

COURSE FOR FORMATORS - AFRICA NAIROBI - 1996

MISSION AND CHARISM Fr. Francesco Pierli

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE WEEK

1. In the context of the Course

1.1 Beatification

The beatification is a grace for our formation process. Now we have many more opportunities to present our Founder to our candidates and also they are better prepared, intellectually and emotionally, to accept and love our Founder more.

1.2 The African Synod

The African Synod and document «Ecclesia in Africa» are also graces for us because they help us to localise, to contextualise our formation work, to inculturate our charism.

1.3 The history of our Congregation

To know our history is also important for the presentation of the charism because the charism must be lived today in continuity with our Founder and our history. Faithfulness to our roots and to our own times. To know mistakes and unfaithfulness may be also useful because we can learn from them. We have to pay special attention to persons. The models are important because they show different ways of living the one, same charism, even though they are not to be copied. By accepting them we grow «within»: by seeing different models we grow inside a 'tradition' and, at the same time, are opened to different ways of incarnating the charism. In fact, each person has his own way of living the same charism. In our faithfulness to charism there is also space for «experimentation».

2. Charism and mission: inductive method

Our reflection on the Comboni charism cannot be separated from mission as it is today. They go together.

We missionaries are more interested in the inductive method than in the deductive one: to start from our history, from our own experience. In order to be grasped, a message has to find the person somehow prepared to welcome it. For instance, when we present the Bible, in order to better understand we start from the life and experience of the people. A message completely new will not be grasped by those whom we address.

Our candidates have already an experience of Christ. They have also an experience of transformation (conversion), which prepares them to receive and to be challenged by the new proposal of the Comboni charism. The formators should pay strong and reverent attention to what they are and to their history.

From this point of view the candidates are far more demanding today than before. If they feel that we try to impose in all of them just one rigid model, without attention to their personal uniqueness, convictions, emotions, feelings, wounds, aspirations, they might adjust their external **behaviour** to our injunctions, but the real self will remain **untouched**.

This is the major challenge we have today. If you accept the candidates as they are (because you recognise and accept that there is a «mystery» in them) and they feel that they are accepted without judgmental attitudes, then they also will accept us. If they have a positive experience of acceptance then they are more ready to welcome our message. Acceptance may also mean to be patient with them: it takes time to feel accepted and free. The risk of trusting acceptance is a sine qua non condition for authentic interpersonal formative dialogue. At times acceptance is made more difficult by cultural difference, age gap, etc.

3. Charism and Mission: their meaning

What do we mean by charism and by mission in our days?

3.1 Charism: in the Founder charism is the experience of a strong presence and action of the Spirit. Historically speaking it means that the Spirit worked in him. The beatification is a clear act of faith: the Holy Spirit has guided this person and worked through him in history. The Spirit is the prevalent protagonist. What Jesus did was done in the Spirit («led by the Holy Spirit...», says Luke). Presence and action: a lasting experience of them both. Hence the Founder is a mere co-operator of the Spirit, nothing more and nothing less. The same is for us: we consecrate our own existence to co-operate with the Spirit (RL 56).

3.2 Mission: Redemptoris Missio, ch.3: the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of mission. So Mission is the transforming presence and action of the Spirit in human history, so that the world may be changed into the Kingdom of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: in the presentation of the topics, throughout the following day I will always keep into account the demands and conditions of the missionary presence and work nowadays. Mission will be the common denominator throughout.

Sharing and questions:

- The first priority, right now, in our formation is to welcome the candidates, so that they may feel accepted.
- By presenting the charism we try to grasp it in the personal life (history) of the candidate: then the deductive method is complementary to the inductive. But the major emphasis should stress the inductive one.
- The fact that we welcome the candidates doesn't mean that we don't have to be sincere and clear towards them. For the vocation discernment the candidate must be sincere also and to have the elements needed to become a comboni missionary.
For the discernment we have to consider three elements in the candidate: the Glory of God, the salvation of others and his own 'salvation' (self-affirmation). We have to see if all of them are present (psychologically they may put first the self-affirmation).
- One way of showing concern for our candidates is, for instance, to help also the candidates who are sent home, assuring them of some sort of financial help (also because many are coming from very poor families). We cannot welcome our candidates without getting involved in their own personal history, also in their financial situation.

(P.S. Per quanto riguarda l'attuazione e l'inculturazione del carisma è utile leggere il cap. V del documento della Pontificia Commissione Biblica «Interpretation of the Bible»).

II. THE MISSIONARY ELEMENT IN OUR FORMATION PROCESS

Since we are missionaries the normal priestly formation for priesthood candidates and the normal religious formation for brothers are inadequate and insufficient. We need something more specific: a missionary formation, according to the ministry of our candidates: missionary priestly ministry and missionary brother ministry.

1. Hints at the formation to mission in the history of the Church

When Catholic missionaries started getting in touch with other peoples and cultures (especially Arabic-Muslim world and China) they realised that they needed a specific preparation for their mission. The situation was no more like the time of St Paul when there was an unified world (beginning of the second millennium; the Spaniard Ramon Lullo, 1235-1315, deserves special mention).

An example is St Francis Xavier. At the beginning he was sent to India to take care of the Portuguese colony. Afterwards he shifted his attention to the local people. In India he invited people «to believe in Jesus Christ and to be baptised in order to be saved». When he reached Japan and started telling people that they should be baptised to be saved, he was challenged by their reaction: if baptism was needed to be saved, what about their ancestors? («Who were to be blamed: our ancestors, or you Christians who arrived only now? Anyway, we prefer to be in communion with our ancestors in hell, rather than with you foreigners in paradise»). St Francis was greatly struck by the level of their reflections. He thought that this wisdom was coming from China and then planned to reach there (He would die on the way). St Francis Xavier realised that the theological formation he had received was no more adequate; the mission had unveiled the weakness of traditional theology.

Very soon the Jesuits became aware that in order to preach the Gospel they had to dialogue with local cultures. Actually, only the Jesuits took that challenge seriously (rather than the Franciscans and the Dominicans).

Dialogue with local culture became an important issue for the whole Church. Also because of that, one century after, in 1622, Propaganda Fide was founded. The emphasis was on the study of religion, language and local wisdom (see document of 1659). A similar experience had been done, in the first millennium, by Benedictines, who also tried to respect the culture of the people they were evangelising.

In 1919, Benedict XV, in «Maximum Illud» says that missionaries have to be given a specific preparation: spirituality, theology, understanding of other parts of the world. Their preparation needs something more than the one required for priests and religious. Also others documents of the Church (like «Princeps Pastorum» of John XXIII, in 1958) insisted on that. But this general principle never became a concrete programme of action, it didn't turn into a concrete programme for missionary formation.

2. Formation to Mission in our congregation

2.1 The time of Comboni

The experience of Comboni in this field was very clear. He was a disciple of D. Mazza, who was convinced that what his seminarians were doing in the diocesan seminary of Verona was not enough for their preparation for the missionary presence and activity. So D. Mazza added medicine, languages (Arabic)..., things which were needed for surviving and for ministry in the missions.

Also Comboni was convinced that the formation imparted in the seminary of Verona was not sufficient to prepare his missionaries. In the Rules of 1871, ch. 9-10-11, he gives some guidelines for the human, spiritual and intellectual preparation of the candidates, that should be added to the programme of the diocesan seminary. The time his missionaries would spend in Cairo was not only a period of acclimatisation, but was also a time of preparation for their missionary work.

2.2 Transformation in religious congregation

With the transformation of the Institute in a religious congregation a great change occurred in the style of our formation. The 'religious' formation took over in our Institute.

The Jesuits emphasised community life from a «religious» point of view, with a transition from a «missionary» community to a «religious» community. Community life is no more for the sake of the missionary work but to be «protected» as «religious». This was also the concern of Mgr Sogaro when he visited the missionary field in 1883: he sees the need of «separating» men and women (according to the interpretation of the religious life of the time). When the first group of FSCJ arrived in Africa this new «religious» mentality was a matter of tension between them and the «missionaries of Comboni». There was a kind of split which became also a tension between the religious superior and the vicar apostolic (which often led to resignation or dismissal of the vicar apostolic). Very often our formators (especially spiritual directors) didn't have a mission experience.

In 1937, when the scholastics started the publication of Combonianum, one of the main purposes was to recuperate the missionary dimension of Comboni which was lacking in the formation of our candidates (priests and brothers). One of the means to cultivate the presence of missionary spirit was the reports (diaries) which the superiors of the missions used to send to the general superior (a custom of the Jesuits), published in the Bulletin of the Congregation.

2.3 Vatican II and the «personalistic revolution»

In 1969, thanks to Vatican II, another great change came: the «personalistic revolution», a formation based on the person. The candidate has also to be a protagonist of his own formation, he has to be more personally involved in the process of formation; a passage from «passive» to «active» formation.

This new style of formation was against two negative aspects of the old one: dichotomy and mass formation. It fosters «integral formation» and it is imparted in small groups.

Signs of this transformation are:

- the international scholasticates: where the value of internationality and the contact with mission is more present (it was meant to open some in mission territories);
- to send scholastics (especially in the DSP) to the missions before ordination (some missionaries institutes still have this kind of training);
- presence of the Founder in formation;
- the study of missiology in the «consortiums» where we send our candidates; missionary researches during theology; intellectual preparation to be more mission oriented;
- growing presence of mission in our formation.

III. MISSIONARY METHODOLOGY AND CHARISM IN OUR FORMATION

The main trend of formation in our institute is to expose the candidate to the influence of mission; mission has to influence the localisation - contextualisation of the charism in the different continents.

1. Vatican II and the new vision of mission

After Vatican II a global mission methodology emerged with three main characteristics:

1.1 Affirmation: to be able to see the positive elements in each people, that is to detect the presence of «**semina Verbi**» and of the **influence of the Holy Spirit** in one's culture, religious experience, traditional wisdom... in others and in myself; this is extremely important to grasp the «world» that is in me and in the others. To see only the negative aspects creates in us a sense of insecurity and blurs the riches of a person. Instead when you are able to see «positively» it becomes a source of joy for what you are, and for what the others are. Negative elements have been too much stressed. Mutual respect is very difficult if you don't feel appreciated. Without «affirmation» there is no dialogue, because you don't see the good of others. This attitude enables us to see God's presence in our own history and in the history of our confreres and students.

1.2 Liberation and conversion: both are typical of missionary work, even if in the past liberation was less stressed than conversion.

1.3 Fullness and fulfilment: missionary work should help people to reach their fullness, their global development as persons.

In formation these three prongs of missionary methodology are to play a major role.

2. Consequences for mission and formation

These elements of the new missionary methodology of Vat II imply several consequences for the mission and for our formation:

2.1 Creation and redemption: we are rediscovering far more than before the importance of creation; and culture is part of creation: it is the first incarnation of the Word of God. Redemption cannot contradict creation. There has been always in the Church a certain tension and uneasiness between Creation and Redemption. An example is the tension which there was for centuries between faith and science (a «good» Christian couldn't be a good scientist). Only in our days science and faith were reconciled, with the «solution» in 1991 of the case of Galileo.

Creation in history becomes culture, as consequence of the relationship between the world and human beings. If it is so, we could say that we cannot very much «manipulate» the character of peoples and persons. How much can we expect the people to change? Hence, how far can conversion go in us and our candidates? Redemption has to help people to change, but creation remains there; redemption cannot destroy or deny creation: the Blessed Trinity is the fountain of both, creation and redemption.

How are the vows to be understood in this context? We are sexual human beings: how are we to live sexuality in virginity? Chastity cannot deny creation, hence sexuality. Some ways of presenting the vow of chastity tantamount to a denial of sexuality. How are we to combine obedience and freedom? Without freedom there is no human being. And poverty should not contradict our mastering the world. How are the vows at service of the person as it appears in Genesis?

2.2 Proclamation and Dialogue: the proclamation of the Gospel cannot ignore other religions, other ways of searching for God. This also is to be applied to formation!

2.3 Contextualisation and communion with others churches: there is a strong difference in the way of conceiving ecclesial unity today: in the past it was uniformity (differences were looked upon with suspicion); now it is communion in plurality. This is to be applied also to charisms.

2.4 New solidarity and fraternity: mission activity is seen at the service of a new solidarity; missionary communities are signs and instruments of it.

3. New vision of mission and charism

In which sense does this new vision of mission challenge charism?

3.1 Charism: an experience of the presence of the Holy spirit

The charism in the Founder is, first of all, an experience of the presence of the Holy spirit. Comboni had already a deep experience of God, but in St Peter's, when he conceived his Plan for the salvation of Africans and was confirmed in his missionary vocation for Africa, he experienced an «irruption» (something unexpected) of God's initiative in his life, a new presence and grip of the Holy Spirit out-pouring from the pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd.

In our candidates, the experience of the charism should be a kind of irruption, something new, unexpected, a U-turn in life. Our task is to help the candidates to insert this new experience into their own experience of God, going back as much as possible in their personal history. The charism is not their first experience of God, even if it is a special and new experience. We are to help them see what kind of experience of God they have, starting from the beginning of their faith journey; the charism is to be grafted there.

Vocation is an answer to a **call**. We discover that life is not only a answer to a «human aspiration» but something more (personalisation of the charism, as something extra). The perpetual vows are a definitive answer to this presence of God in our life. In our spiritual direction we should underline this attention to the presence of God in the life of our candidates, more than to other aspects of behaviour or character. There is no real spiritual growth without a reference to this presence from above.

It is important, therefore, to see the charism of Comboni in the context of his experience of God. Without this reference to the presence of God, the charism becomes ideology. To see the experience of God in the life of Comboni (like in the life of Jesus) helps the candidate to read his own history. Liturgy, prayer, like the other aspects of the formation journey, should help

the candidate to be aware of this acting presence of God in his life, before and after the call and the «yes» to the call.

3.2 Charism: an experience incarnated in the life of a person

The charism, as an «incarnated» experience implies attention to the person as he is, an historical human being.

Today we are able to look at Comboni as he is, with his qualities and limitations. Fr Capovilla in his biography of Comboni (1937) didn't see defects in Comboni. But Comboni, like St Paul, was a leader: he had a strong «intuition» and he put all his person (qualities but also limitations) at the service of that divine-human project, with his strong character (which would also be a frequent source of tensions in his life). His «holiness» comes from his co-operation with the presence of God; both good qualities and limitations were put at the service of God's plan, as St Paul points out in the 2 Cor. Holiness is not absence of limitations and sins, but a charismatic reunification of all aspects of one's person at the service of God's plan. Our formation work should aim mostly at how to put «what we are» at the service of God, more than to focus our attention on «being different». Some aspects of our character will never change. It is better to work on our positives aspects. God has a different mould for each person. Each one of us is called to a personal and unique fullness in Jesus Christ. This fullness is not the same for everybody. Then we would say that we should give less behavioural suggestions and create more awareness of God's presence in the life of our candidates. Our task as formators is to co-operate with the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the only one who is able to «convince» the candidate, through affirmation, liberation-conversion and fulfilment-fullness. He is - as the RL points out - THE FORMATOR, with capital letters.

For personal reflection and group work:

1. The presence of Mission in the stages of our formation: how much is Mission present in each stage of formation (in our spirituality, activities and interaction)?
2. What does it mean «affirmation» in Postulancy, Noviciate and Scholasticate/CIF?

MISSION AND SPIRITUALITY
Fr. Francesco Pierli

RL, chapter one; AG 84; RM, ch. 8;

I. CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY

See REILLY, «Spirituality for mission» (Orbis Books), written by a Jesuit working in the Philippines.

Let us clarify the terms charism and spirituality, because they are not synonymous.

1. Charism

1.1 Sacramental and liturgical presence

Charism is an experience of the presence and action of the Spirit in us. There are special moments when this presence is felt in a particular way and is celebrated: in the sacraments (presence of the Spirit in Christ and in us) and in the liturgical year. They are basic structures of Christian life.

1.2 Charismatic presence

This presence of the Spirit is linked to the charism (the charismatic dimension of one's life). It has to do with the personal vocation of each one of us and particular moments of life (kairos).

Some basic characteristics of the **action of the Spirit**: it transforms us in Christ. And this **transformation in Christ** has three dimensions:

- Christ is the **Son of the Father**: the Spirit leads us to a filial relationship with God as a Father (we have always «doubts» about it). Our relationship with God is never a «solved problem» (like the presence of the parents in the life of a son: it is not always easy); it may become also a challenge (the denial of God's existence, as it was proclaimed by the youth movement of the revolution of '68, has something to do with the complex of Oedipus: «If He is there I am not free, there is no place for me»). We could also say that the relationship between Jesus and his Father was not always easy. Sometimes we idealise it too much (see temptations, for example).
- Christ is the **Brother**: Jesus became gradually a brother. One thing is to be a human being, another thing is to become a brother (He will learn it on the cross);
- Christ is the **Messiah**: that means He has been «sent» to the world for a certain «task»: it is not only a presence but an active presence; a task entrusted by the Father, anointed for it by the Spirit.

As an example, we could see how the Holy Spirit transformed Comboni: in his relationship with God (many times he felt abandoned by God); in his relationship with others (one of the main difficulties for his beatification: he was a very gifted man in public relations, but he was considered as «troublesome»); in his awareness of been sent by God to the Africans and empowered for it by the Spirit.

2. Spirituality

Spirituality has to do with what a person needs for a certain **style of living and work**; with our **motivations** (it matters not only what we are doing but also **why** we are doing it); it has also something to do with **attitudes** (RL 3: a Comboni missionary is the one who contemplates the attitudes of the Heart of Christ); and also virtues and behaviour.

Attitudes are deep orientations in one's life, which imply:

- a deep **intellectual** conviction (at level of intellect);
- an **emotional** attachment to it (in our daily life we follow more emotions than convictions). We should give more attention to this aspect (for instance, the attachment to Christ, Comboni and the congregation should be strongly emotional not only intellectual). In our African environment feelings and emotions are more important than ideas. The problem is how to form these emotions. We also need to heal some feelings, emotional wounds.
- the **operational** element: operational experience of the value. It is important to taste the value, to become involved, to act according to and upon what we believe and feel.

3. Charism and spirituality

Spirituality is part of charism, the heart of the charism, which provides «action with soul»; the «inside» of the charism, whereas the «ministry» is the «outside».

II. SPIRITUALITY AND MISSION

Let us see the dynamism of missionary ministry, as to unveil elements of missionary spirituality.

1. Exodus

Our missionary vocation implies, first of all, an «exodus», that means: to come out of one's «cradle» and to dare to become «nobody» in a new set-up (kenosis); to leave our own family, which implies loss of «protection» and self-affirmation; and all of this because we are «sent» (there is a «mission» behind us). This awareness of being sent is a source of serenity and «parresia», i.e. courage to face difficulties. This dimension of «being sent» is one of the main pillars of the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus: the Good Shepherd has been «sent» (Jn 10 and 17). VD RM 87.

The sense of being sent is very important (a mission «out of obedience») and we must say that it is not much present in our candidates. Very often we can realise that vocation for them is rather and only a personal choice. Obviously, then, when difficulties arrive, disappointment easily comes: «this was not what I had chosen!».

Mission for us is more than «an experience» in our life. There is no missionary activity without this consciousness of being sent. This consciousness implies also our communion with the Church (mission «within» the Church): we are sent by God through the Church.

2. Incarnation/localisation of myself

Each one of us is «incarnated» in a concrete human context (family, culture, country). Missionaries are called to a second incarnation. Tension between my first incarnation (where I was born) and the second one (where I am sent) may arise. Our first incarnation means «walls» (it makes us «different» from others); instead missionaries are called to be bridges. This second incarnation also implies: experience of loneliness, physical difficulties of adaptation, experience/awareness of our own weakness. We discover that we are less than what we thought we were, and yet we should look at these limitations (of any kind) with St Paul's eyes: «when I am weak then I am strong» (2 Cor 12,1-12).

3. Irruption of the Kingdom (breaking-in of the Kingdom)

Before the experience of our missionary vocation, God was already part of our life. But the call of God was like an «irruption» of God in our life, something new which gave a U-return to our life. Something of the kind occurred when we came to Africa to preach the Good News: we realise that in Africa the experience of God was already there, at least in germ, before our arriving. The strong sense of the presence of the spiritual («other») world, very much typical of African cultures, is a sign of this presence. But with the preaching of the Gospel something **new** comes. Mission means to go beyond that «normal» experience of God. Like the presence of God in Jesus. He is called «God with us» (Emanuel). In Jesus God becomes really «with us» (Isaiah). But God was already with his people. There are many signs of this presence of God in the life of Israel: Exodus (day and night God accompanies his people in the desert), the prophets, the Temple, the Law... But in spite of this normal and traditional experience of God's presence, when Jesus comes he dares be called «God with us» (as an accomplishment of the prophecies), as a special a sign of a special presence, something new, a deeper and far closer presence of God among his people. So there is continuity with the Old Testament but also discontinuity.

This was also the experience of St Paul: he knew that the people he was evangelising had already an experience of God, but he was aware that he was bringing something new (cf. Rm 4,15-19; 1 Cor 12,13; 1Tess 1,5).

When Comboni celebrated his first mass in the heart of central Africa he felt a great emotion because he was aware of this deeper presence of God in this continent: in that moment God was becoming present in a «new» way.

The awareness of this «newness» is very important even for our work in formation. Even if our postulants had already an experience of God in their life, when they embrace the missionary vocation something new should happen: this experience becomes not only deeper but goes beyond their previous experience so that it knows a new beginning. And this «newness» has to become visible.

In the Gospel Jesus identifies this new presence of God with the arrival of «God's Kingdom» (Mk 1,14). Actually, Jesus is the «irruption» of the Kingdom. But how does this newness become visible? Mk 16,15-18 speaks of «the signs which will be associated with believers», the signs associated with the mission of the apostles (cf. Lc 9,1-2): the signs of the new presence of God among men. What are the signs of God's Kingdom in the life of a missionary? In the life of the candidates?

3.1 Prayer

A missionary is the new presence of God, sent by Him («man of God»), especially in our days when there are so many other ‘presences’ (but also in the time of Comboni). A first sign of this new and special presence of God is **prayer**. A new presence of God generates a new kind of prayer as a sign of that presence. Without a clear and strong spirit of prayer we can doubt that there is really a special presence of God. And it has to be a visible prayer because it must be a sign!

A missionary is first of all a man of prayer and the missionary community should be a community of prayer, as a sign that they are in a special contact with God. They thus cultivate a new type of relationship with Him (new covenant). A Christian prayer is a new type of prayer. In our houses of formation prayer is also usually seen as a personal need, not as a sign. Pagans also pray when they are in need. But a Christian prayer is a sign of a new presence and relationship which goes beyond a personal need (see the experience of prayer as a sign of this special presence of God in the life of Fr Sartori).

Are our communities really communities of prayer, clear signs of this «irruption of the Kingdom»? Our consecration is also linked with this kind of prayer.

3.2 Proclamation of the Word of God

Another sign of the irruption of the Kingdom of God is the proclamation of the word of God. The peoples we are called to evangelise have already a «word of God» (in their traditional wisdom God is present somehow). But we bring a new Wisdom which - without despising their own wisdom - is more than the word of human traditions, it is the Word of God. Paul says that he is sent to proclaim the Word and not to baptise (1 Cor 2,1), just to emphasise the importance of this proclamation.

We are at the service of the Word. Unfortunately sometimes in the Sects the emphasis on proclamation of the Word is much stronger than in our missionary activity. We do many things which shadow our main task. Even in our preaching it is not always clear the primacy of the Word of God. As an example, the translation of the catechism of St Pius X in local languages was done in a number of missions before the translation of the Gospels.

A clear sign of the presence of the Kingdom is the sowing of the Word of God. The Word of God has a wisdom which goes beyond any explanation. The Holy Spirit is acting «within it», as we can often see when we share this Word in Small Christian Communities. We are sowers: this the second sign of the new presence of God. Today we have many more instruments to spread the Word of God. The Office (especially of the Readings) is a good occasion to be in touch every day with the Word of God. We should be specialists of the Word of God.

3.3 Concern for the poor

Another sign of the new presence of the Kingdom is the concern for the poor, with a spirit of gratuity. Jesus sent his apostles to deliver the people from the slavery of the Devil and to cure and to heal (cf. Lc 10,1-5). Mission is a new way of God’s Providence among men: a strong element is the concern for the sick. At the beginning of the Church it was much more present: healing was a ministry (cf. Ja 5,14-15: anointment and laying-on of hands). Little by little this service is becoming again part of the normal life of the Church. In this healing there is always a psychological and a spiritual element. In this kind of dealing with sickness there is a perception of the «mystery of sickness» and a partaking in the resurrection.

We have to reconsider our way of seeing charisms in the Church. One example: as priests, haven't we monopolised the ministry of reconciliation? Beside the sacrament, there are other dimensions which the priest should not claim to possess. We should be more humble so as to recognise other charisms. It seems that the priest considers only his priesthood as the real ministry and all the others are only «helpers» (see our relationship with Brothers and Sisters). Missionary activity is not just a question of zeal, it implies also a new mentality, which opens us to the freedom of the Spirit who is at work in everyone, for the sake of the «poor».

The concern for the poor means also concern for Justice and Peace. This concern for the people should be strongly visible (see also Lk 4,4-16).

3.4 Fraternity

Another sign of the presence of the Kingdom is fraternity and communion, within the missionary community (community life is also an essential aspect of consecration) and by making common cause with the people.

This is a new solidarity which comes from the fact that we are all creatures of God and brothers in Jesus Christ. We are called to be signs of a new fraternity brought by the Kingdom of God (let us not forget that the apostles were sent two by two).

Community life is always a challenge. It is based on faith and charity, but we cannot forget that we are «human beings»: pious considerations on fraternity don't help to become a community; we have also to consider the human, social, psychological dimension of community life, namely persons of different age, culture, race, nationality living together. Very often we emphasise too much the spiritual dimension. We should know much better «what we are» as persons (with our character, history and culture). We should offer to our candidates the tools so that they may know themselves (self-understanding).

For instance, conflicts have to be tackled in a more serious way. First of all, we have to accept them as a normal event in human relations. To solve them is not enough to preach on fraternal life; they have to be dealt using the psychological and social means which human sciences offer us (VD De Sousa, «Leadership»), besides resorting to charity.

We should try to present to the candidates the vows more and more from a missionary point of view, by stressing how the vows render us more and more visible signs of God's Kingdom, hence signs of the **irruption** of the Kingdom where we missionaries establish our presence and activity. We should try to build a new missionary theology of the vows according to the trilogy of the missionary methodology: affirmation, liberation-conversion, fulfilment.

TRANSMISSION OF THE CHARISM
Fr. Francesco Pierli

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1. Transmission of an experience from «living persons» to the candidates

Let us clarify what we mean by «transmission of the charism». Actually we are supposed to transmit an experience, not just some ideas; that means, to put in contact the persons who possess this experience with the persons interested in such an experience;

This experience is «incarnated» (mediated):

First of all, there is the **Founder**, an outstanding person in our history, where the charism is present in a special way, the «Living Dead» as we would say in African context (and for that purpose the beatification has been a real blessing); other Comboni Missionaries who lived the same charism (history of the Institute). Without that «communion of saints» it is not possible to «inherit» the charism;

Secondly, there is the Comboni Family, the living persons who incarnate today the charism (also Comboni Sisters and other people who have a share in this charism).

2. Risks to be avoided

- **Notionism:** to stress the intellectual dimension (a real risk also because all our documents are prepared in Europe, where the Cartesian mentality is very much present). Emotions are very important, especially in Africa, but also for the young people of post-modernity; the transmission of charism has to be also a transmission of feelings (enthusiasm, courage, generosity, sense of belonging...); we should find ways of touching also the emotional side of human person.
- **Fragmentation:** to stress too many elements is also a risk; for each stage of formation we have to focalise on one point where all the other elements are connected and flow out from it like from a spring. We have to restrain from making a long list of elements of the charism. We need simplicity (as Comboni wanted when he wrote his Plan). We have to find the heart, the core of each stage.

3. Initiatives

We have to remember that initiatives (means of transmission) have to deal with mind (catechesis) and heart (celebrations and experiences); both have to be taken into account. We also have to remember that candidates are persons, each one a mystery in himself; then we need to pay attention to each one of the candidates, so that each one may absorb the experience of the charism in his own way; and also attention to the group (community): the younger they are the more they are depending on the group.

4. Transmission as process

We have to consider the criteria of graduality and totality.

- **Graduality** has to do with human and Christian level and growth. We are too much concerned with Christian or Comboni growth, and we easily forget the human dimension, the dimension of creation. We are unilateral. See Ratio, for instance: human growth is well present in minor seminary and postulancy, but not so much in noviciate and scholasticate.
- **Totality** from the point of view of what is essential, without caring too much about details, otherwise we would stifle the candidates and we wouldn't have enough time.

II. OBJECTIVES OF FORMATION STAGES

We should try to establish - with as much simplicity and clarity as possible - what is the main goal of each stage of formation so that the way the charism is transmitted may be easily grasped, not only by the candidates but also by ourselves.

- **Postulancy:** to reach that level of human and Christian maturity which allows the candidates to take a personal decision about their presence and action in the world and in the Church: what is their goal in history, within the world and in the Church, to serve others and to fulfil themselves. Key word should be **role**.
Attention to their human person: what they are and whatever is linked with their role (to convince them that they have a special role in history).
- **Noviciate:** to reach that level of human and Christian maturity which allows the candidates to live the missionary comboni consecration. Through the vows the candidates are called to become witnesses of the Kingdom (at a personal and communitarian level). The goal would be missionary consecration, but the key word is **witness**.
- **Temporary vows** (scholasticate and CIF): to reach that level of human and Christian maturity which allows the candidates to exercise in the Church and in the world a given missionary ministry in equipe. Key word in this stage is **ministry**.