

[A paper given at “Christian Mission in the Public Square”, a conference of the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS) and the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre of Charles Sturt University, held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) in Canberra from 2 to 5 October 2008.]

## **MISSIONARY DISCIPLESHIP**

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This conference focuses on the theme of Christian mission in the public sphere. Its purpose is to explore how the Christian message speaks in public and civil life in Australia and globally.

An ecclesial event of global significance took place at Aparecida (Brazilian Marian Shrine), 13 – 31 May, 2007, the fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate (CELAM V). Some 162 bishops, 81 other participants, and 23 observers and theological advisors reflected upon the mission of their continental church in a globalised world. That church accounts for 43% of all Catholics.

Pope Benedict XVI called the Conference and chose the theme “Disciples and missionaries of Jesus Christ, so that our people may have life in Him, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.””

Specifically I wish to draw attention first to the methodology adopted by the Conferences going back to the second at Medellin in 1966; Secondly to the preferential option for the poor which is maintained with renewed vigour.

In response to the Pope’s invitation CELAM’s Secretariat took charge of the preparation. They first gathered contributions from various Bishops Conferences and meetings of the CELAM Secretariat on the theme of missionary discipleship and analysis and discernment of the historical moment. This constituted the basis of a Participation Document and Working Sheets. These tools were sent to National Bishop’s Conferences so they could send them to particular churches, agencies and institutions for their reflections and contributions. Various seminars were held and the results published.

I quote from the Participation Document:

“After a year 2,400 pages of contributions were received. They were classified thematically by the CELAM Secretariat. They were studied by a special commission of bishops, theologians, including liberation theologians, and pastoral specialists. This resulted in the drafting of a Synthesis of received contributions, this in turn was sent to the future participants in CELAM V and to Bishops Conferences.

Such a preparation indicates the democratic character of CELAM.

I quote: “This document continues the practice of the “see, judge, act” method used in previous CELAMs. Many voices from the entire continent offered contributions and suggestions along these

lines, affirming that this method has helped us live more intensely our vocation and mission in the Church, enriched theological and pastoral work, and generally motivated us to assume our responsibilities vis-à-vis the concrete situation in our continent. (34)

“This method enables to systematically articulate the believers perspective of seeing reality, the assumption of criteria from faith and reason to be discerned and appraised with critical sympathy, and consequently the project of acting as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ. Believing, joyful and confident adhesion to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and being part of the Church are indispensable assumptions assuring the relevance of this method.(35)

“We can say that the “see” of our method is most immediately connected to God the Father. We always want to see reality in the light of His loving plan, manifested in creation and re-creation in His Son Jesus. The Fathers saving grace is ever seeking to sow life and make it increase, and to defend threatened life and resurrect it in the strength of the Spirit of His Son.”(36)

“The next step is the moment of “Judging”. The Word, Head of Creation and the redeemed world, and the mystery of the Church are the measures for appraising reality. This means that Jesus Christ cannot be reduced to a mere theory, a mere ethic, or a project of human or social development. It is because nothing or no one can replace Him that we can proclaim with assurance that He is the Lord of Life and of history, victor over the mystery of iniquity, and saving event that enables us to issue a true judgement over reality that safeguards the dignity of persons and of peoples.”(37)

“The last step is the moment of “act”. For the believer, the Holy Spirit impels us to act and indicates to us the direction of Gods will, expressed in energising directions consistent with the cries of our peoples and the charity of Christ that impels us.”(38)

“The living experience of faith nourished by tradition and communion in the Catholic Church, on which this method must be founded, helps expand and deepen the understanding of reality and the discernment of situations, while it demands of us that we be able to give reasons for the hope that enlivens us and gives us the boldness and wisdom to act for the good of persons and peoples. The certainties of faith are capable of gathering all the signs of truth, goodness and beauty manifested in our common life, beyond all boundaries and ties of association. From this standpoint we want to contribute, along with many men and women, to the search for the answers demanded by this moment in history.” (39)

These paragraphs provide a Trinitarian foundation for the see, judge, act methodology.

The Concluding Document of the Conference, immediately after the Introduction in Part One summarises the text of the Synthesis concerning the methodology which it has also adopted. (19)

It is significant that the see, judge, act used by a continental Conference of Bishops is also used by the small basic communities.

I was introduced to this method of formation as a seminarian at Corpus Christi College, Werribee, in the 1940's in the YCW (Young Christian Workers) leaders summer schools. While lecturing in our seminary in the 1950's I was chaplain to the Asian student members of the Newman Society at Sydney University, which also used the see, judge, act method of formation. Interestingly in 2007 a Cardijn Liaison Committee was started with a view to bringing together all those who had been formed through Cardijn founded and inspired movements. Joseph Cardijn founded the YCW in 1925 in Belgium. He in turn was inspired while attempting to meet the needs of young workers, by the Sillon (Furrow) Movement of Frenchman Marc Sangier. This movement was concerned with the civic awareness and responsibility of Christians. (Stefan Gigacz [sgigacz2007@gmail.com](mailto:sgigacz2007@gmail.com)).

Similarly a Father Jerry Golden project: Conversations on History of the Apostolate has been started by former members of the Newman Society in universities which also used the see, judge, act formation approach (Noone & Doyle [macmic@netspace.net.au](mailto:macmic@netspace.net.au)).

In 1984 Cardinal Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had issued a critical instruction on certain aspects of the theology of liberation. This followed the publication of Leonardo Boff's "*Church: Charism and Power*". Boff was temporarily silenced. He had been a student of Ratzinger who paid for the publication of his thesis.

A second document in 1986, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation was more sympathetic in tone. At an earlier meeting with the Brazilian Bishops Pope John Paul II accepted that the theology of liberation was correct and necessary but that it needed to enter a new stage of theological reflection.

Rome had replaced bishops, who had translated their commitment to a preferential option for the poor into radical action, on retirement by less committed bishops. One of these was the martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero!

Would the theological / pastoral division among the bishops be reflected in the Conference? No. Quite a number of bishops left before signing the final document. According to the CELAM staff only nine such left – others for pastoral or health reasons. Even though the Conference was pastoral in nature, it did not address formally the issue of liberation theology. It was replaced by a Trinitarian theology of mission and Kingdom. There was frequent reference to a preferential and evangelical option for the poor. The bishops assessment of liberation theology as a living force was clear from the decision to meet with a group of liberation theologians, including Gutierrez, prior to the opening of the Conference and from the fact that several acted as theological advisors during the Conference.

As a concrete illustration of what a preferential and evangelical option for the poor means, the Conference, while waiting for Benedict to formally issue the final document on July 11, addressed a message to the leaders of the G-8 nations who will meet in Heilegendamm, Germany, June 6 – 8. They asked the G-8 leaders to guide the world economy toward sustainable, ecological and human

development, saying that the peoples of Latin America “suffer greatly from unjust relations between rich and poor countries.” The bishops noted that one of the most urgent tasks of our time “is to eliminate extreme poverty by 2015”, and that doing so “is inseparably linked to world peace and security.”

The Conference also provided the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean with a Message which announced the intention to carry out with them a great continental mission, a new Pentecost.

I quote:

“We conclude by saying WE BELIEVE AND WE HOPE;

“We hope...

*To be a lively Church, faithful and credible which is nourished from the Word of God and the Eucharist.*

*To live our being Christian with joy as disciples-missionaries of Jesus Christ.*

*To form lively communities that nourish the faith and encourage missionary action.*

*To value the diverse ecclesial organisations in a spirit of communion.*

*To promote a mature laity, steward in the mission of announcing and making visible the Kingdom of God.*

*To impel the active participation of women in society and in the Church.*

*To maintain our preferential and evangelical option for the poor with renewed effort.*

*To accompany the youth in their formation and search for identity, vocation and mission, renewing our option for them.*

*To work with all people of good will in the building of the Kingdom.*

*To strengthen with audacity Family and Respect For Life Ministries.*

*To value and respect our Indigenous and Afro-American peoples.*

*To advance in the ecumenical dialogue “so that all may be one”, as well as in the inter-religious dialogue.*

*To make of this continent a model of reconciliation, justice and peace.*

*To be stewards of creation, home of all, in fidelity to the project of God.*

*To collaborate in the integration of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean.*

May this Continent of hope also become the Continent of love, life and peace!”

This message was widely reflected upon and discussed throughout the entire Conference. In particular the “We Hope” has become a prayer which is very popular – good pedagogy.