

## Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation

Juba April 2019

The commitment to JPIC, it is good to keep reminding us about it, is not a marginal commitment in our missionary ministry. According to the Chapter Acts of 2015, reconciliation, justice, peace and the integrity of creation *are intrinsic elements of evangelisation* (n. 11). These words are an echo of the words of the final document of the Synod of Bishops of 1971 “*Acting for justice and participating in the transformation of the world - it was said in the document - appear to us clearly as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and the liberation from all oppressive situations*”. It should be emphasised that this commitment is a participation in the transformation of the world and its liberation, indeed, more precisely, in the structural transformation of areas such as politics, economics, legislation and education. A huge task, of course, which for this reason requires a multi-level collaboration network.

As it has been emphasised in the letter of the General Council and the Mission Secretariat, there can be no real commitment to justice and peace without a commitment to the protection of creation. To quote the encyclical *Laudato si'* of Pope Francis, “*the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the human meaning of ecology, the need for forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle*” (n. 16). The Pope speaks, precisely, of integral ecology where “*everything is intimately connected*”.

### 1. The JPIC commitment in the Institute

The work of Justice and Peace is a ministry, that is, is a specific service that requires particular skills (CA '15 n. 45.2). This means that the mission today demands more and more specialised tasks according to the people's needs and requirements. In the early days, the missionary arrived in a mission with well-defined and, so to speak, standardised tasks: the brother (and the nun) had to take care of the aspect of human promotion (care of the workshop and follow the workers, construction, education, health, etc.) and the priest all that concerned the ‘care of souls’ (catechesis, liturgy, courses for catechists, etc.). Today missionary commitment requires an increasingly contextualised type of presence dependent on times and places, and on the particular situation of a people.

For this it is required a deep discernment to see the signs of the times and places where we are and operate, identifying the concrete needs of the people. A discernment that, however, cannot be guided by individualistic criteria that depend on personal tastes, but must be the result of a communal decision that involves the local community, the circumscription and the continent. In fact, speaking of pastoral services, the Chapter Acts 2015 state that these services must be “*in line with the continental priorities, shared among several circumscriptions and lived in broader collaboration, on the inter-Provincial or Continental levels.*” (45.3)

### 2. In the circumscriptions

Each circumscription has developed a Directory and a Six-year plan, where the principles and rules of engagement in the field of JPIC are described. We may mention the *Justice and Peace Manual* prepared by the South Sudanese circumscription. A truly qualified work.

There are some circumscriptions, where the commitment to JPIC has been directed towards specific areas and where different working methods have been adopted. To name a few:

- Commitment to protest and struggle; for example, the organisation *Justiça nos Trilhos* in Brazil
- also supported by the Comboni Missionaries - working close to local communities; its

purpose is to examine human and environmental rights abuses committed by mining companies and steel companies, in particular the multinational Vale.

- Commitment to formation, reception and legal aid for migrants in Europe. This commitment is a continental priority for the European continent.
- Formation and education: the *Laudato si' Centre* in Kinshasa which deals with animation, formation and research on the environmental protection and safeguarding of creation; the Institute of *Social Ministry in Nairobi* offering university courses to become agents of social transformation.
- Work in the field of health with the presence of confreres specialised in the medical field.
- Commitment to reconciliation and peace, and the training of agents who are helping in overcoming the traumas of violence. This was a commitment that the circumscription of South Sudan had assumed, but in which other circumscriptions in Africa should be committed, especially where war and violence are a tragic reality.

What we have mentioned is only part of a great work in the field of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation that is done at the level of the circumscription, in collaboration with the dioceses.

At the level of the Institute we are part of international organisations such as VIVAT and AEFJN and, as you know, the Mission Secretariat coordinates the preparation and presence of the Comboni Family in the World Social Forum and the Comboni Forum. As mentioned in the letter, one of the commitments of the Comboni Forum, after the World Social Forum of Salvador Bahia (Brazil) in 2018, was to organize a possible Forum on the Social Ministry of the Comboni Family that will take place between 2020 and 2021.

### **3 The task of the person responsible of JPIC**

Some indications about the tasks of the provincial responsible for the ministry of JPIC, in particular in the light of the theme of this assembly of JPIC: “*Catholic response to Justice and Peace issues in a changing Africa*”. The tasks of the person in charge could be summarised in these four verbs: *to form, to inform, to animate and to create networks of collaboration*.

- a. **To form**: it is an important task that concerns the formation of consciences on the biblical and spiritual dimension of JPIC, on the Social Doctrine of the Church, on human rights, on the importance of the safeguard of creation, on reconciliation and forgiveness, etc. In summary, to form *on the principles of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* according to a Christian perspective.
- b. **To inform** on social, economic/financial, global and local issues. To inform on the injustices that are perpetrated against marginalised populations and human groups; on cases of corruption and violation of human rights; on damage to the environment; on the trafficking of persons; on forced migration, on land grabbing... in other words, on events and activities that are happening in the country and on the continent where we are working, and which are contrary to justice and peace.
- c. **To animate**. For instance: helping the confreres to become involved in the campaigns for the defence of life and human rights. Encouraging the circumscriptions, when it is realistically feasible, to take a position on some issues that affect JPIC. Encouraging (even here, when it is humanly possible and after a serious community reflection) to participate in protest marches in order to put pressure on the political or on district authority to intervene against cases of abuse and corruption. The task of “animating” could also have the purpose of setting up trauma healing and listening centres, or other centres concerning recovery and healing (like, for instance, the association “*Napenda Kuishi*” in the parish of Kariobangi in Kenya that is geared to rehabilitate and facilitate education and to provide medical assistance to street youth, vulnerable children, young people and adults in the slums surrounding the parish).

d. **To create networks of collaboration** is very important for a JPIC commitment that is truly transforming. It is vital to establish networks of collaboration with the diocese, with the confreres who work in the circumscription, with other religious Institutes, with civil society groups that are engaged in the various fields of justice and peace, with the international organisations such as, for example, VIVAT and AEFJN.

The task of the confrere entrusted with the ministry of JPIC is not an easy one but it is essential because, after all, it concerns the very credibility of our proclamation of the Gospel.

We are also aware that, in most cases, the person to whom this task has been entrusted has also other commitments, especially in the parish ministry, if he is a priest.

Above all, the person in charge of this task must even overcome the resistance of some confreres who say: “It is not our task, we are here to evangelise! Let the diocese and the local church worry about this!”. The confrere in charge of JPIC has also to overcome some suspicion from the ecclesiastical authority (sometimes in high places, like the Nuncio).

The commitment to justice and total liberation is a work which, as previously mentioned, that the Church considers a **constitutive part** of the preaching of the Gospel and which is announcement and prophetic action for “*the coming of the new heavens and the new earth where it will have its righteous dwellings*” (2Pt. 3.13).

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