

Save Africa by Africa

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On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the institute of the Comboni Missionaries, the missionary methodology of our founder St. Daniel Comboni still speaks eloquently and it is being lived concretely. The fact that the Plan for the Regeneration of Africa was conceived in a spirit of prayer and grounded on the familiarity and experience Comboni had with the history of the missions prior to this, made "*Save Africa with Africa*" an effective Plan indeed.

Obviously, the Plan was not a mere question of methodology and strategy that guaranteed achievement of the goal in mind, with technocrats overseeing it. The plan was the work of the Spirit that enlightened Comboni to see Africans with the eyes of faith, hope and love as they engaged in their own initiation to the Good News. Comboni's perception of the Africans and their potentials in the "**Regeneration**" of themselves remains prophetic, Spirit led and unique for his contemporary. That is why he was also keen in knowing the realities of the Africans and articulate more what would work for their wellbeing in line with the grand Plan.

Africans living Comboni's plan

Africans who were well trained, and identified with the Christian values, were the ones Comboni was envisioning for his Plan of evangelizing Africa. A century and half later, do we have Africans who are well trained and identified with the Christian values, and engaged in the spreading of the Good News in their own milieu? Can we say that what Comboni thought of Africans back then is being realized now? Was his Plan unrealistic, idealistic and unlikely?

As a continent, as nations, society and Church, Africans have come a long way since the time of Comboni. Africans have seen freedom from colonial powers, which enabled them to take their destiny in their own hands, exemplary political and religious leaders who guide and lead them to the truth, and competent professionals who practice their profession within the continent as well as beyond. Moreover, the fact that these same Africans have the advantage of knowing their cultures, worldviews and belief systems more than non-Africans, have made them credible agents of saving their fellow Africans. Of course, here I am not denying all the challenges that Africans are facing in all the above mentioned spheres.

As a Comboni Missionary priest from Ethiopia, the vision of St. Daniel Comboni to Save Africa with Africa has exposed me to make my own vocational journey accompanied by competent fellow Africans. The missionary vocation that was well lived and articulated by African missionaries nourished my own awareness of the missionary call. My twenty years of missionary service also have shown me the multi facets of preaching the Good News in Ethiopia and Zambia respectively. Apostolates that were once carried out by non-Africans such as: vocational accompaniment of the youths, basic and on-going formation of the local clergy and religious, formation of lay leaders, witnessing to the love of God to the needy and awakening the missionary spirit of the local Church, have been my concrete areas of evangelization. indeed, I have been blessed to be part of all these missionary features.

The fruits of Comboni's plan

Comboni's grand Plan of "Save Africa by Africa" had room for young Africans who would be disposed to vocations to priesthood and religious life. Similarly, pastoral care of vocations, composed of regular catechesis on vocation, vocational discernment groups, vocational celebrations and accompanying youths to join priesthood and religious life, characterized my missionary work in Zambia. With the words of St John Paul II 5 Vocation Sunday Message of 1993,

I must say that a '**culture of vocation**' was created and it is still being maintained. As a matter of fact, several young men and women joined different religious congregations, and others married in Church and live happily following their vocations. Isn't this part and parcel of Save Africa with Africa?

When it comes to the basic and on-going format of local clergy in the Ethiopian context, my role was all about accompanying 'the candidates, and the local clergy, in the four pillars of formation (Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Pastoral) which the 1992 Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II *Pastores dabo vobis*, stipulated for priestly formation in the Catholic Church. Tapping from the rich Ethiopian Christian tradition elements that can enrich the accompaniment of the candidates and the local clergy in line with the proposals of the Apostolic Exhortation, has always been the approach followed. In line with formation of religious, the concrete example worth mentioning here would be the three-year program for formation of formators that is being spearheaded by Religious in Ethiopia. When the program was started, the majority of those who were offering the course were non-Africans. Few years later, the majority turned out to be locals, enriching the course with their contextualized insights, while still maintaining the core elements needed in the program. African elements being at the service of the Africans; and Africans at the service of their fellow Africans means this.

The Good News and Comboni's plan

As regards to witnessing to the love of God to the needy is concerned, the psycho-spiritual accompaniment of individuals of all walks of life is worth mentioning here. Individuals who carry heavy burden of inhumane treatments of all kinds, sense of worthlessness and senselessness, addictions of all types, unfaithfulness of all forms, fear and anxiety rooted in esteem and effective needs, are the recipients of the message of the Good News in our contemporary society. Letting these individuals know and experience, first and foremost, that they are unconditionally loved and highly esteemed by God, as opposed to the negative perceptions they have acquired for themselves, is indeed Good News being preached individually.

It is precisely here that individuals could engage with life fully, responsibly and gratefully as God intended them to be. This is when the Kingdom of God gets established, the Good News is preached and Salvation is experienced. Seeing Africans accompany Africans in this field, what would the reaction of St. Daniel Comboni be? Indeed, a dream comes true!

In conclusion, it must be said that there are many examples of Africans who are out in the field labouring for the well-being of fellow Africans with competence, integrity and dedication. These are the mustard seeds, small as they may be, destined to grow big and be able to shelter others.