

PLACING NO OBSTACLES IN GOD'S WAY

***Report and Message of the General Council
to the XVII General Chapter***

***Comboni Missionaries
2009***

**Let us help one another:
Let our vow be one, one our purpose and one the commitment of those who love Christ
(Daniel Comboni - W 2182)**

Report of the GC to the XVII General Chapter 2009

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PLACE NO OBSTACLES IN GOD'S WAY

Report of the General Council to the XVII General Chapter

Comboni Missionaries

*"You not only have a glorious history
to remember and tell of,
but great history to make!
Look to the future the Spirit has for you
to do again great things with you"
(Vita Consecrata 110)*

1. Forty five years ago, in the Congo, four confreres were murdered. They were among the first of a line of twenty-six Comboni Missionary martyrs. They died almost as a community in those tragic times when Africa was in the turmoil of independence and revolution. That same year, our confreres were expelled *en masse*, together with the Comboni Sisters. It was a time of trial for all the Comboni family. But even from that *valley of darkness*, thank God, the Institute emerged reconfirmed in its faith and vocation. As we recall those events, we may well remember the question St. Daniel Comboni asked in faith: "*Now why has the smallest and most insignificant of Institutes, microscopic like mine which I founded in Verona, been able to consolidate the Apostolate of Central Africa and pitch its tents more successfully than my predecessors?*" (W 5284).

The reply still comes from the heart of Comboni when he repeats like an antiphon: "*the work which I have in my hands belongs to God*" (W 3615).

2. As we start this Chapter, then, we are invited to thank God for having loved this Comboni family and for having called us to follow him.

We thank God for all the confreres who have imitated the holiness of Daniel Comboni, enriching and transforming this Institute into graces and blessings for the missionary Church.

We thank God for our elderly and sick who are for us monuments to generosity and self-giving. They are the sign and the symbol of the mission lived and loved.

We thank our parents and our families who believed in our vocation and have always been in the mission with us.

We thank God for the new vocations, the sign that God believes in this *His* Institute. Our thanks also go to all the provincial and delegation councils and all the General Administration. Whatever good we did, we did it together.

3. Lastly, all together we thank everyone who has helped us to preach the Gospel of Christ. Each one of us, calling to mind his confreres and co-operators, may repeat the words of St. Paul: "*I thank my God every time I think of you; and every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to spread the Good News from the day you first heard it right up to the present*" (Phil. 1, 3-5).

I – THE SPIRIT OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER

“The past is always a lesson for the future”
(W 1709)

4. We have said it before and we say it again: the General Chapter (GC) is not just an event of the Institute but is, above all, an ecclesial event. For any Institute, a General Chapter is a privileged occasion to acquire fresh awareness of its ties with the Church, in whose mission it plays a part and with the world, to which it is sent by Christ.

5. The General Chapter is mission; it means loving and realising the mission. We have every confidence and hope that this Chapter may become graces and blessings to “*move the world and bear new fruit*”.

The General Chapter calls us to make a leap of faith in order to journey along the original ways of the Spirit. It will certainly be a Pentecost if, with our different visions and positions, we allow the wisdom of the Spirit to do everything according to the will of God and for the good of the Comboni mission. Let us therefore allow the Spirit to free us up, move us, enlighten us and urge us forward.

6. Let us view this ordinary special Chapter with the eyes of faith and remember what was said in the 2003 GC: “The time has come to make courageous choices which are *in accordance both with the original charism and the requirements of the concrete historical situation* and are translated into *new projects of evangelization for modern-day situations*” (VC 73 in AC '03, 28.1).

7. We wish to present our report together with those of the general secretariats. The General Council will confine itself to set out *points* for reflection and evaluation, as well as underlining the principles and general themes of Comboni missionary life which must guide the Institute.

Forty Years Later (1969-2009)

8. We wish to celebrate our ordinary special General Chapter forty years after another special Chapter, that of 1969. That Chapter was a moment of grace due also to the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council. Certainly the Institute emerged from it re-qualified, more missionary and more Comboni.

9. These forty years have been a journey of missionary grace, and God has blessed the Institute with abundant apostolic fruits and accompanied it in the mission, enriching it with vocations and confreres from four continents. Now, after forty years, the Institute has a new identity. It has changed its appearance and has regenerated itself. God has made us proceed according to his will and according to the dream of Comboni, transforming us increasingly into an international and intercontinental cenacle.

10. During the past forty years Propaganda Fide has shown its trust and esteem for us by seeking the collaboration of the Institute and by calling quite a few confreres to the Episcopate; at present they are seventeen. Above all, God has blessed the Comboni Family with the reunification of the two Institutes and with the beatification and canonisation of St. Daniel Comboni.

11. The canonisation of Daniel Comboni has renewed in all of us “the call to regenerate the passion for our common charism; a call which urges us towards more authentic consecrated life, better founded spirituality and more prophetic fidelity to the mission” (cf. Comboni General Councils, 15 March, 2003).

12. We do not conceal our sadness for the number of confreres who left the Institute and the missionary way of life. During these past six years, about 220 left. It goes without saying that, in some cases, defections did no harm to the Institute, whereas others constituted a real loss.

II – ALL FOR THE MISSION

“Sudan gave me life,
the Church gave me the episcopate,
the missionaries of Comboni gave me God”
(Mgr. Ireneo Dud)

13. In the spirit of Daniel Comboni, we are sent into the world to witness to the Good News of the Kingdom. The holiness and passion of Comboni for the mission stirs and urges us to love more deeply the gift of the vocation we were given and to live in the joy of complete self-giving; it renders us capable of taking up with courage and creativity the challenges of the mission in the world of today, sharing the liberating power of the Gospel with the crucified of our time (cf. CA '03, 31-35).

WALKING WITH CHRIST THE MISSIONARY

14. Comboni has taught us that the mission begins in Christ. That same Christ takes us to the mission. “*Whoever has discovered Christ – Pope Benedict XVI reminds us – must bring others to Him. Great joy cannot be kept for oneself. It must be shared. In vast parts of the world today there exists a strange forgetfulness of God. It seems that everything goes along equally well without Him. Let your first and greatest desire be that God may be heard and wholeheartedly loved*” (Address to Religious, 10 December, 2005).

15. First evangelization is our mission priority and, as missionaries, we cannot but speak of “*that which we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4, 20). The missionary, therefore, communicates a lived experience, not simply doctrine. Without a spiritual life, the Gospel of the mission is weakened. Discipleship and mission are two sides of the same coin: if the disciple loves Christ, he cannot fail to proclaim him (cf. *Aparecida* no. 146). Belonging to Christ means “taking part in His mission”.

16. Evangelization *ad gentes* involves two responsibilities: to proclaim Christ to all the peoples, and offer renewal to the communities from which we set out. This is why missionaries must depart and return and realise that returning is just as important as leaving. Knowing how to return to and vivify the Churches we departed from, making them more missionary, is doing quality missionary work. St. Daniel Comboni is still the ideal role model also in knowing how to return: he would return full of missionary passion to animate the Churches of Europe because of and on behalf of his dear Africa.

17. Convinced that the mission is closely linked to the “*journey of the Spirit*” (W 2712), we have sought to reach the goals set by the 2003 Chapter (GC '03). These are:

- to animate the provinces and delegations in their journey of ongoing formation (OGF) for a continual increase in spiritual progress, as a *conditio sine qua non* for evangelization;
- to foster courses of OGF on Comboni spirituality (cf. *Implementation of the 2003 XVI General Chapter – Implementation GC '03, 2.3.1*).

WALKING WITH COMBONI

18. During the past six years, our master of missionary life has been Comboni at whose spiritual wells we have drunk deeply as children and as disciples. We lost no opportunity to present his spirituality (Implementation GC '03, 2.2.1).

The Comboni spirit is, before all else, the *spirit of Daniel Comboni*. Departure from the Founder would mean betraying our charismatic identity, weakening ties with his spirit and running the risk of no longer having anything to contribute to the missionary Church.

19. We have followed Comboni as our Founder who indicates to us the road of fidelity. We have followed him as our Father who shows us the way and his *specific manner of following Christ* (RL 1) and, as a missionary and a Saint who teaches us to give ourselves completely to the missionary cause *for which he spoke, worked and died* (RL 2). We sat at his feet as our master of evangelization who in so many ways has taught us that the mission is, more than anything else, always staying among the people (W 4158), to the point of falling in love with the people we serve. Comboni, in fact, lived like someone in love with Africa, his lover (W 6752).

20. Comboni has also shown us the missionary style to follow. It is that of the incarnation, of making common cause (W 3159) which demands the humility and silence of the seed which dies and germinates from within. It is the task of the missionary to cast the seed, not to plant the trees! The virtue of the farmer who sows is long-term patience (cf. Jm 5, 7-10). Paradoxically, the mission may be impeded by too much generosity - impatient generosity which conceals the subtle arrogance of those who wish to usurp the guiding hand of God.

WALKING WITH THE INSTITUTE

21. We have journeyed together towards the mission with the process of the Ratio Missionis (RM). Despite difficulties and resistance, we may say that the harvest has been good. The objective which the General Council proposed was to open once again the book of the Comboni mission; to move from "*everything is mission*" to "*the mission is everything*"; to reinvest everything in evangelization and to appreciate the *bonum* and the grace present in every circumscription and in the Institute.

The RM has also taught us that the missionary has authority in so far as he is obedient to Christ who sends him. It is certainly not by looking to human beings but to Christ that we understand which mission to undertake and how to carry out the mission (cf. Starting with Christ 22; NMI 24-26; 29). The provinces which worked hardest on the RM affirm that it is a grace and blessing.

22. In response to the objectives proposed by the GC '03, we may say that the process of the RM has created a good climate of communion in the Institute at provincial/delegation and continental levels. The RM has renewed our enthusiasm to follow Comboni, the man with a passion for mission, to seek creativity and new ways of being *ad gentes* missionaries in the reality of today and to evaluate our commitments and methodology in accordance with the priorities of our charism (cf. Implementation GC '03, 2.3.2).

III – TOWARDS THE FUTURE OF GOD

“The mission is my paradise.
I am happy and I thank God,
the Institute and all my confreres”
(Fr. Fulvio Cristoforetti)

23. The future depends on the memory of our past, how we work in the present and on our commitment to participate together in the missionary adventure to which God has called us. The future depends on how much we want to be Comboni Missionaries *together*. The future depends also and above all on a Comboni spirituality that is lived out, from which our doing mission begins and receives its strength.

THE JOURNEY OF RE-FOUNDATION

24. Today there is talk of re-founding the consecrated life. The phrase is a valid one, if one is speaking of the need to return to the foundation which is none other than Jesus Christ: “*For the foundation, nobody can lay any other than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ*” (1Cor 3-11). This process, besides, may be fruitful if by it one wishes to bring the life of the Institute back to the founder and to all those confreres who have followed him and carried out that which St. Daniel Comboni himself could not accomplish. Every founder may say with St. Paul, “*Keep doing all the things you have learnt from me and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do*” (Phil 4-9).

25. Obviously, re-founding does not mean rejecting the past or wiping it out in order to concentrate solely on the present and the future. Real, true re-founding discerns two different spirits: the continuity of tradition, or returning to the roots and the newness of the Institute, and the *res novae* of the Spirit. Every effort at re-founding, innovation or regeneration has as its strong point the inherited experience accumulated in the course of the years and the courage to dare, launching out into the mystery of the future.

26. The main purpose of re-founding is to do that which Comboni would do today in fidelity to the Holy Spirit: to make ever new and relevant the missionary charism which he inherited and pass it on to the new generations of Comboni Missionaries who will continue it in the coming years. It means discovering precisely what our specific task is; to be able to distinguish the aspects that are absolutely essential from those that are not.

27. We have been called to re-found the Institute despite the uncertainty of the future. Numerical diminution, the shortage of vocations and growing old may create a lack of prospects, the need for considerable retrenchment and new equilibrium. To all this we may sometimes add the lack of vitality, vocational fragility and painful defections. In such conditions, it might be extremely difficult to find a strategy of hope capable of opening up new possibilities, providing directives and guaranteeing leadership. Our hope is in God who believes in the Institute and in us who believe in the mission of Comboni for the sake of which we are prepared to be converted and to change. We hope that this Chapter may be transformed into a Comboni Pentecost: the Spirit frees us up and launches us forward according to his plans and his will.

THE JOURNEY OF REQUALIFICATION

28. “*Lord, to whom shall we go?*” Peter asked, knowing well he had no other choice. We too, more than ever, are left with no alternative but to be radical in our *sequela* of Christ just as Comboni embraced and loved the radical following of Christ: “*My dear Rector, do not let any difficulties get you down: the works of God have always cost blood, sorrows and death, troubles etc. But remember that all the troubles, pains and crosses are meritorious because we work for Christ alone*” (W 6660).

Evangelical Counsels

28.1 Pope Benedict XVI reminded us: “In the face of the advance of hedonism, the courageous witness of chastity is asked of you as the expression of a heart that knows the beauty and price of God's love. In the face of the thirst for money that widely prevails today, your sober life, ready to serve the neediest, is a reminder that God is the true treasure that does not perish. Before the individualism and relativism that induce people to be a rule unto themselves, your fraternal life, which can be coordinated and is thus capable of obedience, confirms that you place your fulfilment in God” (To religious, 10 December, 2005). This *sequela* of Christ will be lived according to *the specific requirements of the missionary service of the Institute in the Church, as laid down by the Constitutions* (cf. RL 22).

Community life

28.2 One task of great importance in the new evangelization, entrusted to consecrated life, is the witness of communion, “a sign to the world and an attracting force that leads to faith in Christ” (*Christifideles laici* no. 31). In an epoch characterised by individualism and the return of nationalism, our Institute too, precisely because it is international, is sent to announce, by means of the witness of its life, the value of fraternity and the mission to “keep alive the sense of communion between peoples, races and cultures” (Consecrated Life, 51).

Authenticity

28.3 The consecrated life of the future will find its fulfilment in concentrating on the radical *sequela* of Christ, the faithful servant.

Nothing could be more contradictory and incoherent than to profess total self-giving through the evangelical counsels while in our lives we keep for ourselves our energy and abilities, living the mission part-time, giving way to a life of ease while remaining indifferent to the drama of poverty being fought by millions of people throughout the world. Anyone who has chosen to follow Christ has also chosen his life-style, to avoid becoming rich but to live the beatitude of poverty and simplicity of heart and be always familiar with the poor. Mgr. Giovanni Giordani wrote in his diary: “*Anyone who is poor speaks little of the poor but lives with the poor*”. Availability requires being ready to enter the most arduous, the most dangerous, the most difficult and demanding of situations.

28.4 The choice of the poorest and the new frontiers has its source and deepest motivation in the love of God. Such a choice also has an evangelising purpose. Jesus demonstrates this in the synagogue at Nazareth: “The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor” (Lk 4, 18).

Credibility

28.5 Rather than a crisis of identity, there exists today a crisis of *credibility*. Side by side with the vital drive, capable of witnessing and giving to the point of martyrdom, the Comboni life also recognises “the insidious mediocrity of the spiritual life, being progressively immersed in a life of ease and the mentality of consumerism”.

When we start being people with every commodity and comfort, it is then that the decay of the Institute and the failure of the mission begin.

28.6 Consecrated life must be *a prophetic and visible sign*, meaning it must continue the search for forms of prophecy and credibility which are not only personal but also institutional. It must return to a lifestyle which is more simple and poor, sober and essential. It is also necessary to simplify the structures that, all too often, have become a burden and may render a service but fail to make God present.

28.7 The journey we have made towards the objectives of *re-qualification* (cf. Implementation GC '03, 3.1.2.1) has been positive. During our visits we have seen that we are moving towards a beautiful sort of "*re-qualification*": we saw this in love for the mission and for the people; we have noted a good spirituality and love for the Institute. We may say, thanks be to God, that the mission is loved with passion and confidence "in the God who called us and invited us to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom" (cf. CA '03, 31). In a word, the journey we are making makes us credible.

THE JOURNEY TOWARDS A NEW PLAN

29. "*What remains to be done?*" – Comboni asks himself, thinking of his work – "*We must take steps to achieve our first aim*" (W 2452).

30. At this moment our "*first aim*" is to continue the journey towards a new plan for the Institute. Due to excessive missionary zeal, there is still a strong temptation to respond to every cry, to all needs or requests, without first examining them in the light of our charism and our personnel resources.

31. Our Rule of Life is clear: "*we give priority to the poorest and neediest*" in the four continents, with particular attention to Africa. Our specific purpose (cf. CA '03, 36-38) leads us to:

- Renew our attention to Africa, the continent charismatically inseparable from our history, still said to be the poorest and on which the world is turning its back.
- Remain in the Americas and in Europe where "*situations of poverty and abandonment*" require us to do so.
- Reflect on our presence in Asia, the continent with the greatest number of people who do not know Jesus Christ.

32. This will be one of the greatest tasks of the Chapter: to redefine our presence, elaborate a new plan for our areas of work with all that inner freedom which is not diverted by human considerations but which trusts in God who called us to his mission in the following of Comboni.

THE JOURNEY OF FIDELITY

33. We recount with serenity that which we have seen, heard and lived during these six years. We have seen missionary generosity, Comboni passion and the desire to be radical. At the same time, we cannot deny seeing signs of tiredness, lack of motivation and weakness. With all this in mind we may say that the Institute is healthy because it has a passion for the mission.

34. Courageous prophetic choices made by provinces or confreres have constituted a suitable response to the signs of mediocrity and the tendency to take the easy option which have been noted in our Institute.

Fidelity to the mission and making common cause with the people in situations of war, danger and uncertainty have counteracted the temptation of dominance and paternalism which still survive in our missionary activity.

The growing desire for deep spirituality and evangelical radicalism is greater than the signs of weakness, individualism and superficiality in our consecrated and community life.

35. We greatly desire that this General Chapter may show us the ferment of life, the testimonies to faithfulness and the missionary riches of the Institute. We desire that our virtues be transformed into apostolic generosity and our weaknesses into confidence in the God who called us to be Comboni missionaries together.

IV – COMBONI LIFE AND MISSION

“Three things I love:
the mission, the Church and Our Lady.
Do I love the Institute?
The Institute is Church, mission and mother”
(Fr. Elvio Cellana)

36. The Comboni missionary “*makes evangelization the reason of his being*” (RL 56). Total dedication to the mission is the essential element of the charism of Comboni and the Institute and, it follows, of every confrere. This dedication is lived in faith and love, taking as its model Jesus Christ (cf. W 442) and Comboni, missionary of Christ (cf. *Instrumentum laboris* '03, 51). With this often-recalled truth as our starting point, we are presenting a panorama of Comboni life as we have seen it and lived it.

A – PERSONS AND PERSONNEL

“The Dream of Daniel Comboni has penetrated
deeply into my life and I wish to live it
with all my strength at every moment”
(Mgr. Enrico Bartolucci)

Personnel and commitments

37. The 2003 General Chapter reminds us that “the reality of which we are aware requires us to accept with faith and realism the personnel situation of the Institute. The discrepancy between personnel and commitments remains. It is a fact that this disproportion will increase and become more worrying in the coming years if the proper steps are not taken. The revision and re-qualification of personnel and commitments are to be carried out according to the purpose, the life-style and the methodology of the Institute” (CA '03, 15-23; 30; 133). Our presence in each circumscription must be constantly re-examined, re-defined and re-designed (Implementation CA '03, 6.2.3).

37.1 That which was pointed out during the Assembly of the Union of General Superiors (May, 2008) applies also to us:

“In order to avoid an unrealistic attitude of omnipotence, one certain to fail in any case, each Institute must decide to commit itself only in those fields and initiatives which correspond more closely to its original charism and its tradition and the realistic possibilities of the number and quality of available personnel”.

37.2 We also wish to make it clear that the Superiors not only have too little personnel to respond to all the needs of the mission but they devote much of their time to confreres who are no longer motivated either spiritually or from the point of view of the mission. This situation needs to be faced directly, so as to examine briefly the firmness of the foundation offered to those wishing to undertake the sequela of Christ in a state of Christian life requiring an extreme degree of self-giving (cf. RV 2).

37.3 Another aspect to be borne in mind is that the Institute requires greater and complete availability from those confreres who have completed specialised studies. Their specialisations and qualifications must be placed at the service of the mission, avoiding *personal commitment* to independent personal projects.

Brothers

38. Comboni frequently praises the life of the Brothers, their work and their specific mission, apart from that of spending time among the people (W 5831).

The 150 years of Comboni history have shown that the mission carried out together by Fathers and Brothers is a grace for evangelization. As with all Institutes, the number of Brothers is decreasing. This moves us to make every effort to present with creativity the figure and ministry of the Comboni Brother in the life of the mission.

38.1 In the Implementation of the GC '03 (2.3.3), with reference to the Brothers, we are asked to:

- prepare Brothers for human promotion projects;
- collaborate with the provinces/delegations to study concrete projects as part of the pastoral plan of evangelization;
- study the possibility of taking on the Tangaza Social Ministry, together with other Institutes.

Regarding the first two points, we have tried to attend to the professional aspect of each Brother, both at Postulancy and CIF levels, with good results, and these have enabled us to have a meaningful presence of Brothers in development projects in cooperation with some provinces. However, we must continue our efforts and commitment.

There are still some doubts and question marks surrounding *Social Ministry* which do not leave room for an indefinite commitment. However, the fact is that *Social Ministry* is kept going through the efforts of the Comboni Missionaries.

38.2 The 2003 Chapter (67) did ask for a serious effort in preparing Brothers for perpetual vows: starting in 2005, the GA, working through the secretariat for formation, planned and organised the preparation of the Brothers for their definitive consecration: a journey lasting three or four months with periods of formation, prayer, missionary ministry and spiritual exercises or the Ignatian month. The outcome has been positive. Sixteen Brothers participated in the various initiatives.

38.3 We hope that the Brothers will be the first to show interest and make proposals so that the Comboni family may continue according to the desire of Comboni and the demands of the mission.

Elderly and sick confreres

39. Bro. Angelo Viviani wrote: "*I know the mission. I have seen it in the lives of the elderly and sick confreres*". These are wise words with which we thank God for the example of missionary generosity we see in our elderly and sick confreres.

39.1 We have tried to be close to the communities of the elderly and sick confreres to help them to live their personal situation as a time of missionary grace (cf. Letter of the General Council, Attention to the person, 57). Obviously there is still a long, uphill journey ahead of us, especially in preparing and maintaining structures capable of meeting all the requirements at Institute and at continental and provincial levels. (cf. *Instrumentum laboris* '03, 36).

39.2 There is a tendency today, in western society, to try to keep illness, old age and suffering at a distance. With the pretext of efficiency and charity, we often deprive ourselves of a grace-giving presence, and, at the same time, deprive our elderly of the irreplaceable oxygen of the family and

community. Despite our best efforts, the fact remains that some of the elderly, deprived of the mission and normal community life, just give up and rapidly deteriorate. It is not unusual to find some who see the welcoming communities as the waiting-room for their end.

39.3 We have also tried to encourage provinces to provide welcoming and accompanying communities, respecting, as far as possible, the wishes of those confreres who want to remain in a mission area.

39.4 We are, of course, aware that all the expense involved in these structures falls upon the shoulders of the Italian and German-speaking provinces and we are grateful to the confreres who devote themselves with generosity and a spirit of sacrifice to our elderly and sick confreres.

39.5 Given that the number of elderly confreres is growing, so also the duty and commitment of all to carry on conscientiously administering this sector is becoming greater (cf. AC '91, 38.9).

39.6 It is important to remember that all the history of every missionary belongs to the Institute and the Church, and for this reason we suggest that each confrere make an effort to write down and bequeath his own experience of living the mission.

Former Comboni Missionaries

40. Our former members comprise an army of people “*with a Comboni heart and a Comboni formation*”. Each province has a good number of people formed by Comboni Missionaries. In Italy, for example, there are more than a thousand of them. If we remove the title “former” we can see them as a missionary resource and a reciprocal blessing. We trust that the contacts and approaches made during the past six years may continue, increase and improve.

The laity

41. The laity are mentioned in all our documents - almost as if we were trying to quieten our conscience which accuses us, as an Institute, of having done very little. While we admit we have not made much progress, we also praise the efforts and commitment that various provinces have made in this field. In theory, we are all convinced that the mission requires us to throw wide our doors and evangelise with all the forces that God calls and sends us; in practice, there is considerable resistance to the world of the laity.

41.1 We must keep in mind that the laity possess professional abilities which may providentially question the missionary model used by the clergy and male and female religious. We should also foster the experience of families with the Comboni vocation going to the mission. The lay missionary family provides reasons for witness, besides being a useful resource in the pastoral team.

41.2 In the spirit of the General Chapters, each circumscription has the duty to foster the formation of local laity. In some provinces, the experience is positive and fruitful.

41.3 Two goals set by the Chapter (Implementation GC '03, 5.3.3) were:

- In dialogue with the central committee of the Comboni Lay Missionaries (CLM), to try to promote two pilot projects, one in Africa and one in America, during the next six years (CA '03, 126). This goal has not been reached.
- To convoke the fourth general assembly (CA '03, 126). This was done in November, 2006.

We must note that, both at provincial level and that of the General Administration, the changes of personnel in charge of the laity have been too many, to the detriment of the guidance rendered to the development of the CLM.

The missionary woman

42. Comboni harboured affection for all his missionaries, priests, Brothers and Sisters. In his letters he appreciates the work, the sacrifice and the self-denial of all. As Founder, he sees everyone as a family which loves Africa. In the history of the Comboni mission, the women whom Comboni wanted to regenerate Africa gave an excellent account of themselves and their story continues especially where there is abandonment and suffering. Today, the presence of the Sisters is more necessary than ever because, as women, they complete and perfect pastoral action. Collaboration with the Comboni Missionary Sisters and the Comboni Seculars, shall therefore, be of benefit to all, especially the people we serve.

B- COMBONI ACTION SECTORS

“It pains my heart to see so much injustice
knowing I can do so little.
I am journeying with a faith that creates
as winter creates spring”
(Fr. Ezechiele Ramin)

Ongoing Formation

43. The General Councils of the three Institutes, at the vigil of the canonisation of St. Daniel Comboni, had written that “*Gazing constantly at the quality of our consecrated life guarantees the authenticity of the evangelizing Mission*” (Letter, 1 September, 2003, 39). Ongoing Formation guarantees this constant gaze and indicates the path to follow to re-qualify our particular service to the Mission; it is a grace for the Mission and it means “*being in the mission*”.

43.1 During our mandate we have taken every opportunity to promote courses and periods of OGF, convinced that it is still the priority in which everyone – General Administration, provincials, delegates and local superiors – must collaborate and help each other (Implementation GC '03, 3.1.2-3).

43.2 The visits made by the members of the GA, participation in courses of OGF as well as provincial and continental assemblies were periods of ongoing formation. We have often preached retreats on Comboni themes. During our visits, the Comboni spirituality united and strengthened us in the motivations of our missionary service.

Basic formation

44. Each confrere is one of those thousand lives desired by Comboni (W 2271). The missionaries are the rich resource for that unique passion Comboni had for the mission (W 6987). The attention of Comboni towards the candidates is deep and genuine. Comboni is demanding because the mission requires the impossible, and demands sacrifice sometimes even to the point of death (W 6656).

44.1 In evaluating formation, from vocation promotion up to the time of missionary service, we wish to insist upon strict selection, far removed from any misplaced leniency. Like Comboni, we must be demanding as regards our austere lifestyle, close to the people and missionary reality. We must also nourish our candidates with good Comboni missionary spirituality.

44.2 We have been concerned, while struggling with the selection of formators, to create intercultural and intercontinental teams. We have endeavoured to provide the formators with every opportunity for updating and ongoing formation. We have been careful to see that the formation system responds to the needs of the candidates, most of whom come from the continents of Africa and America.

44.3 As required by the Guide to the Implementation of the GC '03 (3.2.1), and as regards the formation system, the GC undertook to:

- Continue evaluating “mission and phases of formation” (CA '03, 64.1).
- Promote new experiences and alternative forms of formation more inserted in the life of the mission, especially for scholasticates and CIF (CA '03, 64.3).
- Plan concrete experiences of missionary life and life among the poor (CA '03, 64.2).
- Promote formation in the preparation of formators of postulancies and vocations promoters (CA '03, 65).
- Organize courses of OGF for all formators.
- Follow closely the formation of Brothers in the CIF.

The journey remaining is still long and arduous but we must make every effort to foster as best we can the vocations God sends us. We must also bear in mind that our candidates breathe in the air of the life of the provinces and the Institute. Mediocrity breeds mediocrity while a life lived according to Comboni's spirit gives rise to the same.

44.4 The shortage of vocations to our Institute, as is happening in the entire western world, is a generally accepted fact which must challenge us and make us examine ourselves in depth. It is not enough simply to recognise this and dismiss it as being the same for everybody. It is not just a question of a crisis of numbers or mere statistics, fruit of the times we live in. This situation must bring us to serious reflection and evaluation. To examine ourselves as to the spiritual and Comboni quality of the planning at present in force, in the reality of the various sectors of the life of the Institute, would certainly be the most important product of the Chapter.

Missionary Animation

45. A great Comboni Missionary, Fr. Enrico Farè, used to say that “*missionary animation is the oxygen of our formation, vocation and mission*”. He was a great animator who affected and conquered many of us. Before him, Fr. Giuseppe Beduschi (+1924) and Fr. Angelo Abbà (+1952), in different times and with different methods, communicated the best of the Comboni charism in missionary animation (MA). It is beyond doubt that the witness of missionaries who are enthusiastic, well balanced, well identified and possessing a rich experience of mission, is the most efficacious tool in the missionary animation of people, the Church and the Institute itself. The Rule of Life (72-76) speaks to us of the importance of transforming our Comboni experience and our passion for the mission into love for the Church. MA which is mediocre and flat betrays a lack of fascination with and passion for the mission, for the Institute and even for one's own vocation.

45.1 In the field of MA we have also noted a great desire to renew our methodology. We still have a long way to go. We feel it is necessary to continue the renewal of our creativity and bring ourselves up to date with the use of the mass media and all the new opportunities presented by technology.

Furthermore, following the example of St. Daniel Comboni, MA must bring us to adopt “*the prophetic attitudes of announcing and denouncing*” and, above all, to take up “*the animation of the people of God, that it may recognise its own missionary responsibilities and commit itself to the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world*” (RV 72).

45.2 The goals proposed in planning were varied and important, just as MA itself is of vital importance. In the General Administration we felt the disadvantage of various changes in the general secretariat. The secretariat has now recommenced normal work. At provincial and continental levels, however, work has continued with abundant good will.

The planning objectives are sound and we note them again since we must continue to work with determination (Implementation GC '03, 5.1):

- Personnel specialised in the field of mass media (CA '03, 129.2).
- Foster courses at continental level for the adequate preparation and formation of animators (CA '03, 129).
- Prepare concrete plans for the distribution of our magazines (CA '03, 129.3).
- Collaborate in the exchange of material between magazines (CA '03, 129.4).

Communion of goods

46. We continued our reflections on the economy and the mission. There can be no fidelity of mission without just and transparent economy. We have journeyed towards the “common fund” (CA '03, 102) among difficulties, resistance and uncertainties with the sole desire of transforming our economy into mission and a mission which is carried out together. Following the Rule of Life, we call to mind that love for the mission and the Institute is shown in sharing what we have and what we are.

46.1 Other goals to be reached and to which we devoted ourselves (Implementation CA '03, 5. 3.1) are:

- To deepen our understanding of the Fixed Patrimony of a missionary Institute, in order to establish it both at Institute and provincial levels (CA '03, 127).
- To confirm the option of self-limitation in economic goods (CA '03, 103).
- To insert in the Code of Conduct the norms necessary for transparency and ethics in economic administration (cf. 102.5).
- To prepare personnel so as to allow for a balanced rotation of bursars (CA '03, 104). Unfortunately, despite all our efforts, we have not enjoyed much success as regards this last point.

Government of the Institute

47. The General Chapter of 1997, referring to the service of authority, said: “*The disadvantages of a highly centralised structure in our Institute, the difficulties in planning the rotation of personnel, the growing awareness of the need to place both problems and solutions in context, both at provincial and continental levels, show the need for deeper study and – if necessary – a revision of the structural organisation and the modes of coordination within the Institute*” (CA '97, 166).

47.1 Reflection on the government of the Institute has been going on for twelve years now (cf. CA '03, 137-141). During this mandate, a second committee has worked to produce alternative forms of government in the Institute. There have also been reflections at the continental level aimed at sincere collaboration and mutual help in coordinating the Institute.

47.2 It is also true that it is not enough just to change the system of government. As the old saying goes; “Changing the bed does not heal the patient”. While examining alternative systems of

government, we are called to continue our journey of renewal and personal and community conversion. In order to foster leadership at all levels, we all need to grow in the spirit of obedience and belonging to the Institute and the mission lived together.

47.3 Again on the continental level, reflection to enable the unification and joining of provinces and delegations and to cooperate in various activities and sectors has begun.

47.4 Regarding the erection of Poland to a delegation and the delegation of the DCA to a province, the decision was postponed. We first wanted to undertake a journey with DCA and Poland to increase personnel and prepare the move. The time has now come, problems have been solved, both circumscriptions have been provided with more personnel and all is now ready to implement the decision of the previous General Chapter.

47.5 The GC started a process of revision of the methodology of preparation and running of General Chapters (Implementation GC '03, 6.2.2), and appointed a commission for the revision and updating of the statutes for General Chapters.

C - ASPETTI DI IMPEGNO MISSIONARIO

"I am returning from Mozambique tired, wounded and angry:
but I thank God who has allowed me to live in my humanity
one small part of the immense suffering of that people"
(Fr. Cornelio Prandina)

Common cause

48. Things have not improved since Comboni's day: new and worse forms of slavery are springing up which exclude the most vulnerable and make their survival impossible. Comboni calls us to identify these forms and to be present in all works of justice and peace in complete solidarity, making common cause with the victims and the crucified of our time. As already noted, we have many examples of unconditional self-giving, but our "making common cause", our commitment to justice and peace and the integrity of creation, still needs to be freed from a lifestyle which is far removed from the values of the Kingdom which urge us to go to the poor and abandoned.

African diaspora

49. A word or two regarding the world of Africa, not forgetting the other worlds in which we work. The 2003 Chapter Acts underline the close and special ties of the Comboni mission with Africa and confirm once again the preferential, though not exclusive, choice of Africa (cf. CA '03, 37 e 39).

Following the example of Comboni, the African world is still the preferential choice of the Comboni Missionaries. Today more than ever, we are called to direct our efforts not only towards geographical Africa, but towards the entire African world wherever it may be found. In many places the African world is knocking at our door. In the whole of Italy, Africans make up three percent of the population and four percent in the Venice region. If we recall the example of Comboni, all our communities should become "missionary stations", all attentive and concerned with discovering and keeping in touch with the world of immigration.

Examples such as that of Fr. Bresciani are still the signpost that must be followed and perfected and especially completed, in order to reach the heart of our vocation: announcing the Gospel.

We run the risk of playing the strange game of loving Africa while in Africa, and looking on with some degree of indifference when we see Africa in Europe.

Justice and peace

50. Comboni has taught us evangelical commitment in the fight against injustice. He fought with every means available against the horrors of slavery (cf. W 554 and 3344-55), against all kinds of exploitation of human beings and against the arms trade (cf. W 3349). For him it was a question of justice and genuine Christian charity.

50.1 In the footsteps of the Founder, the Comboni Missionaries have dedicated themselves to alleviating the suffering of the poor, the sick, the marginalised, the refugees and the persecuted. The Gospel teaches us that keeping silent about injustice means taking sides with the oppressor and against the oppressed. Even though something has been done, we must continue to become more involved in the cause of those who suffer.

50.2 In the field of Justice and Peace (Implementation CA '03, 2. 1) we have subscribed to *Vivat International*, which is an NGO supported by various Missionary Institutes that engages in *advocacy* and *lobbying* at the United Nations on behalf of the excluded; we have collaborated with the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) in *AEFJN (Africa & Europe, Faith & Justice Network)* in the European Parliament; we have participated in the initiative of the NGO Group *Tavola di Roma* which the Vatican Secretariat of State is organising as a platform for all the NGOs inspired by Gospel values.

We are still lagging behind in:

- Collaborating with the continents in making continental plans in order to establish priorities, methodologies and means (CA '03, 48.2).
- Making a plan of OGF to educate towards JPIC (CA '03, 47.2).

This Chapter must renew our commitment that “justice and peace may become more and more a constitutive part of the preaching of the Gospel” (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa '95*, 69 e 107).

Islam

51. The challenge of Islam is always present in the missions and in all parts of the world, especially in African countries. Our provinces of Africa, even if in varying degrees, must all face up to the powerful growth of the presence of Islam. Islam is establishing itself everywhere, with the danger of destabilisation at all levels: religious, political, social and cultural, amounting in some countries to persecution, terrorism and war.

51.1 In line with the 2003 Chapter directives on competent preparation and deep knowledge of Islam (Implementation CA '03, 2.3.5), we committed ourselves to:

- Appoint confreres to study Arabic and Islam.
- Collaborate with Rome-based PISAI to support the activities of Dar Comboni.
- Continue the preferential choice of countries with a strong Islamic presence which are traditionally Comboni areas (e.g. Sudan - Khartoum).

We must continue to pursue our commitment to foster and refine, on the African continent, the group of reflection on Islam “*with the help of specialists and in collaboration with other Institutes*”.

51.2 In recent Chapters we were invited to respond by promoting the preparation of confreres for the Islamic world. We have really done our best to respond to this challenge but we must surely continue to redouble our efforts.

Local Churches

52. Our total collaboration with the local Church qualifies our way of doing mission. Despite some residual domineering and individualism, we are on the right track towards giving the local Church a privileged place. Speaking of the local Church, we cannot deny that we can always create

dangerous *pitfalls*: pitfalls for the local Church which inherits structures it can never maintain; pitfalls for bishops who find they must bear the economic burden of a diocese which swallows up capital; the pitfall for the faithful who compare the times of the missionaries to those of the local clergy. There is also the pitfall for us who, failing to consider continuity, see all we have built up crumble away to nothing.

CONCLUSION

“I am happy to return to Uganda.
In reality, I have always lived in the mission”
(Fr. Paolo Serra)

Hoping and expressing thanks

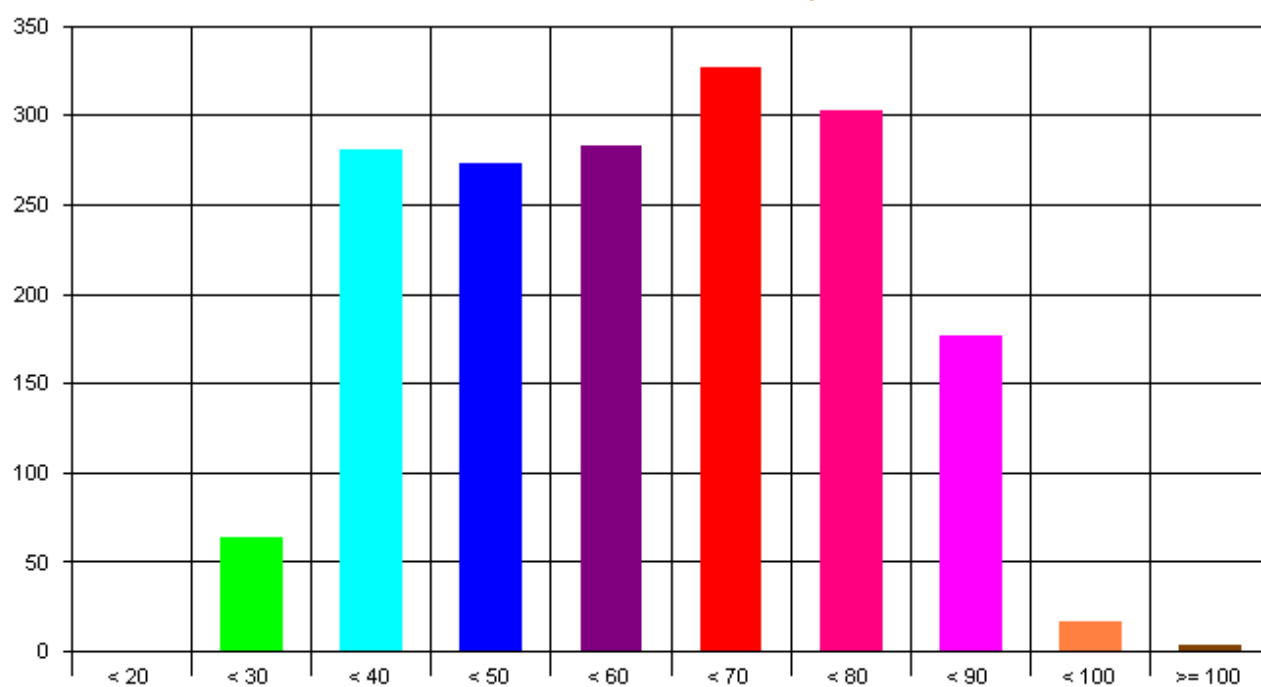
53. All Institutes have their Paschal hour, a time of *diminutio* and of expectation. This, however, is not an hour of spiritual decay: it is an hour of poverty, and poverty is a Paschal virtue. In our lives we must adhere to those words of Isaiah (6, 13) where the Lord promises that even if the oak falls, only the root remains but that root is capable of producing a new and holy shoot. This is the great hope with which we must live the religious and missionary life of today. And when we have done all that is required of us, we thank God as his servants. The important thing is “*not to place obstacles in God’s way*” (W 6561).

Rome, 31 May, 2009
Pentecost Sunday

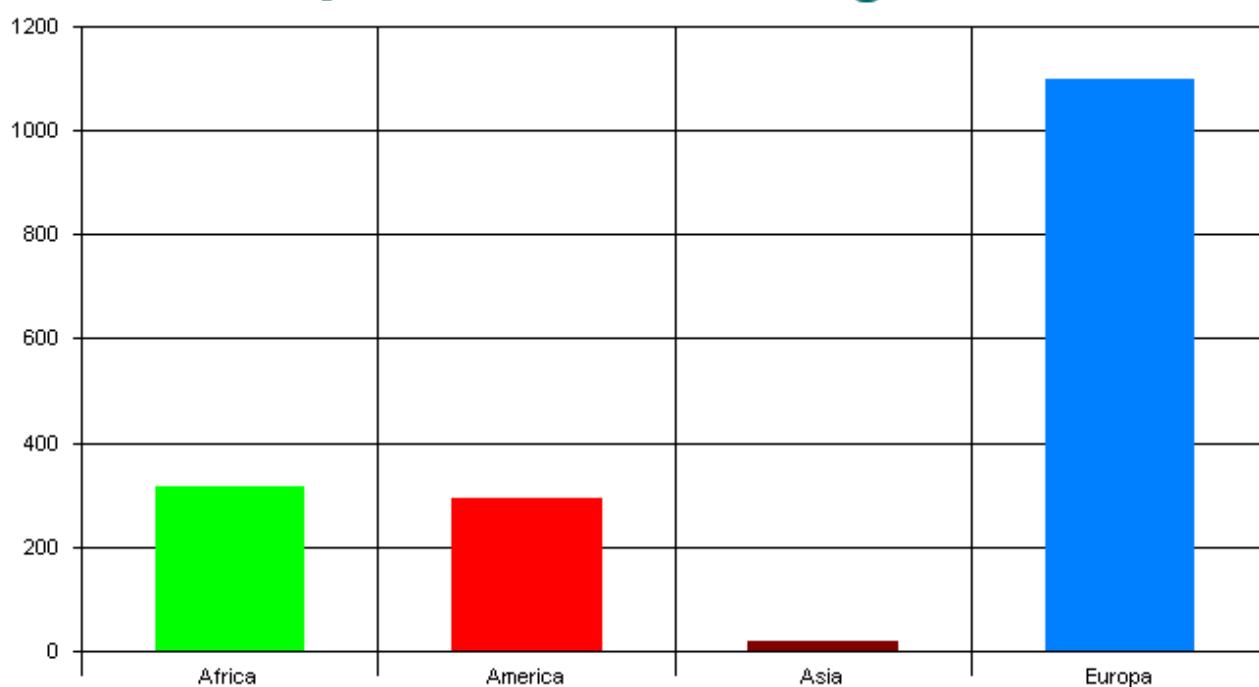
Fr. Teresino Serra,
Superior General
Fr. Fabio Carlo Baldan,
Vicar General
Fr. Odelir José Magri,
Assistant General
Fr. Tesfamariam Ghebrecriostos W.,
Assistant General
Bro. Umberto Martinuzzo,
Assistant General

Comboniani per età al 1.1.2009

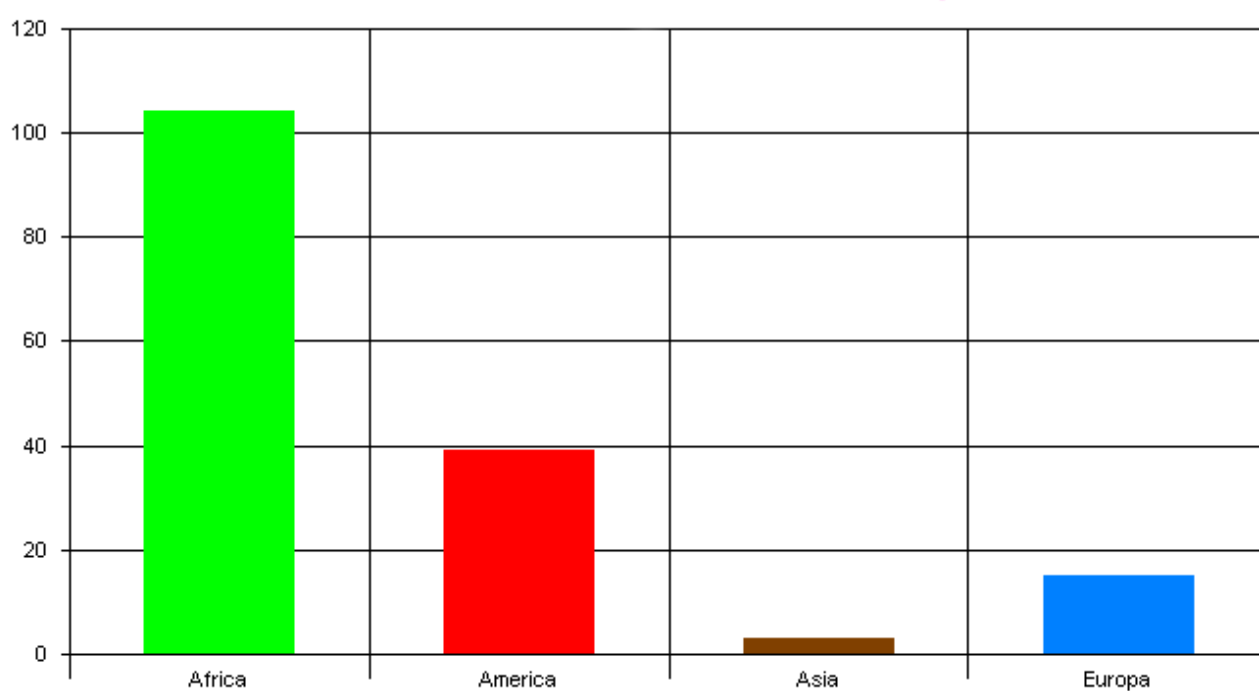
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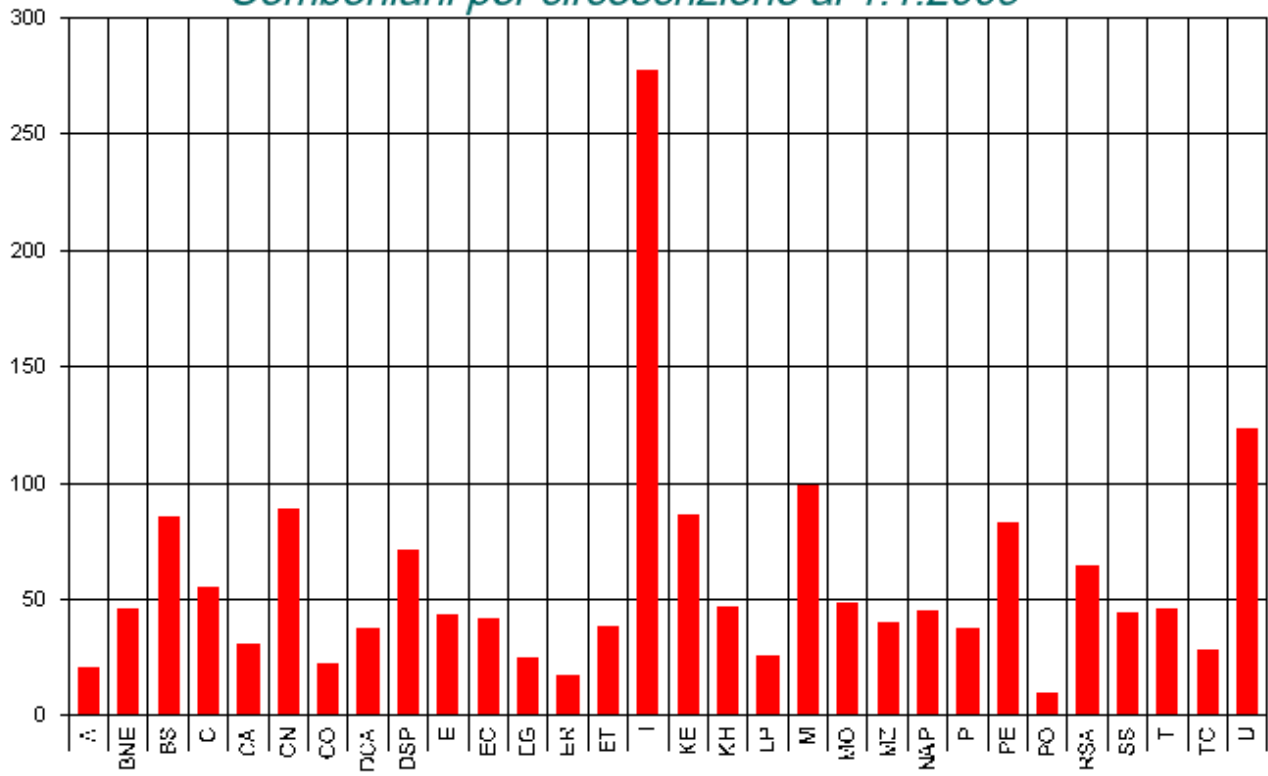
Comboniani per Continente di origine - al 1.1.2009



Scolastici Comboniani per Continente di Origine al 1.1.2009



Comboniani per circoscrizione al 1.1.2009

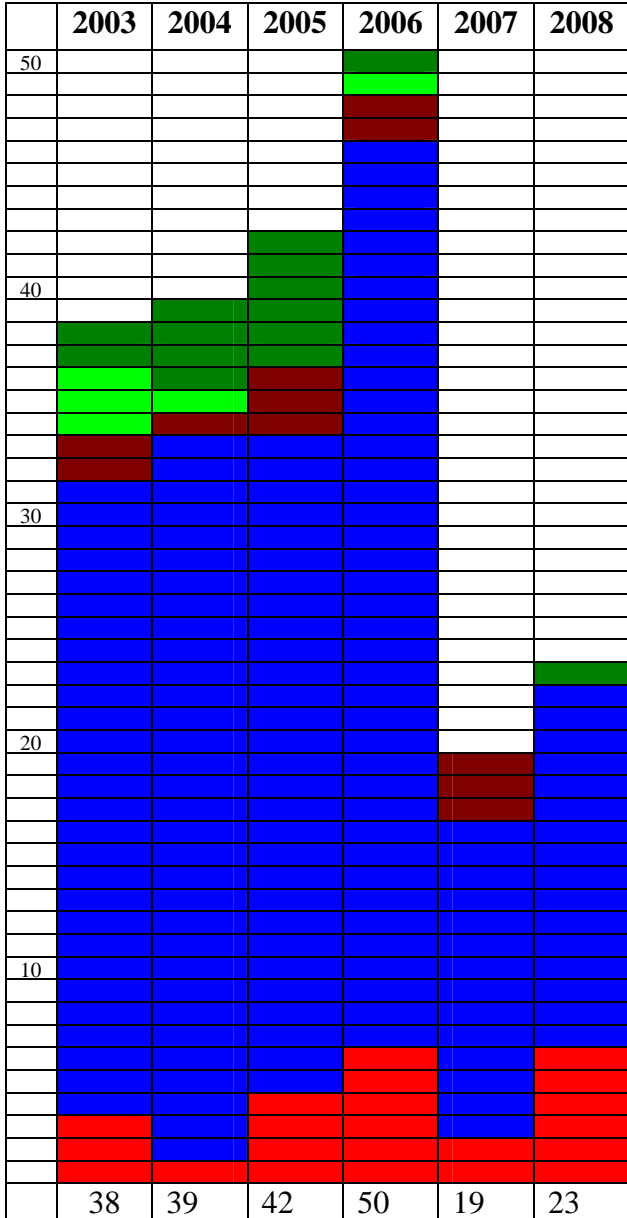


USCITI DEL SESSENNIO 2003-2008

TOT. 211

INCARDINATI
 VOTI TEMPORANEI
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