

**Dear Readers:**

Paul, the heroic lone warrior, who almost single-handedly brings the Gospel to the ends of the earth – this image of the Apostle to the Gentiles is one that is still popular in some circles today. But for a long time now other facets of this intriguing personality, so important for the history of Christianity, have been coming to light.

Paul was in fact no lone warrior, but rather a staunch team-worker and a capable “networker”; he was no “dry”, abstract theologian, but rather a courageous and gifted visionary; an enthusiastic messenger of the Gospel, a multi-talented man – and yet at the same time a man with rough edges, who did not shrink from the use of direct language, when the stakes were high.

On the occasion of the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Paul, Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed the time from 28 June 2008 to 29 June 2009 a Year of Paul in the Catholic Church. The Pope himself said in one of his addresses that it would be an important goal of this Pauline Year “to learn from Saint Paul, to learn the faith, to learn Christ, and finally to learn the way of right living”. Perhaps the Pauline Year can help us all to encounter Paul the man anew. From his life and his faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ we can perhaps all receive inspiration and incentive for our own lives and our own personal faith.

Besides the Pauline Year the primary focus of this issue lies on the Seventh Plenary Assembly of the CBF, which took place last year in Tanzania. We document the major articles presented as well as the message of the Pope, and we supply a few background reports on the course of the Assembly. You will also find – as a removable insert – a copy of the Final Statement of the Plenary Assembly.

The Plenary Assembly was devoted to a great theme of humanity: the question of how reconciliation takes place, what righteousness looks like concretely, and how peace can be lived today. Such great themes always harbor the danger that they remain in the realm

of the vague or the ideal, that they are too far removed from reality, that they sound good in theory, but cannot be implemented in any practical way. And it is not only we as individuals that are exposed to this danger time and time again; organizations and communities must confront it too, even the CBF.

In Tanzania the great, worldwide family of the CBF came together to get a grip on this great concrete theme. It did this with enormous enthusiasm and many good results. But the theme is by no means exhausted with this meeting. The participants were very much aware of this as they together composed the following prayer, with which on behalf of the entire team of the General Secretariat I wish you an exciting and enriching reading.

Sincerely yours,

Claudio Etti

*God and Father of Life,
You open for us your arms of mercy
and with your Son you fill us with your Spirit of love.
You will that your children live as brothers and sisters
and walk united into the light of your project.
We come to you thirsty of the justice of your Kingdom,
Justice that fights the perverse powers
which destroy the beauty and dignity of your creatures.
We feel with you the sorrows of the victims of violence
and the anguished cry of so many excluded and ill treated.
Teach us in the school of your Word,
mainly the great Word of the Paschal Cross of your Son,
the attitudes and initiative that bring into the world
a flow of reconciliation, a source of new creation.
May this discipleship of your life-giving Word
make our communities vital places,
instruments of peace and witnesses of hope.
Lead us not into temptation of avoiding this mission
by fear of persecution for the cause of justice,
give us rather the courage of Mary
to proclaim with all the humblest of the world
a hymn of joy as we believe that your Word will be fulfilled.
For yours is the justice of the Kingdom, the reconciliation
and the peace, now and forever. Amen.*