

COMBONI NETWORK FOR JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Be the change you wish to see in the world



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edited by
Fernando Zolli and **Daniele Moschetti**

Cover photo: SASIN TIPCHAI

Foreword

*“I have observed the misery of my people in Egypt,
and have heard them crying out because of their oppressors.
I know about their sufferings, and I have come down
to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians
and to bring them from that land to a good and spacious land,
a land flowing with milk and honey”.*

(Exodus 3, 7-8)

The book we hold in our hands aims to recall the path we walked as Comboni Family in the field of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), and among other things to make memory of the experiences in the several editions of both the World Social Forum (WSF) and the Comboni Social Forum. Thus, this book is not an essay on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation dimension, rather a corpus of experiences from different points of view. It is a reflection inviting us to elaborate on the reasons and the pressing need for this ministry, as we were also encouraged by Pope Francis’ speeches to popular movements, a real synthesis of the Catholic Social Teaching. Many Comboni Missionaries brothers, sisters and lay people are daily committed in this area, and they work tirelessly for the marginalised and the most abandoned through humble actions without making noise. All of them appear on these pages.

Our participation in the WSF and in the Comboni Forum provided an opportunity of mutual enrichment and offered the possibility to create networks to improve our understanding and efficiency into the matter. On these pages, we find a critical assessment of those encounters whose purpose is to use them at their best and like foundation to inspire and

to develop new methods responding to ever growing challenges in the world today. Each Forum has represented a sharing life-experience workshop and a space for new ideas born from the perception characterising our own Charism.

The evangelising mission of our Comboni Institutes often faced with the major injustices perpetrated against the people we work with. From a creative and true reading of the Gospel arises a genuine engagement in the advocacy for the most vulnerable people. Comboni's encounter with slavery deeply wounded him and gave to his mission a distinctive methodology. The letters he wrote over a lifetime clearly demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of the political, economical, cultural and religious forces regulating relations among people and the impact they had on their lives.

The first missions undertaken by Comboni missionaries brothers and sisters in Egypt, Sudan, Uganda and other countries point out such an interest and concern for the human context of life, the “**making of a common cause**” cherished in Saint Daniel Comboni's heart. We have always sided with those nations who suffer because of any kind of injustice and oppression and we still side with them at present. The martyrs of our family who paid with their own lives the love for the mission they have been assigned to are witnesses of this commitment. A radical experience of faith strengthened their loyalty to the calling. It is true that the language of an epoch could betray us and reduce our understanding to a certain missionary approach but achievements speak for themselves. The ceaseless work in the fields of education and healthcare is proof. Evangelisation unfolded from a whole understanding of human beings as dignified individuals blessed by an only Father who puts all of us on an equal horizontal plan of universal fraternity (see, for instance, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 78).

Therefore, anything related to men and women's life now is a matter of concern for a missionary brother or sister walking alongside people from different countries of the world. God's Salvation Plan comes through the incarnation of His Son, providing a radically new plan for life. This is the heart of the urgency of our mission: the proposal for life in its fullness based on the love of the Father for all humankind

(Redemptoris Missio, 7). The method of salvation through Jesus Christ is liberating, and it fully reaches the individual as His public activity in the villages of Palestine shows.

Advancements in different areas like in technology, communication, medicine, and means of transportation over the last few decades do not necessarily result into a better existence. Pope Francis warns us on the economy of exclusion which rules out many people creating intolerable inequalities (cf. EG 53). We are aware that we are part of this unjust economy. Under the pretext of being good “**professionals**” it is easy to fall into the trap of consumerism that tries to offer solution to any problem. It does exist an intrinsic relationship between plain life and justice. Some lifestyles and customs reinforce unbearable economic structures based on the oppression of the most fragile part of humanity.

In recent decades, in addition to Peace and Justice there also has been a new element that is Integrity of Creation. Environmental destruction is leading our Mother Earth to a critical point. Hence, we are required to call into question our lifestyle. The attention to environment demands unity in order to face this global challenge (cf. Laudato Si’,13) and it is therefore useful to join in different networks allowing us to be more conscious of the question so to incorporate this consciousness into pastoral programs.

Within a global and interconnected world, participation and commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation imbues all missionaries activities. Pastoral, missionary animation, youth ministry, formation and human development projects of all kinds cannot be separate from this central dimension. Actually, as we approach social, political and economical reality of people we share our mission with, we let ourselves be questioned and brought into new dynamics of communion and journey besides poor. As a consequence, a real commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation dimension can be carried through by the compassion of those who invites us to walk towards periphery.

One of the most frequent criticism to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation is the easy decay toward a mission without God. The search for justice is calcified and the spiritual dimension appears to be a form

an alienation. Further, many activities pertaining to this field are implemented in cooperation with institutions strictly secular in nature and even with pronounced antireligious tendency. It is therefore fundamental to develop a characteristic spirituality of the work by Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, as a result of its familiarity with the Gospel that represents a source of life and love for the mission. Those who operate for justice and peace must be ready to be misunderstood, not to see immediate results, and primarily to be a means for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation is one of the areas that made possible a rich encounter among the members of the Comboni Family which make up a range of additional ministries. This book aims to unite such a richness of different contributions in which are developed specific services in response to the need of the mission today. There exists a deep relationship between global and local, and it is therefore essential to make a reflection on both levels in order to enrich them mutually. The world seems to be a vast network in which all phenomena are inter-linked. For this reason, here are included numerous enriching missionary activities. Pope Francis urges on us to “**reach all the peripheries in need of the light of the Gospel**” (EG, 20). To the whole Comboni Family, commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation represents an appropriate space to enter those fringes of society where life is despised, inspired by the passion of Comboni. The Gospel is the source of full life owning the power to transform the hearts, to bring life where there is nothing but death, and hope where everything seems to be lost. Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation viewed in terms of incarnation of our own spirituality, presence on behalf of the poor and liberation from every yokes oppressing them, is a true Comboni mission.

Sr. Luigina Coccia

Mother General of Comboni Missionary Sisters

Father Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie

Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries

CHAPTER ONE



COMBONI NETWORK
FOR JUSTICE - PEACE - RECONCILIATION

World Social Forum WE SUPPC



ANTHROPOGENIC GLOBAL WARMING
GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE



**NON A L'ACCAPAREMENT DES TERRE
POUR LA SOUVERAINETE ALIMENTAIRE**

Paths to build Peace

The journey of Justice and Peace in the Comboni institute

From its very beginning, the Comboni Institute has always been known as an instrument of transformation and regeneration of a humiliated, despised, enslaved and rejected humanity. St. Daniel Comboni expressed it quite well saying that the Comboni Institute must be at the service of the “**poorest and most abandoned**”, “**the unhappy *Nigrizia***”, against the scourge of slavery (See Slavery in Writings nn. 2216 ff), and against arms trafficking (Writings 3349). In the “Plan” he foresaw the formation of religious and lay teams for the regeneration of their brothers and sisters at all levels of human, religious and social life. The property of Ghesirah (Zamalek) in Egypt and later the village of Malbes in Sudan were concrete steps for the realisation of Comboni’s intuition.

The heirs of Comboni, both religious and lay, moved by God's Project and by the charism, have always given concrete and courageous answers, adapted to places, circumstances and needs of the various historical periods by fostering scholastic and professional formation, the establishment of health centres, the promotion of women and denouncing the colonial abuses and injustices first, and then those of indigenous leaders, without escaping persecution, expulsions and, in some cases, even martyrdom. The connection between the proclamation of the Gospel and promotion of human dignity has always had an unbreakable connection in the activity of the Comboni Family, and it still is a characteristic identity that makes them unique and original in the missionary commitment.

A change of paradigm

Beginning from Vatican II, especially in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, (GS, of 1965), the Church, feeling *“really and intimately in solidarity with humankind and with its history”* (GS 1) feels the urgency to *“walk together with the attentive listening of the proclamation of the Gospel, in order to discover, each time, how to be Church in the present time and to live as Christians in the world in the most appropriate way, always substantially faithful to the message revealed by Christ, the Lord of history”* (GS 45).

In *Gaudium et Spes* the Fathers of the Council proposed a new paradigm of reference, because they invited the entire Church to listen to **the signs of the times** and to allow itself to be questioned by human, often dramatic, situations, inviting Christians to change their pace, no longer by being in opposition or indifferent to the world, but becoming interactive. In fact, the Church, holding the deposit of revelation, is called to offer, in the various circumstances of history, a constantly renewing confrontation between the Gospel message and the situation of society, by evaluating each situation and each event with intelligent discernment, in order to reveal God's influence in history and to identify, denounce and oppose anything that brutalises human dignity and the integrity of nature.

The orientation of the Council marked a fundamental step in the service of charity because, in the light of the Gospel, Christians as well were called to discern, to analyse the complexity of reality, to go to the roots of the evils that affect humankind and to find adequate solutions together with Christian and lay organisations and movements that cherish the coming of a world which is possible and livable by all.

A few years later, in the Synod of Bishops of 1971, this view became even more relevant because it affirmed that: **“Activities in favour of Justice and participation in the transformation of the world are a constitutive dimension of the proclamation of the Gospel, namely of the mission of the Church for the redemption of humankind and its liberation from any oppressive situation”**.

The closing remarks of Paul VI to the synod fathers echoed this statement: *“(…) you have stated that the Church, in the current very difficult historical time in which we live, acknowledges quite clearly the duty to renew the efforts for the edification of a more perfect justice among human beings, by better knowing the needs of the world, by itself being an example of justice, by caring for the poor and the oppressed, by educating consciences to social justice, and finally by promoting and engaging in all kinds of activities in favour of the derelicts, these being almost the visible witness of its charity in the world and will stimulate others to move along the same path”*. These are clear and significant words describing in details the commitment to the values of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

Later, this new vision was picked up by various continental synods that adapted it to cultural aspects proper to each place. In the Synod on Africa it was said that **“the promotion of these values must also be part of the pastoral program of each community”**. The America one stressed that **“people of different faiths must feel motivated (...) to work together for justice and peace”**. The Synod on Asia underlined that **“the Church takes an interest in all men and women without distinction, committing itself to build with them a civilization of love, founded on the universal principles of peace, justice, solidarity and freedom that find their fulfillment in Christ”**. And finally, the Synod on Europe stressed the urgent need for good in the entire world and the forgiveness of debt for poor nations.

The Comboni Institute, inserted in the missionary activity of the Church, did not remain aloof from these directives. In the years following Vatican II, it dedicated many community, provincial and chapter meetings to a revision of its Constitutions and prepared a new Rule of Life in which these motivations and activities are gathered, especially in part Three where missionary service is described, where the importance of solidarity with the people served by the missionaries (RoL 60) and integral liberation in evangelising is stressed (RoL 61).

Witness and martyrdom open new ways

At the 1985 Chapter of the Comboni Missionaries held in Rome, the commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation took shape and moved in the direction opened by the Rule of Life, especially with the preferential choice for the “**Values of the Kingdom**” as a fundamental objective of evangelisation for an integral liberation. The decision was not easy. What caused the most resistance and uneasiness in the presentation of these priorities and in the reasons for them was the socio-political commitment coupled with the social dimension of the Gospel proposed by the confreres coming from Latin America.

The approval of this priority was not without suffering and it barely reached the minimal number requested by the Statute of the Chapter only thanks to the martyrdom of Fr. Ezekiel Ramin, killed in Cocal, in the State of Rondônia, Brazil, just during the Chapter. His courage and his choice to defend the indigenous people and the landless moved some to dispel their doubts and to open their horizons to an integral liberation and a commitment incarnated in the life of the poor, sharing the sorrows, the pains and the joys of a full life.

The chapter of 1997 gave the fourth part to the theme: “**Mission is: Commitment to Justice and Peace**” (CA 1997, ##107-118), where attention was given to the historical reasons for this choice, the urgency and need of a new way of conceiving the missionary commitment and some concrete actions proposals, at various levels.

The beautiful and long tradition of the Comboni institute in this field notwithstanding, the Chapter states that many missionaries still do not feel involved in it and that they are unable to answer to the signs of the

times with concrete actions, nor to the great challenges of today's world. The Chapter expressed itself clearly looking at the future: ***“In fact, we want to see the theme of justice and peace move from the head to the heart: acting for justice and taking part in the transformation of the world seem to us to clearly be fundamental dimensions of the preaching of the Gospel”*** (Synod of Bishops 1971, Justice in the world, 6).

Later, quite significant will be the letter of the three general councils of the Comboni Family to the members on the occasion of the year 2000 Jubilee, in order to instill energy in living the Comboni vocation with a renewed commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The paradigm of this letter was deep and original, because it invited the heirs of Comboni to live justice as a life-giving relationship: ***“In this wounded world we are called to find concrete answers and to reach out to all men and women without distinction, striving to build with them a civilisation of love, based on the universal values of peace, justice, solidarity, freedom and integrity of creation. We want to deepen our awareness of the causes and consequences of today's problems and promote among ourselves a new way of thinking and acting”*** (#16).

To concretise this choice the office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation was instituted, and Fr. Anton Maier was appointed to it *ad tempus* to promote and support this new direction in the provinces. The choice was not accidental, because Fr. Anton had already embraced this way of thinking and acting, first in South Africa in the era of apartheid, and later in the North American Province with his involvement in the inter-congregational organization AFJN.

The Chapter of 2003 repeated the choices previously made, especially in the Chapter of 1985, and at #46 of the Chapter Acts it stated that ***“Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation is an integral part of the mission of the Church. Starting from the Chapter of 1985 it has been a priority of our institute and must continue to be, coordinated at the general level by the General Secretariat of Evangelization”***. Following it gave directives for the provinces (CA 2003, #47.1-3) and for the continents (CA 2003, #48.1-3).

The same happened in the following Chapter where the precious work of advocacy, especially on behalf of migrants and refugees was underlined (CA 2009, ##66 and 67).

In the last Chapter of 2015 much was said about the requalification of our presence in the various continents and, among the specific criteria, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation was deemed to be fundamental (CA 2015, #45.3). Furthermore, in this Chapter for the first time a session was dedicated to mission in Europe where **“we are called to have the courage to reach all the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel”** (CA2015, #46.1). The concept of global mission is now making inroads and redesigns our presences, especially in the light of the teaching of Pope Francis in the exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* and in the encyclical *Laudato Si’*.

“My work shall not die”

In the effort to place the values of the Kingdom as a condition for the evangelisation of the world today, the Comboni Institute has doubtlessly set a good pace. A lot remains to be done, however, in reaching the effective and affective involvement of a part of the Comboni Family. There is an awareness of the urgency and need at the level of analysis of reality and of motivations. However, it is still problematic to translate them into missionary practice. This is true in styles of life often too comfortable, in the activities we choose, in the way we use money and the structures that we have put up in the course of time. It also happens that confreres who attempt new ways of presence and insertion in the life of the poor, at times raise **“suspicions”** and **“perplexities”**, do not find support and encouragement to carry on.

As we have been reminded of during the past 50 years or so, the ministry of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation cannot be optional or the preserve of some who have this **“fixed idea”**. In this epochal change, as Pope Francis often reminds us, each missionary is invited to be in a state of mission. For those who evangelise in the style and charism of Comboni this means above all to regenerate ourselves so as to regenerate others. To regenerate ourselves in the gaze, vision, perspective and in the concrete choices and style of our presences.

Moving along on our journey it is necessary to keep focused on the life and expectations of the poor, namely those whom the neo-liberal system

calls “the refuse”. At the same time, it is also a priority to have at heart basic and ongoing formation, in passing on the spirit and the charism and allow the younger ones to surprise us because, as with St. Daniel Comboni, the conviction that “*the work will not die*” remains strong.

Father Fernando Zolli

GERT (European Group on Theological Reflection) Secretary
Coordinator of JPIC Commission
(Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) for the Italian Province

From W Nairobi W to Porto Alegre: a brief history...

It all happened so quickly and unexpectedly, starting from the struggle to stop the demolition of thousands shacks in Nairobi's slums to the attendance to the Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It was a path marked by commitment, discoveries, humanity, friendship, sharing and solidarity with many people living in shanty towns and with men and women of the civil society as well, in order to understand the importance of embracing a network and a web composed by both human relationships and institutions toward a common dream and purpose. Further, it was also a journey characterised by a lot of faith, courage, hope and desire to a complete and dignified life for the marginalised and wounded part of mankind. Little by little, we made steps forward which were crucial and determining in order to realise that it is essential to live in communion, networking, and in concert with the others, ***with all the "others"*** within and beyond the Church, in far and near civil society. Unfortunately, still there are some episodes that fall on deaf ears, information which don't sound like good news, and events which are just pies in the sky but if we put them together they can tell us a story. I have been living in Korogocho slums since the beginning of the 2000s along with some confreres and with the lay missionary volunteer

Gino Filippini, who was a living proof of a life of service and devotion to the poor of Africa for over forty years. Gino devoted himself entirely to the mission and to Korogocho's people until the supreme sacrifice of his life as he felt sick and died soon after from lung cancer, certainly as a consequence of the dioxin we breathed daily coming from Dandora's dump, the one and only dump site in Nairobi.

In March 2004, more than 300.000 people were threatened by Nairobi's government to forced eviction: the wrecking of shacks begins on the basis of a violent reurbanisation plan that leaves no alternative. As Comboni missionaries present on the ground, we made an appeal: ***“Kenya's government wants to demolish 45.000 habitations, and 300.000 people from slums will be thrown into the street within a few week but worst of all, the authority presents no alternative to them”***. The plan imposes the dismantling after the affixing of a red X on the shacks which are considered *“implicated”*; this represent the final sign for eviction. The plea does not pass unnoticed and it is continued along the road from Nairobi to Italy by young people, organisations and groups which mobilise and organise spontaneously a Campaign to protest and to prevent any form of eviction to the inhabitants of more than 200 shanty towns in the bowels of Nairobi.

W Nairobi W's campaign is born

The Campaign “W Nairobi W!” or WNW is born through the commitment by the Kutoka Parish Network (a net composed by some Catholic parishes near and far Nairobi's shanty town, which I chaired then), organisations of the Kenyan civil society, International Alliance of Inhabitans, Tam Tam Association for Korogocho, Commission on Justice and Peace of the Italian Comboni Missionaries and many others Italian associations and institutions. In a short time, more than 10.000 complaint emails are sent to Kenya's government, to Nairobi's mayor and to the UN headquarter on urban settlement UN-Habitat based in Nairobi; through the initiative, the local mobilisation and the involvement of international institutions, demolishing acts and forced evictions are interrupted. Worldwide exposure on policies carried out by Kenya's government against his own citizens worked! It was a first

triumph, and a good news! Nonetheless, up to that point the Campaign only defended people's right to a house, even though habitations were crumbling settlements lacking even in toilets facilities. Moreover, the 60% of Nairobi's inhabitants lived clumped within those areas which occupied the 5% of the urban territory. That was really iniquitous and people's conditions were appalling; we should not let anyone live in such an extreme poverty, human and environmental degradation. What's worse, people living in slums paid and still pay rent to stay in breaking shacks on the government's land. Some speculators built illegally only to demand rent to the poor. So a new proposal emerged starting from the protest; we analysed the phenomenon and some possible resolutions to it by confronting data, and listening to testimony and suggestions. We found that Kenya was in debt of 6.5 billion dollars to industrialised countries; it had no funds for housing policies but it owned ideas and proposals, and its civil society was capable and active. By linking debt with urban regeneration WNW focuses all of its energies on Kenya's debt restructuring to Italy, which amounted to 44 million euro at that time. It was an act of justice and solidarity which could have freed funding to guarantee a dignified habitat to the most of the poor and to those who lived in Nairobi's slums. Some alliances were built in Italy. My own friends and confreres father Alex Zanotelli, father Dario Bossi and other Comboni missionaries, along with other associations and local organisations brought great solidarity and concrete hope. The Campaign was supported step by step by thousands of citizens, by the Union of Italian Provinces (104 provinces), by the Solidarity Network of Municipalities (200 Italian municipalities) e by some prominent Local Societies: the municipality of Rome, of Padua and the province of Venice. A photos exhibition WNW on the reality of Nairobi's slums was prepared *ad hoc* and it was visited by more than 500.000 people in different parts of Italy and abroad. Books and videos on the emergency of eviction were prepared, and some witnesses were invited to public gathering around Italy. The Campaign prepared pressure letters for converting Kenya's debt into development; about 100.000 of them were printed and signed before being sent to the Italian Treasury Department and to the secretary of the Italian Bishops' Conference. Many articles and media services were written and published on the most influential newspapers and weekly magazines, radio and TV interviews were

broadcasted and a lot of contents were posted on the Internet and on websites, including anti-globalisation movements websites. Through these tools, WNW met directly hundred thousand people and far more than this number virtually. In Kenya, a strong work of popular awareness was carried out and ties to ecclesiastical, lay and civil society coordination were strengthened through the encounter with several Government representatives like the House Department and the Land Department, all against national public debt. Demonstrations, events on the debts, popular theatre, radio and video programs, interventions on local newspapers and sport activities, everything was focused on the matter of the debt. Also the Kenyan Bishops' Conference joined in with a pastoral letter against international and public debt. I was amazed and energised by all that workings and creativity, but at the same time I realised even more the importance of involving people of every age, social class and professional position in order to generate ideas and commitment in everyone, in Italy as much as in Kenya. Someone Special was lending a helping hand by opening hearts and closed doors...

And the doors are opened...

Technical tools and WNW political proposal catch the attention of governments, embassies and citizens. Following the further evacuation of the slums *Deep Sea* in Nairobi, in October 2005, the Campaign presents an interpellation both to the Italian and to the European Parliament asking inter alia a coordinated and inclusive action against demolishing acts, and for the dignity of human dwelling, the restructuring of the foreign debt and channelling the funding in a Popular Fund addressed to land re-distribution and to housing policies for the poor. In his response to the parliamentary interpellation (Chamber of Deputies session n.731 on the 17/1/2006) Subsecretary Mantica informed of the decision of the ***“Italian government, in co-operation with the international community, to restructure the debts created by Aid Credits given to Kenya: the negotiations have already begun in order to bring about the prompt release of funds”***. Mantica also notified that ***“the Kenyan Finance Minister himself has affirmed he is interested in the possibility of using a part of the said funds to carry***

out a large Italian project of regeneration in the shanty towns". Precisely on this dialogue, in January 2006 WNW Campaign met the representatives of the Italian government; it is therefore marked again the necessity that both Kenya's government and local authorities ensure the interruption of all demolishing and eviction operations. A request is made on the issue that through the agreement on debt restructuring between Kenya and Italy it is established a **"Popular fund for land and housing"**; such a fund should receive the released finances and should be controlled by stakeholders, in particular by the local civil society. Further, WNW proposes that funds for debt restructuring should be invested in the upgrading of the shanty towns in which people's awareness and organisation is forward-looking because of the Kutoka Parish Network's actions, too. Soweto and Korogocho's slums were proposed for this project, and they would have represented a showcase to be replicated in larger ghettos in the event that any other international fundings would have been released through others debt restructuring. The Campaign believed that it was fundamental to agree on two main principles. The first was land property in the slums which would have been reurbanised; it must have been recognised land property to those community who lived on those lands (*community title deed*); the second was the involvement of Kenyan civil society through a clear, formal and efficient mechanism of participation to the whole process (Fund management, reurbanisation plan and steps towards an effective realisation). This involvement couldn't occur only during the consultation but also in policy-making as it had already happened in some cases of debt restructuring from the Italian side (cf. Guinea Conakry, Peru). After all the work we did together, the path opened up to the concrete hope that this **"restructuring"** on Kenyan debt could really be transformed into development action avoiding the country to pay its debt to the creditor, that is Italy. In 2007, the agreement between Kenya and Italy was sealed right in the moment of the Nairobi World Social Forum and the restructuring of 44 million euro was accepted. Kenyan debt to Italy was transformed into development projects and regeneration of ten crucial areas which were education, healthcare, water and upgrading of Korogocho's slums. This led to a collaboration among ministries, between governments and also Italian and Kenyan civil society which were represented by two governmental working groups in order to choose programs

and implementation methods. Kenyan government committed itself to spend 4.4 million euro that was the equivalent of the overdue amount in the decades to come. Many of these projects have been completed and, in Korogocho, structural improvement was realised through tarmacking and paving of the internal roads in shanty towns. People have grown their awareness on dangerous and difficult dynamics that exist when you start talking about improvement in slums and they also discovered how many personal agendas are hidden beside this matter. What I tried to achieve along with Father Zanotelli and other confreres, and what we fought for, that is the collective title deed, wasn't realised. This is a structural problem because those who touch land are in great danger. The struggle of shanty town dwellers continues, and now it is more aware than ever: it didn't end up with my departure from the mission. There always have been efforts and protests organised by people living in slums and all around the world, to obtain at least the right to live on those lands: lands owned by the government or exploited by *fictional landowner* to oblige poor people and shanty town dwellers to pay rent. It was and still it is a long way to go, but the WNW Campaign has increased our awareness on how strong and important is the synergy, the strength and above all the union among ecclesial groups, people living in slums, and local and international civil society in order to face government institutions wherever they are and to show signs of hope, concrete development and upgrading paths for the life of all mankind, not just of an elite.

Porto Alegre World Social Forum

At the end of January 2005, I left for a week in Porto Alegre, Brazil. After long time of negotiation with Italy, with the coordinators of the WNW Campaign and with my local superiors we realised that it would have been useful for me to participate as a representative of the WNW Campaign along with Cesare Ottolini from the International Alliance Inhabitants, who helped for the African campaign. We carried out some public encounters within the World Social Forum to present and to explain how we were moving with the campaign in Kenya and in Italy. It was the first time I arrived in the Latin-American continent, a land so much discussed, studied and loved; the great Brazil, the home-

land of the Liberation theology, of the *sem-terra*, of the *fazendeiros*, of the great gap between wealth and poverty, of the Afro-Brazilians, of the wretched North-East and of the rich South. Porto Alegre is actually a wealthy small town in the South of Brazil and still hosts many Italian and German migrants, coming from those families who arrived there more than 100 years ago and that they now consider themselves Brazilians in all respects. Over time, I showed gratitude to Cesare Ottolini, member of IAI, for the opportunity and for the “**richness**” I discovered in Brazil, for what I heard from lecturers but especially for people’s mobilisation. I saw 130.000 people coming from all over the world, but mainly Latin-Americans. What really impressed me was the participation of common people; in the meetings, I could see little old men who were about 60 or 70 years old, 15-year-old teens, and men and women from all walks of life who listened with keen interest lecturers such as Leonardo Boff, Saramago, Galeano, Perez Esquivel and many others while taking notes on their block notes.

The motto we share was “*Um outro mundo è possível!*” that is “***Another world is possible***”; we have always shared and we still share that motto. Those people attending the forum stood for millions, billions people all over the world working for justice and peace toward a non-violent transformation. It was certainly a great celebration of community, of a diverse community which was united at the same time in its diversity and asked for an alternative that was not just neoliberalism or financial capitalism. Destructions, inequities and plundering still before our eyes are enough to say: STOP! Although, there is still a mighty oligarchy who is not satisfied and we are not able to claim for every man or woman’s right: the right to live a full life, and not just to survive! This also involves a change of lifestyle, of knowledge and of information, but primarily it endorses the opening up to a solidarity and to a total commitment toward a better and different world for everyone! All together in the same boat! This is the great change that all forum’s movements, civil society and citizens of this world have to face and the message they have to spread all over the world! Let’s start with ourselves! If we don’t really begin to change and to support people in their decisions on cultural, ecological, historical and linguistic common assets, global resources will always be an exclusive privilege of a tiny elite which already owns them, preventing and blocking a fair and deserved development of the South of the

world; a human, cultural and spiritual development! There is only one way through which the mighty gain the loyalty of their allied and that is by imposing fear. Fear is the art of dominion and the core of power relations. This is the reason why fear is the antithesis of love. A powerful person must be feared, and not loved. And this is just the opposite of what we would like to propose and to live with people of the South of the world as missionaries and frontier Church, as well with all people of good will trying to build bridges and not walls, dialogue and not monologues of power, service and not authoritarianism. To build the Kingdom of God *“here and not yet completely”* according to the values of the Gospel, but always within a dimension of Love, Justice, Peace, Solidarity and Reconciliation.

In Porto Alegre I was looking around to see if I could glimpse any familiar face belonging to someone of the Comboni confreres. That gathering was one among the several responses given to the world’s powerful countries who met on those days in Davos, Switzerland. Ordinary citizens actively engaged toward the building of a different world, discussed and protested against the leanings to keep on ruling the entire world by dividing resources and geographical areas of influence just among rich countries.

Unfortunately, I couldn’t find anyone belonging to the Comboni family there in Porto Alegre but I could notice the attendance of other local religious and also of religious coming from other parts of the world, and they presented their initiatives and commitments to the poor and to people coming from different countries of the Earth. Thus, I brought along this gift and the great opportunity I was given to be exposed to this global meeting which rounded up every two years in different parts of the world. The aim was to share ideas, methods and struggles beyond the creation of links and networks exactly as we did for the WNairobiW! Campaign. The WNairobiW! Campaign achieved what we have fought for exactly by fighting together; we could have seen some results a few years later, also thanks to the work and to the commitment by many religious and non-religious people that wished and dreamt of a world which was more united, more fair and attentive, and certainly less selfish or centralised in the hands of a very few leaders.

The Comboni Social Forum

Back to Kenya and precisely to the mission of Korogocho, I decided to share my experience, my feelings and histories with my confreres, and with my provincial superior of that time, father Mariano Tbaldo, as well with the provincial council of which I was a member. Brother Alberto Parise (who was then a council member) and I proposed to host a Comboni Social Forum within the World Social Forum organised for the first time in Africa in 2007. The invitation involved the Comboni Sisters, too and they immediately welcomed with joy the proposal to improve their knowledge on a reality which was still unexplored, but at the same time full of promises about new findings and human and spiritual enhancement. It was an important and relevant sign for me as from personal experience it became an event, a proposal and a sharing moment with the whole Comboni Family.

From then on, this is a story that many of you already know. We have been living this opportunity and privilege for 11 years as the Comboni Forum represented a unique, meaningful and communal moment. This event changed itself into tradition and encounter, as it is fundamental for those who work and commit themselves concretely in our family on the matters of Justice, Peace and Integrity of the Creation. To be exposed to world's reality, to the enlarged civil society and not necessarily religious oriented is one of a kind experience as what unites us is far more important than what divides us. It is right this great value of taking a chance, of going beyond the borders of the mission, of society and of history the one that characterises our Comboni spirit and charism, without any worry or fear! I do believe that this opportunity and well-established experience of life and mission has enriched and enhanced participation, sharing and commitment of hundreds of Comboni religious and lay missionaries. They fully committed themselves in the several forums and they brought along new awareness besides their priceless tasks, and most of all they increased awareness on the values of the Kingdom of Justice, Peace, Reconciliation in their own provinces and Institutes and Integrity of Creation. Most of what we intended to do writing the final messages of the seven Comboni forums was achieved in different ways, and influenced General Direction and Provinces by increasing their perception and commitment on the themes of Justice,

Peace and Integrity of Creation whether on personal or provincial level. We still have a long and difficult way to go as reality surrounding us is harder and harder for those people we are sent to defend. There is need for knowledge, information and formation on how to organise Hope, to walk together and to struggle with people even more. We have to become sign of Dignity, Peace, Non-violence and incarnate Love in today's history looking forward hopefully. And maybe it is time for us belonging to the Comboni Family to move some steps further!

Father Daniele Moschetti

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Sowers of change, social poets

The meaning of the Comboni participation in the World Social Forum

When Fr. Luigi Codianni, provincial of North-East Brazil, assigned me to Açailândia, it took me a while to find this town in the map of Maranhão.

It took me even longer to get to understand where I had landed, and how I could better serve the people who were receiving me. Even though the province was helping, at the beginning reality was mute, looking at us in silence, almost daring us to find the keys that would open new ways. I am sure that all missionaries share these feelings, and more than once in a lifetime.

The doors we are able to open at the beginning of every pastoral journey depend from the variety and richness of the contacts we are allowed to establish as we enter into new contexts.

In our region a new *kairós* was about to take place, the intensity of which we would only have discovered later. The World Social Forum was being programmed in Belém, Pará. During the year-long preparation this Amazon capital hosted meetings of activists, researchers, movements and social pastoral groups, to organise and make the best of the results of the upcoming Forum.

We, Comboni Missionaries, as well started taking part with more questions than answers. We were interested in understanding the possible impacts in our regions. We needed help to understand how to give relevant answers.

The network *Justiça nos trilhos* that defends communities damaged by the mining industries of Pará and Maranhão came from the intuitions of the Forum.

The Forum was also the first meeting of communities and movements worldwide that suffer violations of their rights due to the activities of the same mining international corporation, the Brazilian Vale S.A.

Years later, another coordinated effort of this type would come into being: *Iglesia y Minería*, an ecumenical Latin American network at the service of the local churches that suffer most because of mining abuses.

Later, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* of Pope Francis would touch with vigor some of the same keys of the instrument we had been trying to tune.

Today, the work of the Comboni Missionaries in Brazil is known and valued in the field of the environment even in the ecclesial context. In fact we belong to the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM), we are advisors of the National Bishops Conference (CNBB) on mining matters, and we are actively involved in organizing the Special Synod on the Amazons.

Therefore, let us attempt to explore the World Social Forum (WSF) and the Comboni Forum (CF) as instruments at the service of our mission, in the light of the vision of the Church which Pope Francis proposes to us.

1. The WSF is changing

“Another world is possible”: the utopia that gave rise to the WSF is very close to the evangelical waiting for God’s kingdom. **“To the extent that he reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian teaching**

and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. We are seeking God’s Kingdom” (EG 180).

We cannot recount here the entire history of the Forum, and we do not have the conditions to make a critical evaluation. The WSF passed through Brazil in three very significant periods. It was born here, in Porto Alegre, in 2001. It returned to Belém in 2009 at the heart of the world economic crisis. It concluded its 13th edition in Salvador de Bahía in 2018.

At the beginning of our millennium, many popular movements, organised groups, unions and intellectuals from all over the world gathered in Porto Alegre. The intention was to give an alternative and coordinated answer to the Economic World Forum of Davos, Switzerland that gathers every year in January the great financial powers and the majority of the governments of the North of the world. The dream was to build up a critical counter-power at a time of neo-liberal globalisation.

The systemic crisis of 2008 could be considered a watershed. Even while demonstrating the structural failure of capitalism, it was faced with a rigid defense of the same model, revealing its political impotence and lack of vision. (See *Laudato Si’* 189). What was needed was a courageous response and deep change. We are dealing with **“redefining progress”**, says Pope Francis, **“converting the model of global development”** (LS 194).

However, the answer of the powers is going in a different direction, concentrating the patrimony even more in order to inhibit any type of alternative.

The WSF, born when the challenge was the construction of a different globalisation, find itself today in a moment of flight from globalisation. Complex proposals and visions are diminishing, while calls to local actions and projects are on the increase.

The risk in this new situation may be a taming of the proposed model, moving away from the utopic perspectives and the structural changes that guided popular movements just a few years ago.

On the other hand, new and urgent themes are coming up, such as social and environmental rights as an answer to the **“unique and complex socio-environmental crisis”** (LS 139), feminism and the active role of youth.

The most provoking topics in the last WSF were those that, in answer to a systemic crisis, tried to offer a systemic alternative.¹

There is no lack of structural criticism of the Forum, which, according to the opinion of several people, seems to have lost its incisiveness (“a tamed beast”).²

It is said that a little at the time the WSF has been taken over by the activities of the NGOs to the detriment of popular energy and of movements. In this sense, the Forum would be making an effort to look at the global south, but with the eyes of the global north.

Its organisation would be giving way to bureaucracy and routine. The defense of horizontal rights and inclusion would be damaging the ability to take more courageous and precise political situations. To ensure the autonomy of organisation could generate more disorder than participation.

Finally, a theme that always generate polemics at the Forum concerns power: would change be possible without trying to grab political power at the national and local level?

This criticism is legitimate, transparent and partially shareable.

The attempt of Pope Francis to promote debates that are closer to the popular movements³ shows a thirst for meetings at a more “militant” and inserted level. But the shape of this type of gathering is not yet suf-

1 Cf. www.alternativasistemica.org

2 Aram Aharonian, cf. <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/576334-um-forum-social-mundial-esvaziado-de-ideias-povos-e-luta-muda-se-para-salvador>

3 World Meeting of Popular Movements, Rome, October 2014; Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Bolivia), July 2015; Rome, November 2016

ficiently clear and naturally it cannot depend from the call of a leader, no matter how charismatic and inspired.

On the other hand, all this criticism notwithstanding, the WSF continues to be a free meeting space for thousands of people and for extremely interesting experiences. The only fact of getting together rekindles hope, favours new intuitions, strengthens alliances, and gives life to processes of social transformation that the isolation and divisions of our commitments do not facilitate.

In simple words, we will continue to believe in the WSF until we will discover and build together a more popular and incisive journey.

2. Also the Comboni Family is changing

For long time Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (Pope Francis is now using a better expression that is **“Care for our common home”**) have been considered a fundamental dimension of our mission, with particular relevance in the main missionary Institutes.

Comboni Missionaries as well assume that Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation is a central theme, often considered a **“cross-cutting”** issue as it includes all dimensions of our missionary life. However, this topic is often limited and put into practice just by a few sectors or people, and a few specialised groups.

The recent questionnaire handed out by Comboni Forum’s organisers in some Scholasticates and International Centres of Formation for priests and brothers has revealed that the issue is handled mainly from an academic point of view, and that youth in formation knows a very few initiatives implemented in our provinces by Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. However, there exists interest and openness to elaborate on this missionary field.

Forum after forum we are creating a path to involve hundreds of Comboni missionaries both men and women, and lay people as well.

Generally, our Institute organises inter-provincial encounters addressed to institutional leaders (Provincials, or Secretary for the Mission, Formation and Economics); the Comboni Forum instead, calls chiefly con-

freres and sisters basically committed in remarkable experiences on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation that have less opportunities to get away from their missionary immersion and gather.

I consider the WSF and the CF open workshops, ongoing formation and upgrade about the things that are most current in the area of popular movements, human right defense and globalisation of solidarity.

Since the very beginning, our General Direction has been engaged into the matter and has significantly endorsed the cause. The strengthening of the experience has allowed a better understanding from the institution as well; MCCJ and SMC General Directions' message to participants to the Forum in Salvador, in 2008 is proof.

“These meetings have increased our awareness on social movements and they have favoured a better understanding of the wholeness of the mission. The involvement of the Comboni Family is as well a symbol of the road we walk together and it also indicates the way forward. (...) We cannot separate the Gospel from commitment to justice, as the own life of Jesus clearly shows. Daniel Comboni, who was a man deeply in contact with God, boldly accuses the atrocity of slavery, and since his very first journey to Africa he realised the importance of bringing together the interest on mankind and the teaching of the Word”.

Similarly, Comboni Forum organising committee has always tried to involve the media of our Institute to the full, in the belief that the experience of a large and meaningful number of both missionary brothers and sisters in the WSF is catalyst for new intuitions and for a new way to look at problems and challenges of the world.

Comboni formation world is an open challenge: some young confreres of temporary vows have participated in some editions of the Forum, but still we are not in the condition to let these experiences be inspirational for basic formation.

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation theme seems to us essential to the formative curriculum of Comboni missionaries, and it should be detailed mainly from an experience-based point of view, and not just intellectual. The major experiences could be presented in the basic for-

mation like case studies on subjects directly tackled on the territory (for example: land grabbing, human trafficking, migrations, Afro-descendant and native people rights, mining, persecution and criminalisation of advocates for human rights and so on).

Comboni Forum plenary in Salvador presented a interesting proposal along this line, and it will be presented to the attention of the General Secretariat of Formation.

Those meetings of missionaries coming from different continents organised in the Forum gave great visibility to some experiences that were inspiring and emblematic. Most of us were inspired by the example of Korogocho (Kenya) as a challenge for an incorporated mission, or Chorillos (Peru) as a model for the ministerial parish close to poor people. To these examples we can add Tumaco (Colombia - option of service with the Afros within a context of *guerrilla*), Piquiá (Brazil, socio-environmental mission facing violations of the mining and steel cycle), Abeché (Ciad - precious experience of encounter and interreligious dialogue), Berlin (Germany - Comboni sisters at the service of prostitute women), Bethany (Palestine - Comboni sisters' service for the promotion of women, dialogue and appeasement), Rione Sanità in Naples (support for people in periphery life and against camorra), La Zattera lay community in Palermo (LMC commitment to migrants reception) and so forth.

After the Comboni forum encounters, interchange proposal among communities with similar missionary commitment are born. I am a witness of those encounters I was personally involved in: an interchange between Brazil and Mozambique, in Nampula, in order to form Christian communities *leaders* who were victims of mining multinationals (Vale corporation operates in both countries); the cooperation among Comboni missionaries in Brazil and Ecuador in the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) and the participation of confreres in Brazil, Peru and Ecuador to the encounters fostered by the network *Iglesias y Minería*, founded by the same Comboni missionaries.

I do believe that in the last few years we have grown our commitment in terms of strategies of international impact in the defense of human rights. A more precise comprehension on these mechanism together

with the active participation of the Comboni missionaries to VIVAT international reinforced the tie between basic work and organisations for international condemnation.

We therefore welcome with joy and expectation the arrival of Father Daniele Moschetti in the United States – who is the heart and soul of the Comboni Forum- and his inclusion in VIVAT Comboni team and *Africa Faith and Justice Network*, at the service of the whole Congregation and especially of the African continent, beside Father John Converset and Father Gian Paolo Pezzi, as regards land grabbing.

3. Basic principles

Far beyond latter methods or suggestions for the immediate future, the paths realised from 2007 onwards highlight some basic principles for the Comboni Forum to validate and to boost. Let us deal with the main ones.

To share significant missionary experiences goes beyond nice dynamics we are used to play in order to open an encounter and to get to know each other.

It is giving voice to hope within a context in which the yearning for justice and peace is getting more and more fragile and threatened. It is to value methodologically the concrete practice of a missionary life and to listen to the Spirit which does not reveal to us in missiology essays, rather in practical insights that some confreres and sisters shared to concretise charism in today's challenges.

It is to value that little piece of land which bore fruit without being constrained to the mere analysis of the thorns, the stony ground or the paved road. **“Now that same day two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem (...) Then they began to describe what had happened on the road and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread”** (Luke 24, 13-35).

The dialogue with the social movements starts from the humble assumption that we do not know everything, nor we can resolve everything. It serves

the aim launched again by the last Chapter, and given to us by the same Comboni through his founding visions with regard to the value of ministries and to the Catholic work (not in the confessional sense of the term).

The road we walked together as a real family is a visible and fascinating witness of our engagement. The Comboni Forum is a concrete experience through which this journey becomes further and further creative and continuative. Despite difficulties in relationship and in organising simple processes, Pope Francis encourages us: **“The whole is greater than the part but it is also greater than the sum of its parts (...) Here our model is not the sphere, which is no greater than its part where every point is equidistant from the centre, and there are no differences between them. Instead, it is the polyhedron which reflects the converge of all its parts, each of which preserve its distinctiveness”** (EG 235-36).

The mission in terms of openness of space and time for the Kingdom of God who is coming is an encounter among human beings in solidarity. As Karl Rahner stated: **“All the actions we realize as human beings, if we let ourselves be guided by the dynamic of solidarity, and of the Spirit is love for one’s neighbor becoming real and, even if outside of the confessionality of our action it receives its absolute weight from responsibility, significance and eternal validity”**.⁴

The Aparecida Document explains the mission like this: **“Its mandate of charity encompasses all dimensions of existence, all people, all environments of community life, and all peoples. Nothing human can be alien to it”** (The Aparecida Document, 380).

The prophecy for new missionary roads is to cultivate **“from below”** by stimulating the institution which is called to hear and to connect experiences to offer them structure and guarantee of continuity. It doesn’t make sense and it is not fair to wait for solutions **“from above”**; to repeat mechanically the same missionary methods by resigning ourselves to comfortable habits does not give life.

4 Karl Rahner, part of the speech to people committed in socio-political field, Rozzano (Italy), the 23rd of April in 1991

The more we will experience inclusion and permanent contact with poor, the more we will renew the transforming power of our mission: **“I would even say that the future of humanity is in great measure in your own hands, through your ability to organize and carry out creative alternatives, through your daily efforts to ensure the three “Ls” – do you agree? – (labor, lodging, land)”**.⁵

Life on behalf of poor and the encounter among missionaries committed in transforming unjust social structures foster new mysticism in the mission and incarnated spirituality, assisted by a theological and popular reflection on the Bible.

The mission is moving to ever growing multi-scalar level (local, national and international). It supports alliances and networks at each level investing in media and gaining competence in institutional dialogue through mechanisms and international organisms in defense of life and human rights.

4. Paths of continuity

Considering all these reasons, it seems crucial to us to keep on bringing together the Comboni Forum, both on the occasion of the following edition of the WSF, and proposing specific initiatives allowing a greater follow-up and attention to our experiences.

The continental dimension appears to be significant (but not exclusive) in order to contextualise our commitment and missionary reflection, by consolidating continentality as a decentralising tool and subsidiarity in the organisation of the Institute.

We stimulate especially the continuity of theme-based encounters and Comboni insertion in qualified net of the mission, like the one against human trafficking or *Iglesias y Minería* in Latin America, or even the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM). The latter, in the run-up for

⁵ Second Encounter of Pope Francis with Popular Movements, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, the 9th of July in 2015

the Pan-Amazonian Synod seems to us a privileged framework in which Latin-American provinces and General Direction should insert more directly.

We have not yet succeeded in realising the indication of the last Chapter: **“These pastoral services are to be in line with the Continental priorities shared among several Circumscriptions, and lived in broader collaboration on the inter-Provincial or Continental levels”** (CA 45.3).

We can move steps forwards in the **“creation and consolidation of local and inter-Provincial networks in specific pastoral, in order to promote synergy for our work, exchange of skills and contributions, research and development of our service”** (CA 45.6).

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation still remains at the same time a **“cross-cutting”** dimension that should involve all levels of our Institute and an area in which it is required to get qualified and specialised. For this reason, the proposal to identify a little team composed by Comboni Missionaries and lay people both men and women at the disposal of the General Secretariat of Formation and Provinces offering moments of formation, study and in-depth on those topics seems to be really interesting.

Ongoing formation in terms of Institute took important steps in this direction and it is putting itself at the service of new forms of life for the mission.

As important as it is specialisation in diverse areas of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, missionary can give in to temptation to separate theory from practice and not to immerse in daily challenges as long as he or she doesn't rule completely the theme. Broadly speaking, we believe that the more efficient formation is the one encouraged by everyday work, and thus we value study that accompanies practical-pastoral exercise step by step.

The major effectiveness for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation option is granted by daily exercise on these value in the ordinary pastoral.

Many provinces of ours are asking questions on how to translate basic principles we were dealing with in the previous part of this article into ordinary life.

We need to reflect and to share experiences on Comboni style in our parishes, on ministries and lay formation we have to promote, on contents of our celebrations and their link with the challenges of the region we are living in and of the world as well.

Comboni Forum has crossed continents and gathered missionaries from different provinces in the meetings organised in Kenya (2007), Brazil (2009), Senegal (2011), Brazil (2012), Tunisia (2013 and 2015), Canada (2016) and Brazil again (2018).

We have gone a long way and have acquired a new and further understanding on our mission in the world today. However, the challenges of a ever more unfair and unequal reality urge us not to stop.

“Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope” (LS 244).

Father Dario Bossi

Provincial Superior in Brazil

Pope Francis the Social Justice Movements and Comboni Missionaries

Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio

Many people in the multifaceted movements for social justice know that in Buenos Aires then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio lived a simple lifestyle, living and moving among the ordinary people, and frequently finding ways to be with them and show his concern for disadvantaged people through one-on-one encounters or encounters with small faith communities.

Pope Francis' Choices

As Pope Francis, he has multiple responsibilities, many formal engagements with ecclesial and global leaders as well as with large groups of the faithful, the demands of overseeing the immense (and sometimes fragmented) papal curia, not to mention intensive schedules (not least when visiting countries around the world), and presiding over majestic liturgical celebrations with immense numbers of participants that are televised and shown around the world. Nonetheless, he has done his best to continue his relatively simple lifestyle amid the magnificent architecture, complex organizational structures and rigid customs of the Vatican. He finds ways to manifest his concern for all people who suffer anywhere in the world, in particular for those who suffer due to avoidable causes, such as manifest unjust socio-political structures.

Pope Francis and the marginalized

Pope Francis has made time to visit at Lampedusa and Lesvos the refugee survivors who risked crossing the Mediterranean Sea in flimsy crafts. Frequently he has found ways to encounter refugees and other people whose lives confront daily suffering and the threat of violence in the many countries that he has visited, so that he **“could feel firsthand the suffering of so many families driven from their lands for economic reasons or acts of violence of every kind, crowds of the displaced, people who have endured the painful experience of being uprooted from their homeland”** (Vatican, 2016). He found time and energy to be with youth in Roman prisons and celebrate liturgies with them in which he found ways to affirm their innate human dignity. When there are events with large crowds he “sees” and chooses to meet personally individuals who are suffering from severe illness or who are manifestly “disadvantaged” in various ways.

Pope Francis and the popular movements

By deliberate choice and preference, Pope Francis has met three times with large gatherings of representatives of people engaged in the “popular movements” for social justice: **at the Vatican (28 October 2014), at Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia (11 July 2015), and again at the Vatican (5 November 2016)**. In these encounters with the popular movements Pope Francis fundamentally affirmed the validity of their common concerns and common efforts to address issues of injustice, inequality and exclusion. He endorses their shared visions of a more inclusive and just global community. He also offers, together with what he has learned from these movements, his own insights into the root causes of injustice and suffering, and he proposes some of the elements of a faith response. What follows is based on Pope Francis’ dialogues with the popular movements that are comprised of people at the grassroots of society, those who suffer countless indignities caused by injustice, who are activists at the local level where they live, struggling for justice in solidarity with other members of their communities, but who also struggle for the common good of

all humankind and through their predominantly local actions confront global evils that have a universal impact on humankind and on the environment in which all live.

The right and responsibility to engage in activism

First of all, Pope Francis affirms and validates the right and responsibility of all human beings to engage in the socio-economic-political process, as well as their right to take part in organized movements. He affirms their right and choice to address the structural causes of poverty, inequality and of all associated injustices, such as exclusion, land and water-grabbing, deforestation, degradation of the environment through abusive mineral extraction, industrial farming with its over-dependence on the use of herbicides, pesticides and chemical fertilizer, along with greedy speculation in local and global commerce in food. **“You get organized, study, work, issue demands and, above all, practice that very special solidarity that exists among those who suffer, among the poor, and that our civilization seems to have forgotten or would strongly prefer to forget”** (Vatican 2014). He affirms the local and global efficaciousness of many of their initiatives that manifest a “feet in the mud” grasp of reality and tenacious creativity.

Three key areas of socio-political engagement

In all three encounters Pope Francis speaks of three key areas of concern identified by the popular movements: **land, housing and work**, (i.e., the three “L’s”: **land, lodging and labor**, or in Spanish the three “T’s”: **tierra, techo, trabajo**). This means in essence the sacred struggle to ensure dignified employment with decent remuneration, social security and a pension for those excluded from the labor market, land for *campesinos* and the native peoples, and housing for homeless families, the inalienable right to food, the urban integration of poorer neighborhoods. These needs are not addressed in isolation but are integrally related to a host of other issues, including the appropriation of the goods of the earth by a relatively

few people, the denial of social and labor rights, discrimination, violence against women, human trafficking and other new forms of enslavement. He calls for an end to all wars, organized crime and repression, the plunder of nature that results in deforestation, loss of biodiversity and climate change. He advocates for freedom of expression and democratic communication, putting science and technology at the service of peoples, and respect for the natural world that is our common home.

Transformative development of human beings

For these struggles to succeed the members of the popular movements need to embrace a life project that rejects consumerism and recovers local and global solidarity, respects the culture and identity of all peoples, and fosters mutual love along with respect for nature as essential values. Efficacious solutions to today's real problems can only emerge as the fruit of a collective discernment that matures on the ground, a discernment that becomes transformative action **“in accordance with places, times and persons”** (Vatican 2016). The goal that Pope Francis presents is **“the development of the human being in his integrity, a development that is not reduced to consumption or to the well-being of a few, but includes all peoples and individuals in their full dignity, enjoying as brothers and sisters the marvel of creation”** (Vatican 2016).

Rejecting top-down ideologies

Pope Francis therefore rejects the imposition of globalized **“supra-cultural recipes that fail to respect the identity of peoples”** (Vatican, 2016), that are unilaterally imposed on people by the financial and political masters of this world. These pretended “solutions” and socio-economic structures amount to the imposition of a **“globalizing ideological colonialism”** (Vatican, 2016) that is not open to meaningful grassroots participation in analysis and decision-making. They ultimately lead to greater exclusion, divisiveness, violence and destruction.

International imperialism of finance

The exploitative and destructive global and local structures that Pope Francis denounces are linked to what Pope Pius XI already identified as the **“international imperialism of finance”** (*Quadragesimo Anno*, #109) that Pope Paul VI had declared to be an **“abusive form of economic domination on the social, cultural and even political level”** (*Octogesima Adveniens*, #44). This imperialism rules **“with the whip of fear, of inequality, of economic, social, cultural and military violence, which spawns ever greater violence in a seemingly unending downward spiral”** (Vatican 2016). Francis calls it **“a basic terrorism that is born of the overall control of money worldwide and strikes at humanity as a whole”**. **“(…) terrorism begins when you drive out the marvel of creation, man and woman, and put money in their place”**. It is **“the idolatry of money that reigns rather than serves, that tyrannizes and terrorizes humanity”** (Vatican, 2016).

The cold breath of fear

Pope Francis then identifies **“the cold breath of fear”** as the primary mechanism exploited by the wealthy and powerful to maintain this global tyranny. **“No tyranny can last without exploiting our fears. This is key. Consequently, all tyranny is a form of terrorism”** (Vatican, 2016). Feeding and manipulating fear **“is not only good business for those who trade in weapons and death, it weakens us, throws us off balance, breaks down our psychological and spiritual defenses, anaesthetizes us to the sufferings of others, and in the end makes us cruel”** (...) **“Fear hardens the heart and turns into a callousness that is blind to the blood, the pain, the faces of other people”** (Vatican, 2016). Pope Francis quotes the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople: **“Those who are afraid of you have not looked you in the eye. Those who are afraid of you have not seen your faces. Those who are afraid of you do not see your children. They forget that dignity and freedom transcend fear and division. They forget that migration is not an issue for the Middle East and Northern Africa, for Europe and Greece. It is an issue for the world”** (Vatican, 2016).

The politics of fear

Let us note in passing that the Republican party in the USA has played **“the politics of fear”** for many decades. The methodology is simple: emphasize real or imagined reasons to make people afraid and then present ideological and aggressive policies as the answer to the fear. The destructive result is that the USA is the most militaristic nation in the world, constantly involved in nearly continuous wars (whether overt, covert or by proxy), with a military expenditure that is more than half of the national discretionary budget, and holding thousands of military bases in the US and eight hundred military bases around the world. The threat of war replaces diplomacy in many situations. Fear that is fostered locally has devastating global consequences, but the blame for these tragic human disasters is always placed on the “others”, whoever may be the “other” of the moment.

Love as the antidote to fear

Pope Francis says that the antidote to this lethal fear is to build bridges of love, mercy, compassion, encounter and understanding between peoples that **“enable us to break down the walls of exclusion and exploitation”** (Bolivia, 2015 & Vatican, 2016). Pope Francis invites us to confront structural and ideological terror with love. Francis says that in *Amoris Laetitia* he speaks about the joy of love that is found in the **“the barrio, the community, the people, humanity” when we acknowledge them also as our “family”** (Vatican, 2016). Love for the poor is at the very center of the Gospel and of the social teaching of the Church. **“As members of popular movements, you carry out your work inspired by fraternal love, which you show in opposing social injustice” (...)** **“We do not love concepts or ideas; no one loves a concept or an idea. We love people (...)** **Commitment, true commitment, is born of the love of men and women, of children and the elderly, of peoples and communities (...)** **of names and faces which fill our hearts”** (Bolivia, 2015).

Inclusive, participative democracy

Pope Francis also advocates for a renewal and revitalization of inclusive, participative democracy in which all have an active voice. He laments that **“the breach between the peoples and our current forms of democracy is growing ever greater, due to the enormous power of the financial and media sectors that would seem to dominate them”** (Vatican, 2016). He urges the popular movements to engage tirelessly and fearlessly in the political process, acknowledging that this effort to participate actively has resulted in the deaths of many martyrs for truth and justice. **“The idea of social policies being a policy for the poor, but never with the poor and never of the poor, much less part of a project which can bring people back together, sometimes strikes me as a kind of brightly-painted dust bin to contain the refuse of the system”** (Vatican, 2016). **“Moving towards a world of lasting peace and justice calls us to go beyond paternalistic forms of assistance; it calls us to create new forms of participation that include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny. And all this with a constructive spirit, without resentment, with love”** (Vatican, 2014).

Hope through “people power”

Pope Francis proclaims hope. He states boldly that: **“In these times of paralysis, disorientation and destructive formulas, the active participation of people who seek the common good can triumph, with God’s help, over the false prophets who exploit fear and despair, who peddle magic formulas of hatred and callousness, or a selfish prosperity and an illusory security** (Vatican, 2016). **“The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of the great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their capacity to organize. It is in their hands, which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change”** (Bolivia, 2015 & Vatican, 2016). Part of Pope Francis’ prayer for the movements

is: **“May (God) grant you in abundance that strength which keeps us going and gives us courage to cut off the chains of hate: that strength is hope”** (Vatican, 2016).

Corruption

Pope Francis identifies corruption as one of the greatest dangers that can deviate and destroy the gains of the popular movements. **“Just as politics is not an affair of ‘politicians’, corruption is not a vice limited to political life. There is corruption in politics, there is corruption in the business world, there is corruption in the communications media, there is corruption in the churches, but also there is corruption in the social organizations and popular movements”** (Vatican, 2016). Corruption can lead to serving hidden personal agendas or serving commercial interests for the sake of personal self-advancement at the expense of the community. Without continuous dialogue with the community of which one is a part, without ongoing community discernment, there is always the danger of losing sight of the principles and values that inspired the movements and consequently of the original goals that they validated.

The challenge of austerity and humility

Francis issues a challenge to the popular movements – as well as to all of us: **“(…) those who have opted for a life of service have a further obligation, in addition to the honesty with which any person must act in life. The bar is set higher. One has to live his or her vocation to service with a strong sense of austerity and humility”** (Vatican, 2016). The means that Pope Francis proposes is freely chosen moral and human austerity of life, renouncing being unduly concerned with material things or with appearances, the trappings of power, such as lust for money, rich banquets, sumptuous mansions, expensive clothes, luxury cars, etc. Pope Francis states bluntly: **“Corruption, arrogance and public display by leaders increases collective unbelief and a sense of abandonment, and feeds the mechanism of fear that sustains that evil system”** (Vatican, 2016).

By contrast, the example of an austere life of service to one's neighbor is the best way to promote the common good and the bridge-project of (guaranteeing employment, housing and land)". He therefore urges all to combat **"fear by a life of service, solidarity and humility on behalf of peoples, and especially those who suffer most"** (Vatican, 2016). The Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3 and Lk 6:20) interpreted in the light of the Last Judgment passage in Matthew 25 indicate the way forward (Vatican, 2014).

Relevance for Comboni Missionaries

What does all this mean for Comboni Missionaries and how does it relate to the World Social Forum and the Comboni Forum? Much of what Pope Francis advocates for in terms of our way of life and our missionary activities is clearly indicated in our Rule of Life. What is not in our Rule of Life is the updated analysis of the global systems and structures that cause such harm to so many people, as well as the destruction of the natural environment. The World Social Forum and the Comboni Forum are tools, opportunities to meet, mix with, and learn from so many activists from all over the world, as well as to share our own analyses, "dreams" and initiatives.

The World Social Forum

The World Social Forum is a loosely structured gathering at which tens of thousands of activists meet and "evangelize" each other. Many, especially those from the local area are from the grassroots organizations whose members are often from among the people who suffer the greatest injustices. Many other participants are from more formally established organizations, more of whose members are from the "middle class" who are committed to bringing about a more just world. Our "Comboni Network" delegation would probably be considered among the latter group. At the WSF all these people mix, meet and "cross-fertilize" each other's ideals, analyses and methods of working for justice. They have multiple nuanced analyses of local and global situations and causes. They offer a great variety of approaches to building a better

world for all. They share many ideals, hopes and dreams. They are of many cultures, languages and nationalities. The WSF is, in fact, the equivalent of an immense university that offers an extremely rich blend of opportunities for peer-to-peer learning.

The Comboni Forum

The Comboni Forum is a gathering of members of the “**Comboni Network**” that prepares our representatives to take part in the WSF in a more deliberate, reflective and effective way. It also helps them to share, digest and integrate what they have learned after the WSF has concluded. The WSF and the Comboni Forum taken together constitute a kind of “**popular university**” where the challenges of the “real world” and the ideals of the Comboni Missionary charism meet and enrich each other through which the Gospel and the Comboni Missionary charism can become incarnate in the daily reality of very large numbers of committed people.

Formative moment

The WSF and the Comboni Forum constitute a richly formative moment. It is important that the Comboni team be enriched by the presence of Comboni Missionaries, Comboni Missionary Sisters and Comboni Lay Missionaries of all ages. Those who are older can share their experience, insights and acquired wisdom. Youth bring enthusiasm, hopes, dreams and new ideas. It is a rich mixture that can enlighten all, as they meet with other activists of every possible persuasion and conviction all of whom believe that a better world for all is possible. By their very nature both the WSF and the CF are inclusive. The participants in the WSF are male and female, young and old, believers of many faiths but also in dialogue with those whose inspiration is secular. The participants in the WSF are people of countless nationalities, ethnic groups, cultures and languages, socio-political perspectives and economic status, ideologies and life commitments. The participants in the CF represent a more limited sampling of these many lived realities, but nonetheless represent a human and vocation-

al wealth that Comboni would appreciate and celebrate. As we grow in our grasp of the potential represented by the WSF and the CF we can draw upon these riches to strengthen our own commitment to the Gospel and to the Comboni charisms.

Father John Converset

Provincial Superior
North American Province

CHAPTER TWO



COMBONI NETWORK
FOR JUSTICE - PEACE - RECONCILIATION

TUNIS 24-28 MARCH 2015

WE SUPPORT
JUSTICE PEACE AND
RECONCILIATION

Messages to the Comboni Family from participants to World Social Forums and to Comboni Forums

World Social Forum 2007 Nairobi (Kenya)

Rekindling Comboni's flame!

THE WIND OF PENTECOST MOVES OUR STRUGGLES!

The Seventh *World Social Forum* was held in Nairobi from 20th to 25th January 2007. The first such Forum was staged in Porto Alegre (Brazil) in 2001 and continued to be held in the same city for the next two years until the venue for the Fourth *World Social Forum* was changed to Mumbai (India) in 2004. The *World Social Forum* was started to provide an open platform for social movements, networks, Organisations and groups to meet, to know one another and to discuss issues of common interest and importance.

The *World Social Forum* is held at the same time of the year as the *World Economic Forum* which meets in Davos (Switzerland), and where the very rich and powerful of our world meet to work out their strategies to promote growth and maximise profit at almost any cost. The former was started as a radical critique of the contemporary world economic order which thrives on exploitation and social injustice, all the while enriching the very few at the expense of the masses of poor and disadvantaged in our world.

This year, the first time that the Forum was staged on African soil, has seen the issue of the teeming millions of slum-dwellers (*two and a half million in Nairobi alone!*) around the towns and cities of the South of our world move very much to fore of the Forum's concerns. All in sharp contrast, it must be said, to the vitality, vibrancy and colour of the most marginalised of Continents. The major themes treated at the Forum were the debt burden of many developing countries; access to water for all; the environment; land rights for pastoralists and minority groups; EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements) between the European Union and many nations of the developing world; HIV/Aids; housing; human rights; gender issues; wars and conflicts like Iraq, Darfur and Somalia.

The Comboni Family, borne of the passion of Daniel Comboni for Black Africa, could not miss such a golden opportunity: some fifty Comboni Sisters, Brothers, Fathers and Lay Missionaries from all over the world accepted the invitation to meet in Nairobi from 19th to 27th January 2007 to participate in the *World Social Forum*, and thereafter to a couple of days reflecting upon matters of common interest and concern with the help of a Brazilian theologian, Father Marcelo Barros and an Irish theologian of the Medical Missionaries of Mary, Sister Patricia Lonegan. It was an important moment of fraternity and sharing where we experienced the presence of the Spirit, that not only focussed our attention on many of the world's problems but also on the hopes, dreams, and vision of the poor and marginalised in our midst. We had a profound feeling that as Members of the Comboni Family we should be more and more rooted in the struggles and sufferings of the People of God with a spirituality that will help us to resist a world economic order that dehumanises our people and our very selves.

In the light of this encounter, the process of theological reflection over the last days, the experience of our daily lives and our prayer together, we believe God's Spirit is continuing to call the Comboni Family in the following ways:

1. Collaboration within the Comboni Family

We recognise that co-operation strengthens our respective ministries and is an invaluable support in journeying together towards the Kingdom. We therefore feel the need:

- to foster co-operation through common reflection and meetings;
- to include in the Comboni Family all who were born from the charism of Comboni:
 - Religious and Lay Institutes, former Members of such Institutes, groups, and NGOs;
- to allow ourselves and our lifestyle to be challenged and converted by the poor;
- to be more hospitable and welcoming as befits our missionary spirit;
- to promote leadership that is more open to prophetic vision and approaches from the grassroots;
- to make use of already existing channels to continue theological reflection and the exchanging of our experiences;
- to encourage further theological reflection on our charism and Mission in the Arabic-Islamic world, Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. In this regard we would recommend that the existing Continental Groups of Theological Reflection be organised with the active involvement of all the Members of the Comboni Family;
- to hold a similar Meeting on the occasion of the forthcoming *World Social Forum* in 2009.

2. Networking between Organisations, NGO's and groups representing Civil Society

Networking is necessary because:

- it is a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God and is part of our charismatic inheritance from Comboni;
- in today's globalised world we cannot work on our own, but rather need to join forces to influence the decisions of the vested interests in the present world order (*politicians, transnationals and so on*).

Therefore we wish to commit ourselves anew to:

- network internationally with Organisations, NGOs and groups representing Civic Society dedicated to the betterment of the human situation and the protection of creation (*Vivat, AEFJN*).
- network nationally and/or locally with Churches and with those religious and civil organisations which share some of our basic principles and values, and who are involved in similar areas of work to our own. As a response to the pressing needs of the moment, we wish to become more involved in the international campaigns against EPAs (*Africa*) and ALCAs (*Latin America*).

3. Empowerment of People

Letting go is very painful. Following the example of John the Baptist and Daniel Comboni, we want to strive to enable the people we are privileged to serve to become the true authors of their own destiny. We can only do this by believing and trusting in their gifts, talents and abilities. In the past we were often called to be a 'voice for the voiceless'. Today we recognise that the 'voiceless' often have a 'voice' and can speak for themselves. Our task is to accompany them in such a journey of empowerment, to listen attentively to them and enable them to have

their voices heard. In this light, we should intensify our efforts in the formation of local leaders, willingly leave positions of leadership and foster the concept of self-reliance. This does not, of course, take away from our work of advocacy and our duty to speak out on behalf of those yet unable to speak up for themselves.

4. The Priority of the Poor and Disadvantaged

We ask the Comboni Family to make our ‘option for the poor’ more meaningful by inserting our Communities among the poor and under-privileged, with life-styles marked by simplicity and sobriety. This is the way to personal and communitarian conversion: for if we abandon the poor,

it means that we have abandoned God and betrayed our Mission.

We therefore need to:

- live and pray with the poor;
- convert ourselves to a more sober and simpler life-style;
- keep our houses open to receive the poor and one another;
- ask for the gift of solidarity among ourselves and with the poor and oppressed;
- recognise the dignity of the poor: they are the *subject* of Evangelisation;
- recognise the gifts and talents that God has given to the poor for the good of the community;
- share their dreams, inspirations, struggles, insecurities, hopes and joys;
- be attentive to the marginalised, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.

Since we are privileged people (*having the benefit of a good education, ample resources at our disposal, the opportunity to undertake further studies, the ability to travel*) our ‘option of the poor’ obliges us to return to the poor from what we have abundantly received.

5. Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation

The gospel passage from St. Luke (4:16-21) makes clear that Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation is an integral part of our Mission and of the work of Evangelisation.

We commit ourselves to greater endeavour in the field of Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation by:

- recognising that our commitment to this work is primarily evidenced by our relationships with other Members of the Comboni Family, with our workers and with our collaborators;
- co-operating more closely with Local Churches and Organisations on such issues;
- conscientising Local Communities with regard to such concerns, and encouraging them to become actively involved as protagonists in their own right;
- calling upon each Province to establish a commission or similar body to encourage reflection among the Members of our Institutes on such issues;
- promoting theological reflection on Justice and Peace/Integrity of Creation issues on a continent-wide basis.

6. Promoters of Dialogue, Builders of Bridges

We believe that God's Spirit is calling the Comboni Family to promote dialogue and build 'bridges' among the peoples, cultures and religions where we are present by:

- developing a spirituality of dialogue and reconciliation following the footsteps of Jesus, the crucified Lord, who stretched out his arms to embrace all;
- readily supporting the poorest and most abandoned;

- encouraging the encounter of diversities;
- deconstructing our often deformed perceptions and prejudices of others, healing our memories and those of the people whom we are privileged to serve.

To further such work, we wish to adopt the following methodologies and strategies:

- to be open to ecumenical, inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue through personal relationships and through our respective ministries;
- to foster an attitude of dialogue and reconciliation through formation and education, starting from our very selves;
- to treasure the traditional ways of reconciliation among the peoples with whom we work.

These are the fruits of these days of being together as Members of the Comboni Family after the *World Social Forum*. We are conscious that we are not saying new things contained already in our previous documents and tradition but we offer them to you in the hope that you too will find new encouragement and strength as we had during these days of fraternity and sorority. As the disciples of Emmaus, we have perceived the Spirit of Jesus among us and in the struggles of the many people of good will who believe that **“ANOTHER WORLD IS IN-DEED POSSIBLE!”**.

Nairobi, 19th-27th January 2007

World Social Forum 2009 Belém (Brazil)

*From Nairobi to Belém:
a new Comboni mission is possible,
necessary and urgent!*

1. Time of crisis

The current economic and financial crisis, far from being just a mere conjuncture crisis of an economic model (the neoliberal capitalism), brings out an authentic socio-cultural change, which is intense and global. It involves not only the development models that have been world-widely implemented so far, but also the relationships of human beings among themselves and with the whole of creation, the different cultural and ethical patterns, and our vision/praxis regarding the mission of human being in the world. This is what we define as crisis of civilisation.

Through this global crisis we experiment a permanent feeling of uncertainty, ambiguity, instability, and fluidity of human relationship models and values. We realise that the levels of consumption, pollution, extraction and exploitation of the goods of creation are threatening not only the ecosystems, but also the physical and cultural survival of human beings and, by extension, of all the living creatures. If, on one hand, we all feel affected by the irrationality of our own actions, on the other hand we realise that the most affected by all this phenomenon are still the poor in both rural and urban areas, the young people, the women, the formal and informal workers, the native people (black and indigenous), the elderly, and the children.

2. Listening to the signs of times

Strong economic groups, with the collusion of public authorities, keep on invading and plundering traditional areas which belong to native peoples, profaning the remaining sanctuary of native rain forests and millenary cultures. The institutional violence practiced by many States is shown through sophisticated ways of restrictions of fundamentals individual and collective rights. Life preached and witnessed by Jesus of Nazareth is threatened. All this challenge the Comboni Family as they carry on their mission of humanisation. We feel impelled to change our theological, missionary, and operative paradigms. We feel also challenged to take up new evangelising methods and to propose life styles that are capable of responding in a coherent way to the changes of the current organisational, economic, and cultural systems.

3. Welcoming and integrating what is “new”

There are profound and reciprocal implications in the relationships between human beings and nature/creation as a whole and the WSF 2009 has definitely confirmed a vision/posture of facing and analyzing simultaneously, the effects of the human action on creation and the effects of creation on human being. The living beings are sprouted out from mother earth and, thanks to the divine breath, they live and reproduce. Because of this we mean by socio-environmental mission an action profoundly evangelical whose objective is to create new socio-organisational, physical, economics, and cultural relations in order to produce more integration, harmony, and integral quality of life. In other words, to care for the environment is to care also for the life conditions of the people living in a particular ecosystem.

The WSF 2009 has also helped us to understand better that the integrity of creation is not functional only to human beings but it is also to the entire life in its multiples forms (cultural, social, mental, and integral). It is fundamental to understand that we have to move from a socio-environmental vision which is exclusively centered on the well-being of human beings (anthropocentrism) to a vision/posture that incorporates the respect, the care, the preventive and defensive action towards all the living beings, for the fullness of life in its plenitude and magnitude (biocentric).

4. Back to the sources

It has now, therefore, become indispensable and urgent for us to take on the evangelical commitment of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation – JPIC – in the new Comboni mission. This new mission finds its foundation in the historical experience of Jesus of Nazareth, who took on as his own mission “*to announce the good news to the poor, to set the captives free, to give back the sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord*” (Lk 4,18-19).

This option for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation represents a renewed strength for the Comboni mission and an effort to be faithful to the charism of Daniel Comboni who, in his *Regeneration of Nigri-zia*, summarised the Will of God and his missionary project which consists in a profound social and spiritual transformation of the slavery and marginalised reality of the poorest and most abandoned of his time.

5. Taking up commitments

Therefore, we reaffirm the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation as the inspiring and constitutive element of the Comboni charism (See Document of Nairobi 2007 - Attachment 01) as well as the operative principle which should inspire our entire missionary action. Taking as the starting point our various local realities, as Comboni Family, we commit ourselves to:

a. Socio-environmental mission

- Stimulate the provinces to recognise the new theological spaces, the places where God speaks today to our humanity; to favour a permanent eco-theological reflection.
- Promote a spirituality of the socio-environmental care, thus embracing the biblical dream of the Kingdom of “*a new heaven and a new earth*” (Is 65,17).

- Encourage each province to adopt a new methodology which is capable of identifying the threats and aggressions caused to the habitat, to the culture and life style of the peoples, so that they may be able to elaborate projects of intervention at provincial level in order to strengthen life in its fullness.

b. Insertion

- To take up insertion not only in its physical and geographical dimensions, but also as a full identification with the struggles, claims for rights and better quality of life of the marginalised people with whom we live.
- Adopt a socio-transforming methodology in listening and dialogue with the people we serve in taking up the opportunities, the means, the ambiguities, and contradictions of our history, following the footsteps of Jesus of Nazareth.
- Foster a sober life style, limiting our waste and choosing simple structures in our communities.
- Support the Document on insertion “*Mission: living and working with the poorest and marginalised*” which was presented during the CSF II and will be presented to the Comboni Missionaries XVII General Chapter 2009 (See Attachment 02).

c. Formation and spirituality

- Together with people and within an ongoing process of action and reflection reading our human history and the signs of the times. This leads us to think and perceive a new mission which is based on a coherent theological reflection.
- Foster a spirituality and a mystic that are both tuned in with the sufferings, hopes, dreams, and the historical struggles of people. Inspired by a contextualised reading of the Bible as well. Enriched by interreligious dialogue and an holistic vision of life and creation.

- Constitute and reinforce the continentals and/or provincials groups of theological reflections on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation at Comboni Family level.

d. Decentralised and participative government

- Search and propose new models of coordination that are more for the service of mission than for the internal maintenance of the Institutes.

Particularly:

- Encourage each province to define better in a more specific and contextualised way its missionary project.
- Recommend that the provincial coordination may be more available and dedicated to the animation of the communities in view of the fulfilment of the specific provincial project.
- Favor much more autonomy of the provinces so that they may invest in people, communities, resources in meaningful Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation projects, in the long and short term.
- Promote the participation of the Comboni members, both male and female, in provincials and general decisions through thematic forums, assemblies, debates or even through regional meetings involving members of the Comboni Family in fostering a common missionary project.
- To be more clear in projects that each province develops in the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation perspective.

e. Collaboration and networking

- To create an effective network for acting together as Comboni Family, with other religious congregations and interreligious organisations.

- To organise our socio-pastoral ministry at international and local level in collaboration with popular movements, universities, non-governmental organisations, and other organisations of the civil society. We need to consider that due to the complexity and interrelations of the current challenges, we can no longer decide our strategies of action in isolation.
- Share and reflect together with the Comboni Family what we have experienced and learnt in the CSF II. Put ourselves in an attitude of permanent forum. It's an ongoing process of sharing experiences, information, and taking common positions before specific issues, particularly in this new and challenging time for the Comboni mission in the world.
- Promote and allow the organisation of the next Comboni Social Forum III in 2011 and encouraging the Comboni members to a better participation and representation of our institutes. It will be important to collect the intuitions and observations of the participants in a perspective of continuity.

6. Moved by the Spirit

The cry of the indigenous people, quilombolas and afro-Brazilians, who have welcomed us in the Pan-Amazon, together with many other peoples, cultures, races, and creeds of the world and the whole of creation “*groan waiting for the liberation and the plain manifestation of the sons and daughters of God*” (Rom 8, 20-22), challenges us to renew our commitment with their struggles and hopes, making “common cause” with them in the “*creation of another possible world*” – sign of the Kingdom –, in a permanent attitude of listening to the Spirit which is present in them.

Alone we can do nothing. But as Comboni Family, with the power of the Spirit that constantly renews the face of the earth, we are capable, in today's world, to keep alive the passion and to be faithful to the common mission of proclaiming and witnessing the Kingdom of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation!

Belém do Pará, 3rd February 2009

World Social Forum 2011 Dakar (Senegal)

*With Comboni Under the Baobab Tree
Insights from the participants to the
XI World Social Forum to the Comboni Family*

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the General Directorates of the Provinces and all of the Comboni Family,

We members of the Comboni Family gathered in Dakar for the XI World Social Forum would like to share our experience of these days with the rest of our Institutes.

We felt at home, welcomed and appreciated by the people of Senegal – particularly the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception – famous for their unique style of hospitality named Terangà⁶, which is a landmark of their cultural tradition. It is in this context that, as we have participated in this year's edition of the World Social Forum (WSF), we find ourselves provoked in our being missionaries through this critical global moment of history.

Our missionary presence cannot be meaningful if not starting from the knowledge that, before the slavery of yesterday and today, we felt called to ask for forgiveness. That is why we went to the Island of Gorée⁷,

6 A name in the Wolof language given to the style of hospitality characterised by the Senegalese people in which social and formal and informal exchanges are practice through a ritual which concludes with a meal

7 The island of Gorée whose heritage has been protected by UNESCO as part of human heritage is an Island in the Atlantic Ocean, located opposite the city of Dakar, just 30 minutes by boat. It was one of the sites where men and women made slaves were shipped to the Americas and Europe by the merchants

where we celebrated a liturgical penitential rite asking God's mercy, healing our past memories and succours many victims of our indifference. Aware of the various forms of slavery at various moments of history, both past and present, at Gorée we committed ourselves – in the light of the Chapter Acts – with a desire to re-qualify our mission and re-contextualise our lifestyle.

We have valued our precious reciprocity during our stay in Dakar for our participation and interventions in the XI World Social Forum (WSF) as well as in the third edition of the World Forum on Theology and Liberation (WFTL), which for the first time became an integral part of the WSF programme, indicating the necessary link between theological reflection and the global social-political reality.

This intense and demanding involvement stimulated and provoked us in various dimensions of our being missionaries, spiritually, theologically, in the field of inter-faith dialogue, dialogue with global structures/institutions. Especially during the WFTL our presence as missionaries and our work was appreciated due to our wealth of grass-root experiences, which led a discussion on the practical and contingent strategies.

We became aware that our work really cannot be disconnected from a network of social political organisations and workers. Our participation in this 11th edition of the WSF has confirmed that the problems we face locally as missionaries require us to consider seriously the global mechanisms affecting our local reality prompting us to an ongoing re-contextualisation.

This latter aspect is not indifferent, because our action or lack of it has an impact on a wide network as vicarious liability. Responsibility which the WSF had as its focus in addressing the following main issues: EPA (Economic Partnership Agreements), climate change, violation of human rights, migration, Land grabbing by states and corporations (70% of that hoarding of land is taking place in Africa), water, green economy (with the trap which you want to repair the environmental damage of savage capitalism through the use of biotechnology). We feel that these issues cannot be absent from the agenda of evangelisation and its content during basic and ongoing formation, missionary animation, and our economical administration.

This has convinced us that a commitment to practical and effective Justice-Peace-Integrity of Creation means for us to re-structure and upgrade our missionary plan. We have become more aware that in our Rules of Life and in the documents of the Chapters of the Comboni Family that these principles of holistic liberation of the human person and society are already mentioned explicitly and addressed in theory. The recent popular uprisings of the peoples in Tunisia and Egypt have been in the foreground within the meetings and discussions. These events have taught us the importance of communication and networking, which if used strategically can give voice and actualisation of peoples' dreams for reform. Likewise the turnout of almost complete South Sudanese people to vote in the Referendum for independence from northern Sudan is an expression of this desire for change and redemption.

We feel that mission today to be effective must include these occurrences coming from civil society which have been referred to and presented professionally in the WSF. Therefore, our presence and involvement becomes imperative as we allow ourselves to be exposed to worldwide challenges through which God calls us afresh.

Inclusiveness should also comprise of inter-religious dialogue with a renewed consideration of African Traditional Religions that in turn would be embraced in our formation and missionary action. Senegal has been a good example. In this country, which is predominantly Islamic, Muslims are more open to Christian doctrine and feasts and have a sustained cooperation with the local Church. Although some Muslim religious leaders tend to be resistant to this dialogue, nevertheless Senegalese reality and living hospitality (Terangà) challenge these resistances at grass-root.

Meetings, provocations, prayers and sharing of these days in the land of Senegal – land of French baguette and Baobab trees – among international participants to the XI WSF, III World Forum on Theology and Liberation and the III Comboni Social Forum – we have been made to understand the orientation we should take in order to re-qualify our commitment to Justice – Peace and Integrity of Creation. The above issues call us towards an action and a concrete practical plan that we offer

as an attachment to this letter so that we can better engage our Brothers, Sisters and lay people, of whom we are the first to give our willingness and our commitment.

A proposal for a Plan of Action

Acknowledging the importance of the World Social Forum and World Forum on Theology and Liberation, the Comboni participants propose in this text an actualisation of what has affected us from the various Forums through common sharing and reflection. As a continuation of Belém and Nairobi's proposals, we try to offer a series of initiatives:

1. To have constant communication with Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation General Secretaries of our various institutes of the Comboni Family.
2. To have a reference person of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation at continental level (MCCJs) and inter-provincial for the Comboni Sisters.
3. To have a presence in the Board of Governors of VIVAT & AEFJN (Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network) and improve network of communication and collaborations with other pertinent NGOs (Genève & Brussels).
4. To promote use of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation resources (magazines, newsletters and so on) as part of ongoing formation programmes in the Communities of the various Circumscriptions, through constant communication with the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation coordinator.
5. To commit ourselves as Comboni Family at Continental level to participate in a meaningful campaign for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation – at least one per year – with the mandate to sensitise the communities inviting them to be part of the process.
6. To ensure that the person chosen as coordinator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation at provincial level, commit

- him/herself to animate the Communities with a personal and creative approach which should foresee the organisation of workshops and interactive activities.
7. To strengthen the implementation of including Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation themes in Basic Formative Communities exposing young candidates to the importance of JPIC as component of evangelisation, mission animation, and human promotion.
 8. To request that the Comboni Brothers' Centre in Nairobi may become a centre of animation for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation at continental level through the involvement of the coordinator of C.B.C. in collaboration with the Brother director of the 'Institute of Social Ministry in Mission' in Tangaza College.
 9. To have a team of members of the Comboni Family to organise the next Social Forum (2013), with the possibility to have a stand and to intervene in the sessions.
 10. To invite to the World Social Forum and Theological Forum representative of specific Comboni Groups of reflection (i.e. on Islam, Afro-Americans, Slums, Pastoralists, our mission in Asia) so that to actively participate and bring in the missionary experience.
 11. To suggest our Bursars to be careful Justice in our finance; 'in which banks do we put our money?' bearing in mind Banks that 'promote' economical injustice.
 12. To form a Financial Budget for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation activities at the level of Circumscriptions and for the Comboni Participation in the World Social Forum.
 13. To suggest the Secretariat of Evangelisation to form a reflection group on the African Traditional Religions.
 14. As the priorities of the XVII Comboni Chapter (2009) bring about a reflection on SPIRITUALITY, so we reflect on spirituality of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

COMING IMPORTANT GLOBAL EVENTS
TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION:

- **World Summit on Climate Change. Durban, South Africa
December 2011**

- **World Conference on the Environment “Río +20” at Río De
Janeiro, Brazil - May 2012**

The importance of these events rests in the urgent call for action towards an effective care for the environment, given the failure of coming together to an understanding of environmental resources as common goods of humanity.

- **World Social Forum January / February 2013**

Dakar, 3-12 February 2011

Río +20 United Nations 2012 Río de Janeiro (Brazil)

Open letter to the Comboni Family

RECONCILIATION WITH CREATION

The Comboni Family and the socio-environmental mission

The promotion of Peace, Reconciliation, Social and Environmental Justice is an essential dimension of mission. Gradually, we are becoming aware of the particular urgency of the ecological question and, consequently, of the necessity to include it among our priorities of apostolic action⁸.

The Earth, which we received as a gift from the Creator, Father and Mother of Humanity, has since forever elicited the reverential awe and contemplative admiration of whoever believes in the Bible: “Lord, Our God, how great is your name over all the Earth” (Ps 8). This Earth over which we walk became sacred a second time when the creative Word

⁸ “Healing a broken World”, Special Report on Ecology of the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus (Rome), 2011

came to live in it (John 1,14) The original Spirit, blowing again over the Earth, keeps alive in it the Dream of God of new heavens and new Earth where Justice will live” (2Pt 3,13).

In contrast with the total docility of all creatures, guarantors of the primordial harmony (Baruc 3,32-35), today the Earth is threatened more than ever, object of greediness, manipulation and tyranny, violated and enslaved in order to serve vile and abject interests. The cry of the poor, arising from all sides, is also the cry of the Earth which asks for respect and for justice.

We missionaries of the Good News and of Liberation (Lc 4,14-21) bring peace as the primary gift: “Peace to this house” (Lc 10, 5-). But peace will not reign in this “global house” if it will not find men and women who will accept the needs of social and environmental justice, warranty of fraternity and ecological balance. The challenge that humanity faces today is enormous and has unmeasurable consequences. From our answer depends also the triumph of Life over the dark forces of Death.

The Comboni Family gathered in Río

We members of the Comboni Family from three continents, gathered in Río de Janeiro, on the occasion of the Río+20 Conference and Summit of the Peoples, which we followed with interest on June 20-25, 2012, go beyond the lack of success of the official conference, but feel in its depth the presence of God in the entire creation and in the struggles of people in its defense.

Together we have reflected and have prayed; we have listened and shared the long history that has brought us here, passing through the Comboni Social Forums of Nairobi, Belém and Dakar, and the indications of our General Chapters from 1997 to 2009.

Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by the great socio-environmental problems that arise in our provinces and on our continents. We cannot answer these challenges and this global scenery of degradation without thinking of changes in the paradigms of civilisation and without changing, with courage and humility, our style of life and our very organisation.

Challenged by the great socio-environmental problems

A new environmental awareness must permeate our communities with regard to their models and customs of consumerism, the type of food and our relation with natural goods.

Our popular and religious education must include in its pastoral, liturgy and catechism the theme of reconciliation with creation, trying to include in particulate the laity.

It is up to us missionaries to rediscover and offer the biblical, theological and moral foundation of the preservation of common goods and of the various forms of life and to engage in a prophetic denunciation of the indiscriminate commercialisation of the planet and of life itself.

Necessity of a structural change

The Comboni structure must change at the service of a mission that will be more inclusive and effective. For this reason we see the need for:

- A new interaction of the general secretariats of our Institutes, considering Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation to all effects and integral part of the secretariat of evangelisation;
- A greater administrative decentralisation, starting from the continental councils as instrument at the service of the secretariat and of the general administration;
- A greater involvement of the centers of theological reflection at the continental level, so as to help to contextualise and deepen our commitments in the promotion of Peace, Reconciliation, Environmental and Social Justice;
- A consistent insertion of the themes of the promotion of Peace, Reconciliation and Social and Environmental Justice in basic formation and for the formators themselves;
- A greater interaction at the level of Comboni Family, in particular in a joint reflection for our participation in the next Theological

Forum and in the World Social Forum to be held in Tunis, Tunisia in March 2013.

- A clear availability of the general administrations of our Institutes to support the next Comboni Social Forum in Tunis, in March 2013.

Some promotion proposals

- In order that Peace, Reconciliation and Social and Environmental Justice be an essential part of our Comboni mission, inspiring our evangelisation, mission promotion basic and ongoing formation and the economy, we propose a **common campaign of orientation during 2013**. So our next meeting in Tunis would be a good occasion to launch this campaign.
- **Land conflicts and land grabbing** threaten in a violent manner the territories and the people in both African and American circumscriptions. We have already gathered information and documents on this topic, but we feel the need to deepen this theme, studying it in a comparative way among the Comboni circumscriptions and to organise advocacy ways among the members of the Comboni Family who work in Europe and in North America.
- We have also strengthened interprovincial research tools, denunciation activities and support of communities on the **mining topic**. We support the holding of meetings on this topic among the province and delegations touched by this menace.
- We further recommend attention and study on the grave problem of the **privatisation of water** and the conflicts arising from it, that impact in a global way the entire world. This will be one of the main challenges of the next decades, which will hit directly all peoples and in particular the poorest and the marginalised.

In the certainty that Comboni and his prophetic courage confirm us in these ways of promotion of Peace, Reconciliation and Social and Environmental Justice, we wish as a Comboni Family meet again the people of faith and the social movements at the Theological Forum and at the World Social Forum in 2013.

Río de Janeiro, June 20-25, 2012

World Social Forum 2013 Tunis (Tunisia)

*Springtime of dialogue
Towards the dignity of the human family*

As guest of a nation that is being revitalised, the Comboni Family, gathered at the World Social Forum, breathed the Arab Springtime and the strength of a people's dreams.

In Tunis, the dignity and the critical spirit of women, the potentials of young people, their desire to open up to the world are being awakened. This thirst for liberation and of a religion with a human look, is typical of Easter that we celebrated during the days of the Forum.

Holy Week gave a special flavour to the thirst for justice and peace shared by many peoples and social movements. Conversely, global challenges have brightened in a new way, for us, the mystery of Easter we celebrated with the small local church.

We lived days of respectful and attentive listening to the Islamic world, caused by the intercultural dimension which is a characteristic of these meetings of civil society worldwide.

For the first time, we were not present at the Forum by just being listeners, but by presenting ourselves as Missionary Sisters and Comboni Missionaries, with our specific activities, experiences and communication.

We felt in the right place: in dialogue with many people who were searching and together with other religious sisters and religious brothers who are journeying in the same direction, missionary animators surrounded and challenged by the pluralism of ideas and organisations.

By being the voice of our peoples, by giving the reason for our hope with the consistency of those who live next to the people, we were among the few direct witnesses, at the Forum, of the dramas of the various countries in conflict in the sub-Saharan Africa and in the Arab world.

We felt the Church's wealth of commitments in many areas of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation that we too support. We felt strengthened in the joy of discovering that other religious people follow the Comboni methodology of "Saving Africa through the Africans".

We have built together, Sisters and Religious men, a Comboni Forum alongside the events of the World Social Forum. This step enriches us and makes us feel well, it is a unique opportunity of ongoing formation and makes us believe that a better world is possible.

Areopagus of evangelisation

We are men and women of the roads and the Gospel. We have a great wealth and experience of missionary life to share.

But we need a systematic way to proceed, to recompose fragments, to highlight it, to think more deeply about it.

We ask ourselves what should mission be today, knowing that it is up to us to propose a theology and a spirituality which is embodied in the context, nourished by our being tuned to the Bible, walking with Christ the true liberator of history, recovering the mystique of the peoples to whom we belong and serve, in dialogue with the spiritual heritage of the native peoples and the great religious traditions of the world.

The strength of our faith and of our identity resides in the inclusion of and in the listening to, rather than in the definition of boundaries and differences. We welcome the challenge to open up to the world and to fight all types of prejudice.

To commit ourselves together as the Comboni Family is not the goal, but the initial and necessary condition to be missionaries today.

We feel that there should be more space for the lay missionaries and for the people with whom we live and work, through networks increasingly rich and responsible for the today's complex challenges: the leading role belongs to them; we with them are salt and yeast in kneading a new history, hidden stones, as Comboni says.

Continuing the journey

Rereading the missionary and pastoral experience, we are in great harmony on some areas that associate our local and provincial activities. We renew our commitment to serve three priorities:

- The trafficking in people and the human mobility.
- Care of Creation, especially against the grabbing of land and the plunder of the common goods.
- The interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

In these areas that summarise our options for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, many of us are already building inter-relationship among provinces and collaboration between our two Institutes. We cannot pretend to do everything and to know everything: we must qualify and specialise ourselves on issues that we feel more urgent and in tune with our missionary charism.

Let us then renew the methodology of thematic articulation among communities and provinces which we feel challenged by similar situations, as it is already happening, for example in the case of the working group among the pastoralists in East Africa, or in the case of the common commitment in Brazil, Mozambique and Peru on the impact of mining on society.

Let's start off again from Tunis with the Easter message in our heart, the joy of sharing with our communities and provinces what we have seen and heard.

Let it plainly be clear that the Comboni meeting during the World Social Forum has been an opportunity in which the missionaries can be evangelised and can evangelise.

As Comboni Family, we feel the need that a permanent reference group is to be retained, ensuring and facilitating the continuity of this process. Praying on the tomb of the first Christian martyrs of this land, we have renewed with them the courage to witness till the end our faith and to offer our lives without reservation, so that all may have life in abundance.

World Social Forum 2015 Tunis (Tunisia)

To be Springtime in the Church and World Today

After two years, the World Social Forum (WSF) has returned to Tunis in a context of growing instability and violence in North African Countries and the Middle East. The WSF set out to be a sign of peace and hope for the process of the “Arab Spring” which has been threatened by terrorism and runs the risk of being perverted by religious fundamentalism and repressive governments. The WSF participants have repudiated “every form of terrorism”, including the arrogance of militarism and the systemic violence of a homicidal economy.

The Forum was gratefully welcomed by a people that is in a process of emancipation, with the youth and women as the main actors.

The Comboni Family (as the “Comboni Network”⁹) was once again present, with one of the most representative and international delegations: 37 members working in 15 countries.

In a multicultural setting of colors, rhythms and dances the peoples of the Maghreb were the most numerous participants in the discussions and manifestations. In comparison with two years ago, the participation of other African countries has grown; in many cases the African participants recognised and appreciated the Comboni Missionaries, both women and men. On a global level the Forum is one of the few public spaces in which peoples from the South can express themselves freely.

The principal issues addressed in the roughly 1500 workshops were the defense of human rights (especially of women, migrants and mi-

9 The participants in the Forum were: Comboni Missionaries, Missionary Sisters and Comboni Lay Missionaries, a retired Xaverian bishop, two Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, laypeople from Brazil and Uganda. We organized our workshops in collaboration with various organisations: Lavigerie Team (Tunis), Franciscans, CIDSE, Vivat International, Franciscans International, Solwodi (Germany), John Paul II Justice and Peace Center (Uganda), Liberty Tree Foundation (USA).

norities); the environment and climate change, which require that we change our lifestyle; alternatives to the neoliberal system of economic domination; spirituality and inter-religious dialogue.

As the Comboni Family we discover that we are in growing sympathy with the commitment of civil society groups that have been organised in various parts of the world. This is an expression of our ongoing effort to put into action the Plan of Comboni, whom we experienced as walking with us in the various activities carried out at the Forum.

Over the past eight years the Comboni participation in the WSF has become more qualified: we have begun to organise seminars and workshops inspired by our missionary experience and we are increasingly sharing activities and broader strategies with the groups with whom we network and collaborate.

The booth set up and run by the Comboni Family has become an important instrument of mission promotion: through the diversity of our institutes and nationalities we give witness to our shared Christian commitment to change all that destroys life.

The role of lay people is fundamental; it urges our institutes to open up ever more to ways of sharing our missionary commitment with competent and passionately committed people who broaden our understanding of the world and widen our networks of relationships, guaranteeing continuity in the process of evangelisation and the transformation of reality.

To be present as Comboni missionary men and women

We have taken part in the Forum with the intention of bringing the dimension of faith into the processes of liberation in which we walk together with organised civil society groups. For this reason, each day we set aside a time for community discernment and celebration.

We believe that mission is above all to share the spirituality that nourishes our actions and inspires the transformative vision that “a different world is possible”.

We have repeated this to ourselves while celebrating in the crypt of the Cathedral of Tunis, where the Christian presence is hidden within the

Arab-Muslim culture. We began our time together on the day in which we commemorated the martyrdom of Óscar Romero and thirty years after the martyrdom of our brother Ezekiele Ramin, in the week before Holy Week. The seed that surrenders its life for the life of the world is a beautiful image of our own fragility in the face of such great challenges, as well as of our hope that it is still possible to bring about a “spring-time” together with the peoples who welcome us.

In continuity with the discernment carried out over the previous four Comboni Forums, we reaffirm the dimensions in which we are engaged and which we need to sustain and develop further:

- Freedom from modern forms of slavery, especially trafficking in persons;
- Migration and defending the rights of migrants;
- The pathways to reconciliation and dialogue in countries marked by war, with particular attention to inter-religious dialogue and more specifically Muslim-Christian dialogue;
- Defending creation and the common goods of the earth in synergy with the victims of environmental injustice and reviewing the lifestyle of our communities and provinces.

In order to be effective in these areas of concern it is always necessary to create networks on the interprovincial and continental level, to welcome lay persons who are competent in addressing these issues and to collaborate with other organisations, whether faith-based or not, that are striving to defend life.

As we are called to recognise the “new Areopagi” of Mission, we reiterate the importance of having a Comboni presence at the World Social Forum and propose it as a fixed commitment in which we verify the meaning and effectiveness of our journeys together with humankind, as a pilgrimage towards “new heavens and a new earth”.

The participants at the World Social Forum and Comboni Forum 2015.

Tunis, 29th of March 2015

World Social Forum 2016 Montreal (Canada)

Open Letter

The participation of sixteen Comboni Missionaries and Sisters at the 12th edition of the World Social Forum in Montréal (9-14 August 2016) made it possible to meet many brothers and sisters from various nations who pursue the dream of another world, different from the present, sustainable and inclusive, just and at peace.

We believe that participation in the Forum is a sign of fidelity to the charism of our founder, St. Daniel Comboni, who fought for the liberation from slavery and the regeneration of Africa.

In the seminars conducted by the Comboni Network we had the opportunity to present and raise the awareness of the dramatic situation in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Brazil, highlighting the struggle for a just peace, the commitment for social transformation and the opposition of local communities to social and environmental violations.

In the seminars we even dealt with the analysis of the land grabbing issues, of human trafficking and climate change, highlighting the work of advocacy for a global intervention strategy.

Because of the discriminatory practices of the Canadian Office of Immigration, the visa was denied to so many people from Africa and Asia who wished to participate in the Forum. Their absence was a great loss for the event which, for the first time, was held in a city in the northern hemisphere. We were then unable to hear the voices of those in the Southern hemisphere who would have liked to shake public opinion on the negative consequences of neoliberal economic policies in their countries and make us share the dream of the associations who fight for a just peace and a sustainable economy.

We have noted with sadness the little involvement of the local Catholic Church at the Forum. By contrast, there was a satisfactory participation of religious and in particular of religious women at the WSF.

It is essential that the local Church be actively involved in the preparation and implementation of the next Social Forum to connect with the work for justice, peace and integrity of creation being carried out by many Christians in the world.

Despite the organisational limitations experienced at the WSF in Montreal, we believe that it's important to maintain and strengthen, as Comboni Family, the commitment and participation in the next Forum, a privileged place of encounter and exchange of experiences among those who believe and fight together for a different world.

We welcome Pope Francis' challenge who in the encyclical *Laudato si'* calls the Church to listen to the cry of the Earth and of the poor and to join with all people of good will to accomplish the globalisation of solidarity and take care of the common home.

To the Comboni Sisters and Comboni missionaries we propose:

- that our Institutes be more involved in the preparation of the next WSF and the World Forum of Theology and Liberation, learning through reflection and the praxis of other groups and offering our missionary experience alongside the poor;

- that the participation in the WSF of confreres and sisters engaged in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation may increasingly become a formal commitment by our Institutes. In the context of change in the structure of the General Directions and Secretariats of our Institutes, the continuity of the involvement of the Comboni Family must be guaranteed. Specifically, we must support a permanent team to coordinate the Comboni interaction with the WSF, also by establishing an inter-congregational fund *ad hoc*. Thus, participation in the Forum will be an ongoing process of revitalisation of our missionary experience;
- that we deepen our cooperation with the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of USG and UISG, developing our dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the commitment in the networks of VIVAT International, AFJN and AEFJN;
- that the Comboni commitment at Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation level be extended to the fabric of the social movements which operate in local, national and international networks;
- that our media – Nigrizia, Mundo Negro, Além Mar and Combonifem – become the bearers of values and challenges of the WSF through adequate communication;
- that the Comboni formative process be open to the specific commitments of our provinces in the context of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation and the experience of WSF, to help our young people to better meet the challenges of today's world.

Montreal, 14 August, 2016

World Social Forum 2018 Salvador de Bahía (Brazil)

To resist is to create - to resist is to transform

*Ministerial methods and networking/cooperation
within the Comboni Family and with other organisations*

We, the Comboni missionary lay people, sisters, brothers and priests who took part in the WSF and the CF, greet you from Salvador, the land of black resistance and of Afro-descendant cultures, with hearts full of gratitude and hope. From the 10th to the 19th of March 2018 we lived together a strong and unique experience by attending the WSF, that had as a theme “*To resist is to create - to resist is to transform*” and the 8th CF on the theme of “*Ministerial methods and networking/cooperation within the Comboni Family and with other organisations*”. We thank in particular our general councils that together sent us a message of encouragement for our commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation and for our participation in the WSF as an experience of how we live our charism in the challenges of today’s world.

Our participation was relevant and numerous: 53 members from Africa, Europe and America. We experienced the great richness of our charism in the variety of our commitments. For the first time representatives of

our young people in formation at the scholasticate and at the CIF with their formator attended. We are also grateful for the answers we received from four scholasticates to the questionnaire sent by the central committee with the objective of understanding how much the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation themes are present in their formation. We also confirm our commitment to involve always more the people in formation and their educators in the themes of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation and in the dynamics of the WSF and of the CF.

In the WSF we, as Comboni Network presented four workshops: Land grabbing, Mineral extraction, Socio-political situation of the DRC and of South Sudan, and the Elimination of violence and gender discrimination. This allowed us to share our commitment as missionaries for the possibility of an alternative world within the methodology of the WSC. A stand, which we set up, allowed us to do mission promotion, to meet and dialogue with many people and be known. From among the many workshops offered by the WSF we followed with great interest the New Paradigms, Theology and Liberation, Youth, the Resistance of indigenous people and of Afro-descendants, Migrations. In the course of the Forum we also attended the women's world assembly. The WSF took place in a festive climate, only interrupted by the killing of two human rights activists, Marielle Franco in Río de Janeiro and Sergio Paulo Almeida do Nascimento in Barcarena, Pará.

The CF took place under the sign of continuity with prior encounters. The days were marked by times of inculturated spirituality when we celebrated life, sufferings and hopes in tune with the situations of the countries we came from or encountered at the Forum. We reflected on the need to deepen our reflection on the new paradigms of mission, of consolidating this experience as a Comboni Family and give wider space for lay people to participate. In this reflection we were accompanied and animated by Marcelos Barros, who shared with us the current state of theology and liberation, and by Moema Miranda, who after an analysis of the world's situation, proposed some sources of light for the journey as proposed by *Laudato Si'*. Faced by a neoliberalism without limits, the invitation consisted to introduce the poor to dialogue and to strengthen the faith in the presence of the Spirit of God who walks with us through history.

Stimulated by what we have experienced we propose to:

- Publish a book that will gather the history and the experiences of these 11 years of CF, showing directions for the future;
- Enlarge the coordination of the Comboni Network for a better service of animation and formation on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation themes;
- Organise a continental Comboni Social Forum to involve the various realities wherein we work;
- Create a fund to support the activities tied to our commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation;
- Consolidate an on line platform where to gather and share experiences and material on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

After this experience, we realise all the more the importance of meeting again for a greater cooperation within ourselves, to face one another as Comboni Family and as people busy in different fields but united in our commitment to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation to look for new ways to minister and new paradigms of mission.

Salvador de Bahía, March 10-19, 2018
Feast of St. Joseph

CAPITOLO THREE



KULTUR DES FRIEDENS
CULTURE DE LA PAIX
CULTURE OF PEACE
CULTURA DE PAZ

UEPS
The Union of Students in the Southern
Provinces of MOZAMBIQUE

**COMBONI
NETWORK**

**REVE GRITO
PELA VIDA**

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT
STIFTUNG**

LIVAT
Together for Life,
Dignity and Human Rights

COMBONI NETWORK
FOR JUSTICE - PEACE - RECONCILIATION
World Social Forum
12-17 March 2018

General Directions' Messages and Comboni Family on participation

Beyond collaboration: under Comboni's gaze

*“The whole is greater than the part,
but it is also greater than the sum of its parts”*

(EG 235)

Dear Confreres, Sisters and Comboni Lay Missionaries,

the beauty and joy of the encounter encourages us to open new paths in the collaboration among the Institutes founded by Comboni or which he has inspired.

In a world where walls are built to separate and divide, a world loaded with preconceptions due to differences in races, languages, and nations, and which struggles to open the door to those who are different, we greatly feel Jesus' invitation to unity and communion: “**May they all be one, so that the world may believe**” (Jn 17:21). This unity is an invitation not only to work with others (so to collaborate), but also to enter into deeper relationships and to seek new ways of encounter not based on affinities of character or interest, but on gospel values that call us to open the way to the acceptance of the other with his limits and weaknesses, but also with his richness and beauty, in view of a more fruitful and productive mission.

The last decades have led to profound socio-political changes which challenge us and call us to search for new structures to make our mission more timely and meaningful. Popular movements demand active participation in decision-making processes. This is true not only in civil society: such wave of democratic values has also been experienced in the Church. The lay people are becoming increasingly present in various ministerial domains that have long been the exclusive domain of priests or religious, and contribute to the mission by offering their own viewpoint that helps to give a deeper reading of reality. Along with the laity we can reach areas where the Comboni presence is desired.

As we gathered as Comboni Family on June 2, 2017, at the annual meeting of the General Councils, for a day of reflection, prayer and sharing, we felt challenged to confirm and renew our desire to embark on a path of deeper collaboration among us. A journey already begun a long time ago as a Comboni Family, but which always needs to be renewed and deepened.

We recalled the document **Collaboration for Mission of March 17, 2002**, on the occasion of Daniel Comboni's anniversary of beatification. In this letter are developed in depth not only the journey made and the **“operational indications”**, but above all the evangelical and Comboni foundations of collaboration. In fact, the Spirit of Jesus is the spirit of unity that Comboni has desired from the beginning for his Family, **“a little Cenacle of Apostles (...) bringing warmth as well as illumination”** revealing the nature of the Centre from which the rays emanate, that is, the Heart of the Good Shepherd (W 2648).

During our reflection, we realised that a long process of collaboration has been and is still being made in many different ways and situations in the life of our Institutes: we can think about the sharing at the level of secretariats and general offices, but also at the level of provinces through participation in provincial assemblies, common retreats, Comboni celebrations, ongoing courses of formation. There are also good examples of joint reflection and pastoral action in places where members of our Institutes and CLM live together.

We intensely feel that the desire to revitalise our being and doing mission together is rooted in the nature of the human person – to be in

relationship – in the Word of God and in the legacy left by our founder Daniel Comboni. He wanted the whole Church to engage as one body in the evangelisation of Africa: ***“All God’s works that, if separated from each other produce scarce and incomplete results, but if united together and focused on the single purpose of planting the faith firmly in the heart of Africa, would acquire greater vigour, develop more easily and become most effective in achieving the desired objective”*** (W 1100). Many are his appeals to this collaboration and, looking at his example, we feel more intensely rise again in us this spirit of collaboration.

We are aware that there are difficulties in this journey that can lead us to discouragement, such as inadequate human and emotional maturity, self-referentiality, protagonism, individualism, lack of identity, and sharing of wealth. However, these situations are at the same time a challenge to seek new forms of collaboration together and with creativity. We would like to mention some of the benefits of a combined work among the Comboni Institutes: the innate beauty of cooperation, complementarity, mutual enrichment, ministeriality, the witness of living and working as community – men and women alike – with different nationalities and cultures. This way, not only do we become witnesses of unity in diversity, but we become seeds of new Christian communities of brothers and sisters witnessing to the words we proclaim.

We have a good common charism that has grown and developed in various forms. Thus, Comboni’s inspiration goes in history to become an announcement of the Gospel to every generation where peoples are marginalised. The charism grows and it is renewed when shared with others who recreate it in the peculiarities of every Christian way of life. Diversity is not a threat to the form of being Comboni Missionaries, but it strengthens the sense of belonging when it is lived with simplicity and gives space to the other.

We humbly point out some aspects in which we feel we need a creative and bold effort to improve collaboration at the level of people, communities, provinces and the General Direction: ***“We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all”*** (EG 235).

We commit ourselves:

- to know more about the **history of our Institutes**, remembering with gratitude the wonders of God;
- to know **the people and the present life of our Institutes** by communicating who we are and what we do by the means at our disposal for a greater sharing of our pastoral and missionary activities, by appreciating the efforts we are already making;
- to **reflect together on the Comboni mission** today in the world: the new paradigms of mission, ministeriality (through specific pastoral commitments) and interculturality. More than providing answers to the problems, we need to halt and think so that we may offer visions to our Institutes;
- to **begin ministerial and inter-congregational (or inter-Comboni Family) communities**, where we live in the sign of mutual trust. Looking to the future, to think about how to reconfigure the Comboni Family to better witness a work done together;
- **to work together at the level of formation at the initial stage** of our candidates on the charism and Comboni spirituality, and sharing in the ongoing formation courses and meetings whenever possible (a letter on this topic has been written and distributed to all the Mccj formators during the Formation Assembly in Maia, Portugal, in July 2017);
- to deepen our Comboni spirituality and **to encourage moments of discernment and prayer**, in listening to the Word and the signs of the times, during special occasions in the life of our Institutes, promoting meetings on Comboni spirituality;
- **to respond together to emergency situations** or other situations that imply a common effort.

On the occasion of the 150th Foundation of the Comboni Missionaries' Institutes and of the 25th anniversary of the beginning of the setting up of the Comboni Lay Missionaries, we feel inspired by the Spirit to reiterate the effort of collaboration.

In the certainty that what has been said above represents some of the possible paths on the journey of collaboration, we invite you all to be creative and generous, to open up to the breath of the Holy Spirit who makes all things new and urges us to move forward with confidence: ***“The Spirit is the wind that drives us forward, keeps us on the journey, makes us feel pilgrims and strangers, and does not allow us to sit and become a sedentary’ people”*** (Pope Francis’ General Audience, May 31, 2017).

Rome, 10 October 2017

Mother Luigia Coccia (Sup. Gen. CMS)
Sr. Rosa Matilde Tellez Soto
Sr. Kudusana Debesai Tesfamicael
Sr. Eulalia Capdevila Enriquez
Sr. Ida Colombo

Dalessandro Isabella (Resp. Gen. ISMC)
Dal Zovo Maria Pia
Galli Mariella
Rodrigues Pascoal Adilia Maria
Ziliotto Lucia

Mr. Alberto de la Portilla (Coordinator CLM)

Fr. Tesfaye Tadesse Gebresilasie (Sup. Gen. MCCJ)
Fr. Jeremias dos Santos Martins
Fr. Ciuciulla Pietro
Fr. Bustos Juárez Rogelio
Br. Lamana Cónsola Alberto

Message of the General Councils to the Comboni Family committed in 2018 WSF, Brazil

Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

Greetings from Rome where the two General Councils gather for a sharing day.

The Comboni missionary commitment to the World Social Forum has a long tradition which dates back to 2007 in Nairobi and it has lasted ever since. These meetings have increased our awareness on social movements and they have favoured a better understanding of the wholeness of the mission. The involvement of the Comboni Family is as well a symbol of the road we walk together and it also indicates the way forward. We are fulfilled in noting that a large delegation of Comboni Missionary Brothers and Fathers, Comboni Missionary Sisters and Comboni Lay Missionaries joined in the encounter. We are grateful to you and we praise your engagement as you left your numerous tasks aside to dedicate some time to reflection and sharing on new projections on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

We live in an era which is strongly polarised and mastered by great economic powers that cause poverty and inequality. We are sadly very familiar with these realities due to the work of our missions. Sometimes we run the risk of disguising within the border of the limited reality in which we operate and of ignoring that poverty close by us is the result

of unjust structural conditions which have a global character. A better perception of these dynamics that destroy our lives allows us to be more discerning and to encourage a conscience transformation in people we share life and ministry with.

We have to face worldwide problems in a pluralistic perspective. It is therefore fundamental to create networks of knowledge, reflection and action. At the same time we live in a historical period in which popular movements are social transformative agents that we cannot ignore. Whether the movements are of Christian inspiration or not is not important and it doesn't have to constitute a limit as we are united in sincere humanism and wishing for a decent and dignified life for all creatures. The Pope reminded all participants to the Third World Meeting of Popular Movements that they are **“sowers of change, promoters of a process in which millions of great and small actions linked creatively can come together”**. Against the globalisation of indifference, Francis calls to **“put the economy at the service of people, to build peace and justice and to defend Mother Earth”**.

This year you are going to meet in Salvador de Bahía, Brazil, from the 13th to the 18th of March for the World Social Forum and then you will keep on comparing notes at the Comboni Social Forum on the 18th and on the 19th of the same month on the theme of **“Ministerial methods and networking/cooperation within the Comboni Family and with other organisations”**. You will have the opportunity to share concrete experiences of commitment in different networks touching first-hand our work in America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. We are sure that it will help to broaden our horizons and to find methods to run the mission we carry on together.

We cannot separate the Gospel from commitment to justice, as the same life of Jesus clearly shows. Daniel Comboni, who was a man deeply in contact with God, boldly accuses the atrocity of slavery, and since his very first journey to Africa he realised the importance of bringing together the interest on mankind and the teaching of the Word. The Gospel should transform the individuals and their vital environment at the same time as Comboni exactly tried to achieve in the Malbes program. Besides, how could we forget Father Ezechiele Ramin who left a price-

less proof of a life consumed in the name of justice and of the Gospel, right in the land which will welcome and host you during the time of your meeting.

In this season of Lent, we have close to our heart the condition of many people who are victims of violence. Among them we can catch sight of the look of Christ carrying his cross, but we are also aware that the light of life coming from the Father reaches us beyond the darkness of the sepulchre. We want to thank you for your work and we are grateful to the Central Committee and to the Provinces of Brazil as they welcomed us and for their contribution to the organisation of the event. We wish you a positive moment of reflection and assessment of the last eleven years and may you convert the experience you lived into practical planning that may invigorate our Institutes.

United in Christ missionary,

Rome, the 8th of March 2018

**The General Councils of
Comboni Missionary Sisters
and Comboni Missionaries**

Cooperation for the Mission

The theme of the Comboni Forum, held after the World Social Forum of Salvador de Bahía, Brazil (March 10-19, 2018) dealt with ministeriality and cooperation within the Comboni Family. This is a fundamental theme for mission that was highlighted in the last letter of the Comboni Family titled *Beyond cooperation. Under Comboni's gaze* (October 2017). The letter pointed out the advantages of common activities as Comboni Institutes: *“The innate beauty of cooperation, complementarity, mutual enrichment, ministeriality, the witness of living and working as community – men and women alike – with different nationalities and cultures. This way, not only do we become witnesses of unity in diversity, but we become seeds of new Christian communities of brothers and sisters witnessing to the words we proclaim”*. The letter made it clear how important it is not only *“to work with others”* but go beyond that, *“to deepen relationships and to look for new ways of encounter not based on an affinity of character or interests, but on the Gospel that calls us to be open to accept the others with their limitations, their weaknesses, but also with their richness and beauty, in view of a more fruitful and generative mission”*. In fact, beyond cooperation. It was a letter that followed the document of the Three General Administrations of the Comboni Institutes of 2002, *Cooperation for mission*, placed in the footpath of the charismatic intuition of Daniel Comboni for whom *“the works of God”* the more were they based on a concrete and authentic cooperation and a unity of goals, the more would they develop and obtain *“the desired intent”* (Writings 1000). In a few words, cooperation for mission is part of the Comboni spirit, but not only in the sense of a proper way of **‘doing mission’**, but above all, of **‘being mission’** – namely, a witness of life, mutual acceptance, forgiveness and mercy, sharing, or in other terms, **“the conversion to the Gospel values of communion and participation”** – the foundation of **‘unity of purpose’** and missionary practice.

1. Cooperation within the Comboni Family and with other organisations

The document *Cooperation for Mission* highlighted three levels of cooperation within the Comboni Family: the General Councils, the secretariats and general offices and the provinces/delegations/regions.

Let us explore the situation at the general level, omitting the provincial and regional levels where, we believe, there are examples of concrete cooperation in various sectors.

There is a degree of cooperation between the General Councils of the Comboni Family (Comboni Missionaries, Comboni Missionary Sisters, Comboni Lay Missionaries, and the Secular Missionary Comboni Institute) which is shown in regular meetings (at least twice a year) where programs are shared, together with the ways of implementing the chapters, assemblies connected with them and the formulation of common documents.

Cooperation, instead, needs to be deepened between secretariats and general offices (in particular between the Comboni Missionary Sisters and the Comboni Missionaries who, among other things, have similar government structures and an analogous religious and missionary life), specifically concerning the planning and the execution of joint initiatives in fields such as ***“evangelisation, mission promotion, justice and peace and the integrity of creation, formation, vocation promotion and the economy”*** - sectors of cooperation highlighted in the joint document *Cooperation for Mission*.

A concrete and authentic example of cooperation within the Comboni Family, which by now has a decade old tradition, has been the preparation and the running of the Comboni Forum in the context of the World Social Forum.

The cooperation between the Comboni Family and international and inter-congregational organisations is positive and fruitful, especially with regard to advocacy, with organisations such as VIVAT, AEFJN, AFJN - to note that some provincial initiatives, such as the campaigns against

the negative impact of the mining sector on people carried out by the province of Brazil have been incorporated in the campaigns of VIVAT. Beyond activities of advocacy, cooperation extends also to the sector of *formation* with the participation in meetings of the Africa Working Group (which is part of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Union of Superior Generals – USG – and of the International Union of Superiors General – IUSG – whose aim is the formation of international and local congregations in Africa on themes of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) and of SEDOS (Service on Documentation and Study on Global Mission). Furthermore, we are a stable presence in the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of the USG/IUSG which coordinates the reflection and the organisation of justice and peace activities.

2. Future Prospects

For sure there is room for improvement for a more fruitful cooperation within the Comboni Family, but it should not sound like empty rhetoric to say that the first step consists in cultivating ***“attitudes that prepare us for constructive relations”***. In other words, ***“to destroy subtle forms of prejudice and lack of authenticity that stand in the way of responsible and fraternal relationships”***. Instead, ***“We must recognise and accept that we need one another, with our richness and our vulnerabilities”***. This is what the quoted document *Cooperation for Mission* says. An honest recognition of our resistance and of the prejudices that damage a concrete and joyous cooperation is fundamental.

It seems to us that we certainly need to deepen and improve our cooperation with the Comboni Lay Missionaries and with the Secular Institute. Naturally, there are forms of cooperation at the local, provincial and regional level - but, unfortunately, there are also cases where cooperation, especially with the CLM, is difficult. We have yet to find programs or fields of cooperation with these two branches of the Comboni Family at the general level.

We would like to stress four areas of commitment that the letter *Beyond Cooperation* proposes and that we consider important. First of all, an

effort of *reflection*: on the new paradigms of mission, on new specific pastoral approaches undertaken together and on interculturality. This is a reflection in common that is still missing in the Comboni Family. The second area is *ministerial*: namely, the commitment to start ministerial communities with other Institutes, but also within the Comboni Family. The third area of commitment deals with *formation*, both basic and ongoing, sharing courses and meetings of formation, but also enriching the basic formation teams with people from other branches of our Institutes. The fourth area of cooperation is *an answer to emergencies* that requires common and shared efforts. These are the four possible areas of commitment for a fruitful cooperation in the Comboni Family in the immediate future.

Our current involvement with international and inter-congregational organisations does not exclude the possibility of a greater involvement with other organisations in the future. Questions connected to migration or campaigns of awareness about land grabbing, weapons, human trafficking, mineral exploitation that produce wars in Africa, are all possible areas for our cooperation with international organisations, Ngos, and with both ecclesial and lay groups.

Father Arlindo Ferreira Pinto

Coordinator of JPIC, Comboni Lay Missionaries, Media

Father Mariano Tibaldo

Mission Secretariat

CHAPTER FOUR



RURAL WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

AFRICA *is* **NOT FOR SALE!**



Comboni Family's Reflections

What theology for a new paradigm of mission

Starting from the changes of Vatican II, theological and missionary reflection has focused on a fundamental point: a rethinking and the vision of mission in dialogue with the complex reality of today's world. This thanks to a renewed awareness of the relation between church, world, and God's kingdom that makes **mission dialogical and multi-directional, aware of the global crossroads**, by sharing tensions, dramatic situations and novelties that characterise daily life. In this manner, the new fact of the global village, the crossroad of peoples, brings back the *ad gentes* to its original meaning, including in a positive way 'of many people' namely of any man or woman who may benefit from the Gospel presentation, based on their own social, cultural and ecclesial environment.

Within this point of reference there has arisen an important *methodological* point of view. The need to re-interpret the Christian message at the service of human growth is not born from a temporarily fashionable attitude, but is inserted in the complexity of a change that does not allow simplistic ideological interpretations. Without a relevant interpretation of the *signs of the times*, both mission and the processes of evangelisation risk to become irrelevant. This is the precious inheritance that Vatican II handed to us, in which the missionary dimension of the Church is connected to the decisive question of how to share faith and to a Christian praxis truly contextualised. In fact, to be in tune with the signs of the times, that are always an indication of the activity of the Spirit, means to enter with empathy in the human search for justice, peace, happiness and solidarity. The history that God works in humankind has as an objective to help women and men to realise their identity, to know how to discern in the daily grind all that contributes to make life flourish

and the common good grow. In the wake of a different theological and pastoral method, it is possible to discern some decisional theological horizons towards a different paradigm of mission today.

1. A theology of *kenosis* and liberation

In the vision of a theological reflection the world is a partner in an important dialogue for the prophetic mission of the Church, based on the *novelty of the incarnation*. The Christian proposal gives to each woman and man the responsibility to build a culture capable of making real the values of liberty, solidarity, and personal dignity. The stress, therefore, is on concentrating on giving a witness (eventually much insisted upon by the theologies of liberation) that must have an impact on the social and political life, so as to avoid the emptying of the essence of Christian religion or, worse yet, a declaration of its uselessness for the life of men and women of the 1900s. The reason for this practice is based on the fact that history, in the horizons of the values of the Kingdom of God, is open to a future based on a promise of liberation and salvation already present in the events of Easter. For this reason, mission must speak the language of *kenosis*: God, in Jesus who freely gives himself, shares the passion of the world and suffers his own passion of love for the least, for the last. And he does it by giving to their unfulfilled hopes and to their struggle for liberation a real possibility of fulfillment, so that they, too, will enjoy the fullness of life. This also means that the privileged protagonist of mission are the *impoverished and dehumanised human beings*, those discriminated against, those exploited on a daily basis and the victims of violence both against their bodies and against their dignity, deprived of the right to have rights, up to the point of being “*superfluous*” in a world designed on utilitarian terms.

2. A theology of mission in dialogue with history

Even though history and the world seem to implode in their declarations on the improvement of the standards of life, Christian hope is not weakened by lack of success, or discouraged by evaluations of failure. Rather, in the prophetic dialogue with society and culture, the Church offers the

fruitfulness of a theology inspired by the principles of the exodus and of the Kingdom. Only on this basis it is possible to shape a Christian model in which each man and woman can best express the fact of being the *co-creators* of a different history and world. Freedom of religion, of faith, of conscience become essential criteria of the quality of the Christian message, in the horizon of an ecclesial communion always more aware of being the people of God. It is fundamental to help people understand the transcendental meaning of history, the closeness of God inviting every man and woman to a history of freedom, justice, and salvation. Faced with the temptation to plan a do-it-yourself religiosity, or one leaning towards the search for a psycho-physical balance, it is better to propose a faith style of life that has a project of liberation at its core. Spirituality itself must be critical, against any false spiritualism and capable of a mystic approach with one's eyes wide open. This is where the intercultural, inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue comes in. The importance of dialogue as a style and an instrument of open encounter is one of the guidelines of the re-thinking of the Church's mission. In particular and in relation to other religions, it shows an important conviction: religions have a providential role and our openness to other people's faith implies the ability to share their vision of the world with a sympathy that leads to understanding. Where we happen to be cannot be an obstacle, nor be the significant deciding point of our possible inter-relationships. For this reason, ecclesial communities must live a style of dialogue within mission in order to contribute to renewing humankind. If dialogue produces a mutual understanding and enrichment, it is because it sets the conditions for change, to experience conversion as the openness to the meeting with the truth that the Spirit gives when it accompanies every encounter meant to go to the heart of the matter.

3. An Inculturated missionary theology

The missionary proclamation must constantly open us to the discovery of the other, without whom an authentic experience of growth and cooperation is not possible. It is worth restating something that is already present in missionary practice today: attention to the poor, the minorities (the migrants, the women, the youth, and so on) to the people who live in need and want to be listened to, have given rise to the *ministry*

of advocacy capable of formulating, together with the victims, projects of personal recovery and social reinsertion. From this point of view, it seems all the more vital for global mission to be able to promote and live an *intercultural style*. Within these coordinates mission aims at the building of a new culture based on dignity and rights, especially for those who are excluded and marginalised by imperialistic politics. It is not by chance that today human rights have become a *locus theologicus* that is a source and a place of learning for both theology and mission. This means that human rights are aspects of theological learning opening new spaces of confrontation and critical attention in human society. This is an important aspect from the missionary point of view, because it brings back the question of the trustworthiness and relevance of Christian witness in a solidary society. Among human rights, the dignity of the person holds priority and demands a different awareness of the cultural contribution of ecclesial communities. In particular these rights: a) educate on the respect for differences against any type of fundamentalism; b) show dignity and freedom as lines that cannot be trespassed, and that we must protect; c) represent a process of auto-interpretation of the human being in an opening to truth that transcends history; d) send us back to the need of a foundation which, against the backdrop of a religious experience, refers to the *principle of creation* and the meaning of the *imago Dei*. In this scenario the missionary commitment must aim at valuing human rights as a condition for living as free human beings and in view of making them always more universal.

4. A theology at the service of an integral ecology

Today's mission must include *solidarity with creation and its integrity*. In the state of idolatry of profit and wealth, ruled by consumerism, the unconditional technocracy has a destroying effect on the ecosystem and a senselessly depletes its resources. Attention to creation cannot be reduced simply to the utilitarian management of the ecosystems, but must be connected to safeguarding life for all. This demands cooperation in order to get rid of a civilisation bent on preying and hoarding. There are common goods, such as water, air, forests, soil that can no longer be objects of commercialisation and damaging to human self-sufficiency. The knowledge of the mutual relationship between humankind and

the Earth is changing how we look at ecology: the commitment and the challenge in the environment, the economy and politics are strictly connected to our social and spiritual responsibility. To safeguard creation means to form an alliance for the care of the Earth, to avoid the risk of auto-destruction and of the disappearance of biodiversity. In particular, it is urgent to reconsider hunger as a political and ethical question, starting from processes that look at food simply as a very profitable business. Capitalistic production creates a network of inter-dependence, with international corporations directing agro-alimentary choices towards political interests that do not even touch the elimination of hunger in the world. Beyond every possible solution, it is imperative to embrace *a spirituality of the table* where the attention to the human family will make choices that will limit the impulses to dominate and to hoard, but move towards a consumption based on justice and solidarity, capable of valuing the resources of the environment.

Carmelo Dotolo

Theologian and Comboni Lay Missionary

Challenges to mission from ever accelerating historical and cosmic transformations

This article is about some major transformations in world history and in the life of the Church, which affected its evangelising activity.

*The text has 6 major sections. In Section 7 the authors challenge the readers to participate in a “**Working paper**” (the present one), by adding their personal reflections and contributions. This article, in fact, does not claim any completeness. The topic discussed is far wider than what this text covers. Many other “**epochal transformations**” have taken place in history: socio-political transformations (governance), cultural transformations, and economic transformations. They all need much attention.*

The format of the article has been abridged for space related planning. All the footnotes and the majority of long quotations have been removed from the original text. An * signals where a footnote has been removed, whereas a double ** signals the removal of a long quotation. The entire article is available in digital form at: <http://www.comboni.org/contenuti/109652>

A complex picture

Our society is going through rapid and profound changes due to globalisation processes, closer integration and expansion of regional and continental unions (European Union, African Union, Union of South

American Nations just to mention some), economic crisis, advancement of technology and social innovation, migrations and challenges to traditional identities and memberships, and so forth.

In today's **porous world**, *change* is, indeed, a major sociological – and even theological – category. It affects everything: from cultures to religions, from world order and global governance to management, from security (viewed in terms of '**hard power**' - military might, and economic indicators) to peace (understood as *shalom*, that is, not merely the absence of conflict and war, but rather an inward sense of completeness or wholeness)*, from a type of education based on memorising facts or a superficial understanding of things, without real insight or critical mind development, to an '**ethics education**', which prepares an individual for further life and work, shaped by the all-too-often neglected '**soft power**' potential of ideas and values.*

In his 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio - On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate*, John Paul II was already speaking of "*a complex and ever changing religious picture*" of the modern world.**

This article has a twofold objective: to identify major changes and to envisage their repercussions on Mission vision, strategies and activities. The need to identify the many specific changes (transformations) in act today is given by the fact that many hint at '**changes and transformations**' in general terms, but when they are asked to pin them down and identify them with precise references, confusion and uncertainty mount.

1. The weight of number 40 for Biblical transformations

Mentioned 146 times in Scripture, the number 40 generally symbolises a period of testing, trial or probation. Forty days or years are the periods required for radical transformation (New Creation, Exodus and Resurrection). In the Bible, major transformation does occur at personal, communitarian and cosmic levels and it takes 40 days or 40 years.*

One point needs to be stressed. In any given process of transformation, there are always two forces at work, and they both need to be perceived and taken into account. This point is beautifully expounded in the chap-

ter 3 of the *Gospel of John* through the usage of the Greek adverb ἄνωθεν (*anōthen*), which has a twofold meaning: (a) “from above” (or “from heaven”); (b) again, anew, a second time.

“Jesus told Nicodemus: ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again (ἀνωθεν)’. Nicodemus asked: ‘How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’. Jesus answered: ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit’” (Jn 3:3-5).

We believe that any human transformation is, above all, a work of God’s Spirit. Yet, this power “**from above**” meets human reality “**below**” (Nicodemus and his desires and expectations). God’s presence in the world is a given fact for those who believe. The element “**from above**” is central, but it does not do away with what God himself has created and now wants to “**transform**”, “**renew**”, push forward toward perfection. There is always a ‘**convergence**’ of the two (see the law of Incarnation). The transcendent God is always an immanent God. The God of Heaven, the God of the Whirlwind, the Creator of the Universe, the Almighty, the Strict Father is always the “**God-with-us**”, our Merciful Father, the Living God, ready to dirty his hands in our matters, to bring about for us the best life – “**life in its fullness**” – which he wants us to live here and now.

2. “*Maranatha!*” - Missionary tensions between ‘already’ and ‘not yet’

This reflection is deeply intertwined with our personal history. We have always been attentive to changes in our past life, and we still are at present. We see the future pregnant with surprises. Changes, transformations, new discoveries and developments fruits of human creativity have always exerted a certain fascination on us. We welcomed them as “**words of God**” addressed to us, to institute, to our community, to the Church and to the world. The future still allures and fascinates us, since we strongly feel in communion with the One who, in the book of *Revelation*, says: “*I am the Alpha and Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (Rev. 1:8).

Yes, in this deep communion of faith and hope, together with “**the Spirit and the bride**”, any ‘missionary’ true to this name keeps crying out: “*Maranatha!*” (*Rev 22:17*).* He or she is convinced that no second, no minute, no hour, no day, no month, no year is empty of God’s presence. Our God is always “**Emmanuel**” (“**God-with-us**”). Hence, *Maranatha!* is an expression of hope for something that has still to increase, as well as a song of joy, because that ‘presence’ is already visible.

But it is also an invocation for the acceleration of the coming of the Kingdom. ‘*Maranatha!*’ recalls the supplication ‘*Thy Kingdom come!*’. Prayer is an important factor in any real transformation (*Rev 7:9-17*) and it needs to be a constant in the life of any missionary committed to transform the world into God’s Kingdom. Their prayer is not just about the future.

Too many people today love to make predictions of a dire future, if – for instance – certain leaders continue to be in power, if certain candidates are elected, if things do not change... And they demonise and blame anybody: “**We have problems, and ‘those people’ are to blame!**”, “**Immigrants are to blame!**”, “**Liberals are to blame!**”, “**Conservatives are to blame!**”. This type of discourses are clearly harmful. They tear us apart; they calcify religious, political, social divides; they dehumanise others and trade on fear and hopelessness.

When praying in and with Christ, we turn to a better vision of our divisive world. We can turn to the *Book of Revelation 7:9-17*, where we see Jesus, the Lamb of God, victorious and welcoming those “**who have survived the travails of many kinds**”. They form “**a great multitude that no one could count**”. All tribes, all peoples and languages are beyond count, but they are all there. *We* are all there, too. No matter where we are from or what language we speak, no one is precluded from this moment. No one is excluded. There is no wall, no boundary dividing these worshippers.

This vision is a vision of life overflowing with difference and grace and joy and love. Hunger has ceased, as has thirst. The heat of the day no longer beats down on our shoulders as we work. Grief and pain and hopelessness and despair are vanquished as easily as we wipe a tear from a child’s eyes. Death has been defeated, and so also the many ways we have invented to divide ourselves.

This is a vision of hope and abundance, which makes such a vision so much harder to believe in a world threatened by environmental,

economic, political, and personal crises. More and more, we live in a world where scarcity is the order of the day, where what we lack looms over us.**

A missionary is a person who lives between “**the already**” and the “**not yet**”, constantly welcoming and praising “**the magnificent**”, since he or she believes that God is already present. Throughout the planet, through its different nation races, creeds and social backgrounds, at all meridians and parallel, the Lord is present, and the missionary is the one who proclaims joyfully this presence, even though he sees the tragic inadequacy of any world order, the presence and action of the mystery of evil both in the hearts of human beings and in the religious, economic, social and cultural structures. Missionaries must be able to perceive “**the already**” and “**the not yet**” of the fullness of God’s presence and redemption. They see the fullness of life and joy already present as a powerful ‘**seed**’, and as a ‘**promise**’ of an abundant harvest.

The final transformation of the *cosmos* into God’s Kingdom is both an enjoyed presence and a passionate longing or dream. St Paul, the most fascinating missionary, synthesised the dynamics of “**the already**” and “**not yet**” in Greek word, μυστήριον (*mustérion*),* a ‘plan’ cherished in God’s heart, but to be revealed in order to be accomplished by human beings. It is a process of an accomplishment which is interspaced with darkness and light, greed and benevolence, thunder and *shalom*.

In Daniel Comboni, our ‘father’ in the missionary ministry, we contemplate, in its full measure, the dynamics of the *already and not yet*, and the sense (τέλος, *télos*) of history to be accomplished in the midst of astounding difficulties. He perceived (“**it was an inspiration from above**”) his *Plan for the regeneration of Africa* as part of the great μυστήριον of God for a particular part of the cosmos still in need of ‘**salvation-regeneration**’, and spent his entire life for its accomplishment, fully aware that the ‘**seed**’ had such a terrific (divine) power that guaranteed its fulfilment, despite all the ‘adverse forces’.

The final words he breathed out, on his deathbed on October 10, 1881, were reported to be: “**I am dying, but my work will not die... Courage for the present and especially for the future!**”.

3. The ‘Ecozoic Era’ - The Cosmic Dimension of Mission

One of our ‘*gurus*’ in our early years of missionary ministry was the theologian and Jesuit father, Bartolomeo Sorge. Besides having been blessed with direct personal interactions, we always read his articles and books and listened to his talks. In the late 1970s, both in writing and speaking, he used to repeat this refrain: “**We are living in an era of ‘epochal’ changes**”, explaining that, by ‘epochal changes’, he meant “*very great changes*”. Then, he would hurry to clarify: “**Actually, instead of ‘epochal changes’, I should use the expression ‘the change of an epoch**, or the change of an era in human history, which is far stronger than ‘epochal change’”.

For many years now, we have been living with these words ringing in our heads. Actually, they have become for us a *modus pensandi*, or a *modus cogitandi*, and a *modus vivendi*. We have been reading, reflecting and praying a lot on the meaning of ‘change of epoch’, where the emphasis is more on discontinuity than continuity. Of course, continuity is not done away with: it is ‘there’, guaranteed by God’s faithfulness (he is the ‘number one’ of history), by the blowing of the Holy Spirit, by Jesus Christ (“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” - *Rev. 22:13*), by the Word of God (“**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away**” - *Mt 24:35*). So, continuity is assured “**from above**”. “**From below**”, however, great discontinuity meets us, and it is characterised by “*radical changes*”, which are not dots and commas, but dictionary, grammar, syntax, ideas, concepts.

Fr. Bartolomeo elaborated this vision in a book, entitled *La traversata - La Chiesa dal Concilio Vaticano II a oggi*,* in which he elaborates the changes and identifies the great transformers behind the changes.

The forgers of the phrase *Ecozoic era* are two Americans: Thomas Berry, a scientist and theologian, and Brian Swimme, an evolutionary cosmologist, in their fascinating book *The Universe Story - From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era - A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*.*

The book does not cover just ten thousand years, but it portrays the evolutionary transformations of the universe, starting from the beginning, with the Big bang, right up to our own times, which they call *Ecozoic Era*, and define thus: “**The emerging period of life following the Ce-**

nozoic, and characterised, at a basic level, by its mutual enhancing human-Earth relations. The word derives from the scientific tradition that divides the Phanerozoic into Paleozoic, Mesozoic, and Cenozoic eras”.

Without the horizon of the *ecozoic era*, Mission would be ‘proselitism’, rather than service to the Kingdom.

4. Vatican II - Radical Transformation in missionary goal and methodology

On 11 October 1962, in St. Peter’s Basilica, Saint John the XXIII, in his opening address to the bishops, explained his vision for the Second Vatican Council. His words were “**revolutionary**” in the real sense of the term.* He proposed five points for achieving this goal:

- 1. *Be filled with hope and faith. Do not be prophets of gloom.*** “Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations, which by men’s own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward God’s superior and inscrutable design”.
- 2. *Discover ways of teaching the faith more effectively.*** “The greatest concern of the ecumenical council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously”.
- 3. *Deepen the understanding of doctrine.*** Authentic doctrine “should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine and deposit of the faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another”.
- 4. *Use the medicine of mercy.*** “Errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed

these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation”.

5. Seek unity within the Church, with Christians separated from Catholicism, with those of non-Christian religions and with all men and women of goodwill. “Such is the aim of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which prepares, as it were, and consolidates the path toward that unity of mankind where truth reigns, charity is the law and whose extent is eternity”.

Indeed, those words (and what they stood for) were the true beginning of a new epoch. Today, those words are echoed in Pope Francis’ words. Both insist on the word *rejoice*. Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the virtue of hope. Joy is the evidence that one feels the presence of God in human events, even when everything seems so dark and harmful.

Allow us to quote from that epoch-making speech.

***“It often happens, as we have learned in the daily exercise of the apostolic ministry, that, not without offense to our ears, the voices of people are brought to Us who, although burning with religious fervour, nevertheless do not think things through with enough discretion and prudence of judgment. These people see only ruin and calamity in the present conditions of human society. They keep repeating that our times, if compared to past centuries, have been getting worse. And they act as if they have nothing to learn from history, which is the teacher of life, and as if at the time of past Councils everything went favourably and correctly with respect to Christian doctrine, morality, and the Church’s proper freedom. We believe that we must quite disagree with these prophets of doom who are always forecasting disaster, as if the end of the world were at hand.*”**

*In the present course of human events, by which human society seems to be entering a new order of things, we should see instead the mysterious plans of divine Providence which, through the passage of time and the efforts of men, and often beyond their expectation, are achieving their purpose and wisely disposing of all things, even contrary human events, for the good of the Church”.**

What those words provoked has been described by many as “**a new Pentecost**”. True enough, the expression did not occur inside the structure of a direct, unequivocal attribution stating outright that “Vatican II will be (or is, or was) a new Pentecost”, though it connoted hope and expectation in that direction. Without any doubt, the Spirit blew over the assembly of bishops then inaugurated. And when the Spirit blows, change and transformation are seen as taking place.

Change and transformation became theological categories, alongside the phrase “the sign of the times”, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, in particular from paragraph 4 to 10.*

The Pastoral Constitution dared to call the many “**deep-seated changes**”, the “**various social changes**” and even the “**changes in attitudes, morals and religion**” **observed in the world and history “signs of the times”**, making use of a biblical expression for social transformations pregnant with God’s presence and carrying the germs of the incoming Kingdom of God.*

Up to then, the sacraments were (and still are) signs of God’s presence and action. During the Eucharistic celebration, the bread and wine are signs of Christ’s real presence. Similarly, now ‘*changes in history*’ are signs of God’s presence (or absence) and action. So, we are called to see them, analyse them, accept the ‘positiveness’ or the challenge present in them, and collaborate with God bringing their potentiality to its fullness.

A missionary is a person who believes in the presence of God in history, in all religions, and in all human situations, and proclaim the ‘**good news**’ that God is ‘**there**’. Through the words and actions of the missionary, God reveals his presence, as he did in the words and actions of Jesus, his first missionary. St. Paul understood this perfectly. While visiting Lycaonia, “*in the city of Lystra he met a man who was lame. He*

had been that way from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out: 'Stand up on your feet!'. At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language: 'The gods have come down to us in human form!' (...) But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 'Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:8-17).

Paul does not doubt that the Living God has always been with the inhabitants of Iconium, through many signs of his presence (for instance rain, crops, and food) and filling their hearts with joy. He does not bring a new god. The living God has been waiting for him to reveal to the people of Lystra how close he had always been to them. The miracle Paul accomplishes, through the power of the Spirit, is an invitation, an urge to see and contemplate the Living God acting in their lives.

Mission is proclaiming life, and missionaries are people who believe that the God they proclaim is a God who comes, not to steal and kill and destroy, but to bring about a radical change, so that his children may have life, and have it to the full (cf. *John* 10:10). They are witnesses, heralds and champions of God's love, mercy, tenderness. The result of this is always 'joy', which will be 'full' after the overcoming of anything that denies life.

We all ought to consider Pope Francis a veritable **sign of the time** for today's world, in his conviction that the *Evangelium is always gaudium!* Let us do away with the "**prophets of doom**" condemned by John XXIII. If it does not bring about life and joy, the gospel we preach and translate in life is false. This is the 'acid test' for the truthfulness of a witness of Christ.

5. Epochal Transformations in the Church

Time has come to list out briefly some of what we consider important “epochal transformations”, that is, those events in history which have characterised an era along the past 2,000 years of Christianity, and have been recognised as “**signs of the times**”.

Of course, Mission is the constant horizon we have in mind, and the criterion for choosing a change rather than another. There have been many other transformations in the last 2,000 years of Christianity. We intend to point out only some of them, which we consider more pertinent to Mission.

5.1 From Christendom to Christianity

Before the coming to power of Emperor Constantine, conversion to Christian faith meant ‘risky transformation’, because of the possibility of being persecuted. After the Edict of Milan (February 313), in which Roman Emperor Constantine I, and Licinius, who controlled the Balkans, agreed, among other things, to change policies towards Christians and treat Christians benevolently within the empire,* conversion was the gate to security and privileges.*

Faith became cheap. Hence, the rise of monasticism, a style of life that stressed the fact that faith and conversion are serious matters. We must admit that the Edit of Milan was a mixed blessing for the Church ever since.**

It may be worthwhile considering a quotation from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*.* What can the call to discipleship, the adherence to the word of Jesus, mean today to the businessperson, the soldier, the labourer, or the aristocrat? What did Jesus mean to say to us? What is his will for us today?

Drawing on the Sermon on the Mount, Bonhoeffer answers these timeless questions by providing a seminal reading of the dichotomy between “**cheap grace**” and “**costly grace**”.

“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves... grace without discipleship.... Costly grace is the gospel that must be sought again and again, the girl which must be asked for, the door at which a man must know... It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life”.

The Cost of Discipleship is a compelling statement of the demands of sacrifice and ethical consistency from a person whose life and thought were exemplary articulations of a new type of leadership inspired by the Gospel, and imbued with the spirit of Christian humanism and a creative sense of civic duty.

Another interesting book by Bonhoeffer is the posthumous *Letters and Papers from Prison*, in which he continued his interaction with the philosophical and literary tradition of Western civilisation, thus making his *Letters* worthy to be considered a core text on the question of secularisation. The following passage is a real pearl: “*Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to humankind and the world. Our earlier words are, therefore, bound to lose their force and cease, and our being Christians today will be limited to two things: prayer and righteous action among men. All Christian thinking, speaking, and organising must be born anew out of this prayer and action... It is not for us to prophesy the day (though the day will come) when men will, once more, be called so to utter the word of God that the world will be changed and renewed by it. It will be a new language, perhaps quite non-religious, but liberating and redeeming – as was Jesus’ language; it will shock people and yet overcome them by its power; it will be the language of a new righteousness and truth, proclaiming God’s peace with men and the coming of his kingdom... Till then, the Christian cause will be a silent and hidden affair, but there will be those who pray and do right and wait for God’s own time*”.*

Mission is never the integration in a given world order, be it Roman, European or American.

5.2 From the Mediterranean Church to the World Church

This is another major transformation in the history of the Church, amply analysed particularly by Karl Rahner as the major fruit of Vatican Council II, in two famous articles, present in Karl Rahner’s *Concern for the Church*,* whose contents have been revisited by Seán D. Sammon in an article of *America*, the American Jesuit Review.*

Sammon writes: “From 1962 to 1965 the eyes of the world focused on the city of Rome and the revolution in understanding and practice taking place, as an age-old institution struggled to find its place in the modern world. The occasion was the Second Vatican Council, and almost two decades later, in April 1979, the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner sought to measure its impact.

Speaking in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Rahner argued that Vatican II was the Catholic Church’s first official assembly as a world church. “The council”, he said, “initiated a shift that has occurred only once before: when the church transitioned from the world of Jewish Christianity to take its place in the larger Mediterranean world”.

Rahner divides the life of the Church in three epochs. The first – and shortest – was that of Jewish Christianity, a time during which the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth was proclaimed in Israel and to its people.

The Church’s second great epoch was initiated by the Council of Jerusalem, when the believers in Christ eliminated circumcision for Gentile Christians, thereby giving birth to a Christianity that began to grow in the soil of Greco-Roman civilisation.* During this epoch, which last almost 2,000 years (from the Council of Jerusalem to the Vatican Council II), Christianity became increasingly identified with European culture. Between the birth of what may be referred to as Gentile Christianity and the present one, “**an evolution took place**”.* For nearly 2,000 years, the Church has appeared to be tightly bound to European civilisation and exported as such by its colonial missionaries. The evangelising Church was reluctant to offer anything other than a religion embedded in the European languages, cultures and civilizations that it considered superior.

During this second epoch, the ‘Mediterranean’ Church was basically a northern part of the ‘world phenomenon’, whose structures and the theological thought were rooted in Greek-Latin philosophy and world-view, and her institutional background was shaped by the modalities of the Roman Empire. The only two efforts to broaden the idea of the Church were at first frustrated, and later done away with: at first, with the separation for (schism) and condemnation (excommunication) of the Orthodox Church (and her horizon) in 1054; in a second moment, with the collapse of effort to bring together the Mediterranean Church and the North-European Church, marked by the Protestant Reformation

in 1517 and the separation of the English Church and the Anglo-Saxon world from Rome (1534).

Theologically, ‘**catholicity**’ was understood as ‘**uniformity**’, with the Church of Rome giving the only acceptable ‘form’ of the **communion**, imposing the only possible rite (the Latin-Roman rite) and the only possible language (Latin). The plurality of theologies, rites and language (at the beginning all very present) came to an end. The concept of local church disappeared (it remained in the Orthodox Churches, with the different Patriarchates, different rites and languages).

A different Type of Council

Seán D. Sammon argues that the Second Vatican Council, initiated by Pope John XXIII, was fundamentally different in makeup from any that had occurred before, and surely different from Vatican I where the Asian and African episcopate was made up of missionary bishops of European and North American origin. At Vatican II, however, these same regions were represented, in the main, by delegates indigenous to Africa and Asia. And they did not come to Rome as uncertain visitors. At Vatican II, we witnessed a gathering of the world’s bishops not as an advisory body for the Pope, but rather with him serving as the final teaching and decision-making body in the Catholic Church. For the first time in history, a worldwide council with a truly worldwide episcopate came into existence; one of the oldest globalised institutions in the world was finally taking on a face that matched its complexity and diversity.

For Rahner, Vatican II was a “**seismic event**”. “**When the dust settled, we were left standing in a different place**”. The Council presented us with the possibility of a Church that would act through the influence exercised by all its components. Admittedly, the thought of moving from a Western European form of Christianity to a world Church raised theoretical problems that were anything but clear. For example, Rahner wondered whether the marital morality of the Masais in East Africa would continue to simply reproduce the ethics of Western Christianity... Should the dream of a truly world Church be-

come a reality, there would no doubt be challenges to face, not the least of which would be maintaining unity in the midst of diversity.

At Vatican II, there was the rediscovery of Catholicity as “**inclusive dynamism**”, whereby pluralism was possible within the framework of one Faith (pluralism of codices, theologies, rites and so on). During the Mediterranean Epoch, instead, catholicity was an exclusive concept: to belong to the Catholic Church one had to become Roman.*

One of the symbols of this ‘*plurality in unity*’ were the continental synods (Africa, Asia, Latin America) at the end of the second millennium and at the beginning of the third, which, even though the Roman connotation is still very present, the voice of local, regional continental churches is being heard.*

It is obvious that this is one of the main objectives in Francis’ papacy. For instance, in his major documents, *Evangelii Gadium*, *Laudato Si’*, and *Gaudete et Exsultate*, one third of the quotations come from Local Churches all over the world. Such references had been almost totally ignored by the previous Popes. In other words, Catholic Magisterium was mostly Roman: Popes had been quoting themselves and their predecessors.

This evolution should have a tremendous result in the missionary movement. In the past, ‘apostolic mission’ meant to go and ‘build’ the Roman Church in different parts of the world. The movement was strictly controlled by the Roman Church, who wanted to extend herself. Today, instead, missionaries are at the service of the local churches, more rooted in local cultures and incarnated in local realities, and readier than ever to help local Christian communities to evangelise areas of life in which the Christian message is still either irrelevant or only superficially affecting concrete life.

5.3 From exclusively male ministry to gender-open and pluralist ministries

Christendom is the proper name to define Rahner’s “second epoch” in the life of the Church. This was the period when ministries, governance and leadership in the Church was strongly dominated and conditioned by the mind-set, culture, and philosophy of the Roman Empire,

particularly the Western Roman Empire. As in the Empire, also in the Church 'ministry' was understood as 'leadership' (command) and was strongly male-controlled. The particular care of Jesus for women, the attention of Paul to role of women in the first Christian communities, and the 'lay' character of most ministries in the Church (which, by the way represented a radical novelty in the Roman Empire) was soon sneered at and put aside. As soon as the Church became the official religion of the Empire, the richness in ministry in the Apostolic Church disappeared.

The strong centralisation of responsibility (and its juridical terminology) of the Roman Empire passed into the Church. So much so that, when the Roman Empire collapsed (476), its structure was taken over and perpetuated by the Church, now more than ready to find Biblical and theological justifications for it. A 'forced' and not always correct re-interpretation of the New Testament took place. For instance, a simple "presbyter" (elder) became necessarily an "ordained priest". And the determination of the Orthodox Church to keep the traditional interpretation of the New Testament, in particular as far as the structuring the various churches, was frustrated with the communication of the Patriarch of Constantinople by Rome (1054).

The way the Roman Church was structured was considered eternal and divine. No diversification from it would be allowed. As to this aspect, the remarkable effort of localising the Church in Northern Europe and in the Anglo-Saxon World was termed 'rebellion' against God himself, and hence 'excommunicated'. Today we know, more than in the past, that Martin Luther never intended to split the Church, but only to reform it. Theologically, Christendom was a period characterised by the logics of "*anathema sit*" ("let it be cursed and damned" - which translated, in practical term, as "let it be greatly reviled, loathed, and shunned"). The theological visions of the different ecumenical councils were gradually re-expressed in theological and juridical statements, all formulated in the language of a so-called *theologia perennis*, which frustrated any type of pluralism and transformed Western Christendom into a religion that was too moralistic and legalistic, at the expense of the transcendent dimension.

Probably the most revolutionary decision of John XXIII's was that Vatican II would be "a pastoral council", whose aim was to renew the Church, not to excommunicate anybody.* We know that the Roman

Commission had already prepared complete documents to be signed by the bishop, and all of them had been reflecting the old vision. But when John XXIII saw that between the Roman Curia and the bishops around the world there was an abyss, he dismissed what they curia theologians had prepared. So, the first part of the Council was spent in elaborating a new methodology and process that would allow all the bishops, together with the bishop of Rome, to be the *magisterium*. It was already a beautiful re-affirmation of collegiality and synodality.

Theologically speaking, that was possible thanks to one of the greatest theological intuition that the Council itself would endorse: the definition of episcopacy as a real sacrament (actually, the fullness of the sacrament of ordination).* The bishops, who for centuries had been the “**representatives**” of the Pope (who granted them faculties), were once against “**representatives of Christ**”, not of the Pope, in charge of local churches, loci in which the Universal Church of Christ is fully present.

The bishops, together with their collaborators (priests and deacons), were seen as part and parcel of “**the People of God**”,* “**the messianic people [that] has Christ for its head**”, “**made into a kingdom and priests to God the Father**”, “**who also share in Christ’s prophetic office**” and participate, each in his or her proper way, in the one priesthood of Christ.

In “the people of God” there are also women. During the Council, Pope John XXIII’s encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* (April 1963) had dared to say that, among “the signs of the times”, that is events particularly significant for the knowledge of God and religion, there was also the growing role of women in public life. This social ‘**transformation**’ was to be seen as very important for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in history. The issue was – and still is – a revisitation of the role of the role of women in the church, including which steps can be taken to ensure their presence in significant positions of leadership within the ecclesial community.* It is true that that are basic skills expected of anyone who wishes to be an effective religious leader today (talent as an administrator, a habit of efficiency, the capacity to conceptualise and think analytically. Yet there are other more important ones needed in anyone who might be judged capable of bringing about the transformation required in the whole world and in the Catholic Church today. Effective religious

leaders must be men and women in love with God, deeply rooted in the values of the gospel they are called to proclaim. How else can they speak convincingly about the spiritual meaning of events in the world that surrounds them? Equally important is an ability to dialogue with many diverse groups and to be at home with differences of opinion. Such leaders are committed to building unity in the midst of significant diversity. They are marked by a strong desire to make things better, and an equally strong desire to implement the changes that are necessary if the church and its people are to move forward, regardless of the resistance they encounter. Today, more than ever, we need church leaders who have a clear sense about what is happening among the People of God and in the world at large, individuals with the ability to empower believers, inspiring them to put aside self-interest in favour of a much larger vision.

6. Epochal transformations in Religions

In the traditional missiology, the focus was on personal conversions through which a person entered the Church. Overall, the end of all non-Christian religions was among the objectives of missionary activity: Christianity was to replace all of them.

Today there is a different perception, particularly due to the social and theological understanding of religions, and to the great contribution of Vatican II, particularly in *Nostra Aetate*. * World religions are no longer “the enemies” of Christianity.**

6.1 By linking the vertical dimension with the horizontal and cosmic ones

This new vision of world religions was highlighted, among others, by father Yves Raguin, SJ (1921-1998). Born in 1912, he had entered the Society of Jesus in 1930, and had been ordained a priest in 1942. A leading authority on Chinese religion and on spirituality East and West, Fr. Raguin wrote more than 20 books on these topics. Most of them were first written in French and translated into Chinese, English, and several other languages.

Fr. Raguin studied at the Harvard-Yenching Institute in 1946-49,* and was in Shanghai during the years 1949-53. After his arrival in Taiwan, he took the direction of the Jesuit Dictionary project*, which is now completed. With other Jesuits, he founded the Taipei Ricci Institute in 1966, in the capital of Taiwan, and remained its director until November 1996. More than a scholar, he was a man and a priest whose kindness and wisdom helped an innumerable number of people. The mission to which he dedicated his life was to gain a better understanding of the working of the Holy Spirit within the Chinese culture and to foster a deeper understanding of the contribution of Chinese spirituality to a broadening of Christian thought.

Fr Raguin considered himself a **‘true missionary’**, but in a way that differed from the classical vision of a missionary. He used to say: “My main task is to inject in all Asian religions, particularly Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Shintoism, an ‘element of transformation’, by bringing them into contact with Jesus’ radical religious experience. Jesus is the perfect image of God not only for Jews and his followers, but for all peoples”. He had reflected a lot on the experience of Mahatma Gandhi, who had accepted the ‘message of Jesus’, while reaffirming his own Hindu identity. Fr Raguin was convinced that “Gandhi had enriched his own Hindu religious thought and identity through the encounter with Christ and with all Christ stood for”.

Fr Raguin thought that, after Vatican II, the emphasis of Mission should not be put on personal conversion (though this remained an important component of Christian evangelisation) but on the transformation of any human religion by coming into contact – through dialogue and life-sharing – to liberate humanity from all the many social problems it experiences (see, for instance, the numerous injustices that still oppress many peoples).*

6.2 By renouncing violence of any kind

Definitely, Fr Raguin was seeking (and practising) a new paradigm for mission, and he thought he had found it in “Mission as interreligious dialogue”. Starting as an expression of attention to other cultures and of real solidarity with people who belong to that culture,

the theme of dialogue has changed radically in him, above all by accepting the multi-religious and multicultural pluralism of his (and our) time. Echoing the English philosopher of religion and theologian, John Harwood Hick, he would define this multicultural dialogue “**a kind of theological Rubicon, which one must have the courage to cross**”.

For him the horizon of mission was not the building up of the Church (*plantatio ecclesiae*), which he criticised of ‘ecclesiocentrism’, but the spreading of the Kingdom where it is already present (though partially) or making it emerge, if it is not yet present. From the ‘U-turn’ of Vatican II, as a missionary – like the Church – he saw himself at the service of the Kingdom.* He believed that “**the Church becomes on earth the initial budding forth of that Kingdom**”.* As a Catholic missionary and member of the Church, he wanted to be a proclaimer of the Kingdom of God already begun, a sign revealing God’s Kingdom or redemptive presence now; a servant of the continuous unfolding of the Kingdom. And he filled this last role by acting on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, the despised and the persecuted, as Jesus did and as he instructed us to do as his disciples (*Matthew* 5:1-12). Whether or not we ourselves enter the final Kingdom will be determined by our response to the neighbour in need. Those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger and comfort the sick are those who inherit the Kingdom (*Matthew* 25:31-46), thus manifesting God’s redemptive presence on this earth.*

When one of us met Fr Raguin in Taipei, he asked him to elaborate on this point. He said: “Here in Taipei there are 2,000 Hindu temples. When we arrived, they were exclusively ‘doors of heavens’, places where a person would meet God, who lived in heaven, to whom a poor could, at most, vent out his drooping spirit. Today, instead, at least 30 of these temples have opened premises for the poor. For the first time in the history of Hinduism, we have clear signs of the interdependence between the love of God (highly celebrated in the temple) and the concern for the poor, the marginalised, and the outcasts. Is this not a clear evangelisation of Hinduism? This type of transformation must take place in all religions (Christianity included). Today, on the vigil of third millennium, when religions are often used to justify violence (as if it were God’ will), this transformation is all the more important. The

traditional approach, which insisted on personal conversion, is more likely to increase the antagonism among religions, up to the point of justifying violence”.

He pointed out the great ‘**evangelising**’ role played by the presence in Asia of Mother Theresa, totally committed to help the most unfortunate human beings, but never linking the help she would offer to conversion. **“Working for greater security for all, for peace, for integrity of creation, renouncing any type of violence, will bring world religions at the service of the Kingdom”**.

6.3 From Religion as ‘the Opium of People’ to Religion as ‘Engine of Social Transformation’ (The Social Mission of the Church)

The evolution of the social impact of religions is one of the major transformations, which have appeared over the last 50 years. The social analysis of Karl Marx was based on the experience he had of religion in Lutheran Germany and Anglican England, where religion was strictly part of the establishment and at its service, according to the principle of **“cuius regio, eius religio”**.*

Keeping into account that Marx was one of the founders of sociology (he drew conclusions from what he saw), the conviction to which he arrived – **“religion is the opium of people”*** – was neither theological nor philosophical, but exclusively sociological. By examining the situation in Germany and England, he ‘just saw’ that religion was helping the state to control people, in a historical moment of great transformation, characterised by the emergence of democratic approach to governance (power is in people, who choose their representatives). So, he was right in saying that religion was against transformation in those particular protestant contexts. Wrong have been those who generalised a specific conclusion on a sociological matter and made it into a general philosophical statement. Over the past half century, Christianity (if not other world religions) has become a major engine of social transformation. We may recall what happened in the Philippines and Latin American, where Christians helped in a decisive manner to bring about the end dictatorial systems of governance (in those contexts, the influence of Liberation Theology and the role of Basic Christian Communities cannot be underplayed). In the downfall of communist

ideology in Russia and Eastern Europe, Christianity played a major role. What was termed “opium of the people” turned out to be a force for change. This ‘U-turn’ of Christianity can hardly be explained by a sociologist. It is important to distinguish Christianity from other religions. Only in Christianity, through the contribution of the social encyclicals of the Popes and the statements by World Council of Churches, Christians have developed a robust Social Teaching of the Church. It is true to say that Christianity has ‘a faith with social power’. Yes, Christian faith has a power that transforms the world and makes it more and more similar to the Kingdom promised by God.

This teaching is not an optional in evangelisation. And it is not of yesterday: it goes back to *Rerum Novarum*, published by Pope Leo XIII in May 1891, today considered a foundational text of modern Catholic social teaching.* Yet, a Catholic Church document of almost 47 years ago has been most influential for us: *Justice in the World*, produced by the 1971 Synod of Bishops, dealing with the issue of justice and liberation of the poor and oppressed. The text called for more countries to share their power and for wealthy nations to consume less. It was written by many bishops from poor, undeveloped countries and was influenced by Liberation theology. They wrote that justice is central to the Catholic church’s mission, that **“Christian love of neighbour and justice cannot be separated”**, and that **“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation”**.*

Another important document on Social Teaching of the Church was John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, in 1991.* The year 1989 had been a monumental one of civil protests against communism throughout Eastern and Central Europe. Communism as a major political and economic force had collapsed under opposition to one-party rule. The mood of that year is perhaps best remembered in the ‘Solidarity’ movement’s forcing elections in Poland and images of citizens demolishing the Berlin wall that had divided East and West. In 1991, Pope John Paul II reflected on the rapid downfall of communism in

his encyclical. He named three ‘decisive factors’ in the fall of these regimes:

- the violation of the rights of workers
- the inefficiency of the economic system, which prevented initiative, private ownership and economic freedom
- the spiritual void of atheism, which had denied purpose and meaning in life for younger generations (13, 22-24).

But John Paul II remained concerned for the people of these nations as they turned to the market economy and endured economic hardship in the process. He was also concerned for the peoples of the ‘Third World’ who were still impoverished and denied the social development and economic prosperity of the market (26-29).

For the theme of this article, we want to point out paragraphs 5 and 58 the text, where John Paul II stresses the relation that exists between religion and human social life, between the proclamation of the Gospel and the social concern of the Church, between love for others and for God and the promotion of justice, and confirms that **“to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church’s evangelising mission and is an essential part of the Christian message”**.**

In Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*,* the entire chapter 4 is dedicated to *“The Social Dimension of Evangelization”*.* He re-emphasises “the profound connection between evangelisation and human advancement” and the right of Pastors **“to offer opinions on all that affects people’s lives”**. **“No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society”**. He quotes John Paul II, who said that the Church **“cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice”**. **“For the Church, the option for the poor is primarily a theological category”** rather than a sociological one. **“This is why I want a Church that is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us”**. **“As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved... no solution will be found for this world’s problems”**. **“Politics, although often denigrated”**, he affirms, **“re-**

mains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity”. “I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by... the lives of the poor!”. He adds an admonition: “Any Church community”, if it believes it can forget about the poor, runs the risk of “breaking down”. With regard to the theme of peace, the Pope affirms that “a prophetic voice must be raised” against attempts at false reconciliation to “silence or appease” the poor, while others “refuse to renounce their privileges”. For the construction of a society “in peace, justice and fraternity” he indicates four principles: “Time is greater than space” means working “slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results”. “Unity prevails over conflict” means “a diversified and life-giving unity”. “Realities are more important than ideas means avoiding “reducing politics or faith to rhetoric”. “The whole is greater than the part” means bringing together “globalisation and localisation”. “Evangelisation also involves the path of dialogue”, which opens the Church to collaboration with all political, social, religious and cultural spheres. Ecumenism is “an indispensable path to evangelisation”. Mutual enrichment is important: “We can learn so much from one another!”; for example “in the dialogue with our Orthodox brothers and sisters, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn more about the meaning of Episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality”. “Interreligious dialogue”, which must be conducted “clear and joyful in one’s own identity”, is “a necessary condition for peace in the world” and does not obscure evangelisation.**

7. A Working Paper

Away from us the idea that we have listed all the “epochal changes” in the life of the Church and in the world that had some impact on evangelisation. The limited space granted to our article prevents us from continuing.

But why not considering this contribution of ours just as a “working paper” whose main purpose is to to share ideas about the chosen topic or to elicit feedback from others. It could be a ‘beginning’ of wider reflection carried out by all Comboni Missionaries. We are certain that a similar exercise would be of great advantage for many.

We could just mention few other important ‘transformations’:

I) **From an anthropocentric proclamation to a cosmocentric evangelisation.**

Pope Francis’ *Laudato si’* could guide us in a reflection on what we can define “**an environmental conversion**”. The traditional understanding of ‘Christ’s Mandate to the Church to Disciple and Teach All Nations” could be enriched by re-considering it starting from Mark 16:15: “To out to the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to all creation”.

II) From the Kingdom made coincide with the Church and her spreading to the Kingdom as the fruit of the collaboration between the Church and the World, between Faith and Science.

III) From a liturgy at the service of devotions to a liturgy as a ‘force’ which transforms human beings and the world.

Conclusion - Unfinished Reflection

The few epochal transformations we have tried to underline and the many others that we might have mentioned should convince us, more and more, that history is characterised by *radical continuity, with a prevalence of epochal discontinuity*.

In the past, the mind-set of the Church and her approach to changes and transformation has been highly conditioned by the famous principle of Vincent of Lerins:* “*What has been believed everywhere, always, and by all is the Catholic Faith of Christianity*”.*

Fidelity was reduced to repeating the past. The dynamics of changes and transformations (despite the assurance that Holy Spirit is always at work) were ignored. Attentions to ‘the signs of the times’ faded away.

The ‘actualisation’ of the Word of God, instead, needs to be constant: the fullness of truth is ahead, not behind. “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (*Jn 16:13a*). *Amamnesis* (*zikkaron* in the Hebrew) is the re-actualisation of the celebrated mystery: not just a remembrance of the past, but rather a making the

past present. The ground and reason for the confession of One God is God's own saving action, the salvation history that the confessing person, in recalling, makes present, is drawn into, and participates in.

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The social dimension of the Gospel, at the service of the Kingdom

It wasn't easy to insert Justice, Peace and Integrity of the Creation (i.e. JPIC) dimension in Comboni missionaries' praxis as part and parcel of our mission. Unluckily, even our missionary activity has been prisoner of a proclamation of the Gospel that was confined to release souls and to send them to Paradise. We were imprisoned by a spirituality which was unprepared to combine faith and real life. **“Christian Church”** states the Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole **“is stuck in a place of reticence, where it is considered to hold strict domain in the spiritual and pastoral realm, but nothing else. As such, they aren't in a position to participate in social and material future directions which are therefore delegated to the world of politics”**.

Vatican II turned over a new leaf, especially through the *Gaudium et Spes* which favoured Medellín and Puebla's gatherings and the resulting Liberation Theology. It took social encyclicals as well: *Popolorum Progressio* by Pope Paul VI, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* by Pope John Paul II, *Caritas in Veritate* by Pope Benedict XVI and finally *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si* by Pope Francis.

This conciliar and post-conciliar journey slowly forced us as Comboni missionaries to combine mission and social commitment, and to connect faith with real life. In this respect, the decision to participate in the several editions of the World Social Forum starting from 2007 in Nairobi up to 2018 in Salvador de Bahía, Brazil, proved to be really useful. The attendance to such events forced the entire Comboni Family to take more and more seriously the social dimension of the evangelical proclamation. As a matter of fact, Nairobi's Final Document declares that **“The gospel passage from St. Luke (4:16-21) makes clear that Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation is an integral part of our Mission and of the work of Evangelisation”**.

Starting from these assumptions, the missionaries that two years later joined in the WSF held in Belém, Brazil, thereby concluded that **“We feel impelled to change our theological, missionary, and operative**

paradigms. We feel also challenged to take up new evangelising methods and to propose life-styles that are capable of responding in a coherent way to the changes of the current organizational, economic, and cultural systems”. Even more critical along this process which is leading us in combining faith with real life, is the recovery of the historical Jesus and of his announcement in the Galilee of the poor which was so well described by Luke: *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed”* (Lk 4:16-21).

The social dimension of the **good news that Jesus proclaimed in the Galilee of the “discarded”** is obvious; right in that land, the land of impoverished people he announced the **“year of favor”**. As Ross and Gloria Kinsler explain *“the acceptable year of the Lord or the year of the Lord’s favor is generally understood to be directed to the Year of Jubilee, though it could include the Sabbath Year as well. To bring good news to the poor does not mean to provide a heavenly home after death. It means to change the basic socio-economic and spiritual realities of landless peasants and unemployed labourers in this world. Similarly, we may suggest that the year of Lord’s favor that Jesus proclaimed as the coming of God’s reign was no longer strictly one year in seven or one year in fifty but a new age of perpetual liberty for all God’s people from every kind of oppression”*.

Jesus reclaims and radicalises the ancient dream of the Jewish people: in their prophetic tradition, indeed, Moses is sent by God to set Israel free both from slavery and the Pharaoh. Moses’ God is unwilling to accept that his people live in servitude and he wants them to be delivered from Egyptian’s domination. Thus, in the Exodus, after they have gained liberty, God wants them to create an alternative community which have to be different from the Empires and from the City-States. All the Empires of that time are, in fact, based on opulence economy where only a very few individuals own everything at the expense of the rest of society; to achieve such a purpose, the authority must pursue an oppressive policy in which State security forces like army and police are employed to keep a firm hold on the vast majority of poor people. Actually, the Lord of Moses dreams of a fair economy for his people where all resources

are equally spread within the community; to him, the symbol of such an unfair economy was rotten manna in case it was amassed.

This dream could have been realised only through a policy seeking distributive justice, the same justice that would have allowed anyone to own the wherewithal to live, besides an unwavering faith in a God who was utterly other, utterly free, who could ear the cry of the oppressed, of the marginalised, and of the impoverished and thus who was able to call into question every system that crushed and killed. As a consequence, the refusal of all idols which could be at the basis of an Empire was necessary. This is the faith of Israel, that immediately realised that it was not so easy to transform the dream into reality. In fact, before long Israel turned into a little Realm in which a few people owned everything at poor and enslaved vassals' expense. Hence, the fierce criticism by Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah towards kings, princes and ministers which represented the ruling elite.

The prophetic movement however, who was born to admonish the unjust financial and economical structures, invented the Jubilee which was based on the ancient commandment of the Sabbath reminding every Israelite that he wasn't neither a slave nor a producing machine, but a free man. The deuteronomic Jubilee (Deuteronomy, 15) emerged from that concept: it established the practice of cancelling debts, freeing slaves and prisoners, and restoring the lands to those who had lost them every seven year of Sabbaths. Such grants enabled all Israelites to begin gracefully afresh. In the after exile, Leviticus' authors announced a Jubilee ***“seven times seven years”***. ***“You are to consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom in the land for all its inhabitants”*** (Leviticus, 25). It is right this sabbatical insight which was reclaimed by the prophet who proclaimed ***“the year of Lord's favor”*** (Is. 61, 1-2) following the Exodus; and it is right the text that, according to Luke, Jesus reclaimed as his own project to carry on the ***“good news”*** to the poor of Galilee. The Gospels present a man who travels across the small villages of Galilee inhabited by the poorest. There, Jesus meets the most suffering and dehumanised part of Israel; those people are the “lost sheep” of Israel to whom the Father sent him to announce the “good news” of justice for the oppressed and the humiliated. The Kingdom of God is for them. Jesus' Beatitudes wants to highlight the injustice of that society, besides the announcement that the Kingdom is a good news for the victims of the Roman imperial system. The Son of Heaven is outraged by the suffering of the victims, as his Father is against any form of oppressive power.

This is the reason why Jesus proclaims a Jubilee Year by forgiving debts for those people who were leveraged to the hilt, by freeing slaves and by restoring the lands which were in the hands of wealthy landowners.

“Being an Apostle of Jesus” writes the American theologian Ched Myers **“means to renounce to the seductions and to the false certainties of the System of the debt, in order to embrace a community economy based on sufficiency for everybody”**. Within such an economy, which is called by Jesus **“the Kingdom”**, there will be neither rich nor poor as he stated **“Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God”** (Mark 10:24-25).

Jesus' call for social reorganisation is to be interpreted at each level, starting from family *“His mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent word to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him and told him, “Look, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters are outside asking for you”. He replied to them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Looking at those sitting in a circle around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother”* (Mark 3:31-35), then by means of politics *“James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached him and said, “Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask you”. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked them. They answered him, “Allow us to sit at your right and at your left in your glory”. Jesus said to them, “You don't know what you're asking. Are you able to drink the cup I drink or to be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”. “We are able,” they told him. Jesus said to them, “You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with. But to sit at my right or left is not mine to give; instead, it is for those for whom it has been prepared”. When the ten disciples heard this, they began to be indignant with James and John. Jesus called them over and said to them, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in high positions act as tyrants over them. But it is not so among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you will be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you will be a slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10, 35-45) as it is summed up in the Jubilee ultimatum: *“So the last will be first, and the first last”* (Matthew, 20:16).

Richard A. Horsley and Neil Asher Silberman well interpreted this concept of Jesus: ***“Jesus insight was not on leading his disciples to disembodied communities, rather on creating alternative communities which could withstand and challenge systems of power as he exactly did paying with his own life. The Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed was exactly that socio-economical and spiritual order announced in the Law and in the Prophets and condensed in the vision of a Jubilee Sabbath. He renewed the expectation of the Kingdom in small villages of Galilee. He expressed the new order by “breaking bread” which became the heart of the Jesuit movement that proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God and actualised it through the signs, the life signs”***. Jesus therefore radically rejected monetary economics of accumulation, typical of the Greek-Roman system since ***“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money”*** (Matthew, 6:24).

He could see the tragical effects of those policies on his people, the Galilees, and given that he recognised that the base of such a political and economical system was Jerusalem, he organised a non-violent march to bring to the city their cries of suffering. At the very heart of the system, in the Temple, he challenged merchants and money changers by sending them away because they had transformed it into a bank.

In his “Prophet and Teacher: An Introduction to the Historical Jesus”, William R. Herzog confirms: ***“Jesus’ actions symbolise his comprehensive critics towards the whole system of the Temple”***.

Those are far more than just simple critics towards spirit of enterprise; on this point C. Myers declares: ***“What he really attacks are the interest of the establishment ruling trading companies of the market in the Temple. If so, the prophetic act of Jesus caused a ripple effect on that hierarchy”***.

This was the final deed that sentenced him to death, and to crucifixion: a death reserved by Romans to slaves and instigators against the Empire. The Abba’ (the Father) was loyal to that Crucified man, he revenged his Son and was on his side by bringing him back from the dead. He is alive! He is the God of the crucified, and of all people who were crucified in history. It is right in the name of the Crucified and then risen Christ that the Dream of God will be renewed. Those who welcomed him lived within small alternative communities like the one that Luke

presents as a virtuous model in his Acts (Acts, 1-5) and within small household communities founded by Paul in the cities of the Empire and in the Johannine communities which were alternative to the Roman imperial ethos.

To our Comboni Family, it is crucial to recover that very Dream we took in through the experience of the historical Jesus. It is right the Word that animate our lives and our missionary decisions. It is the Dream of God, it is the Word embodied in Jesus which is at the basis of our social commitment, and at the basis of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation; such a task is not an addition or an enhancement of our missionary involvement, but it is the core of our obligations. If this commitment was crucial to Jesus, who lived within the Roman Imperial context, it is even more crucial to us; we are the ones called to announce the Gospel within the Money Empire, a global and winning Empire which enables the rich to own almost everything at the expense of many people dying of starvation.

These days, we live within a financial and economical system allowing the 8 richest men in the world to own the equivalent of what is owned by 3,6 billions of poor people, therefore allowing the 1% of the worldwide population to own more than 99%, and the 10% to consume the 90% of the goods produced. Such a System enriches the fews and impoverishes the many allowing 30 million people a year to starve to death. **“Such an economy kills”** wrote Pope Francis in 2013 in the *Evangelii Gaudium*. Such a System still survives because it is supported by powerful weapons, and in particular by the nuclear bomb. Globally, last year we spent 1.739 billion dollars in weapons, that is to say the equivalent of 4.5 billion dollars in weapons per day. We declare wars in the name of the mighty and of their vital interests such as crude oil and cobalt, causing millions deaths and dozens of wars in the Middle East and in Africa. Such a militarised financial and economic system weighs so much on the ecosystem that the Earth will bear fewer and fewer the presence of the Homo Sapiens. Such a System requires more and more energy, which is obtained mainly from crude oil and coal; this process causes the “greenhouse effect” since we throw 30 billions carbon dioxin in the atmosphere. A catastrophic ecological crisis leading to a global warming from 3 up to 5 degrees Celsius at the end of the century is what lies ahead. We are in front of the worst disaster regarding both human race and the Planet. Pope Francis gave us the encyclical *Laudato si’* inviting humanity **“to hear both the silent cry of the earth and the cry of the**

poor". Such an Empire based on money is a lethal system: it kills millions of individuals by hunger, war and destroys the "*beautiful garden*" given to us by the Lord.

We believe in a God who is the God of Life and who sent his Son to this earth "*so that they may have life and have it in abundance*" (John 10:10). We are invited to announce God against all the idols of death, and to announce Jesus as well who is "*the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). We are bearers of this Dream of a God of Life, of this Gospel of Liberation. Currently, we are working for a global and inclusive mission: the announcement of a God of Life and the condemnation of any lethal system towards the buildings of fair systems. Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, anti-Nazi dissident and martyr, would now say that at present, just like in the Nazi time, we can talk about *status confessionis*; in plain words, our attitude in front of this System of death is a matter touching the heart of our faith. In fact, if we are on the side of the System, **we have to realise that we are worshipping an idol: the idol of money** ("*You cannot serve both God and money*" Luke 16:13; Matthew 6:24) to which we sacrifice millions of human beings. Instead, if we believe in the God of Life, we have to side with victims, by unmasking such an economical and financial system that beggars the most of humanity and let the few make money by squandering the earth. This is the core of our mission; it is a global mission protesting against a system that kills by hunger and war, that destroys the world and also our inner strenght by dehumanising people.

Besides this denunciation, it our precise task to participate and to support the committees, the networks and the popular movements acting against death structures in order to transform them into virtuos structures in the advocacy for life. It is just what Pope Francis invites us to do underlining the importance of popular movements for the transformation of reality. Let us read and meditate on the three speeches by Pope Francis on popular movements. To us, such an obligation doesn't sound as something strange or new; our founder Saint Daniele Comboni, though he was prisoner of the nineteenth century Christianity, deeply committed himself to the liberation of slaves, but principally he lined up against servitude and arm deals from European countries to slavers. Over the course of our history there were some extraordinary characters belonging to the

Comboni Family who distinguished themselves and incarnated the commitment towards Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. Among them, we would like to honour the memory of Father Ezechiele Ramin, killed in Cacoal, Brazil, on the 24th of July in 1985, while he was defending *campesinos*' right to land in the North-East of Brazil. He is the most remarkable martyr for the campesinos, for the penniless and for the environment. We wish he will be beatified by Pope Francis in the Pan-Amazonian Synod. Another witness who embodied the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation dimension in his pastoral action was certainly Father Franco Masserdotti, Bishop of Balsas, Brazil, who died in unclear circumstances in a mysterious road accident in 2006. Then, Father Raffaele from Bari, killed in Pajule in 2000 and Father Luciano Fulvi, killed in Layibi in 2004 defended dauntlessly human rights in Uganda. Moreover, the stance by a group of missionaries working in Napula, Mozambique, still under the Portuguese colonial regime was equally remarkable. By the document *Obligation of Conscience* written by the Portuguese Bishop Manuel Vieira Pinto together with the Comboni Missionaries, our community stood for the independence of Mozambican people towards a local Church following the guidelines of Vatican II. Soon after, they were expelled from Mozambique. These are just some of the several examples of outstanding confreres who lived the social dimension of their announcement. Archbishop Óscar Romero, a martyr of our time, summed up in a few words Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation dimension: ***“We believe in Jesus who came to bring the fullness of life and we believe in a living God who gives life to men and women and wants them truly to live. These radical truths of the faith become really true and truly radical when the Church enters into the heart of the life and death of people. Then there is put before the faith of the Church, as it is put before the faith of every individual, the most fundamental choice: to be in favor of life or to be in favor of death. We see, with great clarity, that here neutrality is impossible. Either we serve the life of Salvadorans or we are accomplices in their death. And here is what is most fundamental about the faith is given expression in history: either we believe in a God of life or we serve the idols of death”***.

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All-female missionary commitment: an experience-based outlook

Empty or crowded Churches? What is the official figure for Baptismal registers and for all the other sacraments?

Those sometimes reveal themselves as insistent questions to be answered that Jesus of Nazareth didn't care about. Actually, his own mission had close to the heart life, the same life that anyone, whether a man or a woman, from Galilee, Judea or Samaria should have lived gracefully.

Beyond Sacraments

Jesuit theologian Christoph Theobald¹⁰ talks about Jesus like the one who “creates a space of freedom around him communicating a generous closeness by his mere presence for those he run into. He doesn't provide neither a metaphysical nor an ethical or moral teaching, but according to the different individuals he meets, he let people grasp a new way to see the world and to find their own place in it”.

It therefore follows that Christianity according to “Jesus' style” is not an institution imposing dogmas rather a “hospitable” place in which people can let freely emerge the presence of God that already inhabits them. Hence, “the mission interpreted according to Jesus' style” recognises the marvel of every single person when fear is not paralysing him or her, and decline is not deforming one's neighbour. It is a “mission” generating hospitable and liberating spaces for human life.

Beyond the official figures for sacraments registers and for the faithful participating in liturgy, the disciples of the Nazarene could primarily ask

¹⁰ Christian Albini, Christoph Teobald: “A Christianity that is able to understand”, taken from “Christianity as style” in *Theology* 3, pp.298-300

themselves: “Is life defended?”. And if it is not, or if it is painfully deformed, what are the right choices in order to make it “life to the full?”.

Life at the heart of commitment

As women and missionaries committed in non clerical ministries, our target is neither on the Temple nor on its current equivalent represented by parishes, shrines, sacristies or seminaries.

Our searching starts from the “house”, from women and men communities that at the beginning of Christianity met every week in the ordinary nature of the “houses”.

It starts from Martha and Mary, two sisters who, along with Lazzaro, hosted Jesus and his disciples both brothers and sisters. Women who were “hospitable” and welcoming in a different way, and who favoured times of encounter and friendship.

How to live our mission today to make life, in its entire creation, “flourishing” and “fruit-bearing”?

Gospels are permeated by “transforming” experiences which could be defined as “sacred”. However, they are not lived within the fence of the temple; they pervade life in its ordinariness, in the streets or in a house where we share a meal, or even close to a water-well.

The “house” and the “temple” are not mutually exclusive, but our vision originates from the “places” of daily relationship, and the prevailing missionary mandate is the one given by the Gospel according to John (10:10): *“I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance”* rather than by the Gospel according to Matthew (28:19) *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* or Mark (16:15,16): *“Then he said to them: Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation”*.

A ministerial mission

Mission interpreted according to Jesus manner invites to reorganise the old structure of a “sacred” Church, too often “separate” from real life; as Pope Francis underscores, this institution is overmuch concerned about giving answers to questions that are not going to be asked by community.

Chapter 2010 presented an experience-based journey by involving all Comboni Missionary Sisters communities, and it was called reflection on ministeriality of the Church. From 2011 to 2014, starting from Comboni's Plan and from his Rule of 1871, we pondered over the way we live today, and on how we can offer a real service to life. Directions¹¹ emerged from those reflections are given below.

John's manner to look at the mission: our mission symbolises the maternal face of God that participates in the liberation of humanity from evil, the same evil that needs to dehumanise mankind in order to survive. It is a reinterpretation of the ministerial commitment deriving from the Gospel according to John: it recovers John's Good Shepherd embracing the entire human race, and it is right the Shepherd who inspired Comboni that much.

"Regeneration" as multidirectional movement: we are not the ones to regenerate Africa or the several "human groups". Regeneration is a movement starting from God and reaching us, as humanity in our entirety, missionaries sisters and people. In charge of missionary sisters, we travel across a solidarity path in which regeneration occurs in a circular, reciprocal and simultaneous way: as sisters, we feel women collaborating with other sisters and brothers united in Christ so that the glory of God could inhabit our lands.

Today, the spirituality of regeneration allows us to experience the profound and regenerating touch of God whether on our own inwardness or communing with others. By establishing a relation with Him, women disciples of Jesus – who are sometimes paralysed and wounded personalities – have become passionate messengers of "life" beyond limits, beyond any possible failure, women creating positive, tolerant and humanising relations within the different contexts they live in. Consequently, regeneration comes out by offering dignity mutually.

Beside the announce of the Gospel, the emphasis is placed on hospitality, welcoming and trust we receive from populations. Other elements determining the nature of our mission are commitment to justice, peace and integrity of creation and dialogue with people of other faiths, beliefs and spiritual experiences.

11 "To Dare the Mission today" (2014)

Dialogical nature of the mission: Jesus involves all the people he encounters in a personal relationship, and as a wayfarer he finds fresh water even into hostile territories (John 4:1-22). Which are the water-wells where people go and sit in contemporary world? Do we sit close to these wells? Our task is not to “instil our religion in people’s minds”, but rather to let emerge the common desire to a living existence: to operate together toward a world of peace and sharing.

Proximity, openness to dialogue, patience, and warm and non-judging hospitality are necessary to this end. Religious pluralism is a way to be in the world, and dialogue with other religions and cultures is credible witness of a God embracing the whole universe.

Intercultural and relational communities: the dialogical nature of the mission appreciates friendship, trust, relations, and harmony in order to “build a house” with differences, and not to leave them aside. It invites us to live in frontiers and to cross-fertilise each other: visible and invisible people, people belonging to high socio-political classes and to small communities or families, men and women, ethnic groups and cultures, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed, illiterate and learned, lay and religious people, Church and society.

Communing life is essential to the mutual aspect of relation: it is just God’s favourite “place” to speak. So, the mission requires to really understand people and to let yourself be understood by the others to link those worlds who were separated by the walls of prejudice.

We are all hosts, “foreign residents”: if we live our lives (both cultural or religious) in the awareness that we are not guardians of the truth or owners of inviolable and sacred spaces, we could grow a humanising society, together with the ones who feel the same “thirst” we feel.

Towards a humanising faith

Let’s go back to the opening question: “Is life defended?”.

Globalisation is a complex and bivalent phenomenon: his initial promise of wealth for all the people of this world broke into outrageous disparities distressing human race increasingly. Marginalised people are more and more aware of their marginalisation and they dare criticise the “capitalist model” and the various oppressive systems that devour our

Planet and their very existence.

In the spirit of the *Plan*, and of his advocacy for a new beginning, we move some unprecedented steps further within nowadays global reality as well, as we let ourselves be questioned by fresh queries.

Our commitment towards Justice, Peace and Integrity of the Creation (JPIC) as part of our Missionary Animation have already emerged in Chapter 1998, that fosters our meditation on issues pertaining people and human rights, advocacy for the Mother Earth, and a specific ministry defending the victims of human trafficking. In Chapter 2004 Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment became an integral part of the mission (AC 2004, number 4), and each Circumscription was urged to consider new strategies to live Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation and to make it presence, conscience, and sharing on charism imbued with contemplation satisfying the hunger for God in today's society (2004, AC n.27).

Therefore, our mission has expressly become a serious engagement towards Justice and Peace since we are women living in frontiers and promoting a globalisation of solidarity.

The latest consideration on ministeriality of the Church reaffirmed the importance of education and formation for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, with close attention to religious and cultural pluralism. Direct commitment by Comboni communities in hospitality and integration of immigrants and refugees, and the protest against the practice of human trafficking concretely witness our charism.

The World Social Forum

Now more than ever, the current rereading of the *Plan* calls on us in order to seek a “cooperation of strengths”; it implies an inner talent for a “fair research”.

Thanks to religious and cultural support, “others” models of life are emerging from many “neighbourhoods”. Some of the values animating them are in antithesis to consumerist efficiency: cooperation and pleasure of sharing time to set oneself free from the obsession of competition and from the tyranny of work; the significance of a plain life to heal a wasteful society damaged by pollution; a simple life, in respect of the Creation we are a part of, and of the Mother Earth which allows us to live “well” without being trapped by a toxic and lethal finance.

The World Social Forum is an area of encounter and confrontation among those who are experimenting “another possible world”. To be part of this forum, which is characterised by its immense variety of sensitiveness and ideas becomes an integral part of the dialogical mission looking for life.

Sr. Paola Moggi

Combonifem Director

Sr. Fernanda Cristinelli

Missionary Sister in Uganda

The present reflection drew on contributions by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle.

Lay Comboni Missionaries' commitment in the Evangelisation

“We do not live an era of change, but rather in a change of era”. This is the way Pope Francis described the current historical situation characterised by radical changes in Florence in November 2015. He further added: “Therefore, the situations we are living today pose new challenges, which, for us at times are difficult to understand. Our times require that we live problems as challenges and not as obstacles: the Lord is active and at work in the world”.

Chapter 2015 underlined that: “The world we live in today is a theological place where we are supposed to sow and to cultivate the seeds of reconciliation and love. It is a multicultural world, to which we can convey the view that fraternity among people from different continents, cultures and beliefs is possible” (CA 5).

“To resist is to create, to resist is to transform” is a sentence encompassing an extraordinary power. It was used as the motto in the World Social Forum held from the 13th to the 17th of March in 2018 in Salvador de Bahía, Brazil, an encounter that involved our participation as Comboni Family within a framework of open debate and dynamic on the themes of justice, peace and protection of the Creation. From 2007 on the Comboni Social Forum gathers in conjunction with the WSF every year. The topic of this year has been **“Ministerial methods and networking, cooperation within the Comboni Family and with other organisations”**. Times of analysis and reflection strengthened the importance of cooperation and networking notably in a world divided by ever more specialised fields, and where creating links and connections requests a high degree of interdependency and shared responsibilities. Lay people are becoming increasingly active in the life of Christian communities within a world in which consciousness and dignity of human beings are growing more and more. The Spirit of the Second Vatican Council and his strength underlie this new interest by laity. Such a force has opened new ways toward the conception of a Church who is **“people of God”**, **“mystery of communion and participation”**, and ministry and incarnation in the world.

Laities have always had an important role in the history of both Church and evangelisation.

“In the Church there is a diversity of ministry but a oneness of mission” (AA 2). **“This diversity of services in the unity of the same mission makes up the richness and beauty of evangelisation** (EN 66). Different ministries share therefore a sole purpose: the mission, the evangelisation in his entirety, complexity and dynamism (Cf. EN 17). In the Church there is no competition between ministries and charisms as the Spirit himself is the one who has caused them. Ministries are not competitive but complementary, there exists joint responsibility; they have to be raised for the sake of the unique mission in a spirit of communion to be sought and built over and over again, through discernment not free from difficulties.

To identify and to enhance different ministries invites us to overcome the logic of delegating tasks and decentralising activities, and to encourage a new dynamic through which the realisation of a systematic and continuous work linking faith and life is possible.

The Second Vatican Council gave particular attention to lay people by means of documents drawn up by the ecclesial ministry. They considered laity part and parcel of the discipleship and of the missionary activities.

From 1969 on all Chapters and inter-chapter assemblies by the Comboni Institutes has dealt with the matter: it is enough to reassess official documents to understand that an authentic journey of awareness and promotion of lay people has been made.

In recent decades, the new way opened by the Church recalled the awareness of being called to ministry through many forms. We have all become aware that, within the reality we live in today, our commitment is to “be with” the ones who suffer, and not to stay out of sight within the walls of a Church made of “christened” with no engagement. Suffering, poverty and injustice conditions are still the challenge on how to live faith and mainly Jesus’ discipleship. To start from impoverished people of this system facilitates and therefore makes understandable

the biblical language on God; they represent the ideal “place” where to meet the Lord of history who chooses **“life and life in abundance”** (John, 10:10) as a demonstration of His love for mankind. It is a call to live, through one’s own ministry, an incarnate, compassionate, and prophetic faith, that is also full of hope.

Hence, we are all invited to dignify the life of anyone through the identification and the enhancement of different ministries, in attempting to be Christians really able to work together, in several ways and under the impulse of the Spirit, so that “the kingdom of God comes near” (Mark 1, 14:20). Through different ministries we face the challenges of the social, political and economical context.

The Comboni Lay Missionary Movement is the result of walking together according to a pastoral, charismatic and theological agreement. We are present in 19 different countries, and we are opened to the needs of local Churches and of those people who welcome us.

We are men and women steeped in everyday life and we live on our work approaching world’s realities (such as economics, politics, culture and so on) according to the Gospel. Our choice is founded on God’s Word, on the example of Jesus of Nazareth and of His disciple Saint Daniel Comboni. This radical experience of God incarnated in the history of men allows us to get involved into civil society at the service of human liberation, of justice and peace with the preferential option for the poor and the marginalised making a common cause with them. We have close to our hearts the universal value of our mission seen as the announcement of the values of the Kingdom and the “regeneration” of the social structure, and not just as a geographical reality. Further, united in the whole Comboni Family we live our calling following Daniel Comboni’s charism by reincarnating it in the light of the lay identity, and therefore being able not just to get connected to the emergencies and the urgency of history but also to get involved through a “regeneration” and self-determination method (Save Africa by Africa). Many texts taken from the writings of Saint Daniel Comboni, indeed, allow us to state that within the missionary activity in favour of the Nigritia, he could involve not just the clergy and religious institutes, but also lay people from all walks of life and different countries.

We work in the pastoral siding with communities, assisting lay formation, and cooperating for the organisation of pastoral activities (family, health, youth, social, liturgy and so forth).

We are engaged in the social field and inserted within the current reality. We foster community initiatives for formation (associations and training centres, for instance), social action activities, work on justice and peace, human rights defense, activity with the abused (street children, domestic abuse and so on) by promoting communal development and local communities empowerment. In many cases, we are integrated in local structures (for example, health and education) supporting what already exists avoiding to create new structures, and working on the inside thus strengthening facilities.

There are many experiences of missionary life by the Comboni Lay Missionaries in different parts of the world. Following we are going to list just a few flashes on three experiences in our view emblematic to live the global mission we mentioned before.

Mongouba (Central African Republic)

Within a context of great violence and tension due to a civil war, the presence of the Comboni Lay Missionaries has been felt for over 50 years now; in 1998 the international mission by the Comboni Lay Missionaries began, and over time Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Polish LCM interchanged therefore granting a pastoral continuity in Mongouba parish. They also participated in the activities of the local Church according to Saint Comboni charism trying to create an open community, at the service of the poor and listening to them. They also collaborated with other realities in medical and educational fields for social promotion and development of people. It seems to us significant to witness the meaning of “**making a common cause**” mainly in context where wars, violence and conflicts represent the tragic everyday reality. To be a witness of justice and peace could and should be put into practice starting from the places where life is menaced.

Piquiá de Baixo (Brazil)

Piquiá is a neighbourhood in the suburb of Açailândia where steel mills lay their foundations directly on the yards of houses. The dust covers the sparkling green of the Amazonian trees, of brick buildings and roads. *La Poeira* is the name given by people to the smoke ceaselessly coming out of the chimneys of the four steel companies that is Gusa Nordeste, Vale do Pindaré, Simasa, Viena.

The mining giant Vale – once state-owned and now privatised – has transformed this region into the international capital of steel or better, into the international capital of the “**pig iron**” that is the initial and the dirtiest part of the manufacturing. This process is mostly carried out in the South of the World. The presence of the Comboni Family inserts within this context, where lay and priests back community up in their fight for ecological justice and health, along with the group *Iglesia y minería* and the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM) in the light of the social encyclical *Laudato Si'*. We aim at broadening our horizons toward an effort to an integrative ecology, fighting in the interest of the “common home” by preserving it from the dominance of technology and fostering fraternal and fair human relationships.

La Zattera Community in Palermo, Italy

The setting of the city of Palermo is marked by a strong economical polarisation, mainly from a social point of view. It is due to relevant pockets of deprivation, and to a chronic lack of welfare services as well. However, Palermo is a passage for many migrants who cross the Mediterranean Sea leaving from the coast of Africa, and it is characterised by the absence of structural solution for reception centres. The work we are doing as Comboni Family in the reality of migration is essentially networking with other associations, organisations and social and ecclesial movements at local grassroots level in the process of identification and in the condemnation for those who exploit the despair of migrants. With reference to the work of reception, “La Zattera” community is an experience of fraternity where lay missionaries live together with our brothers and sisters migrants. La Zattera was born ten years ago and still operates within this context of hospitality. The missionary action is

translated into a praxis of sharing and solidarity, coexistence, pooling of resources and co-production, besides an accommodation providing possibilities, opportunities, self-determination and social justice processes in cooperation with those realities of the civil society working at local level.

Conclusion

“The reality of an ever-changing mission in today’s world requires an ongoing reflection both on a theoretical (theological-charismatic) level and on a practical (places and frameworks of the mission) level” (CA 15 n. 44.1).

A deep conversion in our pastoral ministry in a missionary key **“seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way” (EG 33) and it will have to combine faith with charisma, and bravery with realism” (CA 15, n.44.2).**

The global mission helps to broaden the horizons of those who withstand troubles daily. It further boosts the reading of the signs of the times and places inspiring to take a contemplative look, welcoming the enhancement of the values of the Kingdom by drawing motivation and encouragement from them. The aim is not to desist, rather to keep on symbolising hope for the poor and the discarded inspired by a great love for Christ and for the poor coming from the charisma of Saint Daniel Comboni.

Tony and Dorotea Scardamaglia

Comboni Lay Missionaries - Palermo

Comboni Missionaries: for the future of the Kingdom of Justice, Peace, Reconciliation and Integrity of Creation according to the Gospel and to the Catholic Social Teaching

Eleven years' experience by the Comboni Forum (CF) in the World Social Forum (WSF) activities allowed our Institute to increase the understanding on the issue that commitment for the Kingdom of Justice, Peace, Reconciliation and Integrity of Creation according to the Gospel shouldn't be an obligation assumed just by some charismatic confreres participating in the initiatives carried on by Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). Through the experiences of both WSF and CF we can infer that this commitment should exist in each one of our initiatives whether of evangelical or missionary promotion. This is the reason why basic and ongoing formation in the Institute should be reconsidered as it was done with the integral educative model, so that starting from basic formation up to ongoing formation all Comboni missionaries are formed not just to enliven "**prophetic consciousness**" on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment, but rather to develop sensitivity and specific skills in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation for a missionary commitment toward the poorest and the abandoned in the world we live in today.

This paper seeks to make memory on the proposal of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the Union of Superiors General (USG) and International Union of Superiors General (UISG) about basic and ongoing formation of the consecrated in general (and of Comboni missionaries in particular) in Justice, Peace, Reconciliation and Integrity of Creation according to the Gospel and to the Catholic Social Teaching. As a matter of fact, in 2010 Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the USG & UISG published a handbook whose title was "*Formative pathways for prophetic religious life*" and which offered an overall view on Catholic Social Teaching for every

step of formation in consecrated life starting exactly from ongoing formation. Therefore, I will try first to highlight the importance of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation for the missionary commitment in the Institute from Comboni onwards. Secondly, I would like to sum up the itinerary proposed by Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the USG & UISG for basic and ongoing formation in the Institute. Then, in the conclusion I will appeal to the General Secretariat of Formation to structure the formation of our candidates in the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation as they structured our formation with the integral educative model.

1. Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment in the Comboni Institute

The history of the Comboni Institute is marked by Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment as a part and parcel of the service of evangelism particularly through Comboni charism and his "*Plan for the Regeneration of Africa*". In the attempt to detect the commitment of the Institute from Comboni until now, I will not retrace only the history of the Institute by making a list of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation tasks, which many Comboni missionaries lived concretely and to which they gave their life, too; on the contrary, I will underline the fact that our Comboni charism, since the very birth and all through its development, cannot be understood if we ignore the commitment for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. The Comboni charism is born through Saint Daniel Comboni's commitment towards justice and peace for enslaved Africans.

Being in contact with African slaves, Saint Daniel Comboni was not satisfied with proclaiming to them the good news of the Gospel which postpones justice and peace in the beyond, but committed himself concretely toward an authentic liberation for slaves and for the struggle against all sorts of injustice exercised against them. His "*Plan for the Regeneration of Africa*" pursued the goal to conceive the evangelism of Central Africa as an effective commitment toward Justice and Peace, according to the Gospel, for the enslaved African people. In particular, Comboni committed himself firsthand in order to support their rights and dignity. Here is one among his several interventions to defend a boy

threatened with abduction by Mister Greek: ***“He wanted to take little Antonio away from me by force, but I told him: “Sir, with your behaviour you would be compromising yourself. You are acting against the freedom of the African who wishes to accompany me. If you seek to take possession of the boy by force you are breaking the law and are guilty of the crime of the jallaba, thus deserving the same punishment as they do. The Governor cannot move a finger against me or against the boy, because I hold a legal authorisation in writing which I shall show to the Government in London if it ever dared to ask me for my documents. You, and the Governor, would then be punished for your injustice”*** (Writings, 878).

This is just one of the examples found in *“The Writings* by Saint Daniel Comboni on his real commitment towards justice and peace for the African people; we can therefore conclude that Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation engagement is a part of the DNA of our charism. As heirs of this responsibility, a lot of Comboni missionaries devoted themselves until giving their own lives the same way Jesus Christ did. We are well aware of the full involvement of those missionaries, and among them I would like to mention Father Ezechiele Ramin, who after a very few months of presence in Brazil made his choice and decided to devote his life to missionary commitment towards justice and peace for the poor. He wrote ***“this evening, this missionary wept at his life but I will continue with my people, I am travelling with a faith that creates, like winter, a new spring. Around me people are dying (malaria has increased by 300%), the landowners are increasing, the poor are humiliated, the police kill the peasants and all the Indian reserves have been invaded. With the Winter, I am creating Spring. I have already given my answer to these people: an embrace. I am not living this situation and neither do I stay within it like a prisoner. I have the passion of one who follows a dream”*** (www.comboni.org/contenti/108836-esemplari-e-ispiratori-oltre-la-necrologia.14/04/2018).

The establishment of a common cause with people who are suffering in order to find new paths for justice and peace is consequently ascribable to Comboni missionaries. Nevertheless, it seems to me that Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment, even though continuously underlined in the official documents of the Institute, is too

often left to the personal charism or to the efforts of a few confreres and particularly to those who committed themselves until the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. However, in the last few years, through the attendance of the Comboni missionaries at the World Social Forum, the participants members of the whole Comboni Family (MCCJ, SMC, LMC) shared their experiences on the responsibility of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in circumscriptions. Comboni Forums have always represented a moment of prayer, reflection and sharing of the charismatic dream of Comboni in the sector of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. From these encounters appeared the awareness and the wish for a more accurate and structured Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment which was guided by the General Directions of our Institutes starting from the grassroots all through different circumscriptions. Over recent years, the General Councils have always encouraged the encounter and the participation of the Comboni missionaries (priests, brothers, sisters and lay) to the several WSFs. For the last 2018 WSF in Brazil the two General Councils (MCCJ and SMC) have written a letter to Comboni Family's participants underlining clearly the growing awareness on our obligation to commit ourselves harder and harder in the dialogue with social movements.

What does this letter by the General Councils emphasise? First of all, it represents an invocation to all of us, Missionary Brothers and Sisters to put Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation themes at the heart of the word of the Gospel, by quoting the same experience of both Jesus and Comboni: ***“We cannot separate the Gospel from commitment to justice, as the own life of Jesus clearly shows. Daniel Comboni, who was a man deeply in contact with God, boldly accuses the atrocity of slavery, and since his very first journey to Africa he realised the importance of bringing together the interest on mankind and the teaching of the Word. The Gospel should transform the individuals and their vital environment at the same time as Comboni exactly tried to achieve in the Malbes program. Besides, how could we forget Father Ezechiele Ramin who left a priceless proof of a life consumed in the name of justice and of the Gospel, right in the land which will welcome and host you during the time of your meeting”*** (Message of the two General Councils, Rome the 8th of March, 2018).

In the second part, the General Councils describe the era which we live in and the risk we run as missionaries of taking shelter within the limited reality of the mission in which we operate and ignoring that the poverty we face every day is the result of unjust structural conditions of global character. ***“We live in a era which is strongly polarised and mastered by great economic powers that cause poverty and inequality. We are sadly very familiar with these realities due to the work of our missions. Sometimes we run the risk of disguising within the border of the limited reality in which we operate and of ignoring that poverty close by us is the result of unjust structural conditions which have a global character. A better perception of these dynamics that destroy our lives allows us to be more discerning and to encourage a conscience transformation in people we share life and ministry with”*** (Ibidem).

Finally, the General Councils have encouraged the attendants to the WSF and to the Comboni Forum stressing the opportunity to share practical experiences of commitment in different networks touching first-hand the work we have done in America, Africa, Asia and Europe. They also have affirmed and underscored that we commit ourselves further and further broadening our horizons and finding new methods to run the mission we carry on together.

As they were supported in their engagement by the official position of the General Councils, participants to the Comboni Forum have decided to involve even more our students in formation and their formators in the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation obligation because it is right in their basic formation that they can prepare the future of the Institute. Thus, since the arrangements of the last CF in Brazil, all scholasticates and their formators have been involved through a questionnaire which aimed at testing their level of knowledge about Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation issues. The questionnaire was born as an attempt to find new ways to actualise a crucial resolution approved by those who attended the meeting of Scholasticates (CIF) and novitiate’s formators of our Institute held in 2017 in Maia, Portugal. The resolution asks for ***“SGF, in dialogue with the SGM and formators, ensures that in our candidates’ formation there will be courses on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and on***

inter-religious dialogue” (Maia 2017, 2.3.1). Partakers to both WSF and CF have welcomed the verdict in their final message: *“For the first time, also delegates of youth in formation in the Scholasticate and in the CIF has joined in with a formator. We show gratitude for the answers we received from the four scholasticates to the questionnaire, too. Central committee has sent this survey with the aim to assess how much Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation matters are acquainted in the formation. We reaffirm the importance of involving more and more those who are in formation and the formators themselves on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation themes and on WSF and CF dynamics”*.

In order to support the obligation of the WSF and CF participants, I would like therefore to summarise the commission’s proposal on basic and ongoing formation in our Institute, together with some inspirations published by Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of the USG & UISG entitled *“Formative pathways for prophetic religious life”*. The main goal of this itinerary is to offer methods through which incorporate Catholic Social Teaching into every single step of religious life formation.

2. Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in basic and ongoing formation

Formation is pursued attentively in the Institute and it is addressed to all positions and missionary roles as it represents the starting point of the same future of the Institute. In recent years, basic and ongoing formation have been unified in all of their phases through the integral educative model to face the challenges of the internalisation of the values of consecrated life. Maia’s document of 2017 underlines the fact that this educative model, as presented by the new Ratio Fundamentalibus (RF) is certainly a strong point for our formation, a clear choice by our Institute which is in line with the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. The model offers efficient tools for a profound knowledge of the individual in his human and spiritual growth. All the same, the document notes some vulnerability towards a serious analysis on social, ecclesiastical and Comboni reality; it therefore suggests

that ***“closeness to people and a serious analysis on reality will allow us to understand the causes of their suffering conditions in order to look for an appropriate pastoral answer. This method will also be necessary for the formation of our candidates that will have to enter reality, cultivate awareness, sensitivity and a critical eye on this matter; moreover, they will have to share more and more Jesus’ behaviour toward mankind, especially to those who are wounded and discarded and in order to achieve this goal we have to improve our knowledge on local cultures, including languages, and on an incarnate spirituality enhanced by a mutual illumination between the Word and reality. Actually, awareness on reality is the best way to form our candidates, as it transforms and gives practical experiences beyond ideas”*** (Maia 2017, 2.2.2).

In front of the awareness on the importance of associating the integral educative model with a solid formation on the analysis on social, ecclesiastical and Comboni reality, participants to the gathering held in Maia state that ***“SGF, in dialogue with the SGM and formators, ensures that in our candidates’ formation there will be courses on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) and on inter-religious dialogue”*** (Maia 2017, 2.3.1).

Formative pathways for prophetic religious life which is the handbook by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of the USG & UISG indicates the way forward to organise a formation that should be contextualised within our Institute. The commission actually expresses the same worry participants to the Maia encounter showed, so that basic and ongoing formation of all candidates could be valued by a precise formation in the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation: ***“The challenge of formation, the contemporary context of the Church and the social commitment by many religious men and women show the importance and the need of introducing seriously and deeply Catholic Social Teaching in formation courses toward Consecrated Life”*** (IFR-GPIC, p.17). According to the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of the USG & UISG ***“now more than ever, faithful to the charisms of their founders, religious men and women commit themselves to fostering justice, peace and integrity of the creation, and to undertaking actively a collaboration toward the***

building of the society of love. Consecrated people are aware that this obligation involves evangelical discernment on social reality, and that this discernment should highlight unfair systems and structures, as well as the root causes of problem affecting the entire world. They therefore understand the reason why is crucial to soak in notions both individually and together with Magisterium of the Catholic Church” (IFR-JPIC, p.18-19).

This handbook by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of the USG & UISG intends to offer to religious Institutes some fundamental guidelines that should guide the integration of Catholic Social Teaching with basic formation programs at each level. The handbook divides its proposal into two main categories:

- 1) In the first part are presented the principles supporting the proposal. Jesus gave to his Church the mission to collaborate together toward the building of the Kingdom of God on Earth. This obligation involves the evangelism of social structures so that God’s plan becomes reality in the life of every individuals and of all the people. Catholic Social Teaching offers interpretation keys of the Christian vision of reality and it is therefore an essential tool for the evangelism. In this respect, to the Consecrated Life is essential to absorb and to incarnate the teaching of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church which is continuously improved.
- 2) The second part offers principles and fundamental criteria for the selection of concrete paths for basic formation; these principles help us to plan formation on the Catholic Social Teaching in the light of an incarnated, ecological and prophetic spirituality which involves inculturation as well. The following pattern shows objectives, contents and experiences of the different steps of a path of formation on Catholic Social Teaching, and it should be used, adapted or amended by religious institutes starting from the essential values of their charism.

The primary intention of this proposal is to offer a contribution which should ease the transition from a formation based on activities toward a

formation encouraging and guiding a process which is consistent with consecrated life behaviours and lifestyle. For each step of formation, starting from ongoing formation, the handbook proposes some specific targets to reach, contents to develop and experiences to share. For each step I am going to mention just some of the specific targets, contents and experiences.

2.1 Ongoing formation

Specific targets	Contents	Experiences
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To cultivate a strong spirituality which leads to listen to God within the reality we live in every day, among poor people and in the Creation in the light of his Word and of the Catholic Social Teaching 2. To reassert the charism of the Institute facing emergencies and challenges of the time, places, cultures and current events of society in order to welcome the Holy Ghost and to collaborate toward a transformation of social reality thanks to the strength given by the Gospel 3. To exercise individual and common discernment about the reality of society to stand critically against ideologies and to be a prophetic voice locally 4. To study and to analyse structural causes of poverty. 	<p>Besides the systematic study of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, there are some contemporary aspects of today's reality which are overriding, and they need to be enlightened by the contents of the Gospel and by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Migration flows 2. Science and new technologies challenges 3. Ecological crisis and environmental problems 4. Solidarity economy 5. Evangelical foundations on human rights 6. Pluralism and interreligious dialogue 7. Culture and interculturalisation 8. Christians and political life 9. Social Doctrine, Christian praxis and pastoral social 10. Ecclesiastical organisations and other networks committed in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation 11. Documents by the Institute on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. 	<p>Amid the experiences that allow us to understand the sign of the times and the realisation and a prophetic and prolific apostolic mission let us mention:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Lectio Divina on the Bible themes which hold a connection with social justice, active non-violence and defence of life 2. Practical commitment in pastoral social and pastoral ecological 3. Networking in collaboration with other committed organisations 4. Encounter with the reality of the social exclusion and meetings with other people involved in movements and organisations fighting for peace and integrity of the Creation 5. Inter-congregational networking with other organisations 6. Creation of groups for the resolution of conflicts.

2.2 Postulate

Specific targets	Contents	Experiences
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To deepen one's own relationship with Jesus Christ through concrete attitude of mercy, love for life, care for nature and ordinary things 2. To pay respect and attention to everyone enhancing cultural differences as resources to grow relations with the Kingdom 3. To become aware of the fact that God's calling reveals itself through the phenomena of the world and in the place we live in. 	<p>Essential contents on postulate formation can be organised according to each group's life conditions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge of the person of the Jesus Christ through the learning of the Gospel 2. Learning of the First Chapter of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church on the love of God for mankind and on the anthropology of the Social Doctrine of the Church 3. Learning of some Social Encyclicals such as <i>Populorum Progressio</i> or <i>Sollicitudo rei socialis</i> 4. Interpretation on the life of the founder from the point of view of his commitment toward the poorest. 	<p>Among the experiences which can be proposed to postulants we can notice:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiation to the <i>Lectio Divina</i> putting first Gospel's passages which present Jesus love for the Father, for the poor and for those who suffer and which present the common good, the values of fraternity, of service and care for the Creation 2. Encounters with poverty in the apostolate 3. Analysis, through the methods of revision of life (to see, to judge and to act), of the news from around the world, of the local and national social-political reality and of the analysis of the youth world.

2.3 Novitiate

Specific targets	Contents	Experiences
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To strengthen the acquaintance of Jesus Christ and of the love for him by observing his relationship with the Apostle and his signs of salvation for the poor 2. To read one's own story again as a sign of salvation starting from the gratuitousness of the love and the compassion of God 3. To exercise personal and collective discernment as tools to reach love coming from the Father 4. To make yourself responsible for environmental protection with a manner of Grace for the gift of the Creation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The learning of Chapters II, III and IV of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 2. In- depth analysis on the prophetic dimension of the Religious Life 3. Consecration and social dimensions of the vows 4. Detailed study on the <i>Magnificat</i> as a canticle to God liberating the oppressed and the poor 5. Identification of the relationship between the charism of the Institute and the Catholic Social Teaching 6. Studies on the values of justice, peace and Integrity of Creation in the documents of the Institute. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Lectio Divina</i> putting first the signs that Jesus made in favour of the discarded, the marginalised and the strangers 2. Analysis on concrete social conditions through the method "see, judge, act" 3. Mission or apostolic experience periods among the poorest and the abandoned by society 4. Communal evaluation on the concrete option for an ecological and sober lifestyle 4. Dedicated prayers on the days of celebration of peace, justice and Integrity of Creation.

2.4 Scholasticate/CIF

Obiettivi specifici	Contenuti	Esperienze
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To strengthen the belief of the centrality of Christ in the personal life trying to incarnate his feelings and behaviours 2. To let the moment of prayer be considered as everyday consciousness of the presence of God and of the action of the Holy Spirit in worldwide, collective and personal reality 3. To exercise dialogue, respect and appreciation of differences as paths of collaboration toward the construction of a global peace 4. To choose a simple and plain lifestyle which is consistent with the commitment towards the poor and the abandoned 5. To commit oneself to protect environment in everyday life. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To deepen the book of the Acts of the Apostles in the perspective of the acceptance of people toward Jesus Christ and of the intercultural of the faith 2. Learning of chapters X, XI and XII of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church 3. Reading and comments in spirit of sharing on the latest social encyclicals 4. Studies on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation values in recent documents of the Institute 5. Knowledge of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of other conceptions on current worldwide challenges 6. Collecting information on ecological matters and on the responsibility of the international community 7. Awareness of the paths of interreligious dialogue and ecumenicalism. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lectio Divina on the Acts of the Apostles' book 2. Individual and communal discernment on the challenges that the social and cultural context presents together with a collection of answers to these challenges 3. Mission periods in existential suburbs 4. Communal evaluation on concrete ways to express the undertaken commitment on adopting a simple, sober and ecological lifestyle 5. Organisation of seminaries to deepen some of the aspects of the Social Doctrine of the Church 6. Communal discernment on electoral periods on the different political choices in the light of the Social Doctrine of the Church 7. Reading and sharing articles on some aspects of the JPIC requesting answers in the light of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Conclusion

Following my contribution on the opportunity offered by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the USG & UISG through their formative handbook for consecrated in the commitment for the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, I would like to end this article by making a plea to our General Secretariat for Formation in order that they could reform objectives and contents of each step of our formation according to the proposal of *“Formative pathways for prophetic religious life”*. Actually, up to now our basic and ongoing

formation has found in the integral educative model a formative method founded on Christian anthropology which gave to all Comboni missionaries the possibility to consolidate their consecrated human life to the values of the Gospel, rather than to personal needs. It is therefore crucial for our Institute to find also ways to organise our missionary praxis on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment. Even if the integral educative model let us structure a formative practice within our Institute together with common references on Christian and human maturity, still there is the need to move forward. I do believe that we lack in revising and restructuring our formation so that it could prepare the future Comboni missionaries to be capable and saint, and not just to analyse the reality we live in. These guidelines will allow us to discover the causes of the painful conditions of the suffering people we operate and work with and to seek for an appropriate pastoral answer with them, beyond committing ourselves practically and consistently for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation according to the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching. In conclusion, our Institute truly needs such a formation as according to the handbook of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commission of the USG & UISG, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment of consecrated people is inspired and led by four main beliefs and these are: faithfulness to Jesus Christ and to his Gospel; faithfulness to mankind and to his time; faithfulness to the Church and to his mission in the world; faithfulness to consecrated life and to the charism of its own Institute. Further, the knowledge and the use of the Catholic Social Teaching enriches our formative process with seven essential points which are fundamental for the competence of our students in formation in the mission of the complex reality we live in and these are: comprehension of both men and women, dialogue with the world, discernment, insertion in life and popular culture, pastoral and social action, evangelism and commitment to justice, peace and integrity of the Creation.

Father Joseph Mumbere Musanga

Provincial Superior
Democratic Republic of the Congo

Incarnate formation in the world we live in today

“Be strong, and let your heart be courageous”

(PSALM 31, 24)

Commitment to justice, peace and integrity of creation has always been an essential part of the ministry of Comboni Missionaries. Beyond the Rule of Life and the experience of the Founder himself, the need to combine evangelisation with social transformation toward the ideal of the kingdom of God, a “kingdom of justice, love and peace”, is endorsed through various documents.

Thus, the Comboni Family has regularly taken an active role in the numerous editions of the World Social Forum that has been organised from 2001 by now. Eleven years ago, they actually took a specific time to reflect before and after the World Social Forum, and this is the Comboni Social Forum.

This year, they have sought to involve Comboni Missionaries formation houses effectively and responsibly. It is not the first time in which youth formed and still in the formation program have attended the World Social Forum edition. Nonetheless, this time a questionnaire has been dispensed all through Comboni houses previously the event.

The aim was to test the level of knowledge about Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation burning issues and to assess the awareness of our students and formators on how those topics are crucial to the mission so to our formation. Results obtained from the houses show a lack of information in training activities about Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation matters, whose knowledge is limited and mainly academic, not enough embodied in practical situations at present.

Three young in formation of whom a scholastic and two brothers, and a formator of São Paulo Scholasticate have joined the latest World Social Forum edition held in Salvador de Bahia in 2018 to represent the Comboni formation. Their attendance and commitment to the event have been fundamental to all of us, as they represented a moment of ongoing formation. They favoured our awareness on the importance of a severe social analysis on current reality; a reality that is more and more complicated and cruel to the most of mankind. Living in the current world and committing ourselves for a transformation demand collaboration and prophetic evidence in defence of human life and of the Earth. Moreover, the gathering of both World Social Forum and Comboni Social Forum enabled us to share and to encounter conferees, sisters and other people, listening to their pastoral experience tied to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation ministry. We can summarise our experience and the following reflection in three “fruits” for our formation.

The first result is the commitment to include global issues and the contemporary debates related to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in the Comboni formative curriculum. The General Assembly of the Comboni Formation (held in Maia, 2017) has already decided to engage in this sense by approving a particular motion: **“The Secretary General of Formation, in dialogue with the Secretary General for the Mission and with the agents of formation, will study on methods through which introduce in the formation of our candidates courses on Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation and Inter-religious Dialogue”**. It is certain that those issues enhance our formative journey and they contextualise it in today’s reality. Analysis on contemporary society shed light on our own missionary consecration and religious commitment, as well as it enlightens the kind of mission we are willing to realise as Comboni Missionaries, staying faithful to the inspiration by Comboni who sought missionaries who were **“saint and able”**. **“Saint”** in their total abandonment to God and to the mission, and **“able”** in their commitment, devotion and responsibility towards their tasks. All this is aimed at growing our creativity and solidarity towards conditions that require new human relationships, a clear affirmation of human rights and of the Earth and a more explicit link between evangelisation and social transformation.

Although we accept that the primary goal of the formative journey is philosophical, theological and spiritual competence, we are also well aware that a formation disconnected from reality and from unjust and violent circumstances of which vulnerable individuals are victims, will generate unconcerned and alienated missionaries. On the contrary, we aim at a kind of formation which is able to form social consciousness; this represents the starting point to be in solidarity with people in their fundamental need of dignity and respect for life. That's how we could be **“shepherds with the smell of the sheep”** according to Pope Francis' words, and not just able to work with people but to live with and to think like them.

The second result taken from the experience of the World Social Forum and of the Comboni Social Forum is the assumption of working together with other actors committed in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, too. The World Social Forum is a worldwide event embodying the universe of associations, organisations and movements committed to social transformation. It is the living proof that we could no longer work within an isolated world, neither as Comboni Family nor as Church or individuals. Therefore, our formative journey must ensure the acquisition of knowledge and skills to keep on working together as a whole, whether among the members of the Comboni Family or even further with any other presence although they are non ecclesial members. This a further distinguishing mark of the Charismatic identity of the Comboni Missionary Institute, as the Rule of Life clearly states: **“Following the example of the Founder, the Institute cooperates with other evangelising agents and organisations to ensure a more effective missionary service and to avoid duplication of efforts and personnel”** (RL 19). The common interest in cooperation is neither on identity (whether they are the same or different as we are) nor on religious belief but it is found in the common goal of acting to advocate for life and to make the world a better place.

Finally, the third result who has emerged is the importance of staying **“connected”** and of networking. Also noted for this point, we have confirmation on a point made at Maia Assembly about the formation on proper and responsible use of the digital world: **“Social networks are not just tools or instruments; they represent the reality which we**

live in and that we cannot exclude. As missionaries, we are required to live among people in this new reality, and above all we have to get in touch with the new generations, the so called digital natives or *millenials*". Though we recognise the dangers represented by the network, we face this challenge positively as we are conscious and supported by the experience of both the World Social Forum and the Comboni Social Forum about the powerful impact that networking could generate towards Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment. The missionary formation cannot banish this reality. We are willing to learn how to use social networks and new media in a compelling and sound way in order to take advantage of their potential to our missionary institute of lobbying and advocacy.

In conclusion, besides being meaningful and reformative, our commitment to the World Social Forum and to the Comboni Social Forum as representative on behalf of the Comboni Family formation houses, has opened up new projections on formation and on its goal and methods. It will be our turn to take a serious journey and to put into practice these results **"so that they may have life and have it in abundance"**.

Father José Luis Rodriguez

São Paulo Scholasticate Formator

Br. Daniel Vasquez

Brother in experience in Peru

Sc. Daniel Wathome

Scholastic at São Paulo Scholasticate

Br. Marco Antônio Faria

Brother at the Formation Centre of the Bogota's Brothers

Br. Alberto Degan

Brother Formator of the Bogota's Centre

Father Stefano Giudici

Nairobi Scholasticate Formator

Letter from the formators and the scholastic to JPIC in the scholasticate

**To the attention of Fr. John Baptist Opargiw
Secretary General of Formation**

Dear Fr. John Baptist,

A big hug. May the Resurrection of Jesus Christ be our hope, giving meaning to our formative and missionary journey!

We are formators and scholastics/Brothers in formation who participated in the last edition of the Comboni Forum in Salvador de Bahía, or in other editions of the same activity. We have written to share with you the joy and gratitude for having had this opportunity, which enriched our journey of formation and missionary identity.

These kinds of events help us to grow in awareness and commitment to the poorest and most abandoned, following the example of our Founder St. Daniel Comboni. As formators and students, our presence and participation in this Forum was very important as an occasion of ongoing formation to analyse the social situation of the world today and the calls for a prophetic witness in the defense of the life of every human being and in the protection and care of the earth. We feel the need to share the pastoral experiences that enrich our formative journey, articulating in the formation process current themes, debates and pastoral and solidarity actions that nourish our consecration to God and the mission: Comboni wanted missionaries “**holy and capable**” in the world of today.

Before the Comboni Forum, many formation houses received some questions to reflect and to verify their missionary commitment in a formative way and to arouse interest in the field of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation as an essential part of our mission. The answers demonstrated that our knowledge of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation tends to be predominantly academic and little involved in the

challenges of the realities where we live or in the practice of the Provinces where we study. They also noted, however, a strong interest of the formandi with respect to these themes and the initiatives of the Congregation in this regard.

One of the final orientations of the Comboni Forum of Salvador was: **“To reaffirm the work of raising awareness about the themes of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in formation”**. In practice, the coordination of the Comboni Forum wants to make available to the General Secretariat of Formation an itinerant team at the service of the formation houses (from postulants to, especially, Scholasticates and International Brothers Centres). Comboni Missionaries with good experience in various fields of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation will offer some of their time to share their experiences and the principles of mission in the light of the Social Doctrine of the Church and of the Comboni charism with the formandi of our missionary family.

So, dear Father, we would like the Secretary General of Formation to propose to the formation houses a programme on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation that counts on this contribution, inviting the confreres to carry out studies, debates and seminars on reality and mission.

We are at your disposal to clarify the proposal better, organise it or adjust it to the needs of formation and the indications of this Secretariat.

May Saint Daniel Comboni and our martyrs help us through their intercession to live our missionary consecration committed to formation.

Sincerely,

April 30, 2018

**Formators and Scholastics/Brothers in formation
Scholasticates of São Paulo and Nairobi; IBC - Bogotá**

A latin american missionary reflection

Medellín Conference and the Promotion of Justice and Peace and Civil Society

Introduction

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Medellín Conference, a document that gave new directives to the mission of the Church and enormous contributions to social change in Latin America. This article seeks to make memory of the role played by the Church in the promotion of Justice and Peace and the formation of Popular Movements and Civil Society in the Latin American context of poverty, injustice, violence and oppression. It also tries to explain how the World Social Forum (WSF) was born in Latin America and why progressive sectors of the Catholic Church show affinity and act in line with the principles and methods of the WSF.

1. Medellín Conference and the Church in Latin America: a new political posture

“The Second Vatican Council is responding, like the Jerusalem Council, to the needs of its time. Let us study it. There are many persons who criticise Vatican II and Medellín, but have not read them. Study them and you will see what a wealth of spirituality, what messages of peace. Let’s study them”. (Homily of Mgr. Óscar Romero, 15th May 1977)

1.1 Significance of Vatican II to the Church in Latin America

As a preliminary step to the II General Conference of the Latin American Bishops in Medellín (*Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* - CELAM), we need to take a quick look at the meaning of the histor-

ical, theological and pastoral importance of Vatican II to the Church and society in the world and point out some of its importance to the Medellín Conference and the whole Church in Latin America.

The event of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council took place in a time of change and transformation. Pope John XXIII had in mind a Council to re-think the identity and mission of the Church and her relation with the modern world. The Council came as a truly experience of Pentecost and renewal and some important documents, such as *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, became particularly relevant in the way the relation between Church and society was conceived.

The *Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium* re-thought the identity of the Church, acknowledged and valued the role and dignity of the Laity conferring them a new status within the Church in virtue of the same Sacrament of Baptism. This encouraged the participation of lay persons in the mission of the Church, stressing their protagonism and presence as **'yeast in the world'**. In turn, *Gaudium et Spes*, introduced new anthropological, theological, ethical and social paradigms that favoured a dialogue of the Church with the modern world and the articulation between faith and social commitment.

Therefore, Vatican II established a new relation of the Church with the problems of our time, stressed the social apostolate of the lay faithful and the **"signs of the times"** as theological and pastoral places, proclaimed the imminent human dignity and placed the entire creation under the salvific designs of God. The Church was then invited to collaborate with man and society, not because of any political status, but because God sends the Church in history so that it may become a sign of the Kingdom of God.

1.2 Contributions to the ministry of Justice and Peace

The call of Vatican II had a positive welcome in Latin America, where there was great injustice, poverty and oppression. At the Medellín Conference the bishops sought to read the orientations of the Council in a very concrete socio-pastoral situation under the theme ***"The Church in***

the current transformation of Latin America in the light of the Council". It was a '*kayros*' and produced a progressive document with a message for all people who "**hunger and thirst after justice**" (Medellín, section on Human Promotion, Doctrinal Basis, 3).

Medellín Conference put the Church in an exodus experience, to move from a situation of social, political and economic oppression towards an integral liberation aiming at transforming the continent in a more just reality that would be more in conformity with God's plan for all. The Latin American bishops were conscious that the Church could not remain indifferent in the face of the tremendous social injustices existent in Latin America which kept most people in dismal poverty and oppression. People asked their pastors for liberation that reaches them from nowhere else (Medellín, section on Poverty: Poverty of the Church, 14, 1-2).

A significant contribution of Medellín Conference was to make explicit one of the intuitions of Vatican II: **'the option for the poor'**. This option led to a pastoral action that gave **"voice to the voiceless"**, to those who in the Bible are called **"God's favourites"**: the poor, the marginalised and oppressed, whose life was reduced by the oppressive system. The Church began **"to awaken in individuals and communities a living awareness of justice"**, **"to defend the rights of the poor and oppressed according to the Gospel commandment"** and **"to eliminate anything which might destroy social peace: injustice, inertia, venality, insensibility"** (Medellín, section on Peace: Pastoral Conclusions, 21-22).

Medellín Conference also applied the **'See-Judge-Act method'**, which took as departure point of reflection the situation of misery and oppression of millions of people in the continent. It is the same method used by Liberation Theology, which looks at reality and tries to understand the unjust and oppressive situation in the light of social sciences. Then, it seeks an interpretation in the light of the Word of God in order to find out how to act to transform such reality. Evangelisation encompassed this integral action: the salvation and liberation of those people oppressed by both spiritual and structural sins.

Another important contribution of Medellín Conference was the promotion of the ‘**Small Christian Communities**’, which were seen as **“the initial cell of the ecclesial structure, focus of evangelisation and primordial factor of human promotion and development”** (Medellín, section on ‘*Pastoral de Conjunto*’: Pastoral Orientations, 15, 10). The members of these communities, largely lay people, are called to exercise the same **“priestly, prophetic and kingly”** role entrusted to them by God through Baptism and make of their community **“a sign of the presence of God in the world”** (*Ad Gentes*, 15).

Finally, Medellín Conference encouraged the formation of ‘Commissions of Justice and Peace’ that are **“capable of establishing an effective dialogue with persons and institutions more directly responsible for the decisions which favour the common good and detect everything that can wound justice and endanger the internal and external peace of the national and international communities”** (Medellín, section on Justice: III Projections for Social Pastoral Planning, 21). These contributions became very important for the Social Doctrine of the Church and for Justice and Peace in the continent.

2. The Church in Latin America and the formation of the World Social Forum

“The peoples of Latin America and in the Caribbean islands live today a reality that is marked by big changes that deeply affect their lives. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we feel challenged to discern the “signs of the times” with the light of the Holy Spirit so as to put ourselves at the service of the Kingdom that has been announced by Jesus, who has come so that all may have life to the full”. (Document of Aparecida, 33)

2.1 World Social Forum: origins and its importance to Justice and Peace

The World Social Forum (WSF) is the largest gathering of popular movements and civil society. It has been defined as **‘an opened**

space' that is plural, diverse, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-partisan, whose aim is to promote decentralised debates, reflections, exchange of experiences and alliances between movements and organisations that are engaged in concrete actions to build a more democratic and fair world. Basically it seeks to build alternatives to the neo-liberalism system, to promote solidarity among peoples and find solutions to the problems of our time. The platform of the WSF also includes migrants, peacebuilding, human rights, socio-environmental and other issues.

At the roots of the WSF are found the inputs and resolutions of many international conferences organised by the United Nations, intercontinental meetings for humanity and against the neo-liberalism system, demonstrations against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Bank, the Summit of the Americas, the G8 (the Group of Eight refers to the group of eight highly industrialised nations), and the Great Jubilee in 2000. However, it was leading members of the global movement for social and economic justice that organised the WSF in response to the annual World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

Among these individuals there are some French intellectuals, militants of left wing Brazilian political parties, NGOs, social movements and anti-globalisation elite. In January 2001 these civil society actors mobilised for a big meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in opposition to the neo-liberalism system represented by the World Economic Forum, which occurred at the same time in Davos. That would become the first edition of the WSF. The organizers of the WSF make a point of convening the meeting in the global South, underscoring their view that this region should take leadership in the movement for progressive global social and economic policy.

The motto of the first WSF, in 2001, was: **“Another world is possible”**. Since then other thirteen forums have been organised around the world. The latest WSF was held in Salvador, Brazil, in March 2018, with the motto: **“to resist is to create, to resist is to transform”**. The proposal of this Forum was **“to think of common solutions for humanity, in a solidarity, democratic perspective, respect for diversity, to face the causes of various forms of violence,**

social and regional inequalities” (Open Letter: Call for World Social Forum 2018, São Paulo, 18 August 2017). This shows a great degree of affinity between the proposal of the WSF and that of Justice and Peace.

2.2 The Church and the formation of the World Social Forum

Following the Rio Conference (1955), Medellín Conference (1968), Puebla Conference (1979) and Santo Domingo Conference (1992), the Conference of the Latin American Bishops met for the fifth time in Aparecida, Brazil, in 2007. Aparecida Conference largely acknowledges and encourages ‘*Pastoral Social*’ (social ministry), but the Church in Latin America as a whole had already been promoting and supporting social movements since the time of Medellín.

Nevertheless, it was the progressive Church in Brazil that more decisively embarked on a rich process of social mobilisation in the 1970’s and 1980’s from which emerged the so called *pastorais sociais* (social ministry). From the fertile dialogue between Church and society another important movement was born in the 1990’s: the so called ‘*Semanas Sociais Brasileiras*’ (Brazilian Social Weeks), with a real and effective protagonism of the laity. This movement initiated a debate about the construction of a ‘*Projeto Popular para o Brasil*’ (Popular Project for Brazil) and generated a series of other social popular initiatives.

Similarly, other Church organisms under the Brazilian Bishop’s Conference (CNBB), especially ‘*Caritas*’ and the ‘*Justice and Peace Commission*’, have given good contributions to the process of formation of civil society and social mobilisation. In this process, the laity played a very important role as they exercise their ministry both in the Church and society. All this, especially the experience of the ‘*Brazilian Social Weeks*’, was important, in terms of influence and contributions, for the formation and some characteristics of the WSF.

Francisco Whitaker Ferreira, commonly known by “Chico Whitaker”, is an example of a politically engaged lay person and active partici-

pant of this process. He is an architect by profession but also a politician and social activist who maintains close ties with the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. His action is inspired by the Social Doctrine of the Church and Liberation Theology. Individuals from the Brazilian progressive Church, like Chico Whitaker, have contributed a lot with the character, organisation, methodology, values and contents of the WSF.

In terms of participation, the Church is also actively present at the WSF. It is worth mentioning that a week before the WSF begins, a World Forum of Liberation Theology is organised in the same hosting town as the World Forum. It is ecumenical in character and its participants normally attend the WSF. Moreover, the progressive Church has been particularly active in organising inter-religious events and ceremonies that attracts a significant number of participants to the Forum. Also, a good number of missionaries and Religious congregations have been very active in the WSF with their stands and conferences.

Just to mention some, the Comboni Family has participated and promoted their Comboni forums and stands since the WSF edition of Nairobi, in 2007. Besides, at the 13th edition of the WSF in Salvador, Brazil, in 2018, the Church through Caritas has conducted six conferences on water, socio-environmental conflicts, women, migration, alternative economy and Church and resistance. Also, Bishop Roberto Paz Ferreria, from the Diocese of Campos, has participated in a seminar on Health and Social Rights.

Conclusion

The Latin American continent, and indeed the entire world, has changed a lot over the past fifty years. The current globalised context and economic system have produced new victims: death of human beings and of the planet. In this context, Medellín Conference needs a more creative reception and the missionary activity of the Church and new approach. The ‘option for the poor’ includes also the option for the entire creation.

Pope Francis during his apostolic visit to Colombia spoke about forming missionary disciples “**who know how to see, judge and act**”, as stated in Medellín Conference. Missionary disciples, he added, “**that know how to see, without hereditary short-sightedness; looking at reality with the eyes and heart of Jesus, and only then judging. Disciples who risk, act, and commit themselves**” (Pope Francis in Medellín, 9 September 2017).

Therefore, Medellín Conference remains significant to Justice and Peace, Popular Movements and Civil Society and inspires a mission that is at the service not only of humanity but also of the entire creation. This mission finds its basis in the historical experience of Jesus of Nazareth who took upon himself a liberating ministry: “*to announce the good news to the poor, to set the prisoners free, to give back the sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed and to proclaim the year of grace of the Lord*” (Lk 4:18-19).

Father Raimundo Nonato Rocha dos Santos

Comboni Missionary in Brazil

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Beyond World Social Forum and Comboni Forum: pathways of liberation and dignity

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has
anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release
to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set free the oppressed”*

(Lk 4:18)

Among the issues introduced by the Comboni network over the several editions of the World Social Forum, trafficking in persons filled a growing space especially through the commitment of a good number of Comboni Missionary Sisters.

Prophetic voices, gathering and abolitionist movements, for human rights as well, rose their voice and commit themselves to abolish slavery, that is one of the most severe human rights violations. That wasn't enough and it is critical to ask ourselves the reasons why both victims of trafficking and of any kind of exploitation keep on rising violently. Such a issue wounds us deeply and destroys humanity and relationships.

“I can't take it anymore. They don't give me food, just a very few cups of tea. I keep on working without rest, available 24/7. I haven't slept a full two hours since months, my master doesn't pay me and took my passport away”.

(taken from a message sent by V., victim of trafficking in domestic servitude)

This woman's cry gives voice to tens of millions people¹² too frequently ignored, silenced and isolated in their own suffering. Those stories open a thin crack in indifference and push community to dare bravely and to be creative while acting in solidarity towards a urgent liberation.

12 United Nations statistics are plural: from 21 millions (ILO, 2012) to 45 millions (ILO, GFN, IOM, 2017)

Human trafficking is a current alternative to ancient phenomena such as exploitation and slavery. Such a reality has historically marked the commitment of the Church and of Comboni institutes since the very day of their birth. Fortunata (Bakhita) Quascè, who was the first African Comboni Missionary Sister, is a magnificent example on how the Charism of Comboni actualised effective pathways of liberation and dignity for those who were released from slavery starting from young African women.

Fortunata (Bakhita) was born on the Nuba Mountains and arrived in Verona, Italy, in 1853 with a group of children released from slavery. She was about 8 and she couldn't remember anything about her life before she was kidnapped and enslaved, not even her name. She was educated at Mazza Institute, in Verona and then she was a domestic servant by profession. There she met Comboni and his plan "Save Africa by Africa"; she was fascinated by the project so far as to join in the institute. In 1867 she went back to Sudan and worked there as a teacher; she was responsible for the education of female children and girls who had been set free from slavery. After ten years of commitment as a lay person, she asked to join the emerging institute of the Pious Mothers of the Nigritia, i.e. the Comboni Missionary Sisters. Soon after her very first vows she experienced the tragedy of slavery again as she was kept in captivity by the Mahdist movement.¹³

Although the slavery experienced by Bakhita (sadly familiar to Comboni as well) had been officially abolished, we can actually state that there have never been so many slaves in the world as now. In the era of globalisation, trafficking in human beings represents one of the main markets for illegal trades which provides about 150 million dollars per year. Two-thirds of those money are from sexual exploitation.¹⁴

At the roots of human trafficking in the age of globalisation are found the inequalities that characterise neoliberalism development model, by stressing and fostering the imbalance of power, by isolating people in conditions of great vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking:

13 In order to know the life of Fortunata Quascè, it is worth to read: Maria Vidale in "Save Africa by Africa: Fortunata Quascè". Mothers of the Nigritia Archive. Year VI, number 9, March, 2005

14 International Labor Organization (ILO) Report, 2014

poor, women, male or female children, ethnic minorities, migrants and those who live in great political instability and in conflict areas. World-wide financial globalisation process reshaped geo-political borders and equilibrium and, besides, it has encouraged the increase of migration flows. Those flows are caused by armed conflicts or delocalising policies following natural disasters or provoked by man and they have raised vulnerabilities and increased exploitation¹⁵; thus, migratory flows are both voluntary and forced.

Human trafficking denounces a profound crisis of values highlighting the difficulty to recognise the one's neighbor as a sister or a brother¹⁶, different from we are but equal in dignity, rights and duties. Trafficking in persons is like the tip of an iceberg: it requires to look beyond what it seems to gain success and to protect the eyes from the blinding lights of advertising inviting to consume no matter what in order to be, to produce and to keep on increasing the consumption. Human trafficking forces us to be aware of the serious consequences sadly generated by this prevailing model where, actually, it is right our own humanity to be consumed and thrown away once it was used or it becomes useless, like a merchandise. This affects everyone, not just the victims of trafficking. Human trafficking is a highly complex and multidimensional phenomenon in which people are often tricked or obliged to go to somewhere else and exploited; their freedom is limited and they are constrained to slavery or similar servitude conditions¹⁷. Human trafficking concerns countries all over the world whether of origin, transit or final destination about people trafficked. Nearly 42% of people are trafficked and exploited within the boundaries of their own country while the residual 58% is smuggled across national borders¹⁸. In the latter case, the victims of trafficking blend with flows of migrants.

15 VOLPICELLI, Stefano; Talitha Kum Training Manual http://www.talithakum.info/files/news/2016/Talitha_Kum_Training_Manual.pdf

16 Pope Francis on the World Day of Peace, January, the 1st of 2015

17 In the first instance, people are exploited through manipulation and coercion, rather than through physical violence; in this case, the individual is relatively free to move but his ability to decide is reduced. In the second instance, the individual is controlled both physically and psychologically.

18 UNODC Report, 2016

Although statistics recorded a rising percentage of men and male children, women and female children still represent the 71% of those victims.¹⁹

Methods of exploitation are plural and they are perpetrated through sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, begging, forced marriages, illegal adoption, organ harvesting and criminal activities or exploitation in manufacturing sectors such as farming, building, fishing and mining industry.

Even though available data on trafficking are rather uncertain, we can declare that tens of millions people are vulnerable to the worst forms of exploitation to provide services as well as to produce large consumption goods. Demand for services, low costs products and sexual services cause this scourge under market economy conditions. A widespread commitment in order to reduce the demand is therefore fundamental.

The phenomenon of human trafficking as we know it now was recognised starting from the 1990's of the last century. It appeared simultaneously in several countries in the world, nevertheless the attention was mainly given to Western countries and to Europe where thousands of girls from Eastern Europe, Asia, South Africa and Africa in general were forced to prostitution. My encounter with the painful reality of trafficking dates back to that period.

Lina was a young Albanian woman who was used for prostitution. She lived on the streets next to Rome Termini Train Station. One night she came for help to Caritas Hostel where I served. She was HIV-positive and she traded her body for a few thousand Italian liras.²⁰ She could no longer bear so much violence. We found a place for her in a safe house and we arranged a meeting. She didn't show up on the date set. Two weeks later she came back looking for me as she wanted to explain the reason why she didn't show her face the time before. Lina had to face a great dilemma. If she ever had abandoned prostitution,

19 In the latest UNODC report of 2016, women represent the 51% while female children represent the 20% of the sum of trafficking in persons

20 She earned the equivalent of 1 or 2 euros per customer

the traders would have killed her son, who was 3 at that time. She had to make a choice between her life and the life of his son so she chose her son.

In 2007, when I committed myself to the Brazilian Network of Religious Life against human trafficking “**Um Grito pela Vida**” by Talitha Kum during in my experience as a missionary in Brazil, I realised how deeply Lina touched and changed my life.

Unfortunately, if the networks responsible for the crimes linked to human trafficking are well organised and interconnected, the organisations that work in order to contrast them often act through a piecemeal approach. At the United Nations Human Rights Council, Jana, who has survived to sexual exploitation trafficking, declared: **“We need to work together, from the basis up to the top, starting from governments and institutions committed in social, juridical and medical sphere and reaching schools, local communities and individuals. Everyone must be engaged. Traders are extremely well-connected and we have to be well-connected, too”**.²¹

In the face of complex situations, we can just join together and collaborate by building networks of hope and trust. This was part of the Comboni commitment as he invited us to join forces and reach out to each other²². Working together as a network against human trafficking is not one of the many possibilities; it is the only effective strategy that we owe in order to be efficient and to resist to violence and to the rampant attitude towards exploitation.

In terms of commitment, many Comboni Missionary Sisters throughout the history of the congregation committed themselves actively against slavery and trafficking going beyond personal projects or agendas. Over recent years, they are actively participating in Talitha Kum that is the worldwide network of Consecrated Life against trafficking in persons.

21 United States of America - Department of State; 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report, page 12

22 Scritti 2182

The organisation is officially born in 2009 following the decision adopted in plenary by the International Union of General Superior who gathered in 2001 in Rome and then it was confirmed in 2004. The goal is to maximise religious life resources with the aim of preventing people trafficking by fostering collaboration at any level.

There are currently 22 networks in 76 countries and 5 continents²³. The organisations creating Thalita Kum's networks are committed at the heart and intercongregational; they also collaborate with several governmental, non-governmental and ecclesiastical organisations and they are in dialogue with other religious belief as well. Among the main activities carried out by the networks we found the prevention to human trafficking through the creation and the disclosure of awareness and information campaigns, projects and promotion of social policies aimed at reducing the causes of human trafficking, hosting programs, protection and socio-economical rehabilitation of human trafficking survivors and promotion of partnership and networking.

In the last few years, this serious matter has attracted international attention increasingly. Specific attention was drawn to the joint declaration of the religious leaders who met in Vatican on 2nd December 2014 and declared **“in the name of all people and of everyone of our own Creed that modern slavery – in the form of human trafficking, forced labour, prostitution or the trafficking of organs – is a crime “against humanity”. The victims of this are from every walk of life, but most are found among the poorest and the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters”**.²⁴

In the effort against human trafficking, Comboni charism can contribute to encourage three vital processes:

From a perspective based on the interests related to the countries of destination of the victims towards a perspective based on those groups who are vulnerable to human trafficking and exploitation; the invita-

23 talithakum.info

24 Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders Against Modern Slavery, Vatican City December 2nd, 2014. Document in <http://www.pass.va/content/scienze sociali/en/events/2014-18/jointdeclaration.html>

tion of Comboni's charism to "Save Africa by Africa" requires attention by fostering the analysis of the phenomenon of trafficking starting from the point of view of people, community and groups in conditions of specific vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation and promoting their centrality.

From individual protagonism to institutional collaboration; the word "inter" has acquired particular force through the systems theory, which has demonstrated how everything is interconnected and interdependent. This word demonstrate how we are a part and how much is important for the parts to be in communication with each other, without a hierarchical order of importance. Comboni already realised how much partnership was crucial. Now more than ever, we are required to live our own mission inter- gentes, to support each other in accordance with diversities to improve our abilities of collaboration by witnessing through our choiches that intercongregationalism, interreligious collaboration, interculturalism and interdisciplinary approach are possible and they represent a priceless wealth.

From the central position of success in profit to the central role of the concern for life in order to promote a society freed from slavery in which individuals are recognised and valued in their own dignity and freedom. This action requires witnesses going against the tides by carrying out daily and boldly acts of charity in the interests of life. Acts of solidarity, hope and sharing. We need people who pay personally the price for starting and ensuring continuity to change processes or personal, social and economical conversion by boosting new lifestyles. To build networks is the patient art of life of those who can reproduce with pursuance and dedication acts to tie threads of dignity and freedom and to overtake individualistic and selfish acts or behaviour excluding our fellow men.

Sr. Gabriella Bottani

Comboni Missionary Sister
Director of Talitha Khum

Like the Sower of Galilee...

A priority for the mission in this tragic moment of history is the contribution “to summon Christians to cooperate, under the help of Christ the author of peace, with all men in securing among themselves a peace based on justice and love and in setting up the instruments of peace”.

(Gaudium et Spes, 77)

Within a (dis)connected world

We live in an era of great contradictions. On the one hand, we thirst spasmodically for news, while on the other hand, we are overburdened with huge amount of information so that we often become numb to any kind of involvement with things we learn. On the one hand, there is a growing diversity of information, while on the other hand, precariousness of available resources frustrate the attempt to spread the echoes of ordinary events throughout the world.

Some important questions are therefore mandatory: how to move within these twists and turns of true or false, common or terrible, significant or frivolous news? How to let *the news* emerge? It is hard to reach such a goal in a greedy world that swallows anyone and anything regardless of what happens. However, a world like this is unable to value *the opportunity* given by the encounter with people next door that could stand for the way forward to achieve a life marked by fraternity, solidarity, and friendship enhancing otherness.

This is a time when we need to convey an ethical sense to what we communicate, and not just to classify the information we provide. This is really a great challenge and also a “**particular hour**” we cannot avoid facing. Daniel Comboni, Father and Founder, points the right course by his creative intent involving individuals and groups in the cause. He was a frontiersman in crossroads of history and faith, of announcement

and commitment. Since we are heirs of him, we have to let ourselves be inspired by his broad-minded approach in order to understand not only the urgency, rather the importance of using media bravely as an essential tool at the service of our apostolic ministry, thus of Peace, the new name for Justice.

To communicate: Comboni D.N.A?

Since the time of his first mission, Comboni was a forerunner of the importance and urgency of networking, and also well-aware of their efficiency. He let himself be shaped by this Areopagus that was already pervasive in the social and ecclesial fields of the 19th century. He understood the importance of raising awareness, telling, and using all means at his disposal to broaden the circle of those people who were supposed to be conscious of the mission he had been assigned to and for which he wished to involve the greatest possible number of people. On the 12th of May in 1881 Comboni himself wrote to Canon Cristoforo Milone: *“If I could, and had the time, I would write to you often, and even once a week; (...) this is why I have to write all the time as a correspondent for 15 other German, French, English and American journals which send me fine sums of money. In Italy, I have relations with nearly all the Catholic papers, especially L’Osservatore Romano, l’Unità Cattolica, l’Osservatore Cattolico, etc. (to which I hardly ever write) as well as my own Annali del Buon Pastore in Verona, which is a quarterly. Now I will always write you letters, but when you find any letters from me in the Catholic papers you may have them printed as though they were addressed to you, because that is what I want and you will be doing me a favour. (...) You will have seen the letters in the Museo delle Missioni of Turin and in the Missioni Cattoliche of Milan and Lyons: lay them out and print them as though they were addressed to you and to Libert  Cattolica because that is what I want”* (Writings, 1067).

Nevertheless, Comboni knew exactly that not all of his companions were willing to play their part by means of social interaction in the delicate matter of evangelisation. The temptation to back off and to only have their own interest in mind is always at work, at anytime and anyplace. Anyway, we are experiencing some contradictions in this regard,

too. Although communication is the core of our existences and identities, as Comboni brothers and sisters, to use and to be familiar with media is often unfitting for us. As we think about the potential of our methods and the struggle to retain them, some might say that we know we are guarding a treasure, even though it is sealed in clay pots.

The qualitative leap

The *Annali del Buon Pastore* was the foundation stone that traced the pathway in our attempt to dare through communication. From that moment on, we have come a long way as well as we have encouraged storytelling. At the beginning, the *Annali del Buon Pastore* was a kind of logbook whose aim was to let people know about the context in which Comboni missionaries brothers and sisters worked and for a long time, they have represented a real compendium of history, culture and geography. Then, as time goes by, the general trend shifted toward a light storytelling, and we would even venture to define it as a self-referential storytelling. Soon, we felt the need to make a qualitative leap and so, from redundant stories on our deeds, we moved to a prompt, deep and fearless narrative. We moved from spiral stories to real geo-political analysis. Even though unwittingly, those tales had too often reinvigorated strict systems preventing the new wave generated by the popular movements from being protagonist of that time. Further, we got to denounce the causes that oppress, marginalise, and make impossible to break free from the secular yokes of systemic subjugation and impoverishment.

Along the way, some of our means of communication have become analysis tools and real politics. They are no longer confined to report the injustice suffered from people of the so-called “South” of the world, rather they seek the original causes to those peoples’ sufferings which are often due to the indifference of the North of the world. They are no longer bulletin of glorious achievements, rather instruments of courageous denunciation. For instance, a compulsory journey to make within our communicative universe is certainly the one about the role of women and their redemption from centuries of structural invisibility together with the rise to power in the social, political, theological and biblical stage.

Today, the most of our media finally focuses as a central issue the search for justice, peace, and integrity of creation. Our media are becoming ever more foundations and space where to give voice to anxiety, hope, dreams and history of nations, peoples and continents in some of which we are present and we operate as missionary community at the service of the Good News. One example: it is enough to surf on the Internet, to search for the archives of any publication of us and to click on the words World Social Forum. Everything is broadly reported. By the grace of God and the prophetic feeling inherent in our great vocation, we have grasped that those international conventions – who were the result of long years of personal and group reflection, including social commitment from those who had conceived and summoned them – encompassed a piece of utopia in need of fertile ground to grow.

Nonetheless, not all of us brothers or sisters realised the dimension of our participation in those movements that are true workshops of empowerment - based paths, and besides creators of a new possible world among all people of good will. And it is right through our means of communication that we have sought to raise awareness, to disseminate, to tell the story of the huge movement of peoples wishing for peace, believing in the beauty of differences, dreaming solidarity as if it was their daily bread to share with anyone who knows that he or she is a servant to the coming of the Kingdom of God in our midst. And it is just because when a dream is dreamt together that our membership to the World Social Forums has translated into the meaningful experience of the World Comboni Forums which aims at preparing and siding with us while implementing the requests expressed by anyone of the single forums by means of concrete decisions of justice and peace.

Password: to invest

We will not comment on the substance of the closedown of MISNA Agency (Missionary Service News Agency). However, this decision seems to us a permanent and painful scar along the road toward social communication in a missionary approach. Misna's purpose was to unite the varied missionary world (and that is saying a lot), to protect the identity of the single **“missionaries journalists”** both men and women and to represent

an authoritative and credible source of information to which many other lay newspaper drew on therefore allowing that the information on the countries of the South of the World could have exposure as agents of their own development and not just subject of our kindness. Definitely, this is not the place to analyse the reason why Misna's prophetic voice has been silenced. After all, we are witnessing a real race to the bottom just about anywhere. The general trend is to cut corners and in some cases to closing down, rather than to dare new strategies and to welcome the "**newness of the Charism**" even in this field. Hence, the importance of believing, of investing, of reinforcing but mainly not to leave only to insiders the burden of this challenge. Any Comboni missionary brothers or sisters should feel responsible for collaborating toward a fair and truthful information. All of us should manage to tell the pieces of the Good News that daily and willfully reveals itself amongst us.

We would like to reiterate how much is important to invest into the world of communication. To invest means to dare, to believe, to support, to encourage so that the voice of hope will not be silenced. Any magazine, any media that is switched off represents a missed opportunity for peace, justice and protection of our common home. The strength of globalisation is information and it is often use to manipulate consciousness and to convey distorted news mostly with regard to migration flows. It's up to us the challenge to give courageous answers. Who better than us?

We owe an extraordinary asset and we must use it more and better. No one can back down or withdraw. We have no excuse since communication is part of our missionary DNA as we were born from the heart of a passionate and amazing communicator. To our missionary promotion we suggest the image of the Sower of Galilee as a biblical image. To ensure a good crop, he sows broadly the seed, and he does not care about how, when and where...

Which side are we on?

Who is reading must know which side we are on. Who is reading must know that we are men and women who decided to be ***on the other side***. Whenever. He or she must be conscious that we cannot remain silent in

front of injustice, and he or she must be well-aware that we are fighting for life to the full, for everyone, everywhere and forever. Never before it maybe is urgent to have media at our disposal in order to stem the tide of new nationalisms and populisms that propose shameful and dishonorable lifestyles, heedless of the past and oblivious to time and path human race has walked in the last few decades, bent on forgetting history and to consign it to oblivion, they do not allow future to be built with by the best premises of present. We face difficult times. Old and new forms of slavery make their way like nothing happened. We swallow injustice and appalling tragedy amidst total indifference.

We must be ready not to drop our guard, to denounce, to make appeal, to be sounding boards for dreams and projects of peoples who are receiving us. We should do more, influence more, and to stimulate greater participation. In an epoch of massive and brazen communication, we must keep our guard up in defense of the common good. Our Founder's *thousands life* are now in our hands and on digital and paper pages, in real time of our publications. Have a good journey and much hope to all of you.

Sr. Elisa Kidané

Responsible for the General House
of the Comboni Sisters in Rome

Sr. Maria Teresa Ratti

Comboni Missionary Sister in Verona

Comboni Mission through social ministry

Comboni's Social Apostolate and Ministry

Comboni lived and ministered during 1800, the century of the rise and development of Social apostolate and of the Social doctrine, first social encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum* (1891 Leo XIII). Founders such as Don Bosco, Mazza, Rosmini, Comboni, had always two objectives: one religious and the other social. Mazza besides having founded two institutes for male and female abandoned children, had been in the Municipal Council of Verona for 15 years in charge of agriculture, with particular attention to silk production. Comboni transferred and contextualised the religious and the social objectives to Africa as essential components of the missionary activity, touching particularly brothers, sisters and laity. Therefore the Institute of Social Ministry in Mission (ISMM) founded in Nairobi by the Comboni Missionaries is an outstanding actualisation of the social dimension of the charism of Comboni which had many concrete manifestations over the 150 years of the Comboni Family's missionary activity.

Foundation of the Institute 1994: African Synod and social roles of the churches worldwide

The occasion for the foundation of the ISMM was the first African Synod held in Rome in April/May 1994. In *Ecclesia in Africa* (John Paul II, 1995) the emphasis on Social Transformation is immense, particularly in chapter 6. Over the ten years before 1994 and the ten years after, the social potential of Christian faith became extraordinary visible worldwide. Examples: contribution of John Paul II to the downfall of the Communist Regime in Eastern Europe; theology and praxis of liberation in Latin America; downfall of Marcos in the Philippines; in Africa, in the transition from dictatorship to democracy, several presidents, national Episcopal conferences were chosen as presidents of the national parliamentary assemblies.

Objectives of ISMM

- To help the local churches to accomplish their social mission at human and environmental level by preparing social ministers for the African context. Let us keep into account that all dioceses, parishes as well, have set up offices for human development, social justice, gender and environment, emergency situation, immigration and emigrations. Ad hoc preparation was need; the ISMM caters for it.
- To promote and accompany social and environmental conversion of Christian Communities (Dioceses, Parishes, Small Christian Communities, Movements, Associations, Confraternities, Non Governmental Organisations) besides the personal one traditionally cared for by missionary apostolate all throughout.
- To identify social sins and sinful social structures to make social conversion possible (often social sins and sinful structures are hidden or camouflaged with mafia style approach; the apocalyptic literature of the Bible provides a resounding example).
- To help all missionary and religious congregations to tap, unfold and actualise the social dimension of respective charisms (see the document of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, (1978): *Religious and Human Promotion*).
- To detect and disseminate the tremendous social potential of the liturgy and of the Bible in strict connection with the Social Teaching of the Church.
- To enrich all the professions and trades with ministerial mysticism and spirituality to boost the service to the people and interpersonal relationship at all levels against the danger of bureaucratic and impersonal approach.
- To disseminate and contextualise the methodology of social transformation: *the pastoral cycle*, started 50 years ago as *see, judge and act*, and now it is broadly elaborated and enriched.

Academic Programs

The medium used to prepare the agents for social transformation are the different academic programs, designed to provide specific competences for social transformation according to the Social Teaching of the Church, Human Rights, and other basic documents for human and cosmic welfare issued by the United Nations.

The emphases is on blending *theories and practices*. ISMM offers the following programs: (a) Diploma in Civic Education and Development Education; (b) Diploma in Social Ministry; (c) Diploma in Science of Human Development; (d) BA in Sustainable Human Development; (e) MA in Social Transformation (*with specialisations in sustainable development, peace and sustainable security, organisation management, governance and pastoral ministry*); (f) MBA in Global Business and Sustainability-Social Entrepreneurship; (g) PhD in Social Transformation (*with specialisation in sustainable development, social entrepreneurship, peace and sustainable security, organisation management, governance and pastoral ministry*).

Key competencies: management, peacebuilding, participatory community development, sustainable project development, professional civic educators, social entrepreneurship, advocacy for social transformation, participatory governance, policy development, action research for social transformation, collaboration and partnership between the private and public sector for the promotion of the common good; systemic attention to gender issues and environmental challenges cut across all programs.

Concrete initiatives

Besides the above academic programs, all of them approved by the Commission for University Education of the Kenyan Government, hence with civil recognition and approval, there the ISMM assure academic and practical accompaniment of several initiatives; let us mention but a few:

1. Social entrepreneurship

In 2010, the institute introduced a program of social entrepreneurship in collaboration with the Catholic University of Milan. Social entrepreneurship has become an important tool for the development of Africa. The Institute is committed to the training of a new generation of social

entrepreneurs who are using building a social enterprise that creates social transformational impact. The institute developed partnership with *Wadhawani Foundation* to provide practical skills in social entrepreneurship at a diploma level.

2. Attention to slums

Entrepreneurship well as civic education, active citizenship, development skill through the *Huruma Program* targets the people in the slums such as Korokocho, Mathare, Kayole, Huruma, and Babadogo. Similar initiatives is carried out in a parish in the outskirts of Nairobi with the plan to scale it to other parishes. Other initiatives are: Usafi Jukumu letu (*Cleanliness is our responsibility*); Kura yangu Maisha yangu (*My vote my right*), Tulinde afya yetu (*let us protect our health*).

3. Administration Police

In 2002, the institute started collaborating with the Administration Police to offer training at different levels (undergraduate and postgraduates). The program gained great interest amongst the police officers. They highly appreciate how the program helps them to see their work as a police force in a new perspective of ministry and social transformation. A total of around 100 police have graduated around are still in the program... As part of this collaboration, in the last general election, the institute was requested by the police to carried out a survey on the peace index in order to identify the how peace was maintained in different counties during the election.

4. Diocese of Nyeri

In 2006 ISMM in collaboration with the Major Seminary of Nyeri started a program to build the capacity of the local pastoral agents (priests, brothers, sisters and lay) who are already engaged in the development work. Through the diploma in social ministry, the pastoral agents were able to acquire new skills to engage in sustainable development in their dioceses or other development projects.

5. County government

ISMM started collaborating with a county government in view of helping the 47 Kenyan counties to implement social transformation, by training the Members of the County Assembly (the local parliament) and the county government (governor plus minister).

6. *Spiritual and Academic Support for Catholic Members of Parliament*

In 2011 the institute initiated a collaboration with the Catholic members of parliament in order to address their spiritual, administrative and leadership needs. The initiative has grown into a regular program, the regular weekly, monthly and annual initiatives. A good network and collaboration is developing now at continental and global level under the patronage the cardinal of Vienna Christoph Schoenborn who founded the association: *International Catholic Legislators Network (ICLN)*.

Growing impact of the social ministry

The impact of ISMM is seen through the work that alumni are doing to influence and change the society. Over the years, more than 1500 students have been trained here, and now they are working in different parts of Africa and other continents. The alumni are working in the field of formal education, and popular education, health, social enterprise, community development, organisation management, peace, and security. While some alumni work in already established institutions, other have created their own initiative for the social transformation.

Inspiring quotations

“I would now like to share my concerns about the social dimension of evangelization, precisely because if this dimension is not properly brought out, there is a constant risk of distorting the authentic and integral meaning of the mission of evangelization”. Evangelii Gaudium (176)

We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship”. Dorothy Day

“When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist”. Helder Camara

Br. Jonas Yawovy Dzinekou

Director of ISMM - Nairobi (Kenya)
Institute of Social Ministry in Mission

Missionary identity in human scenarios where *ad gentes* and *inter gentes* meets

At the end of a morning dedicated to a pilgrimage for peace along the dusty roads that lead from Custom, one of the main markets of Juba, the capital of South Sudan, towards the low rocky mountain that overlooks it, we found ourselves in an Anglican church still in building but already accessible. The ecumenical group of the **Women for Peace**, to which I had gathered for the march organised by them for the first Saturday of November, continued the prayer. A lively song with the rhythm of drums called everyone to dance. A woman with a white and blue uniform belonging to one of the Protestant Churches stretched out her hand to bring me into the dance and modified the song ‘**customizing it**’, so to speak: “**Show this foreigner the Good News about Jesus. We will not go back, we go on**”. Of course, I accepted the request and I joined the fast and joyous rhythm of the song although I am not a good dancer at all, but the words used for the invitation left me in awe. I am used to be called a ‘**foreigner**’ after more than twenty years in Sudan and South Sudan since the physical aspect immediately reveals non-African origins. What really left me displaced was the ‘**missionary**’ role played by that woman, of whom I do not know the name but only that she belonged to a Protestant Church. Not being Catholic, perhaps she did not have a precise idea of the nuns, and even my uniform had not told her much. The unsettling was for me, as a Comboni Missionary Sister, was to receive an invitation to follow Jesus from a person from whom I did not expect it. On the contrary, I think I have by vocation the task of inviting others to follow the Gospel. Was it a reversal of roles? The episode made me think even though it was a small event without probably being noticed by anyone during the long ecumenical prayer. In this case I was considered the recipient of evangelisation by a person who was already following Jesus and inviting me to do the same. After overcoming the feeling of amazement in seeing myself assigned an unusual foreign identity in need of being encouraged to know the Gospel, I tried to understand the perspective of that Protestant woman. Among

the various possible interpretations, the one that satisfied me the most was the broad horizon proposed by ‘**Dialogue and Announcement**’ (1991), one of the guiding documents of the Catholic Church to manage relationships of faith in an increasingly complex global village where individuals and groups belonging to different religious traditions find themselves living side by side and constantly interacting. In the specific episode, the context of welcoming the other, proper to dialogue, was represented by the opening of the members of the Anglican church to receive people from other Christian confessions. The question of proclamation was more subtle: that woman invited me to follow Jesus and to do as her community, which “**did not come back**”, because she considered me far from the Christian faith or because, although recognising me as a member of the Church, she still considered to have something more to communicate? Anyway, there were things – what I could not verify – I think it’s good to sometimes come down from small or large pedestals on which as missionaries sometimes we subconsciously put ourselves. While feeling good in my Catholic identity, it would have been nice to have a conversation with the Protestant woman, whose name I unfortunately do not know, about the ‘good news of Jesus’ that she invited me to know and integrate his perspective on my horizon. As missionaries, we know that we are sent to announce in a respectful dialogue and to contribute to the maturation of a reality of local faith. When the Church is mature or strong enough we go elsewhere, on the model of St. Paul. If this is the reality in Juba, the largest city and the capital of South Sudan, can we rejoice and move to areas where evangelisation is still in its infancy? In fact, in South Sudan, as in many other African countries and beyond, the indigenous Churches are multiplying and the sects are also joined by a number of Catholic faithful. The religious panorama is increasingly varied and made of nuances, not of full colours.

Long before in Juba, it was relatively easy to distinguish a Catholic nun and to have an idea of her social position, but today it is no longer the case. In an increasingly marked context of religious pluralism, identification is less immediate, and thus the recognition of roles. It is no longer obvious that in general others look to a missionary as a depositary of an announcement to be shared. The attitude can be very different, as the woman in the dance invitation testifies. At the end of my reflection, I think I basically keep two points. The fact that someone,

whoever he is, wants to communicate the Gospel, is in itself positive. Not being recognised as a **'missionary'** is secondary to this demonstration of maturity in the faith. Secondly, I read this little episode of a somewhat unsettling relationship with a member of another Church as a call to continue reflection on my missionary identity in increasingly interconnected and fluid human scenarios. It is not a matter of defining who has more **'right'** to announce, but to relate in freedom and humility in contexts where **ad gentes and inter gentes** intersect.

Sr. Elena Balatti

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CONCLUSION



Conclusion

To us, the editors of this book, the text we hold in our hands seemed to be an evocative mosaic composed by many unique, precious and significant pieces, all of them stressing different approaches and perspectives. They have been developed from a female, relational, lay, promotional, intercultural, and supportive point of view, as well as from perception based on dialogue. Moreover, they all express a strong ecclesial and social feeling describing a dynamic and interactive context. Away from us the idea that we have just mentioned and celebrated these eleven years of active and fruitful participation in the World Social Forum and in the Comboni Social Forum, these articles mainly promote and boost the intuitive and charismatic spirit of Comboni: to give one's life "***a hundred times***" (Writings 6438) – as he stated – to the regeneration of Africa. Today, looking at the "**signs of the times**" we add further challenges: the regeneration of the common home, the fight against any form of slavery and the promotion of a radical ecological conversion which was well-described by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si'* (nn.9.16.66.221.) published in 2015.

Since the Second Vatican Council, notably by means of the two Constitutions *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium Spes*, the Church has underlined his role of **Salt, Light and Yeast** in the world no more as an enemy, rather as a partner. *Gaudium Spes*, indeed, starts with very precise and authentic words by challenging all Christians to live deeply their calling – especially religious people – and all those who want to give themselves to God, to a wounded humanity and to the Creation of the Mother Earth and Father God: "***The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts***".

In the past, some of our missionaries brothers and sisters, lay and consecrated, let themselves be pushed by charity (2 Cor 2, 14) towards the historical and contextual realisation of God's plan. They did not let themselves be influenced by the expression "***We have always done it this***"

way”, but they strongly believed and tried new approaches to identify and enhance the centrality and the leading role played by the option for the poor. They provided Hope for the future through an integral liberation (ROL 61). They were able to read the signs of the times that had inspired the Church, and the transformations of economical and cultural systems. The same signs oppressed and still continue to exclude billions of men and women from the banquet of **“life in abundance”** (John 10:10).

In the last three decades, the road we have walked and the paradigm shift of the Comboni work highlighted some fundamental standards and methods to continue along this path of conversion and transformation.

- First of all, the need **“to be at the school of poor people”** by inserting ourselves into their reality, reading and analysing it through their hearts and eyes. Scientific, biblical and theological investigation carried out in a systematic and strict way must be compared with their expectations and feelings. In this regard we must be convinced that any solution comes from **“below”** and from an effective involvement of the impoverished by considering them no more onlookers or assisted, rather protagonists and agents of a real transformation. To live among the poor, with the poor and like the poor by means of specific and well-contextualised decisions will never be neither an easy nor a shared path to take, and it will be often obstructed. Nevertheless, the witness by many men and women, consecrated and lay, who often gave their own lives up to their extreme sacrifice stands for a seed of fertility towards the realisation of the Kingdom of God. There have been, and still there are, great numbers of presence by the Comboni Family. Whether they are **“inserted”** or not, they are crucial for the work we are doing all over the world. They still believe that our ministeriality encompasses the maternal and paternal face of God participating in the liberation of mankind from the evil that dehumanises, so that all human beings can live to the full.
- **Collaboration and cooperation** are necessary requirements for the effectiveness of personal conversion and structural transformation. From our commitment we have learnt that acting alone can maybe gain efficiency, but acting all together as a whole and

by means of patience we can go further and the results will remain over time. Daily practice has also taught that creating alliances, favouring contacts, opening spaces and primarily starting from “below” and from poor’s perspective is essential in order to provide ever more complex answers to the neo-liberal model that centralises common and production assets in the hands of a very few people. Today, networking is not enough. It is necessary to introduce measures to create systemic alternatives through ecological lifestyles, intercultural, fruitful and creative relationships, and the use of an inclusive language. We need to overcome the temptation to transform everything into money and to celebrate life and grass-roots achievements. Now more than ever, we are urged to abandon attention-seeking behaviours in order to put ourselves in the shoes of poor people and to side with nations, churches and social movements to walk together along the same road. Poor should no longer be the subject of our attention and charity, rather the real protagonists of their own history and experience of faith.

- **To shake up missionary imagination** and to redefine his role according to ministeriality and to the necessity of supporting personal charisms and differences. Jesus Christ’s regeneration and His new humanism are the reference point for everyone. Methods of approach and of active role into reality toward a radical transformation of an unfair and foreclosing system will necessarily be differentiated. To work with and among the poor, searching for remedies is important in so far as this action will help broadening horizons. We hope this could also favour a spreading and multi-dimensional mission, as well as local, national, and international advocacy ministry in the effort to information and formation on consciousness, in order to create authentic protagonists for the transformation of the historical processes.
- **To be catalyst for innovation and presence creating aggregation and communion.** The missionary is the pure inspiration of the ethic power of God’s plan within reality on Earth. He or she puts this inspiration at the service of the common union of hearts, minds and people’s expectations. It is vital to be present as a response to the transcendental and escatological values by giving

meaning to poor's struggles, to their existence, resistance and in times of darkness, doubtfulness, dismay and failure, proclaiming that **"time is greater than space"** (EG n.222-225). *It is vital to encourage innovation rather than to occupy spaces*; it is essential to wait for flowers and fruits in a confident approach since we know that the Lord always fulfil His promises.

- **To be men and women of frontiers** namely to be present in those places delimiting borders on the one hand and creating a passage, a possibility to communicate on the other hand. To inhabit frontiers: visible and invisible people, or belonging to high socio-political classes as well as in small communities and families, between man and woman, ethnic groups, rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, illiterate and literate, isolated and delved into the media, among religions, lay and religious, local and universal Church, local and missionary priests, thus becoming **"bridges for peace"** to be crossed and to let themselves be crossed by one's neighbour.
- **To aim to global and ecological conversion** that means to purify our vision in order to see, to elaborate on the causes in order to understand, and to hear the cry of the poor in order to act. Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment must be constantly nurtured, revised and updated according to occurrences, epoch-making challenges and cultural contexts. It is a commitment requiring particular attention and conversion to basic and ongoing formation. To convey ideas and information will be just the first step, as we know that the spirit and the insight rise their power as far as missionary brothers and sisters will be able to make choice for life and fields incarnate with people; by encouraging and supporting all those who proceed along unbeaten paths, but who are attempting to **"break down walls"** and to open new ways into the hearts and the minds of people in order to bring community together and to create authentic Christians communities attentive to one's neighbor, near or far.

These are just some of the aspects taught by the decades of years of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. This experience has also

allowed us to enter both the World Social Forum and the Comboni Forum. Still the longing not to stop and to go any further persists, as we are **“humble and brave”** missionaries. We opened the doors and then we timidly went out. Pope Francis’ call invites us to dare even more, and most of all looking at new missionaries’ generations from Africa, by supporting and encouraging them while choosing **“geographical and historical existential peripheries”** about today’s Nigritiae.

We believe that it is necessary, useful but equally imperative to keep on walking having a look on daily circumstances experienced by billions of brothers and sisters.

- **To welcome with dedication the great “impulse and provocation”** given by Pope Francis’ ministry through the *Evangelii Gaudium* along with other writings and his pastoral approach which is so direct, so close and evangelical in the relation with all nations, whether they are believer or not. It is also important that during the formative process time, space and resources to provide new insights on the mission would be given. Along those lines, the values conveyed by the Kingdom, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation should be used across all fields of investigation. The learning process should also be ecumenical and in dialogue with other religions, aiming at building His Kingdom all together. To us, Comboni Family, is really important to revise and to revisit our strength and the utopia of the Comboni charism. To this, we rejoice at the willingness by the houses of formation in organising formative courses on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation inside the formative process as an integral part of their curriculum, thus encompassing the vision of an integrative formation to missionary life and faith. There is the need to generate aid, tools and life experiences grounded on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation values and integrated into situations daily experienced by candidates.
- **In the planning and in the administration of the Comboni Family, General and Provincial Directions** it is required to offer the possibility to join in activities, at national, continental

and global events for many of our brothers and sisters. And most of all, to those who are fostering actions at the service of the poor and of the discarded. A support **“to open oneself up”** to the global or continental civil society we operate and live in avoiding to transform ourselves into “islands” inside our own mission or nations.

- **To organise global and/or continental forums at Comboni Family level** for the programming of common decisions, follow-up, assessment and study on theological-biblical, ministerial and social motivations for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation commitment. To involve even other social areas of life and of the Comboni charism such as education, healthcare, media, young and women formation, politics and economics in order to face historical and religious realities quickly changing all over the world and within single continents.
- **Once we have written this volume, we feel the need to publish a second one** whose goal will be let people know about the richness and validity of the praxis’ and initiatives of the Comboni Family’s concrete actions in the field of justice and peace throughout the continents. Past, present – and we hope future as well – experiences are really significant and they point out the contents, the methods, the means employed, the aids, the results and the failings toward a commitment more and more effective and affective according to the charismatic inspiration of fighting against all forms of modern-day slavery. We also feel this need due to the appreciation and the sense of obligation to those communities of confreres and sisters who gave their own lives to people and nations and who broadened the borders of the mission both on ministeriality and spiritual and human reflection.

We are humbly conscious and willing to embrace Saint Daniel Comboni’s method. He was a man who could dare, wait, foresee, start over and believe fully, and whose aim was to put the poor and the abandoned in a place of honour as they are sons of the only God. He could also become subject of the same regeneration and transformation of the unfair and unequal system he was preaching.

We are confident that the process of change and integration into the Comboni Family has been started since long time already. This is a “**good news**” and a great achievement. Surely, it is not yet fully defined or taken for granted by many who use it as an essential criteria for approaching to mission today. The newness and the unknown, as a rule, make their way with difficulty. However, step by step they move forward towards the Comboni mission in which the values of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) ever more represent the bearing axle, the cross dimension and integrated in any decision, spirituality, reflection, governance and missionary pastoral action.

Father Fernando Zolli
Father Daniele Moschetti

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The Organising Committee

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