

**A: GOSPEL SHARING**

**A\6**

**DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
GOSPEL SHARING AND BIBLE STUDY**

**TOPICS OF AsIPA TEXTS:**

**A : GOSPEL SHARING**

**B : SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**

**C : A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH**

**D : TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS**

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AsIPA Desk, FABC  
34, Lane 32, Kuangfu, S.Road,  
Taipei, Taiwan (1052)  
Tel/Fax: [886]- 2-577 2007

AsIPA A: GOSPEL SHARING  
Programmes for Training the Christian Community

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## A\6

# DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOSPEL SHARING AND BIBLE-STUDY

## INTRODUCTION

Gospel Sharing has become an important means for the spiritual renewal of local churches in many countries.

Gospel Sharing, however, is something completely different from Bible Study. The difference is similar to “talking about” somebody (Bible Study) and meeting the person in a warm encounter (Gospel Sharing).

Therefore, if we wish to begin Bible groups, we should first understand the theological difference between Bible Study and Gospel Sharing. Both are necessary. However, if we try to do Bible Study and Gospel Sharing at the same meeting we destroy both.

## A. BIBLE STUDY

Academic Bible Study is offered in theological colleges and adopted in many Bible groups.

☛ *Form small groups of 2/3*

Look at the drawing of a Bible Study Group.

Discuss the questions.

Report after 3 minutes.

*Question:*

- *What is the aim of Bible Study? --*
- *What is one of the most important conditions required so that discussions can be good and fruitful? --*





### **Supplement:**

- Bible Study tries to discover what the author of a biblical book wanted to tell the people of **THAT TIME IN THE PAST**.
- Bible Study wants to find out how the people of **THAT TIME IN THE PAST** may have understood this message.
- Bible Study wants to find out the life-problems of the people of **THAT TIME** and how they reacted to God's message of **THAT TIME!**
- Bible Study wants to discover the meaning of the language and customs of the people of **THAT TIME**.
- One of the most important conditions required for a good and fruitful Bible Study is careful preparation with the help of commentaries or biblical experts. If this is not done, Bible Study may become an exchange of ignorance!

#### **In other words:**

- In Bible Study people are “discussing” the original meaning, the original understanding of the message, the original language and customs of **THAT TIME IN THE PAST**.
- Events of scripture are “discussed”, that means (literally) they are “cut to pieces”. Participants talk about people, messages and events of **THAT TIME IN THE PAST**.

- The main characteristic or mark of academic Bible Study is the question, “What happened THAT TIME?”
- Bible Study also tries to explain how a certain text has been understood by the Christian community in the past and how individuals have lived the message in the history of the Church.
- Of course, modern exegetes (interpreters of the Bible) want to open up the understanding of scripture for us today. Even then, however, their explanation remains on the theoretical level in spite of impressive and logical consequences discovered for our daily life.

Our understanding of Bible Study in no way belittles or devalues academic study with the Bible. However, it puts it into its proper place. We need Bible Study :

- 1) to justify a doctrine of the faith;
- 2) to formulate a certain moral demand which has to be accepted by all members of the Church and
- 3) to understand the message of Christ in its historical context.

Bible Study is concerned with the past. It is “talking about” Jesus who lived THAT time.

Gospel sharing is concerned with the risen Lord TODAY who is alive and present. Its aim is not only to “understand” Christ’s message but to “encounter” him as a loving person.

This does not mean, of course, that Bible Study can never lead to personal encounter with Christ himself.

## B. GOSPEL SHARING

Gospel Sharing has a completely different theological approach compared to Bible Study.

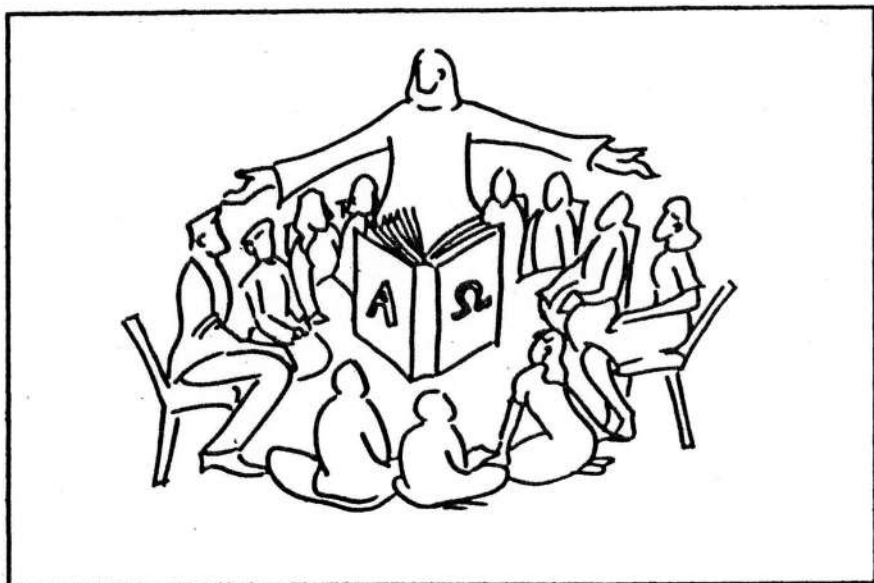
☛ *Discuss in the whole group:*

**Question:**

- *What comes to mind when we look at this drawing below? –*
- *Where lies the difference between this picture and the drawing on page 2? –*

*If you are used to the 7-step Gospel Sharing, ask yourselves:*

- *Why is the 7-step Gospel Sharing Method “Sharing” and not “Study”? –*





## Supplement:

- Participants of a Gospel Sharing group gather because they want to sit down with the Lord and listen to him as Mary of Bethany did. (Lk 10,38-42)
- This is the reason why members of a Gospel Sharing group do not say just any prayer at the beginning of their session but “invite and welcome the Risen Lord” in a personal way (Step 1).
- Behind the many words of scripture they discover THE WORD, Jesus himself. The biblical text becomes for them a “quasi-sacramental sign” of the presence of the risen Christ. By proclaiming the text of the Bible in the group, it becomes reality as in the Synagogue of Nazareth: “This passage of scripture has become true today, as you heard it being read!” (Lk 4,21)
- The biblical text is not taken as interesting information about things of the past. It becomes an open door which allows us to enter today into the reality of what is being proclaimed. It helps us to come into a living contact with the one of whom all scripture talks.

It is for this reason that in Step 2 we read the text several times, from a different translation as well.



- Our aim in gospel sharing is to remain in the presence of the Lord as long as possible, just “to be there” without being distracted by rational considerations at this stage. Therefore, in Step 3 we repeat short phrases or a word and keep a good pause in between the repetitions. If this step is done well, we have a chance of entering into the atmosphere of “contemplation” where we can sense the presence of God without many words.
- In Step 4 we continue to remain in the presence of the Lord in silence.
- In Step 5 we share with one another on a word or phrase which has touched us personally. A theological discussion at this stage would destroy the precious atmosphere of prayer. Discussions, therefore, should be deferred to another time.

## **C. THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY**

1. Gospel Sharing in the real sense as outlined above has its theological justification in our faith that Jesus is risen and that he remains with us.  
“Where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them!” (Mt 18,20)
2. The REALITY (not the mode) of Christ’s presence is the very same as in the Eucharist:  
“The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord...” (Vatican II, Divine

## Revelation 21)

3. Our theological understanding of Gospel Sharing is the same as in the Liturgy of the Word at the Eucharist. During the Liturgy of the Word we are reminded of the real presence of the Lord:
  - The book of the gospel is venerated with incense and accompanied by candles;
  - All rise to welcome Christ in the gospel acclamation and the alleluia, the Easter song!
  - The Christian community acclaims Christ at the end of the gospel with, "Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ!"
  
4. Gospel sharing is not possible without the Church community where the risen Lord is acclaimed and accepted. We remember the Ethiopian eunuch who told Philip, "How can I understand this passage of scripture if there is nobody to explain it to me!" (Acts 8,31). Philip did not give him the typical academic answers of school exegesis (e.g. Deutero Isaiah, Sitz im Leben, context etc..) but used this text to share with him the "Good News of Jesus" (8,35). It is this living faith in the risen Lord, kept alive in the community of Christ's disciples, which is the basic "explanation" of biblical texts.
  
5. In gospel sharing, the Word of God is regarded as the "quasi-sacramental presence of the risen Lord".  
(FABC5#8)

# METHOD OF ASIPA TEXTS

ASIPA TEXTS are compiled for Christian men and women at grass root level of the parish. They can be conducted most fruitfully in Small Christian Communities, Neighbourhood Communities, Parish Pastoral Councils or any other small groups in the parish.

ASIPA TEXTS can also be used with larger groups, e.g. in the parish hall - provided the “participatory method” is maintained in smaller working groups.

## **Features of the “ASIPA approach”**

1. ASIPA TEXTS adopt a **“participatory approach”** in which all participants of a group search and discover for themselves as far as they are able to.
2. The texts are compiled in such a way that the facilitator can use them with a **minimum of preparation**.
3. The facilitator is requested to **follow the text** as closely as possible and allow the participants to contribute when indicated in the text.
4. The facilitator is not content with one answer to a question but he/she encourages as many participants as possible to search for an answer. **“Buzz groups”** of 2/3 are helpful to achieve maximum participation.
5. The **SUPPLEMENT** can help add to the findings of the participants and summarize them.
6. The **SUMMARY** is meant to be used as ‘input’.

# **ASIPA:**

**As-ian -I-ntegral -P-astoral -A-pproach**

The Asian Bishops declared in the Final Statement of their Fifth Plenary Session in Bandung: The Church of 1990s has to be a "Participatory Church", a "Communion of Communities", a Church that "witnesses to the Risen Lord" (*FABC5,#8*).

The question was, how to promote this "new way of being Church". Therefore, late in 1993, jointly sponsored by the FABC Offices of Human Development and of Laity, a consultation meeting was held in Malaysia. It was during this consultation that the pastoral process for promoting a "Participatory Church" in Asia was termed ASIPA: Asian Integral Pastoral Approach.

ASIPA TEXTS (training programmes) follow this directive:

## **ASIAN**

They want to implement the vision of the Asian Bishops and help Asian Christians face Asian life in the light of the gospel.

## **INTEGRAL**

They aim at achieving a balance between the "spiritual" and the "social", between the individual and the community, between hierarchical leadership and the co-responsibility of the laity.

## **PASTORAL**

They train the laity in their pastoral mission in Church and world.

## **APPROACH**

The process of ASIPA TEXTS can be described as a pastoral approach which is "Christ- and Community centred". It involves the participants of workshops to search for themselves and allows them to experience a "New Way of Being Church."

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