

**EXEMPLARY AND INSPIRING
COMPANIONS ON OUR JOURNEY TODAY
*BEYOND THE OBITUARY***

When I was asked to present the figures of our confreres, the process of whose beatification causes is under way, I felt a natural sense of repulsion and sadness. It seemed to me to be a senseless request, seeing that, during the Chapter, there had been no movement for their presentation and that I had not found any explicit reference in the Chapter Acts. Someone pointed out that I was mistaken and that the reference was there. Inserted where they speak of the joy of living the Gospel, a joy of great price in which the call to defend the lives of the sheep from wolves and thieves is taken for granted: “Our martyrs remind us of this” (CA ‘15 n. 4). It is an opportune defence but is, at the same time, harmless as it is rather generic. It appears to me that there is a great difference between those who are subjected to a most demanding judgement by the Church like the Roveggios, Sartoris, Ambrosolis, Giosuè dei Cas and Ezechiele Ramins, since they are recognised also by the local Churches as particularly meaningful lights, and us, the “common ones”. Without detracting anything from those who gave their lives even to the “effusio sanguinis”, these confreres of ours on the path to beatification, ought to become particular points of reference, both for their example and their invocation, for the specificity that belongs to them as witnesses to the vitality of the Comboni charism that unites us. Let us seek “example in their way of life, fellowship in their communion, and aid by their intercession”, as we read in *Lumen Gentium*, n. 51.

Without any ill feelings, I said to myself that, precisely because of the experiential nature of the memorial of the 150 years of the Institute, since it is basically a question of people who lived the joys and sorrows of the mission, the outlook must be different. The very nature of these causes itself requires it. It is not a matter of exhuming the dead or even of limiting ourselves to the mere reconstruction and explanation (I am not excluding the necessary contribution of historical reflection), but of the fact that these confreres oblige us to

go far beyond the memory of their obituaries, the intellectual reflections and the historical reconstructions that, besides, seem to be insufficient if they do not bring us to find in them authentic journey companions to whom we may have recourse with humility and conviction. They look us straight in the eyes, cutting off the escape route of anonymity while the issue is the personal level of missionary response together with the common project of a family, that of the Comboni Missionaries, which has in its DNA the need to take up constantly the Cause of Jesus for all and for today.

Why not take the provocation of their deaths and find new meaning in their “dies natalis” to the extent that they hand on to us a powerful and generating symbol of ever new values of missionary efficaciousness. “Dies natalis” and symbol, two realities we may easily undervalue, either because we place them within a chronological, anonymous and conventional list, or because we divide them, thus reducing the memory to mere ritual and the symbol to the mere external representation of a content that no longer exists and, by doing so, we decree their disappearance for lack of significance and actuality. Confreres, all swallowed up by anonymity, while we seek to exhume them and the mission seeks men along other dramatic roads. And we are not aware that they, if they do have a special place, it is not in order to detach them from the confreres who preceded them or follow them, but quite the opposite: they will help cause to emerge the true missionary values that the Institute has lived and spur us on to re-express them according to the new urgencies of the mission. This will happen if we consider them to be truly among the “living”.

The first and most obvious reality we find is that all these men of ours, Roveggio, Ambrosoli, Sartori, Giosuè and Ramin, died on the mission field and they are able to make our field, too, become a holy place, the place of a calling, the place of collaboration and the place of a missionary response. The second surprise is that, as long as we fail to grasp the symbols they transmit to us, i.e. those not invented by us but lived by them, we will move along arm-in-arm with concepts that are very beautiful but fail to intercept us, to provoke us and to set us in motion. Therefore, this search for symbols, in the

context of their life-end, will never end because, once a spark of the great fire that animated them is discovered, the search for meaning will no longer cease and we will feel that we form part of one great line of confreres, of people never subdued in their thinking and acting, never tired of understanding them more deeply or of becoming aware of their mysterious solidarity. United in choral prayer and a desire for knowledge that involves everyone since each one has a different history, culture, colour, taste and sensibility. Let us therefore attempt to return to their deaths, the hermeneutic key to their lives, to find the open symbol that they hand on to us. Rather than explanations, let us enter the field of indications that move us to act.

Monsignor Antonio Maria Roveggio

Roveggio died at 19.30 on 2 May, 1902, struck down by malaria. The engineer Bakos Lebnan assisted him materially while Ernst Marno, his servant, and Sami, the helmsman of the Redemptor, followed him in another carriage. Worn out, Roveggio had confided to the doctor the account of his journeys and the projects for new missions in the south: an extreme expression of the ideal of the mission that he bore in his heart in his final and extreme solitude and agony. In fact, he was already dead when they reached Berber and he was interred under a palm tree in the desert. Roveggio was a missionary who was used to redeem his solitude with lights that came from God and that constantly opened up new horizons in his life. One illuminating element showing the greatness of the dream and the price to be paid and which ideally united the obscure end to the beginning of his missionary choice, may be seen in the missionary vocational decision of 9 May, 1884, for an Institute in difficulty. He wrote to his parents: "This letter of mine will certainly bring great sorrow to you just as it causes me great pain to write it". However, the broadest horizon had already entered his spirit and, on 1 February, 1884, he was able to write: "Ah! Beloved parents and brothers, if you love me with that true love with which Our Lord wishes us to love one another, my departure must not displease you. On the contrary, it should console you". But then, departure, in terms of broadening horizons, returns!

The youngest professed leads a group of the Sons of the Sacred Heart in the missionary adventure to Cairo. In Cairo, more exactly at Gesira, in the Leo XIII anti-slavery settlement founded by Mons. Sogaro in August 1888, Roveggio introduces a different orientation, transforming the environment with a view to the continuity of the mission: having sought counsel from Sogaro, he had opened a small seminary (under the guidance of Fr. Franz Sinner) to enable any of the younger ones, if they so desired, to dedicate their lives to the spread of the Word of God among their fellow nationals. In the moment of great crisis he remains faithful to the values of religious consecration for the good of the mission and, at the same time, he becomes the proponent of openness of spirit towards the missionaries of Comboni. As Vicar, his horizon is the Centre of Africa towards which all his efforts and plans of re-entry are directed. Immobilised at Assuan, he thinks of the Redeptor. On entering Khartoum, the prow of the boat is always turned towards the south. An invincible hope, a humble act but tenacious and enlightened. Mons. Roveggio felt and believed he was ploughing an ancient furrow and, in this sense, he realised that his work was in continuity with what had been previously initiated and so was eminently ecclesial. The subject of missionary action, *Missio Dei* (1900), and the continuity of the work (1899), blended easily with the brilliant idea of the boat (November 1898, after victory at Kereri on 2 September, 1898). *“I, too, abandon myself body and soul to the Divine and Amiable Providence of my Lord in all that may happen to me as I go among the pagan tribes of my Mission, certain that God, who is good, will always be with me”*. *“That Saint Mons. Comboni, since he too was eager to bring the light of the faith as far as possible, had explored the regions along the White Nile, the Blue Nile and that great tributary the Sobat River ... as far as the most remote populations of his beloved Nigrizia. Only that death overtook him and cut short the grandiose plan”*.

His symbol. The most meaningful symbol that Roveggio leaves us is that of the **prow cleaving the waters** or **an anchor with Redeptor inscribed, and a community**, namely the unquenched hope and a fraternity of men who live and celebrate together, visit, study and

advances ... Roveggio's anchor differs from a material anchor that suggests a halt and it is moved by *implantatio caritatis*, lives from the dynamic of constantly halting and moving on again. Against the drifting of immobilism and subjectivism, the mission is carried out with continual openings, together, since it implies the courage to think and the audacity and the resourcefulness of action. The mission, even today, needs the spirit of Roveggio. That keel that continues to cut through the waters and that community in the shadow of the anchor are still today a continual challenge and a grace made against resistance to change and the fatigue of the projects of a truly super-national and multi-cultural community that listens, understands, feels compassion, forgives, initiates and continues to dare. *Cor unum et anima una!* And my prow... in which direction is it moving? Where are the prow of the Institute and our communities directed? Is there anything in the shadow of my and your anchor? My and our community...?

Father Bernardo Sartori

He was taken away on 3 April, 1983, on Easter Sunday, early in the morning, with his lantern burning. Just like Enock: "*Enock walked with God and then disappeared because God had taken him*" (Gen 5, 24). Fr. Mario Casella gave me the news: "About twenty four hours ago, our most dear Father Sartori was found before the altar of the chapel of Ombaci school, lying down with his arms wide open, the Rosary in his hands and his eyes looking up to heaven! His lantern was burning on the altar. Doubtless, he had gone to pray at four as usual. He felt unwell, perhaps due to a stroke, and knelt before the Blessed Sacrament renewing the priestly offering he first made sixty years previously... Like Mary, he had gone out very early in the morning and encountered his Risen Lord. He then went with Him to celebrate the most beautiful morning of the year and of his life. A morning without end! Blessed are you Bernardo, our holy brother and our father. We congratulate you on this day of your triumph and we imagine that at last you can enjoy the vision that was the desire of your whole life. Now, you see, you contemplate and praise the Father, Jesus Christ and the Mother, in the Holy Spirit, and you meet

the thousands of sons and daughters that your tireless priestly charity placed on the path to heaven in all these years... How we too would also love to be present: wait for us and pray that nothing may distract us or delay our preparation for eternal life” (Fr. Mario Casella).

A life lived with your lamp lit. The founding of Troia, the first Comboni presence in the south of Italy (4 November, 1927). The imperative of your entire life, always and everywhere the mission promotion of the local Church: immediate involvement in the overpowering activity of mission promotion, something never seen before (Conversano and Tricase, 18-22 September, 1928; Castellana, 23-24 September; Alberobello, 28-30 September, People’s University of Foggia, Avellino, Lecce, Napoli, Bari, Salerno, Sant’Agata di Puglia, Canosa, St. Angelo dei Lombardi, Nola, Gargano, etc.). The founding of the mission among the Logbara under the banner of an enculturated Marian spirituality. The aim was to create living communities in the image of Mary, Servant of the Holy Spirit and Mother of the Church, the people of God: Mediatrix and Sultana of Africa at Lodonga (15 February, 1948), Our Lady of Fatima at Koboko (12 April, 1957, Palm Sunday). Maria Regina Mundi at Otumbari (13 November, 1966), Mary Mother of the Church at Arivo (December, 1970). Even during the storm of civil war – the fall of Amin, the destruction and atrocities in West-Nile (1979-1983) – the lamp is not quenched: “Like a tireless bee whose beehive has been destroyed, quietly and with little resources, the missionary starts to rebuild it more beautiful and sweeter than before. It is our work and, God willing, we hope to make Otumbari habitable before the end of the year, both for us and for the Sisters with all the connected activities: the dispensary, catechumenates, schools, etc. And we will again take up the marvellous work of conversions and ministry as in former years. The hard trials, hunger, disease, suffering of all kinds have tempered the faith of the Christians, increasing their fervour, enriching the living with merits and those killed with glory. This is the Church of the Logbara and the Kakwa, planted at the foot of the Cross as in the first centuries, with its saints crowned beneath the storm and her martyrs that purified and glorified her. In April, 1981, Fr. Sartori leaves Otumbari for Italy with two clear objectives in

mind: treatment for his injured eardrum and funds for the translation of the Gospels into Logbara. The first was a failure. Nothing could be done for his hearing as the membrane was worn out. The last gift of the light burning in a man of 84 years was that of the Gospels in the Logbara language. In April, 1981, the indomitable eighty-four-year-old toured the peninsula in a marathon of pastoral commitments. His interior motives and his burning zeal overcome tiredness and swollen feet: “The Africans have the right to our life to the end”, he writes. “I have worked to continue my ministry also after I die, preparing thousands of copies of the Gospels in Logbara”¹. Income from his fundraising exceeded all expectations. He started the work fearing he would not manage to collect the 20 million Lira needed and now he finds he has 80 million. “I will think of resting when in Paradise”, he wrote to the Fathers he had left behind in Otumbari,

His symbol. Practically speaking, God provided the symbol that came from Fr. Sartori: **the burning lantern**. We need to fix our eyes and invest on the strength of that burning flame. It is a stimulating allusion to the essential commitment to animate the Church towards missionary openness; and to the necessary missionary method based on visits, on interiority, on the community beyond external rules, on the meaning of Church beyond its mere structure and to the project (for him it was founded on the Marian mystery). The need for a spirituality that unveils the centrality of the mystery that sustains me and to which I should refer attitudes of life: time for prayer, time for visits and getting to know people, of celebration, fraternal encounter and of authenticity of life. Father Sartori kept his interior lamp lit to overcome the multiplicity of contradictions and, with that light, he illuminated the ecclesial community confessing his limits and, at the same time, while living it like the people of God, recognised the signs of the times coming from the Second Vatican Council. And my lamp? Is it burning? Quenched? Uncertain/ Wavering?

¹ *Positio*, p. 716, note 40.

Father Giuseppe Ambrosoli

He died in Lira at 13.50 on Friday, 27 March, 1987. “To us – said Gen. Tito Okello Lotwa, President for a short time in Uganda (from 29 July, 1985, to 26 January, 1986) – the death of Dr. Ambrosoli is like the collapse of a bridge. It will take many years to replace him”. In those days in March, 1987, no-one even imagined that he was at his life’s end. On 22 March, a Sunday, he celebrated Mass in the chapel of the Comboni College, Lira, but had to take to his bed in the afternoon with a high temperature. The three Comboni Sisters Romilde Spinato, Annamaria Gugolé and Silveria Pezzali intervened with therapy that he himself indicated. He had been alone with no other doctor at his side and perhaps he alone understood the seriousness of his condition. Two days later, seeing that he was not recovering and had repeated bouts of vomiting, they consulted Dr. Corti in Gulu hospital and Dr. Tacconi who had moved to Hoima. It seems that, on Thursday 26, after his first collapse, he appeared to be recovering. At 5am on the morning of Friday, 27 March, Sr. Romilde found him already awake and eager to know what was on his schedule. The plan was to take him to Gulu and then send him to Italy. He implored them: “No! You mustn’t do that. It will be too late as my end is near. You know how I always wanted to stay with my people so why should you send me away?” However, he then thanked them and said: “May God’s will be done”. He cooperated in all that was done to prepare his departure. He was really ready for anything. “Fr. Giuseppe – writes Fr. Marchetti – realised his sight was failing as also the feeling in his legs. He was fully conscious that the supreme moment had come. He repeated emphatically and then followed the prayers as best he could. He then fixed his eyes high up on the wall as if he could see someone. His breathing became slower and, with no contortion or death rattle, he passed away as his heartbeat became gradually slower until it stopped. It was exactly 13.50 on Friday, 27 March, 1987”. Fr. Marchetti gathered his last words: “*Lord, your will be done* – and then in a murmur – *even a hundred times*”. In all his missionary life he did the will of God. In the choice of his vocation at the end of July, 1949, when, as a young

surgeon who had just qualified after a Course in Tropical Medicine at the Tropical Institute (1950-1951) he opted for the mission. He was 28 years old. He continued to do it as he developed the primitive health centre at Kalongo and brought it into full operation: 350 beds and 30 buildings. Under his care, the obstetrics school at Kalongo that Fr. Malandra had dreamed of and Sister Eletta Mantiero had begun on 26 June, 1955, fully matured. His last gesture was to save the obstetrics school so that the girls would not lose the year (Angal, 5 March 1987). It cost him his life but his broken life, as a sign of the will of God, was a message of hope and confidence in the local people.

Fr. Ambrosoli had a pair of magical hands, hands that were multiplied because life is perpetuated through subsidiarity, continuity and the totality of salvation: only in this way are new lives born and souls and bodies are healed. It suffices to look closely at the girls and personnel employed in “*St. Mary’s Midwifery Training Centre*” and run through the list of Sisters and doctors who passed through Kalongo to understand how his mission was global and with the total involvement of the laity, their active collaboration and the perception to form a team.

His symbol. From the missionary history of Fr. Ambrosoli a symbol emerges that is in no way conventional or destined to be insignificant: **two open hands, spread wide from which comes a smiling child who touches our hearts.** Giuseppe was, in fact, a hymn to life. He charmed people with his meekness, patience and good humour. He incarnated the healing hands of Jesus: to him he always attributed his amazing successes His hands speak of concreteness, discretion, respect, friendship, commitment, generating life, didactic availability ...

A reflection on our own hands: open or closed, nervous or respectful, threatening or blessing, distancing or affectionate ...? Each of us may add, modify, accept the perennial and providential comparison between his hands and our hands and involve them in invocation to render them pure, agile, industrious and capable.

Brother Giosuè dei Cas

A man who died at 52, opposing the signs of death with a life project. He offers his life in exchange for that of Bro. Alberto Corneo. It is known with certainty that the death of Bro. Giosuè was not fortuitous or natural but bound up with the voluntary and heroic offering of his life in exchange for that of young Brother Corneo, 28, who was about to succumb to an attack of pernicious malaria. It was towards the end of November, 1932. Unexpectedly, Bro. Giosuè suffers an attack of very high fever. Once it was seen how gravely ill he was, he was taken to the leprosarium at Wau mission where he died a holy death on the morning of 4 December. At that same hour, Bro. Corneo recovers, after three days at death's door, as testified by the eyewitness Bro. Gatti. Giosuè, in his simplicity, was used to making radical gestures. His unforeseen vocational choice is repeated to his novice master, Faustino Bertenghi, at the time when he received his definitive appointment to Kormalan leprosarium. Giosuè writes: "*My mission, as Mons. Comboni intended, is ended, finished. God has so disposed but nevertheless, believe me Father Bertenghi, I am happy, extremely happy. Indeed, even if today I were to be speaking with my parish priest and he were to object: Listen. In twenty years' time you will get leprosy but if you stay here you will not do so, then also today, I believe, I would have to say: even in ten years' time, even in only one year's time, I will go just the same*". The life of Giosuè was always "*per aspera ad astra*". Asperities do not spare him, not even in his first African experience (from 1907 to 1920). During that time, the lay associate Giosuè Dei Cas "was tried by the loss of the majority of the members of his family: first there was the death of his favourite brother Riccardo, in 1910; then, in 1911, that of his father and, in 1916, that of Vittorio, swept away by an avalanche while on military service in the Trentino, on 25 August, 1920". Even after seventeen years of honourable missionary life, in 1921, in Venegono, he is not spared the humiliation of being admitted to the vows without being dressed in the religious habit. Giosuè does not split hairs. He knows another aesthetic, that of charity which concerns the

essential: the disposition to consume oneself for others according to their needs. He is overjoyed at belonging to the Comboni Missionaries and at being able to return to live among his Shilluk people. This closeness suffers a drastic change of quality in 1925 when his leprosy is diagnosed. Sister Cristina Carlotto, who was told of the matter, writes: “God only knows what took place in that soul! But what did the others know about it? Almost immediately he told me about it with the same joy as someone speaking of a most welcome visit. ‘Sister Cristina – he said – You know, I went to the doctor but he didn’t even want to see me and sent me away’ and Giosuè laughed, his face almost radiant with joy, as if this insult had given his spirit a taste of paradise”. Chased away by people but now closer to the condition of humanity as such, in its entire fragility. He had already anticipated in solidarity the closeness of Khormalan when, many years previously, at Tonga, he had carried on his shoulders some lepers who needed medical care, or when, like a modern St. Christopher, he waded at night through the brackish water of the swamps, infested with mosquitoes, carrying a confrere who needed to reach dry-shod the boat for Khartoum.

His symbol. There is an immortal image that defines Giosuè and continues to provoke us at every age: **an ordinary man, a Samaritan carrying a leper on his shoulders**, known by him simply as a human being, nothing more and nothing less than a brother. This is the background. The symbol, instead, would be a great sunflower, the sign of a happy man who generates happiness. And Giosuè, the missionary who incarnates for today the figure of the Servant of Yahweh who bears all leprosy and positively determines a content with endless expressions. The two rails that go on to infinity and carry the Good News are solidarity and simplicity of attitude. Are the responses to real suffering, as we look at them without turning our gaze away, embrace them together with the Servant and concretely share to experience life with dignity until the end. For this reason, the symbol of Giosuè, “a forever missionary St. Christopher of today”, becomes the code and the content of missionary life that invites us to anticipate the future, now, without repeating the past. To his friend

Professor Graziella Monachesi, who wanted to send him altar-cloths for his little church at Khormalan, he replied: “Before seeing the state of the altar, what strikes one is the faithful and the ‘infidels’ worshipping here. To the first, a way was found to give them a loose shirt and a pair of trousers, but the others? Then, since most of them are lepers, as are my ‘co-parishioners’ as a certain malicious confrere of mine calls them, or “my parishioners”, they have no way to earn their living. The moral is obvious: if you wish to give me something, send me trousers and shirts. But, since postage is so dear, without considering customs duty as well, it would be ‘better’ to send me the money. In that way I could also save the 25 lire postage. In my mind, you see, I was thinking: with 25 lire (at the present rate, 33 cents make one piaster), with 6 or 7 piasters I can buy 100 fishing hooks and almost 500 in total. Those blessed fellows come here to annoy me every day: ‘*Faratelo*’, will you give me a hook? Dear Signorina Graziella, I have told you how I feel; but, as I have said before, do as God inspires you to do”. Giosuè was far-seeing, looking to the future. It was his way to “make common cause”, without taking the other’s place but guaranteeing his autonomy. Giosuè is the incarnation of “victorious weakness”. Yes, he had a soft spot for others, from the point of view of their possibilities.

Father Ezechiele Ramin

He was killed at around mid-day on 24 July, 1985, in the territory of Catuva ranch, between the states of Rondonia and Mato Grosso, after having successfully carried out a mission of peace. He had prevented a certain massacre. It was a death that was fruitful for its radicalism and what it contains: a clear option for the poor and communion with the choices of a Church that figured as the servant of the poor. This was a radicality that, if it enshrined exemplarity and greatness at his death, had been equally anticipated in the short course of his earthly life by his youthful participation in Mani Tese. Seeing the situation of discrimination and exploitation of developing peoples, his appeal during Mission day, 1971, rang dramatic and urgent: “Brother, if you do not help to find a solution, you are part of the problem”. We find that same lucid gaze that leads to decision during his years in

Chicago where he forced his theological reflection to compare the pastoral work among the *Latinos* and the *Africans*: “*Their life is unbelievable. It breaks my heart to go into some homes. Each week I bring them something and now, when it is cold, I try to find some remnants of warm clothing for them to wear. Today I ran to buy a pair of shoes for a seven-year-old boy who walked in the snow wearing a pair of shoes with no soles*.” “*Poverty is the norm... (...) I have met people forty years old asking what they could do in their lives. I have lived with alcoholics, beggars and pregnant girls of thirteen. All of them asked simply to be listened to and understood*”. In short, he is made to open his eyes to the point that seeing is painful and is no longer enough, urging constantly to act. From Brasil, after some months, he has already made his choice: “*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*”.

Two photographs must always be taken together to grasp the entire Pascal meaning of his death: that of his body riddled by 72 bullets on the forest track and that of a year previously, 1984, in Cacoal, during the feast of the workers that shows Ezechiele standing upright on a lorry, proud to pour the coffee beans produced by the labour and suffering of a people in search of dignity, respect and redemption. The two photos define his trajectory. The feast of the workers did not need to be repeated: on 24 July, 1985, he himself became in solidarity the wheat of God, capable of rendering the earth fertile and proclaiming the intangibility and the fruition for all of the goods of creation. He could see, even if from a distance, and desired that Amazonia be a land fraternal and blessed for all.

His symbol. Ezechieel's symbol: the background is an Amazonian dawn and, on the ground, his **silhouette riddled with bullets or his swollen face**. In the foreground there is a seed in the ground from which there grows a glorious ear of wheat: from the prophet, therefore, comes a new world.

What are the signs that characterise the true prophets? Who are these revolutionaries? Critical prophets are those who attract others with their interior strength. Those who meet them are fascinated by them and want to know more about them, being under the irresistible impression that they derive their strength from a hidden source, strong and abundant. From them flows an interior liberty that gives them an independence that is neither proud nor detached but that makes them able to rise above immediate needs, above pressing situations. True prophets are moved by what happens around them but do not allow this to oppress or destroy them. They listen attentively and speak with authority but are not easily enthused. In all that they do and say, they seem to have before them a living vision that those who hear them may accept but not see. This vision guides their lives and they are obedient to it. Through this vision, they are able to distinguish what is important from what is not. Many things that seem to have stringent immediacy do not upset them. They give great importance to some things that others ignore. They do not live to maintain the status quo but plan for a new world whose outlines they see and that constitute for them such a call that even the fear of death has no decisive power over them.

Lele knew the evangelical situation of the sower who does not return to his house if he wants to sow ...; Christ the liberator who counteracts all slavery and inertia; Christ dead and risen whose person coincides with his cause, with the Kingdom, with the face and the struggles of his people for justice, dignity and conversion. Lele never separated the person of Jesus from his cause, designated a complete personal commitment "that all may have life and life in abundance". In this way, he sinks the cause into the living flesh of the person so that the furrow of history may become the opening of the heart and the birth of something new. What is born from us? What sort of seed do we sow? How can we fill the void between affirmed

option and realised option? Only the offered body can balance the account and transform the violence suffered into a song of freedom. The blood of Lele speaks of life, of directed commitment and of courage and it contrasts the great amount of blood violently shed in this intolerant, cruel, profoundly unjust and cynical society of ours. Rather than a condemnation, his blood is a radical choice and option that gives meaning to the missionary life.

Conclusion

The deaths of these confreres, if we look closely at them, still speak to us, especially in our time since they helped to bring to full maturity those missionary values that they incarnated during their lifetimes. Unfortunately, we get used to everything and our hurried glance renders everything insignificant, taken for granted and innocuous. In the corridor of the Generalate in Rome, in Via Luigi Lilio, the faces of these confreres of ours have taken on the same gray colour as the wall. They are there, silent spectators and notably absent. Perhaps it would be good if from time to time we could stop and look at them with friendship and ask with humility for those values that distinguished them and made of them, for those of us who are not distracted of course, a living reminder.

It would be equally good if their faces could become familiar in all our houses, beginning right from our formation houses and so on to the most remote mission in the forest. Their language is understandable to all: they do not speak a foreign language, they are not “Italians”, but just Combonis like ourselves, with us and more than us and – why not admit it? – they have an extra gear that does not humiliate us but gives a bit more power to our often spluttering engine, and makes us happy to belong to a long line together with the leaders, Christ and Comboni, down to the very last Christian.

Will we succeed in passing from explanation to contemplation?

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