

SCHEDA 2 – DECOLONIAL MISSION

The General Council's letter on mission emphasises the need to place mission at the heart of the Institute's life. This also means addressing the need to overcome 'coloniality' – that is, the condition of the modern world built upon racial, economic and cultural hierarchies established during the colonial era and still in operation today. St Daniel Comboni anticipated this critical thinking: in the century when European colonialism thought it was bringing 'civilisation' to Africa, Comboni dedicated himself to the regeneration of Africa with Africa, to build together the civilisation of love. The modern Christian mission emerged only in the 16th century within the context of European colonial expansion—an expansion characterised by the invasion, appropriation and plundering of the territories of the New World and its peoples. The frantic search for gold was accompanied by the tireless work of subjugating and converting the natives, who were needed as labourers in the sugar mills and mines. Although there were prominent voices within the Church of the time who, together with the indigenous peoples of the Americas, denounced the brutality of the conquerors, in most cases, organic complicity was indisputably the norm.

Even today, although the political and territorial aspects of colonialism are a thing of the past, colonial dynamics remain dominant: for example, those of an extractive and predatory economy, or those of a cultural invasion characterised by the predominance of Western knowledge at the expense of indigenous, local or non-Western knowledge. The colonial past continues to influence contemporary societies, in institutions, education systems, the media, language, and even ways of thinking. The profound global crisis of our times – simultaneously geopolitical, climatic, economic, food-related and migratory, which is putting life on the planet at risk – is nothing but the result of this dominant colonial system.

Since the decree **Ad gentes** (1965), a profound redefinition of mission has taken hold, affecting its theological, ecclesiological, pastoral and anthropological dimensions, right up to the apostolic exhortation **Evangelii gaudium** (2013). When the latter makes mission the paradigm of the Church's life and pastoral care, it uses the metaphor of the 'Church going forth', indicating a fundamental and subversive shift, a stepping outside of itself, a detachment to perceive and question the reality of the world from the perspective of the poor and others. This is a movement of decentralisation, of repositioning oneself in the peripheries, but also a departure from a mentality of domination, from a complex of cultural superiority, and from the privileges that are the fruit of unjust and dehumanising structures. A mission conceived from a decolonial perspective fuels the aim of denouncing and combating all forms of exclusion (power), exclusivism (knowledge) and exclusivity (being), whilst building new relationships based on participation, learning and the recognition of otherness. All this leads to a style of mission characterised by a dynamic of going out, a humble itinerancy open to encounter, which allows itself to be defined by what comes from outside (rather than by self-referentiality); it is a matter of arriving as 'strangers', asking for hospitality (rather than imposing one's own world, in colonial style), recognising and accompanying the work of the Spirit. All this calls for a deep sense of self-awareness and reflection on missionary practice, to discern how best to promote a decolonial mission. To assist in this task, we are providing three in-depth articles. Firstly, some historical insights into Comboni's experience (**Giampaolo Romanato**). A man of his time, characterised by the dual concept of evangelisation and 'civilisation', he underwent a sort of conversion in his later years, following his encounter with the peoples of the Nuba Mountains. He realised that differences in customs and technology did not imply 'backwardness'; on the contrary, he was struck by the moral and cultural integrity of these peoples, as we see in some of his writings from 1877 to 1879. Secondly, **Stefano Raschiotti's** reflection, drawing on the Latin American context, helps us to understand the Church's journey towards a decolonial mission. Finally, **Antoine Pooda** helps us to deepen our reflection on overcoming coloniality in the African context and the crucial role of the Church in this process.

COMMUNITY DAY – OUR MISSIONARY STYLE

After allowing time for personal reading and reflection on the three short essays on this topic, the community sets aside a day for reflection, sharing and communal discernment. The following structure is proposed: personal reflection, sharing and communal discernment, and celebration.

At the heart of personal reflection (1 hour)

The insights offered by the formation programme on this topic have touched upon various aspects of the Comboni mission in relation to a decolonial style of mission. Each member of the community is invited to reflect on their own mission experience which, more than any other, has distanced itself from their own protagonism and cultural assumptions, to make room for participation, for becoming the other, for inhabiting the frontiers: take the time to relive it through a contemplative gaze, seeking to discern the presence of the Lord in the unfolding of history. Then, in an atmosphere of prayer, reflect:

- = How do the ideas put forward in the written contributions – or in other personal reflections – relate to that experience?
- They might offer insights drawn from Comboni's experience in the Nuba Mountains...
- or perhaps on overcoming colonialism in Africa...
- or maybe on models of decolonial mission...
- = What does the Spirit suggest to you through this new awareness of your community's mission style today?

Community discernment¹

- = Invocation to the Holy Spirit
- = Generative question: From your prayerful reflection on your mission experience, what does the Holy Spirit suggest to you regarding our community's style of mission?
- = Silence
- = First round of sharing: (30 minutes)
- > Each person offers their response to the question under consideration (maximum 2–3 minutes)
- > There are no comments or reactions, only attentive listening
- > A moment of silence between one person's sharing and the next
- > It may be helpful to note down what strikes you during the sharing
- = Second round of sharing: (30 minutes)
- > What have you heard or sensed from the others in your group? What does the Spirit prompt you to share about what you have heard?
- > It is no longer about what you think, but about what you have heard from the other members of the group
- > There are no comments or reactions, only attentive listening
- = Third round of sharing: (30 minutes)
- > What missionary style, in line with the Comboni charism, is the Lord asking of us today as a community? What is the Spirit saying to us as a group?
- > At the end of the sharing, the community discusses and tries to identify one or more actions to put into practice, in response to the Spirit's promptings
- > A secretary records what the group, together, decides as 1–2–3 key points
- > Check for consensus: do we, as a community, agree with these key points to be put into practice?
- > When the group has finished, a volunteer closes the conversation with a prayer of thanksgiving

The celebration

The community gives thanks during the Eucharist, preparing for it with a specially organised programme.

¹ Guidelines for groups of up to 5–6 people. For larger groups, this exercise can be carried out in small groups. In such cases, at the end of the third round of sharing, there will be an opportunity to share the results of the group work.