

Cuarta Tarea: Historias de Vida

Luigi Pellegrino argues that the traditional *ver juzgar actuar* pastoral method remains valuable but needs enrichment, especially in the first stage of *ver*. He explains that pastoral planning risks becoming superficial when reality is treated only as objective data. Instead, he proposes incorporating life stories and lived experience because “la realidad no sólo consiste en el hecho desnudo, sino también en el hecho tal y como lo percibe el sujeto; no sólo es suceso, sino también narración.”¹ This insight highlights that reality includes both events and the meanings people give to those events.

Understanding reality as narration has important pastoral consequences. When leaders focus only on statistics or external observations, they may miss deeper human experiences. Pellegrino therefore insists that life stories are not secondary but “un momento intrínseco de la reflexión y de la experiencia teológica y pastoral.”² Listening becomes essential for authentic pastoral discernment because it reveals fears, hopes, and struggles that cannot be captured by data alone.

This connects directly with the first stage of *ver*. Pellegrino warns that this stage can become overly positivist when it relies only on sociological techniques. He stresses that “no se dan hechos desnudos, sino siempre, cognoscitivamente, interpretados.”³ Reality is always interpreted, and ignoring this leads to incomplete analysis. A purely descriptive approach may result in fragmented pastoral planning where actions are disconnected from actual needs.

Biblical tradition supports this expanded understanding. In Exodus 3:7, God both sees and hears the suffering of the people. Pellegrino notes that the knowledge God seeks comes through “el ‘ver’ y el ‘escuchar’, donde el escuchar es la actitud de Dios de dejarse contar... las historias cotidianas de su pueblo.”⁴ This suggests that authentic *ver* requires listening to personal and communal narratives. Pastoral ministry therefore becomes relational rather than purely analytical.

¹ Luigi Pellegrino, *Las historias de vida en el método de planificación pastoral ver-juzgar-actuar*, *Veritas. Revista de Filosofía y Teología*, no. 36 (2017): 113–134.

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*

This perspective also reflects Vatican II's vision of the Church as a communion. Participatory planning recognizes that all members contribute to discernment and mission. Communities are not passive recipients of pastoral plans but active subjects who help interpret reality and shape responses.

A pastoral example can be seen in ministry with young adults at Sacred Heart parish in Mississippi, particularly in efforts to develop sustainable rural young adult groups. If leaders only analyze attendance numbers, they might conclude there is little interest. However, narrative listening may reveal geographic isolation, demanding work schedules, transportation challenges, or a desire for deeper community. These insights can lead to more effective responses such as localized small groups, flexible meeting times, mentorship networks, and intentional community-building activities. In this case, action emerges from real diagnosis rather than pre-existing programs.

The second stage, *juzgar*, must then interpret these experiences in the light of faith. Pellegrino warns that sometimes *juzgar* becomes abstract theology disconnected from lived reality, producing what he calls theological extrinsicism. Authentic discernment requires dialogue between Scripture, tradition, and concrete human experience so that faith speaks meaningfully to actual situations.

Finally, *actuar* should arise from this integrated process. Pellegrino emphasizes that pastoral action should emerge from diagnosis, not from predetermined formulas. When actions are disconnected from reality, ministry becomes repetitive and ineffective. When they grow out of listening and discernment, they are more likely to foster transformation, participation, and sustainability.

In conclusion, integrating narrative listening into the *ver juzgar actuar* method strengthens pastoral planning by making it more human, participatory, and faithful to lived experience. Listening to life stories allows communities like Sacred Heart parish in Mississippi to develop sustainable young adult ministry rooted in real needs rather than assumptions. Pastoral ministry becomes more effective when it listens deeply, discerns faithfully, and acts in response to the realities people actually live.