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**HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE
OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES**

- OUTLINES -

(Draft)

ROME

COMBONI MISSIONARIES OF THE HEART OF JESUS

1996

"Go to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the ages" (Mt 28:18-20).

"I have only one life to consecrate to the salvation of Africans. I wish I had a thousand to spend all to such a purpose" (Blessed Daniel Comboni)

**OUTLINES
OF THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE
OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES
OF THE HEART OF JESUS**

by

Fr Tarcisio Agostoni MCCJ

**Comboni Missionaries
GENERAL SECRETARIATE FOR FORMATION
ROME - 1996**

FOREWORD

Namugongo,
17th March 1996
Beatification of Daniel Comboni

Dear Confreres,

the peace and joy of the pierced Heart of Jesus be always with you.

I am happy to offer these *Outlines* to all of you who are interested in knowing the main events in the life of Comboni and in the life of our Institute. I chose the term *Outlines* (Italian: "Traccia") because I am not a historian, so I cannot claim to write a book of real History. This would demand much more research work, that I cannot do in Uganda. Moreover I do not intend to be full-time on research work, like some of our confreres. I know I will not satisfy the good wishes of all the provinces and all confreres.

I have been following these papers when teaching our history to the Novices in Namugongo Noviciate, and they were usually satisfied.

1. The main purposes of this work are two:

First, to offer a text to our houses of formation according to the "Ratio Studiorum" No. 275 and 276. In particular I tried to comply with No. 276 that asks for "an historical perspective of the more important events in the history of the Institute". These outlines are mainly responding to this demand.

The same Number of the "Ratio" also asks that our candidates be presented with missionary figures, both priests and brothers, who stand out in the history of the Institute and of the missions. This subject is also very appealing to me, but there are already many biographies of our missionaries and also good obituaries. Many biographies are out of print and also forgotten, like that of Msgr A. Roveggio, Fr F. Vianello and Msgr A. Vignato and so on. Other biographies are still available, like the many of Fr Lorenzo Gaiga who wrote biographies of Comboni Missionaries, Fathers, Sisters, Brothers. I hope someone else may make a deeper research.

A second purpose is to give a frame of events to allow other writings to be placed in their historical context, like biographies of our missionaries, monographic publications dealing with linguistics, ethnology, histories of provinces, of missions and so on.

2. Another issue that appeals to me is the spiritual journey of the Institute. I can anticipate, however, that besides the insistence on the practice on the vows, three points were stressed: charity, spirit of faith and spirit of sacrifice as it appears from the Circular Letters of the Superiors General, mainly those of Fr F. Vianello. In a special way, charity was the common theme, so much so that a special chapter was dedicated to it in our Directory.

The Sacred Heart was not only an object of devotion and prayers, but a model and an inspiration to charity, to spirituality, to a style of life. When I was Superior General a number of priests who had visited some of our communities in the missions were impressed by our practice of charity. I think that if the spirituality of the Sacred Heart as a symbol of divine and human love had been retained as a "spirituality", many crises in the emotional sphere would have been avoided. Human love and other human values were stressed by the Vatican Council, in the great attention this Council paid to all anthropological aspects. This new accent was misinterpreted by many, to the point of becoming prevalent. In this way the supernatural slowly faded from attention. People then missed the point of the divine life present in us, which is the source of our new humanity, that is nothing less than the humanity of Jesus.

3. A book of history can follow different methods: writing by subjects and persons or by periods. In the first and second part I followed mainly by subjects and persons. In the third part, proper of the Institute, I mainly went by periods, though sometimes here, too, I went by subjects.

Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. In the case of our Institute, I proceeded by periods in order to show its development through our General Chapters. It is true

that the first Chapters were rather short and much was left to the General Council; even the minutes of the Chapters were seconded in the book of the "Consulta". When the official Bulletin started much material and many decisions were published in the Bulletin.

The 1947 Chapter in a certain sense was held in the modern way, with the setting up of preparatory Commissions. The "Revolutionary Chapter" was that of 1969 and nobody may ignore its deep impact on the life of the Institute.

Dealing with Chapters mainly up to 1953, I have not recorded all the decisions, but only those significant for the progress of the life of the Institute and its continuity in the history of the Church and of the missions.

4. Life of Comboni: It was not my intention to write a biography of Comboni, but only to supplement the biography with the highlights of his life. It is clear that our candidates must have in their hands a complete biography of Comboni. All the other books written about him, including the letters should be available. Moreover the formators are expected to know Comboni much more than the candidates. I wish that the book of Fr Fidel González, "*Comboni en el corazón de la misión africana*" were translated into some other languages.

5. Among the issues that need more research are our historical relations with different colonial and independent Governments, with other missionary Institutes, other denominations and religions, our followers including intellectuals, politicians, social workers, local bishops and the Holy See. Such a research will be of the greatest help in identifying ourselves.

This task may be easy for one country, but extremely difficult for all the countries where we are, unless in each country somebody takes the responsibility for such a work .

6. I said on the front page that these "Outlines" appear now in Draft form. I am convinced of the limitations and shortcomings of this work. I am ready to accept suggestions and recommendations: all the work is computerised and it is easy to take away, to change and to add. However, I'd prefer that suggestions, additions, recommendations are accompanied by the relevant text.

If some issues, events, and problems are not dealt with, please do not attribute it to bad will or negligence. Such omissions are mainly due to the desire of being brief, or to the little relevance of the issue or the event to the Institute as a whole.

7. I have added "Historical Introductions" whenever I found it necessary. Our young people, especially non-Europeans may know little of some major events of world history and after some decades they may know even less. As you can see from the Outlines themselves, many religious and political events have greatly affected our Institute, its missions and missionaries. So it is necessary to set such events against the proper historical and geographical background so that young people will find it easy to locate the events of our Institute in their memory.

8. Particularly from 1969 my appraisal of our history is a personal analysis, though I have tried to be as objective as possible. Very probably I have not stressed my shortcomings. However, as you may note from the short lives of previous Superiors General, I did the same for them, except for one remark about Fr P. Meroni regarding the separation of 1923.

It is an unconscious attitude of mine. I may underline shortcomings of groups but not of particular individuals, especially those in posts of high responsibility. This does not mean that I am uncritical when talking in private.

Before leaving this life it is good for me to share what I have with all those who are going to read these *Outlines*.

I thank Fr M. Marchetti, Fr M. Devenish, Fr Patrick Stevenson and the Secretariat of CCL (Communion and Liberation) especially Fr Edo Mörlin for their precious help. May the Lord reward them.

In the Heart of Christ.

Fr Tarcisio Agostoni

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Part One

TAKING THE GOSPEL TO THE NILE VALLEY

Chapter One

CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

I. EARLY YEARS

The African Continent was not the last to receive the Christian message. Jesus himself went to Africa, to Egypt, when he was a child: see Mt 2:13-14.

The Good News was carried to Africa before any other country outside Palestine. Acts 8:26-40 describes how Philip the Deacon met the Ethiopian eunuch, a convert to Judaism who had been to Jerusalem to worship. That an Ethiopian could be a Jew is possible, since on an island called Elephantine on the Nile, near Aswan, there was a large Jewish community dedicated to trade between Egypt and Nubia (see "Christianity in the Sudan" by Giovanni Vantini, page 333). "Ethiopian" at the time stood for black, and the territory then called Ethiopia extended South from the first cataracts of the Nile, where today stand the Aswan Dam and Lake Nasser. The eunuch was an official of the "Kandake", which is the Greek rendering of "Katoki" the name given to several queens of Meroe, a Kingdom that lay between present-day Atbara and Khartoum. After his baptism "he continued on his way full of joy", presumably spreading the message. Christian communities were established in North Africa under the Roman Empire. We know of six martyrs killed in the year 180 AD in the village of Scala, Numidia (Northern Algeria), and of Saints Perpetua and Felicity, martyred in the year 203 AD. By the Third Century dioceses had been established. When St Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, was martyred in 258 AD, we are told that a huge crowd of his followers watched the scene.

By the year 400 AD North Africa was predominantly Christian and a theological centre of the Church. From there sprang Bishops like Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo, a Berber born of a Christian mother of Thagaste. From North Africa missionaries were spreading everywhere: Verona, a Church that later was to send hundreds of missionaries to Africa, was converted by a black man, St Zeno, a classmate of St Augustine (died 371 AD). It was a vibrant missionary Church! Monasticism, too, flourished in Egypt, first as anchoritic (St Anthony Abbot, 251 - 356, feast on 17th January) and then as cenobitic life (St Pachomius). By the year 430 AD there were nearly 600 bishoprics in North Africa .

II. THE MUSLIM ERA

Then, in successive waves, the Donatist heresy, the Vandals, and above all the Muslims swept through the area. By the time of Pope Gregory VII (1073 - 1085) only three Christian bishoprics remained, and by the 13th Century even those three had disappeared. Only Monophysite Ethiopia (where conversions on a large scale had taken place under St Frumentius in the 4th Century) and a minority of the Copts in Egypt survived the onslaught.

DECLINE AND EVALUATION

It has been noted that the North African Church failed to translate the Bible and the liturgy into Berber or the Phoenician language and failed to make use of elements of the native culture to create a North African cultural Church, which would then have survived the domination of Islam... It seems rather that at the climax of the Christian mission the Latin provincial culture was eagerly accepted by the inhabitants together with Christianity. Historically, the Church in North Africa was a Church which used Latin to the exclusion of all other languages. While Latin later disappeared completely in North Africa, the Berber language survived. It is here that one can see a fundamental difference between the North African Church and the Church in Egypt. In Egypt and Ethiopia the Christian Faith (Bible, Liturgy, etc.) was very soon expressed in the Coptic and Ethiopian languages, even the minority ones. If the Bible and the Liturgy had been translated into the Berber language, it is quite possible that Christianity would have survived in North Africa, in spite of Islam, as it did in Egypt and the Middle East.

The immediate causes of the decline and disappearance of the Catholic Church in North Africa would seem to be the following:

The Arab-Muslim invasion brought about a considerable decline in the Christian population in the years of subjugation. This decline was caused by the flight of many Christians to Italy and France as well as by the death of many inhabitants in the severe battles for the possession of the cities, the majority of which were Christian.

Another cause is the pressure exerted upon Christians and pagans to convert to Islam. In North Africa, following the Arab-Muslim invasion, the Christians remaining were at first treated according to the usual practice of the conquerors, that is, they were allowed to exercise their religion on the payment of a tax and provided they renounced any propaganda for their faith. But from 720 AD a heavy pressure began under the Caliph Omar II on the still Christian Berbers to convert to Islam, and most succumbed to it. By a rapid conversion of the Moors, followed by a gradual process of attrition, Islam succeeded in weakening the Church in North Africa which, gradually, disappeared completely. (From African Synod: Lineamenta)

NB: Donatism is a heresy for the following errors:

- If the minister of a sacrament is in mortal sin, the sacrament is said to be not valid.
- Baptised Christians who abandon the Church, on their return are to be re-baptised.
- Christians who change a syllable from the Bible or a letter or burn the book deserve a great punishment.

III. EVANGELIZATION: 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES

The exploration of the African coast by the Portuguese in the 15th Century was soon accompanied by evangelization.

As early as 1462, Pope Pius II entrusted the evangelization of the Guinea Coast to the Franciscans led by Alfonso of Bolano. By 1486, Dominicans and others were active in West Africa, notably among the Wolof in Senegambia. The Guinea mission depended upon that of Cape Verde where a bishopric was eventually created in 1553.

At the request of the King of Benin, who had come into contact with the Portuguese in 1485, the Church was planted in that Kingdom. However, no great results were achieved. The mission in Benin, served only intermittently from São Tomé which was made a bishopric in 1534 by Pope Paul II, simply vegetated. In the Congo (present-day Zaire), systematic evangelization began in 1490, conducted by Franciscans, Canons Secular of St John the Evangelist with secular priests, and from the start its success was remarkable. Nzinga was baptised under the name Dom Jodo (1491). A Church was built in his capital, which was named São Salvador. A truly Christian Kingdom, closely modelled on that of Portugal, arose on the left bank of the river. During the reign of King Alfonso (1506 - 1543) Christianity spread widely. Missionaries arrived regularly from Portugal; and young Congolese were sent to Portugal for instruction. Dom Henrique, son of the King, was elected (1518) and consecrated (1521) Bishop of Utica. He soon returned to the Congo, but died in 1530. Dominicans, Discalced Carmelites, and Jesuits sent missionaries. São Salvador became an episcopal see in 1597.

In Angola evangelization began in the second half of the 16th Century. Fr Francis Borgia the Superior General had undertaken to establish a mission there for the Society of Jesus. The Angolan mission was not initially as successful as that in Congo. It was only established when the Bishops of São Salvador took up residence at Luanda in 1626.

It is to the credit of the early Portuguese missionaries in Zaire and Angola that they displayed remarkable missionary far-sightedness by setting up a seminary for the formation of indigenous priests.

On the East African Coast, particularly in Mozambique, evangelization began during the first half of the 16th Century. Saint Francis Xavier stopped over in Mozambique on his way to the East. In 1561 the Emperor of Monomatapa was baptised, thereby arousing a strong movement towards the Catholic Church. These hopes were to be destroyed by Muslim intrigue and influence. By 1591 the mission in Mozambique counted 20,000 Catholics. During the 17th Century new evangelizing efforts were again undertaken in Monomatapa by the Dominicans. A college and a seminary were erected.

It is worthy of note that: a group of 300 Portuguese and African Christians were killed for their faith in Mombasa in 1631 during a persecution that was started by a local King Jeronimo

Changulia who had converted to Islam. It was quite a martyrdom, united in one faith Europeans, Africans and those of mixed blood, priests and lay people gave up their lives.

However, in the course of the 18th Century, decline and decadence set in among the Christian communities and among the missionaries, and by the middle of the 19th Century, the Portuguese Christian missions in Eastern Africa was practically extinct.

POSSIBLE REASONS FOR FAILURE

In spite of the heroic evangelizing efforts of the 15th and 16th Centuries, Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa had completely disappeared by the beginning of the 19th Century. Among the many reasons for that extinction, the following should perhaps be mentioned.

The missions in Sub-Saharan Africa were entrusted to Portugal who claimed the privileges of patronage (*patroado*) earlier granted to them by the Popes. Insistence by Portugal on its “*patroado*” privileges practically nullified the efforts of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide to exercise effective control and to direct evangelization in those territories.

While insisting on its patronage privileges, which enabled it to exclude missionaries of other nationalities from Sub-Saharan Africa, Portugal became increasingly unable to supply enough missionaries for the region. This even led to prolonged vacancies in the bishoprics in Africa, which in turn, resulted in the decline and decay of what had been laboriously built up.

With the exception of the Italian Capuchins in the Congo and in Angola, the early Portuguese missions did not tackle the need for a deep and accurate knowledge of the African languages and that of understanding the customs and mentality of the people. Inculturation was lacking.

The tropical climate often killed the missionaries within a short time after their arrival. This is one reason why the mission in the Kingdoms of Loango and Kakongo (1766 - 1776) had to be abandoned.

IV. THE MODERN PERIOD OF EVANGELISATION

Towards the middle of the 19th Century the evangelisation of Africa was resumed, thanks to the heroic dedication of many missionary Institutes of men and women. During the 19th Century, Spanish and Portuguese influence had waned and the system of “*patroado*” had weakened and declined, thus leaving room for the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide to get a firm and untrammelled hold on missionary policy and strategy in Africa. Today, the Catholic Church is present everywhere in Africa, the result of barely one century of apostolic activity.

When the evangelisation of Africa was resumed in the 19th Century, the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide followed the practice whereby each newly created mission or circumscription was entrusted to the care and jurisdiction of a specific missionary Institute. This was the so-called “*ius commissionis*”. In this Century, it was reconfirmed by an Instruction of the same Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide issued on 8th December 1929.

On 24th February 1969 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide issued a new instruction, “*Relationes in Territoriis*”, which is more in harmony with the new situation in most mission territories, a situation characterised by the erection of local hierarchies, and of more and more dioceses entrusted to the secular clergy, etc. The new instruction is also in keeping with the doctrinal principles brought to light by Vatican II concerning the role of the diocesan Bishop in the Church and in his diocese.

V. NEW STAGE

The growth of African indigenous vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life also justifies the notion of a new period of evangelisation in Africa.

When Pope John Paul II spoke to the priests, religious and seminarians of Zaire at Kinshasa in 1980, on the occasion of the centenary of the evangelisation of that country, he said, *inter alia*:

“You have lived a first great stage, an irreversible stage. A new stage is open to you, a no less exalting one, even if it necessarily involves new trials, and perhaps temptations of discouragement. It is the stage of perseverance, that in which it is necessary to pursue the strengthening of the faith, the conversion, in-depth, of souls and ways of life, so that they will correspond better and better to your sublime Christian vocation; not to mention evangelisation which you must yourselves continue in sectors or environments where the Gospel is still unknown”

This new stage is the stage of Africans becoming missionaries to themselves. The stage of a new evangelisation, new not in its content which is Christ and its message, but “new in its ardour, new in its method and new in its mode of expression”. (Special Assembly of the Synod for Africa)

VI. PRESENT SITUATION IN AFRICA (1991)

STATISTICS AND STRUCTURES OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AFRICA

Total Population	691,897,989	
Catholics	95,855,158	13,85%
Other Christians	113,203,594	16,36%
Muslims	278,525,568	40,25%
Traditional Religion	204,313,662	29,53%
Dioceses:	426	
Cardinals	14	
Bishops:	497	(Africans 383)
Diocesan priests	11,903	
Religious priests	9,865	
Brothers	6,073	
Sisters	43,976	
Major Seminarians	14,363	
Catechists	264,114	

ECCLESIASTICAL REGIONS

- SECAM: Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (French: SCEAM).
- AMECEA: Association of members of Episcopal conferences of East Africa (Malawi, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan).
- ECRNA: Episcopal Conferences of the Region of Northern Africa (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya) (French: CERNA).
- AECAWA: Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglo phone West Africa. (Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Gambia).
- AECRCA: Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Region of Central Africa (Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea) (French: ACERAC)
- AECCA: Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa (Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi) (French: ACEAC)
- IMBISA: Inter-regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, São Tome y Principe, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe).
- RMI: Region of Madagascar and Islands (Madagascar, Seychelles, Mauritius, Reunion, Comores).
- ACHE: Assembly of the Catholic Hierarchy of Egypt.

Chapter Two

CHRISTIANITY IN THE NILE VALLEY

I. THE FIRST ONE THOUSAND YEARS

During the persecutions of the Third Century (Decius 250, Diocletian 284-305) many Christians took refuge in Southern Egypt, and for them it must have been easy to contact the inhabitants of Nubia who lived between Aswan and Khartoum. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria from 328 to 372, created a bishopric at File, South of Aswan, and we have the names of six Bishops who occupied the See there between 325 and 543.

The spreading of Christianity into Nubia is due to the influence of Constantinople: In the year 529 Roman Emperor Justinian wanted to send Catholic missionaries there. His wife Theodora, a follower of the Monophysite heresy, anticipated him and sent her priest, Julian, with a message to the governor of Upper Egypt. In this message she threatened him with death should he allow the Emperor's messenger to precede Julian to Nubia (Kingdom of Nobatia).

By the year 580 AD the whole of Nubia was apparently Christian: the King of Soba (Khartoum) wrote in that year to the King of Dongala: "Christ is with us". It is not clear how such a massive conversion took place, but archaeological excavations made in the 1960s in the Nubian desert suggest that the Kings of Nobatia (North), Makuria (Centre) and Alodia (Khartoum and land south of it) were first converted, and their people followed them.

The same archaeological findings point to a Christian presence lasting a thousand years between the Sixth and the Sixteenth Centuries. Churches built in a typical style were found, outstanding among them the Cathedral of Faras, about 300 km south of Aswan, with convents, tombs with Christian symbols, 160 frescoes, 800 inscriptions in different languages (Greek, Coptic, Nubian, Arabic). In the Cathedral of Faras a list was found with the names of 27 Bishops. When those Nubian Christians came in contact with the Muslims spreading from the North, they were gradually absorbed into that religion, in the same way as in North Africa in general as we have seen above. One of the reasons for the disappearance is also the fact that priests were always supplied from Egypt and no effort had been done to train local people for the priesthood. Local culture however still has customs that derive from their past Christian history. (see Vantini, "Christianity in the Sudan" pages 206 - 208)

II. THE EUROPEAN EXPLORERS' SEARCH FOR THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON

Claudius Ptolemy, a geographer of the Second Century A.D based in Alexandria, already mentioned the opinion that there existed the "Mountains of the Moon" whose snows fed the lake from which the River Nile sprang. But there is no record in history that anyone except the local inhabitants had set his eyes on this fabled mountain and on the sources of the Nile until last Century.

Some people were also suggesting that the sources of the Nile were from Lake No in Chad or Southwest Ethiopia.

A desire arose towards the end of the 18th Century to explore the interior of Africa, for a mixture of motives: trade, politics, curiosity, or just the mere spirit of adventure. We can break down the following period into three stages:

- 1788-1848. A number of Associations were started, like that of Sir Joseph Banks 'for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa', or Geographical Societies like that of Paris (1821), Berlin (1828), Frankfurt (1836), Petersburg (1845), Vienna (1856). Some 500 explorers died while trying to carry out this exploration, with very little to show for all their trouble.
- 1848-1880. The bulk of successful exploration was done by people like Livingstone, Stanley, Grant, Speke and so forth, including our own missionaries, Vinco, Knoblecher and so on.

- 1880 — European Colonial powers scramble to get control of the Continent. In 1884 the major European Powers at a conference held in Berlin parcelled out Africa into spheres of influence that each was to control. One of the prized objectives was control of the sources of the Nile.

III. THE VICARIATE OF CENTRAL AFRICA

1. ATTEMPT TO REACH CENTRAL AFRICA

In the wake of these explorations, within the Catholic Church, too, a number of people began to talk about the need of taking the liberating message of the Gospel to the heart of Africa. 100 million people lived there, it was said, exploited by slave and ivory traders.

In 1844 a Maltese priest took an interest in the region. Annetto Casolani was a Canon of the Cathedral of La Valletta who had travelled extensively in the Middle East, and kept abreast of exploration accounts, thanks to his knowledge of Arabic and his contact with British associations. After reading the book by I. Pallme “Travels in the Kordofan”, impressed by the spreading of Islamic influence among the blacks of Western Sudan, he wrote to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, suggesting that a Mission be sent to Central Africa to stem the expansion of Islam.

Kordofan and Sennaar were lost already, but it was not too late, he wrote for the Nubas, the Kodoro and Shilluk, provided action was taken without delay. He had only a vague idea of the layout of the territory but he suggested starting from Tripoli, then proceeding to Ghadames, Lake Chad and Timbuktu. Whoever led the expedition was “to wear unostentatious clothes, carry no religious symbol, and let no one guess what his real object was.” (These suggestions were fruits of the indications of I. Pallme who gave them to Austria).

The Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda took up the matter and, having requested from Canon Casolani a fuller memorandum on the projected mission, asked the Prefect Apostolic of Tripoli, in Libya, what he thought of the proposal. The Prefect Apostolic approved of the plan and suggested Timbuktu as the headquarters of the proposed mission.

On hearing rumours that the Anglican Archbishop of Gibraltar was also planning to send a Mission from Tripoli to Central Africa, Propaganda Fide on 26th January 1846, established without further delay the Vicariate of Central Africa.

It bordered on the ecclesiastical territories of Tripoli and Egypt in the North; on the Prefecture of Abyssinia in the East; it went up the Mountains of the Moon in the South, and reached as far as the Kingdoms of Guinea on the West. The phrase “the Desert and the so-called Central Africa” referred to in the document lay roughly between Parallels, 8 and 16 and Meridians 4 and 15, and included what today are the Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda, Chad, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and parts of Zaire, Libya, Algeria and Cameroon.

2. BISHOP A. CASOLANI

Canon Casolani was the obvious choice of Propaganda Fide to head the new mission. When he was informed that they intended to appoint him, his first reaction was that he was not the best man for the job. When pressed further, he accepted but, he added, if he was to lead the expedition, he wished to be assisted by the Jesuits.

The Superior General of the Jesuits, however, declined the invitation to take on the project on the grounds of insufficient means and personnel, and, above all, because he felt that a mission into Central Africa had almost no chance at all of succeeding. In any case, he argued, before a firm decision could be taken a fact-finding expedition should be sent to the area. For this limited purpose he was ready to offer Fr Maximillian Rylo, at the time Rector of the College of Propaganda Fide.

Propaganda Fide on 30th March 1846 appointed Canon Casolani head of the new Vicariate. Contrary to the custom of Propaganda - whose normal practice was to entrust a territory to a Prefect Apostolic and only later, when it had a sizable Catholic community, to an Apostolic Vicar, and later to a Bishop, - he was to be consecrated Bishop immediately, so that he would have wide powers of decision without needing to refer back all the time to Propaganda Fide. On

24th May 1846 Casolani was consecrated Bishop, and he was asked to recruit volunteers to go with him and to leave for his destination by the first week of January 1847.

By March 1847 Casolani was still in Malta, (notwithstanding the repeated urges of Propaganda Fide to set off for Khartoum), attempting to found a seminary for the mission in Malta, waiting for letters of recommendation for the Egyptian authorities, and so on. He resented the pressure exerted upon him and pointed out that his original plan had been greatly changed. As a matter of fact the territory entrusted to him now included (probably at the request of Fr Ryllo) Kordofan, Darfur and Sennar - which Casolani had explicitly excluded from his Plan. Taking into account the new boundaries and new information obtained on the area, it had also been decided that Khartoum was to be its headquarters; and the route to it, the Nile Valley.

On 25th March 1847 he resigned as head of the expedition, although he was still willing to go along as a member of the group. (Later he did go, and in fact in the eyes of the civil authorities he passed as Superior of the mission, and they granted him the honours given to a Patriarch, a title however he had purposely chosen).

3. FR M. RYLLO

Propaganda Fide accepted the resignation of Bishop Casolani and on 23rd April 1847 appointed Fr Ryllo as head of the Mission, with the title of Pro-Vicar. Fr Ryllo was a Lithuanian Jesuit priest who had already carried out diplomatic missions on behalf of the Holy See to Russia and the Middle East (where the Egyptian authorities had at one time put a price on his head for helping locals resist Egyptian occupation), spoke several languages including Arabic. The Superior General of the Jesuits, Fr J. P. Rootmann, described him as a robust man, of great learning, full of courage and zeal, always ready to throw himself into the most hazardous and difficult kind of work for the glory of God.

On hearing the news of Ryllo's appointment as Pro-Vicar the General of the Jesuits wrote to Casolani that he should not be entrusted with any responsibility for money matters. "He eminently despises all earthly matters, and this attitude takes him to extremes that could have dire consequences... that is, debts and bankruptcy". He therefore gave him, with the function of 'a guardian angel', in money matters especially, his confrere Fr Pedemonte. (Fathers Pedemonte and Knoblecker had been sent to Lebanon to study Arabic)

Father Ryllo immediately set off for Alexandria with Father Pedemonte. He was joined there by two ex-alumni of the College of Propaganda Fide who had also volunteered for the new Vicariate, and had already gone to Lebanon to study Arabic: Slovene Ignaz Knoblecher, and Italian Angelo Vinco, the latter being a priest from the Don Mazza College of Verona. Shortly afterwards Casolani also arrived. Since Muhammad Ali Pasha regarded the presence of the missionaries in Upper Egypt altogether favourably and kept up an amicable correspondence with Pope Gregory XVI, he made no difficulties for the team's advance along the Nile (see Mc Ewan "A Catholic Sudan Dream" , page 16). After a few months in Egypt the party set sail from Cairo on 28th September 1847 and, delayed by Ryllo who was already very sick with dysentery, arrived in Khartoum on 11th February 1848. (see Hill "The opening of the Nile Basin", pages 31 - 44).

They were not the first Catholic priests to set foot in Khartoum. In May 1842, Italian born Fr Luigi Montuori, of the Society of St Vincent of Paul of French origin, escaping from persecution which had broken out in Ethiopia, had opened a church and a Catholic school in the city, and bought a piece of land for a cemetery. A confrere, Fr G Serao, had soon joined him from Italy. In 1844, however, Fr Montuori had returned to Ethiopia, and soon after also his confrere had departed. Fr Ryllo immediately bought a house with a large garden - (the representative of the French government in Khartoum had sold the old house of Fr Montuori who belonged to a society of French origin and not made it available to the "Austrian" new-comer) - and built a church. He opened a school for orphans and ex-slaves giving them accommodation, food, and clothes. He gathered information about apostolic prospects in the area south of Khartoum (he gave a very optimistic report) - and used up all his money in the process!

He died of dysentery in Khartoum on 17th June 1848, leaving Father Knoblecher as his Vicar-General.

4. FR I. KNOBLECHER

The Holy See appointed Knoblecher, then 28 years of age, successor to Fr Ryllo.

a) Bishop Casolani had been asked by Fr Ryllo to go back to report to Rome on progress made and to recover his health, and Fr Vinco was given the task of collecting money. It was on this occasion that Father Vinco visited the Don Mazza Institute where he impressed the young Comboni. The departure of Casolani and Vinco left the mission with only two priests, Fathers Knoblecher and Pedemonte. To save the Mission the Superior General of the Jesuits sent out a relief party - two priests Fathers Repetti and Zara and Brother Ottavio who arrived in Khartoum in March 1849.

b) Upon the arrival and the return in 1849 of Fr Vinco, Knoblecher took with him Fathers Vinco and Pedemonte and sailed South on a rented boat, attaching himself to a group of ivory traders, looking for places for other possible mission sites. He reached as far as the Bari village of Logwek, near Gondokoro, some 1,000 miles south of Khartoum and less than 200 miles from the Uganda border on the 4th parallel of Northern latitude, further than any other European had ever gone.

Initially they were well received by the local chief. But in the end, because of the schemings of the traders, who in their turn had been put up to it by the authorities in Khartoum, they were prevented from settling and the party had to return to Khartoum.

The trip convinced him that the prospects for evangelisation among the Bari were good, but it would involve great expenses and that missionaries would need to move there independently of traders and government officials.

c) Seeking support in Europe. In 1850 Fr Knoblecher travelled back to Europe on a fund-raising tour. He found the Papal States torn by political strife and the Pope himself in exile in Gaeta (Nov. 1848 - April 1850). Unable to give financial support, Propaganda Fide suggested the Mission be closed down, at least for the time being, as the general feeling in Rome was that the Khartoum mission was proving too expensive and that no good would come of it.

Knoblecher found help, however, in Austria. He asked the Emperor to take the Khartoum Mission under the protection of the Austrian Government, as an appendix to the Egyptian Mission.

Protection usually implied that Austrian authorities would ask local governments to guarantee the safe passage and personal security of missionaries, see that they were not harassed in their ministry and that their followers were not persecuted for their faith, and obtain that customs duties be waived for items they imported. Austrian officials would officially cater for the interests of the missionaries in the country they lived in, and would forward them the money, correspondence and so on, received on their behalf.

Cardinal Massaia, perhaps under French influence, termed this protection the "Austrification" of the mission. The English consul in Khartoum Mr. Petherick also accused Austria of making use of the missionaries to convert the White Nile into an Austrian Colony. (see Smith "Le origini della missione dell' Africa Centrale" page 139 - D. Mc Ewan page 44).

The Protection was also manifested through the Marian Association founded by Knoblecher for the recruitment of missionaries and collection of money. However Austria's opinion was henceforth to be taken seriously into account in the choice of its Superior, and preferably the majority of missionaries were to be from the Austrian/German provinces, so the Central Committee of the Association was to be kept informed of all that happened there. Some observers suspected it as an unholy political alliance between the Church and the Austrian government; but Austria certainly never had colonial ambitions over the Sudan, and missionaries were sincerely grateful for the help that it gave them.

d) The Mission was granted Austrian Protection on 17th March 1851. The Austrian Consul Baron Muller in Khartoum, who had caused severe embarrassment to the Mission, was replaced. A sum of 1,000 florins was given for freeing slaves and the Bishops of all the Austrian provinces were invited by the Emperor to organise collections for the Mission.

The Marian Association ('Marien Verein') was set up in the same year in Vienna. It was to arouse great interest in the Khartoum mission. It had branches in most of the provinces of the Empire and published reports from the mission in its 'Annals'. Its members totalled some five or

six thousand, and during the first ten years of its existence it collected 387,432 florins. It declined after that, because of the heavy death toll among missionaries and the few conversions. Comboni in 1872 tried to revive it and received substantial help. But after World War 1, in 1920/1921 the Association disappeared as Austria had become a small, impoverished Republic.

5. NEW MISSIONS IN SOUTHERN SUDAN

a) The closure of the Mission out of difficulty of finding personnel and funds thus averted, Rome appointed Knoblecher as Pro-Vicar on 13th August 1851. In August he returned to Khartoum, accompanied by five Slovene priests and several lay artisans. Upon their arrival all the Jesuits were recalled by the Superior General, so ending the involvement of the Society of Jesus in the Sudan until very recent times.

With the money collected in Austria Msgr Knoblecher was able to buy land in Khartoum (part of it still belongs to the Catholic Church up to today), the new boat 'Stella Matutina', and later the land for the missions of Gondokoro (1853) and Holy Cross (1854). He also freed a number of slaves. The Marian Association would also pay for the education of young Africans being educated in Europe, the journeys to and from Africa of both missionaries and Africans, and give a subsidy to the families of missionaries who needed it.

With the help of the new recruits at the end of 1852 Knoblecher proceeded south and joined Fr Vinco who in January 1851 had gone back among the Bari and was just then getting ready to sail south still in pursuit of the sources of the Nile. However Fr Vinco fell sick while Knoblecher was there and died in his arms on 22nd January 1853. (See Hill pages 74 - 105).

Back in Khartoum, in 1858 he proceeded on a second journey to Europe seeking funds and personnel, but died during the journey, at Naples, at the age of 39 (See Hill pages 47 - 73).

We can say that Knoblecher anticipated the Plan of Comboni. In fact he had in mind to start a school in Khartoum for training catechists and teachers, and in Europe for local priests. In every mission station, missionaries had to train good young people who were well disposed to cooperate with them. He thought of calling Sisters for the formation of girls but he did not succeed. (see Mc Ewan page 34).

b) The Don Mazza expedition. During his journey to Italy, Msgr Knoblecher met at Aswan a party of five priests and a Brother from the Don Mazza College in Verona who were on their way to Khartoum. Among them was Daniel Comboni, then a young priest of 26.

Fr Mazza had started two colleges in Verona, to provide education for poor girls (in 1828) and bright boys (in 1833) who could not afford to pay for their education. He had already taken in some Africans at his college for girls in Verona, and he planned to open a college for boys somewhere in the Sudan. Fr Mazza was convinced, as other contemporaries of his, like Fr M. P. Libermann and Blessed Sister M. Javouhey were that, "it was for Africa to save Africa". Missionaries from Europe would never manage to spread the Good News to the immense territories of Africa on their own. They were to be helped by a number of educated young Africans, men and women, educated in houses built on the fringes of the continent where both Africans and missionaries would feel at home. The best among them were to be sent to Europe for higher studies, especially those among them who wanted to become priests. Such educated Africans would later, in their turn, move into the interior, pass on their education to their brothers and sisters, open new schools and found new Christian colonies.

Of the two priests who had gone to the Vicariate of Central Africa in 1853 to choose a suitable place, the first, Father Antonio Castegnaro had died almost immediately upon reaching Khartoum, (6th February 1854) and the other Fr G. Beltrame had checked the place, gone back to Verona to report and was now returning with a small support party. With Beltrame were Fathers F. Oliboni, A. Melotto, D. Comboni, A. Dal Bosco, and a layman, I. Zilli.

One of the group, Fr Beltrame himself remained as Procurator in Khartoum, while the rest were taken by Fr M Kirchner to Holy Cross mission station where Father Joseph Lans had survived Fr Bart Mozgan (+23rd January 1858). But they failed to hold it: the leader of the group Fr Oliboni died within 40 days of his arrival; Fr Melotto died the following year and also Br Zilli died in Khartoum (11th June 1858). Fr Comboni's health broke down and he had to be sent back to Europe at the end of 1859. The remaining two, Frs Beltrame and Dal Bosco were to leave in 1862, when the Franciscans moved in. These events marked the end of Don Mazza's involvement in the Vicariate of Central Africa, except for one alumnus of the College, Daniel Comboni.

6. MSGR KIRCHNER

Propaganda Fide appointed Fr Matthew Kirchner, a German priest who had joined the Vicariate in 1854, to succeed Knoblecher with the title of Pro-Vicar. By the time Kirchner took over more than half the missionaries recruited by Knoblecher had already died, and he was left with only five men. Prospects for new vocations, moreover, were understandably meagre: few volunteers for the Mission came forward given the heavy death-toll among missionaries.

The training of Africans in Europe had also suffered a setback when in 1854 the slave trade had been abolished; it became difficult to get children out of Africa through Egypt. In the Sudan, on the contrary, slave trading was on the increase and Africans would not send their children to the mission, for fear they would be sold as slaves. The climate and the social environment of Europe, especially in the North at Verona, proved unbearable to several Africans who did not survive; on the other hand those who settled well did not feel quite at home in Africa any more.

Msgr Kirchner took a drastic decision, to safeguard his missionaries' health: he pulled out all missionaries from the Sudan and opened a new house for them at Shellal, just across the border in Southern Egypt. Shellal was a much healthier place than Khartoum, and was to be the new headquarters where Africans would be trained, and in-coming missionaries would be able to get used to the climate. From Shellal during the months of September to May, when the climate was more bearable, missionaries would mount flying missions to the South to visit the areas which they had temporarily vacated.

But the plan did not work. In the absence of the missionaries, the mission station of Gondokoro had been taken over by traders, that of Holy Cross had been destroyed and that of Khartoum was falling into disrepair. For the reasons mentioned above, in the end only a very small number of children were brought to Shellal. In the meantime, by October 1860 the number of missionaries had been whittled down to 5.

Reluctantly it was concluded that the system followed up to then of recruiting volunteers for the Vicariate had not worked, and if the Mission was to be guaranteed a regular supply of personnel it should be entrusted to an Order.

7. THE FRANCISCAN ATTEMPT

Because the Franciscans were already working in Egypt, and the Franciscan, Fr Ludovico of Casoria, was involved in training children from the Vicariate of Central Africa at Naples, the Styria Province of the Franciscan Order in Austria, was approached by Kirchner and they accepted responsibility for the Mission. Msgr Kirchner went back to his diocese in Germany but kept in touch with the mission until his death: on the death of Comboni he was even offered its leadership, but he declined.

Between 1861 and 1863 the Franciscans sent out 58 missionaries: eight priests, two seminarians, nine brothers and 32 lay people belonging to the Third order.

Disregarding the proposals made by Kirchner about staying in Shellal, their superior and Pro-Vicar, Fr Reinthaler, left one priest and three laymen at Shellal to look after the house, and immediately proceeded to Khartoum and Holy Cross, and opened two new mission stations.

Within five months of their arrival in the Sudan 22 had died, including their leader Fr Reinthaler, many were sick, the majority felt understandably discouraged, and no volunteers would come from Egypt or Europe to replace them.

Fr Reinthaler had not even tried to follow Kirchner's plan of getting people used to the climate: he only stopped in Shellal one day. He was also accused of being too demanding. There was friction, moreover, between Austrian and Italian members of the expedition, which reflected political frictions between Germany, Austria and Italy (Verona, which had been part of the Austrian Empire until then, passed to Italy in 1866 at the end of the 'Seven Week War'). Moreover two thirds of the party were lay people, unprepared for the severe privations that the mission demanded, worried about their families at home, too loosely-knit to be a fighting unit.

8. THE MISSION IS CLOSED DOWN

The Holy See came to the conclusion that the Vicariate of Central Africa was an impossible post to hold and closed it down as an independent Mission. Those who remained and wished to

stay on, could do so and would depend on the Vicar Apostolic of Egypt, who would administer the territory from his See in Cairo.

Between 1848 and 1863, 46 missionaries had died in the Sudan, 24 between 1848 and 1860, 22 between 1861 and 1863, without succeeding in establishing a permanent structure that could prove the Mission had taken off. By Bishop Comboni's own account, they had started four mission stations, and baptised about one hundred pagans, children included. In 1867 the only missionary personnel remaining numbered one priest and two lay people in Khartoum, and Scellal Gondokoro amongst the Bari and Holy Cross among the Dinka were closed down.

Chapter Three

COMMENTS ON THE PERIOD 1847 - 1862

THE FIRST 15 YEARS IN RETROSPECT

GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECT

In their search for a suitable place to set up permanent stations, missionaries kept moving into new areas: they often went further afield, stayed longer and therefore knew people better than most other outsiders. Their objective was admittedly not exploration for its own sake, nor did they have the instrumentation and the financial backing of other explorers, but they were conscious of being pioneers: they methodically took notes of the climate, vegetation, and social environment, and generously shared this information with others. This is a considerable side-effect of evangelisation, though not much publicised. “By the end of our survey it had become impossible to discuss Nile exploration without some reference to the part played by the Missionaries” (see Hill page. 18)

TECHNICAL ASPECT — LANGUAGES

Missionaries in the Sudan were the first to put down in writing the languages of the place. The Missionaries who went to Holy Cross, like Comboni, had prepared within a year or two a Dinka grammar with a dictionary of about 2000 words, a Bari grammar, and an elementary text book of religion of over 300 pages. And they were the first, too, to print books in the local language so that the indigenous people could profit from literacy. They went to infinite pains to set up schools and provide technical education: wherever they settled they taught the indigenous people new skills in building, agriculture, carpentry and simple household management. Over the years missionaries have poured huge capital into the Sudan for this purpose. Unlike explorers, whose audience were European geographical societies and their own governments, missionaries were interested in developing the local people. It is right that in the Sudan, too, most of them were laid to rest after their death for even their graves, many of them abandoned and lost by now, are a mark of their dedication to Africa.

EXPERIENTIAL ASPECT

They were often ill-equipped to face Africa. At the beginning people had no experience, and many did not live long enough to gain it; again, some missionaries (notably the Franciscans from Austria) disregarded the experience of their predecessors. Although their leaders were aware of the need to train missionaries and only bring them to Southern Sudan in stages, so as to get them accustomed to the climate, the death rate was so high that both provisions were often overlooked. Because they wanted to be near the people they often settled in unhealthy places where they had little chance of surviving. In any case, medical science at the time had no effective remedies against the illnesses from which most missionaries died.

PREPARATION

Volunteers (often lay people) were accepted with little screening or training, and they were rushed to the stations. This was partly due to the desperate need for replacements to man the posts. The mission environment demanded a host of skills which no course could possibly give: missionaries hoped for adaptable men rather than for highly skilled specialists, and therefore readily dispensed with preparatory courses. Finally missionaries were often happy-go-lucky, dare-devil and trust-in-Providence pioneers: they would give a chance to work in Africa to anybody who had enough courage to accept the challenge.

They knew however the odds against which they were fighting (with their own hands, they buried their friends one after another!) and persevered because they believed they were doing God's work, and that one day a free Africa and a flourishing Church would grow from the seed they were sowing. They were rooted in Christian hope and, undismayed by the lack of immediate success, they looked to the future.

MISSIONARIES AND AFRICANS

Missionaries respected Africans and whatever they wrote about Africans - we find some of their expressions shocking perhaps - should be understood against what they did for them, if we want to get the measure of those men and women. They believed in their dignity and waited patiently for them to make up their mind and to embrace the faith out of conviction .

Missionaries, too, found the local people intelligent, skillful in dealing with their environment, very courteous, and paid tribute to their health and strength. They understood their attitude to dress and work, even though so different from that of missionaries. Most of them, Fr Vinco wrote in 1851, were well-disposed and would gladly receive missionaries who without a thought of danger or personal safety would be willing to go and teach them. An example of the higher education afforded quite early to Africans, is Fr Pio Hadrian, the first Sudanese priest: he was baptised in 1863, ordained priest in 1872, and died the same year at El Obeid. (see Hill pages 64 - 66; 88 - 89)

INTEGRAL SALVATION

Missionaries believed and tenaciously worked for the salvation of Africans. What did salvation mean for them? Bishop Comboni pointed out himself that after 15 years of work, they had given only about a hundred baptisms, including children and adults. Many missionaries never had a chance of baptising at all, others refrained from baptising people. Yet none of them ever dreamt of giving up. They never gave in to those who said (even in Rome) that the game was not worth the candle. What was this game for which they gambled their very life?

We may take Comboni as their spokesman: his vision grew from the first experience he had had with them, he gradually clarified to himself and later lucidly spelled out in literally thousands of letters what salvation meant for him.

The hour of Africa has now come, says Comboni. Christ is about to dispel the darkness in which the continent has been sitting, the Heart of Jesus wants to draw the peoples of Africa to himself; missionaries are His apostles taking this message to the interior of Africa, his witnesses who make him present among the forsaken people of Central Africa by saying and doing among them what Christ said and did in Galilee.

WITNESSES

It is in this respect that Comboni stands out among other contemporary missionary founders, and reflects the urge of his predecessors in the Central African mission: they chose to live with the Africans. Not just writing about them or teaching them, but becoming one with them, sharing their lot, adapting to the customs as far as they were able and going far beyond what prudence would have suggested. That is what they understood by being witnesses of Christ.

A traveller wrote in 1857: "Both among Turks and Arabs, Abuna Suleiman, as Dr Knoblecher is called, enjoys the highest consideration; far and wide I heard him spoken of with respect. This is already a great success, for it helps the breaking down of colour and religious prejudice. Those who have been long enough in the country to be known, have left a memory venerated by all, even by the pagans, and the funeral chant of one who died last year at his Station up the river, Don A Vinco, a gentleman of Verona, is still sung in their assemblies, as it was composed by the Africans themselves". And another diplomat and traveller wrote in 1854 of Knoblecher and his friends: "Those self-sacrificing men have willingly devoted themselves to a life - if life it can be called, for it is little better than a living death - in the remotest heart of Africa. ...They are men of the purest character and animated by the best intentions. Abuna Suleiman, as Dr Knoblecher is called, is already widely known and esteemed throughout the Sudan." (see Hill pages 12 - 13)

People who had not yet seen traders were soon friendly to missionaries; Fr Vinco wrote of the Bari "I was beginning to be held in higher esteem; they spoke well of me on all occasions, treated me with greater respect and consulted me in their public and private affairs. They went so far as to call me Juoc, the name of one of their gods". To them he announced the Gospel at length, so that the French traveller Lejean wrote of him in 1860: "Fr Vinco was the perfect type of the Christian Missionary in the Sudan ... he was adventurous, brave, gay and an excellent shot; He was greatly esteemed by the Bari whose language he spoke" (see Hill, page 7).

For Comboni the Cross, more than anything else, is the guarantee of true witness, the hallmark of a true apostle: when missionaries labour for Africans, when they are persecuted for defending them - then they are Christ-like. In the very act of suffering and dying, they eminently make Christ present and bring salvation, making up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church (Col 1:24). It is an honour to have been chosen to be apostles to these most abandoned of all the peoples of the earth, now that their hour of salvation has at last come; a privilege to die in carrying out this mission.

A COUNTER WITNESS

And because mission is essentially witness, one of the biggest drawbacks missionaries in the Sudan had to contend with was the counter-witness of an uncaring foreign community with whom missionaries were associated, of ivory traders in whose company missionaries had to travel, of slave merchants who had preceded the missionaries and who had turned local populations against all foreigners. Whole territories were given up altogether by the first missionaries because such people had preceded them to the area. Being mistaken for an agent of the government, or the emissary of some foreign power, or a trader, has constantly been the curse of missionaries. (see Hill pages 81-82, 74-75)

Missionaries had a hard time convincing local people that they were not like the traders who ravaged their lands in search of ivory and slaves. Traders bore the Missionaries no good will, kept them under constant observation and at times brutally insulted them: they resented their presence and tried to set the minds of the local people against them. Vinco reported the case of a Turk who had visited the local chief at night and told him that the missionaries “were evil magicians who would stop the rains on their soil, depriving them of their harvest and pasturing grounds, and that when food was short the white men would eat the flesh of their sons”. (see Hill, pages 73, 88 - 89)

MORE DIFFICULTIES

The conditions were harsh, especially when missionaries first ventured into places where they were unknown, or when local wars were being fought. They depended mostly on their hosts for food and went short with them in times of famine. (see Hill pages 88 - 89)

“I had already gone part of the way, when I came across some young women drawing water from a well. As I was extremely thirsty, I approached them and, in their language asked them to give some to drink, in return for some beads. No sooner had I uttered these words than they stared at me, and hurriedly made off with their pots towards their huts. My companions and I shouted after them, but it was all in vain, and the only result of our shouting, was that we were thirstier than ever. Parched, I rested from time to time under the shade of trees on the way, and we continued the rest of the journey in this way”. (Diary of Fr A. Vinco, Hill page 81)

From the medical point of view they suffered from dirty water and mosquitoes, and the austere life they chose to lead. The quinine they took regularly thinned their blood.

From a religious point of view: the local population had little liking for a religion that taught forgiveness and monogamy. Knoblecher was aware that people came to the mission more for the sake of getting immediate material help than for religious motives or the desire to learn. In spite of that missionaries started four mission stations, gave some 100 baptisms (both children and adults are included in this figure), translated into the local languages some passages of the bible and prepared a few simple catechisms.

COURAGE, HOPE IN PROVIDENCE

Yet missionaries stayed on. They had plans to train local priests in Europe and give an education to many more lay people in the Colleges of Cairo. Very soon they tried to get Sisters to help with the women.

One of the main reasons why they did not achieve more results was due to the poor preparation given to them; they were taught Arabic, but little else apart from this language.

Missionaries also held ambivalent ideas about their first task too: were they to give priority to development or evangelisation? Was evangelisation to be achieved through development? To

what extent was it correct to adapt to local culture? Many of the missionaries in their enthusiasm took too many risks: but only enthusiasts of this kind could open up the country.

It may be necessary to read a page of the diary of Fr A Vinco to see the style of their preaching.

“After a ceremony oxen were slaughtered as sacrifice for the rain. Fr Vinco addressed them in the following way: ‘Bari, as you have been so good as to receive me among you, and honoured me with the invitation to be present at one of your tribe’s most sacred ceremonies, grant me leave to speak freely to you. I do not intend to offend anybody, but I simply wish to bring forth the naked truth, as it is for this very reason that I have been placed among you by Heaven. The God, who created me and you, also created the sun, the moon, the stars, your cattle, trees and rivers. The same God makes the grass and seeds grow - in other words, the same God who from nothing created everything in heaven and on earth. Although this great God is, as yet, not known to you, and, therefore, not honoured and served by you, He nevertheless loves you and helps you in a thousand different ways. This is the God who makes the rain fall, thus preventing your fields from being scorched; He keeps you in good health; He multiplies your cattle; He gives you the strength to overcome your enemies; in short His love for you is greater than that of any father or mother for the sweetest and most cherished son. Hence, if you wish the rains to fall on your fields, you must desist from the quarrels and wars which rage continuously among you, and must stop killing your fellow-creatures. You must refrain from theft and robbery, and must not give way to wantonness; in other words, you must not do to others, what you would not have them do to you’. The people were astonished at the unexpected tenor of this speech, the like of which they had never heard before. Despite this, everybody including the chiefs, the people and Jubek himself, warmly applauded me, saying that my reasoning was sound and that what I had said must indeed be true. My speech was particularly welcomed by the people, who above all admired me for having thus spoken before Jubek himself, as each year they had to hand over many oxen to him, in his capacity as rain-maker.” (see Hill pages 82 - 83)

All in all, the missionaries opened a trail, marked out by their graves: one grave after the other. Along that trail Africans moved to colleges in Malta, Naples, Rome, Verona, Vienna. Down the same trail missionaries kept coming and Comboni widened it and promised never to let it be closed again: ‘Africa or death!’.

Chapter Four

INSTITUTES FOR THE EVANGELISATION OF AFRICA

I. PIONEERS OF MISSIONARY WORK IN AFRICA

1. IN THE FIRST CENTURIES

In the first centuries of the Church, local clergy and individual religious were sent or took upon themselves the responsibility of going and starting first evangelisation in foreign countries.

So did the Apostles and their disciples. Later on we have the following examples:

Pope Celestine I (432) sent Bishop Palladius to Ireland as their first Bishop, succeeded by St Patrick who volunteered to go to Ireland from Britain.

Pope Gregory I the Great (596) sent St Augustine of Canterbury to England with 40 monks.

Pope Gregory II sent St Boniface (672 - 755) to Germany and he became the "Apostle of Germany". In Verona we find St Zeno a black African from Numidia as an apostle in the Fourth Century (the 8th Bishop): probably sent there by a Pope to convert the Northern invaders.

2. THE MIDDLE AGES (600 - 1400)

When Religious Orders started it was the charismatic groups who led the way to foreign missions. Franciscans, Dominicans and mainly Jesuits flocked to mission territories. At the time of their suppression, 1773, Jesuits had about 3,000 missionaries who then left the missions. They have also a good number of martyrs. They were restored in 1814 by Pius VII. (The 2nd Superior General after restoration was Fr Fortis 1820 - 1828).

Today the Jesuits number some 23,000 throughout the world and 1,100 in Africa. They are engaged in diverse apostolates: education, spiritual ministries, social and cultural development, refugee service, communications, media and publications... and so on.

3. MODERN TIMES (1700 TO THE PRESENT DAY)

II. PIONEER INSTITUTES OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS WHO WORK IN AFRICA

THE HOLY GHOST FATHERS (CSSP, RELIGIOUS)

Founded in 1703 in France, in 1841 they were amalgamated into the Missionary Society of Immaculate Heart of Mary started by Francis Libermann (1802 - 1852), a converted son of a Jewish rabbi. Today he is recognised as one of the masters of the Spiritual life based on the interior life as soul of the Apostolate.

The Holy Ghost Fathers first came to Africa in 1778 where they began work in Senegal. In West Africa they landed in Sierra Leone, but malaria and black-water fever claimed all their lives in the first few years. They kept coming nevertheless and went to Nigeria, Gambia, and Ghana where fever claimed most of them. That Coast became known as "the white man's grave". In East Africa they started in Zanzibar and Bagamoyo, and gradually spread to Mauritius, Kenya, Zambia, Zaire, Malawi, Ethiopia, and Uganda. As early as 1839 the first three African seminarians were being trained for the priesthood in the Mother house in Paris.

In East Africa the prefecture of Zanzibar was started in 1860 and stretched along 2,000 miles of coast without limits to the interior. At present they number 3280, of whom 2585 priests.

THE SOCIETY OF THE AFRICAN MISSIONS (SMA, A SOCIETY OF APOSTOLIC LIFE)

Founded in Lyons, France in 1856 by Bishop Melchior of Marion Bresillac for the conversion of Africa and Negroes of African origin.

In 1858, as its first mission, the society was given the Vicariate apostolic of Sierra Leone, where, the following year, Bresillac and most of his missionaries perished during a fever epidemic. Leadership then passed to Father Augustine Planque, whom Pius IX confirmed as the first Superior General of the Society. In 1861 a group of missionaries left for the newly- erected vicariate of Dahomey, where successful foundations were made at Ouidah, Porto Novo, and Lagos. The missionaries established stations along the West Coast of Africa, from Liberia to the Niger River. In 1875 Planque founded the Congregation of Our Lady of the Apostles to provide Religious Sisters to assist in establishing schools, orphanages, dispensaries, model farms, and workshops, in order to improve the conditions of the native people and to attract them to the Catholic religion. At the moment they number 1050, of whom 911 are priests.

THE MISSIONARIES OF AFRICA (WHITE FATHERS, A SOCIETY OF APOSTOLIC LIFE)

Founded in 1868 by Cardinal J. Lavignerie when he became Bishop of Algiers (1867). The first aim was to work among the Muslims. For this reason he gave them a white uniform. The first two groups of missionaries he sent through the Sahara Desert never reached their destination - they were murdered. The third caravan penetrated the interior of Africa from the East coast. Two of them, Father Simon Lourdel - Mapeera (from 'Mon Père') - and Brother Amans, crossed Lake Victoria from Mwanza and landed at Entebbe on 17th February, 1879.

From the time Mapeera and Brother Amans reached Uganda the Society of the Missionaries of Africa has grown, working in over 21 countries of Africa and the Middle East. Their mission is still the same: to bring the good news of salvation to the peoples of Africa and the Moslem World. At present they number 2458, of whom 2094 are priests.

ST JOSEPH'S MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF MILL HILL (A SOCIETY OF APOSTOLIC LIFE)

It was founded in 1866 by Cardinal Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster. It was meant to be the expression of the missionary efforts of Catholic England. At first they worked in Uganda (1894) and Kenya. Now they are spread in Africa, Asia and America. They number 737, of whom 629 are priests.

OBLATES OF MARY IMMACULATE (OMI, RELIGIOUS)

It was started by St Charles Joseph Eugene of Mazenod in 1816. The first members found some opposition because they opposed Jansenism. To be sure the founder asked for Pontifical approval in 1826. The aim was to preach the missions to the poor: but they soon opened to the training of seminarians.

As early as 1831 the General Chapter decided to take up the apostolate of the foreign missions. It was in 1850 that they came to Africa and first of all in North, West and South. In Rome, Lesotho, they founded a Catholic University which they later yielded to the State.

In 1963 the members were more than 7,000, of whom 5,000 were priests and 1,227 scholastics. Now they number 4973, of whom 3790 are priests.

CONSOLATA MISSIONARY FATHERS (RELIGIOUS)

Started by Blessed Joseph Alamanno in 1901 for the First Evangelisation of peoples. Their spiritual life is based on the devotion to Our Lady and the Eucharist. The first commitment was for Kenya in 1902. Their method was: visiting villages, distributing free medicines and starting schools. At present they are also in Tanzania, Zaire, Uganda and in Latin America. At the moment they number 993, of whom 761 are priests.

CONGREGATION OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY (or SCHEUT MISSIONARIES, RELIGIOUS)

The Society was started in 1862 by Theophile Verbist at Scheut (near Brussels in Belgium). The first mission was China where the founder himself died in 1868. They began their missionary work in Zaire in 1885 where in 1961 they had 730 missionaries. At present they number 1444, of whom 1071 are priests.

SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD (SVD, RELIGIOUS)

The Divine Word Missionaries were started in 1875 in Steye, Holland by Arnold Jansenn for the foreign missions. At first the members took private Vows and followed the rule of Dominican Tertiaries. They became a religious Institute in 1889. The first missionary field was Argentina (1884) and the second in West Africa starting from Togo (1892). They are specialised in the apostolate of the press and in Anthropology. They are also keen in the pastoral care of American Negroes. Years ago they had about 100 American Negro priests.

At the moment they number 5791, of whom 3683 are priests. Brothers feel they have their place in the Society mainly in the Apostolate of the press and mass-media.

CATH. FOREIGN MISSION SOCIETY OF AMERICA (or MARY KNOLL, A SOCIETY OF APOSTOLIC LIFE)

American Catholics felt that they had received so much from Europe that they themselves should cooperate for the expansion of the gospel in the world. This society was started by local clergy in 1911. The first field was China and Japan. They came in East Africa, in 1954. They number 726, of whom 629 are priests.

SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS XAVIER FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS (XAVERIANS, RELIGIOUS)

Founded in 1898 by Bishop Conforti of Parma (Northern Italy) for first evangelisation. They started first in Asia and since the expulsion from China they are working in West and Central Africa and Burundi. At the moment they number 927, of whom 693 are priests.

SACRED HEART MISSIONARIES (MSC, RELIGIOUS)

Founded in France in 1869 by Rev. Fr Jules Chevalier to renew the faith in France through devotion to the Sacred Heart. Although not originally intended for work in the foreign missions, the society considered this work very appropriate for the fulfilment of their motto: "May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere" (members must volunteer for mission appointment). Early this Century they went to Zaire. At the moment they number 2388, of whom 1666 are priests.

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS (SCJ, or DEHONIANS, RELIGIOUS)

Rev. Leon G. Dehon started the Institute in 1878 in France. Their distinctive spirituality is devotion and reparation to the Sacred Heart through active apostolate. In the USA they have some Nubians working among the American Negroes. In Africa they work mainly in Zaire, South Africa, Mozambique. At the moment they number 2468 of whom 1775 are priests. They have 366 communities.

III. PIONEER INSTITUTES OF THE SISTERS

SISTERS OF ST JOSEPH OF CLUNY

They were founded in 1807 by Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey (1779 - 1851) with the aim of conducting schools, orphanages and helping the sick and the aged. However the Institute spread immediately to mission territories. In 1817, 4 sisters went to the Isle of Reunion. Blessed Anne herself went to Senegal where she started the project later abandoned of sending boys to France to prepare for the priesthood. She had in mind "We need to save Africa with Africans". At her death,

the Institute had 118 houses for 700 sisters in France and 300 in the Russian territories. At the moment they have 3266 members.

SISTERS OF ST JOSEPH OF THE APPARITION

Founded in France in 1832, by Sr. Emile of Vialar (1797 - 1856) they soon spread to mission territories in Africa and Asia.

They were the first to cooperate with Comboni from 1867 to 1879: first in Cairo in 1867 and then in Central Africa from 1873 up to 1879. At the moment they number 1131.

FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

(SAID OF EGYPT)

Founded at Cairo, Egypt on 19th September 1859 by Mother Catherine of St Rosa (Costanza Troiani 1813 - 1877). The first Italian Missionary Society of women.

The main aim is missionary activity. Mother Catherine began her work at Cairo in 1859 principally concerned with the rescue and education of little Negro girls and orphans. They work also outside Africa. At the moment they number 1026.

MISSIONARY SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF AFRICA (WHITE SISTERS)

Founded in 1869 by Cardinal Lavigerie. They started their Apostolate in Northern Africa. They are engaged in all varieties of services in about 19 countries in Africa. The first Sisters to arrive in Africa south of the Sahara were the group which went to Uganda in 1899.

MISSIONARY SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF CONSOLATA

Founded by Blessed Joseph Alamano in Turin in 1910, after the foundation of the Consolata Fathers (1902). The first field of their apostolate was Kenya in 1912. They have as characteristic the devotion to our Lady of Consolata. At the moment they are 1031 spread around the world in 154 houses.

FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES OF MARY (FMM)

Started in India by a French Lady Heleine of Chappotin of Nenville (Mother Mary of the Passion), specifically for work in the foreign missions. They took their generalate to Rome in 1882.

Their apostolate is education, social services, medicine, nursing and catechetics.

Eight members were declared Blessed, six of them martyrs in Mao's New China. They work also in Africa, particularly Zaire. They number 8310, divided in 885 communities.

SISTERS OF CHARITY OF ST JOAN ANTIDA

Founded in 1799 in France opened to all works of charity and to foreign missions. In Africa they work in Central and Southern Africa but only since 1934. They number 4321 in 553 houses.

SOCIETY OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS (RSCJ)

Its foundress is Madeleine Sophie Barat (1779 - 1865) French. They are devoted to the work of education and they base their spiritual life upon prayer and interior union with the Heart of Jesus whose virtues are to be practised in the apostolate. In Africa, they work in Congo Brazzaville and Zaire. They now number 4174 in 531 communities.

IV. ORGANISATIONS STRICTLY LINKED WITH COMBONI

In addition to Marien Verein and the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition we list the other main ones.

SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGANDA OF FAITH

Miss Pauline Jaricot (1799 -1862) in Lyon France founded this Society. On Christmas Day 1816 she took a perpetual vow of virginity. At the age of 17 she founded the Union of Prayers in Reparation to the Sacred Heart, an organisation of servant girls. It was among them that she first solicited contributions for the foreign missions. In 1820 she formed an Association to aid the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris. She promoted the Association of the Holy Childhood, and engaged in other apostolic works for women of all classes.

Her main preoccupation, however, was to help the foreign missions through the alms and prayers of the faithful. In 1822, the Vicar-General of New Orleans, came to Lyons to raise funds for his mission. He gathered a group of 12 laymen into an association. Because of Pauline Jaricot's success in such work, this association joined with her existing group to form the Society for the Propagation of Faith (3rd May, 1822). Pauline Marie Jaricot is recognised as the foundress. At the time it was also called the Missionary Society of Lyons or the St Francis Xavier Society. There was much discussion as to Pauline's techniques of fund-raising. It was a simple system in which a promoter found 10 persons to contribute a cent a week and who turned these funds over to another person in charge of 10 promoters, and so on.

The Society soon spread all over the World, but the offerings were distributed by Lyons and Paris. However the Bishops of the other countries wanted to transfer the seat of the administration to Rome. This was done in 1922 by Pope Pius XI, who also gave directives for its administration. At the present time it is a department of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (SCEP), who nominates the national Directors.

PIOUS ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE FREEING OF SLAVE GIRLS

FR NICOLAS OLIVIERI (Genova, Northern Italy 1792 - 1864).

The Cousin of St John Batista of Rossi used to meet traders and mariners at the docks, and one day he also met a young African; from then he came to know that the slave trade was still working. He decided to free young slaves, take them to Europe to Institutions set up for that purpose, or entrust them to already existing ones, and prepare them for baptism. He sold all his property including furniture and books. He went to Egypt seven times to free slaves. The members of the order of the Holy Trinity helped them until 1857. They left and were replaced by Fr Biasio Verri.

FR BIASIO VERRI (born in 1819 in Barni, Valsassina Northern Italy, he died in Turin in a house of St Joseph Cottolengo in 1884).

Fr Biasio followed Fr Olivieri in his last journey to Egypt. As Fr Olivieri was looking for money in Europe, Fr Biasio in 10 months made 9 journeys to Egypt. He soon realised the weakness of the system of Don Olivieri, opened a house in Egypt and entrusted it to the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Egypt. The initiative redeemed 810 slaves, of whom 300 died in Italy because of a drought which brought sickness. The contacts of Fr Verri in Germany gave origin to the Society of Cologne.

THE SOCIETY FOR THE AFRICANS OF COLOGNE (KOLNER NEGER VEREIN)

One Siegwart Miller met Fr Olivieri and wanted to help. He received the approval of Cardinal J. Von Geise of Cologne in 1859. At the beginning he had the same aim but later on started to help all initiatives for the conversion of Africa and the training of Africans to become evangelisers themselves. Through their Bulletin donors were kept well informed. Comboni, who was in contact as Director of the Colleges of Don Mazza, found himself in perfect harmony with the aim of the Society and contributed articles to the Bulletin. The Society helped him and the Comboni Missionaries until its close in 1939 when it was absorbed by the Associations of St Francis Xavier, the predecessor of MISSIO, Aachen.

FR NICOLA MAZZA (1790 - 1865)

A Jesuit, Andres Avogadro (1735 - 1815), who was Bishop of Verona from 1790 until 1824, impressed a missionary spirit on the clergy and found a particular response in a priest, Fr Gaspare Bertoni, who in his turn transmitted it to a group of priests, among them Fr Nicola Mazza. The latter became known as 'Don Congo' on account of his missionary interest. In 1828, Fr Mazza started an Institute for the education of needy young people, mainly orphans and poor ones. In 1848 there were 300 girls.

Fr Olivieri asked him to accept his young Africans which willingly Fr Mazza did; Don Mazza later had the idea of sending the young people back to Africa as bearers of the Christian faith.

For this purpose Fr Mazza since 1838 had a plan to start a permanent group of priests. Among these priests we find Fr Angelo Vinco, ordained in 1844 and sent to the College of Propaganda Fide in Rome. In 1847 he came to be part of the first expedition to Central Africa. Don Mazza entrusted him with the task of buying young girls and then sending them to Verona.

Upon the return of Fr A. Vinco, Don Mazza planned for the opening of a mission in Central Africa in consultation with Msgr Knoblecker (1851), Propaganda (1852) and Marien Verein (1853). For this purpose, he sent two of his priests to Khartoum for further investigations, Fr Giovanni Beltrame and Don Antonio Castegnaro who died after a few months. Having received permission in 1857 he sent the first group of six which included Daniel Comboni. In 1862, Mazza sent Comboni to Rome to ask for a mission territory within the Vicariate for his own Institute; a petition which he repeated in 1865 on the insistence of Comboni. Fr Mazza died on 8th February 1865 and his successor Don Tomba declined to take on such a responsibility in May 1866. In this way the Institute of Fr Mazza ended its involvement with the Vicariate of Central Africa.

BLESSED LUDOVICO OF CASORIA (NEAR NAPLES)

Born in 1814, he died in 1885 and was beatified on 18th April 1893 of the main Franciscan Order, (OFM).

Fr Ludovico founded two Institutes in 1852, the Grey Friars and Grey Sisters, grey because of the colour of their habit. After the example of Fr Olivieri in 1854 he started one college for African boys and one for African girls, at La Palma, near Naples. Naples was more fit for Africans because of its mild climate during the winter.

The aim of the college was to welcome redeemed young Africans, to give them a Christian education, a profession and then send them back to share their faith and skill with their own people.

Their training would last more or less 18 years. After that they had to make the choice of becoming Franciscan priests and brothers, or remaining lay people, but members of the Third Order (Franciscan). Once they reached their final goal, they would go back to Africa in groups of three, always including a priest.

When Msgr Knoblecker wanted to start a Seminary in Europe for the training of African boys, Propaganda Fide indicated the choice of the College of Fr Ludovico, rather than starting a new initiative. Marien Verein would pay for the expenses of the journey, for the rest Naples and its King Ferdinando II would help.

In 1860, there were already fifty African boys and six priests; some of them joined the Franciscan expedition of 1861 - 1862.

At the closing of the Vicariate, the Minister General of the Franciscans in 1865 asked Propaganda to appoint Fr Ludovico Provicar Apostolic with the See in Scellal. Propaganda sent Comboni and Casoria to Scellal. Casoria after a short visit left there 2 priests and 14 brothers, but did not accept the division of the Vicariate proposed by Daniel Comboni. In 1867, Casoria closed down and everything disappeared.

Part Two

MAJOR EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF COMBONI

Chapter Five

COMBONI FROM 1831 TO 1872

FROM 1831 TO 1859

Daniel Comboni was born on 15th March 1831 at Limone sul Garda, Northern Italy. The following day he was baptised with the name of Anthony Daniel, but he preferred to be called Daniel. His father was Luigi, his mother Dominica. They had eight children. Only Daniel survived to adult age. On 20th February, 1843 he was received at Verona by the servant of God Father Nicholas Mazza, who educated him for the priesthood and missionary life in his own Institute.

At the age of 17, while sure of his Vocation to priesthood, he desired to consecrate himself to the missions of Central Africa, though his first contact with the missionary work of the Church was the life of the Japanese martyrs written by St Alphonsus Liguori. He himself narrated this event a year later:

"It was in January 1849 when I, as a seventeen year old student of philosophy, at the feet of my venerable superior, Don Nicholas Mazza, promised to consecrate my life to the Apostolate of Central Africa. And with the grace of God I have never been unfaithful to that promise. I began then to prepare myself for this holy undertaking." (Daniel Comboni Gli Scritti Writings no. 4083)

As a consequence he orientated himself towards his future apostolate. Among other things he studied Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish, French and English.

Ordained priest 31st November 1854 he dedicated himself to the care of those suffering from cholera: he earned a public commendation from the Civil Authorities.

The decisive year for his missionary life was 1857, three years after his ordination. At the end of a retreat (9th August) Father John Marani of the Stigmatine Society assured him that he certainly had a missionary vocation for Africa.

With all the courage of an apostle, he was able to face the painful separation from his parents who remained behind, poor and alone, and he decided to leave for Africa on September 6th as a member of the Mazza Institute expedition.

The expedition made a long halt in Egypt and Comboni took advantage of this period to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land (29th September - 16th October), where he visited the places of Christ's life and death. It was this approach to the humanity of Christ that increased and revealed to him the human love of Christ and made him more and more aware of the human needs of the peoples of Central Africa.

The expedition left Cairo at the beginning of 1858. They met Msgr I. Knoblecher at Aswan who told Fr Beltrame:

"I recommend to you the Verona mission, of which you are taking charge. Orders have already been given that you and your companions will be welcome at Holy Cross. You will stay there for some time to explore the country, record the customs of the inhabitants, and study their language. You will then choose a suitable site to found your mission ... I do not know whether we shall ever meet again. I am worn out. I feel that I shall soon die". (Msgr M. Grancelli D. Comboni Page 31-32).

His presentiment was true. Exhausted and ill, Knoblecher died at Naples on 13th April 1858. He was only thirty-eight years old.

As we have seen already after a long journey up the Nile, Comboni reached the Holy Cross mission station in the heart of Africa on 14th February. It was here that Comboni, in all the intensity of his apostolic enthusiasm, had his first living contact with the black African world.

Before long he was struck down with intermittent attacks of fever which often brought him near to death and then he was forced to return to Verona in June 1859.

FROM 1860 TO 1864

This was a period of reflection and rethinking his missionary experience and the many deaths that occurred, of the apparent impossibility for Europeans to live and work in Central Africa; so his thoughts were always turned towards Africa. It was as a result of this openness to the missions that Father Mazza gave Comboni the task (26th November) of going to Aden to ransom some young black slaves whom he was to bring to Verona, where they would be received in the African colleges opened

as part of the Institute. Passing through Rome (20th December), he had his first audience with Pius IX. This audience was very short and Comboni asked him a number of blessings including blessings for the Institutes of Verona and of course Africa. Comboni left the Pope with the greatest consolation in his heart.

He arrived at Aden (12th January) and after wearisome formalities succeeded in leaving (2nd February) with seven African boys. In Egypt he encountered serious difficulties regarding their embarkation for Europe, but he overcame them. The difficulties were created by the fact that slavery had been recently abolished: so Comboni had to prove that he was not taking the young men into slavery. He arrived (18th March) at Verona where he made the necessary arrangements for the young Africans.

He was named Vice-Rector of the African colleges belonging to the Mazza Institute (18th March): he worked in the education of Africans for three years.

In this capacity he had the occasion to go to Germany where he made contact for the first time with the "Cologne Society" which had been formed for the ransom and care of African slave children. All the reflections and contacts of these years matured his approach to the Apostolate in Africa.

It was in fact in 1864 that while praying at the tomb of St Peter in Rome (15th September), the beginning of the Triduum in preparation to the Beatification of St Mary Margaret Alacoque, he conceived his "Plan for the Regeneration of Africa" which he immediately presented to the Prefect of Propaganda, Cardinal Alexander Barnabò on the 18th September, the day of the Beatification of St Mary Margaret, and to Pius IX (19th September). On Cardinal Barnabò's advice, he undertook (October) a journey throughout Europe to promote the missions. Passing through Turin, he published (December) the first Italian edition of the "Plan".

FROM 1864 TO 1872

After the inspiration of the Plan, Comboni felt he had received from God the responsibility of the missions in Africa. So he went all over Europe, France, Germany, England to promote his work and to ask for financial assistance.

During this successful period he had somehow paid for it. In fact while he was away from Verona there had been an attempt to have him expelled from the Mazza Institute. With a heavy heart Comboni hurried back to Verona (June), where he was re-united with Father Mazza, who welcomed him as a son and sent him to Rome (25th June). There, on behalf of the Institute, he was to seek a mission in Africa.

In looking for a mission for the Institute, Comboni kept in mind that the Vicariate of Central Africa had been entrusted to the Franciscans responsible for the Vicariate of Egypt. He approached the Superior General of the Franciscans who directed him to Father Ludovico of Casoria. Comboni and Father Ludovico went to Rome to Propaganda Fide, to discuss the problem. The following suggestions were made:

- The Eastern side of the Nile from Egypt to the Equator, bordering Ethiopia to the Institute of Don Mazza;
- The Western side from Egypt to the Equator and without limit to the West, to the Franciscans.

It would appear that Father Ludovico did not like the division. Then the journey to Scellal of Comboni and the Father did not come to any definite conclusion.

Moreover in May 1866, Father Tomba successor of Father Mazza officially declined to take responsibility of the part assigned to them. However Father Tomba declared his willingness to put some girls trained in Verona at Comboni's disposal .

Comboni did not despair: he recalled the words of Father Oliboni on his death bed: "If only one of you will be left, he will continue the mission". Comboni was encouraged in his work by a request of Cardinal Barnabò to give him a report of the journey to Egypt and Scellal and to express his opinion about future steps for the Vicariate.

Comboni's suggestion was to ask the main Franciscan Order (OFM) in Egypt to take over the responsibility of the territory of Nubia. For the rest he proposed his Plan.

With the support of Cardinal Peter Castellaci, Comboni decided to found his own Missionary Society under the patronage of Cardinal L. Canossa Bishop of Verona (as we will see later on).

Note: J. H. Speke identified the sources of the Nile in 1862.

Chapter Six

THE PLAN¹

I. THE ORIGINAL PLAN

It is contained in the 'Summary of the New project of the Association of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary for the conversion of Africa proposed to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide by Father Daniel Comboni of the Mazza Institute' (Rome - 18th September 1864)

We don't find a formal approval of the Plan: as a matter of fact Cardinal Barnabò did not introduce the Plan to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (SCPF), but he kept the Plan in mind when thinking of Africa. Pope Pius IX in one of the audiences given to Comboni precisely the one of 28th October 1865 told Comboni: "I am pleased of your interest in the cause of Africa. Now go to Paris and introduce the Plan to the Pontifical Works for the Propagation of Faith. Then Cardinal Barnabò will inform all the Ordinaries of Africa and will sign the decree of approval. I ask you also to consider how the Plan can be implemented in collaboration with other missionary Societies".

(It seems that this meeting was the occasion when the enthusiastic Comboni got the Pope with his back to the wall)

The manuscript of this Plan is in the possession of our Institute: there are many scripts prepared for different occasions, like the memorandum sent to Sacred Congregation of Evangelization of Peoples (SCEP) on the 24th October 1864, and also printed editions like those of 1865.

Noteworthy is the "Plan for the regeneration of Africa proposed by Father Daniel Comboni Apostolic Missionary of Central Africa" printed in Rome at Propaganda Fide Press (1867). Here he left out that he was a member of the Mazza Institute: he was an Apostolic missionary that was directly at the service of the Holy See.

Remarkable is the "Letter and Postulatum to the Eminent and Most Reverend Fathers of the Sacred Ecumenical Vatican Council on behalf of the black people of Central Africa" (Feast of the Sacred Heart 24th June 1870). It was presented to the Council Fathers for their signature.

The number of Council Fathers who signed was 70 (pages 131 - 134). The paper could not be discussed because of the war for the independence of Italy whose army occupied Rome on the 24th October 1870.

II. THE MAIN POINTS OF THE PLAN (FROM THE VENICE EDITION OF 1865)

Faced by the facts of experience, the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide was deeply concerned, and reduced, in spite of itself, to the hard necessity of abandoning the important mission of Central Africa if no way could be found of assuring a more effective conversion of the Africans.

"The heart of every good and faithful Catholic, inflamed as it must be by the spirit of the love of Jesus Christ, will surely be deeply wounded and grievously stricken by the appalling idea of seeing the Church suspend, perhaps for many Centuries, her work on behalf of so many millions of souls still languishing in the shadow of death. So the path so far followed must be altered, the old system must be changed and a new plan must be drawn up which will lead more effectively to the desired end. This will serve to strengthen the superhuman virtue of Christian love, and it will expunge forever from the mind of the Catholic philanthropist the distressing thought of leaving those vast and populous regions cloaked in unbelief, when they are clearly the most needy and abandoned in the world." (Page 214)

¹ Quotations and pages without further indications are from "Papers for the Evangelisation of Africa" of Father P. Chiochetta MCCJ - EMI Bologna 1982.

CENTRE OF OPERATION

On this important subject we said to ourselves: “Would the conquest of the tribes of unhappy Africa not be better effected by siting our centre of operations in a place where Africans can live without changing and Europeans can live without succumbing? Our thought has become set on this great idea; and the regeneration of Africa by Africa seems to us the only programme to be followed in bringing about so dazzling a conquest. This is the reason why, in our weakness, we have thought it permissible humbly to suggest a way along which the lofty goal may more probably be reached. On this goal every thought of our life will be centred and for it we would be happy to pour out the last drop of our blood. We hardly dare in all reverence to rise from our lowliness to engage in the discussion of so Catholic a problem, which has perhaps taxed the minds of the deepest thinkers. Yet we shall be forgiven if the impulse of our heart, where we feel most strongly the cry of misery directed towards us all by those unhappy sons of Adam who are our brothers, should carry our mind away from the path of truth and certainty. Perhaps the Plan, which flashed before us as we sighed most ardently for those unhappy regions, when put into effect, would not have the advantage of achieving its purpose with great speed, while in other missions the apostolic workers are already harvesting the fruits of their labours. Yet, nevertheless, it is towards this goal that it unfailingly tends and, for its complete execution, it needs only the shortening of the days which God, seated on his eternal throne, has decreed for its accomplishment.” (page 214 - 215)

THE WHOLE AFRICA

“This new plan would, therefore, not restrict itself to the old-established borders of the mission of Central Africa, but it would, rather, include the whole African race; it would consequently extend and develop its activity over almost all the countries of black Africa. Now, although the Holy Apostolic See has never succeeded in planting the faith with stability among the huge tribes of Central Africa, it has, nevertheless, been profuse in its loving concern for the islands and coastal regions which surround the great African peninsula, and has founded there twelve Vicariates Apostolic, nine Prefectures Apostolic and ten Dioceses which flourish more or less splendidly” (page 215 - 216)

INSTITUTES TO BE ESTABLISHED

“The plan, therefore, which we would dare to submit and propose to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide, would be the creation of innumerable Institutes for both sexes to surround the whole of Africa. These would be carefully situated at the least possible distance from the interior of the continent, in stable and fairly civilised areas, in which both Europeans and Africans could live and work.

These men's and women's Institutes, each situated and set up according to the regulations of the canonical provisions, would admit young African men and women with the aim of educating them in the Catholic religion and in Christian civilisation and of thus creating a group for men and one for women, destined each in its own way, gradually to advance and to spread into the African interior, there to plant the faith and civilisation they have received.

To the directions of these Institutes would be called the religious Orders and the Catholic Institutes of men and women, as approved by the Church or recognised or permitted by the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda.

The personnel in charge of these Institutes would direct their African students according to the rules and spirit of their own Societies, suitably adapted to the requirements of the African interior.

Small seminaries for the African missions will be set up in Europe with these aims: to train groups of European missionaries to direct the African Institutes on the lines described above, to undertake new missions among the African peoples, and to open a way to the African apostolate for all the secular priests of the Catholic countries who might be called by God to such a sublime and important mission” (pages 218 - 219).

PROPER TRAINING

“The training given to the young Africans must be in accordance with their own ideas and must be characterised by the following goals: to impress and plant in their souls the spirit of Jesus Christ, integrity of behaviour, firmness of faith, the principles of Christian morals, a knowledge of the Catholic catechism and the basic elements of necessary human knowledge. Besides this, all the men will be instructed in the practice of agriculture and in one or more skills of first importance; and every woman will be similarly educated in the most necessary of women's skills. Thus the former will become honest, virtuous, useful and active men and the latter virtuous and capable mothers and wives. We believe that this active application to work, in which we want all the members of the African Institutes to be involved, will have a powerful influence for the moral and spiritual good of the individual Africans” (page 219)

“From each of these Institutes surrounding the great African peninsula there will be formed groups of men and women destined gradually to transfer themselves into Central Africa with the aim of initiating and consolidating there the saving work of Catholicism, and of setting up mission stations from which will shine out the light of religion and civilisation”. (page 220)

DIFFERENT TRAINING FOR MEN

“The group of young African men, made up of those individuals judged to be most suited for the great purpose, will be composed of:

1. Catechists to whom will be given a broader knowledge of the sacred sciences;
2. Teachers who will receive every possible instruction in the most important sciences adaptable to the countries of the interior.
3. Craftsmen, to whom will be given a practical knowledge of the necessary skills most useful in the central regions, to make them into virtuous and capable farmers, doctors, phlebotomists, nurses, pharmacists, carpenters, tailors, tanners, blacksmiths, builders, shoemakers, and so on. This group of craftsmen will also become honest and virtuous merchants who will promote and participate in the trade of home-produced and imported goods. This trade will gradually create and introduce a source of that prosperity which will raise the black peoples from their abject poverty and powerlessness to the condition of the civilised nations. From all these elements of indigenous industry there will be produced the material means to maintain the development of the Catholic missions in the African interior”.

DIFFERENT TRAINING FOR WOMEN

“The group of young African women, similarly formed from those individuals most suited for the great purpose, will be composed of:

1. Instructresses, to whom will be given the most complete education possible in religion and Catholic morals.
2. Teachers and housewives who must promote the education of women in reading, writing, keeping accounts, spinning, sewing, weaving, caring for the sick and practising all the domestic skills most useful in the countries of Central Africa”. (page 221)

PRIESTS

“From the group of catechists formed by the young African men, there will be chosen a group composed of those individuals who most distinguish themselves for their holiness and knowledge and in whom there appears to be the readiness to enter the clerical state. These will be directed towards the priesthood. In the training of this special group the great variety of subjects which seminarians in Europe are obliged to study will be avoided. The teaching will be limited to those theological and scientific subjects that are of first importance, such as are sufficient for the requirements and needs of those countries. Also, given the quick physical and intellectual development of the Africans, we would not wish this training to be prolonged to the twelve or more years usual in Europe. We would consider six to eight years sufficient, as might be judged advisable in each case” (pages 221-222).

VIRGINS OF CHARITY

“From among the young African women who do not feel inclined to the married state will similarly be chosen the group of Virgins of Charity, made up of those individuals who have most distinguished themselves by their holiness and in the practical teaching of the catechism, of languages and of feminine skills

“European missionaries must be substituted by others every year or within two years in the on-the-spot direction of the central missions, until such time as experience indicates that it is possible safely to entrust native priests or catechists of proven suitability with the permanent direction of the missions and Christian communities of the interior, once they have been founded and set in motion by the European missionaries” (page 222).

UNIVERSITIES

“In order to develop the gifts of the most able members of the indigenous clergy, and to train them as able and enlightened leaders of the Christian communities of the interior of Africa, the Association in charge of directing the new Plan will, as its great work progresses, found four great African theological-scientific universities at the most important points in Africa.

In these university centres, as in other important places on the islands and along the coast of Africa, may in due course be founded little centres of specialisation in craft studies. These would be for the young African craftsmen found most suited to a more advanced training. Thus, by means of the introduction of these crafts which would improve the material conditions of the immense African tribes, the missionaries would find it easier to introduce the faith in a deeper and more stable way” (page 224).

III. THE “NEWNESS OF THE PLAN”

The “Project for the Conversion of Africa” is presented as “new”. This characteristic of “newness” appears very clearly in the following passage. “Experience has thus clearly shown that the system followed until now, while most useful for the conversion of unbelievers in other parts of the world is no less plainly inadvisable for the regeneration of the African interior”, and Comboni speaks of his own experience.

The originality of ‘Comboni’ project lies in the urgency and resolution with which it faces a dilemma, the depths of which are illustrated by its consequences: “the appalling idea of seeing the Church suspend, perhaps for many Centuries, her work on behalf of so many millions of souls still languishing in darkness and the shadow of death”.

The newness is also the fact that the Plan “has flashed into my mind”. This defines for us its supernatural originality.

A letter he wrote from Rome to his Superior, Father Nicholas Mazza, dated October 20th, 1864, eloquently reveals the excitement out of which the “new Project” was born: “I believe this Plan is the work of God, because the thought of it burst upon me on September 15th while I was doing the triduum to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque; and on September 18th, the day this servant of God was beatified, Cardinal Barnabò finished reading my Plan. I worked on it for sixty continuous hours”.

“It is providence that guided my mind and my heart”. (pages 23 - 25)

The other aspect of the originality of the Project consists in the fact that from now on, the path Comboni was called to follow, stretched out plainly before him, the path for which he would live and die in unconditional self-giving: “Africa or Death!”.

The regeneration of Africa is not only achieved through the training of the local clergy and the establishment of ecclesiastic structures like Churches, Parishes, Dioceses. The target is the radical transformation of service and cultural values which are not in contradiction with the Gospel. (Comboni in this shares the views of other missionaries but he is more practical with a clear project of the integral promotion of the human person) (see Gonzales *Comboni: En El Corazon De la Mission Africana* pages 291 - 292).

Indicative is what Mazza had to say:

“On the theoretical level, as I say, the project (Comboni's Plan) pleases me, but very great difficulties indeed face me in seeking to execute it. I felt and still feel absolutely unable to overcome and conquer them. This is why I told Father Comboni that, for my part, I would not dare to promote such an undertaking but that I would not stop him from doing so, as I did not want to oppose something for which he felt able and enthusiastic. I told him not to act as if encouraged by me, but rather as if separate from and independent of me. If this work were to get under way by God's grace, I together with my Institute would always be ready to help as far as we are able... Everything is possible for God... This is the reason why Comboni is no more considered member of our Institute”.

Father Mazza to Cardinal Barnabò, from Verona, February 3rd 1865 (Msgr Grancelli, ib page 83). Moreover the Plan is not only for Central Africa, but for the whole Continent; it includes a call to the whole Church to feel her responsibility for the conversion of Africans “the poorest and most abandoned” and for their integral development.

IV. THE “POSTULATUM” SENT TO THE VATICAN COUNCIL I

With a covering letter Comboni sent the document to be discussed and endorsed by the first Vatican Council. It was signed by 71 Bishops but it could not be discussed because of the interruption of the Council.

We report here the “Postulatum” itself. The reasons given and the enthusiastic presentation through the covering letter are known from the text of the Plan itself.

“Postulatum” to the Sacred Vatican Ecumenical Council for the Peoples of Central Africa:

“With humility and fervent supplication, the undersigned Fathers implore the sacred Vatican Ecumenical Council, as it turns its attention to the entire world, filled with pity for the needs of all, to deign to direct at least one look of compassion towards Central Africa. That region is, in fact, oppressed by the gravest of evils; its area is twice that of Europe; and it is inhabited by more than one hundred million descendants of Ham, one-tenth of the population of the world.

“The Catholic apostolate has, at all times, made repeated and very great efforts to bring Africa into the true Church of Jesus Christ. Indeed large sections of its coastline are administered by many Vicariates and Prefectures Apostolic and by several Dioceses. Yet Central Africa is still almost entirely unexplored and unknown and, though the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide has, especially in more recent times, renewed its concern for this cause, nevertheless these regions of Central Africa are still neglected, almost completely abandoned to their wretched situation, without Shepherd, without Apostles, without Church and without Faith.

“In the face of these reality, the undersigned Fathers implore the Sacred Ecumenical Council with great insistence to deign to persuade the Bishops, by means of a courteous exhortation and an agreement, to find workers worthy of the Gospel or some other form of help for this abandoned vineyard of the Lord. And if the council should judge it wise, the undersigned Fathers beg it, with its solemn authority, to invite the whole Catholic world to come to the aid of this cause, by endorsing this heavenly and holy undertaking and asking for effective help from the whole Christian people so that it may flourish”.

It is of great interest to see how passionately Comboni writes to Canossa on this point:

“I hope to leave from Alexandria on March 1st and to be in Rome on the 8th. Since the discussion is now about “Matters of the Oriental Rite” and thus concerns the Catholic Missions, would not this be the right moment for you to agree with Cardinal Barnabò and with the Delegate to speak in the Council on behalf of Central Africa, of the 100 million Africans who lie buried in the shadows of death? Would it not be a matter of great importance to make proposals about and to discuss the method of winning for the Church the tenth part of mankind, who have not been won for the Church by so many attempts throughout eighteen Centuries? Would not this be the moment to organise “a coup d'etat”, to call on the great lights of the Church and all the Catholics in the world, represented by the Bishops of the Council, quickly to obtain time, men and money to lay siege to Africa?

“Yes indeed, Monsignor, my Father, it does seem to me that this is a subject worthy of the Council. Let your Lordship stand up in Council and say to Pius IX: *“Emitte, Beatissime Pater,*

voce tuam, et renovabitur facies Africae". A word from the Holy Father, the support of the Bishops, yes, these would make every Catholic in the world sit up and take notice and give generously to Africa. Apostles for Africa would arise.

"Please give these ideas, Monsignor, your careful reflection and have the courage to insist with the Bishops, to beg and thoroughly pester the most Reverend Fathers and above all our Cardinal Prefect, and don't let them go until you have got what you want. The Holy Family will, I hope, grant this grace to me, my colleagues and to our Institutes, where prayers are said daily for this intention" (Message of Daniel Comboni MDC no. 57).

CONCLUSION

Thus it was that Comboni fulfilled the prayer of the dying Father Francis Oliboni at Holy Cross (March 26th, 1858):

"Brothers, I die, and I am glad to die, because it is God's will; but you must not lose heart because of this; do not be shaken in your resolution; continue the work you have begun and even if only one of you is left, he must not give up hope or withdraw. God wants the conversion of Africans. I die with this certainty in my heart" (Msgr Grancelli, *ib.* page 37).

Chapter Seven

THE FOUNDATION OF THE INSTITUTES

The Comboni Institutes are the main fruit of the Plan, they were “conceived” on 15th September 1864. Comboni arrived at their foundation by stages:

I. THE ASSOCIATION OF “THE GOOD SHEPHERD” (OPERA DEL BUON PASTORE)

The Association of “the Good Shepherd” for the Regeneration of Africa (Opera del Buon Pastore). In those years when the new Italian government was against religious Institutes and seized their properties, Comboni started an association which neither in itself nor from the composition of its Board of Governors was a religious Institution. On the other side, he needed the government's recognition for an Association which would be a legal trustee with the right of ownership. The Association was canonically erected on 1st June 1867 by Cardinal Canossa, with the decree “*Magno sane perfundimur gaudio*” (“It is with our great joy that ...”). Later, on the 6th March 1868, the Cardinal sent a circular letter to all the Bishops of Italy inviting them to set up the Association in their dioceses.

The aim of the Association was the Regeneration of Africa through the following means:

- Missionary Animation;
- The opening of several missionary Institutes throughout Europe;
- Financial support for the seminaries and the missions.

A seminary was set up within the responsibility of the Association. Comboni wrote to Cardinal Barnabò on 11th June 1867: “I have the pleasure to inform you that H.E. Bishop Canossa has just opened a Seminary in Verona for our dear African Missions. In the future it is to be hoped that this Seminary will take the name of “The Institute of the Good Shepherd for the Regeneration of Africa”.

THE INSTITUTE, THEREFORE, WAS STARTED

- For the regeneration of Africa through Africa;
- With a profound sense of the Church;
- At Verona, but born (with its roots) in the African missions;
- As typically and essentially missionary;
- As supranational and Catholic, open to the cooperation of the whole of Europe. The Decree of Erection stated: “The work of regeneration must be Catholic, not Spanish, French, German, or Italian”;
- Under the protection of H. E. Cardinal Canossa as the ecclesiastical expression of the patronage of our Lady of the Seven Sorrows and of St Paul Apostle of the Gentiles.
- With the Seminary in Verona near the Church of St Peter Incarnario;
- With Fr Alessandro Dal Bosco as Rector ;
- With its first aggregate members, the four Cammillians;
- With the Committee or Board of Governors set up on 23rd January 1868 in Verona under the Presidency of Cardinal Canossa with Comboni as director. The members were selective representatives of the clergy and the laity of Verona.

II. SUSPENSION OF THE ASSOCIATION (OPERA)

In 1868 Comboni began making arrangements for opening an Institute in Paris, an important political and religious centre. To this end he published a French edition of the Plan and established there a Committee of the Association of the Good Shepherd (as he had already done in Spain and Germany). But at the request of the Secretary of the Association for the Propagation of the Faith of Lyons, who wrongly feared that Comboni's Association would undercut their own collection of funds, Rome ordered Comboni to stop collecting funds both in France and Italy through the Association of the Good Shepherd. Comboni obeyed and stopped also all arrangements for setting up an Institute in Paris and for collecting money.

Cardinal Barnabò wrote to all the Bishops in Italy to prohibit all collections for the missions in their dioceses except those promoted in favour of the Association of Lyons. Canossa following

the decision of Propaganda Fide (Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples - SCEP) called to a halt the activities of the Institute, though he stopped short of suppressing it. So the activity of the Seminary remained at a standstill. The situation was made worse by the death of Fr A. Dal Bosco on the 15th December 1867: he was replaced by Fr Tommaso Toffanelli as a caretaker.

III. THE INSTITUTES OF CAIRO

Towards the end of 1867, Comboni was in Marseilles (Southern France). Here he found Miss Maria Deluil Martiny who was a very zealous apostle of the Sacred Heart, through the devotion of the "Guards of Honour". She later on (20th June 1873) found the Institute of the "Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus". We have many letters of Comboni addressed to her mainly on the "Guards of Honour".

From Marseilles, Comboni went to Egypt to open two Institutes for African boys and girls. He took with him three Camillian Fathers: Stanislaus Carcereri, Giuseppe Franceschini and J. B. Zanoni. Together with him were 12 African girls redeemed from Archbishop Castellacci, with a team of Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition.

The aims of the Cairo Institutes were various: they were the spearhead of the Institutes to build round Africa; the care of schools, catechumenates, dispensaries, for poor and orphan African youths, to accommodate missionaries for a better preparation for Central Africa. The 12 girls from Mazza redeemed from Castellacci had to become teachers and catechists. The Camillians and the Sisters were to be in charge of the two Institutes.

IV. THE RESTORATION OF THE ASSOCIATION AND OF THE INSTITUTE

Since the suspension of the Institute, only two people had joined Comboni: Fr Bortolo Rolleri and the layman Giacomo Rossi, Comboni returned with them to Cairo on 15th January 1869. But he had to get out of the impasse in which the Institute found itself. He took the occasion of the Vatican Council I which opened on 8th December 1869 and suspended on 20th October 1870: Comboni wrote his Postulatum and, after Canossa had appointed him his theologian and thus given him a chance to attend the council, he went to Rome on 15th March 1870. He gave report to Propaganda Fide and presented his Postulatum. In the meantime Cardinal Barnabò had come to the conclusion that the future of Central Africa rested only with Comboni and his Institute. Comboni was told: "Give your Institute in Verona a solid basis and I will give you a mission in Central Africa". Since more candidates were applying, the Cardinal of Propaganda Fide pressed also for the Rules of the Institute to be written. In the meantime Comboni attempted several approaches for personnel including Don Bosco; they all failed.

Following the favourable atmosphere created in Rome and in Verona Comboni took the following steps:

- He provided a new residence in Verona near the Diocesan Seminary. He bought it with an offering from the wife of the Emperor of Austria.
- He started journeys of Missionary Animation in Europe;
- He appointed Fr Antonio Squaranti Superior of the Institute;
- He restored the Association of the Good Shepherd with all its activities and this was done on the 21st of November 1871 with the new Rector Fr Antonio Squaranti present. The "Annals of the Association of the Good Shepherd" started in January 1872.

The Decree formally and canonically establishing the Institute, 8th December 1871, was signed by Cardinal Canossa, after the Basic Rules were approved. (see the Rules of 1871, see Rule of Life of Comboni Missionaries).

1. BASIC RULES: STRUCTURAL POINTS

Name: Institute for the African Missions;

Nature: It is a union of Clerics and Brothers not bound by vows.

Purpose: The regeneration of Africa;

Consecrated to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus (see the Rules of 1871)

Authority: Propaganda Fide, Bishop of Verona. Members have to profess perfect obedience to one's legitimate superiors.

At the conclusion of their spiritual formation members were to make an act of total consecration to the cause of Africa.

2. BASIC RULES: TRAINING OF THE CANDIDATES

Comboni urgently needed missionaries: the problem was how to give a unified formation in different stages, to grown-ups: priests, theological students, brothers.

STAGES OF THE TRAINING

- A thorough screening before acceptance (see the Rules of 1871),
- At least one year in Verona, as a kind of novitiate. Comboni insisted on this before he left for Cairo,
- A Period in Cairo, so they would get used to the African climate and receive the required immediate pastoral training, to complete their formation.

CONTENTS FOR THE TRAINING:

- Love of suffering and martyrdom
- Total dedication
- Observance of the Rules
- Quality before quantity
- Gifted and authentically saintly: otherwise candidates are of no use
- Love, too, is needed.

Comboni did not envisage the usual structures of religious life: his spirituality included and went beyond the structures of religious life. In the Rules of 1871 Comboni, among other norms, gave the following:

“In the Institute of the Missionaries there must be a constant effort to inculcate in the candidates and to impress and plant in them the true and precise character of the missionary to Africa. This latter must be a perpetual victim of sacrifice, destined to work, sweat and die without, perhaps, seeing any result from his labours.... The candidates must be formed to this most essential disposition by having them keep their eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, loving him tenderly and seeking always better to understand the meaning of a God who died on the Cross for the salvation of souls.... They will often renew the offering of themselves, of their health and life, to God.... In circumstances of special spiritual significance, they will all make together and in common a formal consecration of themselves to the God in which they will show how, with humility and trust in his grace, each one of them is ready for martyrdom” (Ch. 10).

At this stage we may say that the renewal which follows the suspension gives more stability to the Institute, it provides better preparation for the works in the mission, it creates the condition for brotherly love and mutual exchange of experiences and of solidarity: the Holy Spirit works also through the shortcomings of men.

Approval by Rome. In view of the progress of the Institute and taking into consideration the Plan of Comboni and his determination, Propaganda practically approved the Institute though they sent the Rules of 1871 back to Comboni for some amendments.

In consequence on 21st May 1872 Propaganda Fide entrusted the Vicariate of Central Africa to Comboni's Institute, and appointed him head of the Mission with the title of Pro-Vicar Apostolic (Decree of 26th May 1872).

On 11th June 1872 Pius IX wrote: “We entrust the aforesaid Vicariate to our beloved sons and priests of the Institute for the African Missions of Verona”. Such a statement can be considered to be equivalent to a Pontifical approval, even though ordinarily an Institute is only considered to be of Pontifical Right after its Rules have been approved by the Holy See.

The history of the Institute really began when the first group of Comboni's missionaries left for Africa, in September 1872: four priests, one clerical student, three brothers and four African girls.

In fact the Institute without members in the missions would not have been a Comboni Institute.

3. THE RULES — HISTORICAL REMARKS

No Institute can be approved and work properly without Rules. So in the Renovation of the Institute Comboni had to prepare the Rules.

Rules of 1871: Comboni prepared them and he consulted the Rules of other Institutes and mainly of that of the Pontifical Institute for foreign Missions (PIME) founded in Milan by Msgr Marinoni in 1850. Comboni presented them to Cardinal Canossa who did not like some points and asked Comboni to rewrite them. We do not know exactly what Cardinal Canossa objections were: but taking into consideration how the Rules of 1872 are compiled, we can conclude that Cardinal Canossa wanted them more juridical and shorter. Comboni worked on them and in

February 1872 he presented them to Propaganda Fide. When in 1874, Father S. Carcereri went to Rome he was asked by Comboni to follow their progress with Propaganda. The work he had to do was to insert in the text the remarks of the Consultor of Propaganda or to change it accordingly. Instead Carcereri introduced several changes of his own that gave the impression of a wholly new text. Propaganda gave them for further consideration to another consultor and this delayed their approval, so much so that Comboni died without ever having them approved.

It seems that Father S. Carcereri, of a notably different mentality to Comboni, wanted loose links of the Missionaries with the Institute, according to the original pattern of the Seminary for the missions.

A different mentality which, extended to other fields, gave rise to the “Camillian Controversy” which gravely affected the missionary work of the Vicariate and of Comboni himself.

V. THE PROGRESS OF THE INSTITUTE

When Comboni left for Africa (17th September 1872), the Institute had:

- an excellent Rector, Fr A. Squaranti who had been given clear directives for his job,
- inspiring Rules,
- sufficient economic assets for its running,
- the permanent Council of the Good Shepherd Association,
- 5 missionaries in Verona, 6 in Cairo, 4 in the field.
- Vocations, Promotion, and Internationality

Comboni continued even from the field his efforts of animation and when back to Italy:

He joined local celebrations and pilgrimages, such as that to the Crucifix of Como and Piacenza where 14 Bishops were present.

He wrote articles for the press in Turin.

He kept voluminous correspondence. In 1879 he wrote 700 letters (only 80 of which have survived), in 1871 from January to May alone he wrote some 1347 letters.

He travelled to meet people, and contacted other Institutes also outside Italy: Fr Jansens of the Divine Word, in Belgium, people in Britain and America. From 15th May 1879 to 10th October 1881 he recruited 40 candidates: 23 Italians, 17 non-Italians.

1. NEW HOUSES OF THE INSTITUTES:

Verona could only house 20 people and in 1879 Comboni accepted 23 people. He considered opening houses in Austria, France, Syria, but he was short of money for any project of the kind. The donation of a house at Sestri, Western Italy, turned out to be a flop. Together with the Order of the Stigmata he approached the Jesuits at the University of Lebanon, who accepted candidates for the study of Arabic, in the end only Daniel Sorur went. Because of shortage of money and Comboni's early death no progress was made in the matter.

2. FURTHER DIFFICULTIES IN THE INSTITUTE

FR ANTONIO SQUARANTI, a diocesan priest of Verona was a good Rector. In 1877 he asked to join Comboni in Africa (where he died in November 1878).

Comboni entrusted the responsibility to Fr Paolo Rossi, from the Diocese of Verona: he had been in the missions and he was his secretary from 1874 to 1876. Comboni appointed him acting Rector on 13th December 1877.

A young man of 28 years, he could not match with all the difficulties especially the financial ones. It seems that to support the Institute in Verona, he was using the offerings given for the missions. Moreover the accusations of the Camillians against Comboni were circulating in Verona. After the arrival of Comboni in Verona (15th May 1879), prey of a great depression and afraid of having lost the full trust of Comboni, Fr Rossi left his responsibilities (August - September 1879) without informing Comboni. He rejoined the Diocese of Verona.

In search of a new Rector Comboni approached the Superior General of the Jesuits, who answered he was ready to help in principle, but not at that moment.

The Superior General of the Order of the Stigmata sent Fr Sembianti, as a temporary measure until the Jesuits sent their man, and on the understanding that he would give a hand for the Sisters, too.

FR JOSEPH SEMBIANTI (1880 -1885) was appreciated by Comboni as a saintly and capable man and invited him to keep in touch with all missionaries by writing to them. He described him also as rather stubborn, pessimistic and scrupulous. However he trusted him and wrote many letters to him with confidence and sincerity: this friendship was of great relief to Comboni. Fr Sembianti remained rector until the Jesuits took over in 1885 after that he became responsible for the finances and economy of the Religious Institute until 1896, when he became a member. He died in 1914 at the age of 78 in our house in Brescia where he was spiritual director.

STATISTICS

From 1867 to 1881, 126 candidates had joined the Institute: 73 priests, 53 laymen, of these 90 Italians and 36 non Italians. By the time of Comboni's death 30 had died and 60 had left. As of the 10th October 1881 there were 35 members of whom 21 were in the mission and 14 in Verona.

Chapter Eight

THE INSTITUTE OF THE PIE MADRI DELLA NIGRIZIA

As a result of his experience in Africa in 1857, Comboni considered it necessary for Sisters to be present in the missions: he wrote to the Society of Cologne that their “presence is essential and indispensable”. He wrote in an article published in 1878, “I have been in the missions with many missionary priests, Italians and Germans, but we have achieved nothing without Sisters, and but for the grace of the Lord we would have been in danger ourselves”.

As a fruit of this Plan, Comboni wanted his own Institute to be accompanied by one for women. He had already mentioned in 1867 writing to Cardinal Barnabò, “As well as the Institute for men, Cardinal Canossa has started one for women”. By this Comboni was indicating a plan of Bishop Castellacci. According to the Visions of Sr. Terese of Angelis, the Sisters' Institute proposed by Comboni was to be founded by Msgr Castellacci and Sister Terese herself, and was to follow the Rules of the Order of the Good Shepherd of which the Sister and Bishop Castellacci were to be recognised as Founders. For this purpose Bishop Castellacci had accepted 12 African girls trained by the Mazza Institute in Verona. He was keeping them in view of starting the Institute of Sisters. This was a clear sign that Castellacci wanted to replace Comboni in the enterprise of the Sisters. Comboni, who did not believe in the visionary Sister and the African zeal of the prelate, refrained from acknowledging such an Institute and claimed the 12 African girls. The Prelate created a lot of difficulties and refused to give up the girls which after all he had accepted from Don Mazza.

Cardinal Barnabò intervened and freed 9 girls; for the other three the Pope himself had to intervene, as Castellacci was Vicar-General of the Pope for the Diocese of Rome.

As a result of the meeting of the Association of the Good Shepherd held on 21st November 1871, on 1st January 1872 Comboni founded the Religious Institute of the “Pie Madri della Nigrizia”. On 12th January 1872 Cardinal Canossa gave it his official approval. The first postulant was accepted in the person of Maria Caspi followed by Maria Scandola.

At first the house for formation in Montorio near Verona was offered by a good lady, Luigia Zago who also became the formator of the postulants. After a few months, in September, a new house was founded in Verona itself, as a residence in the city was more convenient.

Near the Church of St Maria in Organo, an old convent belonging to an Institute of Sisters who followed the rule of St Benedict, became available. The Institute had suffered a loss of vocations because of the Decree suppressing Religious Institutes passed by the new Italian government.

However a group of Sisters remained until the extinction of the Institute which occurred at the death of the last of them (1906). Naturally the Superior of the convent **Sr Giovanna Spiazzi** (52 years old) became the formator of the postulants from 1872 to 1873. But she was training them as if they had to become Benedictine nuns and not missionaries. Moreover the postulants had to take care of the large house which the Comboni Sisters still occupy.

Mother Pia Galli succeeded Sr Giovanna. She came from a convent of enclosed Sisters but Fr Squaranti, had no alternative. She took over in 1873 and left in June 1874: the reasons being that her method of training was too hard and more suited to adult religious women, based on rigorous discipline, fasting and penance.

Fr Carcereri in 1874 visited the Sisters in this situation. He proposed amalgamation with the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition, but their Superior General, Mother Emilie Julien, did not

accept the proposal. Fr Carcereri forced the resignation of Mother Pia Galli and approached Maria Bollezzoli who had not accepted the responsibility when Comboni had asked her.

Maria Bollezzoli, by then 45 years old, after deep and long consideration accepted the offer. A primary school teacher and an active apostle among teachers and the youth, she had sufficient experience of Christian life and enough wisdom to learn how to be a novice and at the same time Mistress of Novices. She joined the Novitiate on the 6th September 1884 and received the Novice's habit on 8th December 1874 together with Teresa Grigolini, Marietta Scandola and 4 other girls. Comboni received her vows and those of Sr. Teresa Grigolini on 15th October 1876.

The first 5 Sisters to leave for Africa on 15th of December 1877, were Sr Teresa Grigolini, Sr Marietta Caspi, Sr Maria Giuseppe Scandola, Sr Vittoria Daganini and Sr Concetta Corsi, they joined Comboni in his journey back to Africa along with 3 priests and 6 laymen. Fr A Squaranti was with them.

At Comboni's death there were 22 professed sisters, of whom 17 in the missions, 5 postulants and 14 novices. Mother Bollezzoli was their Superior.

Fr A. Squaranti, the Rector of the Institute for men represented Comboni and helped the Sisters to write their rules.

Sr. Fortunata Quasce: was the first African Comboni sister, a Nuban prisoner of the Mahdi. She died in Cairo in 1899. Domitilla, a Dinka, had joined with her in 1879, but later left.

CHAPTER NINE

THE FATHERS OF ST CAMILLUS

INTRODUCTION

The Camillians need a special mention for their role in the life of Comboni. "Camillians" is the popular name of the Order of St Camillus whose official title is the "Order of Clerics Regular, Servants of the Sick". It was founded in Rome in 1582 by St Camillus of Lellis (1550 - 1614) an Italian from Abruzzo, Central Italy. To the usual three vows of religion a fourth is added that of serving the sick, mainly in times of epidemics. They usually own and administer their own hospitals, clinics, and nursing homes, but also take over chaplaincies in other hospitals and charitable institutions. In 1964 they numbered 1350. Now they are 1035, of whom 640 are priests.

At this point we summarise the relationship between Comboni and the Camillians.

I. CAMILLIANS AND COMBONI

When the news of the foundation of the Comboni's Seminary for Central Africa spread in Verona, four Camillian priests asked to join him. Frs Stanislaus Carcereri, John Baptist Zanoni, Luigi Tezza, Giuseppe Franceschini. They were aggregated to the Seminary for 5 years through the support of Cardinal Canossa and by a Decree of Pope Pius IX: their Superior General, in fact, had not given the proper consensus, and had even declared their option a kind of apostasy from the Order.

However Comboni mediated and they all accepted the following solution: as religious they continued to be members of the Order of St Camillus, but they were to depend on the Bishop of Verona and on Comboni as Superior of the Cairo Institutes. Though they were zealous priests, it seems that their motivation in joining Comboni was to settle their own future in view of the foreseen suppression of the Order by the new Italian government.

IN CAIRO: In October 1867 three of them (all except Fr L. Tezza) followed Comboni together with 16 African girls and 3 sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition.

The Sisters and the Fathers took care of the Institutes in Cairo and for one year their administration kept running smoothly. But during the month of June 1868, Fr J. B. Zanoni the eldest of them, made a serious mistake during a medical check-up in the Institute of the girls. Feeling so humiliated the Father left Cairo and to justify his departure tried to put the blame on the administration of the Institutes, inventing the accusation of existing promiscuity between boys and girls. It took one year and half to clear the misunderstanding with Cardinal Barnabò in Rome. (see Gilli page 47 and Grancelli, Msgr Daniele Comboni page 145)

IN THE MISSIONS.: Upon the appointment of a new director of the Institutes in Cairo, Fr Pasquale Fiori, Frs Carcereri and Franceschini with two Brothers were authorised by Comboni to explore Kordofan, with the intention of opening a mission there. This was done in January 1872, by the same two Fathers with 2 Brothers, Polinari and Bertoli (the latter being the first missionary of Comboni to die: + El Obeid 26th December 1872)

FR S. CARCERERI: Comboni from Cairo asked Fr Carcereri to leave El Obeid and appointed him Vicar-General and Superior of the mission in Khartoum (10th February 1873). At the end of the year, Comboni sent him to Europe for missionary promotion and animation, for monitoring the Institute of the Sisters and for checking on the progress of the approval of the Rules (as we have seen already).

However Carcereri took upon himself another unwanted task, that of promoting Comboni to the dignity of Bishop. He thought this could enhance the prestige of the mission, attract more

vocations and give courage to the missionaries. But this approach was too impetuous. Propaganda had the intention of promoting Comboni, but they wanted to await a bit longer to see how successful would be his commitment and his missionaries. Carcereri took it that the time had arrived and spread the news of the promotion as an accomplished fact. And this was of more damage than of help to the cause of the Vicariate.

Fr Carcereri only succeeded in convincing the Order of St Camillus to accept officially a commitment in the Vicariate. He then succeeded in recruiting some Camillians and assuring for them from Comboni a proper residence at Berber.

An agreement was signed on 2nd August 1874 by Cardinal Canossa and Father C. Guardi, Superior General of the Camillians, determining the mutual assets and liabilities for personnel and finance (see The Letters of Comboni page 1092).

II. THE CAMILLIAN CONTROVERSY

When returning to Sudan (beginning of 1875), Father Carcereri followed a new itinerary and at a cataract one boat sunk. The journey took 103 days instead of the usual 90 days. Many items were ruined and the damage amounted to a large sum of money. When Comboni told Fr Carcereri his disappointment, Carcereri felt it so badly that he increased his opposition to Comboni and led others on this way.

Discrepant views had already appeared between the two when Fr Carcereri wanted to take the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition away from the Institutes in Cairo and close them down. On that occasion he threatened to resign from the office of Vicar-General and to disregard the interests of the Vicariate. On the other side it seemed that the appointment of a Camillian in Berber was the beginning of a plan to replace Comboni with the Order of St Camillus itself: in that case the other missionaries could work with the Camillians. This may explain why Fr Carcereri wanted the Rules of Comboni to have loose links with the Vicariate similar to those of the original Seminary.

On 1st April 1875, Comboni entrusted the residence of Berber to the Camillians, he appointed Father S. Carcereri its Superior and removed him from the office of Vicar General. The physical distance of the two personalities and the bitterness in Father Carcereri deteriorated their relations. The Camillians gathered behind their confrere but their efforts to have the other missionaries with them were in vain; these instead wrote Comboni a letter of solidarity, as did Cardinal Canossa, writing to Propaganda Fide. The Superior General of the Camillians (January 1876) introduced the controversy to the Holy See, in defence of his own members. Comboni in his annual report did not mention the accusations. He did it when requested and cleared away all of them.

THE ACCUSATIONS

The accusations as we find in a report of Fr Franceschini to Propaganda Fide on 3rd May 1876 are:

- Comboni signs agreements but he does not keep them;
- he squanders the money sent by the benefactors: in consequence the missions lack necessary provisions;
- he easily changes his mind;
- all missionaries deplore lack of directives;
- he mistreats the missionaries;
- his personal life is not of good example.

In consequence of all these shortcomings the Camillians were frustrated and the other missionaries, including the Sisters left their work. As a remedy Fr Franceschini suggested that another person take over from Comboni the finances and the direction of the mission stations. Comboni was to keep the general direction and the relations with Europe and donor agencies.

Moreover Camillians asked an independent mission territory for themselves.

Propaganda, after thorough investigation, cleared Comboni of the accusations (27th November 1876) and nominated him Vicar Apostolic and Bishop (11th July 1877) and asks Father Guardi their Superior General of the Camillians, to recall the two Fathers Carcereri and Franceschini. A very fruitful cooperation which had lasted for 10 years thus came to an end (see Positio: pages 647 -693).

Chapter Ten

COMBONI FROM 1872 TO 1881

IMPORTANT DATES

September 1872: Comboni leaves for Khartoum (from Cairo in January 73)
March 1876: Comboni returns to Europe
11th July 1877: Comboni appointed Bishop
12th August 1877: Comboni is consecrated Bishop, then goes on a tour of Europe
3rd December 1877: Returns to Africa
March 1879: Comboni is back to check on the Institutes
November 1880: Back to Africa
15th October 1881: Death in Khartoum.

COMBONI IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LARGE VICARIATE OF CENTRAL AFRICA

To meet his responsibilities he made the following choices:

I. CHOICE OF PRIORITIES

1. AN ATTITUDE OF SERVICE

After his nomination as Pro-Vicar Comboni reached Cairo on the 26th September 1872 with 3 priests, 3 brothers, 3 sisters, 14 African lady teachers. After 3 months in the desert they reached Khartoum on the 4th May 1873.

In his first address he declared:

“I return among you, never again to cease to be yours and entirely consecrated to your greater good. Day and night, sun and rain will find me equally ready to help your spiritual needs. Rich and poor, healthy and sick, young and old, master and servant, shall always find admittance to my heart. Your good shall be mine, and your sufferings shall be mine too. I shall make common cause with every one of you, and the happiest of my days will be the one when I shall be able to give my life for you”. (MDC no. 18)

2. A SELF-GIVING SERVICE UP TO MARTYRDOM

He wrote to Cardinal Canossa who was going to the first Vatican Council:

“Please push this question in the Council and speak about Africa and about how to gain one hundred million African Souls for Christ. Say that in the Church there is never a lack of workers for the Gospel who desire martyrdom as the sweetest and dearest reward of the hardest labours; and all four of us are ready to undergo the most dreadful of martyrdoms to save a single African soul. For us the African heat is like a cool Italian breeze for a good parish priest in Verona. If then the Holy Father or the Council were to speak up for Africa to the Catholics... we would die with joy for it.” (MDC no. 58)

3. AN ATTITUDE OF COMPLETE TRUST IN GOD

“Though borne down by bitter misfortunes and struck by great calamities, I have never felt discouraged. Rather I am glad that, for the redemption of the pagans, I have been made a sharer in the Passion of Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life. I put all my trust in our Lord and in the sanctity of the noblest causes, to which together with my faithful collaborators I have dedicated myself totally until death, for the glory of God and the salvation of the whole of Central Africa. I have thus decided to take refuge in the Father of mercies and God of all consolation”. (MDC no. 19)

... in Mary, Our Lady ...

“Mary, refuge of all poor sinners, show yourself to be also the Queen and Mother of the poor Africans, because they, too, are your people. I will carry to them the great message which you have proclaimed from this mountain. Yes, good Mother of mercy, you are the Mother of the Africans. Here and now, I, their father and missionary, place them all at your feet so that you may put them in your heart: monstra Te esse matrem! My divine Mother, you know how many beautiful souls and how many generous hearts I have found, thanks to you, among those uncivilised African tribes... Yes, these are the first fruits of my mission, and once again I place them under your patronage. They are certain that the time has come when the whole of mankind, God's people and yours, will be one single flock guided by one single Good Shepherd”. (MDC no. 200)

... in St Joseph ...

“The Vicariate of Central Africa, thanks to the powerful aid of the illustrious Patriarch, St Joseph, who, after the Holy Father proclaimed him Protector of the Catholic Church, became the true Bursar of Central Africa, will never lack sufficient resources”. (MDC no. 207)

... and in genuine prayer:

“Prayer is the surest and infallible means to succeed in doing the works of God, even when they are at their most difficult and challenging times, and so I have with great insistence asked many Bishops and the most respected Institutes in all parts of the world to pray fervently every day to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and to the illustrious Patron of the Universal Church for the conversion of Africa. In this important matter we are dealing with a true gentleman, God, who keeps his word and will stand by it forever”. (MDC no. 183)

II. CHOICE OF THE FIELD OF APOSTOLATE

1. THE CHOICE OF KHARTOUM

The choice of Khartoum as the centre of the Vicariate was taken for granted. However Comboni did not follow the White Nile, where he had his first Pastoral experience, and where the graves of missionaries had marked their presence. He chose instead the region of Kordofan. There are several reasons for this:

- The desire to take the Gospel to the population of Nuba Mountains. Since 1848 Comboni was close to a certain Bachit Kaenda, a redeemed slave from Jebel Nuba, living in Verona: he greatly appreciated his deep religiosity, his unshaken faith, and his wonderful character. Comboni promised him that he would do everything possible to take the Christian faith to the Nubans so well represented by him.
- Slave trade: While the ivory traders were infesting the route of the White Nile, slave traders were mainly devastating the region South-West of Khartoum and this city with El-Obeid was the centre of the cruel trade.
- Comboni gave as a reason for abandoning the White Nile in favour of Kordofan:

“During the first period of the Vicariate, the Africans of the White Nile were found to have been corrupted by the traders.... I therefore thought it best to avail myself of the inland routes and establish a mission between the White Nile and the Niger. It seemed to me that these inland regions were in less danger of corruption”. (see Hill page 20)

When Fr Carcereri was ready to explore the Kordofan, Comboni willingly authorised him to go and to found El-Obeid as the first mission (13th January 1872), to be later followed by Delen (31st March 1875) and Malbes (December 1876).

Comboni was confirmed in his high opinion of the Nubans on the occasion of his visit to El-Obeid (June 1873) where he consecrated the Vicariate to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (14th September 1873). In fact a Nuban chief one Said-Aga and later on the paramount chief Cogiur Cacum paid a visit to Comboni and invited him to establish a school and a Church. The admiration of Comboni for the Nubans increased when he realised that they had repulsed many attacks by cruel slave traders and were not interested in Islam. However Comboni did not confine his field to Kordofan, in fact in 1874 he established a mission at Berber north of Khartoum among another tribe. In less than three years Comboni opened three missions: that was a real achievement considering the distances to be covered by camel and the financial difficulties.

In fact at the beginning of 1876 Comboni went to Europe where the Camillian controversy and his consecration as a Bishop delayed his return to Khartoum for more than two years (12th April 1878).

2. LARGER FIELDS

Upon his return to Khartoum Comboni had plans for reaching western Sudan, the region of the Great Lakes and deep into Nubian Mountains, where a new foundation was already planned by March 1881 with the intention of opening a route southwards towards the Great Lakes: for these missions he had contacted already Propaganda in Rome, Henry Morton Stanley the explorer and General Gordon, Governor of Sudan.

Gordon had once sent his colleague, Romolo Gessi, to the Vicar-Apostolic with a message: "Tell Msgr Comboni that his expedition to the Equatorial lakes will be sent at government expense; he need provide only food." The expedition was to have started in the autumn of that year. Gordon had requested Comboni to send the Sisters to staff the government hospital at Fashoda. But how could it be done? Fr Martini recorded that ten missionaries had recently died in Khartoum alone. In fact 1878 was the death year because of famine and floods. Comboni wrote: "We have consumed the provisions we had, and spent all our money feeding the numerous Institutions we had at Berber, Khartoum, El Obeid, Jebel Nuba.... We also helped the Muslims who were in extreme need... but now we are compelled to close the door to so many unfortunate people, who come to beg for bread" (see Hill page 24)

Physically exhausted, he returned to Italy in May 1879 with the intention also of obtaining fresh financial aid. A few months after his return from Europe on 28th January 1881, where he settled his Institutes, the Great Lakes were already taken from his jurisdiction and given to the White Fathers.

III. METHODOLOGY

Besides the foundation of the Institutes as "Cenacles of Apostles", we can list the following aspects of Comboni methodology, proper of a pioneer who could not enter into greater detail and particular directives:

1. SAVE AFRICA WITH AFRICA

Consistent with his plan, Comboni started immediately to recruit Africans to work with him.

FR PIO JOSEPH HADRIAN O.S.B.

Pio was a Sudanese born in the region of Sennar; at four years of age he was carried off into slavery and sold and resold in Nubia. Rescued in Cairo by Fr Nicola Olivieri, he was afterwards educated at the Benedictine monastery of Subiaco near Rome. Unfortunately affected by tuberculosis he was advised to go back to his home with Msgr Comboni. Comboni welcomed him in 1872 and took him to his Vicariate, and in June 1873 the first priest of Central Africa died.

FR DANIEL SORUR

When Comboni returned to Italy in March 1876, he was accompanied by two young Africans, both of them redeemed slaves. Arturo Morzal and Daniel Sorur. Comboni introduced them to the Pope who sent them to the College of Propaganda (1877). Only Daniel Sorur was ordained priest in 1887 by the successor of Comboni, Msgr Sogaro.

Daniel was from Bahr-el-Ghazal and was taken as a slave to Khartoum in a house near the mission. During one absence of the owner, he jumped the fence and in the mission he found Comboni who asked who had sent him to the mission. The eleven year boy answered: "God". The owner claimed him back in vain offering 4 oxen and two calves to Comboni. After his priestly ordination he taught at Swakim. Later (1888 - 1889) he accompanied Msgr Geyer to Europe for missionary animation and financial help; and with this money two Churches were built, Helouan and Swakim. He died of sickness in 1890.

2. INTEGRAL SALVATION

MALBES MISSION

Comboni was of the opinion that evangelisation and human development must go together as we know from his plan. For this purpose he started (1870) the Mission Station of Malbes which is 18 kilometres South West of El Obeid. The territory was large, some 30,000 square kilometres.

There was a chapel already, with 50 families who were practising Christians. It was a wonderful basic Christian community who gathered themselves mornings and evenings for their community prayers, led by a catechist and for a certain period by a local priest, Fr Anthony Dubal. This village was an imitation of the method followed by the Jesuits in Paraguay; but Comboni had given them more freedom and personal initiative in the use of the land at their disposal.

The Mahdi destroyed this wonderful initiative for the building of a new Christianity in the heart of Africa.

SLAVERY

Part of this integral programme of salvation was the interest of Comboni in fighting slavery. As Apostolic Vicar he continued the practice started by Fathers Olivieri, Verri and Mazza of buying slaves, educating and making them Christians and even leading them towards priesthood as in the case of Daniel Sorur. During the first journey (March - May 1873) Comboni saw a long queue of slaves of all ages lined up in different groups walking through the desert towards Cairo, and they were being tortured. In spite of the abolition of slavery in the 18th Century, the Middle-Eastern Slavery was still flourishing through the African continent.

Even before reaching Khartoum (in April 1873) he denounced the slave trade to Propaganda Fide. In June he wrote to a friend on the same subject and the letter was published in a newspaper in Italy. Again in July and in August he passionately denounced the hypocrisy of local and political authorities of Sudan and Egypt who had officially subscribed to the abolition of slave trade, yet were making huge profits out of it. In his letters Comboni remarked that in El Obeid nearly three quarters of the inhabitants were slaves, while in Khartoum half of the population of 50,000 were slaves.

PROTECTION. Since the political authorities in Egypt and Sudan were involved in the slave trade, Comboni asked a "gran firmano" that was a special recommendation from the then powerful Emperor of Austria, Franz Joseph. By such a document Comboni had a guarantee for protecting the mission and its activities. In Egypt Comboni received from the Khadive, Ismail Pasha, the freedom to fight slavery so much so that the Pasha wrote to the governors of Sudan, introducing him as the "mortal enemy" of the slave trade. In Khartoum and in El Obeid Comboni was authorised to free any slave who could enter the compound of the mission, as in the case of Daniel Sorur. In this way in a few weeks he gave freedom to 500 slaves. Malbes was started in order to help former slaves to earn their food. Since some European Christians were involved in the trade, he denounced them in a pastoral letter (August 1873), and all, including non-Catholics, became frightened.

Later on in 1878 he worked together and efficiently with General C. Gordon, Governor of Sudan and Romolo Gessi, his assistant, to fight slavery not only in Khartoum and El Obeid but in the very fields of the trade in Bahr-el-Ghazal and Nuba. Here he denounced the Baggara tribe as responsible of having, by means of slavery, reduced the population of Nuba from 500,000 down to 50,000.

As national leaders were involved, Comboni took the problem to International level, directly approaching European powers, like England, Austria and France, as their representatives in Egypt and Sudan were often involved.

Just before his death Comboni had presented a plan for the complete abolition of the trade in the Nuba region (see Positio pages 738 - 773). Due to him and to Gordon, Governor General of Sudan, Comboni wrote:

"I maintain that it is really a marvel that Gordon has, single-handedly, by sheer force of will-power, succeeded in striking a blow at the slave trade and slavery. It is an undeniable fact that today there are no longer to be seen on the Kordofan, Fashoda, Dongola routes, those immense crowds of slaves that I saw twenty years ago.... The story that the Government has, with Gordon's consent, sent people to the Bahr-el-Ghazal to capture ten thousand slaves there, is absolute nonsense. Such stories are concocted by people who, not being able to drive their trade without being dropped on by the government, and being prevented from making money as they used to do from sale of slaves, now seek to discredit Gordon. But truth must triumph. Gordon Pasha is the greatest foe of slavery" (Writings no. 5135-36).

Msgr Grancelli, the first biographer of Comboni, wrote of him:

"Strong, bold and fearless in all enterprises, he never shrank from obstacles which others would have thought unsurmountable.... Comboni always and everywhere suffered toil and fatigue gladly for the people of the Sudan with courage and a spirit of self-sacrifice" (page 404).

We quote this appreciation by citing Count Pennazzi's book, "Dal Po ai Due Nili" (1882):

"The Khartoum Mission has counted and still counts among its members fine men who have contributed to the progress of science. Today Comboni... does not fall short of his predecessors, whose names I recall with pleasure since they have removed, as best they could, the dishonour into which a blackguardly rabble has brought the European name. It will be enough to mention Knoblecher, Kirchner, Dovjak, Morlang, Kaufmann, Beltrame and Dal Bosco, who all contributed to overthrow a trade which was the negotiation of honour and humanity."

When Comboni died, the evening of 10th October 1881, the people of Khartoum of every race mourned the dead Bishop, but grief was greatest among the slaves and the poor. Comboni's voice had everywhere denounced the physical and moral miseries of the slaves. He had the courage to write:

"The whole world has been told that the slave trade is suppressed. That is false... the abolition of the slave trade in Central Africa is a dead letter, for the slaves constitute the principal revenue of the Sudan Government and the merchants." (see Hill, page 25)

3. EVANGELISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

It is clear from all the letters that the aim of Comboni's activities was evangelisation for the conversion of Central Africa. He never raised the question of whether development or evangelisation came first, but wanted to make sure that both could proceed together. For this, before all else, he wanted to have the cooperation of Institutes to provide both personnel and the necessary structures, so that once started, the campaign for mass conversion would not have to stop.

His first preoccupation in the mission was the Church and then all the other structures like schools, kindergartens, hospitals and so on. Of interest are few lines of his first report to Propaganda on 2nd June 1874.

"Both in Khartoum and El Obeid, I haven't opened the schools for boys for lack of teachers. However, the girls schools in Khartoum and El Obeid are open, though the number of the girls is rather low due to the lack of teachers and accommodation. I prefer that the African teachers may be occupied in the teaching of catechism to the catechumens". (The Writings of Daniel Comboni, no. 3614)

The interest shown by Comboni in the education of the girls makes him a real pioneer and innovator in the field of gender development.

Here is the testimony of Licurgo Santoni, an Italian postal official in the Egyptian service, who in the course of a tour of inspection in the Sudan in 1877-1878, visited the Khartoum Mission. He wrote:

"When I arrived in Khartoum in January 1878 the missionaries were busy with the education of many African boys.... Domestic science was taught to the girls. When you consider that in those countries women are looked upon as worthless objects, useful only for bearing children, it is easy to imagine how pleased the parents were when they saw their daughters learning to

cook, embroider and sew. The boys were taught, according to their aptitudes, carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring and shoe-making by experts specially brought from Italy.... 200 day-girls and nearly 300 boys attended the school. Besides these, eighty Negro girls and some one hundred boys were fed, clothed and educated till they grew up, entirely at the expense of the mission....The superintendent of the government arsenal, an engineer, Lorenzo Spada, gave instruction in mechanics to those who showed ability and these could then find employment in the government dockyard". (see Hill page 23) (see The report of Comboni to Propaganda of 15th April 1876: Writings of Comboni no. 4077-4153)

4. INCULTURATION

As Comboni did at Holy Cross, so he does as Vicar: he asserted the necessity of learning the local languages and insisted on the knowledge of Arabic. To promote this he dared to face difficulties and opposition like in the case of Sr. Virginia Mansur. The knowledge of the language was the only door to real Inculturation.

In his report to Propaganda (2nd June 1874) he himself wrote that he had started to collect many words of the Nuban language for a dictionary and a grammar. We know also his interests together with all the pioneers of the Vicariate in the description and comparative study of local customs and traditions.

His openness to dialogue as we have seen in the case of the paramount chief of Nuba Cogiur Cacum who stayed with him for 4 days, made Comboni open to different types of inculturation although the use of Latin for instance, in the Mass and administration of Sacraments, was still obligatory.

Chapter Eleven

THE HEAVY CROSSES OF THE LAST YEARS OF COMBONI'S LIFE

FIRST CROSS

Famine, Flood and Pestilence: “Bishop Comboni returned to the Sudan with a party of fourteen missionaries - priests, lay brothers and the first Sisters from his Institute in Verona. On 12th April 1878 they arrived in Khartoum. On the way, at Aswan, Comboni received the first inkling that a disaster had befallen the Sudan. Colonel Gordon, whom he met there, expressed his anxiety. The year before there had been a frightful famine owing to lack of rain. The Mission stations were overcrowded with hungry and thirsty people”. (see Hill page 23)

1878 was a year of terrible famine, “*I witnessed with my own eyes*” - wrote Comboni - “*the extreme misery of so many places. Entire villages are almost destroyed. The few inhabitants left lived on grass, wild seeds and even on the dung of animals*”. It is impossible to put into words the great privations endured by the missionaries including the Sisters. Comboni was taken up by charitable assistance. Moreover when rains started towards July 1878 they reached eschatological proportions with enormous damage to huts, fields, houses. A violent fever epidemic broke out all over the area: people fell sick and died within an hour.

SECOND CROSS

Missionaries were similarly affected by the situation: 1878 was called “the year of death”. In less than 6 months, 8 missionaries passed away, including two of the newly-arrived Sisters; those who did not die were somehow infected, including Bishop Comboni, who was struck more by all the deaths of his beloved missionaries than by fever. The journey southwards was out of question, though Comboni had received the permission of General Gordon, Governor of Cairo, together with directions on how to reach Lake Albert and thence Lake Victoria.

A week before his death, Comboni wrote a report to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, in which he described how the mission was being transformed into a cemetery by the deaths of the missionaries. Yet he was still able to see everything in the light of the Cross, the sign of love and of redemption:

“I was right when I gave orders for the catafalque to be left intact after the Office and Requiem Mass for the three whose deaths I mentioned in my last letter. This morning the lay-brother, Paul Scandi of Rome, died of typhoid fever in a most edifying way... As I write Father Francis Pimazzoni has asked me for the last sacraments; as regards true piety and sanctity he is certainly the first in the Mission, and has also admirable good sense and talent... So we have begun to pray most fervently to Saint Joseph, ardently begging him that Fr Francis should not die. No, he must not die. Immediately after Paul Scandi's funeral, I had them take the catafalque away, because Pimazzoni must have no need of it, at least for now. My very good Fr Baptist Fraccaro, my future Vicar-General, immediately after the funeral and after having been with the dying Brother all night, as he was his confessor, had to take to his bed with a fever. My God! always crosses! But when Jesus gives us the Cross he loves us; all these crosses weigh terribly on my heart; but they also increase its strength and courage in fighting the Lord's battles, because God's works have always been born and grown like this; the Church was founded in the blood of the God-Man, and of the Apostles and Martyrs; all the Catholic Missions in the world which have borne fruit have developed in the image of the Church, and thus they have prospered; thus they have grown strong, thus they have made progress, in the midst of deaths, of sacrifice and in the shadow of the saving tree of the Cross”. (Writings no. 7223-25)

THIRD CROSS

The Boundaries of the Vicariate are redefined. Stanley's appeal for Christian missionaries to be sent to Uganda (1875) had aroused interest in the Christian World. Archbishop Charles Lavigiére of Algiers who had started the Society of the Missionaries for Africa ("White Fathers") in 1868, was an assiduous reader of all publications of those who had made successful expeditions in Africa.

During the 1878, the year of Comboni's death, Lavigiére, who had started the evangelisation of the Islamic regions of Northern Africa, submitted to Pope Pius IX a plan for the creation of four Vicariates for the evangelisation of the Central African regions: two to be entrusted to the Vicar Apostolic of Khartoum, Bishop Comboni and his missionaries and the other two, South West of Lake Nyanza, to the White Fathers.

On this occasion Comboni understood the reasons behind a letter dated 14/8/1878 which Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of Propaganda Fide had written to him to suspend the preparation to go and start the mission in the region of the Great Lakes.

The plan was substantially accepted, but later on in 1881 in defining the areas, the Vicariate of Nyanza, entrusted to the White Fathers, included not only the great lakes and the mountains of the moon but also the Northern province of Uganda and nearly the whole of Southern Sudan up to the Bahr-el-Arab and Sobat rivers. Comboni was taken unawares as he was not consulted about the new boundaries of his Vicariate. In fact the territory where the first two missions were founded in the Southern part of Sudan by missionaries from Verona, were taken away and with them a number of graves. Bishop Comboni thanked God for the input of new personnel into the large territories of Central Africa and welcomed that the region round Lake Victoria was entrusted to the White Fathers.

However he very much regretted, as a "tooth-ache", that the new boundaries included the whole of Southern Sudan, leaving to him only the territories mainly inhabited by Muslims, and taking away the places of the graves of the pioneer missionaries including Fr Oliboni. In spite of that he submitted himself fully to the decision of the Holy See and wrote to Propaganda on 22nd of May 1881:

"Naturally, it is understood that this (that is the previous consultations) is not a duty of Propaganda, but a prudent custom, because Propaganda is absolutely free to give and to take and to do what it wishes, without listening or consulting anyone. Now, should Your Eminence or the Sacred Congregation believe me to be mistaken in my judgment or not to have judged rightly; and should Your Eminence and Propaganda think that the decisions concerning the four above-mentioned Pro-vicariates are well and judiciously made, then at once I beat the retreat and I say with all my heart: *asinus ego*, and I readily acknowledge that the action of Your Eminence and the Sacred Congregation is very well, wisely and prudently taken." (Scritti 6760 - 6761)

Moreover, Comboni warmly recommended the missionaries of Algiers to his good friend Emin Bey governor of Ekuatoria, the southern part of Southern Sudan.

Pope Leo XIII signed the decree of the erection of Nyanza Vicariate and entrusted it to the White Fathers, asking them to start with the districts that could be reached from the Eastern Coast. The decision at that time had some advantage, as missionaries were dying on the way from the North, and Bishop Comboni himself died in 1881. Moreover the army of Mohammed Ahmed Ibn Abdallah, called Mahdi, who claimed to be the successor of the Prophet Mohammed, had taken possession of the whole of Sudan. The missions founded by Comboni in the Sudan and Kordofan, that is Khartoum, El Obeid, Malbes, Delen South of El Obeid and Berber were destroyed. The missionaries from Khartoum and Berber had time to leave the missions. Those from Kordofan were taken prisoners by the forces of Mahdi, some died in prison, some succeeded in running away. The last who managed to run away, Fr Paolo Rossignoli reached Aswan on the 20th November 1894 after 12 years as a slave prisoner.

As the White Fathers did not send personnel to Northern Uganda and Sudan by 1894, Leo XIII decided in the same year to return Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan to the sons of Comboni, newly organised in the religious Institute of the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

FOURTH CROSS

It was in relation to Sr Virginia Mansur and Mother Bollezzoli. Virginia Mansur, a Syrian, was a Sister of St Joseph of the Apparition working in Egypt with Bishop Comboni. When her Institute in 1879 gave up their cooperation, Sr. Virginia wanted to continue. She asked to become a Verona Sister and was accepted. Comboni supported the acceptance as he wanted a teacher of Arabic: Virginia brought with her to Verona a brother and a sister. However, she was dismissed from the postulancy as unfit because of her character and disregard for the Rules. (25th August 1881)

Comboni reproached the Sisters because they did not balance such shortcomings with the great advantage of having a teacher of Arabic in the Institute. The interest shown by Comboni in the case was misinterpreted as being the personal interest shown in Virginia Mansur by a certain Alexander, a gentleman who had wanted to marry her, although she had refused. (see E. Pezzi, pages 176-177; 215-218; 252 ff, 270 ff. The Letters of Comboni, page 1930, The 'Positio' page 895). Such a malicious misinterpretation of the motives of Bishop Comboni reached the ears of Cardinal Canossa, who tied up the opening of a house for the Institute at Sestri Levante to the matter. The house of Sestri Levante was offered to Comboni by a priest Angelo Tagliaferro for any activity of Sisters. Comboni accepted it with enthusiasm for two reasons: to expand in Italy outside Verona and to provide a place with a healthy climate for Sisters who needed some rest. Since Comboni had not previously asked Cardinal Canossa's consent, the Cardinal resented it and suggested that Comboni had squandered money for hidden motives (a residence for the family of Virginia Mansur!). Mother Bollezzoli wrote to Comboni's father that the said Virginia, whom he knew, had been the cause of great sufferings for Comboni. This caused that great sorrow of which Comboni speaks in his letter of 24th June 1881 to Father Sembianti:

"The other day I received the mail and this brought me the very greatest anxiety and pain, far surpassing all the afflictions God has sent me since 1878. In fact, I had to take to my bed for a full three days and who knows when I will be able to breathe easy again. The missionaries think that the trouble is back-ache, because I am rather tired after the explorations I have been making on horse-back. But the true cause, known only to God and to me, is a deep and fearful affliction, which surpasses all the humiliations and afflictions I have been subjected to, and all the injustices and hurt I have had to suffer. But I am altogether too unhappy. Jesus will certainly help me, the Immaculate Virgin and St Joseph will help me. I thank Jesus for the crosses, but my life is an ocean of anxieties brought on me by good people who love me. My God! Dear Heaven, Sister Victoria says - and she is right. But my very heart is petrified. But Africa will be converted and Jesus will help me to carry the Cross..." (Writings no. 6790; 6795-6)

Comboni from Africa decided to close the house though with great suffering:

"What most hurts me is what follows, " these are the very words of our dear Cardinal: "Who urged you to enter for ulterior motives into this unhappy business at Sestri?...." I just don't know what kind of a world we are living in today. Here am I exposed to death so as to serve Jesus in the midst of suffering and crosses, happy to die to save the poor Africans and in fidelity to my arduous, difficult and holy vocation; and then I am supposed to allow myself to be guided by ulterior considerations unworthy of an Apostle of Africa, etc. I have neither the breath nor the energy to write any more. I am simply amazed at being treated like this and to hear how I am thought of at Verona by my greatest benefactor. No, it is not Jesus Christ who has led His Eminence to feel this way about me; His Eminence is not now the person he once was. Although I am certain that I will soon succumb to so many crosses, which in conscience I feel I have not done anything to deserve, still may my Jesus be ever blessed, for he is the true vindicator of innocence and protector of the afflicted". (Writings 6812-14)

As Comboni Missionaries, we cannot ignore the lessons our Founder gave us on how to face the great sacrifices and crosses that we meet in our journey with Jesus.

Chapter Twelve

THE CHARISM OF COMBONI

A. INTRODUCTION

1. WHAT IS A CHARISM

The word “Charism”: from the Greek “charis”, gift or grace, means: “free gift”. St Paul: “Aemulamini autem charismata maiora” (*1st Cor. 12:31*)

In the history of the Church the word Charism was scarcely used, until after the Second Vatican Council. The Council itself does not use the word: The index at the word charism gives: “Spirit”. The first to use the word, “charism” is Pope Paul VI in "Evangelica Testificatio" (1971), speaking of the charism of Founders.

2. GIFTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Holy Spirit reveals himself, starting with Pentecost, as the distributor of gifts:

- gifts of the languages to spread the works of the Lord (24:8-11) in conformity with the Holy Scripture (2:15-21),
- gifts to the Prophets (11:27, 15:32, 2:10), Teachers (13:1) Preachers (6:8 ff);
- gifts of miracles and visions.

ST PAUL

- His preaching is accompanied by the Spirit and powerful deeds (1 Thess. 1: 5; 1 Cor. 2:4).
- He speaks languages (1 Cor. 14:18) and has visions (2 Cor. 12:1-4).
- St Paul describes different kinds of charisms, or gifts in 1 Cor. 12:8-11; 28-30
- and Hierarchy of charism, in Rom 12:6-8.
- We need to discern them: “Never try to suppress the spirit or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt: think before you do anything - hold on to what is good and avoid every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:19-22).
- The capacity to discern is also a gift of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:10) it is “the gift of recognising spirits”.

GOSPELS

- Jesus himself is a charism Luke 4:17-21;
- “The spirit of the Lord has been given to me”.
- John 1:16-17; “Jesus is the fullness of grace and truth”.

3. FROM A THEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW:

- *Everything good in the world is a gift of God:* “Make no mistake about this: all that is good, all that is perfect which is given from above comes down from the Father of all light”. (James 1:17)
- *Salvation too:* “This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us”. (1 John 4,10).

4. DIFFERENT KINDS OF GIFTS

NATURAL GIFTS:

life and its faculties, nature and its fruits and all beautiful things.

SUPERNATURAL GIFTS:

- **Ordinary:** Common to all Christians: sanctifying grace, the basis and the key to all gifts and we receive it in baptism.

Sanctifying Grace gives us:

- A share in the Divine Nature (2 Peter 1:4)
- Dwelling of the Holy Trinity (John 14:23; 15:4)
- Theological virtues: Faith, Hope, Charity (1 Cor. 13:13)
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 26).
- A share in the royal, prophetic and priestly role of Christ (1 Peter 2:9; see *Lumen Gentium*).
These ordinary gifts are given directly for the sanctification of the faithful: “*Gratia gratum faciens*” (Council of Trent, following St Thomas).

- **Extraordinary:** Given to some faithful like: visions, miracles, ecstasies, mystical state of prayer etc.

- **Special:** given to classes of people. They have two aspects:

- Christological: particular share in an aspect of the life of Christ.
- Ecclesial: given directly for particular ministries and services in the One body or family, the Church (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Rom. 12:). “*gratia gratis data*” again according to St Thomas:

Extraordinary and Special gifts are properly called “**charisms**”.

B. SPECIAL CHARISMS

In his Apostolic exhortation “*Evangelica Testificatio*” 1971, Pope Paul speaks of:

- The charism of religious life
- The charism of the founders
- The charism of the Institutes

THE SPECIAL CHARISM OF CONSECRATED LIFE (PERSONAL CHARISM)

1. The overall charism or gift of a consecrated person is first of all a share in a quality of Christ impressed and concealed in one's conception: we become aware of it in different stages of our existence through an experience of the Holy Spirit. We express it in a style of life (Spirituality) consistent with it and with the mission in the Church, for which the gift has been given to us: the mission is inseparable from any special charism.

As we are born marked by our charism, the human person can be defined as a “Vocation”: “A vocation is the hub around which a personality is formed”. (Lozano, “The spirituality of Comboni” page 25)

2. The fact that the personal charism is impressed on us at the very moment of conception (cf. Jer. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:4-6) gives us more light and guidance. The natural qualities and characteristics we have by birth, are destined and made, by Divine plan, consonant with the inserted supernatural qualities proper of the personal charism: in such way the life of those who are truly called is lived in an harmonious and agreeable way: the gifts of the Spirit are never a juxtaposition on human values.

If a consecrated person feels a continuous struggle or friction between his/her natural values and the demands of the charism, he/she may prudently doubt his/her vocation even in advanced age as both values are from the same Giver who told us: “I am the Way, the Truth, the Life”.

However an extraordinary intervention of the Holy Spirit may always make diverse ends meet.

Since the charism is a free gift (1 Cor. 12), since it is not our choice (John 15:10) we are not the owners; we cannot assume its presence (Heb. 5:5), we cannot leave it idle (Mt 25:15 - 28); we are accountable to the Giver, the Owner: we cannot shake it off at our personal whim (cf. Canon Law 691), it is not a “simply personal project” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 36); it is part of the mission of the community, it is an act of love of each one as a member of a community. (see *Rule of Life*, 56)

Some consecrated persons invoke their conscience in the disposal of their gifts. Well and good, but we must keep in mind two factors:

It is quite easy to misjudge the demand of the conscience with a purely personal opinion.

It is true that conscience is a subjective judgment, the deepest one, yet it is not an independent one, just as all our reality is not. The judgment of conscience is not a monologue, but the result of a dialogue with God, the only source of what is good and what is bad, and eventually with his representatives either in the so-called internal (spiritual director or confessor) or external (Superior) forum.

1. THE ANSWER TO AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE CALL OR GIFT

- **IT IS TO BE FREE.**

Jesus told the young man: “If you wish to be perfect, go and sell... then come, follow me” (Mt. 19:21- 29).

Free from external pressure: parents, relatives, priest and so on.

Free from internal coercion: sense of insecurity: - flight from the world or from obligations of married life, disillusioned in love, rape, fear of going to hell, fear of resettling in the world. and so on.

- **WELL MOTIVATED.**

The religious accepts the consecration for the love of God and of neighbour to whom he/she gives a service.

For some people the initial motivation may be wrong and tarnished. However, during the years of basic formation it may be purified, mainly in the postulancy, so as to enter into the Novitiate ready to know and to practice the obligations of religious life. To discover the motivation is the most difficult part of the periods of formation.

- **WELL ENLIGHTENED.**

Before committing themselves they have to know the real life that awaits them and the kind of people they have to live with.

This is why during the postulancy, Novitiate candidates have periods in ordinary communities of religious of the same Institute. During the period of temporary profession an experience in the mission is recommendable.

2. THE SIGNS OF VOCATION

The free, well motivated, well-enlightened personal decision of the candidate: the good qualities are a condition “sine qua non” to be judged by the Superiors. The “yes” to the call is the personal responsibility of the candidate: nobody can take the responsibility for him/her: such a presumption has been there in the past and may be in the present the source of serious consequences for the individual and the Institute.

The “no” may be of the authorities concerned, because of the lack of one of the above signs or qualities.

3. THE SHARE

The vocation is given by Jesus to the called person through a sharing in an aspect of His life. “The charismatic sense of religious life and the multiplicity of forms can be traced back to the same Jesus: his actions, his teachings, or aspects of his mystery and the Church's mission”. (I.L. 39)

The classic charisms imitate particular qualities of Jesus:

- Ora et labora of the Benedictines
- Poverty of the Franciscans
- Preaching of the Dominicans
- Obedience of the Jesuits and so on.

It is this “share” that gives a distinctive character to various religious Institutes. (Mutuae Relationes No.11)

4. PARTICULAR SPIRITUALITY

“The distinctive character also involves a particular style of sanctification and apostolate, which creates its particular tradition. It is necessary to preserve the identity of each Institute so securely that the danger of an ill-defined situation be avoided, lest the religious, failing to give due consideration to the particular mode of action proper to their character, become part of the life of the Church in a vague and ambiguous way”. (Mutuae Relationes No. 11)

It is this particular spirituality that may distinguish one religious Institute from another.

5. SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY, THE CHURCH

Called to the discipleship of Christ, charged with a particular style of life (Spirituality) the religious give a special service to the Church according to the “founding charism which is to be adapted to the changed conditions of the times”. The charisms are not static but dynamic, though never forgetting the “inspiratio primigenia, the original inspiration of the Founder or Foundress”.

C. PERSONAL CHARISM OF COMBONI

1. THE CORE OF COMBONI'S CHARISM

The core of Comboni's charism may be described as follows:

Through the Holy Spirit, Comboni received from God a special gift in virtue of which he shared, intensely and deeply, the love of Christ (the Christological dimension) for the people of Central Africa. This gift committed him for the rest of his life to passionately seek ways and means to share his love with the Africans, the poorest and most abandoned of his times. (gift for others. the Ecclesial dimension)

This personal and original experience of the Spirit reached its peak on 15th September 1864 in St Peter's Basilica, when Comboni had that sudden mystical intuition which is at the origin of his Plan for the Regeneration of Africa. This is the charismatic starting point of his life story:

“The Catholic, who is used to judging things in a supernatural light, looked upon Africa not through the pitiable lens of human interests, but in the pure light of faith; there he saw an infinite multitude of brothers who belonged to the same family as himself with one common Father in heaven. They were bent low and groaning beneath the yoke of Satan, and, in the ordinary economy of the divine Wisdom, they were placed on the threshold of a most terrible precipice. Then he was carried away under the impetus of that love set alight by the flame on Calvary's hill, when it came forth from the side of the Crucified One to embrace the whole human family; he felt his heart beat faster, and a divine power seemed to drive him towards those unknown lands. There he would enclose in his arms in a kiss of peace and of love those unfortunate brothers of his, upon whom it seemed that the fearful curse of Canaan still bore down”. (Message of Daniel Comboni no. 50)

Up to that moment, we could say that, Comboni had been a private person, an ordinary missionary led by an ordinary grace of the Lord.

“The love of Christ for souls forcefully took possession of him. It was a pentecostal experience. Otherwise it is impossible to explain how Africa became his only passion throughout his life, as he himself says. For he would live and die thinking only of this. We have here the fruit of something far higher than a simple personal decision on an ascetical level. It is clearly a mystical experience, an effect of the gifts of the Spirit” (Lozano, page 35).

He had based the certainty of his vocation on the words of Father Marani. On this occasion instead he received his gift through a deep and charismatic experience; he felt then that he was not the one who decided to give his life for Africans but only the one who received a decision somehow passively. He himself was changed then by this inspiration to become the founder of the Church in Central Africa. He was invested with a `public mission': he took upon himself the responsibility of bringing the love of Christ and his message to Africa. A divine, extraordinary power came upon him; he experienced it as a compelling urge stronger than himself, to start

immediately on his task, because he felt deep in himself that the hour of Salvation for Africa has come. He expressed quite strikingly the love he had received from the Heart of Jesus in his first address at Khartoum on his arrival as Vicar Apostolic. All his contacts and journeys after the experience reveals that he felt fully responsible for the evangelisation of Central Africa. (see Message of Daniel Comboni no. 18)

2. WAYS AND MEANS USED BY COMBONI TO FULFIL HIS CHARISM

Comboni then sought ways and means of fulfilling his charism and of putting it at the service of the Church.

- **HIS SPIRITUALITY**

He does it first of all by his spirituality, which is:

- Christ-centered: he receives the gift from Christ, he goes to Christ through His Heart and the mystery of the Cross;
- Church-centered: he receives from the Church a mission to put himself at the service of God, through the same Church.

- **HIS STYLE OF LIFE**

From this spirituality Comboni draws a style of life:

- Total dedication;
- Unconditional love (Message of Daniel Comboni 18);
- An endurance up to death, - `O Nigrizia o morte': `Africa or death!'

- **HIS SERVICE**

Fired with this spirituality and with this style of life, Comboni gives his service, which is an apostolate:

- Exclusively mission-oriented;
- Ad gentes;
- For the poorest and most abandoned of peoples.

Comboni felt that this call to service was urgent: "the hour of God for Africa" had come. "The newness and the originality of Comboni's Project also lay in the urgency and resolve with which it faced a dilemma, the depths of which are illustrated by its consequences: the appalling idea of seeing the Church suspend, perhaps for many Centuries, her work on behalf of so many millions of souls still languishing in darkness and the shadow of death." (P Chiocchetta, "Papers for the Evangelisation of Africa," page 22)

- **HIS METHODOLOGY**

Comboni suggests a methodology to perform this service:

- 'Save Africa with Africa' that is training Africans in Africa, where the white man can survive and the African does not die, and sending the trained ones to evangelize the others;
- Founding Institutes as 'Cenacles of Apostles':
- Accepting full responsibility for the Vicariate of Central Africa.

3. THE CHARISM OF COMBONI AS A FOUNDER

"The charisms of the various Founders reveal themselves to be an experience of the Spirit handed on to their disciples to be lived out, preserved, deepened and constantly developed by them in harmony with the Body of Christ in its continual process of growth". (Mutuae Relationes, 11)

1. Comboni could not transmit to his followers and members of his Institutes his own personal charism, that is his personal sharing of the love of Christ for the people of Central Africa, poor and abandoned.

2. The Holy Spirit gives to all the future authentic members of the Institutes a share in that love of Christ on the model of Comboni, the Holy Spirit being its "causa efficiens", Comboni its

"causa exemplaris". Comboni is thus also involved in our own calling, though we may not be aware of it: it is a consequence of the Communion of Saints.

3. We have been called from the day of our birth. God's act is one: he calls us to existence, he consecrates us to him, he directs us to freely join Comboni's Institute.

A Comboni vocation must substantially give a Comboni personality (See Lozano, page 25). A candidate who gradually does not put on a Comboni personality as a basic model cannot be said to have a Comboni identity.

4. THE CHARISM OF THE INSTITUTE

1. The charism of the Institute is flourishing when its Constitutions explicitly enshrine the spirituality and the service rendered to the Church (*inspiratio primigenia*) intended by the Founder and when the Superior General and his Council *pro tempore* acknowledge the special grace (*grazia di stato*) they are given by the Holy Spirit to fully understand, and appreciate the "inspiratio" and to animate all members so that they may cultivate and fully live it.

2. The charism of the Institute is also the collective sharing, the sum of all personal charisms of the members given by the Holy Spirit through the mediation of Comboni, as model and example.

3. It is moreover the ability of the Institute to mould our individual personalities in such a way that Comboni can transmit his example and message to us, his spirituality, his style of life, his specific service to the Kingdom of Christ through the Church, and his methodology to be developed according to the "Signs of the times."

4. Through its structures, its rules, its field of work, its Superiors and older members, the Institute must be able to help its new members to welcome the Holy Spirit who creates in them a Comboni missionary personality. The Comboni charism is not received on the day one is officially accepted into the Institute. The Institute has the spiritual experience of the charism of Comboni through the spiritual charismatic experience of the members, both individually and collectively: this happens in the ordinary communion at different level of all our communities, of the community of Superior-General and his council and in the extraordinary communion of the Chapters.

The charism of the Institute is fulfilled in the measure that its members fulfil their personal religious and missionary charism and consider the community as a Cenacle of Apostles.

5. The Institute, through the Chapter members who represent it, may develop, interpret, enrich, renew, extend the Comboni charism, - but not impoverish it - provided that the '*inspiratio primigenia*' is faithfully kept. The charism is not static, it does not grow old, it is renewed through all the new members to whom the Spirit is given: a Spirit who is always fresh, new, creative, unpredictable. This development must be like the development of a child into a mature person: the person, the "*inspiratio primigenia*" remains always the same, though the growth is implemented in stages.

6. The Institute, through its members, individually and collectively, is the living memory of the founder, in as much as they live and repeat the deeds Christ lived in the life of Comboni. In this way, and only in this way, we safeguard, deepen and constantly develop the charism and commitments of our Founder in harmony with the Body of Christ which is continually growing. (*Mutuae Relationes*, 11)

5. REMARKS ON THE SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY AS AIMS OF THE CHARISM

We give here some remarks on the practical directives followed by Comboni in evangelisation:

- The evangelisation of Africa is not the work of individuals: it is the work of the whole Church, and in a special way of the African Christians who will come forth in the future.
- It comes about when Christianity, local cultures and traditional religions meet.
- The community is important: within the local Church the one who evangelises is not the individual missionary but the apostolic community.

- The aim must be to evangelise the central elements of society: its leaders and its culture, so as to have Christian communities and leaders in the religious, social and economic fields; Christian leaders who are involved in politics, and tend to create a Christian culture well rooted in African culture.
- Genuine and respectful collaboration with anybody who is willing to cooperate in the task.
- From the experience gained at Malbes more helpful hints can be gathered:
 - Watch out for people who can destroy all that one has built up;
 - Once people have been trained they must find suitable structures in place;
 - Leaders emerge from the group and must keep in constant and close contact with it, if they want to have an impact.
- Evangelisation, in its different stages, demands that whoever evangelises be fully conversant with his people, because it is the local Church that he must help to grow, not a poor copy of a European society.
 - For Comboni, evangelisation calls for the development of the whole person: evangelisation and human promotion are inseparable. The kind of human promotion he seeks is geared to create a Christian way of working and living.
 - Because we must influence the vital points of society, we must pay special attention not only to the youth but also to adults, as those who can fully grasp the Christian message and what it implies, and pay attention also to the family, that guarantees that faith will survive and develop.

Chapter Thirteen

SPIRITUALITY OF COMBONI

The spirituality of individual Christian persons is simply the way they experience God through Jesus Christ and his Bride the Church, in a given time and a given society: it is a thoroughly consistent style of life.

Comboni received much from the spirituality of the clergy in Verona, who had Jesuits and their disciples as spiritual directors.

However since the spirituality of a person depends first of all on his/her vocation and, since theologically speaking a person is above all a vocation, Comboni has his own spirituality, which distinguishes him from all other saints. Such spirituality has been inspired and shaped by the Holy Spirit through his charism, on which his vocation is founded, is experienced and is put into effect.

The spirituality of Comboni are those spiritual, moral, mystic ways and means through which he achieved the aim of the gift.

His spirituality is mainly: Christ-centred, Church-centred.

A. CHRIST - CENTRED

IN GENERAL

- Speaking of missionaries he writes of their life as “a state of life similar to that of Christ and his Apostles”.
- The life of his followers (missionaries) implies the “following of Jesus in the functions of apostolic life”.
- His missionary Institute is “a small Cenacle of Apostles for Africa”.
- His missionaries are to consecrate their own lives and tasks to Jesus the Apostle.
- Evangelising is “Infusing the spirit of Christ into the mind and making it take root among the people”. (The Plan)
- Like Paul, knowing Christ above all. (see 1 Cor 2:2)
- Communion with Christ. To his missionaries: “Let them always keep their eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, loving him tenderly, and striving to understand more clearly the meaning of a God who died on the Cross for the salvation of souls”. (Rules of the Institute 1871, chapter 10, 3, speaking of the spirit of sacrifice.)

IN PARTICULAR

I. A SPIRITUALITY OF THE HEART OF JESUS.

Gradually Comboni's spirituality became centred on a symbol, that of the heart of Christ. It is impossible to understand the religious experience of Comboni if we do not take this spirituality into account.

For Comboni the Heart of Christ:

- Is the cleft in the rock where to hide ourselves (the wound opened by the lance) as it was for the Cistercians;
- Is the open side from which honey, wine and milk flow;
- Is the Heart of Christ as experienced by St Gertrude (1256 – 1301) as part of an intensely mystical interior life;
- Is an object of contemplation or communion as understood by St John Eudes (1601 1680).
- Is the symbol of a love to be consoled and in need of reparation, as it was for St Margaret Alacoque, who played a great part in shaping Comboni's spirituality. He was inspired by words like these: “My divine Heart is so passionately in love with human beings that it can no longer contain within itself the flames of its ardent charity”.

- Is a means for the Apostolate of Prayer as in Ramiere ('ex Corde Christi in universum mundum').

For Comboni - and this is his specific contribution - the Heart of Christ is above all:

- the means to obtain that His Love for human beings may be soon extended to the redemption and salvation of Black Africans (the peoples of Central Africa): "The Sacred Heart of Jesus is going to open his redoubled love towards those who are seated in darkness and in the shadow of death." (Lozano page 62)

For this purpose he consecrates the Vicariate to the Heart of Jesus: "The Sacred Heart of Jesus, to whom this Vicariate of mine is consecrated, beats also for the people of Central Africa, and Jesus Christ died on the Cross for the poor unbelieving blacks too".

Moreover for Comboni the Heart of Christ is:

- a symbol of most pure and merciful love towards human beings
- a sign of full trust and its centre
- a source of strength and courage
- a centre of communication among beloved persons

Comboni is an Apostle:

- of the Apostolate of Prayer
- of the Guard of Honour (to be observed on First Fridays)

The PLAN is presented as the Plan of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary for the conversion of Africa. The Institutes of Cairo: for boys or men, the dedication was to the Heart of Jesus while for girls or women the dedication was to the Heart of Mary.

FEAST OF THE SACRED HEART: Comboni is so taken up with this feast that he asks the Holy See that it be made a Holyday of Obligation in his Vicariate.

THE HEART OF MARY: From the Pierced Heart of Jesus Comboni goes to the Pierced Heart of Mary, who is closely associated with the work of regenerating the African Continent.

"We can say that the Holy Spirit has communicated Christ's love for Africa to Comboni through the mediation of the Heart of the Good Shepherd, pierced for the poorest and most abandoned. It is in the light of this special revelation and communication that Comboni organised in a definitive way the whole of his life, time, and energies and was able to envisage a certain type of missionary Institute". (Pierli, The Heart of Christ pages 13- 14).

II. SPIRITUALITY OF JESUS CRUCIFIED

"I am ready to suffer and with joy for Christ and for the most abandoned souls in the universe". (MDC no. 52)

The Cross of Christ appears in the spiritual experience of all disciples of the Lord. It was mainly towards the end of his life, however, that Comboni revealed a mystical dimension of the love of the Cross. (See Rules of 1871, page 195)

1. LOVE OF THE CROSS

From the loving contemplation of the pierced Heart of Jesus Crucified, Comboni went on easily, under the guidance of the Spirit, to the love of the Cross. The Cross was transformed into happiness: "I myself, my missionaries, are the happiest people on earth ... we suffer for God, for Jesus, for souls: How sweet it is to suffer with Jesus, for Jesus and for the souls we must win for Jesus...The first characteristic of a missionary in Central Africa is a love of suffering". (MDC no. 104) "The works of God are born and grow at the foot of the Cross". (MDC 198, 226, 231, 234, 237, 238, 241, 256, 245)

2. THE CROSS OF DETACHMENT

Spiritual progress through detachment:

- From his parents:

"I am terribly distressed by the sacrifice these two poor people (parents) are making through being separated from me. The Lord subjects this vocation to such a great sacrifice! But I have been assured that God is calling me and I go ahead safe in this vocation." (MDC no. 24)

On the occasion of the loss of his mother he writes to his cousin Eustace:

"My dear Eustace! I am without my mother!... Once she was with me; but now I have her no more... Blessed be the God of mercies who has been pleased to remember me!... Yes, I have by divine grace conquered nature, separating myself from all that was dearest to me in the world to serve the Lord more freely. Yet nonetheless I feel most deeply the wounds of my fragile nature and I have wept bitterly over my great loss. It has pleased him to call my poor mother, whom I remember with such love and who bore much suffering and sacrifice on my account. It has also pleased God to leave my father in sorrowful solitude, and though he is resigned to the divine will his great sensitivity carries and drags him into a deep melancholy. But I must shake myself from this lethargy, look on high and see that man is not made for this world. At this sweet thought, my dear Eustace, all trace of anxiety fades away and my spirit is filled with inexpressible happiness". (MDC no. 35)

- From realities dear to him for the love of Africa:

"Unfortunate Africa was the first love of my youth. I left behind what was dearest to me in the world and came to these lands sixteen years ago to offer my work for the relief of its Centuries-old misfortunes. Then obedience called me home on account of my bad health... I left in obedience. But my heart remained here among you". (MDC no. 18)

- From the mission if obedience demands it:

He wrote to Cardinal Simeoni:

"I received your esteemed letter of the 3rd of this month. I have seriously considered whether, given my weakness and indeed nothingness, I can still be of some use to the African apostolate, doubtless the most arduous and difficult in the world, or whether rather I am likely to do it harm. I considered this question all the more seriously because I have now become really less able to carry crosses; because of so many difficulties, privations, illnesses, fevers; because of so much heartbreak, struggle and opposition, and all borne for many years, but particularly during the recent and terrible period of famine and plague." (MDC no. 241)

- From insecurity and uncertainties, the cross of leaping into the unknown:

The first letters of Daniel Comboni to his family revealed another fact that made his separation from his homeland and loved ones even harder: the natural uneasiness he felt at the thought that he was entering a world that was unknown and filled with surprises - the world of the black populations of Africa. He was bewildered to see them going about naked, armed with spears, bows and arrows, and they seemed fierce enough to do away with him with a single thrust of a spear. (Lozano page 81)

3. THE CROSS OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS

- With his Superiors:

For instance Don Mazza. When Comboni heard the rumour that he was going to be expelled from the Institute, he wrote:

"I confess that I can't understand all this: the serenity of my conscience, and the faith that God brings about for man the designs of his mercy, these two things give me the strength to bless Providence with all my heart for what is happening. Although I cannot see through the darkness of the future, I still carry on calmly and confidently, without bothering about what the world might think about all this. With all my soul I thank the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, who have raised me up to the honour and blessing of being allowed to drink from a bitter chalice, firm in the hope that this will help towards my salvation. I wish a thousand blessings on the people who have helped to make me bear this tribulation, and I shall always pray for them. I venerate and respect that holy old man who has been so good to me for 23 years, and I will love him until death..." (MDC no. 221, Writings no. 1049)

- With his missionaries:

"Thanks to the God of mercies, my Vicariate and its activities move ahead according to the spirit of Jesus Christ. We are succeeding in doing not a little but rather much good, in spite of

enormous difficulties and crosses which come to me from people who should rather be bringing me consolation. But the works of God have always been like that. Trusting in God, I go ahead on my way, happy to die for Jesus and for Africa". (MDC no. 72, Writings no. 6956)

This conversation between Comboni and Father Losi was characteristic:

"My son, write whatever you like against me to His Eminence; write to Rome, to Propaganda, and the Pope, that I am a scoundrel, deserving the gallows etc. But I will always forgive you and I will always love you. If you remain in the missions and convert and save my dear Nubas for me, you will always be my dear son, and I will bless you till I die".

Famous was the sufferings he had to bear with the Camillians and mainly with Father Carcereri who asked his Superiors to report Comboni to Propaganda Fide; Comboni did not defend himself until he was summoned by Propaganda Fide. That he was cleared of all allegations and completely vindicated was witnessed by the fact that he was nominated Bishop soon after by Propaganda Fide.

4. MYSTICAL MARRIAGE

The following passage was so characteristic that may be considered a mystical marriage of Comboni to the Crosses he experienced in his life.

"Your Eminence will see that once again in this new storm the enemy of man's salvation has tried to do me harm; and you will understand how many tempests there are that bear down upon me, so that it is a miracle I am able to keep going under the burden of so many crosses. But I feel so full of strength and courage and of trust in God and the Blessed Virgin Mary that I am certain of overcoming everything and of being ready for other, heavier crosses in the future. I already see and understand that the "Cross" is such a friend to me and is always so nearby that I have for some time chosen her as my eternal and indivisible Bride. So the Cross will be my beloved "bride" and my wise and prudent teacher, Mary will be my dearest "Mother" and Jesus my "all". In their company, most Eminent Prince, I fear neither the storms of Rome, nor the turmoil of Verona, nor the clouds of Lyons and Paris. Slowly and surely, walking on thorny ground, I will succeed in establishing and giving life to the proposed Work for the regeneration of Africa, which has been abandoned by everybody, and which is the hardest and most challenging work of the Catholic apostolate". (MDC no. 224, Writings 1709).

5. LONGING FOR CROSSES

Comboni not only accepts and welcomes the crosses but he longs for them:

"I have always longed for crosses, because they are necessary for the growth of holy works, and the good Jesus has been generous with me in this, despite my own unworthiness. So I am happy to adore in perfect resignation the dispositions of Providence, which has allowed our respected and most Eminent Cardinal Prefect in his cleverness to do no little damage to my resources". (MDC no. 225, Writings 1941).

6. LONGING FOR MARTYRDOM

Comboni is longing for martyrdom:

"Please put this question in the Council and speak about Africa and about how to gain one hundred million African Souls for Christ. Say that in the Church there is never a lack of workers for the Gospel who desire martyrdom as the sweetest and dearest reward of the hardest labours; and all four of us are ready to undergo the most dreadful of martyrdoms to save a single African soul. For us the African heat is like a cool Italian breeze for a good parish priest in Verona. If then the Holy Father or the Council were to speak up for Africa to the Catholics... we would die with joy for it". (MDC no. 226, Writings 2194)

At the end of one particularly painful period in his life, Comboni penned this hymn to the Cross, that Cross "which has the strength to transform Central Africa into a land of blessing and salvation":

The Saviour of the world,
marvelously conquered souls,
by the strength of this Cross,

which destroyed paganism,
 razed the idolatrous temples,
 vanquished the powers of hell,
 and became the altar,
 not of one single temple,
 but of the whole world. This Cross which came forth from the summit of Golgotha
 and then filled the universe with its power,
 this Cross was adored in the temples,
 and in the royal cities received the highest veneration;
 it was revered on the standards of armies
 and invoked on the mainmasts of ships.
 By the Cross priests were consecrated
 and monarchs enthroned with sacred rites.
 Earth, sea and sky recognise the power of the Cross
 and everywhere it is honoured.
 It was in the midst of troubles and thorns
 that the work of our redemption was born and grew:
 its development is wonderful
 and its future is surely consoling and happy.
 The Cross has the strength to transform Central Africa
 into a land of blessing and salvation.
 From the Cross there issues a strength,
 which is gentle and does not kill,
 which comes down on souls and renews them
 like a refreshing dew;
 from the Cross there issues great power,
 because the Nazarene, raised up on the tree of the Cross,
 stretched out one arm to the East and the other to the West,
 into the embrace of the Church;
 with pierced hands,
 and like another Samson,
 he hurled down the columns of the temple
 where for so many Centuries
 men had adored the power of evil.
 It was on this ruins that he raised up the Cross,
 worker of marvels,
 which attracted all things to itself:
 "Si exaltatus fuero a terra,
 omnia traham ad meipsum". (MDC no. 233)

We may conclude this then with the following declaration of Comboni:

"We are made for saving souls, no matter what people may say. God will give me the reward,
 because 'Deus charitas est' (God is love). When it is a matter of love, I despise myself. I take
 no notice of what people say, because their opinion of me may not be based on facts. When
 there is the danger that a single soul may be lost, I listen to my conscience alone. By the
 grace of God and in truth, I am perfect in this: ama nesciri, et pro nihilo reputari. As far as the
 world goes, I have seen just about everything; and in practice I have learned that above all we
 must have a great love for God which gives birth to love of neighbour, quod universa lex est
 which is the universal law. Then I have also understood how wise is the truth preached by the
 Apostle: cupio anathema esse pro fratribus meis". (MDC no. 70, Writings 6846-47)

B. CHURCH-CENTRED

The adherence to the Church is one of the clearest and most constant spiritual attitudes of Comboni:

- AS TO A MOTHER, that is, the source of life and nourishment;
- AS TO A LADY, that is, as to one who had power over him.

"I would be happier to be condemned to perpetual imprisonment and to death, while remaining
 in communion with the Pope and the Church, my Lady and Mother, rather than to be a king
 and to live in glory and honour in the world". (MDC no. 78)

"From the capital city of the Catholic world, I address to you a message of love and devotion
 towards the Church and its Head to the Society of Cologne". (MDC no. 78)

In spite of difficulties with Cardinal Canossa and with Propaganda Fide, he speaks of obedience and fidelity to the Hierarchy: "If the Pope, Propaganda Fide and all the Bishops in the world were against me, I would keep my head down for a year, then I would present a new plan, - but to give up thinking of Africa, Never!" (MDC nos. 76 - 78).

What kind of Church? Simply a juridical entity? with Apologetics (defending itself from liberalism)?

1. COMBONI'S CHURCH IS A MISSIONARY CHURCH

It is first a Church at the service of humankind, though the hierarchy is one important element in it.

It is an Institution founded by Christ the Redeemer, and sent by him to bring his redemption to all peoples. Mission is the Church's very reason for existence.

The first Vatican Council was for Comboni a magnificent occasion to introduce a decisive appeal for the Evangelization of Black Africa. (MDC nos. 56-57)

The Church at its beginning is described as a "Cenacle of Apostles".

The Plan and its aim are all great Church events. (MDC nos. 73-74)

2. THE CHURCH FLOWS FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST

To bring the Gospel is not only a duty ('Euntes'): it is a necessity born of love. Christ loves everyone, and the Church shares in Christ's love for humankind.

From the open Heart of Christ flow the sacraments that form the Church (MDC no. 50), born of the love of Christ the Redeemer. It is a love that spreads and sets the Church on fire as it were. The Heart of Christ, in this way, becomes the very symbol of the mission of evangelization. (Postulatum Papers, 241)

3. THE CHURCH AND THE CROSS

The Church is born and spreads because of the love of the Son of God crucified: Comboni always saw a close relationship between martyrdom in the Church and the Cross. (MDC nos. 166; 167; 215) "It was with sweat and martyrdom that the Church was formed".

This connection he made as a result of his own experience.

4. OBEDIENCE TO THE HIERARCHY

Obedience to the Church as his Lady, 'Signora'.

The Church of Comboni has the Pope and the Bishops at its head.

Rome has always been behind the urge for evangelization and the founding of new Christian Churches, as well as presiding over them in faith and charity.

He went, therefore, to the Pope, Propaganda Fide and the Bishops of the first Vatican Council.

It was in St Peter's that he received the fundamental inspiration.

- Obedience at the start. (MDC 83) "I do not want to begin anything without the 'Placet' of the Church and whatever displeases the Church displeases me as well. If the Pope does not look favourably on me I am going to tear up my Plan". (Lozano, page 163)
- Obedience in carrying out plans. "*In everything I promise Your Eminence perfect obedience, even though I should have to die with a broken heart*". (MDC no. 81)
- Responsible Obedience. After the quotation just reported he wrote: "*If your Eminence does not approve of my Plan, I will draw up another. If you do not accept the second, either, I will draw up a third one, and on and on, until death*". Having said this, he went on urging for steps to be taken: *the time set by God for Africa has come, he said, we must do away with all delays*. (MDC no. 84).

He did not see eye to eye with Propaganda Fide on the question of the division of the Vicariate (MDC no. 87); he complained in a private letter but accepted the decision with respect and spirit of obedience, and offered his cooperation.

Appendix

“THE MAHDI REBELLION”

“17 YEARS OF SLOW MARTYRDOM” for the Comboni Missionaries in the Sudan by Sister Giuseppina Tresoldi, former Superior General of the Comboni Missionary Sisters.

INTRODUCTION

The foreshadowing of the hurricane that was going to strike the missions in the Sudan had already been seen by Comboni during the last years of his life. In fact, in one of his letters he mentioned a “so-called prophet who felt he was sent by God, Allah to free Sudan from the domination of the Turks and from Christian influence” that was penetrating in the Country. There was, in fact a belief among the people that the prophet who would be sent by Allah towards the end of time would be called Mahdi - which means: “guided by Allah” and would bring about a new era of peace and justice there, where there was a reign of oppression; he would also purify Islam and bring it to its final triumph.

In June 1881, a certain Mohammed Ahmed, son of Abdallah, born in 1841 in Dongola, Kordofan, proclaimed himself “the Mahdi” and called the faithful to wage a holy war against the “infidels”; the Egyptian Turks, because they had become relaxed in the practice of Islam, and the non-Moslems. He found many followers in the North of Sudan where people felt oppressed by the Egyptian domination that was imposing heavy taxes. The famine and diseases of the previous years had also contributed greatly to preparing the people to be ready for a revolt. Moreover, they were won by the promises of the Mahdi who guaranteed a sure place in heaven for those who would die in battle and a future of happiness and justice to those who would survive.

In March 1882 the Mahdi began his revolutionary movement which was then to be referred to by the historians as “the Mahdi”. With rallies here and there he aimed at fomenting rebellion among the people against the Egyptian Government and he attracted many who joined in, ready to fight.

The government, both in Khartoum and in Cairo underestimated the strength of this movement. They considered this man just a visionary rebel and sent a small contingent of troops to put down the insurgent rebellion, but they were defeated three times. Had the government sent a more adequate contingent of troops, the movement could have been put down at the very start.

This was really the first in a series of mistakes which allowed this revolution to take momentum.

COMBONI MISSION STATIONS

At this time the Comboni communities were present in **Delen, Malbes, El Obeid, Khartoum** and the nearby station of **Geret**.

DELEN – In this community we have:

- Sr. Amalia Andreis, Sr. Eulalia Pesavento and Sr. Maria Caprini,
- Fr Luigi Bonomi, Fr Joseph Ohrwalder, Brs Gabriele Mariani and Giuseppe Regnotto.

Already in January. 1882, when Sr. Teresa Grigolini as Provincial Superior visited Delen from El Obeid where she was stationed, the road was not safe. The Baggara, a nomadic tribe engaged in slave-trade, was often attacking the area of Delen with violent raids. They were responsible for abducting Zeinab Alif - Sr. Josephine Benvenuti - in 1853 from Darfur and Blessed Bakhita in 1878 from Kordofan. They were great enemies of the Mission and very eagerly joined the rebellious movement of the Mahdi. On April 8th, 1882, the Baggara stormed the Mission very violently killing people and destroying everything they found around.

In May 1882, Father Losi who was the Superior in charge of the missions in Kordofan, gave orders from El Obeid to all the missionaries in the Nuba Area to leave and withdraw to El Obeid, but for our people in Delen it was too late. “El Mahdi” stationed himself in Birket (between

Malbes and Delen), therefore they were completely cut off. No messenger sent from El Obeid to Delen reached safely. Only those in Malbes were on time to reach El Obeid. (Malbes is only 18 kilometres from El Obeid).

In Delen there were only about 100 government soldiers so it was impossible to fight. Seeing the worsening of the situation, with the chief of the soldiers and also with Mr. Roversi, an anti-slavery representative who was trapped in Delen, missionaries agreed to attempt an escape escorted by armed soldiers; but when everything was ready (about 200 people of the mission) our missionaries realised that they had been betrayed. After some time they tried again but there was nothing to do: they became prisoners of the representative of the Mahdi, Mac Omar. The mission was ransacked by Mac Omar's people, the Christians were forced under torture to become Moslems and this caused immense pain to the heart of the missionaries.

Since there were rumours that the prisoners would be taken to the Mahdi, the Missionaries, on the 15th September, 1882, assembled together with the Christians who were still around the mission and celebrated the last Eucharist in the Chapel of Dilling (Delen). It was the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. It was a very painful moment for all those who were there. Mary was with them and Her sorrow was also for them.

On September 18th, 1882, the WAY TO CALVARY began: Mac Omar wanted to reach 'El Mahdi' who was stationed in the camp of Boga near El Obeid. The distance was about 200 Km. and our seven missionaries had to do it on foot. At first they had camels to ride on but soon they were deprived of everything, even of their own shoes. On the way they were always a target of insults and beating on the part of onlookers coming out to see and insult the infidels! Fr Ohrwalder was forced to carry the bronze crucifix of their Chapel since Mac Omar wanted to take it to the Mahdi as a trophy, but during the first night Fathers Ohrwalder and Bonomi succeeded in burying the Crucifix in a place where nobody ever found it, thus avoiding the desecration the Arabs had intended to do. The journey lasted nine days in extremely painful situations: it was the rainy season, so high grass, deep ponds to wade through, torrid sun, no clothing to change, When they reached the camp they were assaulted by the Arabs who were there and escaped death with difficulty . They were brought before the Mahdi who tried in every way to make them become Moslems: "Either Moslems or death" was the ultimatum given and our missionaries were of one voice: **"We are ready to DIE"**. What they experienced that night: How our seven brothers and sisters prepared to offer their life for Christ and for the regeneration of Africa. The words of the Founder echoed in their heart. Sr. Amalia remembered the words she said to Leo XIII in Rome before leaving for Sudan. The Pope asked them: "My daughters, have you the courage to go to those lands, where you could even meet martyrdom?" The Sisters answered: "Would it please the Lord to make us worthy of such a great grace". The Sisters repeated these words to one another; Comboni often said "the real Apostle cannot pull back even in front of death". They were serene and relaxed. Father Bonomi, as the leader of the group wrote a message that they hoped would be taken to Italy and they all signed. Sr. Maria Caprini had a relic of the Holy Cross, they all kissed it and then abandoned themselves to peaceful sleep. There was a beautiful comet in the sky and they saw it as the Star of Martyrdom; but

The next morning, Mr. George Stambulie a merchant from El Obeid who had become a Moslem to escape imprisonment came to say good-bye. Everything was ready for their death. A messenger of the Mahdi came to fetch the missionaries and bring them to the Mahdi. They walked for half an hour and they were certain they were walking to their death. In the presence of the Mahdi they were again questioned and our people were determined; they were faithful to Christ so DEATH was their choice. "Put them to death", was the last word of the Mahdi but, at that very moment, an interpreter of the Koran said: "You cannot do that, the Koran forbids the killing of any person consecrated to God, unless they are found with arms in their hands".

For our Missionaries this was a great delusion! A much more painful martyrdom was awaiting them. In the camp they were strongly tormented by the people. Mr. Stambulie' helped to build a little hut for them. They all became very sick due to the terrible situation in which they found themselves. They were almost invoking death, and death surely came!

On October 27th 1882 – one month after their arrival at the camp, Sr. Euralia Pesavento was very sick and at night, a very high fever brought her to the point of death. She was 26 years old.

Not one of the remaining six had enough strength to bury her! And it was difficult to find anybody who would do it. For money, an Arab accepted to pull the body away 100 metres and covered her with sand! **On October 31st 1882**, only four days after, again at night, Brother Gabriele Mariani died at the age of 29. **On November 7th 1882**, it was Sr. Amalia Andreis, the Superior of the community of the Sisters, who died at the age of 29. She was fully aware her time had come and in great sorrow she left Sr. Maria Caprini alone, the youngest of the group. In her last words she told Sr. Maria to be a mother and a sister to the three missionaries remaining.

To the end of November the weather improved so the missionaries regained a bit of strength. Moreover, news and some help arrived from El Obeid.

We now leave our four survivors in Boga and go to **El Obeid** to see how life was there. In the community of El Obeid we have: Sr. Teresa Grigolini as Provincial Superior, Sr. Concetta Corsi, Sr. Caterina Chincarini, Sr. Elisabetta Venturini and the newly professed Sr. Fortunata Quasce with Father Losi, Superior, Fr Paolo Rossignoli and Brother Isidoro Locatelli.

El Obeid was a commercial town of about 100,000 people; it was surrounded by hills so the climate was quite good. The government had a strong garrison in a well-protected fort. The mission kept on the various activities it was engaged in, but they felt the storm advancing. Sr. Teresa Grigolini felt it would have been good to move out with the Christians towards Khartoum but the Superior of the mission was uncertain and delayed until it was too late. When he decided to move he was not given permission any more. The governor was afraid that if he allowed the missionaries to go, the merchants would move out, too, making it hard for the people of El Obeid. They resolved to move into the Fort and took up residence in the house of Marrietta Combatti - an ex-slave educated in Cremona and brought back to Egypt by Comboni as a catechist.

At the beginning of September 1882 Fr Losi felt inspired to call all the people of the mission to the Church. He celebrated the last Holy Eucharist and then he gave dispensation from the Vows to the consecrated people telling them to renew them daily if they wished to do so. It was very hard for the Sisters who were preparing for their annual renewal since none of them had Perpetual Vows yet.

On September 8th 1882 - the forces of the Mahdi attacked El Obeid but they were pushed back. However, the city was besieged and life inside became unbearable. The missionaries tried to help the people who were greatly affected by terrible diseases, but then they began to fall sick themselves. In November they had the consolation to hear that the missionaries of Delen were at the Boga camp, not far from them and they sent Marrietta Combatti with some help. When she returned, she brought the news of the three deaths. In December, Fr Losi fell sick with the plague and on the 27th December he died; he was 44 years old. In the diary of Sr. Teresa we read that they buried Fr Losi very near their home - only two metres away! Even within the Fort, life could not continue and the soldiers gave themselves over to the Mahdi and El Obeid surrendered.

On January 19th 1883 - El Obeid was taken and terrible moments followed. The houses were all ransacked, people were tortured to divulge where they had hidden their properties. They entered the house of the sisters like wolves, they even dug up the grave of Fr Losi to find things of value. The missionaries were told to become Moslems or else face death; and the reaction was the same as for the missionaries of Delen. Death was their choice, apart from Father Rossignoli and Brother Locatelli, who unfortunately pronounced the formula, "Allah is the only one God and Mohammed his only prophet". However this did not help Fr Rossignoli who often suffered all the hardships borne by the rest of the group. Sr. Corsi instead had the courage to tell the soldiers: "You are dogs and not men!" She was left to bleed from the mouth. All the Sisters had their clothes torn, religious objects taken away and beaten to the point of bleeding.

After two days of this hell they were brought into the presence of the Mahdi at the Boga Camp. It was the **21st of January, 1883** and after a long interrogation trying to convince them on the glories of Islam, they were re-united to the Missionaries of Delen. Mixed emotions filled the whole group, joy for being together and sorrow to witness the miserable conditions of the survivors: "They were like walking skeletons", wrote one survivor.

After about three weeks they were together, a fire broke out in the camp and destroyed almost all the huts including the one of the missionaries. They were now in complete misery. Mr. Stambulie came again to their help and built two small huts for them. They all tried to do

something in order to live, like weaving baskets, sewing, and so on. It was during this period that Fr Bonomi burned some bones, mixed the powder with glue and obtained a kind of ink which was sufficiently readable. They wrote letters to Khartoum and also the common prayers that could not always be remembered by heart. It was the common prayer which helped them to bear their sufferings in union with the Lord. They often made their confession and they so much appreciated staying together.

The Sisters kept inside most of the time to avoid receiving insults while the Fathers were able to move around a bit, though always watched by the Arabs. They were also able to baptise some children in danger of death and reconcile with the Church some Catholics from Middle East who had recited the formula.

Vague hopes of liberation appeared on the horizon. In June 1883 there were rumours that troops headed by Gen. Hicks were marching to Kordofan but on November 4th, when the attack came, they were defeated and the situation worsened. Sr. Teresa Grigolini still succeeded in sending news to Khartoum written on pieces of white cloth since they had no papers. She told the people of Khartoum to leave and take refuge in Egypt because the forces of the Mahdi would arrive also at the Capital.

In December 1883 Marietta Combatti succeeded in going to Khartoum bringing messages to the Ambassador and she found that the missionaries had already left the city; they had left on December 11th 1883. The missionaries in Khartoum at that time were: Fr L. Hanriot; Brs. C.P. Santoni, Domenico Donizzoni, Domenico Polinari and Srs. Vittoria Daganini, Giuseppe Scandola, Matilda Lombardi and Fortunata Zanolì. Br. Polinari remained. Marietta tried to bring some help back to the prisoners but the Arabs stole everything from her.

In March 1884 Mr. Stambulie who had lost the confidence of the Mahdi and found it difficult to continue, planned an escape and invited the missionaries to follow him. They all built up their hopes but another big blow was going to come. The messenger of the Mahdi went to them with the order to follow him to the house of Abdullahi and a real more painful martyrdom begins. They were repeatedly told to become Moslems and at their refusal Abdullahi became brutal in torturing them. He told them openly that he would not kill them since he knew it was what they desired, but they will suffer... and they did.

First of all they were separated. This separation was intended to break the strength they had because of their being together. Sr. Teresa, Sr. Concetta and Sr. Maria were sent to other groups of women and men to be tormented, they underwent terrible tortures and then they were given as slaves to three different women, wives of the officers of the Mahdi. It was April 1st, 1884. The men were also separated: Fr Rossignoli and Brother Regnotto were sent to El Obeid while Fr Bonomi, Fr Ohrwalder and Brother Locatelli after being horribly tortured were separated and told to proceed to a new camp as slaves of the Khalifs.

On April 5th, 1884 the Mahdi gave order to the whole camp to move to Rahad beyond El Obeid (at 650 km from Khartoum). It was an excruciating experience for our people, separated from one another, as slaves to the wives of the Khalifs. It was almost incredible to think how they could have survived such an ordeal. Sr. Concetta Corsi particularly was in the hands of a cruel woman. When the journey to Rehel began she was forced to walk barefoot through the desert and ended up in such a state that she begged her mistress to end the agony by letting her just die. The Khalif's wife, however, tied Sister Corsi to a camel and had her dragged along. After some time, the woman simply abandoned her. It was night. A man approached her and she began to cry. Other men wanted her to fulfil their evil desires. As a way of escaping from their hands, she demanded to be taken to the Mahdi saying, "I want to go to the Mahdi and I will recite the formula". When before the Mahdi, however, Sister Corsi clearly told him that she had no intention of embracing Islam. The Mahdi told her the formula would enter slowly into her heart. "He treated her well".

The three Sisters who were left in the house of Abdullahi, Sr. Caterina, Sr. Elisabetta and Sr. Fortunata also had a terrible time. Sr. Fortunata, being a Sudanese, had been the first one taken as a target of their painful torturing up to the point of death and then left in agony until the order came to be brought to the Mahdi. Sr. Caterina was also tortured in many ways and left almost for dead. Sr. Elisabetta had the worst treatment; she was left tied to a tree and everybody thought that she was dead; when the order of the Mahdi came she was brought unconscious on a stretcher.

It was the **17th of April, 1884**: the Sisters were once again reunited but in such a state that just looking at each other was pure anguish. Some of them were disfigured with terrible cuts and wounds. From the 'memoirs' of Sr. Teresa Grigolini we read about painful revelations of this time. She recalled the fervour of each one of them at the beginning of their way to Calvary, how the words of the Founder spurred them on, how the idea of giving their lives for Christ on the Cross was very pleasant to them, they would support and comfort one another But now it was the dark night especially when they were alone ... no star in the night... the long awaited death was not coming yet the anguish continued. Now, however, being together again, prayer reflowered on their lips and in their heart as a healing touch of the Lord. "We began a Novena to the Heart of Jesus" wrote Sr. Teresa. In fact, they needed more strength to face the next Station of the Cross that was coming on their way.

They were called again in front of the Mahdi. This time he was very kind to them, so much so that they thought they were going to be sent to their country and instead, very slyly he told them that in order to protect them, they have to marry. They were instructed daily by a catechist on Islam and the Sisters were in great anguish. If only they had at least the Fathers near to consult them on what to do!. Mr. Slatin, the Austrian ex-governor of Kordofan who was also a prisoner came to their help. He suggested 'sham' marriages with Greeks or Syrians who were in the camp; he suggested this as the only alternative to their becoming concubines of the Khalifs. It is in the Moslem law that no woman should be left independent. Mr. Slatin convinced the Sisters to take his suggestions and arranged to have these sham marriages in front of the Khalif sent by the Mahdi and the Sisters were separated once again: Sr. Teresa Grigolini, Sr. Fortunata Quasce and Sr. Caterina Chincarini went to three Greek men who had accepted to play that role. Sr. Concetta Corsi went to Brother Isidoro Locatelli. Sr. Elisabetta Venturini and Sr. Maria Caprini were too sick to marry so they were allowed to go, Sr. Elisabetta with Sr. Concetta, and Sr. Maria with Sr. Teresa. **It was May 8th, 1884.**

In August 1884, the Mahdi wanted to move to Khartoum, some 650 Kilometres away, as he was convinced he would defeat the troops of Gordon Pasha. He gave an order to the whole camp to get on the move from Rahad to Khartoum. Before moving the Mahdi sent Father Bonomi and Father Ohrwalder back to El Obeid with Fr Rossignoli and Brother Regnotto. Brother Locatelli and the Sisters moved to Khartoum. It was the 8th August when they started and they reached Omdurman, near **Khartoum on October 23, 1884**; three full months of painful travelling through the desert. During this time Sr. Teresa got news from Aswan: it was Fr Speeke who told the missionaries that he was there trying to arrange for their escape. Sr. Teresa informed Father Speeke of their situation and said that an escape was impossible because they were under very strict guard. She also informed about the missionaries being sent back to El Obeid.

On January 26th, 1885, Khartoum was taken and the Mahdi settled in Omdurman. The English battalion was defeated, both Gordon and Wilson were killed and the Mahdi gained new hope of reaching "Mecca". After the first euphoric excitement at having reached Khartoum, life became very hard; famine and disease spread through the camp and indeed through the whole of the Sudan.

Between January 1885 and September 1898 when the final liberation happened the intensity of the suffering our brothers and sisters experienced during these long years will never be truly measured by anybody. Memories and diaries, letters and reports can only offer a glimpse of the anguish they experienced.

On June 4th, 1885, someone succeeded in reaching El Obeid and rescued Fr Bonomi. The man could not take more than one prisoner so after much hesitancy in leaving the other three behind, Fr Bonomi accepted to go and promised he would work hard to rescue everyone.

On June 22nd, 1885 the Mahdi died and was succeeded by Abdullahi, his deputy who was even worse than the Mahdi.

On October 7th, 1885 another escape was attempted, this time from Omdurman and the choice fell on Sr. Fortunata Quasce and Sr. Maria Caprini. It was a very difficult and risky escape but they arrived safely in Cairo on November 9th, 1885.

Meanwhile in the camp life became even more unbearable; there was hunger, disease and no help was coming; months were passing and not even Fr Bonomi sent word; the Sisters in the camp now experienced a sensation of being abandoned; it was becoming hard also for the 'fake' husbands who were expecting some help from the mission. Sr. Concetta Corsi had the hardest share; Brother Locatelli used violence on her and she became pregnant and was then even abandoned by him.

On March 28th, 1886 the three missionaries from El Obeid reached the camp in Omdurman and on April 25th they succeeded in meeting the Sisters. This brought a break-through of light in the darkness. But then, together, they again experienced the anguish of being abandoned by everybody, even by God. Sr. Teresa appealed to an officer in Cairo, a certain Mr. Messedaglia, whose daughter was also a prisoner in the camp. Convinced that neither the missionaries in Egypt nor in Verona were any more concerned about them, she asked him to turn to her family in Verona to obtain some help. In 1887 Messedaglia went to Verona and the news he brought, added pain and sorrow to the Missionaries in Egypt and to the Superiors in Verona who had been following the situation very closely and had sent help in many ways, but the camp was impenetrable and nothing was able to reach the missionaries. Months and years were passing very slowly and very painfully. To the hunger and disease also violence and hatred were now added in the camp. The men who had accepted to play the role of husbands were now being suspected and one of them, Mr. Cocorempas was threatened to be accused to Abdullahi if he didn't produce money. The hatred was mounting. The fanatic Arabs were now after the Sisters and their 'fake' husbands. They threatened to bring the Sisters to the harem of the Khalif and have the three men beheaded. Father Ohrwalder intervened and pleaded with Sr. Teresa to marry Cocorempas in order to save the other Sisters and their fake husbands. The anguish of Sr. Teresa is immense: "I cried for one year thinking that even the Lord had been unfaithful to me ...". **It was September 1890.**

Brother Polinari who had remained in Khartoum when the missionaries left on December 11, 1883, had joined our prisoners in the camp in Omdurman and on the **27th September 1890**, comforted by Fr Ohrwalder and the Sisters **he died at the age of 54.**

In 1891 a typhoid epidemic broke out. **Sr. Concetta Corsi**, now alone since she lost the child and was abandoned by Locatelli, was now living with the Sisters and in helping the sick people in this epidemic, **she fell sick and died on October 3rd 1891.** She was 37 years old. And the way to Calvary continued for those remaining.

At the end of October there was another break-through in the darkness. Someone had come to rescue the prisoners but he could not take them all. That was the time for Fr Ohrwalder, Sr. Caterina and Sr. Elisabetta. The parting was very painful. Sr. Teresa remained alone! After the escape punishment was inflicted on those who had remained. Teresa with her husband were put in jail and so were Fr Rossignoli and Brother Regnotto.

It was November 29th when Fr Ohrwalder with the two Sisters succeeded in escaping from the camp and they arrived at a safe place on December 8th, 1891 Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

For those who remained the Calvary continued. After some time, Brother Regnotto unable to continue in such strenuous conditions, formed a family. Father Rossignoli helped wherever he could. Teresa was the angel of the camp. Many people were turning to her for help, "everybody knew I was a Sister ..." she wrote in her memoirs.

This lasted until September 2nd 1898 when the Anglo-Egyptian Army led by General Kitchener defeated the forces of the Mahdi and freed all the prisoners in Omdurman. In October 1899, Fr Ohrwalder, accompanied by Fr L. Banholzer, re-entered Omdurman, 'greeted enthusiastically by all his friends'. Thence onwards begins the development which we witness today. As not unworthy sons after over a Century of suffering and achievement, the missionaries of our time work to realise the dreams of those stout-hearted pioneers, Knoblecher and Comboni.

With a touch of prophecy Fr Johann Dichtl's, writing of the desolation of the Mahdist wars, ends his book *Der Sudan* (Graz, 1884) with these words: "May God soon give peace to the people of the Sudan ... may He give them His blessing, that out of the present stress may come good fortune ... and that the State and the Church may equally complete their mission for the civilization of the Sudan".

This has been really a history of **Martyrdom!** The sons and daughters of Comboni proved that they had fully acquired the spirit of their Founder, his love for Christ and his zeal for the evangelizing mission of the Church. Apparently, the mission in the Sudan at that time could have been considered a failure, but in reality ... it has been the seed that dies in the ground so as to bear fruit, much fruit. In fact, as soon as it became possible to return to Sudan, Fr Ohrwalder visited Khartoum to obtain a place to start a new mission. In October 1900 two Sisters were already back in Khartoum to carry on the work ... as the Founder said, **"I die but my work shall continue"**.

Part Three

THE INSTITUTES FROM 1881 TO 1991

Chapter One

FROM 1881 TO 1885

1. REACTION OF THE INSTITUTES AT THE DEATH OF COMBONI

The sudden death of the Founder of the Institutes for the African Missions, Bishop Daniel Comboni, caused a grievous dismay in everybody.

Two enterprises were left – the Institutes in Verona and the Vicariate of Central Africa. The Institutes in Verona had personnel in place for them to continue, Mother Maria Bollezzoli for the Sisters and Fr Giuseppe Sembiante for the Fathers and Brothers.

The first reaction of the Institutes was a firm determination to go on and ensure that the work started by Comboni would continue. Fr Sembiante wrote to Rome in these terms: “It is the wish of many here at Verona that the Mission and our Institutes, which owe their existence to Bishop Comboni, whose death cannot be sufficiently regretted, be preserved as a monument to the distinguished deceased²

Mother Bollezzoli wrote to the Sisters who were in the Missions:

“Be strong and do not be discouraged. Do not lose heart, but keep your course and go on without fear in the field that Divine Providence has entrusted to you. Do not look back but move forward steadily in the footsteps of your magnificent Father. Listen to the cry he sends out from the top of the mountain he has already reached: Forward! Forward!” (Circ. Letter 18th October 1881).³

Similar were the feelings of the Missionaries in Africa. Fr Bonomi, Vicar General, wrote to Fr G. Sembiante from Delen on 7th November 1881:

“The news has reached us only yesterday. More than frightened it left us bewildered. We can't believe it has happened, and we have no idea of what will happen to our unfortunate Mission. The news caught us quite unprepared. But all of us, in Khartoum, and at El-Obeid and among the Nubans, though we have all felt the blow, are sternly determined to carry on with our holy enterprise with whatever strength God gives us and with His grace. We may be unworthy of producing magnificent fruits, but we are always willing to suffer for Jesus Christ and his glory. I am sure these are the feelings of all, as they said in their letters.⁴

The Apostolic Vicariate of Central Africa has wisely been entrusted to the Institute of Verona, and it is from there that assistance, comfort and support will come so that the task that Comboni has, one could say, founded and started, might continue. ... I kindly ask you to express these feelings of ours to His Eminence Cardinal Canossa, so that he does not misunderstand the silence we have kept until now to mean we are discouraged, or even worse that we intend to pull out. We are quietly awaiting for whoever is in charge to tell us what is to be done for this unfortunate Africa, trusting in the Divine Providence that has always sustained us in the dangerous circumstances we have gone through.”⁵

2. REACTION OF THE CHURCH AUTHORITIES TO COMBONI'S DEATH

Cardinal Canossa, Protector of the Institute, was extremely disturbed at the news of Comboni's death. He felt that without Comboni the Institute would not be able to go on, and consequently proposed “to hand over the whole mission to the prodigious Fr John Bosco”, Founder of the Salesians.⁶

² Aldo Gilli, *History of the Comboni Missionary Institute 1881-1885*, page 10

³ Sr Elisa Pezzi, *L'Istituto Pie Madri della Nigrizia 1881-1901*, page 6

⁴ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 9

⁵ E Pezzi, *ib.*, page 6

⁶ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 9

The attitude of the Prefect of Propaganda Fide in Rome was not more encouraging. The Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Simeoni, replied to Fr Sembiante's letter:

"I have received your letter of 4th November 1881, in which you suggest the Rev. Fr Francesco Sogaro as successor to the late Bishop Comboni in the Vicariate of Central Africa. In reply I have to inform you... that, as I have written also to the Superior General of the Jesuits inviting him to take charge of that mission, it is necessary to wait for his reply before engaging in new consultations on the matter."⁷

After the negative answer of the Superior General of the Jesuits⁸, Rome looked for somebody outside the Institute, while at the same time it gave some thought to dividing the Vicariate and entrusting part of it to the African Missions of Lyons. The name of Msgr Matthew Kirchner, who had already been in charge of the Vicariate from 1859 to 1861, was also put forward by several people, notable among them the Austrian Consul in Khartoum; but the Monsignor did not accept for personal reasons.

The choice next fell on Fr Francesco Sogaro, who was already close to the Institute as confessor of the non-Italian candidates in the two colleges of Verona. He was parish priest of a parish in Verona.

3. MSGR SOGARO IS APPOINTED PRO-VICAR APOSTOLIC

Msgr Sogaro was appointed pro-Vicar Apostolic on the 21st September 1882, but was not made a Bishop immediately because of his poor health. He took up his responsibility with great zeal, working tirelessly for the liberation of the missionaries who had fallen prisoners of the Mahdi.

After a period during which all activities were suspended, the Sisters began once again taking religious vows, and candidates were once again accepted for the brotherhood and priesthood. The first objective of Msgr Sogaro was to organise and personally lead a new mission to Africa. He reached Cairo on 18th January 1883, and was in Khartoum on the following 6th March.

In Khartoum he began to be worried. Probably too hastily, he conceived the idea that missionaries in Khartoum had become too lax. He decided to implement a plan with which he had already toyed from the early days of his appointment. In July 1883, on his return to Cairo from a visit to Khartoum which had left him particularly discouraged, he wrote to Propaganda Fide manifesting his plan to transform the Institute into a Religious Congregation.

"Besides his praiseworthy concern to ensure a sound formation for the missionaries, it seems that the main reason for his new plan was the awareness that the close association between non-religious missionaries and the religious Sisters in the Mission was counter-productive and even dangerous for their religious ministry."⁹

He felt, furthermore, that a deeper religious formation would guarantee a better apostolic performance in the missions. A religious congregation would strengthen the commitment required by the vast and difficult territory.

Finally, since the Sisters were religious, Msgr Sogaro felt that priests who were not themselves religious would not be in a position to give spiritual assistance, especially with regard to the vows and community life. In a letter from Suez on 16th December, 1887 he expressed the opinion that such a change would eventually give more stability to the Institute, hence more unity, continuity and efficiency (see Nigrizia January 1888).

He brought up the plan again in 1884 and the following year, always presenting it as his own plan. All along he considered calling on the Salesians, the Missionaries of Lyons, or the Stigmatines of Verona to help him implement his plan; he never mentioned the Jesuits. Having been a Stigmatine himself until 1874, he personally favoured their Institute founded in Verona by Blessed G. Bertoni (1777-1853). Fr Sembiante, too, belonged to that Society, as did Fr Domenico Vincentini who had been made available by that Institute to help him. It seems that from the

⁷ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 22

⁸ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 23

⁹ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 57

beginning Msgr Sogaro felt that the only way to solve the problem of Comboni's Institute once and for all was to amalgamate it with the Institute of the "Sacred Stigmata".

In June 1884, with the support of Cardinal Canossa, Msgr Sogaro made a formal request to the Institute to this effect. The request was formally rejected by a special Chapter called for the purpose on the day of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi, on 17th September 1884. The Chapter gave two main reasons: firstly, such a demanding task would absorb all the energies and finances of the Institute; secondly, it would divert the Institute from its programme, that is, the education of the youth in schools, colleges and seminaries.¹⁰

In 1885 Msgr Sogaro obtained permission from Pope Leo XIII to transform the Institute, with the help of the Jesuits, into a religious congregation of simple and perpetual vows.

In July of the same year he was nominated Bishop and was Consecrated in Rome on 2nd August. He hoped that as a bishop, his former request to the Stigmatine Congregation could carry more weight. So he invited Fr Pietro Vignolo, their Superior General, to his consecration. This gave him the opportunity of putting pressure once again to have his plan of amalgamation accepted. The request was once more turned down.

4. THE JESUITS

Faced with this repeated refusal, the Bishop reluctantly had to turn to the Jesuits. What he wanted was the good of the missions and he thought this would be best served by making sure that the candidates of the Institute founded by Daniel Comboni had a good preparation and that they were formed in the religious and apostolic virtues.¹¹

The Jesuits accepted. In September 1885 Bishop Sogaro began consultations with the Superior of the Lombardo-Veneto Province and soon got two Jesuits for the direction and formation of the Missionaries. The danger of amalgamation thus averted, the Institute founded by Daniel Comboni continued to live its own life in an autonomous way. In fact the Jesuits came with the understanding that they would stay only until the Institute could stand on its own feet. The formation offered by the Jesuits toned down somewhat the strong missionary spirituality of Comboni, but it preserved the original missionary inspiration and kept the Institute's own Mission in the new Constitutions. The new Congregation of the 'Sons of the Sacred Heart' thus retained all the potential for a future re-discovery of the Comboni's original charism.¹²

¹⁰ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 83

¹¹ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 87

¹² A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 172

For all this Chapter see also the recent book "*Comboni en el corazon della Mission Africana 1993*" of Fr. Fidel Gonzalez; page 429-448. Editorial *Mundo Negro*.

Chapter Two

LAUNCHING OF THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE¹³

1. THE BEGINNING OF THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

On 28th October 1885 two Jesuits, Fr Pietro Frigerio, Rector, and Fr Samuele Asperti, Spiritual Director and Master of Novices took possession of the Mother House in Verona.

Fr Sembianti, former Superior of the Institute in Verona, retained the direction of the Comboni Sisters' House in Verona, and the financial administration of the Missions in Verona. He took his vows in 1896. He died in Brescia, 24th June 1914.

2. THE DATE OF 28TH OCTOBER 1885

This is commonly accepted as the beginning of the Religious Congregation of the "Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus", although the name appeared officially only much later.

The Novitiate started on 1st November 1885. It began in the rigorous style of the Jesuits, with twelve novices: one priest, Fr A. Roveggio, six students and five brothers. Two of them, Pietro Baldo and Angelo Prada, had spent a brief period in the missions. Two of the group left in November 1886. Ten of them took their vows on 28th October 1887: A. Roveggio, Angelo Colombaroli, Giovanni Bendinelli, Franz Heimans (from Holland), Francesco Sinner (who left the Institute in 1894), and the Brothers Pietro Fratton, Giovanni Giori, Pietro Baldi, Fiorenzo Dalla Rosa, Angelo Prada.

3. FIRST DEPARTURE FOR CAIRO

On 24th November 1887 Fr Angelo Colombaroli, Superior, Fr Roveggio, Spiritual Director and Bros. Baldi and Giori left for Cairo.

We may remark that nobody joined the new Institute directly from the missions: apparently the continuous prevarication of Msgr F. Sogaro prevented him from informing the missionaries in the mission field of his plan to transform the Institute into a Religious Family. When they were finally informed some were pleased with the change. Others, especially the Austrians and Germans, resented it and only one of them, Fr F. X. Geyer, joined the Institute some time later, in 1896. Right from the start the fact created an atmosphere of mistrust and ill feelings on the part of the Austrians and Germans towards the newcomers.

The religious also strictly observed a number of external rules and formalities typical of the Lombardo-Veneto Province of the Jesuits at the time.

It was quite clear that the religious were under the moral authority of Fr S. Asperti: to him they continually appealed and his decisions were consistently followed, even though he had no knowledge of the local situation and of community life as lived in the mission field, nor of the demands of the apostolate. Fr Frigerio had given the following directives to his religious:

"Remember you are the first fruits of the Society that Msgr Sogaro wants to establish in his Vicariate. You must therefore behave in such a saintly way that you may be pointed to as an example for those who follow you. It is a heavy responsibility you carry, but also something for which God will reward you". And turning to the Superior, Fr Colombaroli: "You, in a special way, have the task of making sure, gently but firmly if necessary, that the Rule in which you have been trained in the Novitiate, be observed. Should difficulties or doubts arise about the Constitutions and Rules - something that often happens when new Institutes are begun - commend the matter to the Lord in prayer (you must by all means keep up the spirit of prayer) and write to Fr Asperti for advice: he is a man totally given to God, and is very experienced in these matters. If you trust his leadership you will not be disappointed". (Letter of 15th December 1887).

¹³ See Fr F. Gonzalez, *ib.*, page 480-494

4. THE TITLE “SONS OF THE SACRED HEART”

According to Fr Colombaroli, “Rev. Fr Asperti, taking into account our condition as orphans, wanted that we be entrusted in a special way to the Most Holy Heart of Jesus by choosing for us the noble title of his Sons”. (Circular letter 3, Bol 1, 7th June 1903; Fr A. Todesco quotes this in his Circular letter of 25th October 1955, Circ, 54 Bol. 45).

In a talk he gave in 1948, Fr Vignato narrated the exhilaration Fr Asperti felt when the news was given by the Holy See that we had been granted that name.

It is well known that the Jesuits have always been keen in spreading devotion to the Sacred Heart, and it would be wholly in line with this for Fr Asperti to propose that title for the new Institute. He himself belonged to an Association which was dedicated to the Sacred Heart called ‘Anonymous Friends’.

5. RULES

For Propaganda Fide to approve the Institute, it was absolutely necessary that it should have its Rules. In 1887 Fr Frigerio wrote a first draft, but Rome sent it back without approval, because the Congregation was thought to be still young and incomplete.

Apparently a second draft was drawn up some time between 1888 and 1890, but no copy of it has been found so far. (Fr A. Trabucchi, Bol. 154, page 15-24).

On 18th March 1894 Pope Leo XIII approved the transformation of the Institute of Comboni into the Religious Congregation of the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, ‘Filiis Sacri Cordis Jesu, FSCJ’ and approved its Rules ‘quoad substantiam’. On 7th June, 1895 the Rules were approved for a period of 7 years, ‘ad experimentum’. On 15th March 1910 Fr Vianello submitted the Rules to Propaganda Fide once again, and Pius X gave his definitive approval.

Chapter Three

THE EARLY DIFFICULTIES OF THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

1. DIFFICULTIES WITH MSGR SOGARO

Msgr Sogaro changed the juridical status of the Institute without realising that the change would subject the members of the Institute to a new religious authority. He had wanted the change to improve the formation given in the seminaries of Verona and looked forward to a better performance in the missions. He still envisaged his missionaries as depending on him as they had depended on Bishop Comboni, his legitimate predecessor.

He soon found out, instead, that he was not given a free hand in the appointment of personnel, or in developing pastoral plans and that the allegiance of the new missionaries was divided. Propaganda Fide had not yet given clear directives as to relations between ecclesiastical and religious authorities. Soon misunderstandings arose between the two authorities, followed by mutual recriminations.

As early as 1889 Fr Sembianti wrote from Verona and asked Propaganda Fide to come to the rescue of the Jesuits who were subjected to undue interference from the Bishop. He continued complaining about the Bishop's authoritarian ways.

He spoke up in the same vein, too, in defence of the Sisters, the "Pie Madri della Nigrizia". In their manual of prayers, they deleted the phrase "committing themselves to serve the mission under the authority of the Vicar Apostolic".¹⁴

Things went so far that the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide wrote to Msgr Sogaro on 5th October 1889:

"I have been greatly saddened by sundry complaints which have just reached me from the well deserving Jesuit Fathers who are working at Verona to establish the Institute, about the difficulties that the missionaries of the newly born Congregation are facing in keeping their rules in the Mission. They have gone as far as stating that they intend to give up the direction of the Institute, if matters go on the way they are now and they see the enterprise to which they so zealously dedicate themselves in Europe actually being destroyed in Africa. It is my duty to draw the attention of Your Excellency to these complaints and to point out the grave danger that faces the Institute of Verona, if the difficulties about which they complain persist and the Fathers withdraw from the task they have undertaken".

Bishop Sogaro had hoped that the Jesuits would withdraw soon after 1890. In his letter to Propaganda Fide dated 20th December 1892, he pointed out that the original plan was to have them only for four or five years. He also asserted and defended the role he had played in establishing the Religious Institute and claimed he had the authority to decide for it.

"I, therefore, with the authorisation of the Holy Father and with the full knowledge of His Eminence Cardinal Canossa, was responsible for this whole project. I received and installed the two Fathers of the Society of Jesus in our house of Verona. I presented the Constitutions in the first place, adopting for them the title of Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was to me that the Sacred Congregation returned these Constitutions for redrafting after they had been found wanting. I have had to seek the means for the maintenance of the Institute, as I am still doing. It was me, finally, that the Rev. Father Provincial of the Society of Jesus (on whom the two Fathers who are at our Institute at Verona depend) acknowledged as the legitimate Superior".

But things did not change, and on 10th April 1893, Msgr Sogaro sought a way out of the impasse by formally asking Propaganda that he be given once again the full responsibility for the Institute, his plan being to return it to its previous juridical status.

For their part the Religious Missionaries sought to solve the awkward situation by going to a new field (possibly Somalia) and letting Sogaro have the Vicariate to himself.¹⁵ This would have meant cutting themselves off completely from the Missionaries recruited by Comboni. The plan showed how deeply attached they were to the new life, but also the extent to which Comboni's influence had been belittled by the Jesuit formators.

¹⁴ Sr. E. Pezzi, *ib.*, pages 310-313

¹⁵ F. Gonzalez, *ib.*, page 525

2. INTERFERENCE FROM THE AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT¹⁶

The background against which the interference developed is represented in the following events:

a) *In 1852 Msgr Knoblicker had obtained from Austria:*

- the Government's official protection
- financial assistance through the Marien Verein;
- personnel.

Comboni kept receiving financial assistance from the "Marien Verein" throughout his life, as well as from the Empress Mother (money to buy the Sisters' house in Verona) and from other Austrian sources.

b) *Verona was part of the Austrian Empire up to 1866, when it passed to the Italian Government.*

c) *Austria was not a party at the 1884 Berlin Conference when Africa was parcelled out among the European powers, but it wanted to retain the patronage over the vast territory of the Vicariate.*

The Austrian Consul in Cairo, Mr. Heider Eggereg set the ball rolling on 22nd June 1891 when he wrote to Count Kolnoky of the Foreign Office in Vienna, that in his opinion it was not right for an Institute which was protected and financially supported by the Austrian Government to have its headquarters outside Austria: other nations, like France, would have found it unacceptable. He suggested that the mission should be under the spiritual protection of the Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna. A house should be found within the Austrian territory where the Institute's students would eventually be gathered, without touching the house of Verona for the time being.

Msgr Sogaro seized the opportunity to solve his problems with the Jesuits of Verona and the religious missionaries in Egypt. In a letter to Canon Mitterutzner of 8th October 1892 he expressed his wish to hand over the house build in St. Giovanni in Valle (Verona) for the "Sons of the Sacred Heart" to the Sisters. The house envisaged in Austria would gradually take the place of the Mother House in Verona and would be staffed by non-religious missionaries, mainly Austrian and German. The Austrian Bishops would be asked to contribute to its maintenance, and a substantial help towards its building would come from the house in Verona. At first the site chosen was Trent, and later on it was moved to Brixen.

The interference of the Austrian Government was felt most heavily when the time came to appoint a successor to Msgr Sogaro: the Austrian Government insisted that he should be an Austrian or German subject, and every effort was made to have Fr F.X. Geyer appointed successor to Msgr F. Sogaro.

3. THE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE COMES INTO ITS OWN STATUS

At this stage Propaganda Fide had to intervene, both to settle the dispute between the Institute and the Bishop, and to appease the Austrian Government. The latter had always been loyal to the Holy See, and its Catholic Emperor still had the right to veto the election of a Pope.

A decision was reached in the Plenary Meeting of Propaganda Fide on 11th January 1894, and made public in February.¹⁷

The following points were decided:

- the Institute was to keep its status as a Congregation;
- some changes were to be made in the Constitutions;
- the Vicariate of Central Africa was entrusted to the Institute, and its boundaries changed (as a result of these changes the whole of Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda which had been given to the White Fathers in 1878 were given back to the Vicariate).

Subsequently Cardinal Ledochowski, Prefect of Propaganda Fide took the following steps:

¹⁶ F. Gonzalez, ib., page 520

¹⁷ F. Gonzalez, ib., pages 526-528

- He asked the Provincial of the Society of Jesus to recall Fr Asperti, who was assigned to one of their communities in Mantova. From there he kept in touch with the Institute (+1896).
- He asked Msgr Sogaro to resign, which he did without ill will: he used to say, “As long as God keeps me alive I will work for the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”. He was promoted to Archbishop on 14th May 1894, Secretary to the Sacred Congregation for Indulgences on 1st May 1900 and President of the Academy of the Church’s Nobility. He died on 6th February 1912 at the age of 72.
- He appointed Fr F.X. Geyer as Administrator of the Vicariate after the resignation of Msgr Sogaro.
- On 21st May 1895 he appointed Msgr Roveggio (36 years old) Vicar Apostolic, with the understanding that Fr F.X. Geyer would soon succeed him. Fr F. X. Geyer joined the Congregation in 1896.
- To appease the Austrian Government he gave permission for a house to be opened in Brixen, for which he also granted a large sum of money.
- He asked Msgr Roveggio to apply for Austrian citizenship.

The Institute owes a great debt of gratitude to the Cardinal. He acknowledged and confirmed that the Institute was a missionary one, and brought the issue to its effective logical conclusion. By entrusting the Vicariate to one of the youngest members of the new Institute he affirmed that it was the continuation of Bishop Comboni’s project and it bore its hallmark and charism.

In this way the Institute got off the ground and was confirmed as a religious institute. One of its members, Msgr Roveggio, was made Bishop on 21st May 1895 succeeding Msgr Sogaro. The danger was averted that either of the branches of Comboni Missionaries would have to withdraw from the Vicariate of Central Africa and seek another field of work. The rules were approved on a trial basis for 7 years (7th June 1895). The new house in Verona was opened in 1892, thus leaving the temporary arrangements of the Seminary.

The Novitiate was opened in Brixen on 9th June 1896. The new Manual of Prayers was made available in 1896.

4. THE HERITAGE OF COMBONI

When it first started the Institute of the Sons of the Sacred Heart, FSCJ, was not considered to be the extension of the College for the African Missions started by Comboni in 1867. The first circular letters of the Superior General of the Institute do not speak of Comboni as a Founder. Typical is the following passage taken from the Circular letter of Fr Angelo Colombaroli, first Superior General, written on 7th June 1903: “For many reasons, we ourselves owe our existence to a holy person who was like a father for us and loved us truly with a father’s love. Yet I still remember how, in his spiritual conferences, which he would give us when our Congregation was still in its infancy, since we had no Father in the true sense: because a Founder is the Father of a religious family he has started and formed. It was truly by divine Providence that Reverend Fr Asperti of venerable memory in view of our condition as orphans, wanted us entrusted in a special way to the Sacred Heart of Jesus with the noble name of his Sons. He wished that we too should have an example on which to model ourselves, in whom we could find abundant life and the source of that loving union which must be the rule among us”.¹⁸

Msgr Sogaro referred to Comboni only as his predecessor in the mission¹⁹ and in the first draft of the Rules Msgr Sogaro is referred to as the Founder.

When Fr Meroni in 1923 sent his pro-memoria to Propaganda Fide which sought the separation of the German branch, he pointed out that the Congregation had been “founded in Italy, by Italian Jesuits, with members who were for the most part Italians, and to replace an Italian Institute - in the ethnic sense, not in an exclusive, political and nationalistic sense”.²⁰

There are several reasons for this attitude.

¹⁸ Fr. P. Chiochetta, *Daniel comboni “Papers for the Evangelisation of Africa”*, page 175.

¹⁹ A. Gilli, *ib.*, page 175

²⁰ *Subsidies for the Chapter 1969, No. 9, Reunion with Missionary Sons of the Sacred Heart (MFSC)*

EXTERNAL REASONS

As already pointed out above, Austria stressed the patronage it had extended over the mission, the financial help given, and thus claimed power to dispose of it and transfer its principal house to Austrian territory.

Msgr Sogaro claimed power over it as successor of Bishop Comboni.

The religious, therefore took their distance from both and forcefully claimed that they had nothing to do with the Institute which was being fought over.

INTERNAL REASONS

The structure of the Institute had been changed: a 2-year Novitiate had been introduced and the vow of poverty had affected the life of both the individuals and the communities.

Rev. Fr Corrado Pistolozzi, Secretary General of the Institute from 1959-1969 is of the opinion that the wish of Comboni was to eventually change the Institute into a proper Religious Institute. His opinion was based on several testimonies of which the most significant seems that of Msgr M. Grancelli. This reliable biographer in the 40th Anniversary of the death of Comboni wrote in NIGRIZIA of Nov. 1921 page 162 that Comboni "*wished to form a truly religious congregation, which was only realised after his death*".

But what makes a Church organisation to be distinctive is its *inspiratio primigenia* - its charism, its spirituality and its aim. All these had remained unchanged. The charism was still a sharing in the love of Christ for the poorest and most abandoned; the Jesuits upheld the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus which Comboni had himself received from other Jesuits; the same was the apostolate among the pagans: not even the field of apostolate had been changed: Msgr Roveggio had substantially the same territory and field of work that Comboni had had.²¹

Some of the controversial issues surrounding the life of Comboni, such as the wrangling over the Order of St. Camillus, too, had a bearing on this, since they seemed to throw an aura of doubt over the character of Comboni. It was only after Msgr Grancelli had published his life of Comboni in 1922, and the following book *Rivendicazioni* in 1926, that Fr Meroni wrote a Circular letter²² in which he announced that the cause of Beatification had been introduced of the Servant of God Msgr Comboni, "our first Founder".

The letter went on saying that "careful research on original documents have thrown such a bright light on his character that every doubt has been driven out".

In 1920 Frs Vignato and Meroni put pressure on Grancelli to write Comboni's biography. And on 30th December 1921 Vignato told Grancelli, "The Sons of the Sacred Heart have always felt the need to publish a biography of Bishop Comboni, as a way of paying our debt of gratitude to him, our source and founder".²³

Apart from the question of the foundation of the Institute at the grass roots level, Comboni had never been forgotten. The first junior Seminary founded in Italy in 1900 was called "Istituto Comboni", and when its Church was consecrated in 1909 the Bulletin published for the occasion stated, that "the Sons of Comboni are now collecting facts about him and his sayings and intend to publish them in the form of a book, thus fulfilling the desire that many people have had over many years".

In "NIGRIZIA",²⁴ we find a short poem and a hymn in honour of Comboni which Fr Federico Vianello had written for some entertainment. Among those who were collecting material for the biography²⁵ we find Msgr Fr X Bini during the years 1914 - 1916. Fr. Bini was secretary of Fr Vianello who had hard times during the first World War (1914- 1918). So the material was laid aside until 1920 when it was given to Msgr Grancelli.

After the introduction of the cause of Beatification of Comboni by Fr P. Meroni things changed completely, though in the Novitiate very little emphasis was given to Comboni's identity.

The popular biography of Msgr Comboni, published in 1928 by Fr A. Capovilla (1898-1975) contributed a great deal to make Comboni present in the Institute and in the Church: it was also praised

²¹ F. Gonzalez in *Bulletin No. 129*, pages 18-22

²² See *Bulletin No. 2*, 19th March 1928

²³ Msgr M. Grancelli: *Msgr Daniel Comboni, Verona, Missioni Africane Verona: 1922*

²⁴ *Nigrizia*, May 1895

²⁵ *Positio*, page XV-XVI

by outsiders. Pope Pius XI who personally knew Comboni, after reading this life said, in a speech, that he still had a fresh memory “of such a great worthy, venerable person: Msgr Comboni”.²⁶

As Superior General (1937-1947), Fr Vignato, was also very explicit in his letter of 13th December 1937²⁷; he spoke of “our venerated Founder” and encouraged his confreres to trust in his protection, to study, meditate upon and imitate our Founder.

The successor of Fr A. Vignato, Fr A. Todesco in 1956 decided to celebrate a Comboni Year on the 75th anniversary of his death.²⁸

The 1969 Chapter totally re-established Comboni in our heritage. Our present Constitutions thoroughly expound on all aspects of the life of Comboni.

At this point one should perhaps add that it was the common heritage of Comboni that paved the way to re-union between the two Institutes of the Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, (FSCJ) and the Missionaries Sons of the Sacred Heart, (MFCJ) in the years 1969-79. The first life of Comboni had been written in Germany in 1882 by Fr F. X. Geyer.

In the late thirties with the encouragement of Fr Vignato, the scholastics started the Internal Review “COMBONIANUM” to publicize the life of Comboni and focus on missionary problems that were the results of different study groups. The delay in the Beatification due to two “Reponatur” (1953-1959) has been a blessing in disguise, because it forced the Institute to deepen the knowledge of the life and spirituality of Blessed Comboni: this has given us a wonderful and deep insight into this gigantic personality.

5. BISHOP ROVEGGIO, A NEW MISSIONARY IN THE FIELD

When the first religious missionaries went to Cairo in November 1887, besides taking charge of the two Institutes, they also looked after the farm on the Nile Island Gezira which had been opened to provide refuge for Southerners who had been freed from slavery. They opened the parish and school of Helouan (1887) and the mission station at Swakim (1889). In 1894 they opened Aswan, Cardinal Ledochowsky being of the mind that it should become the new See of the Vicar Apostolic.

Aswan was a good base also for giving spiritual assistance to the Italian families at Shellal (where a dam was being built and their living conditions were not healthy).

When after the fall of Omdurman on 2nd September 1898, the Mahdia came to an end, and the missionaries heard how the mission of Khartoum had been destroyed and the tomb of Comboni desecrated, Bishop Roveggio asked Lord Kitchener permission to send two missionaries to Khartoum to see what had happened to the mission: after three months a negative answer was given to Bishop Roveggio’s request. What had happened was that Lord Kitchener had tried to replace the Missionaries of Verona with the newly-founded Mill Hill Missionaries, but their founder Cardinal Vaughan had answered he had no wish to replace Verona missionaries. The question was eventually settled because of the intervention of the Austrian Government and the good efforts of Card. Vaughan who thought that our Institute had already the experience to face the difficulties of the country.

6. COMBONI SISTERS

Our Sisters by then were in Cairo, Helouan and Aswan. Their Rules had been granted the “Decretum laudis” on 22nd February 1897. An agreement had been reached with the “Sons of the Sacred Heart” who would pay the Sisters’ travelling expenses to the missions, and would give them a regular allowance according to their needs. Thus relieved of the financial worries they would be able to accept all the candidates.

There had been disagreements with both Msgr Sogaro and Msgr Roveggio because of the Sisters who had to return to Italy after illness, or were unable to move out to the missions for the same reason: the Bishops were questioning their obligation to support the Sisters financially, as they were no more fully at the service of the missions, the basis for their financial support.

However the Sisters had a point there. They needed to give something to do to Sisters unable to go or to return to the missions. Then they wanted to have their own resources and to stop being beggars.

²⁶ *Positio*, page 1346

²⁷ *Bulletin No. 15, 1937-*

²⁸ See *Bulletin No. 46, 1956, Circular Letters*, page 55

Chapter Four

THE INSTITUTE FROM 1889 TO 1909

I. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

1. THE POLITICAL SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

When our missions were re-opened after the Mahdist Revolt, Africa had significantly changed. European powers that had had troubles and problems at home up to 1880 started looking to Africa.

Portugal had claims on Mozambique and Angola. Leopold II of Belgium, through his “philanthropic” International Association for the Exploration and Civilization of Africa, had been preparing plans for a personal dominion in Congo (Zaire). Britain was trading with some Countries and France started opposing Britain. British missionaries and traders tried to thwart both the French and King Leopold’s attempts. Germany was trying to get hold of Namibia, Cameroon and Togo.

In 1884 France and Germany invited Britain to the Berlin Conference which started work in November with the participation of Portugal: the result of the Conference was the allotment of “spheres of influence” to the different Powers. In some cases the boundaries were clear enough, in others, after some clashes, the Powers came to particular treaties; e.g. France and Britain, in Guinea and Sudan, and Britain and Germany in East Africa. The result was what is shown in the attached map.

After its defeat in the first World War (1914-1918), Germany lost her colonies: Namibia to South Africa, Tanzania to Britain, Rwanda-Burundi to Belgium, Cameroon and Togo were divided between France and England: divisions which lasted until the time of 2nd World War, when Libya and Ethiopia too were freed from Italian occupation.

2. OUR MISSIONARIES AND THE COLONIAL POWERS

Our missionaries had to accept the Colonial powers. In Sudan and Uganda our missionaries were free to evangelize under certain conditions, for example, with regard to the location of the mission, the programme in the schools, the standard of health centres, the qualifications of personnel for such activities, which were fair and even helpful. Fortunately enough our Confreres were of a different nationality from that of the colonial Powers. So they avoided the danger of compromise which occurred when missionaries were of the same nationality.

It is true to say that missionaries “cooperated” with the colonial Powers, but only when the interest, the welfare and the respect owed to Africans were involved. We could even say that somehow they forced the colonial Government to cooperate with them. In fact missionaries were the pioneers in the fields of education, health care and social progress of many local peoples. The colonial Government, to save its face before international opinion, had to help them.

3. THE RELIGIOUS SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

Besides the ‘scramble’ for the Sudan by the Austrian clergy, we had other well-intentioned ‘scrambles’, though sometimes with a clearly nationalistic bias.

Msgr Geyer had to defend his territory from the following attempts:

The Holy Ghost Fathers wanted the Western part of the Central African Vicariate that bordered French West Africa. France in fact wanted French missionaries in its colonies. Propaganda on 14th February 1911 cut the Western part of the old Vicariate (the present boundaries with Zaire and Central African Republic) and decided that our responsibility was contained within the boundaries of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Fr Vianello complained to Propaganda against this decision.

The White Fathers asked Propaganda to return Northern Uganda to them on the pretext that a number of Baganda were present there. Msgr Geyer answered that Msgr A. Roveggio had already planned to enter Northern Uganda, but he was prevented by the British Government due to insecurity.

The Priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonians) asked for North Cameroon for the following reasons:

- So far the German-speaking priests had had as their field the Vicariate of Stanley Falls in Central Zaire, but this part had been taken over by the Belgian/French Province. The Germans had been sent to parishes in Brazil. However some of them liked to work in Africa.
- The German-speaking priests of the Sacred Heart had no houses in Germany, but if they were allowed to work in a German colonial territory they would be allowed to open houses there.

Msgr Geyer and Fr Vianello were against it because they too wanted a house in Germany.

But Propaganda decided to erect the Apostolic Prefecture of Adamana which was entrusted to the Priests of the Sacred Heart.

4. THE ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE MISSIONS OF LEO XIII

We know the interest of Gregory XVI for the missions – he erected the Vicariate of Central Africa (1846). Pius IX (1846-1878) was concerned about the missions, as we know from the case of Comboni, but did not leave any document about them. Leo XIII (1878-1903) only two years after his election dedicated the encyclical “*Sancta Dei Civitas*” to the missions. He encouraged missionaries and their assistants, the missionary associations at home, and showed a great understanding of all their difficulties.

II. THE GENERAL CHAPTER HELD AT VERONA IN 1899 (19-22 JUNE)²⁹

Up to this time the Superior Generals had been Jesuits: Fr P. Frigerio (1885-1887), Fr Voltolina (1887-1892), Fr Mologni (1892-1897). At the death of Fr Mologni, Fr Voltolina was sent back with the precise task of preparing the Institute for full self-government. In order to achieve this purpose quickly he appointed Frs. Colombaroli, Vianello, Geyer and Bendinelli as his assistants.

The members in the Institute were then 60: 18 priests, 21 brothers, 21 students. The members of the Chapter were 6, all elected to the General Council, except Msgr A. Roveggio who was ineligible because of his office. Fr Voltolina presided over the Chapter until the new Superior General was elected.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

The Chapter elected the following members to the General Council:

Fr Angelo Colombaroli, Superior General (died in 1922)

Fr Federico Vianello, Vicar General (died in 1936)

Fr Franz Xavier Geyer (died in 1943, at the age of 83)

Fr Joseph Weiller (died in 1946, at the age of 83)

Fr Bendinelli (died in 1940 at the age of 72)

Propaganda Fide allowed Fr Geyer to stay at Brixen, and Frs. Weiller and Bendinelli at Cairo, with the understanding that they would proceed to Verona when and if called.

Fr Angelo Colombaroli was born in Dolce, Verona in 1863. He joined the Congregation with the first group of Novices, was ordained Priest on 7th August 1887, and took his first vows on 28th October 1887. His first appointment was Cairo where he was Superior of the Mission and Procurator, in 1897 he was recalled to Italy to become the first Assistant in the General Council and Procurator General.

III. INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

The Junior Seminary ‘Istituto Comboni’ was opened at Brescia in 1900, as well as a house in Sidcup in 1903, in Southern England in the Diocese of Southwark for the study of the English language: it was closed down in 1911. In 1909 a Junior Seminary was opened at Messeldorf, Graz.

A Circular letter was written on the necessity of charity among the members and of prayer.

²⁹ See *Acts of the Chapter 1899, Archives of the Institute, Roma*

IV. DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSIONS

1. BISHOP ROVEGGIO

Bishop Roveggio received permission to send two missionaries to check out Khartoum. In September 1899 Fr G. Ohrwalder and Fr William Banholzer reached Khartoum where they found they had been deceived as to the extent of the damages sustained by the mission. They found that the tomb of Comboni had been tampered with but they eventually gathered a few of his bones, and transferred them to the Church of Aswan (from where they were later moved to the Chapel of the Mother House in Verona on 12th June 1958).

Omndurman was re-opened on 1st January 1900 by Msgr Roveggio, Fr Weiller and Fr Otto Huber. On 30th October 1900 the Sisters joined them: one of them was Sr. Francesca Delmasso who had with her the cassock Comboni was wearing when he died, and which she had carried with her when she had fled from Khartoum in 1883.

Since Kordofan was still in the hands of the rebels, Msgr Roveggio sailed with the newly bought boat 'Redemptor' down the Nile up to Fashoda, near Gondokoro, where he arrived in January 1901, with the plan of opening a mission. But permission was not granted by the Government and so on his way back he opened a mission station among the Shilluk at Lul, leaving there Fr Beduschi (1901-1904), Fr Wilhelm Banholzer (1901-1914) and Fr Maggio.

At the end of one more journey down the Nile, Bishop Roveggio felt exhausted and wanted to go to Cairo for some rest, but died at Berber on 2nd May 1902.

Bishop Roveggio was an outstanding Son of the Sacred Heart. He joined the Institute one year after his ordination for the Diocese of Vicenza and took his vows with the first batch of ten members of the new Institute. Appointed Bishop at the age of 37, he worked tirelessly and died when he was only 43. Fr Vignato thus described him to the Scholastics:

"He gave us an outstanding example of religious practice and spiritual life. He was a deeply religious man who prayed constantly; devoted to the Sacred Heart, he imitated the humility and meekness of Jesus; in his tireless zeal he would never spare himself; he was prudent, and he put his whole heart in fostering the missionary cause in Europe. He was a worthy successor to Bishop Comboni".

2. MSGR FRANCIS XAVIER GEYER

To succeed Bishop Roveggio, Rome called Msgr Francis Xavier Geyer. Born in Bavaria in 1859, he had joined the Comboni Institute in 1882 when he was still a Theology student. In that same year he wrote a life of Comboni while in Cairo. When Msgr Sogaro died in 1894, he was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Vicariate until Bishop Roveggio arrived: then he left for Verona to make his Novitiate. After his profession he went to Brixen, Superior and Novice Master. The community greatly expanded while he was in charge, and the house had to be enlarged accordingly.

After his consecration as Bishop at Munich (1903), he hastened to reach Khartoum where he carried on the work of rehabilitating the mission and started also building the Cathedral, though he never completed it.

By 1903 there were in Khartoum about 450 Catholics out of a population of 20,000 of many different religions and nationalities. A good number were Southerners. Some of them were former slaves baptized by Bishop Comboni, the rest were their children.

Fr Vantini in his book "Christianity in the Sudan"³⁰ mentioned a Catholic lady by the name of Margherita who welcomed our missionaries when in 1899 they visited Omndurman and who surprisingly welcomed Bishop Geyer on his arrival in Bahr-el-Ghazal. She had gone back to her Goli tribe.

Bishop Geyer wrote from Khartoum: "Those Southerners are our exclusive heritage and are here to prove the seniority of the Catholic Church which has been planted here, when other denominations were completely absent".³¹

Pastoral work among Catholics was mainly dedicated to the visit of families in order to strengthen their faith and encourage them to benefit from the reception of sacraments.

³⁰ ib. page 147

³¹ see *Nigrizia* 1907, No.3, page 35

The opening and running of schools was a must. Since they were the best in the town, Muslim parents asked to enrol their children. The Government granted the request on the following conditions: the written permit of the parents; occasionally the permission of the Government; any proselytizing forbidden.

“MISSIO EXCURRENS”: by this name the work among Catholics of Oriental rite was indicated by our missionaries. Fr Otto Huber (1872-1954) was in charge of visiting them in all directions: North-East and West. He was respectively reaching Berber, Kassela, El-Fasher and Nyala. He would travel by camel. Christians remembered him up to the Sixties.

Bishop Geyer, however, felt that his first task was to open up Bahr-el-Ghazal for mission work: he sailed on the ‘Redemptor’ up to Mesra, and then he marched with the missionaries on the long and painful trek to Wau.

The Bahr-el-Ghazal mission deserves a special mention because of its difficulties. Wau was its centre but it took Bishop Geyer, Fr Vignato and Fr Tappi a 10-day march to reach it from the place where they had landed.

Since the place was full of Moslems, after a meeting with the chiefs of the place, Chief Kayango gave the missionaries a spot in his area, and there the mission station of Kayango was set up, named after the Chief who had accepted the missionaries. In 1905 the Government however asked the missionaries to set up a carpentry school in Wau, and Fr Firisin and Bro. Zorn went there under strict orders not to preach any religion.

Fr Vignato, then only 26, was appointed Superior of Kayango, joined later by Fr Bertola and Bro. D. Augusto. All their capital amounted to 15 pounds.

Chief Kayango, as it soon became clear, proved a liability rather than an asset for the mission: he had only accepted it for the prestige of having white men in his territory. He played his own game with both the Government and the Mission from which he tried to squeeze out as much money and goods as possible. But the missionaries were poor. Whenever supplies arrived, the boxes had to be opened in his presence, and he would take whatever he fancied and mainly the bottles of pickles. He had the support of the local Egyptian Muslims and profited from slavery. There were no more raids into the villages, but both chiefs and parents would hand over to them their subjects, either orphans of the clan, or children of slaves in exchange for alcohol, guns and ammunition. The traders said that they were their porters or slaves: in the whole country there were only about 50 free families. Kayango clearly tried to stop the mission from developing.

3. DIFFICULTIES

The Missionaries found it difficult to stay alive. Here is a medical record of those days:

1905: Evening of 25th November: Fr Paul Koster suffered an attack of black fever. The Syrian Doctor prescribed a purge and liquid quinine. On 26th November he died.

10th December 1905: Fr Vignato suffered a strong fever bout, Fr Tappi anointed him and suggested he should promise to go to Lourdes if he was given the grace to recover. The British Doctor ordered him to take brandy, water and broth every two hours. Vomiting was forbidden.

1906: January: Fr Vignato recovered and had to go to Italy to recuperate

2nd July 1906: Fr Volkenhuber, 28 years old, died at Mbili. Fr Tappi had to be repatriated because of poor health. Bro. Simone Fanti in Wau with black fever.

12th July, 1906: Fr Cirillo Frizzera, 37 years old, died in Wau.

August, 1906: Fr Firisin left Kayango for Khartoum to recuperate

6th November, 1906: Bro. Divina, 39 years old, died at Wau.

9th November, 1906: Fr Bottesi, 26 years old, from Kayango, died at Wau.

Faced with five deaths in one year, Frs. Colombaroli and Vianello decided to close down the Bahr-el-Ghazal mission. Bishop Geyer, however, did not inform the missionaries of the decision taken and Fr Vignato returned to Kayango. Later Fr Tappi returned to Wau and reported what had been decided; he allowed the missionaries to give the mission one last trial, but gave the order to close Mbili. Towards the end of 1906 eight new missionaries came, and Fr Tappi addressed them in these words: “We must leave no doubt in the minds of our Superiors and of the Government that we are ready to face any challenge ... In virtue of the religious vow of obedience that you have taken, I order that none of you must die during the next year!” They obeyed: none of them died, and in fact ten years passed before another grave was dug anywhere in the Bahr-el-Ghazal.

4. THE METHOD FOLLOWED BY MISSIONARIES

Fr Vignato and others with him aimed at the integral promotion of the human person, through both schools and catechumens. On the feast of St. Anthony, 13th June 1906, a friendly little boy, Morgiam, stood at the door of Fr Vignato's office: there and then he decided to open a school for people like him. He taught them Catechism. It seemed that this method was not completely approved of by German confreres who underlined first human promotion and later the catechism too. Fr Vignato remained faithful to his method; and in February 1907 he had the consolation of having some Catechumens baptised by Fr Meroni, the Provincial Superior.

Fr Vignato had another small, but useful consolation because on 25th August Fr Bertola from Cairo introduced the first bicycle into Bahr-el-Ghazal.

5. DIFFICULTIES FROM THE GOVERNMENT

In Southern Uganda in Buganda territory there had been clashes among Muslims, Catholics and Protestants. Perhaps to avoid the repetition of such events in 1903 the Government of Khartoum promulgated the decree, "Missionary Spheres System" that demarcated the zones of activities of different religions in the following manner:

The North to the Muslims; Bahr-el-Ghazal and the Shilluk on the West Bank of the Nile to the Catholics; the East Bank of the Nile from river Sobat to the boundaries with Ethiopia and the 7°30' Latitude North to an American sect, Equatoria to British Societies (since no British Society was present). Some observers think that the move was made in order to reserve a large territory for the Church Missionary Society (CMS) from England.

Conflicts among Christian denominations arose only after the divisions of Southern Sudan into zones that did not last long: Fr F. Giorgetti very wisely broke the boundaries.

Besides Kayango (1904) and Wau (1905) the following mission stations were started in Bahr-el-Ghazal, Mbili (1904), Mboro (1912); among the Shilluk, Tanga; among the Azande, Mupoi (1912).

6. COMBONI (VERONA) SISTERS IN SUDAN

As we have seen in Chapter IV n. 9, the first Sisters went back to Omndurman on 30th October 1900. Here they opened a school for girls that included lessons on tailoring. The works of the girls were displayed in a show that attracted the general admiration.

In 1903 some Sisters arrived in the mission of Lull that had been opened in 1901. The Superior was Sr. Giuseppa Scandola who had been directly recruited by Bishop Comboni. She joined the postulancy a few days after the first postulant Maria Caspi, and was among the first five sisters to accompany Comboni on his return to Africa in 1877, on 15th December.

Towards the end of August Fr Beduschi became seriously ill and received the sacrament of the Anointing of the sick. He was only 29. Sr. Giuseppa, 54, sent a message to the young priest: "Father, do not worry, you will not die because you have much work to do for the Shilluk. I will die for you because I am old and useless". She was in perfect health. Two days later she died with the comfort of the sacraments of the Anointing and of Holy Communion, administered to her by Fr G. Beduschi who had already completely recovered. It was 1st September 1903. "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends". (John 15:13) (Fr G. Beduschi died in 1924 at the age of 50).

The life of Sr. Giuseppa was written by Sr. E. Pezzi: "Una strada che si chiama silenzio" ("A road called silence" EMI 1978).

In 1903 we also find the Sisters in Khartoum where they already had a school known as "Sisters' School Khartoum" near the Cathedral: it is still there. A third school was soon opened in Khartoum North. A dispensary free of charge was also opened in Khartoum, with one hundred poor sick people treated every day. The teaching of religion had first priority in the schools. Muslim pupils were allowed to attend these lessons, without the obligation of memorizing them.

In 1906 the Sisters already numbered 34 and slowly expanded to other missions: the mission of Wau in March 1919 was the first to receive the Sisters after Lull. Here too the Sisters started teaching catechism, they opened a dispensary. They were the first European women to appear in Wau and so they were the object of curiosity and wonder. Later on in 1920 they opened a school for girls at the insistence of the population. Kayango and Kwajok followed in 1923 and 1927.

Chapter Five

FROM 1909 TO 1919

A. HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

The First World War (1914-1918) disturbed both our Institute and our missions: In Europe, students and young priests had to enrol in the army. In Africa members of different nationalities suffered in turn from the warring factions.

This war is called “World War” because it involved Europe, Asia (Japan), America (USA) and Africa where the nations at war had colonies: England fought Germany in German colonies. It is interesting to know how the war came about.

At the beginning of this century Austria and Hungary were united in one Empire, which ruled different nationalities of Central and Southern Europe: besides Austria and Hungary, there were Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina and two Northern Regions of Italy.

Germany had flourishing industries and trade and was building up a large arsenal of weapons and ammunition, a powerful army, a new war-fleet, etc. France and England were not happy and made an alliance. Serbia also was not happy because of her claims on Bosnia-Herzegovina.

On 28th June 1914, a Serbian terrorist killed the Austrian Emperor's heir, Franz Ferdinand, at Sarajevo. Austria declared war on Serbia, thinking the war would be a local one. But Russia mobilized its army to help Serbia. Germany, allied to Austria, declared war on Russia (1st August 1914) and on its ally, France (2nd August 1914) and invaded Belgium (3rd August 1914); England was afraid and intervened; Japan, allied with England, declared war on Germany (23rd August 1914); Turkey, afraid of Russia joined Austria and Germany. In May 1915 Italy declared war on Austria to liberate the two Italian regions under Austrian domination. Since German submarines were sinking all the ships between Europe and America, the USA joined the allied forces against Germany (1917). Thus America replaced Russia which had withdrawn because of the internal revolution started by Lenin in October 1917.

The Allied forces at the beginning of 1918 had some 21,000,000 soldiers, while Germany and Austria some 18,000,000 and were defeated: they signed the ceasefire on the 4th November 1918 and the peace treaty on 28th June 1919 at Versailles in France.

All the nations engaged in the war had depleted their financial and economic resources: even more, this war marked the decline of Europe in favour of the rise of USA.

Eight million soldiers were killed in battle and some twenty million were either wounded or handicapped for life.

The war itself broke all the boundaries laboriously built up during the centuries of limited war. New weapons, modern artillery, machine guns, poison gas, submarine warfare, extensive use of mines, and aerial bombardment, shattered the rules of international law that had been confidently reaffirmed as recently as at the Hague Conference of 1907. Starvation blockades and economic warfare touched millions of individuals who were, in the traditional sense, clearly not engaged in war activities. And in the mistaken belief that the entire society of an enemy was a legitimate target, the strongest possible measures were taken to weaken that society.

The peace treaty was too exacting for Germany, and did not satisfy Italy because the Allies did not keep their promises. The new International body “The League of Nations” that was supposed to monitor Germany did not work. So, though heavily punished, Germany continued to be a powerful nation; and the seeds of the Second World War lay in the Treaty of Versailles.

B. SECOND GENERAL CHAPTER (VERONA, 3RD-12TH OCTOBER 1909)³²

The members of the Institute were 127, of whom 64 fathers, 46 brothers, 17 students.

The members of the Chapter were 16.

New members of the General Council:

³² Acts of the Chapter 1909: Archives: Roma

Rev. Fr Federico Vianello (+1936) Superior General; Fr Angelo Colombaroli (+1922); Fr Giuseppe Bernabé (+1922); Fr Angelo Abba (+1952); Fr Matthias Reffeiner (+1973).

Elected on the 4th October, Fr Vianello did not accept his election until his return from Rome where he had gone to see his friend Pope Pius X. The Pope encouraged him to accept and to choose two of his assistants. He chose: Fr Bernabé whom later he appointed Novice Master and Fr Reffeiner instead of Fr Wilfling whose name was also given by the Chapter. Fr Reffeiner was more acceptable to the German group.

Given his character and spirituality Fr Vianello kept the attitude of a Novice Master and Spiritual Director even during his generalate.

Fr F. Vianello was born in Venice in 1872 and entered the Novitiate in 1888. Ordained priest in 1895. He was asked to open the house in Brixen 19th August 1896. He returned to the Mother House as Vice-Superior and assistant of the Novice Master who was Fr Voltolina.

After a six-month experience in Cairo he was recalled to the Mother House as Counsellor and Assistant to the Novice Master. Here in 1899 he was made Vicar General and Novice Master. Even after his mandate as Superior General, he continued as Spiritual Director of the Scholastics and of all the Fathers who were going back to him: we can truly call him the Spiritual Father of the Congregation. He kept alive in the Institute the devotion of the Sacred Heart which he had drawn from Fr Asperti and from the memories of Bishop Comboni whose life he had begun to write. He instilled devotion to Comboni. He taught the confreres to imitate the Founder in his interior attitudes of charity and fraternal love. He fostered this as a distinguishing trait of the Institute's members.

Fr A. Vignato writes, "Fr Vianello was a resourceful optimist; but above all he was eminent because he was humble; was able and active because he was mild, enlightened because he was pious, thus sharing in the divine light".

He was also highly esteemed outside the Congregation, especially by Bishops and by Pope St. Pius X who knew him personally. During the first World War 1914 to 1918, Fr Vianello proved that he not only preached fraternal charity but above all practised it. He kept a continuous correspondence with the eight confreres who had been enlisted: he would send means of support to those in need, food parcels to prisoners, in everything and at all times showing his concern and fatherly love.

His urge to work and the concern for his sons prostrated Fr Vianello who had never enjoyed a good health: he suffered a very serious breakdown. He was treated in Savona and in Brescia but he could never recover completely. He asked the Holy See permission to hand over the government of the Congregation to his Vicar Fr Colombaroli (1918) and retired for a well-deserved rest in Venice with his cousin, a parish priest. He was not present at the Chapter of 1919.

During the Chapter the differences between the two groups slowly cropped up. The differing missionary methods became evident. Fr Banholzer reported that 49 Shilluk tribesmen were around the mission and that, having finished the buildings, the fathers could now concentrate on evangelization. A grammar, a catechism and a dictionary in Shilluk were being printed. The contrasts between Fr P. Meroni, Religious Superior and Msgr Geyer also became visible during the Chapter.

The Chapter among other things recommended the learning of English in England and Arabic in Cairo; and that the accounts of the goods of the religious community and those of the missions be kept separate.

C. DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE INSTITUTE

- final approval of the Constitutions (19th March 1910).
- celebration of the 25th anniversary of foundation (16th July 1910).
- circular No.6 of 21st May 1914: on the necessity of fraternal charity, the distinctive title of FSCJ (Fili Sacri Cordis Jesu) or Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.
- opening of the Novitiate at Savona (1915).
- opening of a house in Rome (1910) at the Church of Ss. Vincent and Anastasius, near the Trevi Fountain, through the help of Pius X. It stayed open up to 1938 when the house in St. Pancrazio on the Gianicolo was purchased.

D. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MISSIONS

Knowing the wish of Bishop Comboni that our missions should extend to Uganda, soon after the Chapter Fr Vianello helped Bishop Geyer to open some missions in that Country, and he paid all the expenses himself. This he achieved by collecting offerings toward this aim personally, and by writing articles in “Nigrizia” of which he had been the Editor for the last twenty years and which he continued to direct during his term as Superior General.

I. OPENING IN UGANDA

In Sudan the Sons of the Sacred Heart had always been the only missionaries. In Uganda they were faced with a different situation: in the southern part of that Country the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), founded by Cardinal Lavigerie, had started the work of evangelization as early as 1879. Between 1885 and 1887 22 Martyrs had become the seed of Christianity.

1. THE JOURNEY

From Gondokoro (North East of Juba) a team of missionaries left for Nimule, which they reached on 2nd February, 1910. It was a very tiresome journey on foot, with some 60 porters, across hills, swamps and forests. In spite of the documents brought by the Missionaries from Khartoum, the British officers at the border were reluctant to grant them permission to settle in Northern Uganda, ignoring the fact that a permission had been granted two years before, on condition that a location should be chosen South of Parallel 3°30' North and near to Government centres.

The reluctance of the Officer at the spot was based on a number of misconceptions:

- the climate was bad, unsuitable for non-Africans,
- very few Catholics were present to justify the presence of a permanent mission-station,
- the primitive standard of the population,
- the difficulty of the Government in protecting their security and their life,

N.B. Though Bishop Geyer does not mention this in his report to Propaganda Fide, the most likely reason of that officer was that he did not want the Catholic missionaries to enter where the Protestant ones were still absent.

Bishop F. X. Geyer realised that such arguments reflected the private opinion of the British Officer who was new in the place. The Bishop then requested the Officer to contact the Governor at Entebbe.

It took four long days to clear the matter and to get a Visa from the Entebbe Central Offices via the newly-installed telegraph line. Of great encouragement to the missionaries and officers was a tourist expedition arrived in those days and led by the former President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt. In the presence of the British Officers he manifested great enthusiasm about the Catholic missions and their contribution to the development of Africa, something he had witnessed in all his journeys throughout the Continent.

2. Koba — Omach

At last on 17th February 1910 they reached their destination, the Government post of Koba, a settlement on the Eastern bank of the River Nile more or less facing present-day Pakwach. It was the 31st anniversary of Fr Lourdel's and Brother Amans' landing at Entebbe, in the South of Uganda. Our team was composed of Bishop F.X. Geyer, his secretary, Bro. Cagol and Fr Albino Colombaroli as Superior. Fr Albino was coming from Bahr-el-Ghazal in the Sudan. He had learned the Luo of the Jur tribe and was happily surprised to realise that the Alur spoke a similar language.

At Koba, they were welcomed by Mr. Paul Hannington, the British Commissioner, son of the Anglican Bishop, James Hannington, murdered by order of Kabaka Mwanga in 1885. There they accepted the hospitality of Chief Omach: the locality also was called Omach.

Msgr Geyer and Bro. Cagol left for Europe via Kampala and Mombasa. On his way back Msgr Geyer visited several missions of the White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa) where he saw their dedication to the apostolate and was surprised at the scale of their success. He told Bishop Streicher

who had invited him to visit their mission in Masaka, Villa Maria Parish: “My Lord, you do not have here a mission, but a Diocese: what I see here goes beyond all that I had heard about it; in Khartoum there is nothing like what we see here”.³³ Bishop Streicher gave him the Acts of the Synod they had held in October 1909. On the other hand we read in the journal of Fr Raux, W.F., “...The missionaries of Uganda have realised that Providence has given to the Khartoum Mission a good Bishop, whose humility and piety are only counter-balanced by his science and zeal”.³⁴

At the end of March 1910 new personnel arrived: Frs. Luigi Cordone and P. Crazzolaro, Bros. Clement Schroer and Benedict Sighele. At the beginning of 1911 three Fathers arrived and this time not along the Nile, but via Mombasa and then by train to Kisumu, Kenya on the shores of Lake Victoria: the Fathers were J.B. Fornasa, Giuseppe Beduschi, Giovanni Audisio. In 1913, Frs. Molinaro and Vignato (Superior) joined the group.

With the cooperation of Chief Omach and his people the missionaries learned the language, built a Chapel, a house and a school.

3. THE IMMEDIATE AIM

The immediate aim of the missionaries was the Evangelisation of the Alur community and the spiritual assistance of the Baganda (the majority were porters). Msgr Geyer asked Bishop Streicher for two fathers from Hoima (Bunyoro), and two permanent Catechists and which he obtained. (The Banyoro tribe has a Bantu language very similar to that spoken by the Baganda i.e. Luganda). Later on Fr Albino asked for four Catechists and obtained three, though only Lazari continued until his death in Gulu.

4. TRANSFER TO WEST NILE AND GULU

Koba had been chosen for it made communications (by boat on Lake Albert and the Nile) easy. Under the pretext that the zone was infested by tse-tse fly, the British Government forced the Alur to cross to the Western shore of the Nile, whereas the Acholi had to move East towards Gulu. It seems that since the Protestant missionaries were not there, the Government did not want the Catholic missionaries to take up the school for the sons of Chiefs. So while the Government officials moved to Gulu, the Acholi moved in the same direction. The Alur had crossed the Nile to the West by 1914.

Two missionaries, Frs. Colombaroli and Fornasa, reached Gulu on the 19th February 1911. Soon after them, Frs. Audisio, Beduschi and Cordone were sent to Gulu together with Bro. B. Sighele. Missionaries from Omach could not follow the Alur people until 1917 when they went to Orussi and then to Angal.

In the meantime, missions among the Madi tribe near Sudan were opened by Fr Zambonardi (1912), Fr Molinaro (1913) and Fr Cardani (1914) at Pakele in the East Nile and later on at Moyo (Western bank of the Nile – 1917).

5. DIFFICULTIES FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

Healthwise, the environment was not as bad as Bahr el Ghazal. It is true that the conditions of living were too poor and that very often missionaries had to go back to Italy for health reason. The first death, and the only one during this period, occurred only in 1915: Brother Nicola Cò of black fever.

The presence of wild beasts was more dangerous: elephants, leopards and lions were disturbing the mission. In 1915 on their way from Omach to Gulu Fr Vignato and Bro. Cò had to face a lion and a lioness in the forest during the night for seven hours. Their Guardian Angel saved them, wrote Fr A. Vignato.

Some Protestants, and the Government, created various difficulties. Our missionaries were not prepared for both challenges. One reason for misunderstandings was, very few of our missionaries could understand and speak English, and know the type of administration and behaviour of British Officers.

³³ Bulletin 1938

³⁴ *Research Papers on Uganda*, by Fr. M. Cisternino

Our missionaries had their shortcomings. Against the official assumption of the Protestant religion by the Government on the pattern of England, our missionaries were fostering the interests of the Catholic Church through a full dedication and zeal, often expressed in an aggressive way. This disturbed the Government, whose motto was “cooperation not competition” among different denominations. Now, the Protestants were not in Gulu when our Fathers went there. The Government asked our missionaries to take over the school for the sons of Chiefs, who eventually could replace their fathers or uncles. When the Protestants arrived they took over so that future chiefs could be Protestants.

The missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had reached Gulu before us, in 1905. But they had soon left (1908). During their absence our mission in Gulu was opened. When (1913) they went back to Gulu, they were very much surprised and upset by the zealous presence of the Catholic Missionaries. The following quotations from Fr Antonio Vignato’s journal are self explanatory: “Our missions in Bahr el Ghazal since the very beginning had to butt against Moslem fanaticism which had disseminated hatred against the Christian name. Here instead we find ourselves in front of an elegant and organised English Protestant Minister, who would impose himself on the simple mentality of the natives”, posing as an official ‘Rabbi’.

At the end of 1913 the new District Commissioner, Mr. Postlethwaite arrived at Atura Port. He first met the two Protestant Ministers Mr. Wright and Mr. Lees at Otimodere, the first village of Gulu District. On his way to Gulu he stopped at Minakulu and at Puranga; he spoke with the village chiefs and asked about their relationships with our missionaries.³⁵

We take from the Fr Crazzolarà’s journal³⁶ the following passage:

“27 January 1914 - Mr. P.R.P. Postlethwait (vulgo “Bwana Gweno”) is the new Assistant District Commissioner (ADC). I take some of our boys to welcome him and they sing the English anthem fairly well. The day after tomorrow I am invited to his office. Whenever I go to him, he, in the presence of another officer, tells me that chiefs are true rulers in their own village and therefore they can grant permits as well as withdraw them, and even drive us out. The land to apply for is “crown land”; he, the DC, can lease us crown land for the price of 3 Rps monthly per lot. Essence of the talk is: the Mission must leave Puranga where a school was being built; while on his way to Gulu, this new ADC took opportunity of placing there as new chief a young Protestant who - evidently well directed - immediately ordered that our school building be removed three miles further, to Palenga - which we did. 6 February 1914 - During the afternoon instruction of our monthly retreat Mr. Postlethwait comes to pay us a visit. Having dealt such a blow, he is now very kind and upon visiting the Church even makes a genuflection.”

One day the Governor General of Uganda arrived to Gulu and Msgr Vignato writes,

“we thought it to be our duty, or at least opportune, to go and visit him to pay him homage and greet him on behalf of the Mission. I went there together with Fr Crazzolarà; but alas!... we had to return to our huts without even being admitted into the reception tent. As we reached the mission I was telling Fr Crazzolarà: ‘Could we be more humiliated than this?’”³⁷

6. WITCHDOCTORS MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT

Drought, famine and an epidemic disease hit the East Acholi zone (now Kitgum District). The witchdoctors threw the blame on the presence of the White men. The mob then killed two Catechists, Daudi Okelo and Jildo Irwa, who are venerated by the Catholic laity as Martyrs.³⁸

Fr Molinaro, among the Madi tribe, speaks of other difficulties missionaries met when learning the Madi idiom, which is more difficult than the Luo languages (Alur, Acholi, Lango, etc.):

“Children were happy to teach us new words, new sentences and we were busy ourselves writing them in our notebooks in order to find out some rules of grammar . Very soon we realised that children were playing tricks on us. What they had called white yesterday, today they called black. On top of everything, we understood that the elders did not want us to learn their language. The reason was clear to us: they wanted to keep us away from their way of living so that we were not able to understand them. The elders were hoping and praying that, getting discouraged, we might

³⁵ Fr M. Cisternino , ib.

³⁶ Fr M. Cisternino, ib.

³⁷ Fr M. Cisternino , ib.

³⁸ Fr. A. Medeghini; *Storia a’Uganda*, page 436-437; Elitrice Nigrizia, Bologna 1923

go away. They were treating us a Jadia (the slave traders), or the Equatoria (the Egyptians). After some attempts, we found our way. Children were always near us, therefore with a sweet or with a holy picture, we were able to make them speak and make important remarks. In this way we gained new words for our notebooks. As we used the words and sentences learned in that way, people were amazed and surprised at how we knew such expressions. The elders were not happy with our progress in learning their language and their hostility was transmitted to the children that were coming to see us; they were beaten and banned from approaching us".³⁹

7. MISTREATMENT OF AFRICANS INCREASED THE SUFFERING OF OUR MISSIONARIES⁴⁰

From the journal of Fr Crazzolaro we take the following two episodes:

"1st December 1911 - Chief Abok (alias Awic) from Payira is today being driven into exile to Entebbe and old Aaluja is also being taken together with him. He, of course, wants to keep his independence as natural Rwot and submits to the English Officer only in appearance. In order to legitimate this deposition in some way they have put up a list of many old sins: years ago he hid a gun that had "slipped off" a government policeman; two years ago he stole a number of cattle belonging to Okello Moaka, and so on. These may well be true crimes, yet traditional in native life. The real reason is that he has been quite restive against English authority ... and therefore he must go". In his place they put his son Alier, a CMS pupil, and as his assistant another of Awic's sons, Alier Lawang Abok. As their interpreter they placed a man from Payira, Abraham Gwara, ex-slave of slave dealers.

The second episode has its beginning from the fact that one Labeja from Lamogi tribe (North of Gulu) had attempted to kill chief Ali from Patiko tribe (North West of Gulu): the Colonial Government had to intervene.

"12th January 1912: Today the Government began the war against the Lamogi on Guruguru Mountain. The Lamogi professed solidarity with Labeja, Ali's would-be murderer, and started dancing and shouting abuses at the British Commissioner and his company according to native customs when declaring enmity.

20th January 1912: They were inside the mountain and on its flat top. On that mountain there are caves, with much water running in them, although, they say, it is now undrinkable and the natives will tell you why. From there, they positively challenged the British to a fight.

According to custom, the people of Patiko are bound to take revenge of the (attempted) murder of Ali and of the other man killed by mistake, and therefore, when the Commissioner on 20th January 1911 summoned all men in possession of guns to come out and fight, they eagerly joined the Government troops who had come all the way from Masindi and Nimule. The many Lamogi sympathisers kept quiet, as they would otherwise risk the loss of their cattle, as had already happened to those among them who had accepted to hide Lamogi's cattle for the meantime. Guruguru Mountain (properly Palei) was therefore surrounded by guns, while the dancers inside it were very sick with diarrhoea (it is said that hundreds died) due to the bad water inside. And as women came out to fetch water from a nearby river they were shot at. March 1912: Today the Lamogi people of Guruguru were taken prisoners and brought here in Gulu. They were forced by circumstances to submit to the District Commissioner and to the Captain. They have to build their huts immediately south of the Government station; their wives and children can stay with them. Their defeat is meant as a lesson for themselves and the rest of the Acholi who, instead, would rather have liked to go and congratulate them as victors".

The mistreatment some British officers were inflicting on the local people increased the sufferings of our missionaries.

Fr Zambonardi narrated the following event:

"An Assistant District Commissioner, one Armstrong, on a visit to Palaro wanted ivory free of charge: a local Madi chief Ayo Kabir who refused was caned with 50 strokes of korbash (of Hippo skin). One great chief also refused: he was given 100 strokes and Mr. Armstrong finished him with powerful kicks to the amazement and bitter disgust of the people, who paid a last homage to the old and very respected chief, who left 12 wives with children. People baptized him, 'Bwana Mutu'".

³⁹ Fr M. Cisternino, ib.

⁴⁰ Fr M. Cisternino, ib.

Fr Molinaro had another story: another Assistant District Commissioner, a catholic Maltese, Mr. Manara, wanted to collect all the guns which were in the hands of the people. He entrusted the task to his policemen (local). In Palaro the policemen found much resistance and hanged a dozen girls by their hands on tree trunks; then they beat them till they bled to make them talk. Father Molinaro heard their wild cries and ordered the policemen to set them free on his responsibility, nothing could be done against the Father.

We know however that missionaries were a pain in the neck for the officers, because they were dangerous witnesses of their misbehaviour.

8. MISSIONARY METHODOLOGY

The life of our missionaries was full of difficulties, but also of satisfactions. They found people responsive to their efforts.

Missionaries embarked on the integral formation of the human person who is neither only body, nor only soul, but only one reality made up of both.

In fact Brothers like Klement Schroer, Benedict Sighele, Peter Poloniato started practical teaching of masonry, carpentry and mechanics (repairing bicycles). He also started distributing medicines: in 6 months 1,500 sick people were treated.

Later on the British Government asked the missionaries to start a rural trade school to prepare artisans, to be at the disposal of the British Officers. Bro. Simeon Fanti was really the man for this task, with all the skills he mastered.

The priests organised schools where the teaching of Catechism had a pre-eminent role. Fr Crazzolaro, a language genius (later internationally appreciated by Ethnologists and the British Government), had prepared the Alur translation of the Catechism.

At first the Catechism was to be learnt only by heart. But Fr Fornasa introduced its thorough explanation as he had seen it done by the White Fathers.⁴¹ In fact, before his arrival to Omach he had spent one month in the White Fathers' missions as his Superiors had recommended him. The White Fathers had been there for the last 30 years. The first Baptism took place in November 1910 when at Omach Fr Cordone baptised a Muganda, already prepared in the Catechumenate of the White Fathers in the South: his name was Enjuba Paul.

The great day however was the 6th of June 1913. Fr Fornasa on the advice of Bishop Geyer had prepared 12 catechumens and had given them full cover of the most important truths of the Christian teaching and its moral demands. By then this looked like an innovation into the system of Sudan affected by the Muslim environment.

It was the privilege of Fr Colombaroli to baptise the 12 catechumens and to give them confirmation on the 22nd of the same month.

On 13th of June he assisted also at the first Christian marriage.

On the 1st of November 1913, 4 adults were baptised by Fr Bernabé an Assistant General in official visit to the missions. In 1914 84 more baptisms were celebrated.

They were given to two boys. Fr Crazzolaro commented: "This ceremony made a very great impression on the other catechumens who are now very anxious and regular in coming for catechism instruction. A dozen more should not be very far from baptism" (from his Journal). Aleni, a Catechist trained by the White Fathers of Bunyoro District, southwest of Gulu, was a great help.

When Fr Vignato accompanied Msgr Antonio Stoppani, Vicar Apostolic of Wau, on his journey to Kampala in 1914, he was happy to see that the White Fathers followed a similar methodology. Moreover he continued the tradition started by Fr Albino: fifteen men catechists and three women from Bunyoro reached Gulu.

II. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MISSIONS

As the number of missions and missionaries in Southern Sudan and in Uganda was increasing, Fr Vianello and Msgr Geyer asked Propaganda Fide to divide the large Vicariate of Khartoum. So in 1913 the Prefecture Apostolic of Bahr el Ghazal with headquarters in Wau was erected: in 1917 it became a Vicariate Apostolic: the leader was Bishop A. Stoppani.

⁴¹ Fr M. Cisternino, ib.

III. A SET BACK

In 1914 the Great War (First World War) broke out and the mission suffered its consequences. Austrian and German citizens, considered by Britain actual enemies, had to be deported. Italian citizens too were considered potential enemies in 1914. In Sudan and Uganda they were somehow kept under house arrest. Fr Fornasa, at that time Superior at Omach, after the sad news went to the Church and prayed: “O Lord, if you need a victim to avoid this tragedy for our mission, please take me”⁴². However, when Italy joined the Allied forces by declaring war on Austria and Germany, the Italian missionaries returned to their usual life, though limited by the impossibility of receiving new personnel and other kinds of help.

In Egypt and in Sudan the members of German nationality were interned (13 of them in Egypt), while others were allowed to stay in their mission stations but under special control. Italian missionaries, too, and properties in Egypt were saved because Fr Vianello, through many efforts, succeeded in having the Holy See declare that the mission was no longer under the protection of Austria. Fr Angelo Colombaroli, Vicar General, who was by the time in Egypt, was expelled and could not enter Italy because he had an Austrian Passport (he was from Trent).

When the war broke out, some sixty professed members and novices were called up and had to join the army. Fr Foglio was made a military chaplain. His goodness and spirit of sacrifice earned him praises from officers and men. While assisting a wounded soldier he was taken prisoner by the Austrians. Other missionaries were disturbed because of their Austrian nationality, as Britain and Austria were at war. Thus Bro. Clement Schroer was sent to a concentration camp in India .

E. COMBONI SISTERS

I. COMBONI SISTERS IN ERITREA

In the year 1914 Eritrea was an Italian Colony.

Fr Luigi Bonomi (+ Asmara 1927), had found a field of Apostolate in the Vicariate Apostolic of Asmara, as chaplain of the “Regina Elena” Hospital in Asmara town. Through the mediation of the Vicar Apostolic he succeeded in having Comboni Sisters for the Hospital. Fr Bonomi, a former Comboni Missionary, had known the Sisters in the Sudan, and had helped them during the Mahdi Revolution. The Sisters reached Asmara in 1914. They met many difficulties at the hands of the military officers of that period. However after 10 years the dedication and witness of their religious life earned the trust and respect of military, civil and political authorities. The Hospital of Masawa was entrusted to them, too, in 1927. Another important step was the school “Vittorio Emmanuele” for Eritreans, started by Fr L. Bonomi.

An important commitment was the “**Villaggio della Carità**” formally opened in 1938 and owned by the Institute: today it is “Casa Comboni” residence of Sisters responsible of different missionary activities. Other Hospitals and Schools were later-on entrusted to the Sisters. A social project, “Holy Family Institute” was opened in 1938 as a Hostel for students, mainly orphans. It gave hospitality to many missionaries, mainly those of Comboni, who had to abandon their missions in Ethiopia because of the war against the Italian occupation. A unique step in the history of our Institutes is the foundation of the Catholic University of Asmara. It obtained canonical sanction of the Holy See in 1960. It was approved by the Ethiopian Government as a full university in 1965, and was nationalized in 1979. In 1982 all religious institutes had to give up schools and religious houses. The Sisters however are still present in the University, for teaching and evangelical witnessing.

FORMATION OF ERITREAN SISTERS.

Six girls entered the postulancy on 11th February, 1938. In 1942 they took their vows, but only as a pious association “Pie Sorelle della Nigrizia”. This is an ordinary step the Holy See makes, to delay the formation of new Institutions. In 1947, the association was fully incorporated in the Institute of the Comboni Sisters. At the moment the Sisters of Eritrean origin number 150.

The Institute was split into two provinces: Eritrea with 12 communities and 86 Sisters; Ethiopia with 14 communities and 67 Sisters.

⁴² Fr M. Cisternino, ib.

II. COMBONI SISTERS IN UGANDA – 1918

Just as Comboni had appreciated very much the presence of the Sisters, so did our missionaries consider it a need and a priority. Fr A. Vignato, in the name of all the missionaries, asked the then Superior General, Rev. Fr Celdare to send Sisters to Uganda. The Sisters arrived in Uganda on 8th December 1918, via Nimule, and were welcomed by Fr A. Vignato: The leader was Sr. Carla Troenzi who had been a missionary in the Sudan and was later on Superior General of the Comboni Sisters.

The other Sisters: Sr. Amalia Lonardi, Sr. Camilla Uberti, Sr. Luigia Quaglia, Sr. Rosalba Ghirlanda. The sisters learned the local language and started caring for and teaching in the Catechumenates for girls.

They also taught them some domestic science, ways of raising their standard, distributed medicines and created proper dispensaries. Later on they started schools for girls. The first school was in Gulu under the leadership of Mother Angioletta. It was from this school that the first members of the Congregation of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate, founded by Bishop A. Negri in 1942, came.

With the opening of Uganda, not only the dream but also the interest Comboni had shown in Uganda was fulfilled. Even after Uganda had been given to the White Fathers he had continued to be interested in it and to advise the missionaries like someone responsible for the territory formerly entrusted to him. He had been interested in Uganda up to the very end of his life. For example: On 23rd August 1881 Comboni wrote to Cardinal Simeoni about a great tension and an increased danger of war between Mutesa and Kabarega of Bunyoro.

His friend, Governor Bey, had returned to Comboni 3 letters addressed to the missionaries, Livinhac, Barbot and Lourdel, that on that occasion could not be sent to Rubaga. Comboni was assured that Emin Bey would send them via Zanzibar, and was convinced that the same Bey would soon go and try to reconcile the two kings. (Writings: no. 6957-6958).

Chapter Six

NEW EMPHASIS IN MISSIONARY WORK AND THE ANSWER OF OUR MISSIONARIES

A. NEW EMPHASIS IN THE CHURCH'S DOCUMENTS 1919-1995

1. "MAXIMUM ILLUD" (30th November 1919) of Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922)

The ravages of World War I were felt throughout the missionary world. Mission personnel were recalled, and never replaced. This manifested the critical scarcity of the native clergy. The nationalism of the missionaries had kept the number of local clergy very low and established the tradition that the native clergy were not to be prepared for the responsibilities of the hierarchy. After centuries of mission work in China only one Chinese priest had ever become a bishop, and even then under very unusual circumstances. This was Gregory Leo (Lopez), O.P. who was consecrated in 1685.

Benedict XV, in his "Maximum illud", set out to correct this injustice, which was a deviation from the Church's missionary tradition. This deviation had many causes. One was the interference of Spain and Portugal, whose governments and missionaries did not favour granting Holy Orders to aborigines, mestizos, and mulattos in the vast, newly discovered territories allotted to them by the "Padroado" until the natives reached a cultural level approximating their own. There was a general lack of understanding of the good qualities of natives from a different cultural level, and a misconception of the cultural values of the high non-Christian civilizations of India and China, along with a gross lack of sympathy for natives. An exaggerated nationalism on the part of mainly French missionaries was partly responsible, too, since it led them to disregard the national aspirations and feelings of their charges. The long-outmoded educational programme for indigenous clerical candidates left them wholly unprepared for leadership. Hence, the complaint of Benedict XV:

"It is sad to think that there are still countries where the Catholic Faith has been preached for several centuries, but where you will find no indigenous clergy, except of an inferior quality; that there are nations, deeply penetrated by the light of the Faith, that... have reached such a degree of civilization as to possess men distinguished in every department of secular knowledge,... and have as yet been unable to yield either Bishops to rule them, or priests to direct them".

"Maximum illud" has been termed the "Magna Charta" of the contemporary mission movement. "Missionary work" the Pope said "is the obligation of every Catholic. Not enough is being done; new seminaries for the foreign missions have to be established". The Pope spoke out strongly against associating Christianity with any national government, and he unequivocally affirmed that a native clergy is the "one great hope of new missions. Native clergy are not to be mere auxiliaries of the foreign missionaries, but rather they are to be equal partners destined one day to take over the work of the Church in their native land."

2. "RERUM ECCLESIAE" (26TH FEBRUARY 1926) OF POPE PIUS XI (1922-1939)

Pope Pius XI, the Pope of the Missions, shared his predecessor's interest in the missions. He worked to develop both a native clergy and a native lay apostolate in the missions, to dissociate the faith from charges of being a white man's religion based on European culture, and to emphasize that Catholic dogma and worship should be adapted to local culture. The Pope asked that the Gospel "on being introduced into any new land should not destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful... whatever there is in the native customs that is not inseparably bound up with superstition and error will always receive a kind consideration and, when possible, will be preserved intact." In this spirit the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith submitted a new policy for mission activity which was approved on 8th December 1939. The age-old controversy over "CHINESE RITES" (No.39) was finally laid to rest, and the Holy See approved what Ricci had advocated in the Seventeenth century, namely that Chinese ceremonies were only civil acts of reverence for ancestors, and that they demonstrated love of one's native country or courtesy toward one's neighbour. Addressing those responsible for the foreign missions in "Rerum Ecclesiae", the Pope writes: "Let Us recall to your attention how important it is that you build up an indigenous clergy. If you do not work with all your might to accomplish this, we maintain that your apostolate will not only

be crippled, but it will become an obstacle and an impediment to the establishment and organization of the Church in those countries ...”.

Pius XI himself started implementing the above policy by consecrating the first six Chinese Bishops, a Bishop from India and one from Japan, and prepared the way for the consecration of the first African Bishop in modern times, Msgr J. Kiwanuka from Uganda. It was the pleasure of Pope Pius XII, in 1939 to consecrate him in St. Peter's, together with the first Malagasy Bishop. Pius XI encouraged the Bishops to send Seminarians or priests to Rome for University Studies and ordered a World Mission Day to be celebrated all over the world. Further he warmly recommended religious life to Christians in mission lands and the founding of local Religious Institutes.

3. “EVANGELII PRAECONES” (2nd June 1951) of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958)

Pius XII, called the chief pastor and teacher among the Popes, followed his predecessors. He emphasized to missionaries the necessity of teaching and practising the principles of Justice and Peace as contained in the Social Doctrine of the Church, and insisted on training lay people for Socio-political action. One reason for this was the spread of Marxism-Leninism in Third World countries as a liberation movement.

4. “FIDEI DONUM” (21st April 1957) again of Pope Pius XII

In this document the Pope emphasized the missionary duty of all Bishops, priests, lay people and religious. In particular he encouraged Bishops to support missionary vocations, even though their diocese be in need itself of vocations to the priesthood. Even today diocesan priests who take on the responsibility of missionary work are called “Fidei Donum” because of this letter.

5. HIERARCHIES

It was under Pius XII that the majority of the missions in one State were given a proper Hierarchy. That means that the missionary Institutes are now at the service of the Hierarchies who become responsible for the missionary and pastoral apostolate. “Ius Commissionis” granted to the missionary Institutes gradually gave way to a contract between the Bishop who invites and the Institute, who, on certain conditions accepts the invitation. The “Ius Commissionis” granted exclusive responsibility of the apostolate to one Institute in a given territory.

6. “PRINCEPS PASTORUM” (28th November 1958) of John XXIII (1958-1963)

The Pope emphasized:

- the necessity of a well-trained catholic laity, able to take on their own responsibility as Christians in the socio-economic and political field of their countries,
- the necessity for local clergy to take over the responsibility of the formation of their clergy,
- the necessity for international Catholic organizations to assist students from mission territories who go abroad for further studies, so that they may maintain their Catholic life.

7. “AD GENTES”

This decree, approved during the last session of the Second Vatican Council (7th December 1965) makes a synthesis of the Church's doctrine on its mission and of the modern Encyclicals. In particular it emphasizes the order of the missionary work and other points:

- Christian witness;
- Proclamation of the Good News;
- Formation of Christian communities;
- Missionary responsibility of the particular churches;
- Technical, moral and spiritual preparation of the missionaries to be done for those countries to which they are later to be sent and where they will continue their on-going formation;
- Institutes of contemplative life to establish their communities in mission territories.

Pope Paul VI and John Paul II would develop the above principles and adapt them to their time. These two Popes had great impact on missionary work through their journeys, speeches, homilies in nearly all the countries of the Third World. “REDEMPTORIS MISSIO” is the latest attempt of Pope John Paul to give clear directives to Missionary work.

However this does not apply to Africa as John Paul has published the Apostolic Exhortation “Ecclesia in Africa. (14-9-1995). This document has a particular importance because its contents is based on the resolutions of the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa.

B. THE ANSWER OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARIES

I. TRAINING OF CATECHISTS

There was no need for Pope Benedict XV to emphasize the role of Catechists and their importance. The success of Missionary penetration in the territories entrusted to us is owed mostly to the simple and generous work of the catechists. They have more stability, they know the language and the mentality of the people. Out-stations, chapels, Eucharistic centres are entrusted to them.

In general they fulfill the following duties:

- they direct the Sunday Assembly, at which they may be expected to give some religious instruction;
- they are in charge of instruction of children and catechumens;
- they perform emergency baptisms and make pre-marriage enquiries;
- they visit the sick and assist the dying;
- they conduct para-liturgical funerals;
- they watch over the interest of the missions and keep registers;
- they see that the missionary is kept informed. Often they are expected to manage small bush schools where children are taught the catechism in addition to reading and writing.

Recently in the Eucharistic Centres they have been allowed to distribute Holy Communion.

At the beginning of Evangelisation, there was little need to encourage catechists to spread their faith. In Uganda for instance some Catechists were working in our territories on their own before our arrival. In one region in Uganda, Kigezi, the catechist Joanna Kitagame and a government representative Joanna Sebalijja, were the founders of the Catholic Church.

We have seen how catechists from Southern Uganda of Bantu language and origin, went to Northern Uganda among peoples of different language and ethnic origin. Famous among them Lajari Bagenda, Martino Musoke, Mama Cecilia and Mama Pudenziana.

We had some martyrs like Daudi Okelo and Jildo Irwa among the Acholi as we have already mentioned. Even in recent times between 1985 and 1990 some catechists in Northern Uganda stayed in their place in spite of harassment and some were even killed. Early in 1913 in Gulu Fr G. Beduschi started a formal school for catechists that was continued by Fr Fornasa. Nowadays there are several schools for catechists in Uganda. When Bishop Geyer visited Uganda he was very appreciative of the work of catechists. In his report to Propaganda Fide in 1919, Msgr Stoppani, Apostolic Vicar of Bahr-el-Ghazal was very happy to say that at last the Institution of Catechists had been recently understood and promoted in nearly all the missions.

Later on in the Twenties, schools for Catechists were started by our missionaries in Sudan. In 1922 in Uganda the first congress of Catechists was very successful mainly due to the faith and enthusiasm of Martino Musoke from Gulu, of Aleni from Moyo and of a holy man from Kitgum, Jakobo Kinyang.

At present schools for Catechists are common in all places where we are present as all missionaries appreciate their work. Their remuneration is still an object of discussion: in some places they have no remuneration, in others it is left to the local community and in others they receive a fixed remuneration.

Every year Propaganda Fide gives a grant to the dioceses in territories still linked with it for the training and maintenance of Catechists.

II. TRAINING FOR PRIESTHOOD

The first two Diocesan Priests of our missions, after Fr Daniel Sorur, were ordained on Christmas Day 1938. Frs Donasyano Bala and John Ongom were ordained in Gulu Cathedral by Bishop A. Negri. Fr A. Vignato, who had welcomed them in the junior Seminary, attended their Ordination.

Faithful to the Motto of Comboni "Save Africa with Africans", our missionaries started training local young men for the priesthood very early.

- In 1920 Fr Bernabé started training two boys in Wau; none of these succeeded. In 1929, Fr E. Mason took care of five boys from the intermediate school; among them the future Bishop Ireneo Dud who in 1930 attended some lessons of Latin. On 21st December 1944 he was the first candidate from Sudan to be ordained priest and in 1955 the first Bishop of our missions.

- In 1924 Msgr A. Vignato sent five boys to Nyenga Junior Seminary, in the Diocese of Kampala, entrusted to the Mill Hill Fathers. In 1927, Msgr Vignato kept the seminarians with him in Gulu.
- In 1928, at Okaru in the East of Juba Fr A. Todesco was the first Rector of the Junior Seminary of the Prefecture of Bahr el Gebel; it was founded by Msgr. G. Zambonardi.
- In 1932: The Philosophy course started in Gulu, and Theology in 1936.
- In 1933: At Bussere in Bahr-el-Ghazal, a junior Seminary was opened with the intention of opening a Major Seminary 1939.
- In 1937/39: A large Seminary is started in Lacor (Gulu) which was to be a Junior Seminary for Uganda and a Major Seminary for Sudan and Uganda.
- In June 1940 when our Fathers were all under house arrest in Katigondo, Masaka Diocese, (Southern Uganda), Lacor Seminary was taken over by the British Government as a Hospital for soldiers; the seminarians were transferred to Arua and later on the Major seminarians to Lodonga. 5 missionaries were released from house-arrest for the training of the Seminarians. By 1944 all the Seminarians were back at Lacor.
- In 1947: The Junior Seminarians (40 of them) from Uganda were transferred to Okaru, but they returned to Lacor in 1948.
- In 1956: The Inter-vicariate Major Seminary for Sudan was opened at Tore on the way from Yei to Meridi. After the expulsion of the missionaries, the Seminary was transferred to Rejaf. The attacks of Government soldiers forced the Seminarians to take to the bush for one week until they reached Lacor Seminary in Uganda. From there in 1968 they joined all the Major Seminarians of Uganda in the new national seminaries, Katigondo (South Uganda) for Philosophy and Ggaba, near Kampala for Theology.

In other mission territories, too, our fathers were and are teaching in or directing the Diocesan Seminaries. Often this activity was claimed to be a priority but we are not always consistent with this priority.

All the first Bishops of Sudan come from our Seminaries, together with four from Uganda, of whom two have died. In the Churches of our foundation, Sudan and Uganda, there are at the moment about 300 priests.

In general, the Father Professors of philosophy and theology have been graduates from the Urbanian University, with a few coming from the Gregorian University.

The training in the seminaries was and still is on the traditional model of the Church. This model is often under discussion but the Diocesan Bishops and Clergy have not yet decided on any fundamental changes.

III. FOUNDATION OF RELIGIOUS AND OTHER INSTITUTES

1. LITTLE SISTERS OF MARY IMMACULATE, GULU

When Msgr A. Vignato in the early thirties asked the Comboni Sisters to take responsibility for the girls' school in Gulu, he had already planned to select some of them for sisterhood. Msgr A. Negri (1935-1949) quite willingly took up the challenge. In 1940 he asked and received the approval of the Holy See for setting up the Congregation. In 1942 their Novitiate started on Christmas Day and led to the first professions on the feast of the Epiphany in 1945. Their main aim is teaching in schools, but they are also committed to nursing and pastoral work. At the moment they number nearly 300. They written the life of Mother Angioletta Dognini (+1990) whom they consider their co-foundress. The vast majority of sisters come from the Northern dioceses and their work is mainly in the same territory. They have 2 communities in Kenya.

2. THE CONGREGATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY (DIHM)

The Congregation was founded by Bishop J. Riegler, MFSC. Msgr Riegler was making his first public appearance as a Bishop in Glen Cowie parish, Lydenburgh Vicariate, when he presided over the ceremony of the founding of the new Institute on 2nd February 1949. On that occasion the Bishop said: "The feast of Our Lady's Purification in 1949 will always be an outstanding day in the history of the Lydenburgh Vicariate. This is an occasion and a day for which I and the Religious of our Vicariate have prayed for so many years: the starting of an Institute of Sisters in our Native Community. It is the express wish of the Holy Father that the religious state should be fostered and promoted in all missionary countries. Vocations to the

religious and priestly state always indicate the strength and stability of our faith". The Bishop drew an analogy between the religious life and the candles held by the candidates during Holy Mass: "You will burn brightly before your God as you consume yourselves for Him".

Rev. Mother Consiglio, one of the Loreto Sisters (IBVM) working in Glen Cowie, was the first Superior and Novice Mistress in the demanding task of helping the young Institute grow. Sr. Consiglio had many years of experience both in Kenya and the Union (South Africa). She had studied Sepedi, the local language, and the Native customs and mentality. Consequently she was equipped with the necessary qualities for the task in hand.

The first two candidates, Ambrosia C. Mkhathswa and Elizabeth Mkonto, received the Religious Habit on 22nd August the same year.

In 1982 the Congregation held its first General Chapter and elected the first Mother General.

3. SISTERS OF THE SACRED HEART

Msgr S. Mazzoldi then Vicar Apostolic of Juba opened their Novitiate in 1952 in Juba and entrusted the novices to Sr. Domitilla. Initially they were developing very well, but the civil war in Southern Sudan meant they had to flee to Moyo, Arua Diocese. Here they were well-trained by Sr. Elizabeth Coggi. They have a variety of apostolates. They number about 150 and are mainly spread in Sudan and in Uganda where they have several houses and the Novitiate. Their main house is now in Juba, Southern Sudan.

4. ST MARTIN DE PORRES BROTHERS

This Institute, too, was started by Msgr S. Mazzoldi in 1953 with the assistance of Fr G. Gusmini (+ 1980) and Bro. Pelucchi. The main purpose was to prepare qualified teachers for the direction of schools of Catholic Foundation. Their development was not smooth as they too had to take shelter in Uganda in 1965, where they also opened the Novitiate. Their apostolate is also multipurpose and their spirituality is the one received through the Comboni Brothers.

They had to face many difficulties both in their internal administration and their relations with local Bishops and priests. They number about 40, the majority in Sudan and one community in Uganda where they have started a Senior Secondary School.

5. BROTHERS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY OR THE MARIAN BROTHERS

They were founded in the present Arua Diocese where they have their general Headquarters. Bishop G.B.Cesana started the Institute in 1954 and entrusted it to Fr Gino Albrigo (+1995). Later on Fr G. Volpetti (+ 1994) assisted them for many years: they now have their own General Direction regularly elected by the General chapters. Their aim is multi-purpose. They have a variety of apostolates.

At the moment they count about 50 members. To welcome the call to the brotherhood is not very common.

6. BROTHERS OF ST JOSEPH OF WAU

Started by Msgr E. Mason, then Vicar Apostolic of Wau in 1955 with the multi-purpose aim fit for the vocation to Brotherhood, Comboni style. When our missionaries who were in charge of training were expelled from Sudan the Brothers found themselves in great disarray. It seems that they are not flourishing as they number only 7, all in the Diocese of Wau.

7. SISTERS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF SUDAN

Bishop Mason had started an Institute for Sisters in 1956 "Sisters of Nazareth" while Msgr D. Ferrara of Mupoi-Tombora had started another "Our Lady of Victories" in 1957. Due to the great difficulties encountered in Sudan and as refugees, both Institutes were languishing. The Holy See in 1977 amalgamated the two into one, under the above title.

At the moment they have a community and the Novitiate in Uganda and a community in Khartoum. There are 15 professed, 3 Novices and 3 Postulants. Some Comboni Sisters are in charge of their training and administration.

There are a few Sisters in two small groups of the two original Institutes who live on their own and are much appreciated for their good works.

8. SISTERS OF PERPETUAL ADORATION OF THE HOLY TRINITY

A Comboni Sister, Anastasia Fumagalli (+1992) for years felt a call to a life of contemplation. When Bishop Tarantino (+1990) became the Bishop of Arua the Sister found a patron and a juridical status (1960). She found 12 sisters to go with her and consecrate themselves to contemplation, penance and work. Their life of prayer is offered to the Lord for the sanctification of priests and religious of all the world, but mainly of the Diocese where they have their community. They have one community with their own superior.

9. THE APOSTLES OF JESUS

This is the first Religious Institute in Africa which is exclusively Missionary. It was started in 1968 by Fr G. Marengoni under the patronage of Msgr S. Mazzoldi, then Bishop of Moroto. The Institute soon became international with candidates from more than 6 African countries. Starting from Moroto, houses of formation were started in Tanzania, in Western Uganda (Bukinda-Kabale), in Nairobi and Kiserian. In 1983 the founder, Fr Marengoni, left the General Direction to the African members.

The priests number about 200, the brothers 20. The General Direction is in Nairobi, Langata. They have communities in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Sudan. Their spirituality is mainly centered on the Heart of Jesus.

10. EVANGELIZING SISTERS OF OUR LADY

The Institute has the same founders as the Apostles of Jesus and it was started in 1975 with the official name of “Missionary Congregation of the Evangelizing Sisters of Mary”. The Constitutions of 1977 were revised according to the Canon Law of 1983 and approved by Msgr C. Davies Bishop of Ngong in whose diocese the main house resides. The Constitution emphasizes the main object of their work that is “the first evangelization through catechical instruction” mainly in Africa.

However the primary end remains always to bear witness to Christ and to the spiritual values proper to religious consecration.

11. MISSIONARY SISTERS OF MARY MOTHER OF THE CHURCH

The Institute was not started by a Comboni Missionary but by Msgr Caesar Asili from our missions in Moyo and who in his 17 years of training in the Seminary had absorbed the Comboni spirit of dedication and of missionary zeal. Their Mother House is in Lira where Msgr Asili was Bishop since 1968. He founded the Institute in 1972 as a bouquet to Our Lady. He had a deep devotion to Our Lady because through her intercession he succeeded in reaching the priesthood in spite of many obstacles from his Superiors.

Unlike the other local Institutes, Bishop Asili started immediately recruiting members from different corners of Uganda. He had many followers, though not always of good calibre. These gave rise to some internal and external difficulties. He died in 1988. The Sisters number now about two hundred and they work in Uganda, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania. They have many excellent elements.

12. THE LITTLE BROTHERS OF THE GOSPEL (LES PETITS FRERES DE L'EVANGILE, LOMÉ)

The “Little Brothers of the Gospel” is the name of the Institute born of the fusion of two Institutes: “The Brothers of St. John the Baptist” started in 1968 by Msgr Dossey Ampron, by then Archbishop of Lomé (Togo) and the “Disciples of Jesus” started in 1971 by our Father Francesco Grotto. In 1974, by common accord of the two founders, the two Institutes were joined together in the present one under the direct responsibility of the Brothers of Christian Instruction of PLOERMEL.

Their main aims were:

- to catechize in all forms the faithful for the reception of sacraments and the celebration of the Liturgy,
- to promote the laity and its associations and movements,
- to foster Catholic instruction and education.

At the moment the Brothers number about 20, they are meeting some internal difficulties, that hopefully will soon be overcome.

13. “HANDMAIDS OF THE CHURCH”

The Congregation was founded by Bishop A. Gasparini, MCCJ, Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate of Awasa in Sidamo, Ethiopia.

He entrusted the formation of the members to the Comboni Missionary Sisters.

It started very slowly with a group of young girls who were helped, first of all, to reach a level of formal education necessary for a proper Religious Formation Programme.

In 1989, the Novitiate started and the first 5 Sisters professed on the 15th August, 1992.

Three Comboni Sisters are assigned to care for this Congregation and the one responsible now is Sr. Neghesti Tecchie.

14. THE SECULAR INSTITUTE OF COMBONI MISSIONARIES (WOMEN)

Fr E. Ramponi (+ 1982) in 1950 was following different groups of lay helpers for missionary animation and promotion. Together with him, a group of them conceived the project of organizing themselves in a group called “Comboni Auxiliaries” of secular Comboni Missionaries.

The decree of canonical erection was granted on the 8th September 1968 and it was celebrated in January 1969 by the Bishop of Rimini (Italy).

In 1971 the name was changed to that of the “Secular Institute of Comboni Missionaries”: this gives a clearer juridical aspect to the Institute. In this way it is no more a group of helpers of the missionary, but a proper independent missionary Institute which aims at “the cooperation in the missionary Apostolate, according to the spirituality of Daniel Comboni, Apostle of Africa”. Since they are not bound by community life, the first and essential task of each member is the missionary animation of people and places where they live and work.

However the Institute offers the possibility to those members who opt for it, to go to missionary territories after a specific preparation. At the moment they have 7 members in Brazil and 2 in Ecuador. Altogether they number about 150.

15. LAY HELPERS SOCIETY

The Society is not a secular Institute: it is only a lay Association whose members make a promise of faithfulness to the aim and rules of the Association. The promise is made after two years of spiritual and particular formation in the Apostolate at the service of the Diocese or Parish. The Society was started by Fr Antonio Lasalandra in 1970 at Maracha, Arua Diocese.

16. MOVEMENT OF LITTLE BROTHERS OF MARY (PEQUEÑOS HERMANOS DE MARIA)

The movement was started in 1971 by Fr Antonio Piacentini. He had a strong experience of the Holy Spirit urging him to make the Gospel known. Then he thought that alone he could not satisfy the urge and the richness of the Gospel but only by sharing with as many faithful as possible.

Naturally the evangelizer must first live in him/herself the demands of the Gospel and witness to Christ in deeds and words. The nature of the movement is described in the Decree of Approval by the Pontifical Council of the Laity which acknowledged the “Movement of the Little Brothers of Mary” as an international private association of faithful Christians of Pontifical Right, which enjoys juridical personality according to Canons 298-311, 321-329 of the Code of Canon Law. In the same decree the Constitutions are approved *ad experimentum* for a period of three years. The date of the decree is 2nd July 1991. The movement spread in Mexico, in the Philippines and in other 16 countries of the world, and now some has 16,000 members.

The basis for the approval is:

- the approval of the Ordinary of La Paz Prefecture in 1974;
- the recommendation of the Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries;
- the praises of many diocesan ordinaries.
- the conformity of the Constitution to the doctrine and the Laws of the Church;
- the evangelical style of life based on the spirituality of Fr Charles de Foucauld and Fr René Voillaume;
- the clear missionary inspiration and its activities.

17. DIOCESAN MISSIONARIES OF THE SACRED HEART (WOMEN)

The institution was started as a pious association by Mgr. E. Bartolucci and Sr Cecilia Davila, a former member of the Order of Visitation. It was approved by the Vicar Apostolic of Esmeraldas and his Presbyteral Council on the 9 June 1983.

At the beginning the aspirants were mainly young women who had not been accepted in different Institutes because of lack of formal education. The aim of the Institute is to give proper service to the dioceses according to different needs. At present in 1996 the professed sisters are eight, the novices two, the postulants seven, and the aspirants two.

The sisters are in charge: of the Retreat Centre of Holy Cross, of the Renewal Centre of Our Lady of Hope for girls, of Nazareth School for up-country girls who stay in town, of the Diocesan Procure in Quito, of catechesis in various parishes. The Superior General is the same co-Foundress, Sr Cecilia Davila.

18. MISSIONARY PROJECT "MARY STAR OF THE SEA"

When in charge of a large slum, called Guasmo in Guayaquil in Ecuador, the then Father O. Spagnolo became soon aware of the moral, legal and spiritual chaos of the inhabitants. He planned to establish missionary communities to live among such poor and abandoned people. Thus in 1991 he launched his project. He had a very good response and started his project to be realized in four branches:

- an Institution for Priests intended to become "The Society of Apostolic Life Ad Gentes Maria Estrella del Mar". At present there is a house of formation with four priests, three deacons, twenty students of theology and eight of philosophy. The Institute was approved by the Ordinary of Medellin on 30 January 1995.
- a Missionary Congregation of Religious Women, "Maria Estrella del Mar". It was approved on 1 May 1995 by the Ordinary of Ibarra. At present the professed Sisters are nine, the Novices eighteen, the Postulants twelve.
- a Priestly Fraternity counting twenty members at the moment.
- a Lay Fraternity counting forty at the moment.

The Fraternities "Maria Estrella del Mar" have as their aim to support the members of the two institutes by prayers and various kind of activities. The Episcopal Conference of Ecuador has encouraged Mgr. O. Spagnolo, now Auxiliary Bishop of Guayaquil, to continue in his project and they promised to help him by encouraging good vocations.

IV. INCULTURATION

1. TO KNOW AND SPEAK THE LANGUAGE

The first element for a genuine Inculturation is to know and speak the language. It is an illusion to think that one can penetrate into the culture of people without a substantial knowledge of at least one language, (vernacular) the one spoken in the homes and in the villages. Our missionaries took as their first task to study local languages. In our first missions, Uganda and Sudan, this has not been an easy task as there were many languages: some have a common root like the Bantu and Lwo languages, others are quite different from the two and among themselves.

Eminent confreres in this field were the following:

FR PASQUALE CRAZZOLARA (1884-1976) - LINGUIST AND ETHNOLOGIST

He was one of the first missionaries to arrive in Uganda at Omach in 1910. He started immediately to learn Acholi and when he was transferred to Southern Sudan he learned the Nuer language.

He attended courses of phonetics and anthropology at the University of Vienna and London. He published an Acholi grammar and dictionary and a Lugbara (Madi) one, with scientific phonetic signs and accents: they are both classic works. He also wrote two volumes on Lwo migrations, the first of their kind. He was awarded the Medal of the Royal Society of London, the M.B.E (Member of British Empire) and the nomination to Commendatore of the Italian Republic.

When Fr Crazzolaro was sixty he started a particular study of a small tribe of Arua Diocese, the Okebo. In his eighties he started writing a Ngakarimojong grammar, but unfortunately he did not have the time to complete it. It is hoped that Fr B. Novelli and Fr M. Mantovani will do so.

The basis of Fr Crazzolaro's life and studies was the missionary ideal: to make God known to the Africans. This is the synthesis of his life up to the end. A man of distinct intelligence, he was very keen to teach and explain the catechism to the illiterate catechumens and to the small children of primary school because he loved them: he felt their difficulties, their limitations, he

lived their problems and knew how to indicate possible solutions. Bishop Cesana, who lived with him, testifies in the obituary “we really loved him and looked at him with certain veneration”.

FR FILIBERTO GIORGETTI (1902-1978)

Fr Filiberto Giorgetti learned the language of the Azande drum “GUGU” (Bahr-el-Ghazal).

Fr “Ghero”, as was his nickname, was a musical genius: as far as I know, the best of our missionaries so far. He had the intelligence and the interest to study the Azande Drum, as the originality of African music is not the melody, nor the harmony but the rhythm given by the drum, the intervals and major/minor tones - messages are also transmitted by the drums, moreover different kinds of drum are used for different occasions and different performances. It was after the study of the drum that Fr ‘Ghero’ became supreme in Azande music.

If we keep in mind the role of the drum and of the songs in the modern African music, we can understand how Fr Ghero was a pioneer.

I take from the obituary of Fr Santandrea, his long life friend and colleague:

“For sometime, Giorgetti had become aware that our Latin language, as used in our worship and transplanted into Africa in its original form, did not appeal too much to the local population. What was wanted was their music, and, further, their dances, naturally with some restraint. And so ingenious songs were composed, which were learned immediately and sung full volume by the whole assembly. Then came the para-liturgical dances like nativity scenes and the Via Crucis. Finally, also entertainment, which aroused irresistible appeal and drew large crowds: little Zande dances, always self-contained, which excited enthusiasm of Blacks and Whites alike. The whites wanted more compositions even as far as Juba, the capital of the Province.

We must not forget that music became, thanks to Ghero, a very important factor in religious formation. His songs, with refrains in perfect Azande language, expressing praise to God, to Christ, to the Virgin, or fundamental truths of our faith accompanied Zande melodies, passed from mouth to mouth, to the instruction and edification of the people. Not only Catholics sang them, but also Protestants and pagans. It was not infrequent to hear them sung in profane dances, often substituting indecent texts. They became a patrimony of the Azande, who found in them their language and their true music. Not a few of those songs took the inspiration from Zande singers, a motif caught here and there by the always attentive Ghero”.⁴³

“As an ethnologist, Fr Giorgetti is known internationally for his deep knowledge of the Azande. Three of his books can testify to this. *“La Superstizione Zande”* (*The Zande superstition*): the title is not very proper in as much as the book contains an amount of material which exceeds the title. “Death among the Azande of the Sudan” a book in English which had a better fortune than the first. “Non siamo cannibali” (“We are not cannibals”), his last work full of anthropological and historical interest, which he was preparing in English in the last days of his life.

The three books together constitute a significant monument to the culture of the Azande people.

Besides various articles published in NIGRIZIA, three articles appeared in magazines of the international repute, such as AFRICA and THE ANNALI LATERANENSI”.⁴⁴

FR STEFANO SANTANDREA (1904-1990) - A LIVING ENCYCLOPEDIA

On the eighty sixth birthday of Fr Stefano Santandrea (February 16th 1990), the librarian of the Generalate, Fr Alessandro Trabucchi, prepared an exhibition of all his publications and a bibliography of all his writings. The show was visited by all the major superiors, confreres and scholastics and was certainly a long-overdue tribute.

Visitors were amazed at what that humble, quiet and simple Fr Santandrea had achieved: 150 books and booklets, all on very taxing ethnographic topics, without counting the innumerable articles in specialized magazines, most of them in English, with many translations. It is not easy to evaluate all that he produced.

He was held an authority on everything African and his opinion was sought and appreciated by international scholars.

This knowledge was deepened during the years that he was in charge of the library at the Generalate in Rome. To the admirers of his works he always gave the following answer:

“The whole thing isn’t worth much. I hope that Jesus Christ will take pity on me and out of my thirty years of work will give priority to my predilection for the old and abandoned people, for the lepers, particularly the years of Khor-Malang with Bro. Giosue, and when I was alone”.

⁴³ See Bulletin, No. 123, page 78

⁴⁴ See Bulletin, ib.

His work in the field of ethnology and linguistics is appreciated by the Africans themselves. One Luis Omodo, an old pupil of his, recently wrote in a booklet, 35 years after the Father left from Sudan:

- He taught us Christianity, as a way of life and encouraged us along the way of goodness, inspiring us development and progress.
- He saved our African culture with his research.
- He wrote many useful things for our welfare and growth.
- He was our pioneer and animator in every field.
- He will always be remembered in Bahr-el-Ghazal; he consumed himself for us, therefore he is ours, he is one of us.
- He was always faithful and exact in all his duties; may God reward him with eternal life.
- He waited on us with care, affection and serenity. May he continue to be our guardian and protector also from heaven.
- We are not weeping for him; we are invoking him as a father and protector of Bahr-el-Ghazal.
- And may the Lord Jesus be blessed for having sent him to us. Amen.⁴⁵

Other missionaries composed simple grammars and small dictionaries: Fr Maccagnan (1905-1978) in Lugbara, Fr A. Malandra in Acholi (1905-1973), Msgr A. Tarantino (1908-1990) in Lango, Fr Nebel (1888-1981) in Dinka, plus Didinga.

MSGR A. GASPARINI

Former Vicar Apostolic of Amore, Ethiopia must be mentioned here because of his great interest in the study of local languages. This he did in order to facilitate the knowledge and understanding of the mentality and culture of the people. He also learned Russian in order to understand the liturgies of those people. He learned English, French, German and made use of them in his letters to benefactors; modern Greek and Hebrew helped him to deepen his understanding of the Bible. He started learning Arabic in senior three, this enabled him to learn by heart the verses of the Koran that he studied in three different commentaries. With such linguistic preparation he learned, though with great efforts, the Ge-ez that is the most ancient Ethiopian idiom. Amharic and the language of Tigray too found form in his extra-ordinary memory. In 1960 he wrote the history of Ethiopia in Amharic.

The following writings can testify his contribution to inculturation:

- Grammar of Sidamo language, Awasa 1978 (cs)
- Gujj Grammar, Awasa (cs)
- Sidamo English Dictionary, page 362, EMI, Bologna.
- Practical Grammar of the Gede'o language with exercises. Part one, Awasa 1985 (cs)
- Gede'o Grammar: Part two; Proverbs, Pages from the Gospel, Folk-tales, Awasa 1985 (cs)
- Gede'o Grammar, LINT, Trieste University, Trieste 1994, CS, ciclostyled.

2. TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

Besides Fathers Crazzolaro, Giorgetti, Santandrea, many other missionaries wrote on traditions and customs: Fr Zambonardi, Fr Molinaro, Fr Pedrana about Ugandan and Sudanese tribes. As for books: Msgr A. Negri (+1949) and Fr Pellegrini (+1988), Fr Zanoner is still alive and active in further research at the age of 79, for the Acholi of Northern Uganda.

3. PROVERBS

To penetrate the minds and the hearts of human persons and to live and to work with them it is not enough to know the language and customs; it is also necessary to know and identify those values which commonly-speaking claim a priority in life and in their societies.

For instance, Westerners give priority to values such as efficiency and the importance of time; for people in the Third World the priority is more in personal relationships and the events of everyday life. Westerners tend to be more individualistic in their outlook while those in the Third World tend more to sharing and living within the community.

They are different styles of life; both of them are good provided they do not become exclusive. Those African values which are important are mainly contained in proverbs. We read the proverbs of the Bible: we have to know the proverbs of the peoples where we live. Africans in particular live out of their proverbs. In this field our Fathers have excelled: Fr Pellegrini collected 500 Acholi proverbs but these are not yet published, Fr A. Dalfovo collected 904 Lugbara (North Uganda) proverbs while Fr M. Cisternino collected 2719 of Kigezi and Ankole (Western Uganda). These are a very rich contribution to African culture.

⁴⁵ See Bulletin No. 170 pages 34-53

Chapter Seven

FROM 1919 TO 1931

A. THIRD GENERAL CHAPTER (VERONA, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 1919)

1. THE MEMBERS OF THE CHAPTER were 22. The Congregation then numbered 150.

2. THE ELECTIONS gave these results: Fr Paolo Meroni, Superior General; Fr Antonio Vignato; Fr Federico Vianello; Fr Franz Heymans - (+1948, aged 83); Jacob Lehr (+1966, aged 89).

FR PAOLO MERONI

Born in Milan (Northern Italy) in 1873, he joined the Archdiocesan Seminary of Milan where he excelled for his intelligence and love for Philosophy and Moral Theology. In 1896 he joined the Institute. After the death of Bishop Roveggio, Fr Meroni was nominated Religious Superior of the Vicariate, as the Ecclesiastical and Religious authorities were divided: he was only 29 years old. After a shipwreck during the First World War in the Mediterranean Sea while returning to Khartoum, he had to stay in Italy. He was Superior General for 12 years. He was the mind behind the separation of the Austrian/German members; he multiplied the Junior Seminaries; he initiated the Congregation Bulletin in 1927; he prepared the norms for the missionaries in the field. He wrote 11 Circular letters where he emphasised the necessity for intense spiritual life as a means of apostolate, for brotherly charity, for a sense of belonging to the Institute, and the observance of the Rules. We owe to him the official acknowledgement of Comboni as our Founder and as a model for all members of the Institute. In the first number of the Bulletin in 1927 he suggested that "excerpts of the letters of our great and holy Founder could be published therein". In 1928 (Circ. letter N.2, 19.3.28) he announced the introduction of the process of Beatification of Comboni as "Our First Founder", "Model of Heroic Virtues mainly of those which are the foundation of religious and apostolic life". Fr Meroni died in Verona in 1939. He fostered in a particular way the professional formation of the Brothers.

3. PARTICULAR PROBLEMS OF THE CHAPTER

- For the first time commissions were established for the discussions of some problems brought to the Chapter.
- The years of service of the Superior General and his Assistants were reduced from 10 to 6.
- The houses in German speaking territories were to form a province of their own.

4. CATHOLICS IN OUR MISSIONS: December 1923

Khartoum	2,277
Bahr-el-Ghazal	928
Equatorial Nile	6,668 (in 1919: 2,048)
Total	9,873

B. FOURTH GENERAL CHAPTER (VERONA, 1925)

1. MEMBERS OF THE CHAPTER: 18

2. ELECTIONS: Fr P. Meroni (+1939, aged 66); Fr F. Vianello; Fr Francesco Saverio Bini (later Vicar Apostolic of Khartoum from 1930; + 1953); Fr Pietro Audisio (+1943); Fr Domenico Francesconi (+ 1933).

3. PARTICULAR PROBLEMS: the problem of formation is felt as urgent especially for Brothers; the Congregation should commit itself for a secondary school in Khartoum; the problem of relations between Religious and Ecclesiastical authorities should be tackled.

C. MAJOR EVENTS FROM 1919 TO 1931

I. SEPARATION BETWEEN ITALIAN AND AUSTRIAN-GERMAN CONFRERES

From the time of Bishop Comboni's death some facts can be highlighted that some may interpret as roots of the division. But we cannot say that such events, particularly those external to the Institute (Congregation), have led to the full division. In fact nobody at the grass-roots, neither Italian nor Austrian-German missionaries wanted it.

Fr P. Crazzolaro, by then an Austrian citizen, when he was student in Brixen - Milland wrote in his journal: "In Brixen we had external professors both clerics and laymen. From time to time we heard the suggestion from them that we of Milland ought to separate from the Italians. I never heard anyone reacting in a positive way to such an idea". (Crazzolaro by Fr Cistermino: research paper).

Here are some facts, in a chronological order.

1. FR JOHANNES DICHTL (BORN 1857 - BURIED IN AUSTRIA 1889)

Member of the Comboni Institute and very close to Comboni, assisted him in the last hours of his life. Fr Dichtl was convinced that the difficulties met by the Institute in those years were due to the fact that its Headquarters were in Verona. He also had in mind that sometimes, mainly in times of suffering caused by people in Verona, among them Cardinal Canossa, Comboni had expressed the desire to have a house outside Verona: for this reason Comboni had willingly accepted the offer of a house in Sestri, Western Italy.

Fr Dichtl remarked also that due to the occupation of Verona by the Austrian Empire up to 1866 some anti-Austrian feelings were still present there.

As a consequence Fr Dichtl came to the decision that the Comboni Institute would be very much improved if it were transformed into an Austrian Institute for foreign missions with Headquarters in Austrian territory.

On the 26th June 1884, he presented his plan to the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph who welcomed the idea and promised to help in all possible ways. The same attitude was shown to him by the Archbishop of Vienna.

Fr Dichtl presented his plan on his own initiative without previous consultation with Card. Canossa, Msgr Sogaro, Fr Sembianti, Superior of the Institute in Verona. He only informed Card. Simeoni, Prefect of Propaganda Fide.

2. INTERFERENCE OF THE AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT

The proposal of Fr Dichtl had no repercussion from the confreres, yet the Catholic Austrian environment was affected as we have previously described. The Government started claiming its rights over the "Austrian" mission: the Austrian Bishops were willing to start a missionary seminary. This claim had some influence in the foundation of Brixen (1896).

3. DIFFERENT TRAINING

We cannot deny that the different places and houses of training had an influence in the mutual relations of the different nationalities in the mission territories. The spiritual training given in Verona in those years could not avoid the influence of a rather narrow-minded mentality pervading the religious atmosphere of Verona, a narrow-mindedness already felt and denounced by Bishop Comboni. On the other side the environment of the great Austrian Empire was able to create a deeper sense of belonging but also a more nationalistic tendency.

4. THE CHANGE OF THE INSTITUTE INTO A RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION

In Cairo the majority of the missionaries were German/Austrian. They did not receive timely information about the change, and the choice given to everybody to join the new structures was not availed to them. They resented it and did not accept the new style of life and the total dependence of the missionaries on the religious (Jesuits) Superiors in Verona. The attitude of Bishop Sogaro and new support of Austrian aspirations, as we have previously seen, aggravated the ill feelings.

The appointment of Bishop A. Roveggio and the entrusting of the Vicariate to the Sons of the Sacred Heart was not well accepted by the non-religious in Cairo where the majority were Austrian/German. However, the kindness of Bishop Roveggio and the following appointment of Bishop F. X. Geyer (1903) smoothed away the adverse feelings.

5. INTERNAL AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT?

On the occasion of the opening of Uganda, Bishop Geyer wanted the new mission to be entrusted to non-Italians, to personnel chosen among missionaries trained by him in Brixen. The main reason was to give to the Austrian/German confreres who were mainly in Northern Sudan a chance of harvesting some satisfaction among the well-disposed and welcoming black population. Moreover, the Vicar Apostolic had noticed the existing discrepancies and perhaps discrimination in the mixed communities on both sides. If Fr Vianello would have agreed, the Bishop would

have been satisfied, but he did not and insisted on mixed communities under the trusted leadership of his former novice, Fr Albino Colombaroli.

On the occasion of the division of Khartoum and Bahr-el-Ghazal, Bishop Geyer insisted again on the above plan, as that of Fr Vianello, according to him, was a flop. Because of his insistence, on 2nd of April 1913 an agreement was signed by Msgr Geyer and Fr Vianello. The basic statement was as follows: "The Vicariate of Northern Sudan will be staffed by German speaking missionaries, while the Vicariate of Southern Sudan, will be staffed by Italian speaking missionaries. The Superior General however has authority over all members of the Institute, according to the Constitutions".

In force of his authority Fr Vianello continued his policy of mixed communities even in Uganda, where, however, the majority were Italians, though some missionaries like Fr Crazzolaro of Italian origin were Austrian citizens. Bishop Geyer however continued supporting the separation of the two ethnic groups on the basis of full equality, in spite of their numerical imbalance. He then decided to open a new field in Cameroon which still belonged to his Vicariate. The choice of Cameroon-Chad which was under German influence was justified by the fact that such an opening could give the Institute the right to open a house of formation in Germany. Thus the Institute could have more missionaries to satisfy the needs of Cameroon and Uganda as well. However, for the personnel of those years, such a commitment was beyond the capacity of the Institute. Bishop Geyer wanted equal "share" among the two ethnic groups; that is two Vicariates: to the German speaking Khartoum and Cameroon, and to the Italians two: Southern Sudan and Uganda. He had another reason against mixed nationalities in Uganda: as the personnel was limited, Germans appointed to Uganda would impoverish Cameroon.

Other germs of division could be spotted in the fact that in the Institute at the time there were virtually only two ethnic groups, of different characters and mentalities. Then the nationalisms of the time should not be overlooked. Let us remember that Austria had dominated in Trent up to 1918.

Add to this the tendency of easy generalisations "ex uno disce omnes" (That is: "one may judge all by the behaviour of one").

6. APOSTOLIC METHODOLOGY

The Austrian/Germans in general were stressing socio-human promotion, delaying the teaching of Catechism until a certain degree of purely human promotion was achieved, while the Italians in general were for integral promotion and development of man without delay. Bishop Geyer accepted this.

7. THE CHAPTER OF 1919

Following a request of Fr Wilfling and having considered the question, the Chapter decided to erect a province in the Canonical sense of the word comprising the houses in the Austrian-German territory with its own structures and its own field of mission, in favour of the Austrian/German confreres.

(Notice: since the Peace Treaty of Versailles of 1919, German missionaries could no longer return to Khartoum, Bishop Geyer included. Some of them expressed the desire to have a field of apostolate in South America, where many Germans had emigrated).

Fr Meroni began the consultations and approached Bishop Geyer (already retired) hoping that he might accept to be the Provincial, but the Bishop declined. It was quite understandable.

Later on Fr Meroni had second thoughts and did not wait to refer himself to the next Chapter as he should have done. Moreover since Fr Lehr was member of the Consulta, Fr Meroni did not call the meeting for one year (the whole of 1922) previous to the decision for the separation. He was consulting the two assistants in Verona, Frs Vianello and Vignato. He abandoned the question of the Province and proposed the fusion or the separation as radical solutions.

Fr Meroni rejected the Province because, according to him, the Austrian/Germans were too easy-going in accepting candidates in order to balance the Italians; and the province would thus slip from his hands. He had the impression, based on facts, that German/Austrian confreres had their own secrets hidden from the Superior General. He also considered the juridical imbalance of a province on one side and all the rest under the direct responsibility of the General Council.

He proposed the fusion, with only one novitiate at Venegono by closing down Brixen. But the Austrian/Germans refused. Separation was at the door and thus happened. Propaganda Fide sent its envoy for an extensive enquiry and regretfully allowed the separation. At this stage, Bishop Geyer, asked for his opinion by the Holy See, agreed to the separation. Due to the fact of the choice left to the members, some of the Austrian/German remained with the FSCJ, from this time called "I Veronesi". At the moment of separation these numbered 148, while MFSC were 54.

The juridical separation, on the side of the Holy See, took place on November 27, 1922. The erection of the new Congregation Missionari Filii Sacri Cordis (MFSC) took place on July 7, 1923. The financial convention for the division of goods took place on July 26, 1923 (especially of the properties in Cairo).

As a conclusion may be of interest to read some extracts of the journal of Fr P. Crazzolaro, already quoted.

The majority of German-speaking members were in an Alien Internment Camp in Egypt for four years. The idea of separation was never suggested by anybody; and if it had, the “informant” among them, who had reported some other unfavourable matters to the Superior General, would certainly not have kept silent.

As a rule the German speaking Fathers wanted a separate province, not a division, which later was forced on them by the hostile sentiment expressed against them. As a matter of fact, Fr Meroni had to refuse to accept German personnel who requested to stay with the FSCJ, otherwise very few would have remained with the Germans. It was an obsession of Fr Meroni and Co. Fathers said repeatedly: “Verona has welcomed us through the door and thrown us out of the window”!

II. DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE

1. Revision of the Constitutions (1924) and of the General Directory (1928) according to the Canon Law of 1917 and introduction of the cause of Beatification of Comboni (1927).

2. New houses of formation: Fr Meroni increased the number of these institutions for the future development of the mission. The following Junior Seminaries were opened:

Thiene (1919) for candidates to brotherhood, dedicated to St. Joseph, Ellwangen/St. Joseph Stall (1925), Bad Margentheim (1920)**, Trento (1926)* Venegono (16.7.1921), novitiate; dedicated to the Holy Family; Sulmona** (30.4.1927), Troia* (1927), Riccione** (1928), Carraia ** (1931) transformed into “Liceo Comboniano” in 1958 and Padova (1931)* dedicated to St. Joseph 46.

III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MISSIONS

1. In 1922 Bishop Geyer retired and Bishop Tranquillo Silvestri (1877-199) (former missionary in Bahr-el-Ghazal) was appointed to the Vicariate of Khartoum. Bishop Geyer later on started the Society of the Holy Angels for the assistance of the German citizens abroad. He died in Germany on 2nd April 1943.

2. In 1923 a new Prefecture Apostolic was erected with its centre in Gulu, called Equatorial Nile; it comprised Northern Uganda and Bahr-el-Gebel in Southern Sudan: Msgr A. Vignato is its Prefect. It was to become a Vicariate Apostolic in 1934, with Bishop A. Negri; and a Diocese in 1953 with Bishop G.B. Cesana.

3. From the above jurisdiction a Prefecture of Bahr el Gebel was detached in 1927, with Msgr Zambonardi as Prefect; it became Vicariate in 1951 with Bishop Mazzoldi and Archdiocese in 1975, entrusted to the local clergy: the first Archbishop was Ireneo Dud who was already Bishop of Rumbek Diocese.

4. Following the creation by the government of the Northern Province in Uganda, Lango and Karamoja Districts were entrusted to the Vicariate of Equatorial Nile with the headquarters in Gulu near the new centre of civil administration. The mission of Lira (Lango) was started in 1930 by Fr Casari and Bro. Chiavegato. In Karamoja, Kangole was started in 1933 by Fr Molinaro, Bro. Lorandi; Fr Moizi joined them later on.

5. In 1930 Bishop T. Silvestri retires and Bishop F.X. Bini is appointed Vicar Apostolic of Khartoum.

6. A Directory for the missions was published in 1931 (Bull. N. 5, page 114.) being more structural than pastoral in character.

Other norms are issued by the General Council to help the missionaries and encourage charity, the preparation of the personnel and the upkeep of the vow of poverty. Norms are also given for those leaving for the missions (Circular 17).

⁴⁶ Those houses with one * have changed their function, two ** have been sold

Chapter Eight

OUTLINES OF THE HISTORY OF THE “MISSIONARII FILII SACRI CORDIS” (M.F.S.C) FROM 1923 TO 1979.

NB. In giving the outlines of the history of the Institute I have chosen the method of “periods” though sometimes also of problems. The periods are limited by the dates of the chapters. Since after separation our confreres MFSC had different dates for their chapters, so, I thought it opportune to give the outlines of their history in one go until the REUNION (1979). I have taken the material from the report which Fr Klose, by then Superior General, gave to the chapter of 1979.

A. SITUATION AT THE MOMENT OF SEPARATION.

1. DECREE OF ERECTION ON 27TH JULY 1923

With a Decree of *Propaganda Fide* dated 27th July 1923 the “Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” was erected as an independent Congregation, to which the Apostolic Prefecture of Lydenburg (Transvaal) South Africa was entrusted.

Through another Decree of *Propaganda* dated 27th July 1923, Father Jacob Lehr was nominated first Superior General of the new Congregation. The first two general Assistants, nominated by the SCEP, were Frs. Alois Mohn and Alois Wilfling.

2. STATE OF THE PERSONNEL AT THE MOMENT OF SEPARATION 27TH JULY 1923

Fathers 26: 15 in Europe, 11 in the mission
Professed Brothers 22: 14 in Europe, 8 in the mission
Student novices: 7
Student postulants: 0
Brother novices: 8
Aspirant Brothers: 1
Seminarians: 36: 15 in Brixen and 21 in Josefstal
Candidate Brother 9 at Josefstal.

3. HOUSES EXISTING IN EUROPE AT THE MOMENT OF DIVISION

House of Milland near Brixen, since 1899.
House of Messendorf near Graz, since 1909.
House of Josefstal near Schrezheim, since 1920.

The missionary magazines “STERN DER NEGER” and “WERK DER ERLOSERS” (Work of the Redeemer) had been introduced in German-speaking places already before the separation. Stern was begun in 1898 and ceased 1966, when the first issue of “KONTINENTE” appeared as a magazine common to the missionary Institutes.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONGREGATION

Despite being few and sad, our confreres did not lose heart. On the contrary, already before the official decree of erection, they had ensured the new field of work in South Africa, according to a basic Comboni choice. To Comboni they always remained faithful. And it was thanks to the conscience of the Founder’s memory in both Institutes that the re-union of 1979 became possible.

Even after the Nazi regime, which inflicted serious losses both in houses and in personnel, the Institute recovered with a great vitality.

In fact as regards to personnel:

- in 1939 the congregation had 213 professed members of which: 73 fathers, 96 brothers, 44 scholastics;
- in 1946 it had 166 professed members of which: 74 fathers, 50 brothers, 22 scholastics.

I. DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE

1. LIST OF THE GENERAL SUPERIORS MFSC

Fr Jacob Lehr 1923-1932 at Josefstal/Ellwangen,
Fr Joseph Musar 1932-1938 at Josefstal/Ellwangen,
Fr Johann Deisenbeck 1938-1955 at Mellatz,
Fr Richard Lechner 1955-1967 at Josefstal/Ellwangen,
Fr Guenther Brosig 1967-1973 at Josefstal/Ellwangen,
Fr Georg Klose 1973-1979 at Mellatz - Poecking from '76.

2. LIST OF GENERAL CHAPTERS AND DATES AND MEMBERS

1. Josefinum/Schrezheim	07.06-12.06 1926	with 8	Chapter members
2. Josefstal	01.09-08.09 1932	with 11	
3. Milland/Brixen	01.09-06.09 1938	with 12	
4. Josefstal	03.08-09.09 1949	with 11	
5. Josefstal	09.08-19.08 1955	with 15	
6. Mellatz	25.07-03.08 1961	with 15	
7. Mellatz	01.08-30.09 1967	with 16	
8. Mellatz	03.07-05.09 1973	with 21	
9. Mellatz (Spec. Chapter)	11.08-02.09 1975	with 18	

3. MINOR SEMINARIES

The first minor seminary was opened in Graz (1924); it was abandoned in 1931 and the seminarians were transferred to Unterprenstatten, an old castle which was bought in that year. The boys were 90 in number. The Nazi regime interrupted its operation, but it resumed in 1947 up to 1982.

In the year 1924 a house was opened at Bad Mergentheim in the diocese of Rottenburg: opened in 1928 as a seminary. It was closed by the Nazis in 1939, but in 1947 it resumed operation; it was closed down again in 1978.

St. Paul in Neumarkt was inaugurated in 1957 and is still functioning as a centre for missionary animation.

4. ELLWANGEN

Ellwangen deserves a special mention

- It was begun with acquiring an old house "Schleif hausle" in 1920. It was re-shaped and it was declared the Mother House in 1932; it was refurbished in 1977 and has been used for missionary animation since then.
- Josefstal, situated on the Hill called St. Joseph, near the Mother House, was built anew (sparing the old building) in March 1969 as a centre of formation for brothers; it was finished only in 1977.
- Josefinum was bought in 1925 as a minor seminary. Seized by the Nazis and used as a hospital in 1939, it was blown up by the SS in 1945. In 1952 it was re-opened on the eve of St. Joseph's feast. Since 1986 it is the provincial house.

5. POECKING

The general house was transferred here from near Munich in 1976.

6. NOVIATATE AND SCHOLASTICATE

The novitiate house and the scholasticate were together in Brixen already before the separation (since 1896). It was transferred to Bamberg in 1934: in 1938 the novices were 34, the novice master being Fr Ehl.

In 1959 the novitiate was transferred to Mellatz. Bamberg remained as a scholasticate up to 1974; in the meantime (school year 1971-1972) two theology students and two postulants were beginning theology at the "Canisianum" in Innsbruck, where today an international scholasticate is situated.

II. DEVELOPMENTS OUTSIDE EUROPE.

- In 1930 there was an attempt to establish the Congregation in the United States, but it did not succeed. It was tried again in 1956, when a parish was taken in the diocese of Nashville, Tennessee, with the intention of opening a house later on for the development of the Institute there; the experience was interrupted in 1962.
- Opening in Slovenia, Lubiana, in 1937 under the name of Knoblecker House, as a minor seminary; it was taken by the communist regime in 1948. It was again re-opened in 1968 and abandoned in 1973.
- In 1950 the congregation tried to open a house in Ireland, where however too many religious houses are present; hence nothing happened.
- The general Procure in Rome was opened in 1950, in Viale Vaticano. Up to this time the FSCJ procurator had been keeping contacts with the Holy See and the Church Authorities on behalf of the MFSC. Some students were sent to the Roman Universities. This house was closed after the re-union.
- In Spain for vocations. As part of the commitment to develop in Latin America, contacts in Spain were started since 1956. In 1960 the first house was opened in Saldana, the college or seminary of St. Francis Xavier, and in 1962 permission was granted to open a novitiate in Palencia: St. Peter Claver College.

III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MISSIONS.

1. IN SOUTH AFRICA.

a) LYDENBURG, first as a Prefecture, then as a Diocese:

As a result of some clauses of the treatise of Versailles, the German missionaries could no longer return to Khartoum Vicariate where Msgr Geyer was residing as Vicar Apostolic. On 12th June 1923 the Apostolic Prefecture of Lydenburg was erected. On 9th September 1948 it was elevated to Apostolic Vicariate and on 11th January 1951 it became a diocese. The Apostolic Prefects and Bishops were:

- Msgr Daniel Cauczor - 16th August 1923 - 9th July 1926
- Msgr Alois Mohn - 10th December 1926 - 10th October 1938
- Msgr Johann Riegler ordained Bishop - 30th June 1939 - 7th October 1955
- Msgr Anton Reiterer - 10th March 1956 - 1981.

With permission from the Holy See Bishop Riegler transferred his see to Witbank. At present the diocese is called "Witbank-Lydenburg" and has a local Bishop.

b) THE FIRST MISSIONARIES: On 13th February 1924 the first 14 missionaries entered South Africa. 9 of them were priests and 5 brothers. The missionaries developed a fruitful activity. The missionary methods answered the needs of the time. They erected various agricultural schools, intermediate and secondary schools. Two houses for medical assistance were opened at Glen Cowie and at Bongani. With some exceptions in the following years, almost every year one or two fathers left for South Africa. It was only between 1938 and 1948 that only one priest could be sent there.

c) MARIA TROST was the first missionary station opened in 1924; hence it is considered the mother station where most of the deceased confreres rest in the peace of Christ. It was the residence of the Regional Superior from the Sixties up to 1987.

d) NOVITIATE: In agreement with the Ordinary, the General Direction decided in 1965 to open a novitiate for candidates to priesthood in Luckau. The SCEP had given the permission on 14th March 1965. The first novice master was Fr P. Roth. The first South African was Fr Denis Bourhill. He professed in 1967 and died in 1980 at the age of 58.

e) Expansion in Pretoria diocese:

Up to 1969 we were present only in the diocese of Witbank-Lydenburg. It was felt necessary to own a house for the Congregation in the Capital. Thus a piece of land was bought in Silverton quarter of Pretoria; a Church was built, together with a parochial house, which was entrusted to our Fathers: the Church (St. Augustine) was consecrated on 7th December 1969. The house is used as a residence for travelling confreres.

2. IN PERU (1938)

In 1909, after two years' voyage, a group of Tyrolese and German people reached the territory of Huanuco where they settled and kept their own language. In 1937-38 an Austrian Tyrolese priest, Fr H. Rauser, approached our confreres of Brixen asking for help in terms of personnel. Father General J. Musar approached the SCEP and further motivated the request with other missionary reasons. From these contacts the new mission took origin.

a) The parish of Pozuzo in the virgin forest (diocese of Huanuco). With a letter of *Propaganda* dated 30th May 1938 to the MFSC Congregation another territory outside South Africa was entrusted to it, in the diocese of Huanuco, in Peru, South America. Three fathers left from Genoa on 19th August 1938 and in the middle of September reached Pozuzo parish in the untrodden forest. Up to these days Pozuzo parish is entrusted to the Comboni Missionaries. Pozuzo was the first missionary commitment in Latin America. From there our work expanded elsewhere in Huanuco, in the diocese of Lima, Tarma and Arequipa.

b) In the archdiocese of Lima, besides a parish taken in 1954, two other houses were opened: one in 1978 for missionary animation and a magazine, and another for a postulancy in 1979.

IV. POST- CONCILIAR RENEWAL

1. CHAPTER DOCUMENTS

This task was faced in the 1973 Chapter, which produced the “Chapter Documents”. These were submitted to the SCEP in October 1973 and approved “ad experimentum” by the same in April 1974. In his report to the Chapter of the re-union of 1979, Fr G. Klose, Superior General, noticed that these documents did not get the attention they deserved. One reason was that the 21 Chapter members, who should have contributed to the deepening of the documents, were not determined to work for their re-elaboration. Another reason was that in view of the re-union many thought the documents were provisional. After all, everyone's attention was riveted on the issue of the re-union and after 1975 the communities concentrated on the study of the project of the Constitutions for the re-united Institutes.

2. SOME IMPORTANT POINTS

Some points of spiritual nature were particularly studied and discussed after the Chapter:

a) About missionary renewal:

- The confreres remaining in the fatherland took on a greater commitment to stir missionary consciousness in the local church, both by working as missionary experts in the dioceses, and by preaching mission appeals.

- Many confreres left for the first time for the mission: from 1973 to 1979, 31 professed left for the mission: 13 priests, 12 brothers and 6 scholastics.

b) Fraternal charity was stressed, to which after all we are already committed by the very fact that we are Christians.

c) Simplicity in the communion of goods which, generally speaking, improved during the six-year term.

d) Responsibility of every confrere in vocation promotion, which ought to draw all our attention without giving in to discouragement.

3. INNOVATION IN ORGANISATION

- Institutions of secretariats:

- Secretariat for formation,
- Secretariat for mission work,
- Secretariat for finances and administration.

- Formative experiences for novices outside the novitiate house, both in one of our houses and in various pastoral fields.

- Council of Brothers: besides completing the process of perfect equality of rights between Fathers and Brothers, a consultative Council of Brothers was established within the General Direction; it had to meet at least once a year and also for appointment and transfer of brothers.

The Chapter Documents contain an entire section regarding the brothers, with quite clear directives for the preparation of brothers for the mission, with the priority commitment to dedicate themselves to the teaching of trades and jobs to the local people.

- Moreover, the documents insist on:

- the priority of missionary work;
- the necessity for rotation of personnel;
- on-going formation;
- specializations in view of the teaching in mission seminaries and of the pastoral work of missionaries;
- the deepening of Comboni's life and charism;
- vocational promotion, and so on.

Chapter Nine

FROM 1931 TO 1937

I. FIFTH GENERAL CHAPTER (VERONA, 3-10.9.1931)

1. THE MEMBERS OF THE CHAPTER were 19. The members of the Institute were 318: 5 prelates, 133 priests, 112 brothers, 68 scholastics.

2. ELECTIONS:

Fr Pietro Simoncelli (+1964, at 73).

Fr Angelo Negri who was to become Bishop as Vicar Apostolic of Equatorial Nile in 1935 (+1949); substituted by Fr Federici.

Fr Pietro Villa: who in 1937 became Prefect Apostolic of Gondar; in 1946 Auxiliary Bishop of Cardinal Tisserand for the Dioceses of Porto and S. Rufina (+1960).

Fr Rodolfo Orler (in 1933 made Bishop Vicar Apostolic of Bahr-el-Ghazal; +1946); substituted by Fr A. Capovilla;

Fr G. Bombieri (+1964), Novice Master for 10 years.

FR SIMONCELLI

Fr Simoncelli was born in the Province of Verona in 1891; and died in Verona in 1964. He had his missionary experience in Uganda in the territory of what is today Arua Diocese, from 1915 to 1931. He attended the Chapter as Religious Superior. He was the first Superior General to visit the missions mainly during the winter time in Italy. Missionaries were very happy about his visits as a man of pastoral experience, so different from the previous Superior Generals. He ordered better food, better care during the safaris and better houses in the missions. A man of few words: he wrote only one brief circular letter. He had a sound spiritual life. After his term of office, he went back to Uganda, to what is today Arua Diocese.

3. PARTICULAR PROBLEMS AT THE CHAPTER

The Chapter recalled a number of rules and pieces of advice on the virtue and vow of poverty in a special way, at the same time it recommended the care of the missionaries' health avoiding exaggeration in missionary activities. Special recommendations were: to read and re-read the precious circular letters of the Superior Generals; to send articles and photos to the NIGRIZIA magazine. A recommendation was given to the Superior General to visit all the communities in the missions.

II. DEVELOPMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE

1. DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE

- In Verona the Mother House was enlarged and the third floor was added.
- In Rome for various reasons the Church of Saints Vincent and Anastasius in Piazza Fontana Trevi, a central and famous place, was given back to the Diocesan Authorities. In purchasing a new house, the necessity of sending scholastics to attend the Roman Universities was taken into consideration. A house in Via S. Pancrazio was purchased, from where the University of URBANIANA is within a walking distance over the hill called Gianicolo. At present this house is used for the mission Secretariat and assistance to confreres travelling to and from abroad.
- In 1936 a small house was acquired in London near the University to make it easy for Fathers and BROTHERS to frequent specialised courses, mainly the Colonial Course, to equip missionaries of the necessary Diploma to teach in schools. (see Bulletin N. 14, pg. 425).

2. DEVELOPMENTS IN MISSION FIELDS

- In 1933, 10th January, a new Ecclesiastical Territory was separated from the Vicariate of Khartoum. It was called “Missio sui juris” (on its own) of KODOK. It included all stations among the Shilluk and Nuer tribes, along the White Nile. The Superior of the Mission was Fr Matteo Michelon, who had no other ecclesiastical title.
- In 1933 Bishop A. Stoppani retired from the Vicariate of Bahr-el-Ghazal and chose Venegono as his residence. He died there in 1940. Bishop R. Orler, an Assistant General was appointed to succeed Bishop Stoppani. Bishop Orler became very popular among the missionaries and the civil authorities. He died in Wau in 1946 of a heart attack at the young age of 53. He overworked himself in spite of the advice of a doctor.
- In 1934 the Prefecture Apostolic of the Equatorial Nile was raised to be Vicariate. Bishop A. Negri, up to now Vicar General of the Institute, was appointed Vicar Apostolic and was consecrated Bishop in Brescia on 1st May 1935.

Msgr Vignato retired to Cairo: his zeal and his missionary commitment had been appreciated by the White Fathers and Mill Hill Missionaries working in Uganda. During his retirement Msgr Vignato wrote two very interesting booklets.

- A collection of suggestions and points of doctrines for practical use of young priests (1936) or Missionary Methodology.
- A doctrinal collection on the Sacrament of Baptism for the Missionary of Africa (1936).

The two booklets must obviously be updated for our modern times, but they remain a very valuable contribution to the Methodology of Evangelisation, surely useful to every missionary. Fr Pierli, when Superior General, made a summary of it for common knowledge and recommended a reading and reflection about it. Fr Vittorino Cona published a summary in English.

IN ETHIOPIA

In 1936, Fr P. Simoncelli forwarded a petition to the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Churches to have a territory in Ethiopia. On the 10th August the Sacred Congregation granted a large territory centred in the historical town of Gondar, North of Addis Ababa. A group of missionaries led by Fr Rizzi reached their destination towards the end of the year. Msgr P. Villa, who had been called in 1935 to be an army Chaplain for the Italian troops based in Mogadishu, reached Gondar as Apostolic Prefect on 17th October 1937. About 10 missions were soon opened. Among the missionaries Fr Alfredo Delai, stationed at Socota, was murdered during the Liberation war(26.4.1941).

BROTHER GIOSUE DEI CAS (1880-1932)

Since this Brother died during this period it is fair enough to include his life in these outlines.

Brother Giosue was born in Piatta (Sondrio) on September 27, 1880. He entered the Institute on April 25, 1906. Due to a certain exterior roughness, he was not admitted by the Superiors to take the religious habit and to make his Profession. But considering his exceptional good moral qualities, the superiors kept him as an auxiliary, and, in 1907 they sent him to Africa among the Shilluk. When he went back to Italy he had the joy of making his Profession after one year of Novitiate, on November 1, 1921. Shortly afterwards he left again for the Shilluk mission. Around 1925 he was struck by leprosy, and in 1928 he went to the leper colony of Khormalan, near Wau, where he passed the last years of his life instructing the lepers. He died a saintly death in Wau on December 4, 1932, comforted by the Sacraments of the sick.

He leaves an outstanding example of abnegation and patience. Our Institute is considering starting the process for his beatification.

Chapter Ten

FROM 1937 TO 1947

A. HISTORICAL NOTES

This period is characterized by the Second World War which had four characteristics:

- “LIGHTNING WAR”, for the sudden and unexpected invasion of European nations by Germany and of some places in East Asia by Japan.
- “TOTAL WAR”, because no means were spared: genocide (Jews by Hitler), strategic bombing that destroyed whole cities, cynical aggressions and inhuman behavior of the aggressors. More than 40 million people were killed: about 19.5 million soldiers and nearly 20.5 million innocent civilians including adults and children which nobody could justify. Land, sea and air were fully utilized in order to destroy and to kill.
- “NUCLEAR WAR”, because the atomic bomb was invented and used by the USA. Atomic bombs can effectively destroy a large city by blast fire and radio-active fall-out, the fall-out remaining as a hazard to life within the immediate area of the explosion. The first cities to suffer from bombs were Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan: it is reckoned that the two bombs each killed 70,000 people: Japan had to surrender to USA.
- “IDEOLOGICAL WAR”: it is true that the hard conditions imposed on Germany after the First World War were too taxing for the Germans, but what made them go to war, was the ideology proposed by Hitler: to break the selfishness of England, France and USA, which after the First World War had practically shared the world and to submit “inferior” races, mainly slav populations to the “superior” race of Germany the best of the so called “Aryan people”.

Japan wanted to conquer and dominate East and South East Asia against the presence of the other three powers: France, England, USA. Italy joined Germany in June 1940, nine months after the beginning of the war, September 1939. The dictator Mussolini imposed the war on the unwilling Italian people and army. The rest of the world was against Germany, Japan, Italy, (AXIS). Italy pulled out of the war in September 1943. The war ended in Europe in 1945 with the defeat of Germany and the overall presence of the United States in Western Europe. It ended in Asia in 1946 with the surrender of Japan and the submission of all Eastern nations to Soviet Union.

The war affected our institutes and personnel:

- In Europe: with economic crisis, lack of basic goods and food, fear of bombardment - the MFSC was much affected because many of its members had to join the army and many died.
- In Africa: no new personnel, little communication, exile of missionaries, limitations to their movements as we’ll see later in the following pages.

Many Africans from the colonies had to join French or British armies and fight for them both in Africa and elsewhere, mainly in Asia.

B. THE SIXTH GENERAL CHAPTER (VERONA, SEPTEMBER 1937)⁴⁷

1. ELECTIONS

Members of the Chapter: 17

Members of the Institute 417: 5 prelates, 186 priests, 140 brothers, 80 scholastics.

Elected: Fr A. Vignato (+1954, aged 76); Fr Agostino Capovilla, Vicar General (+1975, aged 77); Fr Bombieri; Fr Mariani (+1979, aged 78); Fr Cesana, who in 1951 was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Gulu; in 1953 residential Bishop of Gulu; in 1969 retired; died 1991 in Verona.

⁴⁷ Bull. N. 15

FR VIGNATO

Fr A. Vignato was born in Gambellara (Vicenza), Northern Italy in 1878. His missionary vocation matured after a visit of Bishop A. Roveggio to the Seminary. He professed in 1900; 1903 was posted to Khartoum and in 1904 to Bahr el Ghazal; 1910 to Uganda; 1919 Vicar General of the Institute; 1923 Apostolic Prefect of Equatorial Nile with See in Gulu; 1934 retires; 1937 elected Capitular from Egypt.

Fr Vignato is the only Comboni missionary who up to now covered both Religious and Ecclesiastical top responsibilities. He worked tirelessly in both the apostolic and religious fields. As Superior General he introduced a new and simple style.

In his speech at the Chapter he underlined the following points:

- Animation: “My office will always be that of a father who will animate ever to go on, on the way of good, with courage, obedience and sacrifice”.
- Optimism: “My task will not be that of a reformer because if in the Congregation there are defects to be removed, many more are the good qualities”.
- He used to say: “We need to instruct ourselves better and to pray more; let us talk less...”
- He held a clear balance between religious life and missionary life: he could not understand how religious life could be an obstacle to missionary life and vice-versa.
- In his circular letters (14 of them) he resumes the topics of his predecessors (Charity, S. Heart, Vows, Prayer, Community life) trying to situate them in the missionary life.

In a particular manner in his first letter to the Institute (28.10.1937) he recalls our spirituality as the one given to us by the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a spirituality which demands great charity, zeal and sincere love among ourselves. This is the particular spirit of the Institute.

On his first visit to Rome he was encouraged by Cardinal Verde who was in charge of the process for the beatification of Bishop Daniel Comboni, to have hope for his beatification. He then wrote a circular letter asking all Sons of the Sacred Heart to pray for the process, to have great hope in the intercession of Comboni, “Our Founder” for their own spiritual life and for the life of apostolate, to study his life and virtues in order to imitate the great apostle who is Comboni, a spirituality to be inserted in our own spirituality. (Cfr. Circ. 21, nn. 13 & foll., Bull. N. 15).

He was convinced that all members should go to the mission field. After the War he sent 50 members to the missions.

2. PARTICULAR POINTS OF THE CHAPTER

- The Chapter asked to revise the Statute of the Missions of 1931, especially concerning relationships between Religious and Ecclesiastical authorities.
- It was requested that biographies of deceased confreres be written.
- In the missions, prayers after meals may be recited in the dining room itself, if it is not possible in the Church.
- All missions have to keep records of the main events for witnessing the great sufferings of the pioneers.
- No permission to smoke should be granted to those who are not yet used to it.
- The establishment of senior schools is vehemently encouraged and invitations to institutes of teaching Brothers to take over these schools are much welcome.

C. DEVELOPMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE FROM 1937 TO 1947

I. INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

OPENING OF NEW HOUSES IN ITALY

Junior Seminaries: Borgovico (Como) in 1938; later transferred to Rebbio* in 1941. Pesaro in 1940* (Central Italy), deriving from previous Junior Seminary of Riccione, in 1941. Crema (Northern Italy) in 1941.**

Novitiate: Since the separation with MFSC only one Novitiate was functioning in Italy. But the Novices being too numerous for one Master only, a new Novitiate was opened in Florence in 1940. To maintain the same method of formation, a group of novices who had done the first year in Venegono were asked to go and start the new Novitiate with Fr S. Patroni (+1966).

Bologna (1943)* On the occasion of a missionary exposition the Superiors realised the large sympathy of this town in Italy where the first University of the World was founded in the 13th Century. A house was opened with the intention of opening there a Philosophicum. But it proved too small. A group of confreres started there with courses to learn English. At the moment it is the Provincial house of the Italian province.

Indoor Theology. So far the scholastics in Verona were attending lessons at the Diocesan Seminary. Since the number of our students were regularly increasing, the Superiors were planning to have an indoor Theology. But the events of the Second World War in Northern Italy accelerated the change. The school years 1943-1945 were held in Rebbio (Como) with over 100 students and with nearly all the teachers from our Institute who had attended the Roman Universities.

A Missionary Catechetical Congress (2nd-4th September, 1944). It was the initiative of the scholastics to prepare themselves for the missionary task of catechising. Conferences were given on:

- The Child and the Supernatural World;
- The lesson of religion;
- The Methodology of Jesus; the audiovisuals; the Holy Scripture and the Catechesis; the Psychology of the African Child.

It was a very enlightening Congress which aroused the greatest satisfaction and enthusiasm of Fr Vignato.

II. TOWARDS INTERNATIONALITY

1. OPENING IN GREAT BRITAIN (1938)

It happened in 1938; it was done because of the increasing necessity of our missionaries to learn English and be acquainted with the English culture which was influencing all colonies. In those years our missionary field was mainly in English-speaking countries. Moreover the necessity of having English-speaking personnel was highly felt.

Before this time some fathers used to go to England as Chaplains in Colleges of Brothers in Southampton and Market Drayton. They studied English while they were there. Many of our fathers (Bini, Negri, Orler, Baroni, Todesco, Bano, Santadrea, etc.), followed courses of English in the above colleges. However a house of ours was wanted and with more facilities. Thus a property was sought in the surroundings of London; the search resulted in the purchase of Sunningdale. In the meantime, a house had been rented in London. During the War, Sunningdale was taken over by the Government for diplomatic use.

In 1940 the War became heavy. 11 fathers and 3 brothers were interned with other Italians on the Isle of Man. These events delayed considerably the work of vocational promotion in Great Britain.

2. OPENING IN THE UNITED STATES (1939)

The aim was threefold: vocational promotion, missionary work among the "Negroes", financial help.

Fr E. Mason was first sent to look for a place, which he found in the Diocese of Cincinnati, where Bishop McNicholas offered us the charge of the Parish of Holy Trinity and later on St. Henry, both of them among the American Negroes. While Fr Mason returned to Bahr el Ghazal, Frs A. Accorsi and D. Ferrara remained there to establish the Institute.

After the War (1946) Fr G. Rizzi was sent to USA to look for the possibilities of opening a Junior Seminary.

3. OPENING IN PORTUGAL (1946-47)

The aim was to prepare missionaries for the mission in Mozambique, a Portuguese Colony, and to start vocational promotion. Fr Cotta (1883-1976), a legendary pioneer, totally green in the Portuguese language, succeeded soon in opening a Junior Seminary in Viseu (North Portugal).

III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MISSIONS

1. OPENING IN MOZAMBIQUE (1947)

On his way to Rome to receive the red hat, Card. C.T. De Gouveia, Archbishop of Maputo (by then Lorenzo Marquez) stopped over in Khartoum; quite impressed by the work of our missionaries, he invited us, through the Secretariat of State in Rome, to work in the Diocese of Nampula (North Mozambique). Fr G. Zambonardi who was sent to survey, reported that two thirds of the population were followers of traditional religion, the large majority of the rest Muslims and very few Catholics. The offer was willingly accepted also because the Superiors were afraid that Italian Missionaries would no longer be able to enter British colonies, since Italy had been at war with Great Britain. It had happened with the German/Austrian Missionaries after the First World War, who could no longer go to Sudan.

The opening of Comboni College in Asmara by Fr A. Gasparini (1947): The standard of the College gave the Comboni Missionaries, well represented by Fr Gasparini, very high credit all over Ethiopia: his fame and experience made him quite welcome as Vicar Apostolic of Awasa, Sidarro, Ethiopia.

2. SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES IN SUDAN AND UGANDA

These difficulties were due to the fact that our mission fields were bordering Ethiopia (Kodok), or in nearby Bahr el Gebel, Uganda. Ethiopia was occupied by the Italian government and Italian missionaries operating in British colonies were looked at with suspicion.

Missio sui juris of Kodok

All our missionaries had to abandon all their missions and the numerous graves of Fathers, Brothers and Sisters. The territory was entrusted to the Society of St. Joseph (Mill Hill) of English foundation. The Decree of the Holy See is of the 4.8.1938.

Prefecture of Bahr el Gebel

The same fate of Kodok was due to fall also on this Prefecture. But through negotiations between the British Colonial Office and the Holy See only the leader of the Mission was changed. Msgr G. Zambonardi resigned and a non-Italian Missionary had to be appointed. The names of Fr Serafino Twrtkovic from Herzegovina and of Fr Stefano Mlakic from Bosnia were presented. But Fr Twrtkovic died in a motorcycle accident while travelling from Lira to Gulu in July 1938. So Msgr S. Mlakic was appointed on the 21st October 1938.

Forced Residence

All our missionaries in Northern Uganda were transferred to Southern Uganda during the first part of World War II. The Fathers and Brothers were taken to the Major Seminary of Katigondo, Masaka Diocese, the Comboni Sisters to two places: some to the Convent of a local Congregation, the Little Sisters of St. Francis, Nkokonjeru, Kampala Vicariate; some in a boarding school of girls in Nkozi, Rubaga Vicariate. Some White Fathers were sent to replace our missionaries from June 1940 to December 1941. The sisters had no replacement. This period was of great suffering for Bishop Negri because of the misunderstandings with Fr Hughes, a White Father who was responsible for the situation, but went too far in exercising it.

All missionaries in Bahr el Gebel were forced to stay in three missions only, for two years from September 1940 to August 1942.

3. WITHDRAWAL FROM ETHIOPIA

At the beginning of 1942 the English troops together with local "askaris" chased the Italian troops and entered the territory of Gondar. Msgr Villa and all other missionaries were deported to Saganaiti in Eritrea on February 15, 1942. A year later (August 1943) Msgr Villa with few others re-entered Italy. Msgr Villa was then employed by the Sacred Congregation for Oriental Churches and in 1946 was made Auxiliary Bishop for the Suburbican (= around Rome) Diocese of Porto and Sta. Rufina. He died on 13 November 1960.

4. OUR FIRST MARTYRS

We had many deaths in our missions in Africa, but up to 1941 none of them had met violent death by the hands of Africans. **FR DELAI ALFREDO** (1913/1941) was the first to die as a victim of the war and of his duty to remain in his mission. When the soldiers arrived, from his hideout he showed his Crucifix, to signify that he was not any enemy. But an askari delivered three shots, point blank in his back at the order of the British Commander : it was the 26th of April 1941.

FR ARPE ANGELO (1886-1946), a pioneer missionary in the difficult Bahr el Ghazal, arrived there in 1912 and founded the mission at Mboro in 1925. A certain Christian Rafael had once a dispute with Leone the Head Catechist of the mission; he suspected his relationship with his wife. On the feast of All Saints, Rafael attempted the life of Leone and then turned to Fr Arpe; he speared the Father twice until he killed him. In order to stop the homicidal fury of the assassin the teacher Placido killed him too. (Placido was the father of Archbishop Gabriel Zubeir of Khartoum).

Chapter Eleven

FROM 1947 TO 1959

A. HISTORICAL NOTES

OPENING IN LATIN AMERICA

Our MFSC confreres had been in Peru since 1938 - they went there before the above period.

One reason for the opening in Latin America by the FSCJ was the appeal to send missionaries to Latin America by Pope Pius XII: local vocations were scarce, mainly in Brazil. For this scarcity we can find some reasons:

a) the anti-clericalism which developed in the post-independence era, (from 1825 onwards) against the clericalism of the colonial times. Even the Bishops were not united in facing the independence movements: from the Archbishop of Mexico City who decreed excommunication against all insurgents and instructed his priests to combat independence, to the Bishop of Quito who accepted the presidency of the revolutionary junta. The clergy also were divided, though generally (Ecuador) their support for independence prevailed, except in Venezuela where the clergy were rather circumspect.

b) the neglect of promoting vocations among the Indians and Negroes: traditionally it was easier for a "mestizos" to be ordained than for an Indian, and easier for an Indian than for either a mulatto or a "Negro"; such neglect left a painful legacy in Latin America after independence.

c) in Brazil we find some special circumstances that affected the social and religious environment. The new constitution of 1891, positivistic in the extreme, passed a number of measures that affected religious life like the laicization of education in public schools, civil marriage as the only legal marriage, denial of all political rights to religious, exclusion of Jesuits and the absolute prohibition of new convents or houses for religious. The method of attack was different, but the purpose was still the same: The Portuguese empire smothered the Church, and the new republic completely ignored her, both, however, aimed to keep her powerless. Urged by the new Internuncio, Msgr Spolverini, the Bishops issued the celebrated "Collective Pastoral Letter" of March 19, 1890, which solemnly protested the new decrees and succeeded in blunting many of the new measures. They obtained freedom of government for the Church and had the law against Jesuits abolished. The positivists continued their attacks in newspapers and pamphlets, the ultra-liberals and freemasons against religion in the schools, but in the Constitution of November 1937, Catholics fought for and obtained that the teaching of religion be allowed if the parents so wished. Other reasons were: widespread illiteracy (50%), spiritism (30%), very poor living conditions, and the lack of a strong Catholic press: it was only in 1930 that the first Catholic newspaper in Portuguese was published.

Because of the lack of priests, parishes were much too extensive and many of them lacked pastors. In 1929 under Pius XI, the Brazilian college in Rome was started, but there were not sufficient students.

The separation of Church and State, decreed by the constitution of 1891 brought the advantage that the Church could create new Bishopsrics, that the previous government had so long denied: in fact in 1889 there were only 12 dioceses. In 1959, 25 archdioceses, 87 suffragan dioceses, 30 prelacies nullius, one abbacy nullius. However there has been considerable growth in the vitality of the Latin American Church in the last 60 years until the explosion, so to say, of this vitality in the Meetings of Medellin, Puebla, of St Domingo.

B. THE SEVENTH GENERAL CHAPTER (VENEGONO, MAY 1947)

Due to the Second World War, this Chapter could not take place according to our Constitution after six years:

1. MEMBERS of the Chapter: 23, members of the Institute: 682;
2. ELECTED: Fr A. Todesco (at the very first ballot); Fr A. Vignato; Fr G. Briani; Fr A. De Berti (+ 1969); Fr Leonzio Bano (+1983).

FR ANTONIO TODESCO

Born in Northern Italy, made his first profession in 1902; died in Verona in 1979. In 1922 he was ordained priest together with Fr E. Mason who was the first in a series of missionaries hosted by the Brothers of Christian Instruction in Southampton, in South of England. In 1928 Fr Todesco left for Bahr el Gebel. In 1937, was a member of the Chapter. In the same year he was appointed Novice Master, an office which he performed in a rather progressive way.

As Superior General, Fr Todesco improved the method of formation of candidates, as he had done as Novice Master; though remaining within the traditional structures, he tried to develop more the positive values of each Candidate, to be more open and more respectful of their personality, according to the tendencies of young people, who tend always to be different from the old in developed or developing countries. On these lines he gave many good (for those times) directives that had a particular significance. (See circular letter of 25.10.1955, Bulletin N. 45. He started meeting of Spiritual Directors and Masters of Novices (2 to 4 December 1947), and of Superiors of Junior Seminaries of Italy (21.10.1948).

Fr Todesco gave clear directives on vocational promotion. (Museum Combonianum started at this time (Cfr. Circ. Letter of 1.11.48, Bull. N. 28; Circ. letter of 13.8.51, Bull. N. 36).

His priority was made clear in his first Circular letter (Dec. 1947): "This will be my main pre-occupation, that all confreres cultivate interior life, so that all may be the authentic promoters of the coming of the Heart of Jesus into souls".

In 12 years Fr Todesco wrote 23 Circular letters: some for all missionaries, others to the provincials, to confreres working in the missions (Circ. 51, Bull. N. 43); and to Brothers (Circ. 47; cfr. Bull. N. 38).

He would insist on: prayer, charity (interesting is Circ. 54, Bull. N. 45, pages 990 to 1002); community life, humility, responsibility of superiors, devotion to the S. Heart (Circ. 54, Bull. N. 45).

He promoted a study congress on the Sacred Heart, held in Venegono on 10th September 1948, which is reported in Bulletin N. 30, pages 893-996.

Fr Todesco also promoted a Marian Congress for the scholastics of Philosophy at Rebbio, on 28th - 30th September 1949 followed by another one in Brescia in 1955. Fr Todesco did not fail to find inspiration in Comboni. In his declaration of the Jubilee Year on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of Comboni's death, he wrote:

"We his sons, must imitate him and follow him... Heroic love for the Cross, missionary abnegation in order to keep charity, prudence and fortitude in the defence of evangelical principles and in faithfulness to the apostolic vocation: it is part of the figure of this great Servant of God, our venerable Founder" (July 23, 1956).

PARTICULAR ISSUES OF THIS CHAPTER

There was a preparatory commission to coordinate and study the proposals sent to the Chapter.

There were pre-capitular meetings before the reports, in order to get information and explanations. Both proposals have been since institutionalised.

The Chapter marks the beginning of de-centralisation with the creation of the circumscription of the Apostolic Schools, and division of responsibilities among the General Assistants. It advises the expansion of the Congregation abroad leaving the practical modalities to the General Council.

A Formation School Council was created to organise better and direct the Apostolic Schools. A move towards the Ratio Studiorum; Philosophy and Theology courses were already internal in the Congregation.

An exhortation is given to introduce the name of "Comboniani" in Italy and of "Comboni Fathers" in English speaking countries.

One week of holidays is granted to the scholastics in the third year of Theology before taking perpetual vows and Subdiaconate.

More frequent periods of holidays are also granted: every 6 years to the missionaries in Sudan; every 8 years to the missionaries in Uganda, the difference is due to the better climate in Uganda.

C. THE EIGHTH GENERAL CHAPTER (VERONA, 1-8 JULY 1953)⁴⁸.

1. Members of the Chapter: 42.
2. Elected: Fr A. Todesco, Superior General (re-elected) (+1979); Fr Giulio Rizzi, Vicar General (+1983); Fr Gabriel Bevilacqua (+1969); Fr Ferdinando Arcozzi (+1981); Fr Francesco Colombini (+1979).

PARTICULAR FEATURES OF THIS CHAPTER

A religious Assistant is nominated to the Chapter by the Holy See in whose name he presides over it: he is Fr Cristoforo Berutti, O.P. The reason for this was that some confreres, dissatisfied with Fr A. Todesco's formative methodology and the openings in Latin America, had appealed to Propaganda Fide.

Some indications given by the Chapter for the welfare of the Institute:

- In our houses of formation there must be uniformity: hence the methods of formation are to be coordinated in Italy and abroad in order to keep our characteristics. In general our formation should be based on personal conviction, on self denial, on obedience and on spontaneous piety.
- A technical preparation is desired for the Spiritual Directors.
- The pros and cons of scholastics as "prefects" in Junior Seminaries are questioned and as result the practice is limited, though not excluded.
- The need arises to open a second Apostolic School (besides the one in Thiene) for candidate Brothers. It is proposed that professed Brothers remain in Italy for two years, in order to complete their religious formation and to acquire some skill in other jobs.
- The Novice Masters are invited to avoid any form of psychic tension, stress and too many practices of piety; it is also approved that novices may have some games besides the traditional walk.
- In the scholasticate: to foster a deeper, more missionary spirit nothing forbids that Fathers returning from the mission may sometimes, at the discretion of the Superior, give some conferences and also entertain the students, even during the time of recreation. It is desired that courses of Missionary Canon Law are made possible.
- The General Council is asked to nominate a Commission for the revision of the Constitutions and of the Prayer Book.
- It is left to the General Council to study the proposal of introducing one year of "probation", (which nowadays we would call a Sabbatical year) for rest and renewal.
- It is interesting to note the norms which the General Council emanates in 1958 (Cfr. Bull. N. 48, page 1273) regarding the personal outfit, journeys, etc. Already Fr Meroni had given norms about journeys (Circ. N. 13). All these norms are to suggest a real and living poverty.
- The Chapter wishes that vocations to the Congregation from Seminaries and local Clergy are to be encouraged.
- Keeping in mind the reasons given by the Holy See and those for which the Superiors accepted missions outside Africa, the Chapter members encourage the development of the Mexican and Brazilian works to the benefit of the dechristianised population and in the fulfilment of the Institute's programmes and plans.
- The preparatory commission of the Chapter must be composed of Chapter members, and the General Direction must nominate various commissions according to the various topics to be dealt with at the Chapter.
- The Superior General with his Council shall form a commission to study the way of unifying formation in the various countries.

Notice: As a part of this formation journey the General Council decided in 1956 to postpone the novitiate to the end of the Philosophy course in Italy (Bull. N. 47, pg. 1223) or the equivalent in other nations.

⁴⁸ Bull. n. 41 and 42.

D. DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTE AND ITS MISSIONS 1947-1959

I. THE INSTITUTE AND ITS JOURNEY TOWARDS INTERNATIONALITY

1. NEW JUNIOR SEMINARIES:

- Viseu, Portugal: 20.10.47;
- Stillington, Northern England: 1948;
- Cincinnati (USA): 1948;
- Sahuayo (Mexico): 1954;
- Bari (Italy): 1957;
- Corella (Spain): 1959;
- Ibiracu (Brazil): 1959.

2. HOUSES OF FORMATION FOR BROTHERS

- Pellegrina, in 1951: a farm school in the fields of a Lady; for her continuous interferences and lack of clear purpose, it was closed in 1966.
- Pordenone: 1958 (closed for brothers in 1991).

3. NOVITIATES

- Gozzano (Northern Italy) in 1947; transferred from Venegono.
- Sunningdale (Great Britain): 1948
- Cincinnati (USA): 1949. It was transferred to Monroe in 1952
- Tepepam (Mexico): 1955
- Famalicao (Portugal): 1956

4. SCHOLASTICATES

- Venegono, in 1948. The Theology course was brought here from Verona where Philosophy went on until 1958. It will become international as non-Italian Scholastics will join the Italians here, even from Africa, except those from USA.
Notice: Fr Todesco at the 1959 Chapter had given the main motivations for the International Scholasticate which can be summed up briefly. Thus: less teaching personnel; more fraternity and mutual knowledge among various nationalities; more seriousness in studies; less nationalistic spirit; more facilities to study the Congregation's literature, and in particular to learn the Italian language, especially for those who will be the foundation of the other provinces.
- In the USA: In September 1947, 6 Scholastics from Italy arrived for Theology in the Major Seminary of Cincinnati. Later on Theology will be in San Diego.
- Sunningdale, in 1952: Philosophy, with Scholastics also from Italy.
- Carraia, Italy: Philosophy, before the Novitiate started here in 1958.
- Maya, Portugal in 1958: for Philosophy.
- Comboni House, 16 Dawson Place, in London, is opened in 1944 as a centre of study and learning of English. Fr Vignato had insisted that all missionaries for Egypt, Sudan and Uganda had to learn English.

5. ERECTION OF REGIONS

The process of decentralisation started with the Chapter of 1947 in Italy and now it is brought elsewhere.

- Great Britain: in 1948 Fr Bresciani is made Regional Superior
- USA in 1950, with Fr G. Rizzi as Regional Superior.
- Mozambique in 1950 with Fr G. Zambonardi as Regional Superior.
- Mexico in 1953, with Fr S. Patroni as Regional Superior.
- Sudan and Uganda had regions already.
- Balsas in Brazil North, in 1956 with Fr Seri as Regional Superior.
- Spirito Santo, Brazil South, in 1956 with Fr R. Carlesi as Regional Superior.
- Portugal in 1957, with Fr Calderola as Regional Superior. This region later on will be called Iberic Region for it as included Spain for some years.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTE IN THE MISSIONS

This period, when the Institute opened up missions outside Africa, represents a turning-point in the history of our Congregation. This opening has been controversial among our missionaries, not so much because it was deemed to be beyond our original and traditional field of work, but because they were not considered fields of first evangelisation. The answer given was that Comboni dedicated himself to the evangelisation of the poorest and most abandoned: At that particular time these were in Central Africa, but they may be found elsewhere also. Another reason given was vocation promotion, i.e. in order to internationalise the Institute. In 1947, another reason was that the opening would offer the possibility of other Mission fields, should the Sudan and Uganda Missions become prohibited areas for political reasons.

1. NEW FIELD OF APOSTOLATE

1.1 OPENING IN MEXICO (1948)

On the 27th of September, 1947 our Procurator General, in conformity with the wish of the Superior General, presented to the Secretary General of Propaganda Fide the difficulty of sending personnel to Egypt and to the English territories. Fearing the worst for the future of the missions in Sudan, he suggested that another field of work be made available for us. Thus the thought to ask for a mission in Brazil. His Excellency Msgr Constantini, Secretary of Propaganda Fide agreed on the opportunity of the intended step, but he suggested to talk first with Msgr Philip Torres, Administrator of the Vicariate Apostolic of Baja California (in Mexico) who was in Rome in those days looking for missionaries. Thus on 2nd October Fr Capovilla (Procurator) had a first talk with Msgr Torres, to be followed by many others. On 22nd October, Msgr Torres also had an interview with the Superior General.

The conclusion was that we would soon send some missionaries for the spiritual care of one of the two civil provinces of making up the Vicariate, that is, the Southern part, with capital La Paz. For the time being they would be under the jurisdiction of Msgr Torres, until the territory could be erected into an independent Prefecture or Vicariate. The Sacred Congregation of Propaganda was willing to do that as soon as possible.

In January 1948, the first missionaries under the leadership of Fr Elio Sassella (1910-1970) arrived at La Paz. The Superior General who went there in April to visit them, commented: (cfr. Bull. N. 27 of 1/7/48).

"I confess that I felt a pain in my heart to see how this poor region needs priests and an active apostolate. The larger part of this country has for many years been without priests, while those few ones who lived here and there alone among the people, it is sad to say, were not always of edification and of help to those souls.

At present our missionaries occupy about one third of the territory entrusted to us; later on, when other personnel will be sent to help, they will establish themselves over the whole territory. All the people welcomed our missionaries with enthusiasm and immediately admired their zeal and activities. Msgr Torres, the Apostolic Administrator, welcomed the confreres with a fatherly heart, and with feelings of deep esteem and gratitude".

Fr Elio Sassella however, with intelligence and a keen realistic mind saw clearly that Mexico could be a fertile field for missionary and vocation animation.

In 1952, he opened a centre in Mexico City and considered opening Sahuayo (1953) as the first Comboni Seminary in Mexico. In Baja California he founded a magazine, small but spunky, "Adelante" which made such a good impression and prepared the way for "Esquila Misional".

In 1957, by a decree of July 13th, contrary to what was foreseen, the S. Congregation of Propaganda Fide detached the Southern territory of Baja California from the Vicariate of Tijuana erecting it into an Apostolic Prefecture and entrusting it to us. With a decree of 15th April 1958 Msgr G. Giordani was nominated first Apostolic Prefect of La Paz.

The territory entrusted to us was 75,000 sq. km. with a population of 70,900. Thus reports Fr Fare at the Chapter of 1959:

"The situation of the missionary stations of Baja California is, in many aspects, very similar to that of the missions in Africa. The climate is tropical, the soil is dry and arid, roads are full of dust

and stones and frequently out of use. The population is scarce, much dispersed and very poor, with lack of missionaries and means of living. Due to lack of priests, people remained spiritually abandoned for many years, religious ignorance prevails; men are generally absent from the Church - numberless are the illegitimate marriages and powerful is Freemasonry".

Fr Fare reported also the great difficulty encountered by the missionaries in obtaining entry permits. The first fathers entered by a favour of the President Aleman, as members of a cultural Italian Society and without paying any immigration fee. These facilities could not be obtained later and some ten confreres (including the Apostolic Prefect) had not yet a regular passport. Missionaries entered as tourists, with the obligation to go out and renew the tourist Visa every 6 months, with great loss of time and money.

ABOUT PROPERTY TITLES

The Mexican Constitution denied religious institutes the right to possess; so all seminaries and religious institutions had to make use of anonymous or civil societies with all the troubles connected with that. By 1995 the civil legislation has officially changed and relations with the Holy See regularised.

1.2 OPENING IN THE INDIAN MISSION OF USA (1949)

On his return from Mexico the Superior General approached Bishop Buddy of San Diego in the US California, and asked him to open a Procure in San Diego to assist our confreres in Mexican California, for vocation promotion, and also to have a missionary commitment in the Diocese.

The Bishop offered missions among the Indians in the Southern part of the Diocese. So in 1948 our Fathers celebrated Christmas in Pala, St. Isabel and other Chapels (Bull. N. 29, of 1/3/49 page 826).

1.3 OPENING IN BRAZIL (1952)⁴⁹

It was January on 15th that: "Following the strong preoccupations of the Holy Father for the religious fate of Latin America, also our General Direction, thought it its duty to manifest to the Sacred Consistorial Congregation that our institute was in a position to accept the spiritual care of a territory in Brazil, which might present a certain affinity with the specialisation proper of our Institute, and which could be at the same time advantageous towards vocational promotion for us. The negotiations took quite a long time to materialise. We believe, however, that the issue perfectly corresponds to the goals proposed by the General Direction".

The Holy See (S. Consistorial Congregation) offered us a new prelacy, BALSAS, detached from that of the Diocese of Cazias in the State of Maranhao, North Brazil, with the capital St. Louis on the Atlantic Coast.

On the 12th February 1952, our General Council accepted the offer. The territory entrusted to us was of 51,535 sq. km. with a population of 89,000 people. The territory is very deep inside Brazil and communications are few: the land is hilly, the climate rather good. The population is Catholic but priests had been lacking for a long time. Very numerous were Negroes and Mestizos.

Due to the position of the new field of work, very far from communication centres, the General Direction was soon looking for a "pied-a-terre" on the Atlantic coast which could serve as liaison with the General Direction.

Through the mediation of the Apostolic Nuncio to Brazil, the parish of Serra in the State and Diocese of Espiritu Santo was offered near Victoria town and Diocese. And we got both commitments.

Fr Diego Parodi was appointed leader of the group of missionaries who in May 1952 arrived in Balsas. We read in the Diary of those days:

"Balsas is a little town of 5,000 souls: 10% are rich, 90% are poor, not to say slaves. In the whole territory there is only one priest who has welcomed us with great enthusiasm. We found ourselves in the middle of America which, in truth, looks very much like Africa. People see in us, besides the priests, real friends who will be able to help them to come out of their moral and physical poverty".

⁴⁹ Bull. n.36 of 19/3/52, page 231.

Fr Parodi and his "troupe" rolled up their sleeves. Few days after Fr Parodi arrived in Balsas, he was called by a sick man. It was an old man lying on a mat, wrapped up in scanty rags, full of sores like Job, suffocated and eaten up by flies and mosquitoes. He made his first confession and died praying with the fervour of an angel. In that man Fr Parodi saw the symbol of his people. Visits to the sick, talks to the parents, catechism to the children were the main activities which occupied the recently-arrived missionaries, during the first months. Following the tradition which has the roots in the primitive Church, Fr Parodi and the missionaries gave themselves body and soul to human promotion besides the pastoral work.

In 1959 Fr D. Parodi became Prelate and he was consecrated Bishop on the 21st June, 1959. He built a hospital, a college and a seminary. He resigned in 1966; was made Apostolic Administrator of Gubbio (Central Italy) and later Bishop of Ischia (an Island West of Naples). There he suddenly died in 1983. He was succeeded in Balsas by Bishop Rino Carlesi in 1967.

The region of "Espírito Santo" started with 2 fathers and a brother in Serra. But soon it developed to the North and South: to the North with the Diocese of San Mateus in 1958 entrusted to us and several houses of formation; and to the South with other junior seminaries, a parish in Sao Paulo (1955) and later on a procure in Rio de Janeiro (1960).

On the 9th May, 1959, Pope John XXIII, with a decree of the Consistorial Congregation, nominated **Bishop Giuseppe Dalvit** for the **diocese of S. Mateus** (Spirito Santo), which had been erected on 16th February, 1958. He was consecrated on 30th June, 1959. Born in 1919, he had been in the territory since 1954 always working with great dedication and consciousness. People had a veneration for him. Sufferings of different kinds broke his fibre. He asked the Holy See to be relieved. After a period of rest in Italy he went back to Brazil. He died of a heart attack on the 17th January, 1977 during a visit to his former diocese of San Mateus.

1.4 OPENING IN ESMERALDAS-ECUADOR (1954)

On the 28th of January, 1954, the Holy See (*Propaganda Fide*) (cfr. Bull.N.49) entrusted the Apostolic Prefecture of Esmeraldas (West Ecuador on the Pacific Ocean) to our Congregation in spite of the fact that the Superior General had notified the S. Congregation that the situation of our personnel could not allow us to take on new commitments beside the ones recently taken in Mexico and Brazil (Bull.N.51, of 6/1/59, pg.35). Such an unusual procedure may be explained by the fact that, since we were wholly dependent on *Propaganda*, before taking commitments outside the territories entrusted to her we should have consulted her. Apparently this was not done in the case of Brazil. When we took over Esmeraldas, the territory was entrusted to a Religious Order which had declined the commitment. Fr Umberto Mariani reported to the Chapter of 1959:

"On the 17th December of 1954, Fr Angelo Barbisotti was nominated Apostolic Administrator; he reached his See, together with two other Fathers, on the 13th April, 1955.

With the arrival of the other two groups in July and September, the Congregation was keeping their word given to the Holy See to have ten missionaries there during the same year. It must be said at the outset the reception on the part of those who were leaving was cold and hostile. What was found: house, churches and chapels devoid of everything, even articles of worship donated by the population.

The Prefecture comprises the whole territory of Esmeraldas province, with almost 16,000 Sq.Kms. The population count is almost 100,000 inhabitants and 60% of it is made of up of Blacks; some 30% of Mestizos and the rest is more or less white. We have also one tribe of Indios, the Cayapas, who live in a very primitive way, on the margins of civilisation. The means of communication in the province are the rivers, along which live the greater part of the people. Our private means of communication are the canoes, and for the missions situated on islands, the banana boats. All the missions are now provided with motor canoes. The rest of the population lives in isolated farms; their assistance and instruction is a difficult problem. The religious life of the people in the past consisted of baptism and where possible confirmation; then of a series of external acts of worship, processions and rites, often of a superstitious character. Homes are full of religious images and of litres of holy water and candles. Sacramental life is almost quite unknown. Religious marriages do not reach 10% and persons receiving first communion outside Esmeraldas are 2%. They willingly take part in processions and external ceremonies, nocturnal vigils which ordinarily degenerate into solemn orgies. However, there is a foundation of an aspiration to good Christian life, upon which we can work with very good results".

With a Decree dated 17th November, 1957, the Prefecture was erected into a Vicariate and the Apostolic Administrator was elected Titular Bishop of Cauno and Vicar Apostolic.

2. DEVELOPMENTS IN AFRICA

2.1 BAHR EL GHAZAL

In 1947 BISHOP E. MASON (1903 - 1989) succeeds Bishop R. Orler (+1946).

Bishop Mason had spent his previous years of missionary life in this region mainly looking after schools and the education of young Africans both academical and technical. He also started the periodical "The Messenger". Consecrated Bishop in Padova on 29/6/47, he continued his missionary activities with great zeal; in 1960 he was expelled from Wau; he was given the See of El Obeid in North Sudan; again expelled, together with all other missionaries in 1964. He then dedicated himself to the assistance of refugees and spent some years (1974 to 1979) with the Apostles of Jesus in Nairobi. Finally, he retired to Verona where he died.

2.2 APOSTOLIC PREFECTURE OF MUPOI

As the Vicariate of Bahr el Ghazal was too large. It was felt by Bishop Orler, and later by Bishop Mason, that its division could be advantageous. So on 3/3/1949 *Propaganda* erected the Prefecture of Mupoï (today it is called Tombora) and entrusted it to the Prefect Apostolic MSGR D. FERRARA (born 1905) who had previously worked in that region mainly populated by Azande people. After the 1964 expulsion from Sudan he was nominated Titular Bishop (1966).

2.3 UGANDA: DEATH OF BISHOP A. NEGRI (1889-1949)

Bishop Negri was hit by pneumonia in one of his tiresome safaris, and died of a heart attack in Arua on the 11th November 1949. He had been in Uganda from 1920 to 1926. He wrote a book on traditions, customs, legends and religion of the Acholi people. In Italy from 1927 to 1933 he wrote a few missionary books for missionary animation. Consecrated Bishop, he gave all his energies to his Vicariate and it is to his credit if our missions in Northern Uganda were left to us during the second World War. In spite of very difficult times, he promoted the local seminaries; he founded the Diocesan Institute of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate, he stayed on with his missionaries when under house-arrest in Katigondo Seminary, later on "Parole", that is almost as a prisoner, he resided in Nyapea Mission for quite a time. He was highly esteemed by the colonial authorities who openly manifested this at his death.

2.4 BAHR EL GEBEL

Bishop Sisto Mazzoldi (1898-1987) succeeded Msgr Mlakic as Apostolic Prefect and as Apostolic Vicar, being consecrated Bishop in 1951 in Trento, his Diocese of origin. He had been in Bahr el Gebel since 1931 and from 1948 as religious superior. After his expulsion in 1964, he asked to return to the mission; he was made Apostolic Administrator of Moroto Diocese in Uganda (1965) and then residential Bishop in 1967.

He resigned in 1980 and went to Nairobi (Kenya) where he spent his energy and money for the Apostles of Jesus and the Evangelizing Sisters. He died in Nairobi greatly admired for his zeal, faith and prayer life.

In 1958 in Torit (East, Bahr el Gebel), a mutiny of soldiers against the Arabic commanders prompted a severe repression. For many Southerners the Church appeared the saviour against the subtle and hypocritical presentation of the Church on the part of the Government. In 1957 all the mission schools in the South were taken over by the Ministry of Education. Consequently no priest was any longer allowed to teach in those schools.

At the 1959 Chapter, Fr A. Todesco, Superior General, gave the following remarks on the situation in South Sudan:

"Our Missions of the Sudan during this 6 years' term have written pages of painful sufferings, of glorious sacrifice, and of admirable self denial. All of us know already the sad history of those regions, the persecutions and the hardships that our confreres have had to undergo. I assure you that we have followed with fraternal deep regret the various painful phases of those Missions. We have prayed and asked others to pray for them; we have tried to encourage them, by words and at times with our own presence; we felt pre-occupied to stay near them with advice and with that concern which was suggested by our heart and much

more by our duty; we approached persons and authorities and requested timely interventions which might bring light and help to the situation. In this solemn moment let our praise go to their Excellencies the ordinaries and to all our confreres of Sudan. We wish that the truly missionary spirit shown by them in these painful situations may pass on entirely and fruitfully to all confreres who will succeed them in those Missions which are so dear to us. In spite of the fact that the devilish storm has attempted to destroy God's work, yet we have to realise that those Missions did not relax in their apostolic progress: God in his mercy willed to console the heart of all by inviting to his Church a very consoling number of souls. All our ecclesiastical jurisdictions of Sudan are in a position to present reassuring statistics of an ever increasing number of Christians and of catechumens, full of Catholic fervour.

From 1953 to 1958 we notice an increment of more than one thousand Christians in Khartoum, of more than 10,000 in Wau, of more than 30,000 in Mupoi, of more than 70,000 in Juba. Local religious Congregations, male and female, go on in all vicariates at a consoling stride, and with such religious motivations to draw the admiration of all people". (Cfr. Bull.N.51, page 31).

2.5 KHARTOUM VICARIATE

- A new Bishop: in 1952 Bishop F.X. Bini resigned for health reasons and died in 1953 at Venegono. BISHOP AGOSTINO BARONI (born 1906) succeeded him and was consecrated on 21/9/53. He had spent eighteen years in Khartoum (1932-1950). He led the Diocese from 1953 to 1981 when he retired.
- **Sudan independence, on 1/1/1956**, brought a great increase in the number of Southerners that left the South and flocked to Khartoum, where "nadi" or centres of assistance for them became schools of Catechism in different languages, evening classes in English and Arabic, and the teaching of Arithmetic and other subjects. BROTHER MICHELE SERGI distinguished himself in the assistance of the Southerners. His "nadi" had every evening between 1,000 and 2,000 people. In other towns of the North, many Catholic Southerners formed the first local Catholic communities (Cfr. Vantini, Christianity in the Sudan, pg.251).
- Comboni College in Khartoum continued its amazing popularity and its high standard.
- **Missions in Darfur** were opened including El Obeid after 60 years.
- **The Vicariate Apostolic of Rumbek** is created, detached from Bahr el Ghazal and Bahr el Gebel. Bishop Ireneo W. Dud is its first Apostolic Vicar (from 1955 to 1960).

2.6 ARUA AND GULU DIOCESES

Under insistent pressure of Bishop Cesana, **Arua Diocese is erected in 1958** comprising Alur, Lugbara and Madi people, the most Catholic part of Gulu Diocese.

BISHOP A. TARANTINO (1908-1990) is appointed on the 28th of February, 1959 and consecrated at his home town in Italy on the 1st May, 1959. He retired in 1984 on the occasion of his Silver Jubilee as a Bishop. He had been in Uganda uninterruptedly since 1932, for 58 years, except for short holidays. He died in Arua on 15th April, 1990.

Reporting to the 1959 Chapter Fr Todesco could speak of Uganda of those years as follows: (Cfr. Bull.N.5a, Pg.32)

• Diocese of Gulu

The Diocese of Gulu, in Uganda, during this six years' term had no halt at all in its apostolic activity and in its work of Catholic penetration. During these six years the number of Christians has had an increase of almost 130,000. The apostolic works continue to multiply themselves: stations, churches, schools, hospitals, maternity centres, artisans' schools, native religious congregations for men and women, seminaries, lay apostolate associations, social activities, etc. The community of 346,000 catholics is assisted by 108 priests, comprising the 16 local priests".

• Diocese of Arua

"The wonderful development achieved during these years by Gulu Diocese suggested to us to present to *Propaganda* the proposal of a division of the territory. These last months we had the satisfaction to see realised also this long expected wish. The Holy Father condescended to erect the new diocese of Arua and to nominate one of our confreres as the first Bishop of the flourishing Mission. This realization will bring sure advantages in the apostolate and a great relief to the Bishop of Gulu and to all missionaries of the area".

Two publications played a decisive role for the religious, social and political formation of our people: LOBO MEWA (Our Land) in 1952, in those days with 18,000 copies (12,000 in Luo and 5,000 in Lugbara); LEADERSHIP (in 1956) for the training of Christian leaders and of organized lay apostles.

2.7 MOÇAMBIQUE

No special developments are noticed, but the work of evangelisation was proceeding steadily with *the help* of catechists not always well prepared. Missionaries look also after schools which prepare effectiveness as well (Cfr.Bull.No.51, Page 96/97).

E. COMBONI SISTERS

1. COMBONI SISTERS IN THE UNITED STATES (1950)

In the plan of expansion for the vocational promotion and missionary animation the Sisters could not omit the USA. The first place was Richmond in Virginia and Mobile in Alabama in 1950. The Afro Americans had attracted their interest.

Since 1956 they are present in Landsdale in Pennsylvania for social and medical activities. While in Chicago, started in 1983, there is a centre for missionary animation and vocational promotion.

The provincial house is still in Richmond.

2. COMBONI SISTERS IN ZAIRE (1952)

The Comboni Sisters went to Northern Zaire in 1952 in the Diocese of Wamba in the mission of Nduye that was staffed by the priests of the Sacred Heart (Dehonian - in Zaire from 1897) at the time of the Simba revolution 1964 besides Nduye, they were working in Bafwasende, Ngavu, Wamba and Mabone. All the 27 Sisters underwent the harassment and some the tortures of the rebels. They were often threatened with death but none of them was killed. All of them managed to repatriate. At the moment they are still in Nduye, but left the other missions and took other missions in different dioceses. They have a novitiate in Kisangani and the provincial residence in Isiro.

Chapter Twelve

THE NINTH GENERAL CHAPTER AND THE PERIOD 1959-1969

A. THE NINTH GENERAL CHAPTER (VENEGONO, 6-25 JULY 1959)

1. CHAPTER

Members of the Chapter: 37 (Bull. N.71);

Members of the Institute: 235 (9 Bishops, 2 Apostolic Prefects, 685 priests, 233 scholastics, 306 brothers).

Elected: Fr Gaetano Briani, Superior General, (1900-1984); Fr G. Batteli, Vicar General; Fr L. Bano (+1983); Fr L. Urbani (+1991); Fr G. Baj (+1993), assistants.

FR GAETANO BRIANI.

Professed on the 1st November, 1921 at Venegono. He left for Bahr el Ghazal in 1933 where he stayed until September, 1947, when he was elected Vicar General; from 1953 to 1959 he was Regional Superior in Bahr el Ghazal, Wau. After the end of his office as Superior General (1969), he stayed in Italy giving his services in different houses. He was a very honest and sincere man and one dedicated to his work and to the Institute with a sincere spirit of faith shown in many ways. He was aware of the great crisis of the Institute, but did not decide on any introduction of substantial changes in the rules, remitting every decision to the 1969 Chapter. However, he honestly authorised the preparation of a overall questionnaire in which all the rules, style of life and structures of the Institute were bluntly put under discussion. He died in Verona.

2. SPECIAL REMARKS

A religious assistant was sent by the Holy See to preside over the Chapter in the person of Fr Clemente da S. Maria in Punta, O.F.M. Cap. who on July 6th received the Chapter Fathers one by one. He also informed the Chapter that all resolutions will have to be ratified by him after the elections. He will keep the office of Assistant to the congregation for a certain period. On the 9th August, the Assistant sent six points for the new Father General:

- Stabilize and strengthen what has been accomplished under the government of the outgoing General Council.
- No to new missions, and to opening of new houses until those already existing have been provided for satisfactorily.
- In the disciplinary field: To promote and improve the spiritual life; the observance of the vows; respect for Superiors; fraternal charity.
- In the mission field: In every parish or station entrusted to the Institute there should be at least two priests.
- In the field of schools : In obedience to pontifical prescriptions, it is necessary to provide proper spiritual and cultural preparation of those put in charge of formation of the youth; to increase their number in proportion to the students; to change them only for serious and urgent reasons.
- In the economic field: To cover the existing debts, and in future to embark in expenditures according to real financial possibilities.

On the 14th September, the Assistant approved all the resolutions taken by the Chapter. What had prompted the visitation was the dissatisfaction of some confreres, because of apparently biased choice of capitulars, and also complaints about speed of the expansions and consequent expenses during the 12 years of Fr A. Todesco's government, as can be understood from some of the six points above.

3. PRECAPITULAR ASSEMBLIES

On the 24th June, Father General announced that the Holy See has sent an Assistant who would only arrive on the 6th July. So seven precapitular commissions were established, as follows:

- Constitutions, Traditions, Manual of Prayers to be revised.
- Directory: To be revised.
- "Ratio Studiorum", or Programme of Studies. to be prepared
- Finances.
- Structures and Organization.
- Mission Fields.

It was the longest Chapter by then, both because of the numerous reports, and for the discussions due to the preparatory commissions.

The following reports were published for the first time:

Report of the Superior General, of the General Bursar, of the Procurator, of the Assistant of the "Ausiliarie Comboniane", of the 15 regions.

4. MAIN RESOLUTIONS OF THE CHAPTER

- Superiors of the scholasticates are invited to encourage the personal inclinations of the scholastics in their studies and in the knowledge of languages: The Major Superiors will take this into account for the destinations.
- An International Scholasticate for Theology is encouraged for its great utility in amalgamating the students.
- A structure for adult vocations in Italy is authorized (this will be in Crema, Northern Italy).
- The admission of candidates must take into consideration the global judgment of the Superiors and of the staff.
- State exams after the middle course are for all - at the end of Latin courses for the majority of the students; at the end of Liceo for some students. (This is valid for Italy, and the equivalent elsewhere).
- A commission for the preparation of the "Ratio Studiorum" is established; criteria to be followed and sources to be used are given.
- Resolutions about missions and missionaries:
 - Arua in Uganda and Esmeraldas in Ecuador are erected as full regions, corresponding to the two territories.
 - Personnel to Sudan: As far as possible, they should be in good health and well prepared.
 - A centre to assist Southerners flocking to Khartoum was to be under the control of the Ordinary; but the Congregation will help with suitable personnel, possibly confreres who have experience of the South.
 - Uganda:
 - * the foundation of Comboni College in Lira is approved and its implementation is demanded of the new General Council;
 - * it is suggested that as many missionaries as possible be sent to Uganda as long as the situation allows it.
 - The proposal of a Centre to take care of the Africans flocking to Cairo, especially students, is approved; modalities and suitable personnel are the responsibility of all the superiors who are interested in it.
 - The initiative to send students from Africa to Europe and America was approved; it was deemed opportune to appoint a priest in Italy and another in USA to look for bursaries, including university fees, lodging and living.
 - Confreres who are teaching in the schools in the missions are doing a real missionary activity, and are to be prepared also with academic qualifications.
 - Detailed instructions are given for the care of the sick confreres returning from the missions: They should be made to feel welcomed; all efforts to be done to cure them; avoid making them feel a burden. The expenses are distributed among communities and regions.

B. PERIOD FROM 1959 TO 1969

I. DEVELOPMENTS AND OPENING OF NEW INSTITUTIONS

1. JUNIOR SEMINARIES:

- Mexico: S. Francisco del Rincon (1959).
- Brazil: Sao Gabriel* *(1963); Jeronimo Monteiro* *(1965); San José de Rio Preto (1967).
- Italy: Lecce* (1963); Asti* *(1967).
- Canada: Brossard* *(1966) as animation Centre.
- Eritrea: Decameré (1963).

2. NOVITIATES AND SCHOLASTICATES:

- In Mexico, Xochimilco (1962), New Postulancy
- In Spain: Moncada* (1964).

3. ON-GOING FORMATION:

- In 1961 the Superior General authorises the publication of "Archivio Comboniano", it publishes studies and documents on Comboni and the Heart of Jesus. The initiative was from Fr P. Chiocchetta.
- A permanent course is established for up-dating our confreres, in view of the changes brought in by the Vatican Council II: It lasts for nearly 9 months: The first course is during the school year 1964/1965. During the course different subjects are revised such as Dogmatic, Moral Theology, Liturgy, H. Scripture.

4. NEW COMMITMENTS:

One priest is assigned for pastoral work among the Italian emigrants in Holland and one in Switzerland where a house is opened in Gordola (1964): both commitments were ended after the 1969 Chapter.

5. OPENING OF THE NEW HOUSE IN ROME:

A new house was built in Via Luigi Lilio, 80 for the residence of the General Council members and for administrative offices, Scholasticates and courses for on-going formation.

6. ERECTION OF NEW REGIONS

- Iberic region, comprising Spain and Portugal, in 1960.
- Three Regions in Italy: At the end of 1964 the General Council, makes a temporary experiment by sub-dividing Italy into three regions including the new region of the South, especially in view of a better vocational promotion.

II. CONGRESS OF MAJOR SUPERIORS AND FORMATORS

It gathered in Rome from June 1st to 9th, 1965 following an indication of the previous Chapter. The post-Vatican Council crises were slowly appearing. The Superior General in his own way enlightened the the confreres of the difficulties he was encountering. One quotation from his opening speech is indicative:

"The young confreres exempt themselves from the traditional set-up by saying that today's young people have other needs and that they may be allowed to be formed according to today's spirit. Those of middle-age want to enjoy freedom because they are already mature. All of these interpret the innovations of the Council in their own way and lead an individualistic life on the pretext of "aggiornamento". This does not bring any advantage to community life at home and in the missions. If you have followed the speeches of the Holy Father to Religious, you may have understood the meaning of "aggiornamento", it is to return to the genuine spirit of the founders by using modern means in order to achieve the same aim of the Order or Congregation. The genuine spirit of the Founders (and therefore also of those who formed our Congregation) is the Evangelical spirit. The Gospel is therefore the unique norm to which we must conform ourselves".(See Bull. no. 74 – 1/7/65).

The Programme of the Congress:

- Religious and missionary life: Fr A. Capovilla.
- Junior Seminaries (Fr Colombini); Liceo Comboniano (Fr Accorsi).
- Novitiate (Fr Todesco), Scholasticate of Theology (Fr Gusmini).
- Sacred music (Fr Bonfitto);
- Formation of Brothers (Fr Matordes);
- Apostolate (Fr Carlesi);
- Animation and vocation promotion (Fr Fare).

Conclusion:

There was a lot of discussion on difficulties faced by formators, because after the Vatican Council, an intolerance of discipline and traditional formation methods was common. All this was a symptom of the existing general frustration of young people which led to the peaceful revolt of 1968. The meeting discussed the possibility of asking *Propaganda Fide* to update our constitutions at least "ad tempus" in line with the principles of the Vatican Council. The opinion of waiting for the 1969 General Chapter prevailed. In the meantime, the confusion of candidates and formators continued and some houses had to be temporarily closed.

III. FIRST CONTACTS BETWEEN MFSC AND FSCJ

- Informal and personal approaches had been taking place, mainly among students and Fathers at the Urbaniana University, since 1955.
- Fr Lechner, then Superior General of the MFSC wrote a letter (15-2-63) to Fr Briani, Superior General of FSCJ about the possibility of a reunion: This led Fr Briani to pay a visit to Fr Lechner in Germany.
- The two Superior Generals on the occasion of their presence at the Vatican Council met to consider the possibility of setting up a mixed commission to discuss the issue: *Propaganda* was in favour of it.
- The General Chapter of MFSC on 1967, celebrated the centenary of the foundation of the institute in 1867. The occasion prompted a discussion on reunion and of an approach to FSCJ. The capitulars were in favour of it on condition of maintaining their missions in South Africa and Peru. In the same year the FSCJ opened two communities, one in South Africa and another in Peru.

IV. DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSIONS

1. OPENING IN FRENCH-SPEAKING TERRITORIES

Due to the expulsion of missionaries from Sudan, which started in the early sixties and reached its peak in 1964, some of them were available and were asking to go again to mission territories. The presence of Father General at the Ecumenical Council gave the chance for many Bishops to ask for personnel. An opening in the French-speaking territories was also good because for many missionaries expelled from Sudan, French would be easy enough. In fact French was taught for 3 years in Italian schools up to the fifties. So the following countries asked and obtained personnel:

- **ZAIRE:** In the Diocese of Nyangara (Dec. 1963).
- **TOGO:** In the Archdiocese of Lomé (1964).
- **BURUNDI:** In the Diocese of Bujumbura (1964).
- **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC** (1964). This opening was due to the necessity of providing assistance to Sudanese Refugees who were running away from Southern Sudan. The main centres were at Mboki and Obo in the Diocese of Bangassou, entrusted to the Holy Ghost Missionaries. A community, moreover, was opened in the capital Bangui (1967) for logistic services to Mboki and Obo. (See the booklet of Fr De Angelis).

2. RETURN TO ETHIOPIA

After the expulsion of 1942, some of our missionaries remained in Eritrea especially at Comboni College. In 1964, two of our confreres, Frs Maccani and Lonfernini, who had been expelled from Sudan, entered Ethiopia almost unnoticed and began our presence with the

foundation of Awasa (1965) to the South of Addis Ababa in Sidamo Province. In this they were helped by Archbishop G. Moioli who had previously acquired a large piece of land near Lake Awasa for future possibilities of the Catholic Church. During the Vatican Council he also had approached Fr G. Briani and the offer was accepted. (For the whole history see the Book of Fr Lonfernini: "Nelle vecchie e nuove vigne Africane". EMI).

3. MARTYRDOM OF 4 CONFRES IN ZAIRE

Martyrdom of 4 Confreres in Zaire and return of the others to Italy (Cfr. Bull.Nos.72,73,74; see Vol. 1 of "English translations of Necrologies of confreres" 1/7/1965, Page 185).

At the end of 1963, 8 confreres who had been expelled from Southern Sudan left for North Zaire to the Diocese of Nyangara entrusted to Belgian and Dutch Dominicans under the leadership of Bishop Francis De Wilde.

Our missionaries were assigned to the mission of Rungu and Ndedu. In 1964 the Simba revolution reached their mission. All Belgian and American Missionaries were arrested among them, Fr Remo Armani, in spite of being an Italian.

FR REMO ARMANI: (1917 - 1964) ordained priest for the Diocese of Trento in 1941, he made his profession in our institute in 1950 and was immediately appointed to Juba, among the Azande and in 1960 to Yambio. Expelled from Sudan at the end of 1962, he was appointed representative of the Superior General for the new group in Zaire. He was residing in Ndedu, North-West of present Isiro together with Fr Merloni and Fr Colombo, Br Pariani. Fr Remo was imprisoned, towards the end of October with other missionaries.

On Tuesday, November 24, the parachutists dropped in Stanleyville (Kisangani). In a last radio transmission, the heads of the Popular Republic gave orders to kill all hostages.

The rebels of Paulis (Isiro) started the executions before the arrival of the parachutists into Congo (Zaire). The evening of Monday November 23, when it was already dark, they ordered the prisoners to come out, they made them kneel and beat them. Then Fr Armani got up and said he was Italian, because the reprisals had the Belgians and Americans as targets. Immediately a "simba" shot him in the head.

And so, around 9.00 p.m, Fr Armani offered his life as a sacrifice to the Lord for the salvation of his dear Africans. He was the first to be killed.

Frs Piazza, Migotti, Zuccali, and Br Mosca were in Rungu where they met their holocaust.

FR LORENZO PIAZZA (1915-1964): He was ordained priest in 1960 and appointed to several Junior Seminaries in Italy. In 1953, he earned doctor's degree at the Catholic University of Milan with a paper on the art at the Azande and he reached them in 1955, appointed to Mupoi. He was expelled in 1963.

FR E. MIGOTTI (1922-1964): As a seminarian he was impressed by the life of Comboni and joined our institute where he was ordained in 1948. Appointed first to Ethiopia he later spent 10 years (1953-1963) among the Azande.

Fr Migotti was endowed with a simple good character, and worked always obediently and generously, and behaved as an exemplary religious.

When his mother embraced him for the last time, she told him: "Fr Evaristo, you barely escaped being killed in Sudan, and why do you want to go to Congo where they keep killing the whites"?

"Mother", answered her son, "I think that if the Lord would ask me to die a martyr, I would not be worthy of such a great grace".

FR ANTONIO ZUCCALI (1922-1964): Fr Antonio entered the Novitiate at Venegono on September 11,1943, at the end of his first year of theology, from the seminary of Bergamo. The departure from his family required heroism. His father and one of his brothers were in the army, and another had to report to the military post in those days.

He left his mother and two young sisters at home. He reached Isoke, Bahr-el-Gebel in 1951. He found himself at once in a very vast field. The mission had 8,000 Christians out of 80,000 inhabitants. The increase was about 1,500 Christians a year. Taking advantage of that period of freedom of ministry, Fr Zuccali built about 30 chapels in bricks. Many of them under his personal supervision.

He had a trade school with a good group of apprentices, and various instructors. He gave a vigorous impulse to adult conversions. He organized Catholic Action even in the villages, committing its members to lead prayer in the chapels, to promote Christian life, and in particular, to help solve some delicate family situations.

He was transferred to Torit in 1959 and in 1963 we find him at Rungu.

MARTYRDOM

When the Simba reached Rungu the missionaries went into hiding. Bro Mosca who survived describes the events:

"In the morning of November 30, after almost one week of this wild life, the teachers came to tell us that the "Simba" had threatened them with death if we didn't come out of the woods.

Then we had a council, and we all agreed on the decision to give ourselves up in order to save the lives of those poor people who had done so much for us, even though we had the certainty that we were going to meet death. All of us went to confession with serenity, thinking of the glorious sacrifice that the Lord was requesting from us for the good of the souls entrusted to our care and of the whole Congo".

When they came out of the woods the Frs. Piazza, Migotti and Bro. Mosca were taken to the river Bomokandi, shot dead and thrown into the river. However Bro Mosca swam. He told us:

"They told me to sit on the shoulder of the road, a few feet from the beginning of the bridge, with my face towards the wood. They were using only one gun because of shortage of ammunitions. Before shooting me, the chief of the group commanded me in French: 'Show your face'. I obeyed mechanically without saying a word.

"I turned toward the wood and a gun shot thundered. I felt a heavy blow on my left shoulder, near the neck, and my arm remained paralysed. For an instant I had not decided what I should do, because if I had turned around they would have fired another shot. With full consciousness I followed the inspiration to let myself fall on my right side as if dead. Meanwhile the blood was flowing abundantly from the wound.

I was the last but one to be thrown into the river. The last one was Fr Piazza. The grace of the Lord assisted me in that moment, too, and I had no fear at the thought of hitting the rocks of the river or of breaking my bones against the pillars of the bridge or even drown. Fortunately I hit the water with my back, and propping my feet against the water bed I was able to hang on to a pillar".

He roamed around for days until he fell into the hands of the "simbas" again:

"At first the "simbas" looked at me with their eyes full of hatred, then an officer commented, "But this is a miracle!. Only God saved you!.. You are invulnerable. We will make you the Archbishop of the Popular Army"! They gave me some bread and margarine. Everybody wanted to see my wound and were repeating with amazement: "Only God has saved you"! One of them offered to disinfect my wound with water.

That same evening the officer had gone to tell the sisters that they had found me, and that the next day they would take me to them for medication. The Rungu Colonel, coming back from a trip, said he was very sorry that the Fathers had been killed and assured the Sisters that if he had been around the massacre would not have happened".

After a few days the liberators arrived and Brother was freed.

The killing of Fr Zuccali

Fr Zuccali had remained in the woods together with Paul Lepeche, a Belgian, hoping that in a few days the National Army would arrive. In the morning of December 2, a native made them come out of hiding because - he said - the rebels not only were killing those who were sheltering the Whites, but also those who had only seen them.

The two walked towards the mission. A teacher's wife, a holy woman, as soon as she saw the two betrayed by that man, tried to assume full responsibility for their lives. The traitor was almost convinced by her words, when suddenly a truck full of "simbas" appeared. They killed the Father and the young Belgian near the electricity generator of Rungu.

The Father had time to give absolution to his companion and to bless the woman who had risked her life to save them. Their bodies were thrown into the River Rungu, which is an affluent of the River Bomokandi, and were taken by the current. The teachers looked for them in vain for a long time.

Our missionaries of Ndedu, and the Comboni Sisters who were working in 5 missions in the diocese of Wamba had been harassed and tortured for many days but at last they were liberated.

4. MASSIVE EXPULSION OF MISSIONARIES FROM SOUTHERN SUDAN⁵⁰

Though the expulsion of missionaries from Southern Sudan started in 1962, in 1964 they were all expelled. The expulsion took place from the 26th February to the 9th March: 104 confreres, 98 Comboni Sisters, 12 Mill Hill fathers; a total of 214.

Accusations: Subversive and illegal activities; obstinacy in challenging the law; incitement to subversion. The decree of expulsion refers to some cases of priests who had been accused of such things, but all of them were absolved by the local magistrates. No accusation was brought against the Sisters, and yet they are all deported. The Ordinaries, that is Bishop Mazzoldi (Juba), Msgr Ferrara (Mupoi/Tombora), Msgr Te Riele (M.H. Malakal) wrote a letter of protest to the Government; they worded it and signed it in Khartoum on the 8th of March, 1964. They brought to the notice of the Government what we have said above. Among other things they wrote:

"We, the undersigned, have been appointed by His Holiness the Pope to head the local Churches in the Southern Sudan and still remain in our office, even if deported, until His Holiness the Pope decides otherwise. As the responsible heads of those Churches for several years, we know perfectly well all our Missionaries, namely the Priests, Brothers and Sisters who are now deported with us. We supervised their activities closely all these past years. We are consequently in a position to speak for them, and even more, we are bound by justice and charity to defend their good reputation when their behaviour is correct, just as we would avow their faults, if found and detrimental.

Allow us, therefore, Your Excellency, to assure you that none of our missionaries indulged in any way 'in destructive or unlawful activities'. They, each and every one, bore deep respect for the Law and for Authority, and this same respect they urged their Christian faithful to bear for those in Authority. We cannot therefore accept your Excellency's statements and wish that the true facts be made known to the people at large. Your Excellency said, in the statement to the Central Council: 'It was my wish to seek your indulgence in order to state in detail all the incidents and offences which have been proved beyond doubt, to have been committed by these people. But time is short, and so I will content to refer to few incidents as an example'. Your Excellency, for the sake of brevity, quotes only a few cases. We must suppose that you quoted the most incriminating ones and consequently, as we can prove that these instances are no proof at all of your general statements hinted above, also the others unquoted are in no way helpful to substantiate those same statements".

Concrete examples follow. On their arrival in Rome they were received by Pope Paul VI who proclaimed their innocence like this:

"Venerable Brothers and beloved children! we admire the moving testimony your innocence, comforted by the tears of your faithful. We deplore the primitive enactment which lacks the very motives for which it wants to be justified. Such a move is against the good name and the civil progress of the Nation, and offends the sacred and common rights of justice and of liberty".

The Superior General led the deported confreres on a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

5. EXPULSION OF TEN MISSIONARIES FROM UGANDA

Expulsion of ten Missionaries from Uganda, in February, 1967. Before the order of deportation reached the confreres, the news was privately revealed. Bishop Tarantino (Arua) and Bishop Cesana (Gulu) tried to prevent the order and asked to see President Obote. Bishop Cypriano Kihangire also tried his best. The President refused to see any of them. The official reason given was that the Fathers were assisting Sudanese Refugees: nearly all the expelled had not seen any of them. The true reason was the bad feelings of two non-catholic members of the Uganda Parliament, one from West Nile, the other from Kitgum, who were afraid that the zeal of the missionaries, mainly in the organization of the youth, had political aims; this was not true. After the fall of Obote some of them were able to go back to Uganda.

⁵⁰ Vd **Bulletin 169**.

6. MORE MARTYRS

FR BARNABAS DENG (1936-1965)

Some of the Sudanese confreres remained on the spot after the expulsion of all missionaries; Fr Barnabas is one of them. The Father got close to one of the expelled fathers at Aweil when he was departing; he told him: "Father, pray for us; we will see each other only in heaven". He was killed near a military barracks on Monday, 23rd August, for no apparent reason.

FR LUIGI CORSINI (1928-1963)

He was found killed on the sea-shore in the mission of Todos Santos, in Mexican California. He had a wound on his neck, the sign of free masonry. He might have come to know some of their secret moves or he might have denounced some of their injustices.

FR MARCO VEDOVATO (25/4/1930 + 19/10/1968)

Fr Marco Vedovato belonged to the new community of the Pastor Bonus Parish, some sixty miles away from Balsas, in Maranhao, North Brazil.

On a Saturday evening, October 19, 1968, he returned from a visit to a chapel, he was very tired and wanted to rest in Mirador. His nerves were somewhat shaken, so much so that the next month he was due to go back to Italy for a vacation period. In a house nearby, a dancing party was stretching out into the night. Around 11.30 p.m the father, unable to close an eye and go to sleep, got up and went to ask the people to interrupt the dance. He thought everything ended there, and he turned around to walk out. At that moment the accordion player, a twenty year old youth, discharged a pistol and shot into his kidneys. The father fell, was taken to a pharmacy, where he died twenty minutes later.

V. COMBONI SISTERS

1. COMBONI SISTERS IN SPAIN (1963)

The Sisters could not miss Spain for Vocational promotion and Missionary animation: they are also present in Spanish-speaking American countries. It was in 1963 that the first Italian Sisters reached Madrid in a nice place not far from its centre. Barcelona came second but only in 1974. At present (1995), they have four communities. The residence is in Madrid and the Postulancy in Murcia, a community opened in 1980.

2. COMBONI SISTERS IN KENYA (1965)

The first commitment of the Comboni Sisters in Kenya was Ngandu (1965) in the Diocese of Nyeri, north of Nairobi. The Diocese had been entrusted to the Consolata Fathers in 1962. By then the Bishop was a Kenyan Msgr Caesar Gatimu (1921-1987). In Ngandu they were in charge of a Girls' Secondary School which in the 1970s excelled with the best Form IV results in the whole country for four consecutive years.

Other communities followed suit: Laisamis (24th January 1966) and Marsabit (7th October 1966). At present they have several communities with a postulancy in Ting'ang'a and the Provincial Residence in Nairobi.

Chapter Thirteen

INDEPENDENCE ERA IN AFRICA (1959-1975)

1. IN GENERAL

In the period 1959-1969 the majority of African nations became independent though some such as the Sudan and Ghana got independence before, and others later.

The independence of India in 1947 indicated that its example could be followed.

In an attempt to destabilize England and France in their colonies, and to replace them, the Soviet Union inculcated the necessity of independence for African colonies according to the dream of Lenin and Stalin. The Soviet Union presented Marxist-Leninist socio-political philosophy as a liberation movement in all the Universities in Africa, an ideology still well diffused. The Soviet Union supplied weapons and ammunition to some countries where guerrilla warfare was active.

Mr. Yoweri Museveni, President of Uganda, brings another reason: the Second World War weakened the remaining European imperialist powers so much that they had to relinquish their colonial possessions.

The progress in education up to University level gave Africans the aspiration towards independence. Especially those Africans who had the opportunity of studying abroad went back to their own Countries feeling perfectly able to rule them.

The U.S.A. were growing rich and needed new markets. The United Nations therefore put pressure for the colonial empires to be disbanded, and fostered uneasiness in the colonies to achieve this aim. Thus colonial reforms leading to independence were hastened during the Fifties.

2. COLONIAL POLICIES

Whatever may be the historical judgment on the phenomenon of colonialism, during this period we find the following trends adopted by colonial powers:

GREAT BRITAIN - The hope of persuading its restive non-European colonial subjects to remain affiliated with Britain through the Commonwealth dominated British colonial policy. Long-range aims of policy included:

- the establishment of educational institutions;
- economic development and foreign British investments to raise living standards and develop agriculture and local resources through fostering production and the export of raw materials;
- the gradual introduction of political structures which would eventually lead to independence within the Commonwealth of Nations as economic and political units.

Such policies however started rather late, and were carried out in a hurry for the general reasons stated above. The first territory which Great Britain released was Sudan (1956) followed by Ghana (1957); within the Sixties all the other Countries gained their formal independence though remaining in the Commonwealth. These ties were becoming weaker and weaker.

FRANCE - French practice was different. For many years France denied the possibility of adaptation and autonomous development for its colonies and insisted on the full assimilation of colonial inhabitants and their territory into the French cultural and political system. There was no local self-government. Administration was controlled centrally from Paris, and educational policy was designed to train a small élite of colonial subjects as good Frenchmen. After 1954, however, "assimilation" as a goal gave way to "association." Colonies were called "Overseas territories". Due to this atmosphere some Africans, like L. Senghor, former President of Senegal, were able to become members of the National Assembly of France.

In 1958 the new Constitution provided for self-determination. By 1960 all colonies South of the Sahara became independent while continuing their association with France. 'Association' explains the presence of French troops in some independent countries and the monetary links with the French Franc through the C.F.A. currency.

PORTUGAL - Portugal insisted that its colonies were provinces of the Motherland and in no sense subordinate to it; it maintained intact a doctrine and policy of assimilation to Portugal. However, the policy was characterized by little education, with meagre economic and political evolution.

Since the colonies were 'formally' provinces, Portugal refused to grant them independence and gave in only to campaigns of violence; guerrilla warfare became a constant drain on the economy of the country, already poor because of an archaic system of agriculture and uncompetitive industrial policies. All Portuguese colonies were granted independence only in 1975, after a military revolution at home.

BELGIUM - Belgium fostered the rapid industrial and commercial development of Zaire, but did not begin a process of technical and political education for the native population until about five years before independence, which was unexpectedly and suddenly granted in 1960. This caused a massive and panic-stricken "exodus" of the Belgians: in fact the soldiers revolted against their officers and scattered around the large country looting and killing at will. During this period however no missionaries were killed. A new rebellion started in 1963 by followers of the late Lumumba (first Prime Minister who had been murdered in 1961) and was supported by Chinese officers. Invited by Moise Tshombe, former leader of Katanga, and Prime Minister at the time, Belgian parachutists arrived in the country; then "the Simba" arrived and started killing the missionaries including our confreres towards the end of 1964.

In 1965 General Mobutu, then only 35, took full power; he is still in power in spite of his leadership that has led the country to ruin. He is supported by France in order to counter Museveni, who is supported by Anglo-American economic and political interests.

3. IN PARTICULAR

I give here a short survey of those countries where we were then working and which achieved independence more or less during this period and were real hot-spots with special problems.

SUDAN - It was under Anglo-Egyptian rule, but practically the day to day administration, particularly in the South, was carried out by the British officers. Independence movements had already started in 1922. But aspirations increased dramatically when, in 1951, King Farouk was unilaterally declared King of Egypt and of Sudan.

Fearing independence under the political domination of the Arab-Moslems the Equatorial battalion of the Army revolted: the mutiny broke out in August 1955 accompanied by serious disturbances between north and south.

Independence was granted on the 1st January 1956, and already in 1957 all mission schools were nationalized as a part of a national unification policy that aimed at the progressive islamization of the South and the gradual enslavement of the southerners to the North. A wild opposition started against missionaries. Southern political leaders started going into exile; Fr Saturnino was one of them. He was later killed by Ugandan soldiers.

The Missionary Societies Act (1962) severely restricted religious freedom, but the law was rigidly enforced only in the South. The expulsion of missionaries in 1964 was followed by a massive exodus of civilians including students and senior seminarians. Guerrilla warfare started under the name of the Anya-Nya. After several coup-d'Etats, 1964 brought to power General Jafar Nimeiri who in 1972 signed an agreement with the Anya-Nya in Addis Ababa. However in 1979 the Khartoum Government enforced the Muslim "Sharia" law throughout the country. Guerrilla warfare started up again and is going on up to now; a situation which prevents all development in the South. Divisions among Southerners on tribal basis, the massive exodus of refugees, famine and torture, have all plagued the South.

In October 1994 the Missionary Societies Act (1962) was replaced by the "Provisional Order: The Miscellaneous Amendment (Organization of Voluntary Work), Act 1994." This act was rejected by the Catholic Bishops in a statement of 1st February 1995. The basis for this rejection is the fact that the Church is considered as "a foreign voluntary organization whose purpose is to carry out work, the nature of which is religious". Such a concept attempts to submit the Church to the complete control of the Government and to the whims of its fundamentalist leaders.

UGANDA - Uganda achieved independence on 9th October, 1962. In order to understand the events of Uganda in its journey to independence a brief historical introduction is necessary.

I start from well-known facts: the Uganda Martyrs 1885-1887 were killed by Mwanga the King of Buganda, the largest tribe in Uganda. Mwanga killed Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims. The three groups got together to overthrow him and they eventually succeeded. The Moslems by then had more power so they set up as King a brother of Mwanga and circumcised him. Christians got annoyed and after several separate attempts they got together and overthrew the Muslim King and brought Mwanga back, who in his exile had been with the Catholics; Protestants felt uneasy and were looking at the Catholics with great suspicion.

From an incident where a Catholic in self-defence killed a Protestant, a battle ensued among the two groups. As the Catholics were the majority they were about to defeat the Protestants when Captain Lugard, the representative of the Imperial British East African Company, gave the Protestants two powerful Maxim guns that put the Catholics in disarray. Protestants destroyed the Catholic mission of Rubaga, many Catholic chapels, and sold some 50,000 Catholics as slaves. They considered themselves the winners of a war, the only ones eligible to rule.

Out of 19 counties in which the Buganda territory was divided, 15 went to Protestants and 4 to Catholics and Moslems. The children of Chiefs had to go to Protestant schools, which meant in effect to become Protestants; this was to ensure the creation of a Protestant Establishment like in England, without declaring it. The last English Protestant Archbishop Leslie Brown, just after independence asked President Milton Obote to declare the Anglican Church the State Religion.

The Protestant Establishment was made all the more secure through the founding of a secondary school for the children of Kings (all Protestants) and Chiefs: Kings' College, Budo. The discrimination against Catholics went on throughout the century and after independence too, as the following statistics can illustrate:

Census 1991:

Catholics	7,426,500	44.5%
Protestants	6,541,800	39.2%
Muslims	1,758,100	10.5%

Main political posts by appointments of the Central Government in 1993 were as follows:

Catholics	35
Protestants	116
Muslims	9

As recently as 1986 when the National Resistance Movement of President Museveni introduced free elections for the different levels of local councils, many Catholics were elected as Chairpersons. In some parts of Eastern Uganda some of them were murdered. A BBC correspondent went to investigate. Her reports on "Focus on Africa" stated that people had never seen a Catholic occupying posts of leadership in that part of the country: so they had to be eliminated in order to avoid setting a precedent!

Independent Movements

The first political party was the Uganda National Congress (UNC) started in 1951. Catholics joined it, but they came to realize that they were being discriminated against as the party was dominated by the Protestants. Moreover, the policy of the party was to obtain freedom from the white men, including missionaries and the religion that they had brought in order to submit local people to Godless communist ideology. Their founder, I. Musasi, had been in contact with Russian leaders and had been in Moscow.

A group of Baganda Catholics in 1954 started a new party "Uganda Democratic Party (DP)", which in 1956 spread all over the country with the encouragement of some Bishops: they saw in it a necessary step to fight the unjust discrimination against the human rights of the Catholics.

A non-Catholic historian of Uganda says that "one has to wonder not because the Catholics organized themselves to peacefully fight such a discrimination, but why they did not do it before." Such a step was also necessary to dissipate the accusations brought against the Catholic Church which was portrayed as discouraging Catholics to compete for political posts.

A great help was given by the Catholic press towards the political awareness of the Ugandans in the North, where nobody else was doing a work of this kind. This is well demonstrated in a

doctoral thesis presented to the University of Chicago by a Ugandan, who is now a Senior Lecturer in Makerere University. I quote:

“Three such publications were to be found in the Northern region during the decade 1952-1962. Two were newspapers, namely the ‘Lobo Mewa’ in Acholi (‘Our Land’) and the ‘West Nile Gazette’, and one was a magazine, ‘Leadership’. Through this rigorous content analysis of the papers it became possible not only to gauge the intensity or seriousness of the Church’s political programme but also the precise nature of this programme, namely the concrete matters or issues over which the Church was concerned and the types of action taken.

“In addition to all these sources, Father Tarcisio Agostoni, the editor of Leadership in the decade, one-time Spiritual Director of the Lay Apostolate in the region, and author of an important book on politics for Ugandan consumption, “Every Citizen’s Handbook” made available for study his own personal papers on politics during the decade. These papers are of special significance in any study of the political activities of the Catholic Church during the decade of our concern; for, Fr Agostoni was virtually the principal mentor of the Church on political matters. As a matter of fact his papers clearly influenced and guided Church thinking on the political matters in respect to which we cite them in this work”⁵¹.

At the elections of 1961 the DP came out victorious. But for political and religious reasons the colonial Government asked the Ugandans to repeat the elections in 1962, with the pre-determined intention to take away the power from Catholics and give it to the Protestants, according to their long-time policy. In fact in no other British Colony or Protectorate were the elections for independence ever repeated after the period of self-Government had already been granted.

The DP was suppressed by Obote. It was revived before the elections of 1980. When the results were announced at the polling stations, DP had received the absolute majority. The Military Commission that was then ruling the country stopped further announcements. Falsified results were directly announced by the Military Commission gradually over the period of a month. It was in fact the plan of Mwalimu Nyerere to put his Socialist friend Apollo Milton Obote back into power. Because of the rigging of these elections, a group of radicals led by Yoweri Museveni went into the bush to fight a guerrilla war which brought them to power up to the present day.

MOZAMBIQUE - The movement towards independence started in the late Fifties. In 1962 Frelimo (“Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) was founded by Edward Mondlane who was an employee of United Nations. Guerrilla warfare started in 1964 following the manual of Mao-Tse-Tung. Portugal was forced to employ some 60,000 soldiers, half of them Africans. The moderate E. Mondlane was murdered in Tanzania in 1969 and replaced by the military leader Samora Machel who led the country to independence in 1975. A Marxist-Leninist regime was introduced which caused great poverty and misery. Fishing rights went to the Soviet Union in compensation for the military assistance given to Frelimo during the pre-independence guerrilla war.

As violence generates violence, so a violent opposition movement, Renamo (Mozambique National Resistance) was started and helped by South Africa and former Portuguese settlers. The new war impoverished the country in the extreme. In 1993 Mozambique was by far the poorest country in Africa with a pro capita income of 70 USA \$, the second being Tanzania with 110 followed by Ethiopia with 115 .

Samora Machel died in an aircrash on his return from Lusaka in doubtful circumstances. He was succeeded by Albert Chissano who signed a cease-fire in 1990 in Rome and who is leading the country after defeating Renamo in the general election of 1994.

During both wars missionaries had to suffer a lot partly because both guerrilla movements were visiting the missions, and new residence permits were denied to missionaries by the Frelimo government until 1989. It was during the war between Renamo and Frelimo that several missionaries including Sr. Teresa Dalle Pezze and Bro. Fiorini, were killed.

SOUTH AFRICA - The Boers (or peasants) from Holland arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. They started tilling the land with imported slaves from Angola. In their efforts to penetrate the interior, they had to fight with local inhabitants mainly the Xhosa. In the meantime other Protestants arrived. Both new and old comers thought to be a new nation entitled to conquer a new promised Land.

⁵¹ A.G.G Ginyera-Pinyewa, *Issues in Pre-Independence politics in Uganda*”, pages 9-10.

When the British arrived in 1806, the Boers at first welcomed them. But later on they started migrating to the North where they found precious minerals in 1867. From there wars started between the British and the Boers. The British increased their soldiers from 20,000 to 200,000 and the Boers were forced into submission in 1902. In 1910 the South African Union became independent with two official languages - English and Afrikaans. Africans realized their actual destiny and started the African National Congress: from that time discriminatory acts against Africans started: the "Native Lands Act" 1913, which created land reserves; and the "Colour Bar Act" 1926, which excluded Africans from qualified jobs in industry.

Other acts followed up to the creation of full "apartheid" with Prime Minister Dr. Malan (1948-1954); a policy approved by the Dutch Reformed Church. But citizens of British origin, the Anglicans and Catholic Church opposed this policy.

Our confreres had fully supported the policy of the Catholic Church: but they often found themselves in situations of conflict and also in a condition of suspense fearing a blood-bath between blacks and whites. The reform in the Soviet Union which took away the fear of Communist influence in a country under African majority rule, gave way to the freeing of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and to General Elections on the basis of "One man, one vote" in April 1994.

BURUNDI - Burundi, like Rwanda, was from the beginning of the century part of Tanganyika of German East Africa. After the First World War both countries were entrusted to Belgian administration as a single political entity. The Belgians limited the power of the kings, abolished slavery and tried their best to put an end to the servitude of the Hutu. In Rwanda, however, in 1959 the Hutu, who were almost 90% of the population massacred thousands of Tutsi in an uprising, while thousands more took refuge in nearby countries.

A referendum in 1961 was in favour of the separation of the two States. The Hutu got power in Rwanda and the Tutsi in Burundi. Here the king was deposed by a Tutsi-led military coup in 1960, led by Michel Micombero. In 1972-1973 the Hutu seemed to organize themselves and fight for their rights as a majority (84%). The Tutsi, afraid of the repetition of what happened in Rwanda in 1959, stimulated an uprising and massacred more than 200,000 Hutu. Micombero was deposed by Jean Baptist Bagaza, a more rigorous anti-Hutu. He feared the influence of the missionaries and of some of the local clergy who were in favour of the rights of the Hutu and he introduced the policy of weakening the Catholic Church and eliminating the missionaries. In this context our confreres were all expelled from Burundi in 1977.

However such policies made Bagaza unpopular and he was deposed by a more moderate military officer Pierre Buyoya in 1987, who prepared general election that brought the Hutu to share in the political power, though the real power, that of the military, is in the hands of the Tutsi. This is the root of present instability, fear, killings and so on.

KENYA - Though we took pastoral responsibility in Kenya after independence, it is useful to know some historical events.

The 1st July 1895 Kenya was officially announced as being under British authority.

The railway line started in 1896 in Mombasa, reached Entebbe in 1901. Many Indians, brought in for the construction of the railway, established themselves in Kenya and Uganda. Slowly during the years, British subjects occupied three quarters of the most fertile lands.

Rightly dissatisfied, the Africans started to organize themselves: "Kikuyu Central Association" was founded in 1925; the Secretary was Jomo Kenyatta who in 1948 started "Kenya African Union". Its aim was to abolish racial differences and acquire equality of political rights.

The question of land brought about the "Mau Mau" insurgency that was harshly repressed by the colonial government from 1952 to 1957. 40,000 people had been killed and thousands imprisoned, among them Jomo Kenyatta, who became President of the independent Kenya in 1963 as leader of Kenya African National Union "KANU". In 1968 this party was declared the only party until recently, when under international pressure the successor of Kenyatta, Daniel Arap Moi had to allow a multiparty system in 1988.

The Democratic structure did not change Arap Moi's dictatorial mentality.

Kenya did not have the religious troubles that we had in Uganda, though a prominent Catholic leader in KANU Tom Mboya, was killed in very doubtful circumstances in 1969.

However so far Kenya has been rather peaceful, allowing about 120 international religious Institutes to settle and work there.

The Episcopal Conference of Kenya has recently been very outspoken in denouncing corruption, malpractices and tribalism in the country often appealing to Arap Moi and denouncing his responsibility in this lamentable state of affairs.

4. THE CHURCH AND INDEPENDENCE OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES

The Church in general did not explicitly accept or condemn colonial Powers. She was satisfied with the freedom of religion, of movement, of hospitals, of welfare activities, of development projects, of schools at different levels, and so on.

However Catholic thought has increasingly tended to stress the equality of the human personality that colonial Rule openly or covertly denied.

Talking of political rights, Pope Pius XII said,

“That perpetual privilege proper to man by which every individual has a claim to the protection of his rights, and by which there is assigned to each a definite and particular sphere of rights, immune from all arbitrary attacks, is the logical consequence of the order of justice willed by God”. (Radio Message, Christmas Eve 1942).

In the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* John XXIII condemned the idea that some peoples or cultures were so inherently superior to others that they had the right to rule over them (No. 88-89-92). He noted with approval that National Independence was becoming universal (No. 42-43):

“Men all over the world have today – or will soon have – the rank of citizens in independent nations. No one wants to feel subject to political powers located outside his own Country or ethnical group. Thus in very many human beings the inferiority complex which endured for hundreds and thousands of years is disappearing, while in others there is an attenuation and gradual fading of the correspondent superiority complex, which had its roots in social economic privileges, sex or political standing. On the contrary, the conviction that all men are equal by reason of their natural dignity has been generally accepted. Hence racial discriminations can in no way be justified.”

The Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI, and John Paul II, developed on the principles of John XXIII, adding as far as Christianity is concerned, the need of inculturation and the need for Africans to be missionaries to themselves.

Chapter Fourteen

THE CRISIS IN THE CHURCH

A. INTRODUCTION

Our Institute could not avoid being victim of the crisis that affected the Church on the occasion of the changes brought in by the Second Vatican Council. The misunderstanding of some of these changes and the uneasiness present by then in the Church as a whole affected priests and religious, men and women, in an extraordinary way. Some religious institutes lost many members. One institute lost 35% of their members. Our institute was somehow blessed because we lost less than 2.5%. Better than our institute was an Indian Congregation which lost less than 2%.

The following statistics may give us an idea about the exodus. It does not explain everything, though, because these figures do not include the newcomers, mainly from the Third World, and the number of natural deaths.

STATISTICS

1. RELIGIOUS MEN AND WOMEN IN THE WORLD

	1942		1966		1991	
	M	W	M	W	M	W
Europe			179,287	492,252	107,987	334,573
America			190,534	323,876	73,948	225,291
Asia			21,368	32,547	28,772	85,180
Africa			15,369	21,345	17,745	26,158
Oceania			5,977	16,011	5,176	11,182
TOTAL	220,041	586,646	412,535	886,031	233,528	682,384

2. STATISTICS OF THE MORE NUMEROUS INSTITUTES

WOMEN	1942	1966	1991
Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul	43,325	45,048	28,999
Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesians)	8,708	18,435	16,915
Sisters Scholastics of Our Lady	10,582	11,980	6,227
Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Good Shepherd	9,822	9,579	6,713
Sisters of Charity of the Holy Cross of Ingebohl	8,154	8,975	5,653
Sisters of Charity of B. Capitanio and Gerosa	7,655	8,795	6,598
Sisters of Charity of St Thouret	6,263	7,736	4,435
Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus	6,618	6,963	4,340
Sisters of Joseph Cottelengo	-	6,284	3,282
Ursulines of the Roman Union	7,134	6,133	3,425
Little Sisters of the Poor	5,662	5,656	3,808
Sisters of Blessed Saviour of Miederhroun	5,604	5,198	2,613
Daughters of Wisdom	4,895	5,145	2,861
Dominicans of Charity of Tours	3,477	5,103	5,530
TOTAL	128,129	158,170	106,690

MEN	1942	1966	1991
Society of Jesus (SJ)	26,303	35,919	23,778
Franciscans (OFM)	24,148	25,272	18,738
Salesians	11,702	22,726	17,555
Brothers of Christian Schools (Lasalle)	15,303	17,787	8,149
Franciscan Capuchins (OFM Cap)	13,510	15,710	11,699
Marist Brothers for Schools	6,941	10,221	5,791
Dominicans (OP)	6,567	9,946	6,715
Redemptorists	6,352	9,052	6,135
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI)	5,277	7,890	4,331
Lazarists	5,155	6,230	3,681
Society of the Divine Word (SVD)	4,955	5,748	5,729
Holy Ghost Fathers	3,662	5,137	3,323
Franciscans Conventuals (OFM Conv.)	2,757	4,605	4,295
Order of St Augustine (OSA)	3,099	4,504	3,105
Passionists (CP)	3,310	4,340	2,663
TOTAL	139,341	185,087	126,687

3. NATIONS WITH MORE RELIGIOUS

		1991		1966	
		M	W	M	W
Europe	Italy	27,529	109,001	49,598	155,962
America	U.S.A	26,505	86,761	49,634	162,304
Asia	India	13,037	53,078	7,104	10,571
Africa	Zaire	2,930	2,774	2,622	2,462
Oceania	Australia	3,179	8,372	4,300	12,157

4. NOVICES

In Europe 1991			In America 1991		
	Men	Women		Men	Women
Italy	677	1,245	U.S.A	553	631
France	177	677	Canada	57	57
Spain	487	649	Mexico	424	1,234
Belgium	48	100	Brazil	526	1,251
Holland	25	11	Ontario	170	450
Germany	160	168	Colombia	316	779
England	102	67			
Austria	55	43			
Poland	719	1,071			
Switzerland	30	53			

B. TENTATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CRISIS

It is not easy to fully analyse such a world-wide crisis. But I am trying to find some useful indications. I write what was my personal experience. In fact, as Superior General, I had to analyse the requests for laicisation of priests and dispensation from vows of Brothers. Moreover during the biannual three-day meeting of the Superior Generals we had public and private exchanges of experiences. I hope to offer some light to enable people to read the past and the present and somehow foresee the future. History should be the teacher of life. Unfortunately the main lesson of this teacher, is that very few people remember, or apply the lessons.

I. CHANGES IN SOCIETY

The religious world is part of society and is affected by it for good or bad. The causes of the major changes that affected society are the following:

1. The appreciation, usefulness, newness of modern products of technology brought a deep and anxious greed for them which generated indifference for the old and obsolete spiritual and supernatural values. Even in religious feasts the balance went more to the material aspects.

2. Citizens of industrialised countries may have food and means of maintenance through their wealth. They don't see the need to pray the Lord for rain and sun. They don't need God any more!

3. Parents who toiled to make a living and for a standing in society wanted to make the life of their children easy and affordable. The children grew up wanting only pleasure and with a strong tendency to have all they want. So they reject hardship, binding commitments, sacrifice, privation, crosses, etc. They tend to embrace only those hardships which bring more pleasure and satisfaction.

4. The communication explosion has created a very confused cultural context that often shook and shocked the good consciences of Christians who were Christian more by tradition than by deep personal conviction. Television, more than all the other means, broke into the homes, the sanctuary of society, and disturbed the consciences. Commercial journalism, whose main aim is profit and not the building of honest personalities, relies among the other laws on two which are double-edged swords.

- The law of publishing what "makes news", whatever the content. One could make a choice between good, educative events, and bad, unedifying ones. But generally the choice is for the latter. The loving harmony of millions of families does not make news. A wife who cuts off her husband's penis makes news all over the world. Millions of mothers who adore their children do not make news, whereas the few mothers who throw their babies into a dustbin attract TV coverage. This causes young people to lose the sense of good and evil. Easy generalizations do the rest.
- The second law or axiom of commercial journalism is that journalists must write what people like to read, otherwise they will not sell. In general people like news similar to those above. Only those who are committed develop nausea for such news. As human beings are inclined to an easy life, society is taken into a spiral that leads to moral and spiritual decline.

5. Dictatorial regimes in Europe had created a deep thirst for democratic regimes which, as a reaction, were often unable to contain the excesses of individualism and the abuse of liberties. It was necessary to initiate an overall process of democratization of the civic structures which carried along new awareness of the value of the human person, of its freedom and of its rights, but diminished the sense of its duties.

As all other remarkable occurrences in the history of mankind, this wonderful new trend brought its excesses. One of them is the return to the tenets of democracy as declared by the French Revolution, with the proclamation of human reason as the supreme Goddess, the source of laws of human behaviour, with the exclusion of the true God and his Church. So illuminism and paganism came back. They even penetrated religious life. Unfortunately community life was seen only in its aspect of regular observance and its rules mainly in their aspects of coercion and self-denial.

The whole set-up became unbearable and exploded: thousands and thousands of priests and religious abandoned the life they had embraced. The proclamation of the equality of all human beings represented by the formula "One man, one vote", the democratic mentality became a leveller, abolishing all social distinctions. Authority was greatly affected. Its role, when not denied, became questionable, and encountered practical difficulties in finding its place within the new culture.

II. CHANGES IN THE CHURCH

1. REACTION TO “SPIRITUALISM”

Spiritualism is the tendency to consider the supernatural gifts and qualities the true and only reality, neglecting natural qualities and gifts. This was well expressed in the axiom: *Age Contra*, that is, “repress your natural inclinations and gifts and give way only to the supernatural ones”. The axiom can be understood in a positive way as affirming resistance to sinful tendencies and anything leading that way. It involves self-control, self-denial, as are implied by the discipleship of Jesus. “If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, let him take up his cross and follow me” (Mc 8:34).

The Bishops at the Vatican Council, aware of such spiritualistic tendency, intended to strike a balance by giving the proper value to natural qualities and gifts without diminishing the role of the supernatural order; they proclaimed the integration of all values in the unicity of the human person, redeemed and elevated by Christ through a share in divine nature (II Pt.1:4). This constitutes the heart of the so-called anthropological turning point of the Church which by many was misinterpreted, striking the unilateral balance on purely human values.

The Council recalled however two things:

- The reality of human weakness left in us by original sin;
- The reality of consecrated life when we voluntarily restrain from the exercise of some natural gifts like freedom, sex, possession of goods, etc.

Some Catholic writers, instead of proclaiming the balance brought in by the Council, reacted to spiritualism by emphasising and proclaiming the victory of natural qualities and tendencies, neglecting to give due consideration to the supernatural ones.

Many religious and priests who felt the conflict of the two tendencies, tried to find a solution only in human means, in psychological devices, friendships and the free exercise of freedom without restraint. We noticed then a rapid decline in personal prayer, ordinary confession, spiritual direction, spirit of sacrifice and of faith. Hence personal crises, which deprived people of the proper solution and generated more confusion and conflicts in individuals and in religious communities. When a supernatural gift is at stake the reductive approach to human means is deceptive. It may even favour the permanence in religious life of inept but generous people and/or of conformists and mediocre individuals not qualified for the mission. A supernatural gift is nourished mainly by supernatural means. “Without me you can do nothing”, says Jesus. On the other hand the reductive recourse to spiritual and ascetic voluntarism to resolve deeper questions of human life may be heroic but may lead to a dramatic and existentially mistaken way of life. What is radical is the totality of the person that lives in the totality of the baptismal and religious consecration expression of a Christian totality. Either we take the totality of a consecration or we leave no compromise.

2. DESACRALIZATION

Following the devaluation of the spiritual and supernatural order, this phenomenon came in its wake which involved first of all objects, places, priestly and religious habits, etc. Secularization involved persons (secularism). The sacrality of priestly ordination and religious consecration lost their meaning; many priests and religious did not consider their vocation as a gift of God. They forgot what Jesus proclaimed, “You did not choose me, I chose you”. They felt it was their own choice and so they easily disposed of it not as administrators, but as it were their own property. Then to abandon it could be easily taken into consideration. For many, though, the decision was a painful step to take, but often only from a human point of view, as if this was the novelty of the Vatican Council. The devaluation of the supernatural order affected the concept of sin mainly of individual sin and those realities linked to it like purgatory and hell. Social sins are seen only from a social point of view.

3. CONSECRATED CHASTITY

A special target of this “devaluation” was consecrated virginity and celibacy. These were often presented as a deprivation of a great human value which is even necessary for the transmission of the human species. A human person, so the ideology goes on, is not biological and psychologically

complete without the intimate company of the other sex. In order to fulfil their sexuality as a necessary component of their personality, consecrated persons must keep intimate friendship with the other sex for an exchange of values proper to each sex, so as to help a growth in the perfection of charity. Many priests and religious entered into this adventure starting even with the exchange of spiritual and purely human values. But from friendship, to liking, to affection, to love, the “respectful” distance between sexes was often reduced and eliminated. Since moments of depression and crisis in consecrated life are not rare, the idea of a permanent union in marriage took shape. So writes a victim of this ideology: “It is difficult to share sufferings without expressions of love, and it is difficult to share the suffering of a close friend of the other sex without becoming vulnerable”. Add to this that many priests and religious were spiritually and humanly immature. Too many left, others remained, though leading a double life. If they hadn't embraced the above ideology, many sooner or later would have overcome their inner conflicts.

We had to admit also that the protective method of formation prevented religious from realising that the other sex is attractive. So, coming in direct contact with women, men discovered this attractiveness and gave in.

Celibacy is a gift, a charism, is not only a question of ecclesiastical discipline. For this gift we are accountable to God.

4. CRISES OF IDENTITY

Another consequence of the process of “devaluation” of the supernatural reality in the priestly and religious life was the loss of identity, that is of the theological aspect of one’s vocation. Who is a priest, a religious? Both lives are of supernatural origin: a loose reference to the origin, a very loose explanation of their realities led many priests to look at their office just as a profession; as it led many religious, mainly brothers and sisters, to identify their charism with their service, forgetting the gift of sharing in an aspect of the life of Jesus. So members of teaching, nursing, or social service institutes thought they could give the same service to the Church or the civic community without the burden of community life and the profession of the vows. Some of them managed the new life, many succumbed to a kind of life for which they were not prepared.

5. CRISES OF FAITH

The Council of Trent in view of preserving the faith in the time of reformation had clear-cut definitions of the Catholic doctrine. The Vatican II did not define any point in the classical manner, though it described and proclaimed the doctrine. Many problems were opened to discussions and further research. Within the Catholic Church a theological pluralism developed not only through different theological schools, but also through doctrines both self-contradictory and going against the official teaching of Popes and of other offices of the Holy See. Moreover the misunderstanding of true ecumenism prompted teachers of philosophy and theology to introduce some protestant principles into Catholic teaching. Many young priests or even adults who had not deepened Catholic theology remained confused and chose subjective criteria for interpreting the Gospel message. Some rejected the authority of the Church as an institution, others refused to believe revealed truths.

6. THE CRISIS OF AUTHORITY

A democratic, ‘all-levelling’ spirit challenged also the role of authority in the Church. Many priests and religious did not challenge the role of authority itself but the authoritarianism of some superiors: the way of exercising authority, the lack of dialogue, of a loving attitude, of understanding. They challenged authority lived more as power than as service.

7. THE PRINCIPLE OF CIVIL AUTHORITY

Some priests and religious had confused ideas about the difference between the origin of authority in a democratic society and in the Church. In the democratic theory the basis of authority is in the people through free, fair and periodical elections. It is a necessary process to identify the persons who are willing and able to take the responsibility to direct, coordinate, unite all the activities of the people towards the common welfare. Pope Pius XII said that the democratic regime in civil society is a natural right of human persons and it is commanded by human reason. When we

uphold that authority in society is from God, we intend the following: God has created man to live in a society; but there is no society without authority. Then authority is from God, according to the order established by him. This is the mind of St Paul: “ Let every person be subject to superior authority. For there is no authority except from God. Thus the one who resists authority, resists the ordinance of God”. (Rom.13 1:2)

8. AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

The Church is not a natural society; the religious dimension is natural in human beings but not necessarily in the form of the Church founded by Christ. The Church is a gratuitous gift of the Lord to humankind with an internal consistency that enables it to reach its proper aim and to last until the end of the world. Faithful Christians are not simply “the people” but “the people of God”. The sense of belonging to “the people” is the sense of belonging to God. Here is the Vatican Council: “The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus” (The Church, 3) “The Spirit dwells in the Church. He bestows upon her varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts and in this way directs her” (The Church, 4).

Authority in the Church is not from below, it is a gift from above: we can refuse to accept this gift, but once we accept it and form the Church we have to abide by her interior consistency. “The one who listens to you, listens to me and the he who rejects you, rejects me, and he who rejects me, rejects the One who sent me” (Lk 10:16).

In his farewell to the elders of Ephesus, St. Paul tells them “Look after yourselves and all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as Bishops, to shepherd the Church of God which he obtained through his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

The challenge to those in authority in the Church is the exercise of the sincere and deep sense of service, the usefulness for the persons and the institutions as well.

9. SHORTCOMINGS OF RELIGIOUS FORMATION

a) Not all the crises depended on the individual religious person. Some were coming from community life itself. The spiritualistic school had its responsibilities: many communities were very protective, rather legalistic, and formalistic. Moreover some spiritual values were not lived “spiritually”: some insincerity in mutual relations, authoritarianism of the superiors; charity too weak; simple innocent friendliness misinterpreted; sense of frustration of one’s human qualities because they were not all allowed to operate and develop.

Many institutes and more communities did not perceive the “signs of the times”, did not open up in time to new trends. As long as the old system had no alternative, members of such communities peacefully though painfully endured it. But when the environment and society changed, the situation could no longer be accepted. Then people started to leave. Some religious priests, mainly in mission territories, left the community to join dioceses in the same territories.

b) The screening of vocations also was defective. The pre-conciliar theology of vocation taught that the signs of a genuine vocation were two: first, the necessary supernatural and natural qualities; second, the judgement of the superiors. The crises have instead proved beyond any doubt that the sign of vocation is the personal and free decision of the person, a decision well motivated and well enlightened about the commitment linked with the vocation and its development.

Often candidates with all the qualities, but without a personal decision and clear motivations, were encouraged to go ahead because of the good qualities they had: spiritual directors or superiors were taking upon themselves the responsibility of the decision. So for many religious and priests who left, very often the question was not and it is not why they were leaving but why they had joined the priesthood or the religious life in one definite institute in the first place.

c) The lack of preparation of formators: too few formators had a specific preparation for the task given them, and changes found them devoid of resources: they were carrying on in the same way in which they themselves were trained.

10. THE MISSIONARY INSTITUTES

Some of the aspects of the crises described above did not affect members of some missionary institutes, for instance the crisis of identity. Also this was questioned, though, on the following grounds:

a) The trends of “devaluation” of supernatural realities affected the aim of missionary activities. For many missionaries the human-socio-political promotion became the only target. Evangelisation as integral promotion was obscured: some General Chapters of Missionary institutes dealing with human promotion or liberation forget the word “integral” or total.

b) Emphasis was laid on ecumenism, on dialogue with other religions, on the assumption that by following one’s religion salvation is at hand. The task of announcing the Gospel was minimised even in those places where it was possible. This trend brought some crisis of identity in some missionaries: the trend of “devaluation” of the Christian message and its supernatural contents played its part. Of course final salvation in the end depends on God, who may use all religions, but the task of announcing Jesus Christ whenever possible has been given to us: “Go throughout the world and preach the Gospel to all mankind”. (Mk. 16:15).

c) The “end” of missionary institutes: The emphasis on the local churches and their missionary commitment, in itself a correct thing, brought some people to proclaim the end of the missionary institutes: the local churches would take over or replace the role of the missionary institutes. This trend as a whole proved to be only a good proposal in spite of some laudable efforts of a good number of dioceses. It is however proper of the missionary institutes to be the backbone of missionary efforts.

We cannot exclude that some missionaries of the same nationality of the colonisers were affected by the end of the colonies: perhaps they felt that the Church in these countries would no more need missionaries.

Some people proposed a “*Moratorium*”: that is missionaries should for a certain period leave the local Churches and stop the input of personal and of material help into the missions in order to force local Churches to self-reliance. But such ideology cannot become real: the question is either to stay or to leave for good. If missionaries stay, however, they have to reconsider their new role within the local Churches.

11. SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES FOR BROTHERS

In clerical institutes the role of the brothers became obscure: they often had crises of identity: some priests were telling them (and also to Sisters) that human promotion was a goal for lay people only. They should devote themselves to pastoral work. Too many were confused and lost, because they had to abandon the profession they knew to embrace an activity for which they were not prepared. They also felt frustrated because for many the charism was only the service and not the gift and its spirituality. Some Brothers opted for the priesthood; others opted for their profession and left the institute; others managed to continue their way, following their genuine vocation.

Here also the ideology that lay married people would replace the consecrated brother played the part in the “devaluation” of the supernatural gift of consecrated life that includes the profession of vows and community life.

III. CRISIS IN OUR INSTITUTE

1. THOSE WHO LEFT

The following statistics may give indication to understand the crisis in our Institute over the 15 years after the Council:

	N.M.	T.V.	P.V.	Total	Diff.	%	Deaths
From 1964-1969	440	194	44	238	+202	56%	
From 1970-1974	253	133	94	227	+26	89%	50
From 1975-1979	254	49	52	101	+153	39%	49

Legend: N.M. = New members; T.V. = Temporary Vows; P.V. = Perpetual Vows

In the 10 years 1970-1979 we had the positive difference of 65 new members while 99 members had left for the eternal province

We diminished by 34 units that correspond to less than 2.5%. The percentage is in comparison to the newly professed and not of the newly professed.

2. THE ANSWER TO THE CRISIS IN THE INSTITUTE

An immediate answer outside the General Chapter was difficult to find, for the difficulty of a global solution decided only by the General Direction; difficult also for the contents: it was clear that the crisis had deep roots, not easily identified by some Superiors and formators.

There were also many abuses in the name of the Council which prevented the practical application of the changes introduced by the same.

The Superior General and his Council referred to the 1969 Chapter for a global solution. Some letters were urging the return to the sound traditions of the Congregation: changes were not accepted: in the observance of silence, in the religious habit, readings in the refectory, in going to film shows, in the use of TV, etc.

“If the next General Chapter will want to remove these rules, O.K.” (Letter of Fr Briani, Nov. 1966, Bull. N. 80).

All possible efforts were made but rather in the way of patching up, especially in the field of formation, where due to the change of personnel in search of a saviour, Novitiates and Scholasticates suffered heavy losses.

3. A LONG-TERM ANSWER, THE CHAPTER

Two years before the Chapter, on 10th April 1967 (Bull. N. 81) Father General issued a Questionnaire made up of 235 questions which had been prepared by a group of Fathers who were attending a renewal course. In every region a regional commission was to be formed to study and to give the answers to the questionnaire involving all confreres. A central commission was also established.

The General Chapter was called on the 27th October 1968.

This General Chapter had two functions:

- The function of an ordinary Chapter, the tenth of the series of Chapters.
- The function of a special Chapter, for the renewal.

The Chapter lasted from May 16th to December 6th of the same year, with two breaks: one of rest (during August) and one for technical reasons, in order to prepare the final text of what will be called “Chapter Documents”.

Chapter Fifteen

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHURCH THAT MAINLY AFFECTED OUR INSTITUTE AND ITS MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES (1959-1975)

I. THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

I have mentioned the crisis that came from several misunderstandings of the Council: but the changes brought by it had many meaningful aspects.

1) In our missions the Council opened us up to Ecumenism and Dialogue with other religions and the world in general, to Inculturation and Liturgy. Liturgical activities were the first effects of this opening: vernaculars were introduced in all services and African instruments resounded in Churches and chapels. Our missionaries were at the helm of the patient efforts of translation and of the excitement of local music in collaboration with the local people and diocesan clergy, though some confreres did not wait or ask for a substantial contribution. However none of our musicians had the competence of Fr F. Giorgetti in African music, songs and instruments.

Our confreres had the difficult task of translating into many vernaculars. In Uganda for instance they had 6 languages to deal with. In Sudan there would have been many more. In all this work they had the cooperation of local clergy and also consulted elderly people.

2) Differences in theological and Biblical approaches that so much characterized the post-Conciliar era and are now offered in different theological Institutions attended by our scholastics have an impact in apostolic methodology in the missions vis-a-vis the local pastoral workers and the missionaries of other Institutes. Uniformity is not the target, but harmony is needed in order to avoid confusion and disarray among the simple faithful who put high value on the external image of the Church, of its workers and its institutions. Often our faithful had, and still have, to face developments in doctrine and liturgy without any previous explanation or Catechesis.

We take too many things for granted: ordinary Christians know very little of Christian doctrine. Moreover, mainly in Africa, external changes in religion are mistaken for substantial ones: the distinction is not always easy to grasp.

3) The emphasis on the Church as identified with the “People of God” in the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Vatican Council, *The Church*: No. 4) had wide and deep consequences. The pyramidal concept of the Church, usually identified with the Hierarchy and only in her institutional aspect, had given way to the Church as “a sacrament – a sign and instrument – of communion with God and of unity among all men” (Ib No. 1)

The issue was not Authority itself, but the way people in authority exercised it. The collegiality of the Bishops found its main expression in the Ordinary, Extraordinary and Special Synods, and in other consultations of different departments of the Holy See. At diocesan and parish levels the respective councils acquired a juridical status. The Lay Apostolate is no more the cooperation of the laity in the mission of the hierarchy, but the fulfillment of the responsibility of all the baptized to witness to and proclaim Christ in all walks of life: they have a direct mandate from Christ for such an apostolate (Baptism enables the Christian to share in His priesthood) (I Peter 2:91). It is true that not all clergy and laity have assumed this new mentality, but the seed is there. The prophecy of Moses is being fulfilled: “Would that the whole people of Yahweh were prophets and Yahweh gave His spirit to them all!” (Num. 11:29-30).

In the pyramidal conception of the Church the clergy were somehow unconsciously withholding the Holy Spirit. But now the Spirit has taken its full freedom and operates miracles all over the Church: lay movements, lay volunteers, radical poverty, small Christian communities etc. are springing up. However the new era of the Church needs new Saints, like the era after the Council of Trent.

N.B. The impact of the Council in religious and missionary life is shown in my comments to our Chapter Documents (1969) or “On the Development of Peoples”. (1967)

II. POPULORUM PROGRESSIO

This encyclical of Paul VI which had an impact on all faithful Christians, was especially meaningful for the peoples of the Third World where missionaries work:

“The development of peoples has the Church’s close attention, particularly the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfillment.” (No. 1).

The Pope recalls general biblical principles and Christian tradition:

“Fill the earth and subdue it”: the Bible, from the first page on, teaches us that the whole of creation is for man, that it is his responsibility to develop, to perfect it, so to speak, for his use. If the world is made to furnish each individual with the means of livelihood and the instruments for his growth and progress, each man has therefore the right to find in the world what is necessary for himself. To quote Saint Ambrose: “You are not making a gift of your possessions to the poor person. You are handing over to him what is his. For what has been given in common for the use of all, you have arrogated to yourself. The world is given to all, and not only to the rich”. That is, private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute and unconditioned right. No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities.” (No. 22-23).

The duty to share one’s possession is a world-wide one and it is an obligation of a nation towards other nations, because in the modern world the welfare or the poverty of one nation affects another in an unpredictable chain:

“This duty is the concern especially of better-off nations. Their obligations stem from a brotherhood that is at once human and supernatural, and take on a threefold aspect: the duty of human solidarity - the aid that the rich nations must give to developing countries - the duty of social justice - the rectification of inequitable trade relations between powerful nations and weak nations; the duty of universal charity - the effort to bring about a world that is more human towards all men, where all will be able to give and receive, without one group making progress at the expenses of the other. The question is urgent, for on it depends the future of the civilization of the world.” (No. 44).

Such an obligation is an obligation of conscience:

“Let each one examine his conscience, a conscience that conveys a new message for our times” (No. 4).

In commenting on this passage, John Paul II in the 20th Anniversary (1988) of the Encyclical writes:

“Therefore political leaders, and citizens of rich countries considered as individuals, especially if they are Christians, have the moral obligation, according to the degree of each one’s responsibility, to take into consideration, in personal decisions and decisions of Government this relationship of universality, this interdependence which exists between their conduct and the poverty and underdevelopment of so many millions of people. Pope Paul’s Encyclical translates more succinctly the moral obligation as the “duty of solidarity”; and this affirmation, even though many situations have changed in the world, has the same force and validity today as when it was written.” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 9).

However Pope Paul feels the necessity to define the meaning of Development:

“Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete, integral: that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man. As an eminent specialist has very rightly and emphatically declared: ‘We do not believe in separating the economic from the human, nor development from the civilizations in which it exists. What we hold important is man, each man and each group of humanity.’” (No. 4)

Pope Paul would pursue this concept of Development in his Apostolic Letter *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, where he proclaims the aim of Evangelization as “The integral development of the human person”.

Whether in obedience to *Populorum Progressio* or challenged by other healthy principles many confreres – including those in charge of our magazines – have been working in the spirit of the Encyclical, though sometimes without clear ideas and mature judgement.

III. GENERAL CONFERENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS OF MEDELLIN (COLOMBIA 1968)

If it is difficult to assess the impact of *Populorum Progressio* in the world. It is easy instead to assess the impact of Medellin in the Church of Latin America. It was really a turning point: the changes of the Ecumenical Council and the indications of *Populorum Progressio* were brought down to the grassroots. Documents and directives given to the Universal Church by the Council, the Synods of Bishops, Encyclicals, Pastoral letters of the Popes, by their nature are given in general principles, and sometimes in rather difficult terminology, like some documents of John Paul II. But they are directed first of all to the Bishops and the Clergy. It is up to them to break down their contents and bring them down to the level of the grass roots.

This was the secret of the success of Medellin. In an era of phobia against structures, the Latin American Bishops understood their importance: they did not destroy them, but changed them into a structure visible to everybody: "The small Christian Communities." In this way Medellin united traditionalists and progressists: those traditionalists who are open to the "signs of the times" and those progressists who are open to the permanent values of the Gospel and of the tradition, that is, of the secular experience of the Church.

The Conference of Puebla (No. 1134) acknowledged some wrong interpretations, and consequent deviations in the spirit of Medellin: this was due to individuals who did not keep the balance between tradition and progress. There have been individualistic interpretations of the "signs of the times" which often appealed to some clergy and religious.

The following basic main points were the charismatic principles of Medellin which are practical applications of the contents of the Second Vatican Council:

- Preferential option for and solidarity with the poor;
- Bishops, clergy and Religious to give witness to evangelical poverty and to become the voice of those who have no voice;
- The Church as the people of God is above all a communion with God and with all men: faith then is not to be lived in an individualistic way, but in communion with all human persons who have to give priority to "being" over "having".
- Religion is service and sacrament and finds its strength in the spirit of collegiality, the principle of subsidiarity or division of powers.

IV. FIRST MEETING OF THE SYMPOSIUM OF THE PISCOPAL CONFERENCES OF AFRICA AND MADAGASCAR (SECAM) 1969

On the occasion of the pilgrimage to Africa of Pope Paul VI, the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar gathered in Kampala for three days at the end of July 1969.

It was during this meeting that Pope Paul VI formulated the spirit of "Maximum Illud" of Benedict XV. "By now you Africans are missionaries to yourselves, in other words you Africans must continue the building up of the Church upon this continent."

Present to the Symposium were the six Cardinals from Africa, L. Rugambwa, P. Zoungana; J. Malula, L. E. Duval; A. Siderous, Mc Cann (South Africa), the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Archbishop Pignedoli from Propaganda Fide. The Pope exhorted them to work on inculturation so as to give the Gospel an African face.

V. SYNODS OF BISHOPS

During the Vatican Council, in the Constitution of *Lumen Gentium* No. 22, and in the Decree *Christus Dominus* on the Pastoral office of the Bishops No. 4-6, the collegiality of Bishops with the Pope and among themselves was underlined: "The order of Bishops is the successor in the college of the Apostles in their role as teachers and pastors and in it the Apostolic college is perpetuated, together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff"... (*Christus Dominus*, No. 4). It was suggested that such collegiality should not be exercised only in the Ecumenical Council, but also in a Council "which shall be known by the special name of 'Synod of Bishops'" The details will be determined

by the Roman Pontiff. On 9 September 1965, Paul VI gave norms for the Synod in his *Motu Proprio* apostolic letter, *Apostolica Sollicitudo*. It established three different kinds of Synods:

- Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod: it is composed of Bishops *ex-officio* and of Delegates elected by relevant Episcopal Conferences;
- Extraordinary General Assembly of Bishops composed of Bishops *ex-officio* and of the Chairmen of the Episcopal Conferences;
- Special assembly of the Synod of Bishops: it is composed of *ex-officio* Members and of delegates of a particular region of the Church: for instance the special assembly of the Synod for Africa (1994).

The first ordinary Synod “On Dangerous Opinions and on atheism” was convened in 1967; the second on “Justice in the World” was convened in 1971; the third “On Evangelization in the World” in 1974, and since then every three years. All Synods are of great importance for all members of the Church; however the second and the third have a special meaning for us missionaries.

1. SYNOD ON “JUSTICE IN THE WORLD” (1971)

This Synod identified the role of the Church in proclaiming the works of Justice and in denouncing the injustices. Two points are very important:

- **First: Necessity of Justice within the Church**

“While the Church is bound to give witness to justice, she recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting of the possessions and life-style found within the Church herself. Within the Church, rights must be preserved. No one should be deprived of his ordinary rights because he is associated with the Church in one way or the another. Those who serve the Church by their labour, including priests and religious, should receive a sufficient livelihood and enjoy that social security which is customary in their region. Lay people should be given fair wages and a system for promotion. We reiterate the recommendations that lay people should exercise more important functions with regard to Church property and should share in its administration”.

This seems to be the first time that such a statement is included in a public document – the Church accusing herself. This is of great importance for us missionaries: it is true that we live in charity, but we cannot expect our employees to help us out of charity as well. A reflection on salaries is always necessary in changing the poor Third World countries: we fight for just wages keeping in mind a family wage whenever possible; this is part of the Catholic Social teaching.

- **Second:**

“The Church has received from Christ the mission of preaching the Gospel message, which contains a call to man to turn away from sin to the love of the Father, to universal brotherhood and to a consequent demand for justice in the world. This is the reason why the Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustices, when the fundamental rights of man and his very salvation demand it. The Church, indeed, is not alone responsible for justice in the world; however, she has a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with her mission of giving witness before the world, of the need for love and justice contained in the Gospel message. Of itself it does not belong to the Church - in so far as she is a religious and hierarchical community - to offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world. Her mission involves defending and promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person”.

2. SYNOD ON EVANGELIZATION (1974)

The Third Synod of Bishops was on “Evangelization in the Modern world”. This gathering changed the procedure of the synod. In fact the two previous Synods themselves published the full text, the result of their discussions and decisions.

When the two secretaries of this Synod presented their draft for the final approval the Synod rejected half of it. It was only one day before the closing. What could be done? The late Cardinal Marty, Archbishop of Paris, and Cardinal Suenens, Archbishop of Mechelen-Bruxelles, suggested to the Synod Fathers that they give all the material to the Pope and that the Synod publish a

“Message”. At the next Synod in 1977 on “Catechesis”, the Bishops were so happy about the Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*” that by large majority they proposed to follow the same procedure and pass on to the Pope their “Propositions” or “Resolutions” approved at the last session. Out of this material the Pope could prepare and publish the relevant letter.

Contents: The Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI was highly appreciated for its clear and exhaustive content and its simple style, sign of a mature and wise mind.

DESCRIPTION (NOT DEFINITION) OF EVANGELIZATION

• PROCLAMATION AND PASTORAL ACTIVITIES

“In the Church’s evangelizing activity there are of course certain elements and aspects to be specially insisted on. Some of them are so important that there will be a tendency simply to identify them with evangelization in terms of proclaiming Christ to those who do not know him, of preaching, of catechesis, of conferring Baptism and the other Sacraments.” (No. 17).

• IMPLANTATION OF A LIVING CHURCH

“In its totality, evangelization – over and above the preaching of a message – consists in the implantation of the Church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist.” (No. 28).

• TOUCHING LIFE AS A WHOLE

“But evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man’s concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realised, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development are hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development.” (No. 29).

• NECESSARILY LINKED TO HUMAN ADVANCEMENT

“Between evangelization and human advancement – development and liberation – there are in fact profound links. These include links of:

- * an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelised is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions;
- * the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored.
- * the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity. How in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man? (No. 31).

• A MESSAGE OF LIBERATION

“It is well known in what terms numerous Bishops from all the continents spoke of this at the last Synod, especially the Bishops from the Third World, with a pastoral accent resonant with the voice of the millions of sons and daughters of the Church who make up those peoples. Peoples as we know, engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism. The Church, as the Bishops repeated, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children, the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization.” (No. 30)

- **WITHOUT REDUCTION OR AMBIGUITY**

“Any partial fragmentary definition which attempts to render the reality of evangelization in all its richness, complexity and dynamism does so only at the risk of impoverishing it and even of distorting it. It is impossible to grasp the concept of evangelization unless one tries to keep in view all its essential elements.” (No. 17).

“We must not ignore the fact that many, even generous Christians who are sensitive to the dramatic questions involved in the problem of liberation, in their wish to commit the Church to the liberation effort are frequently tempted to reduce her mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. They would reduce her aims to a man-centred goal, of the salvation of which she is the messenger, would be reduced to material well-being. Her activity, forgetful of all spiritual and religious preoccupation, would become initiatives of the political or social order. But if this were so, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of Liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems and political parties. She would have no more authority to proclaim freedom as in the name of God. This is why we have wished to emphasize, in the same address at the opening of the Synod, “the need to restate clearly the specifically religious finality of evangelization. This latter would lose its reason for existence, if it were to diverge from the religious axis that guides it: the Kingdom of God, before anything else, in its fully theological meaning...” (No. 32).

After having described Evangelization very well, the Pope explains its contents, like:

- * Evangelization of cultures;
- * Primary importance of witness of life;
- * Need of explicit proclamation;
- * The Centre of the message: salvation in Jesus Christ;
- * An evangelical concept of man involves a necessary conversion of heart and a lookout by all, starting from the leaders;
- * The exclusion of violence;
- * One important remark: “the Church is an evangelizer but she begins by being evangelized herself” (No. 15).

Chapter Sixteen

THE TENTH GENERAL CHAPTER 1969

A. AN “ORDINARY” CHAPTER

The Chapter of 1969 was an ordinary Chapter in the sense that it was due to be held according to our constitutions. We may however ask why it was held after 10 years instead of 6, as it used to be since the Chapter of 1919.

The reason is that the Chapter of 1953 had proposed some changes in the constitutions. The commission set up by the chapter had made some proposals, among them that the duration of the General Council should be of 10 years. In the resolutions of the 1959 Chapter we read that a commission should be set up in 1964 to work on the constitutions to be submitted to the 1969 Chapter. How instead this important change was approved and introduced is not in the decisions of 1959 Chapter, as published in the Bulletin No. 71.

B. A “SPECIAL” CHAPTER

The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council had asked all religious institutes to update their rules and style of life to meet the needs of modern society and of the new developments in the Church (Cf. *Perfectae Charitatis*, No. 2). For this purpose the Council gave a simple but basic directive: “The up-to-date renewal of the religious life comprises both a constant return to the sources of the whole of the Christian life and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time”.

Pope Paul VI publishes some norms to implement this directive in the *Motu proprio* “*Ecclesiae Sanctae*”, some of which we quote here:

1. In each Institute, in order to put renewal and adaptation into effect, a special general chapter is to be summoned within two or, at most, three years from the *Motu proprio*. This can be the ordinary general chapter, or an extraordinary one. This chapter can be divided into two separate sessions, provided that not more than a year elapses between one session and the next, and provided that the chapter itself so decided by a secret vote.

2. In preparation for this chapter, the General Council must arrange, by some suitable means, for an ample and free consultation of the subjects. The results of this consultation should be made available in good time so as to guide and assist the work of the chapter. The consultation may be done at the level of conventual or provincial chapters, by setting up commissions, by sending out questionnaires, etc.

3. The general laws of every institute (Constitutions, typical, rules or whatever other name is given to these) must, generally speaking, contain the following elements:

- The evangelical and theological principles concerning religious life and its incorporation in the church, and an apt and accurate formulation in which “the spirit and aims of the founder should be clearly recognized and faithfully preserved, as indeed should each institute’s sound traditions: all of these constitute the patrimony of an institute” (P.C., N. 2b).
- The juridical norms necessary to define the character, aims and means employed by the institute. Such rules must not be multiplied unduly, but should always be clearly formulated.

4. A combination of both elements, the spiritual and the juridical, is necessary, so as to ensure that the principal codes of each institute will have a solid foundation and be permitted by a spirit which is authentic and a law which is alive. Care must be taken not to produce a text either purely juridical or merely hortatory.

5. From the basic text of the rules shall be excluded anything which is now out of date, or anything which may change with the conditions of time, or which is of purely local application. These norms which are linked with present-day life or with the physical and psychological

conditions or situations of the subjects, should be entered in separate books such as directories, books of customs or similar documents, whatever be their name.

Both our Superiors in preparing and calling the Chapter, and the Chapter itself, tried, as much as possible, to fulfil the above directives with great advantage of the institute as can be seen by the 1969 "Chapter Documents".

C. MAIN CHANGES AND INNOVATIONS OF THE CHAPTER

1. COMPOSITION OF THE CHAPTER

The chapter members numbered 67. The members of the institute were by this time 1534: 983 priests, 330 brothers, 221 scholastics. Among the chapter members we have 5 brothers (for the first time).

- Invited 2 MFSC as observers.
- Other observers from ethnic groups: Spain, Portugal, Sudan and of English Language.
- A working charter or rules of procedure was prepared.
- An organizing secretary and alternating moderators (3) were elected by the assembly.

2. THE PERSONALITY AND CHARISM OF COMBONI

The Personality and Charism of Comboni, for the first time in a Chapter are abundantly studied and proposed as a model and inspiration (D.C., Pg 42 fol).

3. THE IDENTITY OF THE COMBONI MISSIONARY BROTHER

The Identity of the Comboni Missionary Brother is better presented, and that there is the possibility; given for some cases to opt for priesthood and, with the permission of the Holy See, to become superior in some particular communities (D.C., Pg. 86-89).

4. COMMUNITY LIFE

Community Life: a Family or Community Council is formalised giving it an On-going Formation and administrative character:

- It is wished that community life become more and more an apostolic life, with common projects to be sign and cause of presence of Christ in the community.
- Correspondence to be secret, a greater openness to hospitality, especially in view of missionary animation, is recommended. (D.C., Pg. 91-111).

5. PRAYER: BOTH LITURGICAL AND ECCLESIAL

- Daily community acts are reduced to the High Mass and to another act left to the choice of the community. (Breviary).
- Individual prayer: At least one hour during the day and half an hour of spiritual reading (D.C., Pg. 118-141).

This question of prayer to be chosen freely as to the time, was one of the most discussed points, and with some concern in fact from 1969 to 1979, only 20% of the members, mainly brothers, put it into practice. This was due to lack of formation in this new method.

6. THE VOWS ARE PRESENTED IN THE LIGHT OF THE COUNCIL

A. CHASTITY more than a self denial is taken as a profound, immediate and joyful gift of love towards God and the brothers, from this the renunciation of closing oneself in love for one person only (D.C., Pg. 146-162) and all its consequences in the sexual life of the individual missionary.

B. OBEDIENCE, besides being an acceptance of authority is presented as a sharing in the obedience of Christ and of his Church to the Father. Obedience is given by the Superior in dialogue; the religious accepts it with the conviction of being co-responsible in Christ's project as regards his Church and in a project of the Institute. The exercise of authority has to keep in mind the attitudes of contestation, of anticonformism and of criticism (especially of that time), plus the very acute sense of freedom and young people's feelings of personal responsibility. (D.C., Pg. 163-195).

C. POVERTY is presented as apostolic, poverty more than renouncing and dispossession; that is, as a life style of a poorer presence in today's world. The apostle does not give up necessary human and useful modern means, but he considers them insufficient and disproportioned to God's saving plan. It is viewed as real and personal poverty which does not rely on the comforts provided by the community and on the superiors' permits. It must be interpreted not as mere legalism, but as a gesture of solidarity towards the community. A sum of money to be determined by the Family Council is permitted and left for the use of the religious, but he must render account (D.C., Pg. 119-216).

7. MISSIONARY ACTIVITY (D.C. PG. 228-330)

A. THE VALIDITY OF MISSIONARY INSTITUTES IS RE-AFFIRMED with the following remarks:

These institutes:

- Do not possess in an exclusive way the missionarity of the churches from which they come;
- In the local churches the sense of incarnation should prevail and that of service; the *Jus commissionis* is to cease; replaced by contracts between the institute and the diocese.
- Missionaries should assume tasks of first evangelization of people and of certain categories (e.g. pygmies in Africa, Indios in Latin America).

B. THE ELEMENTS OF THE MISSIONARY DYNAMICS ARE CLARIFIED:

- Witness, Announcement, the formation of Christian communities. The brother is invited to fully share this dynamic (this will cause the problems regarding the mission and the role of the brother in the institute).

C. FIELD OF WORK AND THEIR CHOICE:

- Comboni chose Africa as his field of work, at that time considered the country of the "Poorest and most abandoned" people.
- This criterion and the criterion of first evangelization must indicate the lines of a revision to be carried out by every Chapter of our missionary commitments.
- The Institute still keeps a particular commitment towards Africa for historical reasons.
- Before assuming new mission fields not foreseen by the present programme, all the members of the Institute are to be consulted and their possible remarks be taken into account.
- The possibility of an initial option for the field of work should be given to our missionaries, and the individual preferences be kept present in the first appointments.

D. MISSIONARY ANIMATION

- It is clarified that it is also our duty to make the people of God at home aware of their own responsibility regarding the missions. The acceptance of this responsibility is expressed both in the moral, spiritual and financial support, and above all in leaving for the mission. This animation is to be promoted by selected personnel in various animation centres, but every Comboni missionary, brothers included, and every community, should feel co-responsible of such activity, e. g. Organization and Missionary Activity.
- There is an insistence on our missionaries to be specialized according to the needs of the mission.
- Communities in the missions to be international, without creating too many difficulties to the confreres.

8. COMBONI MISSIONARY FORMATION (D.C. PG. 333-456)

- On one side formation is to be positive, aiming at maturing, at developing human dignity and personal gifts, and at helping the young man towards a balanced and Christian use of his freedom, through the proposed authentic contents, freely taken and assumed.
- On the other side, a methodology is wanted which aims at a mature and Christian acceptance of sacrifice, of contradictions and of self-denial as a joyous sharing on the paschal mystery.
- The life, charism and directives given by Comboni so far about for the formation of his missionaries must become part and parcel of the formation set up given to the formators and from that to the candidates in search of a "Combonian identity".

- Religious consecration is to be presented as God’s gift wholly integrated with the missionary formation. Thus that dichotomy, placed by some people between religious and missionary life, is overcome.
- A sound and balanced contact with the external world is wanted, especially with one’s family, with youth of the same age, with the local church and other missionary institutes. What is wanted is a formation lived in society rather than a flight from the world, and as an initiation to the specifically Comboni way of insertion into the contemporary church and in the world.
- At higher levels of formation, the young candidates are to be helped to make pastoral and missionary experiences. Likewise, the way of spending summer holidays on the mountains is to be revised, so that the pleasant relaxation may be in common but still be a useful experience.
- The annual and daily programme should possibly be formulated with the participation of the young students with whom the educators should form one single community to favour and open and trustful dialogue.
- The formators must be technically prepared, after a fruitful missionary experience “rotation”, ready and capable to work in “equipe”. There is distinction between superior and spiritual father in the scholasticate and minor seminaries, though the scholastic may choose the spiritual fathers, informing the superiors of the choice.

9. PHASES AND STRUCTURES OF FORMATION

A. THE VALIDITY OF MINOR SEMINARIES is confirmed. In these the educator shall stress the integral, human and Christian formation. The vocational aspect is to be included as a specific orientation toward a progressive maturity.

B. THE PHASE AND STRUCTURE OF POSTULANCY is proposed; the General Direction will decide whether or not to introduce the period of postulancy where it does not yet exist. Postulancy must prepare the candidate to enter the noviciate with a sufficient degree of maturity, both human and spiritual, that may allow him to answer God’s call with the mature and responsible choice to embrace the institute and its apostolic activities; he has to show his ability to progressively aide by its ideal.

- Postulancy is extended to two-three years, for the students to complete the philosophical course, and for the brothers to acquire a profession or an equivalent qualification.

C. THE NOVICIATE

- As the young man enters the noviciate already decided to become a Comboni missionary, he must confront himself with the needs of religious life in the way it is lived by the Comboni Missionaries.
- The novice master is no more the only one responsible, but is to be helped by an equipe of formation whose members live together with the novices and have precise responsibilities in the noviciate.
- The noviciates are to be re-structured in such a way that they comprise a period of formative experiences in relation to the activity and kind of life proper of the Comboni Missionaries.

D. THEOLOGICAL SCHOLASTICATE

- All the scholasticates shall be international. Possibly there should be one scholasticate for every language group corresponding to the main languages spoken in mission territories. These international scholasticates shall depend directly on the General Direction.
- It is desired that before beginning theology, the possibility be given to the scholastics to opt for the diverse mission territories on a language basis.
- The whole theological teaching is to be characterized by serious commitment to pastoral and missionary life.

E. FORMATION OF BROTHERS

- It is wished that, as far as possible, brothers reach a level of formation analogous to that of the members who are priests.

- Their instruction must be apostolic, doctrinal and professional. Some of them should be sent, moreover, to courses of higher specialization in economics, administration, medicine, engineering and education so that their formation is diversified.

F. COURSES

Special courses in the pastoral field in different specialization according to the needs of the institute are to be favoured. Renewal courses are highly recommended.

The official course of renewal in the Congregation is established; so it is a right and a duty of Fathers and Brothers to attend after a certain period: for the Fathers, after the 7th or 10th year after ordination; for brothers, after the first period spent in the mission.

G. THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR FORMATION is established. (This is to replace the Prefect General of Formation, as in 1958 constitutions).

10. GOVERNMENT

- While it is reaffirmed that AUTHORITY resides in the person of the superior at all levels, it is stressed that:
 - more than power, authority is a “service”;
 - all members of the community should feel co-responsible in its welfare. this requires: that the process towards the making of a decision is done in a “spirit of collegiality”;
 - all that is carried out with the co-operation of all the members.
- For the PRINCIPLE OF “SUBSIDIARITY”, the inferior authority has its sphere of action where the superior authority does not interfere, except in cases of true necessity for the good of the community.
- Regular successions in the exercise of authority recommended, so that all members may offer their service and in due time lay down their responsibility.
- The Congregation is divided into PROVINCES, REGIONS AND DELEGATIONS (the rule of life of 1979 will abolish the Regions).
- The CONSULTATION of all confreres in perpetual vows before the Superior General with his council appoints the respective superiors is introduced. (The RL of 1988 gives active voice also to members in temporary vows).
- FOUR GENERAL SECRETARIATS are established:
 - For Formation
 - For Economy
 - For the Missions (comprising a Central Procure)
 - For Missionary Animation.
- COMPOSITION OF GENERAL CHAPTERS:
 - Ex-jure members:
Superior General and his Assistants; the Provincials (former Regionals as well). Those holding general offices and the ex-Superiors General are excluded .
 - Delegate members:
They must be at least half plus one of all the members of the Chapter.

11. PLANNING

The last days the chapter drew a plan or programme for the General Direction (cf. Bull., No. 90).

- Priorities
 - Formation: to consolidate structures; to prepare personnel; to give particular attention to the formation of brothers, stages and contents.
 - Animation: vocational promotion with particular attention to brothers and to adults.
 - Missions: to consolidate and develop those missions where we are already present and active.
- Reunion with MFSC to be made a priority, and its implementation tried.
- An intercapitular assembly is prescribed to be held three years after any ordinary Chapter.

Chapter Seventeen

FROM 1969 TO 1979

I. 1969 AND 1975 CHAPTERS

1. CHAPTER OF 1969 - ELECTIONS

- Fr T. Agostoni, Superior General
- Fr O. Sina, Vicar General
- Fr A. Fornasari, Fr L. Penzo, Fr R. Bosse

The members of the General Chapter: 67; of the whole Institute: 1,534, of which 983 priests, 330 brothers, 221 scholastics.

2. CHAPTER OF 1975 - ELECTIONS

- Fr T. Agostoni, Superior General
- Fr S. Peano, Vicar General (+ 1991)
- Fr P. Tiboni, Bro. E. Massignani, Fr C. Walter
(cfr. Bull. N.110, Chapter Documents 1975).

II. RE-UNION WITH THE MFSC

1. MEETING OF THE TWO GENERAL DIRECTIONS

The first concrete act in this direction was the meeting of the two General Directions which took place at Limone on the 28th October, 1969 for the formation of a mixed Commission (RSC) in charge of studying the problem of re-union. (Bull. N. 97)

2. MFSC REFERENDUM

In 1973 the MFSC indicted a Referendum in preparation for their Chapter. Results: 166 votes in favour (=92%), 12 contrary.

3. THE MFSC GENERAL CHAPTER

The MFSC General Chapter was held in July-August 1973. After a meeting with Fr Agostoni it is decided on 28 August, 1973 to send a letter to be presented to the FSCJ Chapter in 1975; in this letter it is declared that the active commitment towards the re-union is a must for all the Comboni Missionaries: the re-union is practically asked for under the usual conditions.

4. THE 1975 FSCJ CHAPTER

- accepts the re-union.
- makes a change in the constitutions by accepting the principle that a Province may directly manage some mission territories (Cf. RL 114).
- prepares a Special Juridical Order (SJO) which regulates the relations between provinces and the General Direction as they emanate from the above principle. (Cf. Bull. N. 111 and Bull. N. 113).

5. THE RE-UNITED CHAPTER AT ELLWANGEN ON 1-2 SEPTEMBER 1975

The Chapter is composed of the former members of 1973 MFSC Chapter and of the Chapter 1975 FSCJ. The joint session of the two Chapters accept and approve the re-union and the Special Juridical Order with the following results:

- MFSC 18: 17 yes, 1 abstained;
- FSCJ 55: 55 yes.

THE MAIN FEATURES OF THE SJO

- The DSP (Deutschsprachige Provinz = Germany speaking province) has all rights and duties of any other province of the Institute; it includes however the house of Milland-Bressanone which geographically is in Italian territory.
The following differences are accepted:
- It is the responsibility of the DSP:
 - to make agreements with the Ordinaries of the present provinces in Peru and South Africa, and of any other territory entrusted in future to DSP: the General Council is to ratify the agreements;
 - to provide personnel and necessary means for those missions and to visit them within the terms of reference of SJO;
- Moreover, a candidate for Provincial Superior who is not a member of DSP needs a two-thirds majority. N.B.: in a referendum of 1991, among the DSP members, this clause was eliminated.
- All MCCJ members who have the DSP as their province of origin may participate in the election of the Provincial Superior of DSP. N.B.: this was also removed in 1991 referendum.
- The SJO can be abolished, changed or modified, only by a two-thirds majority of the radical members of DSP.
- It was also agreed upon that the SJO will not be included in the text of MCCJ Constitutions or Rule of Life.

6. THE UNITED CHAPTER MEMBERS TAKE THE FOLLOWING DECISIONS:

- A referendum: the two General Council will arrange a referendum in order to sensitise the members of the two Institutes to the problem of the re-union; This was done on 10 June.
- The results: 95% of the members of FSCJ and 85% of the MFSC voted in favour.
- A special technical-advisory Commission to be established to help the two General Councils in the carrying out of the steps towards the re-union as contemplated by the two Chapters.
- A special Commission to be set up, to prepare a unified text of Constitutions and General Directory. The text is to be presented to the 1979 Chapter.
- The two Spanish Provinces of MFSC and FSCJ to be united into a single Province. After a referendum among the members and the approval of the Holy See, the Province in Spain was erected on the 16 January 1976, and Fr Domingo Campdepadros was appointed as the Provincial on the 9th February 1976.

7. THE REFERENDUM ON THE NAME

A referendum is also made on the name to be given to the re-united Congregation; two names were proposed: CMC = Congregatio Missionaria Comboniana (604 votes), and CMSC = Congregatio Missionaria Sacri Cordis (496 votes). (cf. Bull. N. 124, pg. 80).

8. THE 1979 CHAPTER

The 1979 Chapter was composed of 59 representing the FSCJ, and 21 representing the MFSC; it realised the re-union:

- With a Solemn Ceremony held on the solemnity of the Sacred Heart, in Rome on 22 June 1979, both in the Chapter Hall and in the Liturgy presided over by Card. A. Rossi, Prefect of the SCEP, and in the presence of all Chapter members of MCCJ and of some Superior Generals of Missionary Institutes.
- The re-union is formally decided upon by a decree of the SCEP issued on the same day and read out by Card. Rossi during the Liturgy.
- The same SCEP gives some directives about the re-union which are read and commented in the Chapter Hall; these will subsequently be incorporated in the new Rules; among other things, the SCEP confirms and convalidates the SJO (cf. Bull. N. 125).

III. A NEW STYLE OF LIFE AND OF GOVERNMENT

A new style of life and of government has been introduced during this period.

The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a Sacrament; a sign and instrument of **communion** with God and of unity among all men (LG1). As the Church emphasises communion and unity, our Institute following the directives of the Chapter Documents had to emphasise communion and unity. So the following instruments were used:

1. CREATION OF COMMUNION AT A HORIZONTAL LEVEL

Creation of communion, at a horizontal level, through dialogue: among the members of the General Council, of the Provincial/Regional Councils, and in local communities (Community Council) all in line with the principle of collegiality.

2. CREATION OF COMMUNION AT VERTICAL LEVEL

Creation of communion at vertical level, between the General Direction and the Provincial Councils and confreres in line with the principles of decentralisation and subsidiarity, through frequent visits, through the participation to the meetings of Provincial Councils and of Provincial/Regional Assemblies, and through personal dialogue with the confreres.

3. CREATION OF STRUCTURES OF COMMUNION AND SHARING

• THE INTERCAPITULAR ASSEMBLY (IN 1972; CF. BULL. N.99)

The participants were the members of the General Council, Provincial and Regional Superiors, heads of the 4 Secretariats; altogether 27. It was held in Rome in our Generalate house from June 26 to August 2, 1972. It was the only assembly of the term. At the end of the meeting no new resolutions were formulated, but a continuous reference to the Chapter was the main inspiration. At the end the participants wrote a letter to the members of the Institute. We report here only part of it:

"This meeting, called three years after the Special General Chapter, by the Chapter Documents was assigned well defined aims. The General Council and Major Superiors were called upon to review together how the Chapter Documents have been applied, and to plan for the coming three years which separate us from the next Chapter. It was not a question of changing existing regulations, nor of issuing new ones; but rather of checking our conduct and of exchanging ideas for a better follow up of the Chapter guide-lines.

It seems to us that the goals set by the Chapter have been to a large extent achieved. Since the election, the General Council expressed its determination to arrive at a form of collegiate government, based on mutual relationship of collaboration at every level, of sharing experiences and taking into consideration the requirements of all members. During these days we have been living in full our joint responsibility in the government of our family, in an atmosphere of a frank and enlightened exchange of opinions.

Our substantial convergence of outlook, evaluations and conclusions, was for us all a pleasant surprise and a strong incitement to continue resolutely on the path taken since the last Chapter".

• ESTABLISHMENT OF THE 4 SECRETARIATS

Establishment of the 4 following Secretariats: Finance, Formation, Missionary Animation, Missionary Activities.

To identify their role was not an easy job. Through them we had other assemblies at world level, continental and Provincial/Regional levels.

• ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOLASTICATES

Establishment of international Scholasticates in accordance with the resolutions of the Chapter:

- Paris (2.6.1970) for French-speaking mission countries.
- Elstree (1.12.1970) for English-speaking mission countries.
- Madrid (1972), replaced by Granada (1974), for Spanish-speaking countries. It was closed in 1979 for several reasons, to be re-opened in mission territory - a plan later fulfilled with the opening of the international Scholasticate of Lima in Peru (23.10.1985).

- Kampala (Uganda) in 1.1.1975. This opening represents a new trend suggested by the 1975 General Chapter; preparation to missionary work is not only initiated by the study of the language: the knowledge of the people and of their culture and traditions is much more important; young men are better equipped to learn such necessary issues.
- Innsbruck (1975), opened by the former MFSC General Direction.
- Chicago (6.8.1976) mainly as a support to vocational promotion in USA. However, the advantage of learning English is there.
- Sao Paulo, Brazil (1977), for Portuguese-speaking countries.

The above added to the international Scholasticate "Daniel Comboni" in ROME.

The one FOR BROTHERS_in Pordenone was confirmed, though being of the Italian Province: it will be closed later on.

The International Scholasticates belong to the Curia District though the formators are members of the province where the Scholasticates reside. The Provincial Superiors have some responsibilities for the Scholasticates in their province, according to the Directory of the Scholasticates.

4. CREATION OF COMMUNION WITH OTHER INSTITUTES

- Periodical meetings at the level of General and Provincial Councils with the Comboni Sisters.
- Periodical meetings and a few circular letters with the Missionary Institutes of Italian origin (cf. Bull. N. 91 and N. 94).
- Periodical encounters with the World Union of Superior Generals (USG) in Rome and participation in their Sixth Commission on missionary activities, in their Documentation Service (SEDOS), in their monthly meetings and twice-yearly courses.
- Substantial help in personnel to the Apostles of Jesus, Marian Brothers, Brothers of St. Martin de Porres. Financial help too, mainly from different provinces and to local Congregations of Sisters.

IV. REVISION OF BASIC FORMATION STRUCTURES

1. FORMATION STRUCTURES

As the methodology of formation had to change so also the structures had to.

The main change was in the number of Noviciates and Scholasticates. Before the crises in the Church such establishments were large, catering even for 100 and more candidates. As a reaction to these structures, new trends were experienced. A trend was to divide large groups into small ones, around 5 or 6 with one formator residing in a non-religious house, i.e. among the people. Our Institute did not allow that; experience proved later on, that such a trend led to almost complete failure. Students were not free and almost unable to find time for their studies and prayers at home.

We abolished large communities and as a rule opened new houses for 25-30 candidates with two formators working in a team. Some old houses, however, had to be adapted to the new situation and were re-opened.

2. DIRECTORIES AND RATIO

New methodology and structures needed a revision of Directories and working charters for the formation institutions, both at central and national levels: this work started but it went rather slowly as they had to be cleared by a living experience of candidates and formators who had to face very new trends of the young people and of the societies around them. Eventually this work led to the publication of "Ratio Fundamental Institutionis et Studiorum" published in 1991.

3. MISSIONARY ANIMATION CENTRES

Missionary animation centres, too, had to be revised. So animation centres for young men were opened with the main aim of vocational promotion, as the crises of minor seminaries had already started.

4. OPENING OF ANIMATION AND FORMATION STRUCTURES IN AFRICA

The only house of basic formation in Africa was the Junior Seminary of Decamere in Eritrea since 1963. With one or two exceptions all candidates for the Noviciate, even from Sudan and Uganda, were sent to Europe, mainly to Italy. But this experiment as a whole did not prove a successful one.

Fr Todesco in 1957 intended to open a Noviciate in Uganda and Bishop Cesana offered the land. But the initiative didn't take shape. By this period, also, the opening of Junior Seminaries, in decline in Europe, did not appear to be feasible.

The first formal house of Postulancy was opened in Kampala (1976), which was followed by the Noviciate welcoming candidates from other English speaking countries. Zaire followed suit with some postulant brother candidates in Kisangani who later on did their Noviciate there (1980).

V. FACING THE CONTINUATION OF THE CRISIS IN THE INSTITUTE

N.B. For this period see the statistics (of the 11th Chapter).

In spite of having identified the causes of the massive exodus and of having found the remedies, the crisis went on. However, that was normal as the suggested remedies had not yet been assumed: rejection of the old trends continued while the input of new principles and practice penetrated very slowly. We have also to add that not all the formators were up to the required standard: not all were able to balance the antithesis to the past with the new trends of society. The synthesis of the old and new could be summed up in the following statement:

Formators and Superiors had to continue demanding the maximum from their subjects, though with the maximum respect. The past was characterised by the maximum demand, even to the extent of belittling the needs of the persons. During this period instead maximum respect prevailed belittling the necessary demands. In the past the emphasis was put in the formation of the will, belittling the development of freedom. In this period prevailed the emphasis on the use of freedom with little demand for restraint, sacrifices and sharing the Paschal Mystery, from Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday.

The principle of a misinterpreted spontaneity instead of the healthy principle of "sincerity" in mutual relations prevailed, as if human nature and human activities were not affected by human weakness due to original sin: naturalism and rationalism prevailed against the considered "authentic supernatural values and the principles of our faith as we find them in the Gospel and in the tradition of the Church". (cf. Rom. 7:14-20; 12:1-12; Gal. 5:17). Modern reactionary authors replaced the Evangelists and the Apostles.

Perhaps the advice of St. Paul was neglected: "For me there are no forbidden things, but it is not everything that helps the building to grow. Nobody should be looking for his own advantage, but everybody for the other's way." (1 Cor. 10:23-25). (The Latin text was more concise: "Omnia licent, sed non omnia oportent").

We have to add that the practice of the one hour to be given daily to personal prayer was not very common. When giving the report of the General Council to the 1975 Chapter, the Superior General could utter that from the experience he gathered in his visits to all communities not more than 20% were practising it; and these were mainly the Brothers.

We have to add here that some confreres who had come from Seminaries and some late Vocations had not perceived that our Comboni Missionary service is an expression of our religious consecration with all its requirements of obedience and poverty, and that the Comboni charism is unique and indivisible: it is first of all a sharing in the Paschal Mystery that includes Christ's sacrifice for the redemption of the world, from which the missionary service derives. Charism is not only what we have and the amount of work we do, but first of all **what we are in Christ** and in his salvific mission.

We cannot even exclude that some ex-Seminarians who join the Institute left the Seminary dissatisfied with the environment and formative methodology by then prevailing. In fact some of them when leaving the Institute asked for incardination in the Diocese where they had worked as Comboni Missionaries and not in their Diocese of origin, though some did.

The abandoning of the Institute due to a crisis of Comboni identity substantially increased in the 1980s. **The therapeutics** for these evils was done through the **progressive and faithful application of the '69 DC**, particularly:

- In the selection and training of formators, through courses of specialisation through meetings organised by the formation Secretariats both at general and provincial levels and at level of categories.
- The work of formators was generally done in a team. Formators were possibly chosen from those having a valid mission experience.
- For priests and brothers of perpetual vows, on-going formation was taken care of through the official 9-month course in Rome, other courses and above all with the animation of communities done by the provincial and local superiors, though not all of them were ready for this. Anyhow the period from 1975 to 1979 marked a clear improvement as is shown by the statistics quoted above. In fact community life and the practice of personal prayers had slightly improved.

Moreover the formators who have had their experience tried their best to enlighten the new ones, though each one likely to have his own experience.

VI. DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSIONS

1. UGANDA

1.1 REDUCTION OF PERSONNEL

In 1972 missionaries numbered more than 300. The General Council made some considerations and the Superior General discussed the problem with the Regional Council in December 1972. The necessity of such a reduction was acknowledged by the Council which decided to reduce personnel and concentrate in the following priorities.

- Training of the clergy, of religious and of catechists.
- Formation of the laity mainly in the schools, so they would exercise their own responsibilities both within the Church and in the society and offer leadership in a spirit of service.
- Due importance to the urban apostolate.
- Parish work whenever possible.

Such reduction would not eliminate the possibility of young missionaries entering the country, especially for specific work.

1.2 EXPULSION OF MISSIONARIES

Beside denying new Entry Permits and the renewal of old ones since 1972, President Amin (1971-1979) in 1975, July accelerated the reduction with the expulsion of 15 valid Missionaries. The reasons for this expulsion were not given, because it was sectarianism: from the list of those expelled appeared very clearly that it was an attempt to cripple the Catholic Church.

Those expelled in fact were Fathers (2) in charge of the Inter-diocesan Training Centre for Catechists; Fathers (2) in charge of the training of Adult Vocations to Priesthood in Kitgum; then 5 very innocent and industrious Brothers in charge of vehicle repair in Gulu and Lira, of carpentry, printing press, building at Lacor Hospital which was to serve everybody. There was not any political interference whatsoever and so no political or criminal reason that could justify the deportation.

1.3 MARTYRS

In Uganda none of our missionaries had been killed up to then. It was the year 1979 that marked the defeat of Amin that painted our history with blood: our missionaries became victims of the disorderly withdrawal of Amin's soldiers and of the reigning anarchy and cruelty.

FR GIUSEPPE SANTI (1920-1979)

Fr Santi went to Uganda in 1951: a priest very dedicated to pastoral work first in Gulu and then in Lira. He had been Regional Superior for 5 years. In April 14, 1979, Holy Saturday, two young

men arrive at Aloi Mission, Northwest of Lira. They were from Patongo, Gulu Diocese - there Amin's soldiers were terrorising innocent people.

The young men asked Father Santi to drive them to Lira town to look for the Tanzanians who were falsely reported to have reached there. At a road block the young men asked for the Liberators - not realising that the soldiers manning the road block were those of Amin. They were allowed to pass, but at their return the soldiers killed all of them. The body of the Father was found four days later.

FR SILVIO DEL MASO (1912-1979)

FR ANTONIO FIORANTE (1925-1979)

The two Fathers were killed in the same house on the same night of the 4th May 1979. Nobody saw the murderers (Muslims?). But suspects point to some Amin's soldiers from their Pakwach Mission, Arua Diocese. The Fathers were stripped of their clothes and tortured, their house ransacked. Their dead bodies were found early morning on the 5th May.

Fr Silvio Dal Maso was ordained in 1939 and late that same year was sent to the new mission of Ethiopia that he had to leave due to the war. In 1947 he was appointed to Bahr-el-Gazal until all missionaries were expelled. He was asked to go to Uganda, where he stayed from 1965 until his death.

He was dedicated to his pastoral work, heedless of labour and hardship. A man of deep prayer life. His death was sudden and violent yet he was found clutching his rosary in his left hand.

Fr Antonio Fiorante: Ordained priest in 1950, he was appointed to Bahr-el-Gazal where he learned Dinka and a little Ndago. Expelled from Sudan in 1962, he was sent to Uganda, where he worked among the Alur. The only aspiration of Fr Antonio was this apostolic ministry.

FR GRAZIANO PANZA (1917-1979)

Fr Graziano was ordained in 1943 and we find him in Wau in March 1946. Expelled in 1964 from Sudan, after few years of animation in Sicily, he dedicated his last 9 years to pastoral work among the Alur in Parombo.

The soldiers from Pakwach went also to Parombo, they stole his car, gasoline, slide projector, camera, watch and even his clothes. They hit him on the head as well. These and other events led to cerebral haemorrhage: The Father from the nearby station, Angal, found him unconscious and speechless. He was taken to Lacor Hospital, Gulu to no avail. The murder of the two Fathers at Pakwach had been a shock for him. He had much to suffer because of his character, but he was esteemed by all because of his faithfulness to his vocation and to apostolate.

FR SILVIO SERRI (1933-1979)

From the beginning of the war when the defeat of Amin was irreversible, the danger to life was always close and Fr Serri in the isolated mission of Obongi on the Nile knew it very well.

On 11th October 1979 a disbanded soldier appeared in the mission asking for gasoline and for the key of the car. The Father tried to talk a bit with him. At a certain moment somebody rang the bell, the soldier got excited, and discharged a mortal shot that killed the Father.

"A man of only one word" was his nick name given by the parishioners. The word which became very real was "I will remain with you, no matter what happens". - RIP.

FR MARIO POZZA (1935-1972) and FR PAOLO PONZI (1930-1972)

Both died suddenly on June 3, 1972 around 12.30 in the mission of Kigumba, Hoima Diocese, while performing an act of charity: "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The cook of the mission sent a boy down an abandoned well. The boy was suffocating from poisonous gases, Fr Pozza went down and with a supreme effort succeeded in lifting the boy up to the surface. But in that very moment Fr Pozza was overcome by intoxication and fell unconscious to the bottom of the well. At that sight, Fr Ponzi lowered himself immediately into the well to help the Father: he also fell victim to his charity. Nothing could be done anymore. The firemen from Kampala 200 kilometres away reached the place in the evening.

2. MOÇAMBIQUE⁵²

In the years of guerrilla warfare between FRELIMO and the Portuguese Government our confreres had to face many difficulties in some missions. In fact it was common to have Government soldiers during the day and guerrillas during the night.

The Portuguese Bishops, except one, could not see and understand the right of the Mozambicans to Independence for two reasons.

First because the country had been considered a Province of the motherland for centuries, so the legitimate authority in Lisbon was equally legitimate in the Colonies.

Second because the Mozambicans themselves suffered from the shortcomings of their culture: like Israel that remained in the desert to purify themselves from any pagan influence they absorbed in Egypt.

In such circumstances, there was great agitation among the missionaries. The White Fathers pulled out in protest against the Bishops. The Holy See was not well informed: the Nuncio was residing in Lisbon: he was briefed by the Bishops and accordingly was feeding the Vatican Secretariat of State.

Fr Agostoni asked and was allowed to see the Under-secretary, the late Archbishop Benelli who listened and sent the late Msgr Gaspari of the Secretariat of State to Mozambique : We do not know what his report contained, but our confreres had a very good impression of his interest. Personally I sensed that the Secretariat of State was listening to the Bishops more than to the Missionaries.

Then our confreres prepared a document, called "Imperative of Conscience", where the injustices of the Colonial Government were denounced. They were asking the Government to acknowledge the liberation movements and the right of the Mozambican people to self-determination and independence.

The Regional Superior had to answer excessive sets of questions which were intended to discover which relationships our confreres had with the FRELIMO; he was deported with other 12 confreres in June 1974.

Due to the low opinion many Bishops had of Mozambicans, at the time of independence there were only 27 diocesan priests. However, the Holy See was able select from among them Bishops and an Archbishop.

3. BURUNDI⁵³

All our confreres (11) were deported in 1977 together with 4 Italian lay volunteer missionaries. Other confreres had already left. This expulsion was announced on the radio. They were declared "personae non gratae", and had to sign their expulsion documents.

The friction with the Government went back to the massacre of the Hutu people in 1972 (250,000 were killed) perpetrated by the Tutsi Government. Our missionaries working and living among the Hutus could not accept their massacre nor the public silence of their Bishop, and rightly so. The pretext for the expulsion was an article published by one of our magazines against I. Bagaza, the President of the time.

VII. NEW OPENINGS

1. KENYA (1971)

The 1969 Chapter in its planning (Bull. N. 90, pg. 27) had entrusted to the General Direction the task of opening as soon as possible a new mission in English-speaking territory. The events in Uganda, and the existence of various territories of first evangelisation in Kenya, suggested this choice.

At the end of 1971 some commitments in the Diocese of Eldoret were assumed. Eldoret Diocese numbered 1,500,000 inhabitants with some 80,000 Catholics; 90% of the population being pagan. It was hoped that the Kiltegan Fathers, present in that Diocese, would accept some commitment in Karamoja as a compensation. But this did not happen. In 1974 as there were already 16 communities with 40 confreres, Kenya was erected into a new region.

⁵² Vd. Bulletin N. 111 page 51ss.

⁵³ Vd. Bulletin N. 118.

2. MALAWI (1974)

The confreres of Mozambique had repeatedly asked for an alternative and a support in nearby Malawi. Four missions were opened in 1974 in the Archdiocese of Blantyre, near the boundaries with Mozambique, and one Gambula on the road from Nampula to Tete. It was made a Delegation in 1977, a Region in 1979; two other missions were opened, in 1978, in the neighbouring Diocese of Chadisa (Zambia) where they speak the same language, Chichewa, that is spoken in Malawi. This opening proved to be providential in later years as masses of refugees from Mozambique fled to Malawi, followed by our missionaries both Fathers and Sisters.

3. RONDONIA (BRAZIL)

Taking into consideration that local vocations, both religious and diocesan, were increasing in the South of Brazil, and that Amazonia was opening up to immigrants from the region of Spiritu Santo where we were already working, new commitments in Amazonia (Rondonia State) were assumed, in the Diocese of Porto Velho with the foundation of Cacoal Mission in 1974.

4. INDIOS OF MEXICO

Remembering that we are for the poorest and most abandoned, and availing ourselves of the fact that Baja California could offer some missionaries, some commitments among the Indios in Southern Mexico were assumed. Thus two missions were opened in the Diocese of Tuxtepec (Oaxaca State): Ojitlan (in 1972) and Siltepec (1974).

5. COSTA RICA (1979)

Taking advantage of the abundance of vocations and of a permanent peace in Costa Rica, a new pastoral commitment was taken up (Limon, in May 1979), while a centre for vocational promotion was set up in San José, the Capital (Feb. 1979) (cf. Bull. N. 123).

It was also noticed that no other missionary Institute was present in the country and that both civil and religious authorities were favourable to our presence.

6. SOUTHERN SUDAN

After the expulsion of all European missionaries from Southern Sudan, three Sudanese confreres had remained there. Due to intensive pressure on our part four non-Sudanese Brothers were allowed to return in 1976. But by the end of 1979 some Fathers also were allowed to enter for teaching in the schools: altogether we had 11 confreres.

VIII. ERECTION OF NEW REGIONS

The 1969 Chapter had asked the General Council to reinforce the small existing groups. This was to facilitate the exchange of personnel, the Comboni identity, and the substantial help given to the dioceses where we were present.

The strategy that was followed was, whenever possible also to open new missions in nearby different nations, with the same language, as it was done in Malawi.

This could meet the eventuality of missionaries expelled from one country who could work in another country without great difficulty.

The following Regions profited by this directive:

- **ZAIRE** (erected in 1972):
 - in 1971 - 25 confreres working in 6 missions
 - in 1979 - 63 confreres working in 13 missions
- **TOGO** (erected on 20 January, 1976)
 - in 1971 - 18 confreres working in 6 missions
 - in 1979 - 37 confreres working in 11 missions
 - Extension to Ghana, with 2 missions, to Benin with 2 missions.

- **CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC** (opened for Sudanese refugees in 1966; erected on 22 December, 1975.
 - in 1971 - 16 confreres in 4 communities
 - in 1979 - 39 confreres in 11 communities
- **ETHIOPIA** it was united with Egypt up to 1969 Chapter; it was erected as a Region on 25 September, 1969.
 - in 1971 - 39 confreres in 9 missions
 - in 1979 - 58 confreres in 12 missions

IX. MISSIONARY METHODOLOGY AND IDENTITY - 1975 CHAPTER

In spite of the difficulties created by new fashionable trends, our Institute in its policy and its identity remained substantially stable. In a meeting held in Birmingham (England) in 1972 for all Institutes working in mission territories we were strong supporters of the necessity and continuity of missionary activities and of Institutes. We know however, that we had entered a new missionary era where many new trends had to be faced and eventually embraced in common with the Universal and Particular Churches. These new trends were wholly discussed in the 1975 Chapter.

1. THE MAIN DOCUMENT OF 1975 CHAPTER

The Main Document of 1975 Chapter was on the "COMBONI MISSIONARIES IN TODAY'S MISSION". The Document clearly testifies: "We feel the need to confirm the fundamental dimensions of our missionary work to make it a true evangelisation. We believe first of all that all our activity should spring from our interior life .. it is rooted, as was the life of Comboni, in an authentic experience of faith ... it is a concrete expression of Christian hope which springs, like our Founder's from the mystery of the Cross and finds there its sustenance". (Introduction N. 7).

2. MAIN POINTS OF THE DOCUMENT

- The document then underlines the necessity to WELCOME NEW TRENDS in the missions such as:
 - Pluralism of culture;
 - Inculturation of the Gospel;
 - Integral promotion of the human person on the lines of "Evangelii nuntiandi".
 - Necessity of encounter with other religions (ecumenism) and of our presence among the Moslems.
 - The claim of "frontier people", that is of people not only evangelised, but who remain on the fringes of the present trends of development and of the church.

- The COMMUNION WITH PARTICULAR CHURCHES has become a main problem in our missions mainly in Africa: two concepts have to prevail:
 - The particular Churches re-inviting us; and
 - To be available for a true service of collaboration.

In this new type of presence we are not there merely to carry out orders, but to act as sensible and responsible co-workers, using all our faith, energy and intelligence, in the pastoral decisions of the local Churches, in loyalty to our particular vocation. We also accept the rate and manner of growth proper to each individual Church; it means working with them rather than for them. It should encourage us to know that now, as never before, we are being faithful to Comboni's institution to save Africa through Africa.

- **DECLARATIONS**

The Chapter made a number of declarations; among them the following:

- Conditions for the insertion of lay missionaries into the life and activities in our mission fields.
- Increment of vocation promotion to our institute in missions.
- Necessity of Missionary work among the students and the elite in the missions.
- Suggestions to the editors of Comboni Missionary Reviews in Europe and America. They must keep in mind the repercussions certain articles may have on the missionary.

X. COMMITMENT IN ASIA

"Another characteristics of our times is the emergence of the peoples and cultures of Asia. Beside taking over a main role in tomorrow's history, these peoples make up the great majority of non-Christians, and represent the greatest part of that humanity suffering from the evils of underdevelopment. In this respect, we believe that our missionary preference "the poorest and most needy" embraces, today also the peoples of Asia. We think time is ripe for the Congregation to study the possibility of a future commitment in Asia". (N.15)

In observance of this wish of the Chapter the Superior General, with Fr P. Ravasio, Secretary for Evangelisation, on 19th March 1977 left Rome for a long trip to Asia where they had contacts with Church authorities and other personalities in the following cities and countries; Bahrain in the Persian Gulf; Karachi and Lahore in Pakistan; Delhi and Calcutta in India, Bangkok in Thailand; Manila, Zamboanga and Davao in the Philippines; Tokyo and Kyoto in Japan, Taipei and other dioceses in Formosa, Hong Kong and Jakarta in the Island of Java, Indonesia, Singapore. At the end of the journey the visitors suggested taking a commitment in the Philippines:

"It would be of great advantage for a missionary institute to have Filipino members, both for the geographical position of the islands, facing Asia and Malaysian blood, but also Japanese and Chinese. Moreover, they are people well open even from the vocational viewpoint. The Fathers of the Divine Word, for instance, have several Filipinos, with 25-30 ordinations per year, and have two Vocational Directors. Other Congregations, too, have many vocations. The Filipinos, moreover, have no difficulty in working abroad; this country would be a good work field for recruiting vocations." (See Bull. N. 117, pg. 33-39).

The suggestion was implemented in 1987, after other explorative journeys.

XI. GENERAL CONFERENCE OF LATIN AMERICAN BISHOPS, PUEBLA 1979

1. THEME

The Conference of Puebla (27 January - 13 February 1979) was held 10 years after the Conference of Medellin for an evaluation of its impact in Latin America and for considering further steps on the journey already taken.

The Theme was: "EVANGELISATION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE OF LATIN AMERICA".

The Pastoral and Theological background was given by two complementary stand points: Communion and co-participation.

- COMMUNION with God through faith, prayer, reception of Sacraments, with all Brothers up to the Pope; among all Christian communities for reconciliation and service in evangelisation.
- PARTICIPATION in the life of the Church, of the society, of the natives mainly of those in Latin America. **God is love**, we share a oneship in Him and our Brotherhood with all men.

2. THE EVALUATION OF MEDELLIN

The evaluation of Medellin is very positive, as the principles laid down has been put in practice with great impact on the people of God.

However, the Bishops acknowledged that the commandment of love was not well followed even by themselves and they asked for pardon from and reconciliation with everybody.

3. SOME SPECIAL ISSUES

The Bishops underlined and clarified some issues that had been misinterpreted or undervalued.

3.1 OPTION FOR THE POOR

Option for the poor is preferential, not **exclusive**. This has a double meaning:

- **First:** The best service to human kind is not material and social, but spiritual: the proclamation of the Good News: that prepares human beings for the oneship of God, to integral promotion (1145).
- **Second:** The service of evangelisation must reach everybody and aim at his/her conversion so that those who have can help those who do not have (479; 1150).

3.2 LIBERATION

Liberation must be integral, authentic, truly Christian that is based on **three pillars**: the truth about Christ, His Church, human persons (484).

To be **integral** must include:

- liberation from the personal and social slavery of sin, selfishness, wickedness
- liberation is not only from something but for a progressive growth in being somebody, more than in having something in order to be in communion with our common eschatological end (482, 3,5).
- liberation is to be reached through the means offered by the Gospel and the Holy Spirit without violence or class-struggle (486).

It is only when the above elements are present that liberation is an essential part of evangelisation (351) and that development is an integral part of it (355).

3.3 MARXISM AND LIBERAL CAPITALISM

These two ideologies once embraced, somehow embalm the mind in one directive: idolatry of money and material progress to which other values are sacrificed in a Machiavellian way. They are both capitalistic: Marxism of the State, Capitalism of individuals or group of people: they become religions without God.

Moreover liberally wild CAPITALISM in some nations has been controlled: Certainly, private initiative is to be maintained but if it is true that a type of capitalism has been the source of excessive suffering, injustices and fratricidal conflicts whose effects still persist, it would also be wrong to attribute to industrialisation itself evils that belong to the woeful system which accompanied it(342 pp. 26). Moreover many capitalists live as atheists (546).

MARXISM: Since some theologians have included Marxist elements in some "theologies of Liberation" Puebla cautions them. On this occasion Bishops give some clarifications: not all people who oppose wild capitalism are necessarily tarnished by Marxist ideologies (92).

Bishops reject:

- Class struggle; (544 all forms of violence 532)
- A more equal society achieved through the Dictatorship of one class organised in one party
- Militant atheism (546)
- They believe that it is possible to separate the Marxist analysis from its basic materialistic philosophy: "It would be illusory and dangerous to reach a point of forgetting the intimate link which radically binds them together, to accept the elements of Marxist analysis without recognising their relationships with ideology, and to enter into the practice of class struggle and its Marxist interpretations, while failing to note the kind of totalitarian and violent society to which this process leads". (544 quoting the Apostolic Letter "Octagesima Adveniens" of Paul VI, 1971).

The Bishops affirm:

- A theological reflection that starts from Marxist analysis reduces the aim of the Church to a man-centred goal: the salvation of which she is the messenger would be reduced to material well-being; faith would be solved at the level of social and political science neglecting or denying the transcendent dimension of Christian salvation (Ch. 545).
- The Church wants to keep herself far from both socio-political systems: her aim is man - the whole man (551). She has in her deposit of faith all the necessary principles to work successfully for the total liberation of man (552).

3.4 POPULAR DEVOTIONS

Since after Medellin many priests tried to indiscriminately discourage and/or ban popular devotions like the Rosary, pilgrimages, sacred objects and Sacramentals, like Holy Water, Puebla suggests: Pastoral Workers must:

- take care of the popular piety of both the peasants and the aborigines (464).
- revitalise the values of the Gospel that are connected with popular devotions both personal and communitarian (959).
- Popular devotions must be an occasion for catechising Christians and offering them the Word of God (960); they must not be abolished. If abuses are there, through a proper catechesis

these can be eliminated (96). Our Lady and the Saints are to be presented as a personification of the Paschal Mystery (963).

4. OTHER POINTS THAT ARE REAFFIRMED OR UNDERLINED:

- The theological reflection (the judgement) must be based on the Vision ('see') of the reality of our people who are crying out for justice, freedom and their fundamental rights N. 40).
- Our disciples of Christ must be authentic and nourished by the good news of the Gospel but we cannot forget the social and political dimension of the message in the spirit of communion and participation (48).
- Preferential option for young people in Latin America who seem condemned to live without the benefits of the youth.
- The promotion of the woman within the Church: more involvement in decision-making for pastoral work which the clergy share with them.

5. INDIOS OR AFRO-AMERICANS

All pastoral workers are expected to attend to the groups of Indios and Afro-Americans: they are in fact marginalised and live in a dishumanised conditions: they have to be considered the poorest among the poor (34). Proper evangelisation must reach them also, no group is to be forgotten by pastoral workers (365).

Our confreres, mainly in Brazil and Ecuador, took a keen interest in them and entered into several experiences. Some of them did also some research work about their history, customs and traditions.

6. REMARKS

- The documents of Puebla and later on of St. Domingo (1993) do not mention ANY "THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION". What now prevails is the terminology "Theology of Pastoral action, that is not much different from the so called Contextual Theology" as far as methodology is concerned.
- SOME THEOLOGIANS OF LIBERATION follow the analysis of dividing human kind into oppressed and oppressors. The analysis of Jesus in St. Matthew Ch. 26 divides human kind into those who love their neighbour and those who do not. In fact when the oppressed replaces the oppressor and liberates out of love he will continue to love. Otherwise he will become an oppressor himself, like all liberators through violence and hatred: nearly all Marxist Leninist leaders from the liberator, Lenin, to Stalin, to Mao-Tse-Tung, Fr Polpol, to Fidel Castro, Menghistu, Samora Machel, etc. did precisely that.
The true liberators like Ghandi and Martin Luther King had no hatred, they used no violence. True, they died themselves but saved millions who would have perished in violence that generates more violence and perpetuates hatred and revenge (classical the example of Rwanda).
- The OPTION FOR THE POOR may be better identified with the option for "the powerless" to clarify that the poor is not only the one who is economically poor, but all those who suffer injustices, who suffer discrimination, innocent people condemned by civil or military tribunals languishing in prisons, sick people, etc. Among them we may find also well-to-do people, but who are powerless like the very sick and incurable ones.
As for the economically poor we may approach the rich; for the powerless we have to approach the powerful. It is not a question of compromising our principles, nor of siding with them or enjoying their benefits: this has happened in the past and may happen in the present. We definitely do not feel in this moment that we give that impression, but, like Comboni, for the love of the poor and powerless we approach and try to convert the rich and the powerful.

Chapter Eighteen

TWELFTH GENERAL CHAPTER 1979 AND PERIOD FROM 1979 TO 1985

A. TWELFTH GENERAL CHAPTER (ROME, 1979)

This Chapter took place in Rome in 1979 and it was divided into two Sessions:

I Session: 22 June to 3 August

II Session: 20 August to 5 October

The members of the Chapter were 79.

For the members of the Institute we must distinguish:

BEFORE THE RE-UNION

	Bishops	Priests	Brothers	Scholastic	Total
FSCJ	12	1,125	296	132	1,565
MFSC	3	120	72	8	203

AFTER THE RE-UNION

	15	1,245	368	140	1,768
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1. ACTS OF THE CHAPTER

- Re-Union: See Chapter 17 A.
- Reports: they were the reports of the period 1975-1979: we have already given what happened in that period.
- Discussion and approval of the "Rule of Life" 1979: the draft was presented by an "ad hoc" commission. This Rule of life has been updated after the publication of the Canon Law of 1983. This is the Rule of life of 1988.

2. ELECTIONS

Fr S. Calvia, Superior General; Fr Alois Eder Vicar General:

Bro. Enrico Massignani (re-elected)

Fr Francesco Pierli

Fr Gianfranco Masserdoti

B. ACTIVITIES AND COMMENTS OF THE PERIOD 1979-1985

A general remark of this period is that, compared with the previous 15 years (1965-1979), it is relatively calm. However, new problems are arising as is usual in a living body:

- The Re-union with the German-speaking Province proceeded smoothly. During this period only one former MFSC left the Institute because he did not agree on the way the Re-union was made.
- Within the Institute itself the tendency to become continental minded is increasing with its advantages and disadvantages; some people seem to ignore this trend, and it becomes a divisive element. (Cfr. Report of the General Council to the 1985 Chapter).
- There are positive signs of growing identity with the Institute, mainly around the personality of Comboni: courses and various publications are promoted: yet some members and groups are still negative:

- Individualism in the communities and consequently also in the apostolate is still rather common.
- The due importance to the local Churches for some groups means emargination of Comboni identity.
- The RL which is the structural basis for identification with the Institute is not sufficiently read and meditated, especially on local community level. Only passing references are made to the RL in annual retreats with the result that the RL does not help much to nourish the spirituality of our members. However, a certain number of confreres on an individual basis are reading, meditating and keeping it.
- The meaning of our charism is often not well understood. The spirituality is an essential part of our charism and of our identity. To say that our Charism is 'ad gentes' without including the spirituality is a partial and reductive vision of the Charism.
- Individualism and inexperience provokes a harmful confusion on evangelisation, human promotion and missionary animation.
- There have been positive signs of the growing interest in community prayers: some confreres tried to have other prayer experiences, even through the help of ecclesial movements. Yet the vast majority still pay quite insufficient attention to personal prayer with all the consequences for consecrated life.
- The General Council have tried their best to remedy the situation by arousing interest in basic and ongoing formation.
- The Directory of the General Curia has its second edition in 1984.
- Opening of vocational promotion in Poland (1984-1985) and in Chile (1984).

1. BASIC FORMATION

Formation houses have their directories and community charters. Numerous assemblies continue to be held at various levels, also for missionary animation. What is found difficult is the selection and the training of formators, due also to the great number needed. Assemblies do not always make an evaluation of the decisions of the preceding one, sometimes progressive decisions are not taken, but derogatory ones appear. The report of the General Council to the 1985 Chapter says: "It seems to us however, that follow-up has not been sufficient, perhaps due to the lack of realistic and concrete conclusions and the lack of continuity and support. At the provincial level, intermediaries were lacking". (Report of the General Council to 1985 Chapter).

- NEW POSTULANCIES are opened in the missions: Malawi (1985), Togo (1983), Kenya (1983), Ecuador (1982).
- Scholasticates for Brothers or CIF in Nairobi (1982) and Kinshasa (1984).
- This would seem to indicate the necessity of a larger MISSIONARY ANIMATION in mission territories.
- MINOR SEMINARIES are gradually closed down in Brazil, Italy, Spain: other houses are scheduled for closing down.

2. ON-GOING FORMATION

- Specialisations are better planned in view of the real needs of the Congregation and of the missions. Thus we reckon: 6 Theses for Doctorate; 10 Licences; 4 Diplomas at University level; 12 courses with Diploma of various kinds
- So far on-going formation is good at the level of structures, but it has problems at the level of persons particularly of local superiors.
- On the occasion of the Comboni Centenary and of the progress of Comboni's cause of beatification new interest is stressed along with the bearing of Comboni's charism on the Congregation. All this is particularly encouraged by two monographic courses, one held in 1979 and the other in 1984.
- The spirituality of the Heart of Jesus is taken up under different aspects (cfr. "The Pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd" of Fr F. Pierli, EMI 1985).

3. CONTINUATION OF THE CRISIS

In the report of the General Council to the 1985 Chapter we read:

"The phenomenon of confreres leaving the Congregation exists and is serious. Perhaps, in the illusion that it would cease, we did not pay sufficient attention to it, especially at the level of on-going formation".

We give here a specimen, adding separately also the years 1986 and 1987, for comparison of the percentage of exits over the newly professed:

	Prof.	Total exit	Diff.	Fathers	Schol.	Brothers	%
1980-85	249	118	+131	52	44	22	47%
1986	42	23	+19	8	11	4	54%
1987	34	18	+16	5	12	1	52%
TOTALS	325	159	+166	65	67	27	

N.B. While during the period 1970-1979 in the case of priests the laicisations prevailed 57 out of 84, from 1980 incardinations prevail, 34 out of 65, which would indicate lack of Comboni identification; there remains however uncertainty about the fate of those dismissed, many of whom may have got married.

In fact the policy of the Holy See has changed; under Paul VI dispensations were granted above all at "fait-accomplì" (= once they had married). However, towards the end the same Pope began to doubt that policy. It was remarked that there were no dispensations from Matrimony except for annulment (= in case of the non-existence of a valid marriage); the same policy should have been followed with the dispensation from the priestly bond; it should then be given only when the applicant demonstrates that his Ordination for one reason or another had been invalid. However, the dispensation is given also to priests of a certain age (50 years) who have contracted grave responsibilities with a family, and especially for the education of their children.

Beside those dismissed, there are many confreres who find themselves outside community: in 1987 they are 40; in 1990, 46;(in 1994, 56). These are open to diverse solutions including a return, although this is very rare.

4. DEVELOPMENTS IN MISSIONARY ANIMATION

Centres are opened in Poland (1984-85) and in Chile (1984).

An international Congress of African Studies, "Africa at the time of Comboni", is held in Rome in 1981, in the Centenary year of Comboni's death and the 150th of his birthday. A book was published "Daniel Comboni in the first Centenary of his death": it contains Messages of the Pope, of Episcopal Conferences, of our expert confreres, of other eminent personalities, etc.

In his address to the Sudan Episcopal Conference on the 30th October 1981 Pope John Paul II said:

"The Centenary of Bishops Comboni's death has itself become a "symbol of hope" in the Sudan. On that very day (10 October) three weeks ago, missionary hope found fulfilment as Archbishop Zubeir succeeded his beloved predecessor, Archbishop Baroni as the Metropolitan of Khartoum".

In his address Archbishop Zubeir said,

"We look forward to the day this great Apostle will be raised to the honours of the Altar so that his life may become an inspiration for all the missionary endeavours of the Church".

5. PARTICULAR SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATIONS IN AFRICA

• MOÇAMBIQUE

In Moçambique the situation is improving: some permits are being granted and control of the missionary activities has relented, though the life of the people becomes more and more miserable. Our missionaries share their sufferings. Massive emigration calls for religious assistance and the institute sends Fathers and Brothers to help among the refugees in Malawi; also the Comboni Sisters accept the challenge.

• UGANDA

In Uganda the guerilla against the Government brought full violation of human rights in some parts of Uganda. Insecurity became rampant everywhere, robberies and looting of some missions was common all over Uganda. In this period two Martyrs are called by the Lord.

• SOUTHERN SUDAN

In Southern Sudan the guerilla of the SPLA continues to impoverish the population and increases the persecution of Christians. The relations of Moslems and Christians are repropounded in a sharp way; for our missionaries it becomes very difficult to move, in some places it is nearly impossible, especially when leaving the country is necessary.

The Apostolic Administrator, Msgr Pellerino and Fr Cefalo are kidnapped and forced on a long journey to Ethiopia where they will be released (1987).

Recurrent drought and famine in many countries of Africa and Latin America are further impoverishing the already poor people, thus creating a situation of misery, as it is in the case of internal and external massive migrations.

6. POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA IN AFRICA AND SECAM GENERAL ASSEMBLY (1981)

After about 20-30 years of independence of many countries in Africa we may see and judge the present situation. I say "countries" and not "nations" because in the majority of cases independence did not give birth to unified Nations but only to one Central Government and one State.

Under one Government in many countries there are different nationalities. We may call some of them "tribes" if they are still in a primitive slowly developing situation like Karamoja in Uganda and Turkana in Kenya, etc. At the same time we may call "Nationalities" those ethnic groups, which beside the values of their original culture including idioms of high value, have acquired a better standard of life and they can avail themselves of all the products of modern technology including mobile telephones, colour TV, Computers, etc. (they are not common outside the cities, yet they are present and available). I have the impression, for instance, that an overall standard of life of people in Albania is not superior to that of Baganda in Uganda now.

The greatest post-independence value, in my opinion, is that local people are in a position of being masters of their own affairs and protagonists of their own history. I say, in a position, because they cannot always manage it, due to external and internal factors.

A Chinese proverb says that the longest journey starts with the first step. African independent nations have made the first step: the journey is long, and full of pot-holes as for any other nations of the 1st and 2nd World. They are liable to make their own mistakes as developed nations made theirs. Individuals and nations rarely learn from others' mistakes. Experience, says somebody, is the sum of one's mistakes.

There is a very critical evaluation of the past 20-30 years of African countries in a document released by the GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF SECAM in 1981 by the title:

"JUSTICE AND EVANGELISATION IN AFRICA".

I quote:

"TODAY'S REALITY"

Serious situations continue to pose a challenge to us. As in the time of the prophets, we are obliged to acknowledge that under every sky there are individuals, groups, even nations who continue, coldly and cynically, to trample underfoot the rights of other people. Think of the thousands of innocent victims whose cries reach us almost every day.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

We must be aware of international domination from political, social and cultural points of view. How many are the so called "liberating" foreign armed interventions which, in reality only create new states of dependency and a whole train of misery, violence and physical, moral and religious oppression? Think of the unjust distribution of the earth's possessions between rich and poor; of the dialogue of the debt between North and South; of the all-powerful hold of multinational companies; of the pillage of raw materials from the Third World; of the ever-growing deterioration in terms of exchange and of national debts.

All these factors in the international field weigh heavily on the continent of Africa; they perpetuate situations of injustice and create what are often insurmountable obstacles to development and social and economic progress.

INTERNAL FACTORS

But if we look at Africa for a few moments, we also have to admit, alas, that the sons of this continent themselves are far from escaping the sin of the century. Violations of human rights are perpetrated in a thousand different ways and at every level, but more especially by those who hold economic or political power.

For many leaders, has politics not become the propitious pathway to dictatorship, totalitarianism and the oppression of the weakest and of rivals who have been beaten in electoral campaigns? Freedom of expression and the right to information have become attributes which people enjoy only partially or not at all. How many are the countries where the Constitutions are being flouted; then the human person becomes the mere plaything of an unbridled power which bears down with all its weight on both minds and bodies; and the common good gives way to the interests of individuals or of particular groups.

Corruption of every kind is destroying moral standards; for example, we see the embezzlement of public funds, or the refusal to perform freely those services that are due in hospitals and elsewhere. There is also the buying-off of consciences, and even the buying of conversions.

There is also the squandering of the national patrimony for purposes of prestige; or the maladministering of public funds, which sometimes entails the breaking down of the economy in countries otherwise well endowed by nature; or again the disorganisation of administrative services that have been drained of the spirit that should animate them, namely professional conscience and dedication.

And who will reap the bitter fruits? The lower classes of the rural areas and the workers, or the ordinary civil servants whose purchasing power is crumbling away from day to day, in the face of the offensive prosperity of the wealthy minority. In this world which is so disfigured by injustice, have Christians understood that their faith calls for a different kind of behaviour? Have they grasped the fact that works of justice are part and parcel of the Christian ethic which they profess?"

The document continues to suggest some remedies to this reality: a call to love and commitment, to sincere conversion to Christ, to parsimony in order to share what one has, to education for justice and denunciation of injustices, etc.

The assembly has established also the "Committee for African Internal Affairs" (CAIA) to inspire and coordinate the activities of National Justice and Peace Commissions of the Episcopal Conferences of all the African countries.

The following point is of great interest to expatriate missionaries:

"Here we would like to recall that speaking out in the cause of justice is not necessarily a public act. Before making an open intervention in the cause of justice, before rectifying some situation or condemning abuses, it is normal, each time this is possible, first of all to get in touch with those who are responsible for, or even guilty of, these situations. The effectiveness of an intervention is not necessarily measured by the degree of verbal violence or the sensation aroused by a speech. According to our tradition, priority must be given to man-to-man dialogue. Moreover, this is the Gospel way that is proposed to us by St. Matthew". (Matt. 18, 15-17).

A note of hope concludes the courageous document:

"By his light and power, the Holy Spirit will be our guide and our strength as we go more deeply into these reflections and directives in favour of justice, freedom, and the equality and the advancement of all men and of all peoples of our African continent and of Madagascar and the Islands, and as we strive to put them into practice.

It is the same Spirit who will arouse a sense of collaboration and cooperation at all levels among you who are apostolic workers, and he will give you the courage to bear witness, to educate and commit yourselves energetically to action for justice."

REMARKS ON THE ABOVE VALID ANALYSIS

It lacks an explicit cultural analysis, at least in my opinion, how do traditional positive values hold up in the face of the invasion of values and non-values of the present style of life of Western countries? The invasion reaches African countries through the presence of expatriates, through social communications, including videos. The immediate targets are secondary and post-secondary schools, universities, city dwellers: yet through them villagers are affected: a mixed culture is coming up.

Young men and women are at a crossroads and which way are they to choose? Usually the easiest, the most pleasant, the fashionable one, the one chosen by the vast majority, particularly the one travelled by the modern West, without asking where the Westerners have gone. They do not choose the less travelled by, the narrow one of the Gospel, unless this is presented through the power of the Holy Spirit and the Christian witness of pastoral workers.

AN OBSERVATION

While giving abundant directives for the cause of Justice a pastoral problem is not hinted at: that is; is it morally right to give and accept bribes? When salaries, mainly of Government officials, civil servants, accountants, etc. are completely insufficient to maintain a family?. Is restitution to be imposed before giving absolution for money and wealth obtained through corruption and embezzlement?

Yes, it is true that there are common rules in books of Moral Theology, but a reflection is necessary for a common stand among pastoral workers. In Uganda a "newly born" or a member of the "Saved Sect" denounced and gave back the money he has embezzled in a public office, he was sent to jail: through the intercession of the wife of President Museveni, herself a "saved", the man was released!

During colonial times certain values were somehow imposed. Now they are only proposed. Africans have to take their own responsibilities, and blame those who deserve the blame, themselves included.

7. NEW MARTYRS

• SR LILIANA RIVETTA

Sr. Liliana Rivetta (37 years), the first victim of our Comboni Sisters, was killed in an ambush on a road of Karamoja (Uganda) on 10th August 1981. She was very dedicated to her work and well identified with the people for whom she was working.

• FR OSMUNDO BILBAO

Fr Osmundo Bilbao (37 years) was also killed not far from Kampala on 20th April 1982 while trying to escape from an attempt to steal his car. He was very popular among the Madi tribe, Arua Diocese.

• FR EZECHIELE RAMIN

Fr Ezechiele Ramin (32 years) is killed in an ambush in Cacoal (North Brazil) on 24th July 1985 because of his involvement in the cause of the poor campesinos in their struggle for justice. His main purpose was to teach justice and fair play without violence - in fact when a volley of bullets struck him he had gone to a fazenda to advise the farmers to abandon certain premises in order to avoid greater danger. He died a witness of charity for the Indian and the landless farmers.

• SR TERESA DALLE PEZZE

Sr. Teresa (1939-1985) went to Mozambique in 1968. Her main activity was teaching. In fact under the communist regime of those years in order to be allowed to stay and to do some work, missionaries had to put themselves at the disposition of the Government as teachers, nurses, etc. She was killed in an ambush that had 20 victims on 3rd January 1985. Her last deed was an act of charity towards a soldier, the last of a numberless list of such acts.

- **FR GIUSEPPE AMBROSOLI**

Fr Giuseppe Ambrosoli (1924-1987), though he did not die a violent death, we consider him a martyr because he died out of his heroic faithfulness to his commitment.

After the Doctorate in Medicine he decided to become a priest and a Comboni missionary. Ordained in 1955 he reached Kalongo, Uganda in 1956. From a small dispensary he built up a hospital famous all over Uganda. At a check-up in Italy in 1983, he was found that only half a kidney was working. He went back to Kalongo with strict orders to stand working only about 3 hours a day and to travel only by Ambulance. When the Uganda Government gave the order to close the Hospital and to take its equipment away, the Father was on his feet for several days and travelled about 100 kms. by lorry on rough roads. The Provincial Superior suggested that he return to Italy.

He asked to stay on as he had to transfer the nurses to another school, in order to prepare them for the coming examinations.

He again travelled on rough roads. On reaching Lira, he fell sick. Due to insecurity on the roads, no doctor was available: only radio contacts were possible. The Government granted a helicopter for his transport, but when this arrived, the Father was already dead: he was 64.

- **FR EGIDIO FERRACIN**

Fr Egidio Ferracin (50 years) was killed on 4th August, 1987 while on his way to visit villages. He ran across a band of thieves who were taking three girls along with them. The Father tried amicably to persuade them to let the girls go free. But to no avail. They did not accept the advice of the Father: on the contrary, they beat him, then tied him to a tree and gunned him down.

- **FR EGIDIO BISCARO**

Fr Egidio Biscaro (1929-1990), formerly a Brother specialised in mechanics. He asked the Superiors' permission to become a priest and was ordained at the age of 46. Appointed again to Uganda first to Lira Diocese then to Gulu Diocese.

On January 29, 1990, while driving a patient to Kitgum Hospital with Fr Pieragostini he fell into an ambush and they were both shot. He lost a lot of blood and died after two hours on the road waiting to be rescued, while Fr Pieragostini was taken to hospital just in time to stop bleeding. He knew that the road to Kitgum was not so safe: but he died while performing an act of charity.

- **FR WILLIAM NYADRU**

Fr William Nyadru (31 years) was on his way to Moroto in Karamoja when he ran across his killers. They made him lie face-down and shot him in the back with a single shot. The way they executed him clearly denoted that it was a ritual: a victim of witchcraft for the success of a big raid planned by cattle-raiders. It was 25th October 1991.

Fr William is the second African Comboni priest to be martyred, after Fr Barnabas Deng (killed on 23rd August 1965) in Sudan. His death was a great loss to the Institute that nourished great hopes in his intelligence, openness and exemplary behaviour.

- **BRO ALFREDO FIORINI**

Bro Alfredo Fiorini (1956-1992) became a medical doctor in 1980 with the intention of helping the most poor and abandoned of the third world. However, he wanted to become a missionary as an ordained priest; so he studied theology at our Scholasticate in Nairobi. Later on he thought it better to become a Brother in order to be fully dedicated to his medical profession. Appointed to the Province of Mozambique (1991) he practised in a health centre in Namapa for only two years. He was brutally killed by rebels (RENAMO) who did not know they were killing a missionary and a doctor: it was the 24th of August 1992.

Chapter Nineteen

THIRTEENTH GENERAL CHAPTER 1985 AND PERIOD FROM 1985 TO 1991

A. THIRTEENTH GENERAL CHAPTER (ROME, 1985)

Members of the Institute: Prelates 16, Fathers 1,284, Brothers 342, Scholastics 135, Total 1,777.

ELECTIONS

Fr Francesco Pierli, Superior General;

Fr A. Lafita, Vicar General,

Fr O. Fuchs; Brother G. Menegotto; Fr V. Milani.

ACTS OF THE CHAPTER

We have already reported the activities of the previous administration as they are contained in the Report of the General Direction.

The acts of this Chapter are also available. They deal with on-going formation, rotation, general secretariats, lay missionaries, associated Comboni Missionaries, expenditure limits, opening in Asia, the Comboni Missionary Brother, Scholasticates and International Centres (CIF), Ecclesial Movements, Neo-catechumenals. These documents in general are a confirmation of previous decisions.

The following points contain some new directives:

1. DECISION ON OPENING IN ASIA

The Chapter agrees to an opening in Asia during the present six-year period.

The primary purpose of this opening is first evangelisation. This does not exclude mission animation and vocation promotion, which are integral part of our charism.

The choice of fields of work and of the formalities connected with it is entrusted to the General Administration.

2. SECRETARIATS

Each Secretariat is to be composed of an office with a Secretary and, if needed, an Under-Secretary with a Council of at least three members chosen according to criteria of competence. The Council is to meet once a year. The decision of the Under-Secretary was not implemented up to 1991. Perhaps such a goal is not clear.

3. LAY MISSIONARIES: WHAT IS REQUIRED OF LAY MISSIONARIES

The Chapter emphasises that Missionary service today requires that Lay Missionaries:

- be inspired by Missionary motives
- be willing to bear Christian witness
- be open to dialogue and inculturation
- be willing to cooperate with other pastoral agents
- be qualified in a specific sphere so as to take up a definite task
- be sufficiently able to speak the language of the country

4. ASSOCIATED MISSIONARIES

Associate Missionaries are committed Christians who place themselves at the service of the missions for a period of from three to five years.

The Chapter:

- Approves of the experience of the Associate members begun in the German-speaking Province as authorised by the General Administration and encouraged by the Intercapitular Assembly of 1982.
- Invites the Provinces of Africa and Latin America to include this new form of missionary service in their activities, integrating Associate Missionaries in their communities. It hopes that this experience will also be tried in other provinces.
- Requests for Associate Missionaries are forwarded through the Provincial Administration to the General Secretariat for Evangelisation which will provide a coordinated service.

5. ITINERANT CATECHISTS

Bearing in mind the fundamental importance of community life in our Institute (RL 40), the Chapter does not grant the possibility of becoming "itinerant catechists" to those confreres who request it.

B. PRIORITIES

The chapter sets the following priorities:

1. TO REVIEW AND REDEFINE THE PRESENT COMMITMENTS

With the following guidelines:

FAITHFULNESS TO THE COMBONI CHARISM

Since we have been sent, through the Church, to peoples or groups of peoples not yet or only inadequately evangelised (RL 13), we believe it is necessary to review our commitments on the following guidelines:

- give preference to the poorest and most abandoned from the point of view of the Kingdom, especially those in missionary situations of first evangelisation.
- choose the non-christian masses of Africa, Islam, Asia Afro-Americans, minority groups, suburbs of large cities, situation of injustice and oppression, the youth of the world.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MISSION IS TO BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION IN EACH COUNTRY

The more significant developments are probably the following:

- a more complete knowledge of the relationship between the Mission and the Kingdom of which the Church "becomes on earth the initial budding force" (LG5)
- the growth of the local Churches
- the abandoning of a territorial view of mission in favour of "missionary situations" (RL 14.2)
- the basic importance given to "evangelisation of cultures" (EN 20)
- a more explicit commitment to total human liberation (RL 60) and the abandoning of unnecessary assistentialism;
- the realisation that the poor, instead of being merely the object of mission, acquire a determining role in evangelisation itself and in evangelising the missionaries.
- the increasing involvement of the laity
- the growth of a type of missionary methodology which brings to the forefront trust in the Holy Spirit, the promotion of ministries, simplicity of means and the formation of small Christian communities.

2. THE COMBONI MISSIONARY COMMUNITY

The Chapter takes full account of the progress in community life achieved during the past six years. At the same time it believes that there is still much to be done in order fully to understand and live that ideal which the Rule of Life presents.

There are still too many communities which are numerically incomplete or not sufficiently open to internationality. In detail one notes: individualism; irregular times of prayer; lack of incisiveness in the role of the Superior; failure to maximise the qualities of the members of the community and a life-style which is far removed from that of the people (22).

In the light of our charism and facing up to those challenges issued to us by the situations in which we live, the Comboni Missionary community must adopt an attitude of continual conversion, and allow itself to be evangelised by the values which are inherent in those situations, in order to become a prophetic sign of the new humanity born of the Spirit (RL 36) and the leaven of mission animation in the Local Church. (23)

3. VALUES OF THE KINGDOM AND TOTAL LIBERATION OF MAN

The General Chapter considers "bringing out the values of the Kingdom of God with a view to the total liberation of man" a priority of our missionary service today.

The mystery of the Kingdom extends beyond situations, structures and ideologies. It is the person of Christ himself, in whom the entire universe is "called" to achieve its unity so as to become that Kingdom of complete salvation desired by the Father (Eph. 1:10). Bringing out the values of the Kingdom implies showing and fostering the signs of this slow and sometimes painful, but decisive and progressive transformation of all in Christ. (Rm 8:19).

An examination of the situations of the peoples among whom we work (in Africa, Europe and the Americans) reveals, side by side with the values of the Kingdom, the failure to preach the Gospel, injustices, oppression and misery which disfigure the face of Christ in many of our brothers.

These situations present us with a challenge which we must meet according to our charism. If we accept the challenge, our *sequela Christi* will become more radical and our proclamation of the Gospel and our commitment to the poor and abandoned more evangelical.

This priority was **very controversial** at the Chapter, not in itself, but for the different interpretations given by some capitulars. As some trends in modern theology, mainly coming from the duty of fostering ecumenism, focus on general values common to all religions, some misunderstandings, also in our circles, arose on the line of making Jesus Christ equal to Buddha and Mohammed, etc. The explicit announcement of Christ, not only in some circumstances but as a policy, is left aside by some theologies and places. In view of this the General Council wrote a letter of clarification in 1989 which was very much appreciated. "*Redemptoris Missio*" focuses the problem very well, when John Paul II among other things writes:

"... The Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine or a programme subject to free interpretation, but is before all else a person with the face and name of Jesus of Nazareth the image of the invisible God. If the Kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the Kingdom of God which He revealed. Likewise, one may not separate the Kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she ordered towards the kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both". (RM 18)

The intervention of the Pope is a clear sign that the "values of the Kingdom" had to be clarified. This does not mean that the document of our chapter was not clear; it needed however to be more developed and detailed.

N.B.: The Report of the General Council to 1991 Chapter is rather positive on the implementation of the above priorities.

"The three priorities set by the 1985 Chapter are all firmly bound together. As we have already pointed out in our Christmas 1985 letter (6-14) the unifying factor is the third priority on the Values of the Kingdom and total liberation of man". The Kingdom of God in Christ is in fact the final aim of the mission. The other two priorities, RRC and the Comboni Missionary community, are means that through our life style testify the real presence of the Kingdom, even if incomplete, while our missionary activity is an effective instrument for the growth of the Kingdom in the world".

The report underlines that the first value of the Kingdom is *Sequela Christi* (N. 35,2).

C. MAIN ACTIVITIES OF THE INSTITUTE FROM 1985 TO 1991

1. REVISION OF THE RULE OF LIFE

Revision of the Rule of life according to the New Canon Law (1983) and the 1985 Chapter.

The Chapter had approved about forty amendments to the constitution as well as the directional part of the RL. They were passed on to the SCEP for approval (cf. Bull. N.153). SCEP's reply came on July 7 1987 with remarks and modifications to the text before the final approval could be granted. The GC thus appointed three committees in succession to do the revision work. The revised text was twice sent to SCEP before final approval on December 3rd 1987. The RL was subsequently published in 7 languages.

The report to the 1985 Chapter had stated how, after the first initial enthusiasm, the RL was inadequately present in the life and apostolic activity of our confreres. The GC took the occasion of the centenary of the first religious professions to propose some initiatives for a more sapiential knowledge of it:

- meeting of all the provincials, April 1987 with 2 weeks spent on the RL;
- three weeks for the Novice Masters, who studied the RL to make it into the unifying axis of formation in Novitiates;
- all formation and mission animation assemblies subsequently spent time on a deep scrutiny of the RL;
- courses of spiritual retreats with Combonian contents and perspectives were held during the centenary year, according to scheme agreed upon in Pesaro, in December 1986 - January 1987, where the RL was used as a meditation and prayer book;
- the monthly prayer intentions of the Centenary Year were all centered on the RL, with an aid explaining the fundamental points;
- we like to mention here the praxis of those Provincial Councils that begin their sessions with a reflection on the RL, as well as of those communities that make regular use of it in community reading, community prayer and community councils. Something with a wider scope and more systematic must be done to turn the RL into the real source of spirituality and missionary methodology. Some confreres refer to the text of the RL only for juridical problems.

2. "RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS INSTITUTIONIS ET STUDIORUM"

The 1985 chapter had asked to finalise this "Ratio". The work was coordinated and done by the Secretary of Formation who took the following steps:

- Continental and sectorial assemblies were held between 1986 and 1988. The working paper was presented to a Commission named in 1989 which prepared the first draft that was sent to provinces and expert confreres.
- After Continental Assemblies in 1990 and other contributions, many suggestions and proposals were inserted and the Commission finalized the text, which was submitted to and approved by the General Council in December 1990.

3. SPECIALISATIONS

Specialisations practically redoubled during this period; all together 72: 11 Degree Courses, 48 Licences and Masters of Arts, 13 Diploma Courses.

There is in fact a growing need for specialisations for the requirements of the missions and for the internal needs of the institute. Perhaps the responsibilities of the General Direction and of the Provinces may be better defined, in order to bring out the value of the specialization and exploit it at the best.

4. ORDINARY AND SPECIAL EVENTS

- Sectorial, Special, Continental, Intercontinental Assemblies went on with a certain increase; we notice also the participation of the Institute in ecclesial events and meetings in a noteworthy way.
- The publication of the Founder's writings as a single volume (1991).
- Two Continental courses on Comboni's charism: in America (1990) and in Africa (1991).
- Celebrations and occurrences:
 - 1987 100 years from the first religious professions;
 - 100 years from the opening of Helouan (Egypt);
 - 75 years of our arrival in Northern Uganda
 - 50 years of Peru and Northern America Provinces
- Establishment of the Delegation of Central America (1988).
- Foundation of NEW MAGAZINES:
 - In Africa: New People (Nairobi), Worldwide (South Africa) and Zikomo (Malawi).
 - In Latin America: Alo Mundo (in Ecuador);
 - In Asia: World Mission (Philippines);
 - In Europe with Comboni Missions (England).
- Opening of the following POSTULANCIES:
 - For Priest candidates: Centrafica-Tchad Philippines, Khartoum (with Egypt). Mozambique, Poland, South Africa, Southern Sudan.
 - For Brother Candidates: CIF of Quito; postulancies: Togo - Uganda - Ethiopia.
- Transfer of Formation Houses: Gilgil to Nairobi (CIF); Quito to Bogota (CIF); Kampala to Nairobi (Scholasticate).
- Foundation of Sakakini Centre (Cairo) for Islamology and Arabic language (1984). In 1995 transferred to Zamelek. It is also a Centre for African students in Egypt.
- Museum Combonianum starts a new series of "Bibliotheca Comboniana" with its three sections of Anthropology-Linguistic, Sources-History, Mission-Spirituality.
- Vademecum of the Provincials and the General Directory of the Curia (1991 in its 3rd Edition).
- Revision and qualifications of commitments (1988): A document of the General Council that develops updates the suggestions and pieces of advice of the intercapitular assembly of 1982.
- A special mention deserves the meeting of the provincials in 1990 when the crisis of defections and perseverance in the Institute were well discussed.

5. GENERAL CRISIS AND DEFECTIONS

During this period there has been a good number who left the Institute, a total of 88:

In his report to the 1991 Chapter, the Secretary of formation and vocational promotion expresses his personal opinion on the defection of Scholastics with the following statement:

"The percentage of leavers is well within the normal trend, particularly if we look at the reasons of their leaving.

Without fear of being proved wrong I can state that 90% of leavers during their formation period is the result of a vocational discernment process, hence rather than a defection it should be called a discovery of one's vocation. Normally the candidate and the formator value together the presence of a Christian and human maturity, the intellectual capacity, the suitability to lead a community life, the concrete capacity to live a consecrated life. This is how they arrive at the conclusion that they have no Comboni Missionary vocation though in many cases they have a priestly and even missionary vocation.

It would of course be better if these conclusions were reached during the postulancy period or before the first profession. There are factors however making this difficult, among them the complexity of the process of discerning a consecrated missionary vocation, the youth situation of today, the precarious way vocation promotion and even formation is at times carried out, the lack of specially prepared formators".

However, the General Council had felt the urgent need to discuss the question of perseverance of all professed in the Institute as "a vital question" in a meeting of the Provincial Superiors in 1990. The meeting was held after a questionnaire had been circulated to the Provincials. The aim of the research was proposed in the following manner:

"Notwithstanding the structures of basic formation, in the Institute we have reached these last years a certain stability, but the crises and the consequent defections of confreres, also young confreres, have not disappeared. There are various instances of personal crisis; crisis of identity with the Institute, and crisis of identity with the priestly and consecrated life".

Giving the report of the answers to the questionnaire, Fr Lafita said:

"All the reports show that the problems is felt in every province, and that it requests urgent attention and a harmonious action in the various sectors: vocational discernment, basic formation and, above all, at the level of local community".

6. THE INTERCAPITULAR ASSEMBLY - ELLWANGEN, 1988

As usual this Assembly was mainly a revision of the decisions of 1985 Chapter. So, how the 3 priorities had been observed was the main target; the judgement of the assembly was more or less like the one already reported at the 1991 Chapter.

A particular issue was the promotion and vocation of the Brothers. We report here the main points:

- The Institute has done great efforts to start and to structure the **formation of brothers**. Among the various initiatives we can mention the following:
 - a committee ad hoc for the Brothers' directory and ratio studiorum
 - the creation of Postulancies for Brothers in various Provinces
 - International Centres for Brothers were opened
 - a growing interest of the Provinces toward the Brothers' vocation promotion and formation
 - a questionnaire on the situation of the Brothers and the Assembly on the formation of Brothers.
- Notwithstanding all this, it was not possible to overcome all the difficulties which remain there; the points stressed by provinces are:
 - lack of brothers in vocation promotion and formation
 - few candidates and consequently lack of communities of formation for them
 - too great variety in the age of candidates which prevents a smooth and common formation with the same contents for all.
- Other difficulties
 - different set-ups in the professional schools some of which give qualifications without adequately teaching a profession
 - multiplicity of services for which the brother should be prepared
 - lack of interest and experience in some provinces.
- The Formation Assembly for Brothers held in August same year, has made a proposal later on underlined by the Intercapitular Assembly in these terms:
 - at this moment it is necessary to request the involvement of all confreres in vocation promotion, basic formation and ongoing formation of Brothers
 - historical and theological research of the Brother's role be continued so as to get orientations in line with the Capitular Acts (AC 85, 113)
 - have a Brother in the formation Secretariat or a permanent Commission be established to collaborate with the Secretariat.

The General Council commits itself to materialise these requests. Four Brothers, for the first time were present at this Intercapitular Assembly.

D. MAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MISSIONS

1. ERECTION OF OUR MISSIONS IN TCHAD INTO A REGION

Erection of our missions in Tchad into a Region, in 1988. Tchad was a former territory entrusted to our Founder; it is now one of the poorest countries also from a Catholic point of view, as the Catholic population is only 6% of the total. The Episcopal Conference of Tchad insisted on having one of our confreres as Bishop of Doba. Bishop Michele Russo was consecrated on 21st May 1989.

2. THE "NEW SUDAN"

In 1990 a large territory of Southern Sudan was under the control of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). The Diocese of Torit was somehow cut off from the assistance of our missionaries; so two missions were opened, Torit and Loa, where our missionaries entered without the permission of the Khartoum Government. The zone was also represented at the 1991 Chapter. The move was made after wide consultation including one with the Holy See.

3. OPENING IN THE PHILIPPINES

On January 4, 1988, the first group of three Comboni Missionaries led by Fr Marchetti arrived in the Philippines. While giving themselves time to get acquainted with the Filipino reality they focussed their reflection on a programme of missionary awareness which would include vocation promotion among the youth and the publication of a missionary magazine.

Two Fathers began establishing contacts and working in vocation promotion with the youth, mainly in the Universities of Manila, where, however, young people come from various Provinces of the nation.

Later on in the year the group drew up the following first stage PLAN:

- the continuation of the vocation promotion among the youth
- the publication of the magazine in March 1989
- the beginning of the Comboni Postulancy in 1990
- the consequent opening of a novitiate in 1992
- the commitment to first evangelisation

This plan was finalised more or less as scheduled. The magazine WORLD MISSION in particular had a great success in the local Church and among the faithful.

A group of five young College graduates began their Postulancy in June 1990. The new building, called "Daniel Comboni Seminary" was officially inaugurated on January 12, 1991. In June 1991 a second group of ten young men joined the Postulancy thus bringing the number of Postulants to 14. (The first profession of 6 Filipinos took place on 6 May 1995).

In December 1990 the General Direction made a choice for FIRST EVANGELISATION among the Chinese people in MACAU. A first Comboni Missionary Priest was appointed in 1990 and two others in the March 1991 Consulta. In January 1991 one of them began the study of Chinese in Hong Kong, and in July an apartment in Hong Kong was rented to house the group.

Chapter Twenty

THE FOURTEENTH GENERAL CHAPTER OF 1991

A. FOURTEENTH GENERAL CHAPTER (ROME, 1991)

Members of the Institute: 1,818; 14 Prelates; 1,301 Priests; 345 Brothers, 158 Scholastics.

ELECTIONS

Fr David Glenday, Superior General;

Fr Vittorio Moretto, Vicar General;

Bro. Casas R. Guillermo; Fr Casillas H. Manuel; Fr Giuseppe Filippi.

B. REPORT OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL

It is a very comprehensive objective report, in three parts, introduced by a preamble.

1. The PREAMBLE stresses how the *Holy Spirit* is the protagonist of the mission and how the Kingdom of God is first of all a gift of the merciful and liberal love of the Father, that gradually penetrates and transforms history. We are not the protagonists of the coming of the Kingdom, and of the mission, but only "co-operators" (RL 56). This faith-vision is necessary to understand the inner dynamics of the mission.

2. The Institute is not an isolated body, but shares in the life and history of the Church and of the world. Thus THE FIRST PART recalls the *historical events* that have characterised this six-year term and had a bearing on our mission and life, particularly in the continents and countries where we are present and work. We have here to recall the many socio-political aspects in the third world in general, and in the relations between North and South, between rich and poor people, etc. Important Church issues that influenced the life of the Christian community and the missionary activity are also mentioned, such as the increase in the number of human groups not yet evangelised and the changes in the missions brought about by socio-political and rapid cultural changes.

Ecclesial movements, growth of missionary laity, rapid expansion of sects, ecclesial ministries, are also factors bringing substantial changes in our methodology and dictating the update of our basic and ongoing formation.

3. The SECOND PART looks at the quality of the life and mission service of the Comboni Missionaries, with particular bearing on the way the **CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER** is being actualised, this being the main aim of the Chapter (RL 146). Thus this section will present the prayer life, community life, consecrated life and missionary service. This part will also present the state of the personnel: age, mood, co-operation and complementarity between Brothers and Fathers, the delicate and complex problem of perseverance. The growing awareness of Comboni's charism is rather positively assessed, though the theology of charism has not yet penetrated in many of us. Two sharing sessions at continental level, America (1900) and Africa (1991), have provided good material for those who are willing to follow it up.

A great contribution to this has been the publication in various languages of "The spirituality of Comboni" of a non-Combonian Father, that is Fr Lozano, a Professor of Spirituality. The Novice Masters held a ten-day meeting in Rome (November 1986) on the RL as the fundamental text for the spiritual identification process with the Institute during the Noviciate (Rome, Nov. 1986). It has not been possible to finish a comment on the RL but a lot of material has been collected.

Spiritual retreats on Combonian contents have multiplied Confreres who can give this kind of retreat centred on the Founder and on the RL have been prepared (course for preachers of Combonian retreats held in Pesaro from December 28th 1986 to January 6th 1987). This type of retreat was very well received and courses were held in the almost all the Provinces.

Comboni Sisters, the Comboni Secular Missionaries and Lay groups who ask to live our mission spirit and spirituality, are also a growing challenge to us.

A good contribution to the spirituality of Comboni has been given by the active support to the theology and cult of the Pierced Heart of the Good Shepherd through specific studies (Degrees, Theses and Licentiate) and popular publications. We were active and committed also in promoting spirituality meetings among the Institutes consecrated to the Heart of Christ, in view of encouraging basic and ongoing formation.

4. A NEGATIVE ASPECT is mentioned *which comes up in all Chapters* and intercapitular assemblies is the following:

- "For a good number of our confreres the writings of Comboni are *only an occasional reference* point; they are not contributing significantly to their missionary activity and spirituality;
- Many still look at the RL simply as a *juridical document* and not the concrete path of our 'sequela Christ' as followers of Comboni" (pg. 26).
- Another issue which returns at every Chapter is *personal prayer*. Though as a whole there is some improvement, yet there are still many signs of inadequate personal prayer.

5. As for the CONSECRATED LIFE the report bring forwards positive and negative aspects that are very common to the other Chapters and assemblies:

OBEDIENCE deserves some good reflections. We report the whole page here as obedience well lived is a guarantee for the keeping of the other vows, as all breaches of them definitely go against one or the other precepts of obedience to the Gospel, to the RL to superiors. It is also the secret for any positive aspects of community life as described in the report. Here is the long quotation about obedience;

Positive aspects:

- The readiness of most confreres to submit to obedience, to rotation and to work in very difficult and dangerous missionary situations is very edifying. Community discernment is more and more accepted so as to compare, complement and review one's opinions with those of the others, though individualism is still a problem. The "mission" project is no longer the project of an individual but is becoming more and more a joint project involving all the community's energies.
- More attention is to the signs of the times. This is a consequence of the third priority on presence or absence of the values of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.
- Community councils are held more regularly, and they help discernment, evaluation and the orientation of the community.
- There is greater consciousness for the need to plan.
- There has been an improvement in our capacity to enter into the diocesan planning (ecclesial obedience) (RL 66).
- There is a growing acceptance of the role of the local superior in community life and for discernment.
- The use of the community charter is spreading.

Negative aspects.

- Some confreres still think of the mission as "to go and experiment" according to one's taste and ideas, with more attention devoted to oneself rather than to the real needs of the people and of evangelisation. There is a rather strong undercurrent stream of thought supporting this attitude.
- Difficulty in accepting the Institute's and Provincial guide-lines and methodology. Some incardinations are the result of the lack of obedience. A Bishop has been sought who will give in to one's wishes.
- Some look with a kind of "estrangement" and even "suspicion" on whatever emanates from Rome be it the "Vatican" or the General administration.
- Privacy is seen as an unalienable right. This is a source of problems in religious life. Some religious resent having to inform or give accounts of their actions and travels. There is a feeling that the affairs of the heart and relations with the people are an exclusively personal affair.
- There isn't as yet sufficient technical knowledge and practice of community discernment.

6. MISSIONARY SERVICE

Two remarks are important (from the Report):

"1) The growing re-discovery and knowledge of our founder has been increasing; also the awareness of our being specifically 'ad gentes' as stated in RL 5 and 13 and now stressed also by RM Ch. 4. Our commitment is first of all towards human groups not yet evangelised. This has brought us to hand over several institutions, where the 'ad gentes' aspect had been fulfilled and to the opening of others still bearing this characteristic. The opening in Asia is the clearest example. We should not forget that fidelity to groups not yet evangelised is not always an easy one; discernment at times becomes difficult, in the absence of clear demarcation lines, as pointed out also by the Encyclical. Often our criteria for discernment and our feelings differ from those of the Bishops and the local people, giving rise to painful tensions and misunderstandings.
2) The two assemblies have shown that attention be paid to missionary methodology has increased considerably, even if the way ahead is still long. The growing commitment of the provincial councils to follow up evangelisation and human promotion is a guarantee for a continuing positive trend [VSC 71-80]".

This growing commitment should end the dichotomy often created by some missionaries between religious life and pastoral commitments; such attitude is often an encouragement for some missionaries to leave the Institute seeking incardination in a diocese. Religious consecration, on the contrary, is a wonderful source and means of evangelisation.

7. "SITUATIONS OF MARTYDOM"

We are grateful to the General Council for the following statement:

"It is right here to stress also the missionary importance of the presence of confreres in high risk areas, in situation of isolation, with little or no medical assistance, no mail. In order to share the life of the people these confreres are undergoing a constant wear of their physical, psychological and spiritual forces, a real martyrdom. We could name these types of presences as 'situations of martyrdom'. Let us be grateful to God and to our confreres for such an example (pg. 35)".

8. INCULTURATION

The following statement of the Report needs a comment:

"We cannot approve the attitude of the missionaries who say that 'inculturation is something that must be done by the local pastoral agents, it cannot come from outside'".

It is true that inculturation cannot come from outside. However a missionary who has lived and worked in a given culture and has been attentive to its manifestations cannot be said to come from outside. The role of such a missionary is of a paramount importance in helping the local pastoral workers to be aware of their own culture. An attentive person is in a better position to identify the elements of another culture where he lives and works. He will help the pastoral agents to analyse the elements of the local culture and to identify the positive and negative values, judging them not only from a human viewpoint but also from the Gospel's point of view. Such a missionary may be very helpful in the process of acculturation.

The work of inculturation as far as Christian values are concerned should be the result of sincere co-operation, openness and mutual trust of missionaries and local clergy. Local pastoral agents who do not consider the experience of missionaries, and the missionaries who alone decide for pastoral agents what to do, are both confused.

The following fact may clarify what I say. A Ugandan, Joseph Kyagambiddwa, whose musical talent was discovered by the Missionaries, was sent to USA for musical training. Once he deepened Western and Eastern music he realised the differences with his native music. Once back he wrote a classic book treatise on Kiganda Music.

He composed the "ORATORIO" of the Uganda Martyrs that was performed several times in Rome with great success and was described by an expert an original and authentic piece of Kiganda Music.

So the same with culture: one becomes aware of his own culture and style of life, when he meets and understand another culture.

9. EDUCATIONAL SECTOR

Another clarifying statement is the following:

"Our commitment in the education sector is quite valid and is a practical and concrete means of human promotion (cf. RL 61.4), deeply rooted in the tradition of the Institute. It should not be given up, particularly at the higher levels".

There has been a period when the missionaries left the administration of Catholic schools en masse without discrimination between primary and secondary schools. For many missionaries this move meant abandoning the schools. Many left them because to them the school could not offer sufficient opportunity for pastoral work.

All the schools instead particularly at higher level and the boarding ones are privileged parishes where the pastoral care may reach the persons more easily and more efficiently than in the villages, which takes more time and is a less continuous pastoral assistance; it is the continuity that counts not so much sporadic and brief visits. Truly, personnel must be prepared both pastorally and professionally, so that its presence in the school is really a meaningful presence as of heaven.

The above rhymes perfectly with the following statement of the report:

"The RM has taken up ideas already present among the missionaries, including the Comboni missionaries, when it writes: 'Today the mission ad gentes is perhaps changing: efforts should be concentrated on the big cities where new customs and styles of living arise together with new forms of culture and communication, which then influence the wider population. It is true that the option of the neediest means that we should not overlook the most abandoned and isolated human groups, but it is also true that individuals or small groups cannot be evangelised if we neglect the centres where a new humanity, so to speak, is emerging, and where new models of development are taking shape. The future of the younger nations is being shaped in the cities'. (RM 37a) Report pg. 43)".

And it is in the cities mainly in the schools of high level, where new and future leaders are formed.

C. CONTINENTAL REPORTS

For the first time comprehensive reports were prepared by the Capitulars on Africa, America, Asia and Europe.

I give here their main interesting and new points except for Asia already given above.

I. AFRICA

1. SIGNS OF HOPE

In spite of many problems we can thank God for positive signs:

- the cry for democratic structures, hoping that slowly this will create a democratic mentality based on the full respect of human rights.
- the desire for and the attention to cultural values in the society and the local Churches: here we find trends towards basic communities, and theological research.
- the aspect of the Cross realised through the martyrdom of Comboni Missionaries and other Missionaries, of Catechists and lay people.
- I can add the Beatification of Josephine Bakhita (1993) of Isidore Bakanja (1994) and of our Founder Bishop Comboni (1996).
- Original and relevant documents at Continental level (two of SECAM) and at the level of Episcopal Conferences.

2. PROBLEMS

Problems are too many and the majority are difficult to solve; others will take time. Among them:

- The poverty of the ordinary people and the universal phenomenon of the periods of economic crisis when the poor become poorer and the rich become richer, both within the national society and within nations themselves: hence the striking differences between North and South.
- Poverty that grows due to illiteracy, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, unemployment, guerrilla warfare, military expenses etc.

- Interference of great powers both in political, social and economic life and mainly in cultural life that drives young generations into a cross-roads without exit in search of a happiness that is never at hand: armed criminality is on the increase.
- Islamic and sectarian fundamentalism that disturb the societies and are often the instrument of political ambitions.
- Health problems: new types of persistent Malaria, AIDS, etc.
- The Particular Churches structure is very solid but the journey has just begun towards a Church of Communion, of interiorisation, of spiritual and supernatural and Ecclesial values.
- There is still some authoritarianism and clericalism. Training in some Seminaries, Noviciates and ongoing formation structures is still lacking. Some Churches lack a personal and Ecclesial witness of an authentic Christian, religious, priestly life.

3. SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions are given to the General, Provincial, Community Councils.

- They are urged to the performance of their responsibilities as in the Rule of Life, and the 5 documents of the Chapter in a special way.
- The communities are exhorted to be more cenacles of Apostles, than communities of work which often becomes activism: hence more prayer and trust in the presence of the Lord in the Religious and Ecclesial communities.
- More concentration in the ideal of "Save Africa with Africa" in order to encourage a self-supporting, self-ministering, self propagating Church, starting from grassroots.
- Emphasis is put on the training of pastoral agents and of leaders not only in the religious, but also in the socio-economic-political field.
- Preferential option for the poor and for first evangelisation.
Isn't today the hour of Africa?

4. ADDITIONS

To complete the above comments, I may add the following points:

CHURCH'S SOCIAL DOCTRINE

Some African countries, had followed communist socio-political trends. Some have abandoned it early enough, like Senegal, Ivory Coast. Others abandoned it after the break up of Soviet Union. But some of them are driving towards unfettered capitalism.

It is urgent for the Church to enter fully into the social questions with the teaching and practice of Catholic Social Doctrine. After all John Paul II in his Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) writes:

The "new evangelisation", which the modern world urgently needs and which I have emphasised many times, must include among its essential elements a *proclamation of the church's social doctrine*. As in the days of Pope Leo XIII, this doctrine is still suitable for indicating the right way to respond to the great challenges of today, when ideologies are being increasingly discredited. Now, as then, we need to repeat that there can be *no genuine solution of the "social question" apart from the Gospel*, and that the "new things" can find in the Gospel the context for their correct understanding and the proper moral perspective for judgement on them". (N. 5).

"Thus the Church's *social teaching* is itself a *valid instrument of evangelisation*. As such, it proclaims God and His mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself. In this light, and only in this light, does it concern itself with everything else: the human rights of the individual, and in particular of the "working class" the family and education, the duties of the state, the ordering of national and international society, economic life, culture, war and peace, and respect for life from the moment of conception until death." (N.54)

Too many Catholics in social and political life, and even University lecturers in Social Sciences ignore the social teaching of the Church: failure of the Clergy?

POVERTY

The reality of poverty in Africa is alarming: this is expressed in an article of the African-American Institute Dec. 1994, published in "Africa Report" Dec. 1994.

"In 1993, the U.S. Treasury Under-secretary presented evidence to the House of Representatives (USA) that poverty was sharply increasing in Africa. That the number of poor people was on the rise and that those already poor were actually becoming poorer. He called for a shift in direction and thinking by the international financial institutions (IFIS). From that moment, USA has been quietly discussing the need for a change in policy in Africa".

"In the article, UNICEF is quoted as having expressed concern over:

- the millions of poor small scale farmers who in recent years, have been hit by tight credit policies, cuts in extension services, the withdrawal of subsidies on agricultural inputs, the deterioration of roads and other infrastructure; rural wages which have generally been stagnant and the purchasing power which has been reduced by higher food prices;
- domestic food security and the production which decreased markedly;
- events which caused cheap food imports at the expense of increasing local agricultural production. This came about as a result of the liberalised import systems;
- cuts on real per capita expenditures on education, resulting into declining enrolment and quality of education e.g. sub-Saharan Africa primary enrolment fell from 80% in 1980 to 69% in 1990;
- cuts on real per capita expenditures on health, resulting in increased deaths e.g. Oxfam quotes Zimbabwe, on the introduction of user fees, three times as many women at Harare Central Hospital died in child birth. There has also been brain drain of doctors as a result of low salaries. Not to mention absenteeism, inefficiency, corruption, etc. and the return of communicable diseases like yellow fever, malaria, cholera, etc."

Strange enough the article does not mention AIDS as a communicable disease which within few years may affect millions of Africans.

II. AMERICA

1. SIGNS OF HOPE

- Popular organisations have encouraged fraternity and solidarity in the socio-political and economic fields: this phenomenon greatly helps the ordinary people to become more and more responsible protagonist of their own destiny.
- Clergy and laity men and women live their own responsibility in the Church: vocations and missionary spirit is the stand of the Church in the proclamation and denunciation of injustices is increasing.

2. PROBLEMS

- Economic and political, social problems, dependence on international situations are more or less like those of Africa.
- Specific ones are: large land estates in the hands of few and this renews the servitude of the poor;
- Urbanisation: in some nations 70% or 80% of the population are in big towns often in dehumanising slums;
- In some cases institutionalised violence of the armed forces, police and local units, are adding fear to disarray: the "disaparecidos", drug-terrorism, extra-judicial executions, etc. are on the increase too.
- The problem of sects seems more acute than in Africa given the nearness of their source, i.e. USA and financial means.

3. SUGGESTIONS

The approach to the problems taken by capitulars from America within the Institute is more or less the same as the one of capitulars from Africa: however a problem is underlined i.e. of how to live the internationality in the Institute and in our communities: it is a challenge to be seen not in terms of numbers, but of mentality, openness and true loving inclination towards everybody without discrimination.

Recurrent suggestions are: the necessity

- to deepen the relation between a Comboni spirituality and missionary methodology and the Latin-American ones.
- to deepen the meaning of integral or total liberation of human person in the context of a well understood significance of evangelisation: not all confreres have clear ideas on this issue. "*Evangelii Nuntiandi*": still stands as an answer.

III. EUROPE

The problems of Europe are different from those of Africa and America and also from Nation to Nation. However, there are some common issues in Western Europe.

1. SIGNS OF HOPE

Signs of hope are given by minorities. The majority of young people abandon the Church, religious practices, and Sacraments: for many who still ask for them they have more a cultural than a spiritual meaning. However, the leaven is there as shown by the growth of interests in the person of Christ in the memberships of ecclesial movements, in the increase of missionary lay vocations and the interest of some Dioceses in personnel and finances for some missions (twinships with dioceses in Africa with its pros and cons).

2. PROBLEMS

- Scarce success in Vocational promotion and consequently in professions and ordinations;
- Immigrants from the South: problems of hospitality and assistance: any specific responsibility for us?
- Rotation with all its advantages and disadvantages;
- Comboni brothers: numerous problems in their formation mainly in CIFs;
- Associate member (DSP) and lay missionary vocations;
- Assistance to old and sick people;
- In some provinces the care of particular cases of eccentric members.

3. SUGGESTIONS

- Deepening of the Encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" of John Paul II.
- Study of the Social Teaching of the Church in order to make Christians aware of the World injustices vis-a-vis the Gospel.
- Encouragement of Comboni Lay Missionaries.
- Scholasticates to continue to be intercontinental, without exaggerations: i.e. availing the presence of too many nationalities.
- Newly ordained priests and newly professed brothers to leave for the missions as soon as possible.

D. CHAPTER ACTS

These acts are somehow more important than the reports, in the sense that they are a programme for all the members of the Institute in a special way for the 6 years after the Chapter.

The preparatory commission had prepared 8 drafts for 3 subjects:

- Revision of commitments
- Internationality
- Missionary Methodology

The Chapter however decided to deal with different subjects.

First of all the capitulars identified the FOCAL POINT from which all other issues may derive: it is "With Daniel Comboni today", and described with: MISSION/CHARISM - CHARISM/MISSION.

Mission/Charism focuses the SERVICE we render to the Church. Charism/Mission focuses the SOURCE of the missionary service.

Charism in fact is first given to us in the time of our life; it is the call itself. Mission is first in the intention of God who gives us the charism for a service, for a mission.

E. LINES OF ACTION

As lines of "ACTION" the experience of our founder is indicated as light and way, and consequently lines of action are given.

- Comboni spirituality.
- Comboni missionary community.
- Basic and On-going Formation.

- Fields of work.
- Comboni missionary methodology.

1. The five paths had to be composed without any previous draft except the one on methodology. Perhaps the attention of the capitulars has been diluted.

Except for the first path on "Comboni spirituality", the others do not go deeper than the contents of the RL. However, they all offer a great advantage with "POINTERS", that is suggestions for action. A very good suggestion and enlightenment is given in a pointer on the first path at N. 25-27 which we report here:

"In order to live the missionary dimension that springs from the Heart of Christ, Provinces and communities are urged to promote initiatives that bear witness to solidarity with "the poorest and most abandoned": fast days, prayers for justice, a greater missionary component in traditional celebrations of the Heart of Jesus.

Social, political and economic events and the violence, injustice and distress which afflict the poor must become subjects for discernment in the light of the gospel, and a source of prayer for the missionary.

Support should be given to the initiatives of confreres who opt, as a community, for a lifestyle of greater contemplation at the service of the mission."

2. Pointers for programme of activities are given also to provincial and General Councils. Notable are the on BASIC AND ON GOING FORMATION. About formation some capitulars wanted to discuss some problems of formation, some others were not of this opinion: they thought in fact that the former ones wanted to discuss the structures and contents of the whole system of formation which was not the case. After all the Secretary General of formation in his report had lamented,

"... the precarious way vocation promotion and even formation is at times carried out, the lack of specifically prepared formators".

3. In the document of FIELDS OF ACTION, the following are to be noticed:

- ASIA: Philippines:

- Consolidate and strengthen missionary animation and basic formation (e.g. Noviciate).
- Support the evangelisation project in Macao according to first evangelisation criteria.
- Pay particular attention to cultures and to interreligious dialogue.

- EUROPE:

- Mission animation ad gentes in East Europe:
- Investigate prospects for mission animation "ad gentes" in Eastern Europe, encouraging the provinces in Europe, especially the DSP, to keep track of developments.
- Presence in Poland: the progressive consolidation of our presence.

4. We also report the CONCLUSION of the main documents: "NEW MISSIONARY AGE ":

"Never as before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age." (Cf. RM 92)

Let us praise the Lord for this period of grace and for the present-day reality of the charism granted to Daniel Comboni.

The living presence of the Founder is being revealed to us by the life of confreres engaged in their work, by the sick and the elderly, by all those who are involved in situations of emergency within the agonising history of peoples, and impel us to proclaim the Gospel frankly and with enthusiasm.

JESUS TODAY AND FOR EVER!

A M E N.

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