the people lived in peace because their traditional enemy, Syria, had been weakened through its fighting with Assyria. King Jeroboam in the Northern Kingdom took the opportunity to attack the people on the other side of the river Jordan, an area which had formerly belonged to Israel. These military victories awoke dreams of greatness among the people (Amos 6:13f.). Amos, however, warned the people to beware of this time of calm. A mortal threat was hanging over Israel: the Assyrian army was approaching and might yet attack.

Peaceful times were good for the economy. Business connections with foreign lands increased internal trade, bringing prosperity to the country. In Samaria, the capital, the rich flaunted their wealth. They built their houses with dressed stone and filled them with luxury items, such as beds inlaid with ivory, plush cushions, blankets and carpets. They dreamt of spending their time lolling on their beds or sprawling on their divans, dining on choice lamb and stall-fattened veal. They listened to instrumental music, drank wine by the bowlful and anointed themselves with the finest oils (Amos 3:12; 6:4-7).

With the economic boom the old solidarity between the members of Yahweh's Covenant People gave way to exploitation of the poor by the rich and powerful. The latter oppressed the righteous and resorted to bribes (Amos 5:12). The merchants tampered with the scales (Amos 8:5f.) and the judges no longer acted in a just manner (Amos 5:7).

The rich justified their consciences by building a beautiful temple to Yahweh at Bethel, the king's sanctuary (Amos 7:13). They paid the prophets and priests to support a sumptuous religious cult and felt that God was thus with them protecting them from disaster (Amos 9:10). The poorer people, however, were more interested in the popular traditional gods of Canaan, the Baals and Astartes, who gave them rain in due time, fruitfulness at the harvest and security while going about their daily business.

Religion was as perverted as society! Amos compares Israel to a virgin who is destined to be married to Yahweh. But she declines the invitation and as a result will die young and without descendants, double misfor-





tune for every girl at that time (Amos 5:1-2). The main reasons for this approaching death were lack of justice and religious hypocrisy (Amos 5:7-15; 21-24).

Amos was displeased to see what was happening, especially the social injustices. Yahweh could not allow exploitation of the poor or religious decadence. As a lion (Amos 3:8) He roared; His words were strong and direct; He denounced social injustices.

### Our situation today

Today, the call to be a prophet comes unexpectedly to many of us Christians because we do not realise that our Baptism and Confirmation challenges us to do something about the injustices around us. The Second Vatican Council has taught that "Forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design" (*Gaudium et Spes* 29).

Some of us may feel like "reluctant prophets", but the call to work for a better society and a world in which all can grow to their full human potential remains the challenge to all Christians today. The "Amos Sessions" contained in this book are an effort to help do that.

The Amos Programme tries to help people see that in the daily difficulties of life we can still have choices and, indeed, it further helps us to appreciate that if we profess our faith in Jesus Christ, then we are bound by conscience to do something about the daily problems we encounter.

The starting point of the programme is a real-life situation, followed by a series of questions that try to deepen the understanding of the particular life situation and search for the root causes. Then one is invited to see the problem through the eyes of our faith: What is God saying in this situation? How can Scripture enlighten us? What does our faith dimension bring to the problem? Finally, there is a call to action. What can we do? How can we plan our action?

## II. The four steps of the Amos Programme



### Step 1: Look at life

Look at real issues of life – real-life experiences in the parish, local community or beyond the immediate community. What is dealt with here are "burning issues/problems" that affect the daily lives of people and not abstract issues/problems, i.e. issues that people are actually experiencing and struggling with.

In the parish, local community or beyond, what are the things that make people feel happy, joyful and hopeful?

In the parish, local community or beyond, what are the things that make people feel angry, sad and frustrated?

Justice is about people, what they are experiencing and how they are feeling. If we ask people to talk about the injustices in life, this may prove too abstract. But if we ask people what makes them happy or angry, in other words their emotions and feelings, then we touch on the issues that really affect their lives, their burning issues.

### Code

The use of a code which could be a story, a play, a drawing can be helpful to look at the problem or issue. The code must, however, be precise and clear, to the point, so that the issue being highlighted must be understood immediately. It must raise only one issue. The code should not be confusing or attempt to give answers. The code needs to show the problem as clearly as possible.



### Step 2: Why does this happen?

The concern here is with diagnosis, trying to understand the root causes of the problem, in order to be able to reach a solution, which will hopefully provide an answer to the problem.

A series of questions which have proved helpful and are often asked are "why, who, where, and what" (questions), in order to come to a deeper understanding of the issues.



### Step 3: Our Christian tradition: Scripture, social teachings of the Church or Bishops' statements

As Christians we have a mandate from our baptism to try to challenge and change unjust situations affecting people's lives. To achieve this we have a wealth of resources at our disposal. The Bible, the social teaching of the Church and the Bishops' statements are rich sources of our Christian heritage. So having looked at the root cause of the problem we have chosen (step two) we are now invited to view the problem from our faith position/perspective.

The following questions may help in making sure the choice of biblical texts or Church teaching texts are appropriate:

Is the biblical text appropriate?

Are you led to understand the meaning of the biblical text?



- Are you led to connect the text from Scripture with the issue?
- Does the Church-teaching shed new light on the issue?
- Have the bishops of the country spoken on the issue?



**Step 4: Plan with firmness and love**

In this step the decision is made as to what can be done about the issue. There are six sub-steps to be followed. No need to rush through them. We make sure we deal with each step thor-

oughly so that we eventually come up with a Gospel-based, practical plan of action:



**1. Formulate the problem**

Put into simple words a concrete objective which we can actually attain. Write it down on a board or news-print.



**2. Brainstorm**

Suggest as many solutions as possible, even if they sound impractical, or even stupid. Do not discuss at this stage.



**3. Discuss a few solutions**

Choose what seem like the most Christian and practical solutions. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each.



**4. Discuss one single solution**

Decide which one of the possible solutions you wish to work on.



**5. Appoint**

Decide who is going to do what, when, how and where. Be very practical and precise, write down what has been agreed on.



**6. Evaluate**

Arrange a place and time when you will report back on the action taken. If it was successful, talk about why and how you acted. If it was not successful, discuss what went wrong and how you could change your plan next time. Do not give up!

**III. Example of an Amos Programme session: The gravy train**

**Step 1: Look at life**

*Read the following story.*

**The gravy train**

"I am fed up with all these politicians," complained Mama Philippa. "They either become big bosses and push people around, or they do nothing at all. And look how many have been accused of embezzling money – our money, that is." Her neighbour Lebohang agreed: "As you know, I belong to another political party, but it is just the same. Our leaders talk big in public but do nothing. They seem to be in the job for the money and the big cars they drive around in. All they're interested in is riding the gravy train. They don't seem to realise that it is our taxes they are enjoying."

Tom interrupted her. "It's not as bad as that. We need politicians to talk out, to raise the issues of the people. I don't mind if they're paid well. They deserve it. Without them the workers in the public sector would do nothing at all. They need guidance in their work and the politicians provide that." Then Mpho spoke. "I don't think that all politicians are useless. I know some are, but not all of them. Even those who begin by not doing much often see the many needs of the people and start to contribute to a better nation."

Lebohang insisted, however, that they were all useless and that everybody would be better off without them.

*Form buzz groups of 2-3 and answer the following questions:*

Do you agree with any of the above speakers? If so, which ones?

Do you think that Lebohang is justified in carrying no hope?

What do you think of Tom's position?

*Share your responses in plenary.*

**Step 2: Why does this happen?**

*Form groups of 4-5 and discuss some of the following questions:*

What has been your experience in dealing with your local administration and politicians?

Do you know your local political representative?

Which responsibilities do the locally elected persons have towards the community?

Do you agree that politicians should be paid well? Why? Why not?

Why are many politicians seen as using the job for their own gain?

What responsibilities has the community got towards the elected representative and administration?



How can you as a community, monitor the work of your local representative and local administration?

Who can you complain to if the administration is not satisfactory?

What can be done about corruption?

*Share your responses in plenary. You may like to record these on newsprint.*

### **Step 3: Our Christian tradition**

*Return to your groups. Create a prayerful atmosphere by placing a lighted candle in the centre. Read the following Scripture text aloud twice:*

Ezekiel 34:1-10: Abuse of leadership

*Individual participants read aloud prayerfully a phrase or sentence in the text which has touched them. Then share your opinions on the following questions:*

To whom is this text addressed?

List some of their actions which are condemned.

What is God's response to their actions?

Where will hope come from?

What does this text say about the role of politicians in our society??

*Record your responses in writing. These can then be shared in plenary. Now read the following text from Church teaching:*

### **Good politicians and good administration**

We acknowledge that the greatest challenge of bringing about justice and peace in Africa consists in a good administration of public affairs in the two interrelated areas of politics and the economy. Certain problems have their roots outside the continent of Africa and therefore are not entirely under the control of those in power or of national leaders. But the synodal assembly acknowledged that many of the continent's problems are the result of a manner of governing often stained by corruption. A serious re-awakening of conscience linked to a firm determination of will is necessary in order to put into effect solutions which can no longer be put off.

"On the political front, the arduous process of building national unity encounters particular problems in Africa where most of the states are relatively young political entities. To reconcile profound differences, overcome long-standing ethnic animosities and become integrated into international life demands a high degree of competence in the art of governing. That is why the Synod prayed fervently to the Lord that there would arise in Africa holy politicians – both men and women –

and that there would be saintly Heads of State who profoundly love their own people and wish to serve rather than be served." (Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* 111)

*Discuss the following views from the text. You may like to choose others.*

"The greatest challenge ... in Africa consists in a good administration of public affairs."

"Many of the continent's problems are the result of a manner of governing often stained by corruption."

"A high degree of competence in the art of governing."

"That there would arise in Africa holy politicians – both men and women – and that there would be saintly Heads of State."

*Record a summary of your findings in writing. Now meet in plenary. The report-back could take two forms. Either each one reports back verbally and someone writes a summary on the board. Or each group has already written its summary on newsprint and now presents that to the whole group. Allow time for general discussion.*

### **Step 4: Plan with firmness and love**

*In this step you decide what you can do about the issue. Do not rush through the following steps. Make sure that you deal with each step thoroughly so that you eventually come up with a Gospel-based and practical plan of action.*

formulate the problem

brainstorm

discuss a few solutions

discuss one solution

appoint

evaluate

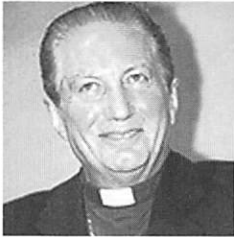
For further information about the Amos Programme and twelve more sessions refer to the following publication of the Lumko Institute: *Social Problems – What Can We Do?* (Social Awareness Series 24B), by Fr. Anselm Prior, ofm (ISBN 1-874838-31-3).



## Ardent Testimony on Jesus

### On the Book *Jesus of Nazareth* by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI

Carlo Maria Martini



Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, sj, was rector of the Pontifical Biblical Institute from 1969 to 1978 when he was appointed chancellor of the Pontifical Gregorian University. In 1979 he was appointed Archbishop of Milan and has been archbishop emeritus since 2002. He now lives in the Holy Land.

#### 1. Who is the author of this book

The author of this book is Joseph Ratzinger, who, from the 1950s on was a professor of Catholic Theology in different German universities and who was therefore aware of all the advances as well as the various vicissitudes of historical research on Jesus, a research that was developing even among Catholics in the second half of the past century. The author has now become Bishop of Rome and Pope under the name of Benedict XVI. We have here already a possible ambiguity: is this the book of a German professor and a committed Christian, or is it that of a Pope, with its magisterial weight?

The question is posed already from the title page, where the two names are juxtaposed: Joseph Ratzinger and Benedict XVI, although more discreetly in the French than in the Italian edition. As it happens, the papal name occupies two lines of the title page in the Italian version and only one in the French. It would perhaps have been better to omit mention of the Pope altogether on the title page of the book. But as to the substance of the question, the author himself writes very frankly in his foreword: "It goes without saying that this book is in no way an exercise of the magisterium, but is solely an expression of my personal search 'for the face of the Lord' (cf. Ps 27:8). Everyone is free, then, to contradict me. I would only ask my readers for that initial goodwill without which there can be no understanding" (p. xxiiiif.).

I am prepared to extend this goodwill, but I also think that it will not be easy for a Catholic to contradict what is written in this book. I will nevertheless attempt to reflect on it in a spirit of liberty. The more so, because its author is not an exegete, but a theologian; and although he clearly knows his way around in the exegetical literature of his time, he has not done first-hand work, for example, on the critical text of the New

Testament. In fact, he almost never cites textual variants, nor does he discuss the relative quality of the manuscripts. In text-critical matters, he simply accepts the conclusions the majority of exegetes regard as valid. This absence of textual notations makes it difficult, e.g., to understand exactly what is meant by the words on page 179 a propos of Deuteronomy 32:8: "A recent variant of Deuteronomy 32:8, which has become the generally received version, runs as follows: 'When the Most High (...) separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel'", etc. As the Italian edition puts it: *La piu recente variante di Dt 32, 8, accolta poi generalmente, dice* (The most recent variant of Deut 32:8, which has since become generally accepted, says). The French edition has similar wording. None of these formulations is accurate. The allusion here is probably to the variant "angels of God", which is found in a number of Qumran fragments, in the Septuagint Bible and in other versions. But the Hebrew text is not a version, and its witnesses testify unanimously in favor of the text "sons of Israel." On the other hand, one is pleased to note that a number of mistakes in the Italian edition are corrected in the other editions, for example on page 195, where one reads, correctly, "I R" (I Kings), while in the Italian edition "2 R" is found. I note in passing that the explanation given here (p. 171 in the English) for the expression: "And he appointed (or, made) twelve" in Mark 3:14 as an expression derived from the Old Testament for the investiture of priests is not convincing, because, in the two places cited (1 K 12:31 and 13:33), it is a question of the institution of illegitimate priests, and I am not aware that the expression is employed elsewhere in the Greek Bible in the same sense, above all in places where the ordaining priests for a legitimate service is involved.

#### 2. What is the real subject of Joseph Ratzinger's book?

What is his topic? While the actual title of the book is *Jesus of Nazareth*, in my opinion, a more accurate title would be *Jesus of Nazareth yesterday and today*. The fact is that the author moves with ease from consideration of facts pertaining to the life of Jesus to the impact of his person on subsequent centuries and on our Church today. The book is thus full of allusions to contemporary questions.

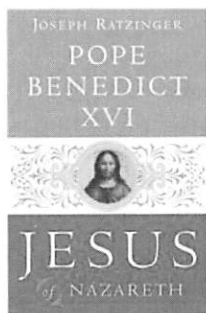


For example, when he speaks of the temptation in which Jesus is offered dominion over the whole world, the author affirms that "(i)ts true content becomes apparent when we realize that throughout history it is constantly taking on new forms". Thus, "(t)he Christian empire attempted at an early stage to use the faith in order to cement political unity. (...) The powerlessness of faith, the earthly powerlessness of Jesus Christ, was to be given the helping hand of political and military might. This temptation to use power to secure the faith has arisen again and again in varied forms throughout the centuries" (p.39-40).

This type of reflection on the history of the time after Jesus and on current issues gives the book a breadth of vision and a flavor that other books on Jesus, preoccupied as they are with a focused and meticulous discussion of the events of his earthly life, do not have.

The author thus willingly cites from the Fathers of the Church and the ancient theologians. For example, when commenting on the Greek term *epiousios*, he cites Origen, who says that, in the Greek language, this term "does not occur anywhere else in Greek, but that it was coined by the Evangelists" (p. 153). For the interpretation of the petition of the Our Father "And lead us not into temptation", he recalls the interpretation of Saint Cyprian, who clarifies: "the enemy can do nothing against us unless God has allowed it beforehand, so that our fear, our devotion and our worship may be directed to God – because the Evil One is not permitted to do anything unless he is given authorization" (p. 163).

As for the history of Jesus, the book is incomplete, because it considers only events starting with the Baptism, the temptations, the discourses, the disciples, the great images of Saint John, Peter's confession of faith and the Transfiguration, with a concluding chapter on Jesus' self-referential statements.



But the author frequently takes a text or an event in the life of Jesus as the starting point for a discussion on its implications for the generations to come and for our own generation. The book thus becomes a meditation on the historical figure of Jesus and on the consequences of his coming for the present time.

He shows that, without the reality of Jesus, a flesh and blood reality, "the word loses its power. Christianity becomes mere doctrine, mere moralism, an intellectual affair, but it lacks any flesh and blood" (p. 243).

The author is very careful to anchor the Christian faith in its Jewish roots. Jesus, in the words of Moses, is the

"prophet like me from among you (whom the Lord your God will raise up for you) (...) him you shall heed" (Deut 18:15) (p. 3). Now Moses spoke with the Lord. And Israel can hope in a new Moses, who will speak with God as a man speaks with a friend, but to whom it will not be said, as it was to Moses, "You cannot see my face (Exod 33:20). The new Moses "will be granted what was refused to the first one – a real, immediate vision of the face of God, and thus the ability to speak entirely from seeing" (p. 5). This is what the Prologue of the Gospel of John says: "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1:18). "We have to start here if we are truly to understand the figure of Jesus" (p. 6). It is in this interlocking of historical insights and insights of faith, where each of these fields maintains its dignity and its freedom, without mixture or confusion, that we find the proper method of the author, of which we will speak in a moment.

### 3. What are his sources?

Joseph Ratzinger does not treat his sources directly, as do many works of the same genre. Perhaps he will tell us something about these at the beginning of the second volume, before treating the Gospels of the infancy of Jesus. But it is clear that he in fact follows closely the four Gospels and the canonical writings of the New Testament. He thus initiates a lengthy discussion on the historical value of the Gospel of John, in which he moves with freedom, rejecting the interpretation of Bultmann, accepting in part that of Martin Hegel and critiquing that of certain Catholic authors – all of this by way of expounding his own synthesis of the data, which closely follows that of Hengel, but with a different equilibrium and order, to conclude that the Fourth Gospel "does not simply transmit a stenographic transcript of Jesus' words and ways; it escorts us, in virtue of understanding-through-remembering, beyond the external into the depth of words and events that come from God and lead back to him" (p. 235). I can imagine that not everyone will recognize as a view he would share the description he gives of the author of the Fourth Gospel, when he says: "In the light of current scholarship, then, it is quite possible to see Zebedee's son John as the bystander who solemnly asserts his claim to be an eyewitness (cf. Jn 19:35) and thereby identifies himself as the true author of the Gospel" (p. 225).

### 4. What is his method?

From all of this flows clearly the method of the work. It is altogether contrary to what has recently been called, especially in works of the Anglo-Saxon and American world, "the imperialism of the historical-critical method" (cf. for example, Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotiation*, 1993). Ratzinger acknowledges that this method is important, but that it runs the risk of dissecting the text and rendering incomprehensible the realities to which



the text refers. He sets out to read the different texts within the purview of their relationship to the whole of Scripture. In this way, “you can see it (the developing process of biblical revelation) moving in a single overall direction; you can see that the Old and New Testaments belong together. This Christological hermeneutic, which sees Jesus Christ as the key to the whole and learns from him how to understand the Bible as a unity, presupposes a prior act of faith. It cannot be the conclusion of a purely historical method. But this act of faith is based upon reason – historical reason – and so makes it possible to see the internal unity of Scripture. By the same token, it enables us to understand anew the individual elements that have shaped it, without robbing them of their historical originality” (p. xix). I have made this long citation in order to show how, in the thought of the author, reason and faith are mutually inclusive and overlapping spheres, each with its proper rights and status, without confusion or mutual suspicion. He thus rejects the opposition between faith and history, convinced as he is that the Jesus of the Gospels is an historically intelligible and coherent figure, and that the faith of the Church cannot do without a certain historical foundation.

All of this means in practice that, as he himself puts it on page xxi, “I trust the Gospels”, which he does while integrating into his overall system what has been learned from modern exegesis. And from all of this emerges a real Jesus, an “‘historical’ Jesus in the strict sense of the word” whose figure “is much more logical and, historically speaking, much more intelligible than the reconstructions we have been presented with in the last decades” (p. xxii).

### 5. How to judge the book as a whole?

The author is convinced that “(u)nless there had been something extraordinary in what happened, unless the person and the words of Jesus radically surpassed the hopes and expectations of the time, there is no way to explain why he was crucified or why he made such an impact”, so that his disciples in time came to acknowledge his title to the name which the prophet Isaiah and the entire biblical tradition had reserved to God alone (cf. p. xxii).

Through the application of this method to the reading of the sayings and discourses of Jesus, which makes up several chapters of the book, the author reveals his conviction that “the deepest theme of Jesus’ preaching was his own mystery, the mystery of the Son in whom God is among us and keeps his word” (p. 188). In particular, this is as true of the Sermon on the Mount, to which two chapters are devoted, as it is of the message of the parables and of the other great discourses of Jesus. As the author says when he takes up the Johannine question, that is to say the question of

the historical value of the Gospel of John, and especially of the words the Evangelist puts in the mouth of Jesus, which are so different from those of the Synoptic Gospels, “the mystery of Jesus’ oneness with his Father is ever present and determines everything, even though it remains hidden beneath his humanity” (cf. p. 218).

Finally, to say it in a nutshell, true to the very nature of the written word of God, we must “read the Bible, and especially the Gospels, as an overall unity expressing an intrinsically coherent message, notwithstanding their multiple historical layers” (p. 191).

If this is the reading method of the author, what are we to think of the overall success of the work, beyond the fact that numerous copies have been sold throughout the world – which, in the final analysis, is but a feeble indicator of the book’s real value?

The author confesses that this book “has undergone a long gestation” (p. xxiv and cf. p. xi). If he began working on it during a vacation in 2003, the book is nevertheless the mature product of a meditation and study that have occupied an entire lifetime. From this he has drawn the conclusion that Jesus is not a myth, that he is a man of flesh and blood, a fully real presence in history. We can choose to follow the paths he took. The witness of his disciples does make it possible for us to hear his words. He did die and rise again.

This book is then a magnificent and ardent testimony on Jesus of Nazareth and on his significance for the history of humanity and for the perception of the true character of God. It is always comforting to read witnesses of this kind. In my opinion, it is a very beautiful book; it reads with a certain ease, and helps us better to understand at once both Jesus, Son of God, and the great faith of the author. Nor is the book’s value limited to the intellectual side. It shows us the way of the love – of God and of neighbor, as he puts it very well in explaining the parable of the Good Samaritan: “Now we realize that we are all in need of the gift of God’s redeeming love ourselves, so that we too can become ‘lovers’ in our turn. Now we realize that we always need God, who makes himself our neighbor so that we can become neighbors” (p. 201).

It had been my intention to write a book on Jesus myself toward the end of my life, as a conclusion to my works on the texts of the New Testament. It now seems to me that this book of Joseph Ratzinger fulfils my own desires and expectations, and I am very happy that he has written it. It is my hope and prayer that the joy I experience in reading it will be shared by many.

(Translation: L. Maluf)



## Pope Benedict Announces the Pauline Year

During the first vespers of the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul Pope Benedict XVI announced an important initiative of the Catholic Church, the Pauline Year, a Jubilee Year dedicated to the memory of St Paul, the "first Christian theologian" on the 2,000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. This Jubilee Year will commence 28 June, 2008 and end on 27 June, 2009. In the following please find an excerpt from the Holy Father's announcement:

*Dear brothers and sisters, as in early times, today, too, Christ needs apostles ready to sacrifice themselves. He needs witnesses and martyrs like St Paul. Paul, a former violent persecutor of Christians, when he fell to the ground dazzled by the divine light on the road to Damascus, did not hesitate to change sides to the Crucified One and followed him without second thoughts. He lived and worked for Christ, for him he suffered and died. How timely his example is today!*

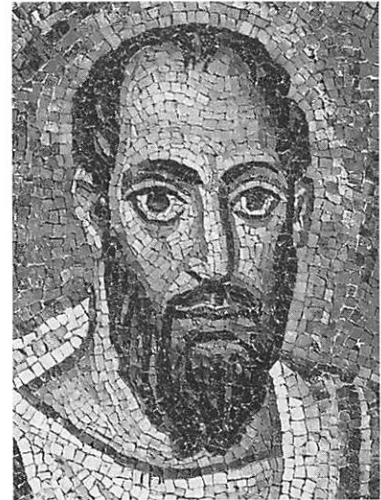
*And for this very reason I am pleased to announce officially that we shall be dedicating a special Jubilee Year to the Apostle Paul from 28 June 2008 to 29 June 2009, on the occasion of the bimillennium of his birth, which historians have placed between the years 7 and 10 A.D.*

*It will be possible to celebrate this "Pauline Year" in a privileged way in Rome where the sarcophagus which, by the unanimous opinion of experts and an undisputed tradition, preserves the remains of the Apostle Paul, has been preserved beneath the Papal Altar of this Basilica for 20 centuries.*

*It will thus be possible to have a series of liturgical, cultural and ecumenical events taking place at the Papal Basilica and at the adjacent Benedictine Abbey, as well as various pastoral and social initiatives, all inspired by Pauline spirituality.*

*In addition, special attention will be given to penitential pilgrimages that will be organized to the Apostle's tomb to find in it spiritual benefit. Study conventions and special publications on Pauline texts will also be promoted in order to make ever more widely known the immense wealth of the teaching they contain, a true patrimony of humanity redeemed by Christ.*

*Furthermore, in every part of the world, similar initiatives will be implemented in the dioceses, shrines and places of worship, by Religious and by the educational institutions and social-assistance centres which are named after St Paul or inspired by him and his teaching.*



*Lastly, there is one particular aspect to which special attention must be paid during the celebration of the various moments of the 2,000<sup>th</sup> Pauline anniversary: I am referring to the ecumenical dimension. The Apostle to the Gentiles, who was especially committed to taking the Good News to all peoples, left no stones unturned for unity and harmony among all Christians.*

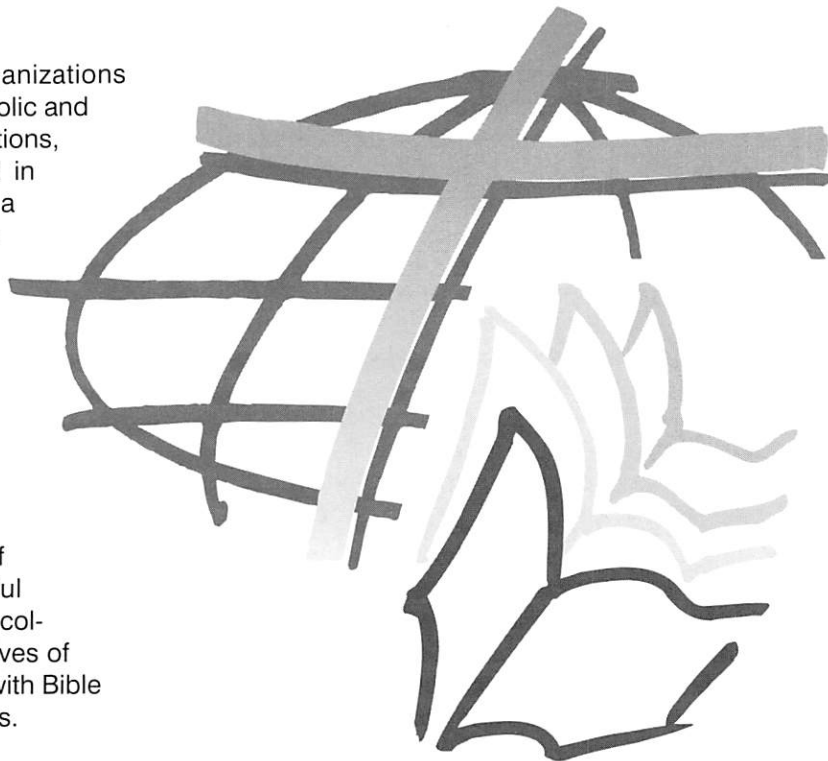
*May he deign to guide and protect us in this bimillennial celebration, helping us to progress in the humble and sincere search for the full unity of all the members of Christ's Mystical Body.*

**Please go to the website [www.annopaolino.org](http://www.annopaolino.org) to find further information on the "Pauline Year" and on other events in connection with it. Should you as CBF member be organizing any kind of special initiatives, cultural events or festivities, or should you be planning special contributions in any of your publications in honour of this Jubilee Year dedicated to St. Paul, we would be very pleased to learn the details.** ■

The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. At the present time, the CBF membership includes 95 full members and 236 associate members coming from a total of 132 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of Holy Scripture.

The CBF promotes the biblical pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in this field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. It seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.



In particular, the CBF works towards the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

At the beginning of the third millennium Holy Scripture can be viewed as the great textbook of humanity. Especially in times like this the reading of the Bible not only helps the Christian community to grow in faith and love, but it can and should also offer to the whole world those words of brotherhood and of human wisdom that it so desperately needs. This is the great challenge that the Catholic Biblical Federation sets for itself.

**Vincenzo Paglia, Bishop of Terni-Narni-Amelia, Italy, President of the CBF**