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From the Editor

The road ahead

We’ve moved away from 2017 (already three months ago!) and are now forging ahead in this the new year 2018. Talk always abounds of the need or good sense to make plans and draw up strategies for our future. Not too many consider themselves soothsayers. Perhaps the down to earth thoughts of Rabbie Burns might make us think again!

‘The best laid schemes o’ Mice and Men, Gang aft agley, An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain’ For promis’d joy!

Things don’t always work out as we would like and this undoubtedly must lead us not to despair but rather nurture in ourselves the never-dying virtue of HOPE against all the odds!

Looking back at the recent year we could pick out good and also sad events in our journeys. Thanking God for the graces and redoubling our efforts to avoid the unfortunate and sad.

In 2017, the Comboni Missionaries celebrated 150 years of their existence and celebrated in many parts the patient and kind God leading them (religious and laity) ahead, through the light and dark of life’s corridors.

We push ahead on our Faith Journey, filled with HOPE, for Christ is forever with us. “Go forth...and look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.” (Mt.28.v20).

In this our Spring edition we wish to live the Spring of Nature and what better way than celebrating the birth of Christ from the tomb “He is Risen, Alleluia!” the Christian people sing.

“But Christ is risen, he is alive, and he walks with us. For this reason, we sing and we walk, faithfully carrying out our task in this world with our gaze fixed on heaven” (Pope Benedict XVI)

May we all rejoice in this event that renews and rekindles our HOPE!

A happy and Holy Easter!

By Fr John Downey mccj
Dublin, Ireland, has been chosen by Pope Francis to host the next World Meeting of Families in August 2018. Started by Saint John Paul II, and held every three years, this major world event celebrates family as the cornerstone of our lives, and the fundamental building block of society and the Church.

Families and others from all over the world will gather in Dublin from 21-26 August 2018 to celebrate their lives together, to share their experiences from different parts of the world, to reflect on the different challenges they face and to grow together in faith.

The theme chosen by Pope Francis for WMOF2018 is The Gospel of the Family: Joy for the World. The WMOF2018 Logo, launched in December 2016, reflects on this theme and our journey towards August 2018.

The event will consist of a joyful and reflective programme of workshops, talks and discussions for adults; an engaging and exciting programme for young people as well as faith and fun activities for children. WMOF2018 will include the daily celebration of Mass, a festival of families event, exhibitions, cultural events and musical performances, events around the city, gestures of solidarity with those in need, and much more.
Getting to know the
Comboni Missionaries

Fr Paul Annis

A Comboni Missionary who has been living in the Arabic world for almost 25 years, talks about his origin and how he feels working among Christians and Muslims. Fr Paul’s last assignment here in the London Province was at Carmyle, Glasgow, from 91 – 96. He now ministers in the parish of the Holy family, Helouan, Cairo, Egypt.

Fr Paul offers his deep reflections on how he lives and ministers in an Arabic- Islamic State:

“My missionary experience changed from trying to proclaim values and to enlighten, into asking questions and accompanying people to reflect about realistic choices in life. A life that we live together as human beings with meaning and dignity”.

Moving to England

On the eve of the Lebanese civil war due to an opportune contract in London, Dad took me and my two younger brothers to England. As a teenager in the ’70s growing up with the Beatles music, Simon and Garfunkel and Abba, my passion for science and technology moulded my aspirations, dreams and discontent.

Soon the systematic analysis of scientific disciplines allowed me to examine my quest for meaning. In the music of ‘The sound of silence’, I pondered the purpose of my being.

The quest for meaning and God’s design

Thoughts, knowledge and feelings knitted a tapestry of significance as I sought meaning in solitude. My origin was not calling me to return to be in the past, but to become my destiny. My experience of God as an itinerant in foreign lands was my fabric on which God drew his design. I became a Catholic Missionary with an Arabic background; Sudan and Egypt were undisputed destinations.

Fr Paul Annis

Fr Paul’s parish Church, Holy Family
Being a British-Egyptian, which recalls Egypt as a British protectorate and the Sudan as a colony, set my official identities as an ideal passport to Sudan and Egypt. While others would wait for years to acquire their visas I would enter with ease. As if God had designed me for the purpose to be sent into these Arabised lands.

Arabs and Muslims are associated in popular perception, which begs the question: what is the use in preaching to Muslims? Although Sudan and Egypt are Islamic states, where Christians in both countries are a minority, our mission is to care for the minority and witness to the Muslims through health care and education. Before the New Millennium, activities in human development were no longer exclusive to the Church. UN bodies, NGOs, al-Da’wa al Islamia – the Islamic call – and many Islamic Organisations took over, more professionally, human aid and development. While Islamic Organisations aimed at proselytising in Sub-Saharan Africa, for me ‘Saving Africa with Africa’ meant education. Comboni College, Khartoum, furnished an appropriate space for cultural, moral and spiritual education.

Proselytising or Conversion?

When humanitarian aid-systems addressed the needs of people who are on the edge of survival, it was difficult to create a self-sustaining society. Emergency after emergency occurred: for 14 years in the Sudan this fact dug a deeper pit of dependence and poverty. With aid as bait, Islamic proselytising activities was state-protected and swiftly spreading through Africa. Despite that Christians were prohibited from increasing their affiliation with a legal ban on converts to Christianity, Sudanese from the South embraced Christianity regardless of persecution and discrimination. The joy of neophytes amidst misery and oppression was a repeated miracle that baffled the reasons for their joy. I saw unconditional joy in their laughter, singing and dancing, as pure in its manifestation as it is spontaneous.
More than possession, their joy comes from their sense of affiliation. Their ‘richness’ is their community, so that even when dispersed, they find each other when they dance with joy in binding rhythm and movement.

Their being community has a sense of belonging; it is instinctive. Where we speak of sharing and teach about common good, they live it before they name it as a value. Being community surpasses religious differences, giving way to tribal adherence above any religious one. Marriage is the institution that preserves this affiliation where two families enter into alliance for generations to come. Where the couple are not just two individuals from various clans, but a new budding branch of an existing tree of parents, grandparents and ancestors. The religion of aliens when it enters the system of marriage, is confronted with verifying tribal rules, such as the dowry. The secured future of the newly wedded is assured by the elders and chieftains of the tribes having to verify the fidelity and the bond of union. In this contest, Christianity is disadvantaged with its monogamy, where Islam has both the financial advantage of the dowry as well as the legal acceptance of polygamy. Since missionaries work among the poor, the chance of a good dowry is much less than that of those who are commercially abled. So Muslim young men marry easily and more numerously than Christian men.

The spread of Islam and Democracy

Although Islam has the upper hand on Christianity through polygamy, it attempts to ‘educate’ African youth in their institutes according to ideologies that form the future radical Islamists. Islamic education differs from Catholic education in both method and content. Although a certain degree of bias exists in every education system, the anthropological philosophy determines its objectives. The past is better than the present; where the age of the Caliphates is the model of ruling. The Abbasid age was the peak of science and knowledge. For Islam, obedience and submission to God supersedes human will or choice. Therefore democracy is based on human opinion that will always be errant in comparison to divine will expressed in the Shari’a. Becoming a Muslim guarantees a predestined future to be among the elect.

At best a true Muslim is God’s slave (‘Abd Allah), a faithful, obedient servant to the Shari’a and Muhammad’s practices (Sunnat al-Rasul – the rules of the Messenger). Humanity is predestined by God to the reward of Paradise or condemnation to Hell.

Since Islam is the ultimate religion, it abrogates what comes before it from Judaism and Christianity. Thus Islamic mission calls all humans to believe – to accept this ultimate truth or else die.

A Mission of Choices

Education and human development in Christian Catholic anthropology respects the human conscience, with all its limitations, without denying its depth and that it is an essential fabric of human dignity. Working in the Sudan and Egypt during their transitional events of the Sudanese referendum with the birth of the Republic of South Sudan; and the Egyptian revolutions in the midst of the so called ‘Arab Spring’, as a Comboni Missionary, I spent time in listening and understanding people’s motivations and convictions. Arabs, Egyptians and Sub-Saharan Africans seek choices. Among these various ethnic groups I hear a frequent question asked; are humans created to be pre-destined and thus submit to our fate or do we have choices?

My missionary experience changed from trying to proclaim values and to enlighten, into asking questions and accompanying people to reflect about realistic choices in life. A life that we live together as human beings with meaning and dignity, both of which stem from knowing oneself and the One who desired my being. As we journey together on a quest in discovering the purpose of our being, I share what I believe and how I came to discover it. Religion is a necessary vehicle to transmit and receive experiences of God, but faith helps me to interpret the world in which I live and grow. While faith helps me to understand the various images of God without excluding the image of the unseen God, who is Christ. Christ Jesus whom Muslims call ‘Isa’ is an option that you can choose. Even if no one chooses to know Christ, I remain to be myself, a Christian living the meaning of a God-Man offering Himself as an option for more life with integrity. Mission for me is not about proselytising, but about ‘seeing’ options that God has put in our way. As I journey on the choices I live, dialoguing with those who are searching; enriching my faith-life in the hope for a better world.
Openness towards immigrants and foreigners is a sign that Christ is working in our hearts, bringing to fulfillment his “miracle”. On the contrary, “we know there is no Christian joy when doors are closed; there is no Christian joy when others are made to feel unwanted, when there is no room for them in our midst”. This is what Pope Francis said in the homily of Mass on a beach in this city in Chile’s far north. Inspired by the Gospel episode of the Wedding of Cana, read during Mass, the Pope highlighted the prompt solicitude Mary shows in taking on the difficulties of the spouses.

That solicitude - the Pope wanted to suggest - is familiar to the peoples of northern Chile, which thanks to popular devotion almost conforms to the feelings and actions of the Mother of God: “You” said the Pope addressed to the faithful present “know how to celebrate by singing and dancing God’s fatherhood, providence, constant and loving presence; this engenders interior attitudes rarely observed to the same degree elsewhere: patience, the sign of the cross in daily life, detachment, openness to others, devotion”. The Virgin Mary - said the Pope “passes through our towns, our streets, our squares, our homes and our hospitals. Mary is the Virgin of la Tirana; the Virgin Ayquina in Calama; the Virgin of the Rocks in Arica. She notices all those problems that burden our hearts, then whispers into Jesus’ ear and says: “Look, they have no wine”.

Iquique is a region of immigrants, accustomed to welcoming flows of migrants in search of a better life. The families who arrive there – especially those who had to leave their land for lack of life’s bare necessities – are an image of the “Holy Family”, which had to cross deserts to keep on living”. The Pope expressed the hope that the local populations will guard the attitude to hospitality that characterizes them, continuing to conform to the industrious solicitude of the Virgin Mary towards those who find themselves in need, and also continuing to “take advantage” of wisdom and of good things that migrants carry with them: “Like Mary at Cana”, the Pope said, “let us not be afraid to raise our voices and say: ‘They have no wine’. The cry of the people of God, the cry of the poor, is a kind of prayer; it opens our hearts and teaches us to be attentive. Let us be attentive, then, to all situations of injustice and to new forms of exploitation that risk making so many of our brothers and sisters miss the joy of the party.

The reception of foreigners, migrants and solicitude towards those in need, in the perspective of works of mercy, was outlined by the Pope not as a voluntary effort, but as the sign and effect of the change made in us by Christ: “Let us allow” the Pope said in conclusion of his homily “Jesus to complete the miracle by turning our communities and our hearts into living signs of his presence, which is joyful and festive because we have experienced that God is with us, because we have learned to make room for him within our hearts. A contagious joy and festivity that lead us to exclude no one from the proclamation of this Good News”.

In Iquique, Mary is the Virgin Mother of the people
Once again greetings to all our readers and benefactors from the warm heart of Africa, my mission land, and its wonderful people. I recall the first time I touched down at Lilongwe airport on 23 November 1992. Hence with joy, I am today celebrating the silver jubilee of the start of my missionary life in a mission land I love and you may come to know a bit better through this article.

**A Description of Malawi and its People**

The Republic of Malawi is a nation of Eastern Africa known also as Nyassaland. It is a landlocked country bordering North with Tanzania, South and East with Mozambique and West with Zambia. Lake Malawi is the third largest lake in Africa. The capital is Lilongwe. It has 17 million people scattered in rural areas. Life expectancy is 49 years for men and 51 for women. The dominant ethnic group are the Achewa but, there are also other minority ethnic groups. The national language is Chichewa, spoken in all the country. At religious level, although there are still traditional cults, the population declares to be Christian with a majority of Protestants and Sects (55%), Catholics (28%) and a minority of Muslims (13%) who live along the shores of Lake Malawi. Malawi is ranked among the world’s 20 least developed countries on the UN’s Human Development Index being one of the LDCs (Least Developed Countries) of the world marred by rural poverty. The poor are disproportionately located in rural areas, they are primarily engaged in agricultural and associated activities, are more likely to be women and children. The statistics show that 50.7% of the country’s population lives below the poverty line of US $1.25 a day the rate grows to 56.7% in rural areas. Healthwise people have to cope with epidemics of AIDS and malaria.

**The Local Church tackling poverty:**

Not long ago the African bishops comparing the economic gulf between nations wrote:

“Science and technology are making giant strides in all aspects of life, equipping humanity with all that it takes to make our planet a beautiful place for us all. Yet tragic situations of refugees, abject poverty, disease and hunger are still killing thousands on a daily basis. In all this, Africa is the most hit… rich in human and natural resources, many of our people are still left to wallow in poverty and misery.” (n.4-5 ‘Final Document’ 2nd African Synod 2009)

It was Jesu’ mission to proclaim the Gospel to the poor. In today’s Church, Religious Missionary Institutes and Diocesan Bishops and Clergy are trying to follow the same path encouraging the participation of the Laity in an effort to eradicate the causes of poverty. As I hold the post of Vicar for the Religious in my Diocese before coming to the UK to do mission appeals this year, I attended the launching of the strategic plan of the Diocese of Mangochi

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By Fr Donato Goffredo mccj

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**IN MALAWI**

Fr Donato who recently worked in the London Province (2002-2013) tells us of his happy ministry in Malawi as a teacher, formator and the challenges facing the people in face of scandalous poverty and exploitation. The Bishops of Malawi proclaim that overcoming these evils is to “empower the communities (Christian) through promotion of human rights, education, good health and sustainable development”. 
2017-2022. The document recognizes as causes of poverty “the environmental degradation leading to climate change, drought and natural disasters, the limited access to potable water, food insecurity and high level of household poverty, high illiteracy especially among girls and women...” and in order to address these issues some strategic objectives have been recommended such as to “empower the communities through promotion of human rights, education, good health and sustainable development.” Here is opened up a huge field of action for all Christians and people of good will.

Our Comboni Presence and Service

The idea of mission is evolving at all times but for our Comboni communities our specific tasks are: a sense of belonging to the mission; making common cause with the people we serve; and dialogue with local Ordinaries before assuming any pastoral and human commitment. On these premises, since our arrival in Malawi, with Fr. Joseph Gusmini in 1973, we found ourselves serving in parishes, major seminaries and vocational training campuses.

In 1974 four parishes were offered to our pastoral care: Phalombe, Chiringa, Muliza and Gambula, all bordering Mozambique, from where we cared for the refugees from the civil war ravaging that country. Currently we serve the parishes of Lilongwe, Lisesungwe, Mbera and Msamba (in Lilongwe) and... from 2015 a new-born parish, St. Peter’s Mbera, in the Diocese of Mangochi.

Fr. Mennas Mukaka the acting parish priest explains this late acquisition: “the mission of Mbera covers an area of 400 squares Km, with a population of 20,000. The rate of demographic growth is very fast with 52% of people below the age of 18. 60% of the houses are still built with mud and straw. The people that inhabit the area are for the majority Ayao. The main language spoken by the people is Chiyao. The level of education is very poor. The large percentage of farmers practice agriculture of subsistence and the tool used in the cultivation of the fields is the hoe. Unemployment rate is close to 80% in the area, for lack of businesses. In Mbera there are no structures yet, such as a presbytery or a parish church but with help from SCIAF (Scottish Catholic Aid Fund) and other generous donors we hope to make some progress pang’ono pang’ono that is a bit at the time”.

Working with the young and vocation ministry

As Pope Francis is asking to focus on youth and their vocational discernment (forthcoming 2018 Synod of Bishops) and so the care of youth has always been a constant for us Comboni missionaries starting from our parishes. For the professional training of youth in 1991 our Comboni German brothers built the Comboni Technical College (C.T.C.) at Lunzu (north of Blantyre) which we still administer with an intake of more than 100 apprentices per year.

On a more distinctive note, in 1986 we Combonis co-founded with the Monfortian Missionaries the Inter-Congregation Seminary (I.C.S.) now a Philosophical Institute (I.C.I.) at Lunzu (north of Blantyre) which we still administer with an intake of more than 100 seminarians. Since my return to Malawi in 2013, I have been working with the formation of brother, sisters and priest candidates. Teaching them different courses, from missiology to religious life from spirituality to (yes) the sweet taste of English Grammar! I am now growing a grey and white beard, a sign of the aging that is our common human bond, but I feel still energetic as ever to serve as a Comboni missionary for as long as the Lord gives me to live.

Dear friends of the Comboni mission, as I come to the close of my article, I raise my eyes from my desk to look at the worried faces of my students sitting an examination and reflect on how all of them are still so youthful and full of energy for the mission.

Praise be to God, blessing to you all dear Friends and good luck to them!
We are well acquainted with Pope Francis’ catchphrases for the church: not being ‘a museum’ but instead called to be as a ‘field hospital’ welcoming the broken hearted and wounded, in the spirit of Jesus Christ. To be a people who go out in search of the lost sheep and to have the ‘smell of the sheep’. Pope Francis’ call is for us to be a missionary Church/missionary disciples.

With this truly consistent attitude he set off for South America, his own native homeland, to speak with the peoples of Chile and Peru. This was to be his 22nd Apostolic visit abroad.

A truly missionary Pope!

During his trip the Holy Father met with Presidents, youth groups, university students, workers, indigenous groups, women prisoners, a children’s care home, Christian communities and 60,00 young Chileans at the National shrine of Maipu. He acknowledged the beauty and different cultures of the people of Chile and Peru and encouraged all to work for unity and peace. Pope Francis was forthright in his condemnation of corruption at political levels and gave particular attention to the long suffering indigenous people in their struggle to defend their land. Preservation and care for the earth was often pointed out as the Holy Father condemned
the invasion of large businesses exploiting the natural resources to the detriment of nature and the people. He also brought care and compassion to a women’s prison.

“Yours is a great and exciting challenge: to continue working to make this democracy, as your forbearers dreamed, beyond its formal aspects, a true place of encounter for all.”

“Pope Francis explained to us a new concept of maturity. And he asked us to have voice in the Church; this why we young people must make ourselves be heard”. A young student.

“The presence and the voice of the Pope are a consolation for all of us, and we fully agree when he says that the cry of the poor is the cry of Pachamama, Mother Earth. We Andeans believe that the earth is a living being, that takes care of us, welcomes us until death.”

“They enter into our territories without asking us and we suffer a lot and we will die when they drill our land to retrieve the black metal water.” Yesica Patiachi, a Peruvian indigenous representative, told the Pope.

“I want to thank Fr Xavier, the religious brothers and sisters, the lay missionaries who are doing such wonderful work, and all the benefactors who are part of this family. I also thank the volunteers whose gift of time is like a balm soothing every wound. Likewise, I thank all those who confirm these young people in their Amazonian identity and help them to forge a better future for their communities and for our entire world.” Pope Francis.
The Donkey

By G. K. Chesterton (A reading for Palm Sunday)

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil’s walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.
The Easter Resurrection is one of the greatest mysteries of our faith.

There is an interesting but rather unusual story which may help us to understand a bit better such a profound and miraculous event.

We are told that in the famous Nuremberg War Crime Trials, one witness, a gifted poet, described how he outmanoeuvred the German Gestapo to escape dying in the gas chambers by hiding in a Jewish cemetery in Vilnius, Poland. He also describes the birth of a baby in the cemetery in one of his poems. A grave digger succoured the baby boy by wrapping a shroud around him. As the child gave forth his first-born cry, the old grave digger exclaimed: “Great Almighty God, have you finally given us the Messiah?” For who else except the Messiah can be born in a grave? Very sadly, after a few days the newly born infant died as his poor mother could not feed him to keep him alive.

Imagine: to be born in a grave is so far removed from being natural or normal. We usually associate a grave where the frail human cadaver returns to the clay of the earth. I believe to be born in a grave is only an act which the Messiah can bring about. I say this knowing from Scripture that Our Lord, was to suffer death and be buried in a grave. Our poor infinite human minds can never comprehend the mystery of Good Friday and Holy Saturday when the Son of God passed through death in the grave to life. The life of the Resurrection in the grave has overcome death.

On Easter Sunday we celebrate a Messiah who was literally ‘born in a grave’, a borrowed grave at that! The empty tomb is not a gigantic lie that has lasted for twenty centuries. Our Lord will never be found in the world of the dead. The disciples and the never-ending army of saints-martyrs down the centuries have given their lives to preach Christ is risen. On Easter Sunday from the dark graveside the light of Christ shines forth on the world. He has risen. He lives forever.

Easter us, Lord of the Resurrection. Grant us an awareness which claims and proclaims happiness, a smile and a laugh among all whom we will meet on this coming Easter morning 2018.
The plan was realized by the Vale giant mining company, which was at that time a state-owned company and which was later privatized. “We are aware, by now, that the dust will continue to fall in the coming decades, until the exhaustion of the resources of the Serra dos Carajás field. We hope to be able to move far from the red cloud soon”, says Joselma Alves de Oliveira, an inhabitant of Piquiá do Baixo, a district in the municipality of Açailândia, Maranhão State. In 2015, slightly more than a thousand people, men and women, joined to challenge Vale, and the local and national government, by organizing demonstrations and sit-ins until they obtained the promise that the entire neighborhood would be transferred to a safe area far from pollution.

These courageous people were supported by the Comboni missionaries of the Santa Luzia parish in the Açailândia municipality and by the human rights Centre Carmen Bascaran. Finally, the inhabitants of Piquiá de Baixo obtained a 38 hectares area where new houses and infrastructures will be built. The construction will be two thirds financed by the national executive, while Vale is being asked to pay the remaining sum of money. “Building has not started yet, so people won’t be able to move to the new area before two years. Besides, we hope that the removal of former President Dilma Rousseff from the presidency, following an impeachment procedure, will not delay the transfer of these people to the new area.”

“Former President Rousseff was the one who signed the transfer act”, says Joselma. “Vice President Michel Temer, who in the meanwhile has shifted to the opposition, succeeded to the presidency. The first declarations on the environmental situation by the new administration were not encouraging, in fact they were in favour of landowners and powerful agribusiness executives”, continues Joselma. “We are afraid that the transfer will be delayed once again … and waiting is hard for those who live in the cloud of red dust”.

Father Dario Bossi is a Comboni missionary who is in charge of the Iglesia y Mineria group of the Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (Repam).
The missionary has been supporting the battle for the justice and health of this community for over ten years now. “The inhabitants of Piquiá de Baixo are humble workers earning minimal wages or unemployed people that live less than fifty meters away from pig iron plants”, says Father Dario Bossi. Though the municipality of Açailândia, thanks to the iron deposits, produces a third of the GDP of the Maranhão State, one in four of its inhabitants is poor.

Piquiá de Baixo, which is a working-class area, has been terribly affected by pollution. According to a recent study, 28 percent of the residents in the area have been shown to have lung function abnormalities. A rate up to six times higher than that which is observed in a similar population by age, sex, and nationality. The consequences of pulmonary function abnormalities are: cough, bronchial hypersecretion, bronchopulmonary respiratory infections and risk of tumor.

“The red dust is not the only problem that affects the 312 families of Piquiá de Baixo, the ‘iron snake’ is another big threat to their health”, adds Father Dario. The ‘iron snake’, that is how locals have renamed the train whose 330 wagons are loaded with the iron which is extracted from the Serra dos Carajás field and that crosses the area of this community 24 times a day to transport the mineral (about 100 million tons per year) to the port of São Luís from which it is exported all over the world. The iron train travels along a 900 kilometres railway line system, which has been constructed by VALE, and which crosses twenty-seven municipalities and a hundred communities scattered throughout the region, including Piquiá de Baixo.

“The impact is devastating. The passage of each train, which is 4 km long, lasts at least four minutes. This means, since iron trains cross the municipality 24 times a day, that for over an hour and a half, life in Piquiá de Baixo stops. The clanking noise of the trains is deafening, it is impossible to speak. The ground shakes, the walls of the houses crack”, says the missionary. “When the locomotive crosses the neighbourhood, residents have to wait to reach the other side of the area, some of them, especially the children, are impatient, and since there is no protection, they try to challenge the train and cross the railway line, and this behaviour causes at least one victim every month and a half”.

Ore-train traffic is expected to increase, up to 36 trains per day. “We must leave the area before that day arrives”, says Josefa. “We will fight until the transfer will become reality”. The people of Piquiá de Baixo are determined. Because, as they like to repeat, “In the persistent struggle, in the tenacity of those who do not give up, there is already a fragment of victory”.

"Com boni Mission • Spring 2018"
**AFRICAN LEGENDS**

Spanning our last 2 editions of Comboni Mission we have presented colourful and inspiring African personalities…. Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere, Clementina Anuarite Nengapeta amongst others. We hope that they have inspired you too!

Here we give you the final 2 personalities in the hope that through their example and love of their country Africa will be ‘Saved by Africa’!

**Ana Maria Muhai (1962 – 2013)**

She was born in a country area of Mozambique. Married, with eight children, when her husband discovered that she had contracted HIV, she was abandoned and in 2003 given up as dead. Thanks to medical aid and assistance received in the capital Maputo she began to recover. A few months after, she decided to dedicate herself completely to the cause of AIDS and declared publicly of being herself HIV positive. She dedicated herself fully and in person to help overcome the stigma attached to the disease, visiting and giving help to the afflicted and making people aware of prevention and testing and of effectiveness of cures. She journeyed throughout various states giving witness and campaigning for the right to free medical aid in poor countries. In 2012 she was awarded the prize ‘Woman of Courage’ for her battle against the scourge of AIDS.

“*When I was tired and without strength because of the illness, nobody approached my market stall for fear of contracting the disease. Today, after all the work that we have done, my neighbours come and ask for advice.*”

**Mahmoud Mohamed Taha (1909 – 1985)**

He was a Sudanese and an engineer. He entered into politics in 1945 and was among the founders of the Republican Party – which he then led for forty years opposing the British colonial power and for this he was imprisoned. On his release he withdrew himself for a period of prayer embracing an ascetical life style and study. In this period, he developed what came to be called “the second message of Islam”. It was a moderate interpretation of the Koran contrasting with the Islamic Law (Sharia), recognising full rights for women and cooperation with other religions. Owing to his political influence he clashed with the prevalent power and was accused of apostasy and sentenced to death by the regime of Gaafar Nimeiry. Through his peaceful attitude he came to be known as the ‘Gandhi of Sudan’.

“*Islam generates a nonviolent social order, based on tolerance, also religious; nonviolence and respect for women and strangers.*”
‘Keep Me Safe’ - an exhibition of paintings by Marguerite Horner evoking memories of the Calais Jungle Refugee Camp took place at Farm Street, Jesuit Church, London last year. Ms. Horner’s stark monochrome images, painted in oil on linen - of shelters improvised from sheets of polythene and scrap wood, and figures against stark winter landscapes - brought home the harshness of conditions in the camp.

One particular painting entitled ‘Church’ depicted in graphic fashion the exterior of what was to become later a furnished chapel for the Eritrean community. It received the MS Amlin prize showing ‘Continuity in an uncertain world’. A parishioner at Our Lady of Grace and St Edward church in Chiswick, west London, Marguerite visited the camp several times in 2014, with members of the parish prayer group.

Fellow parishioner Jeanette described the first time they visited the camp, on a very cold windy day. They were shocked to see kids walking with no shoes. “We had brought food and clothes, but we were told not to open the boot of the car because we would be swamped. So instead we put on extra layers of clothes and went walking and gave people clothes when we could see they needed them.”

Several of the paintings show the refugees in their ill-fitting but warm new clothes. Jeanette said they sat together with some of the refugees who shared food with them and talked and prayed together.

The theme of prayer ran through the evening. Fatima Alves, another member of the prayer group, lived in the Grenfell Tower with her family. Fatima gave a harrowing description of how she and her husband and children had managed to escape from their 13th floor flat, and watched with horror as they saw their home going up in flames. Then Fatima realized she had a pregnant friend and her husband on the 21st floor. She telephoned them several times urging them to leave but eventually the line went dead. As the situation grew more chaotic, the family who were staying with friends, just knelt down and prayed the Rosary. Two days later they learned that their friends had survived, although they had lost the baby. Fatima is certain that their prayer that night saved their friends. The next day, her daughter went to school and took a GCSE exam. (She’s passed with Grade As!) Fatima said: “Don’t say to someone you have a problem - say you have a friend in God.”

The final speaker was Comboni Sister Natalia Gomez, who described how she had set up the prayer group in Chiswick. In the past she said she had experienced very poor conditions working as a missionary in South Sudan, Uganda and the Congo, but prayer always helped her through her journeys. “Prayer is not something isolated” she said. “It goes together with action, which is why we got involved with the Calais refugees - as well as other justice and peace projects.”

Read more about Marguerite Horner and her work at www.margueritehorner.moonfruit.com
On 2nd December 2017 Ken Dransfield, soldier, teacher, preacher and missionary in Africa left this world to join our Lord and Saviour just short of his 98th birthday.

Over the last 12 years, after our Mum Jean passed away, I have spent quality time with Dad. Each week we Skyped and each Christmas I travelled from New Zealand and we would drive and admire the North Yorkshire countryside, and I would listen to his recollections. I also had the opportunity each year to travel with him to share a meal with the Verona Fathers in Horsforth. The highlight being their recounting of shared experiences in serving God and the people of East Africa.

There is a Chinese saying that you should not only listen with your ears but also your eyes, your heart and above all you should listen to each person as if they were a King. Dad was a King. His story had many chapters, and given this opportunity by Father Franco Mastromaso to write an article I want to share some excerpts. Each chapter contains significant individuals who created and shaped his values.

His fondest recollections were of his childhood in Hoyland and Dodworth, South Yorkshire, his 6 years in the Army during WWII, his life shared with Mum and with Kathleen, Robert and me in Africa, and over the last 40 plus years his experiences as a teacher and local preacher in Yorkshire.

His early life in South Yorkshire was against a background of extreme hardship, particularly when our Grandfather Colin, was laid off during the Miners' strike in 1926. But despite that the community supported each other, with Colin taking the lead, and had as its cornerstone the Methodist Chapel.

After a tentative start at school it is obvious that Dad was a bright student and ended up training as an accountant. He also followed his father's footsteps as a local preacher, which was to play a significant role throughout his life.

His passions were football and harriers, and his best mates and team mates were “Jenny” Lee, Herbert Hodgson and Arnold Turton. All three were killed in the war at the age of 20. He never forgot them. Dad's path was different, at 20 he was promoted to Sgt and after his Mother had written to his CO stating that he should be an officer he was shipped off to Kenya, but not as an officer. There he and others trained 12,000 African troops in Mbgathi Camp.

He fell in love with the country and its people. This was reflected in his becoming fluent in Swahili and the obvious respect his men had for him, as he played football with them, led a Christian fellowship group for them and performed in shows that he
organised alongside them. During this period, he developed a strong friendship with the Reverend Busuliva from Uganda and the majority of the Christian Fellowship group, who met in the garrison church were from the Baganda tribe.

As the war drew to a close he made the decision to serve in Africa. His mentor was from the Church of Scotland, in fact David Steel's father. He told my Dad that to serve he needed a skill that was of use to the people. Dad chose teaching as his path, and hence ended up teacher training in Harrogate. Each Sunday he would attend Wesley Chapel and that is where he met the love of his life, our Mum Jean, he described “a row of remarkably pretty girls” in the Choir at Wesley, but one beautiful blonde stood out. Once married, they decided to become missionaries and went first to Kenya and then Uganda.

These were Dad’s favourite years and he was surrounded by exceptional people. When I listened to Dad describe those years I marvel at what he achieved. In the Lango district, Uganda, he was charged with developing and executing a 5 year plan to build and bring into schools 24,000 pupils. He visited each community, spoke, got their support, personally marked out the school rooms, 8 paces, then 6 paces at right angles, pegs were put in place and then the locals, at no cost, built the school. Next, he needed to solve malnutrition after a failed UNICEF program, so he again met the community and they agreed to establish successful school farms. In 5 years he had delivered the set goals, and more.

There were men and women he always spoke of: one of these was Joel Wacha-Olwol who became Dad’s best friend and later the President of Uganda. Another was Janani Luwum, a parish priest who went on to be the Bishop of Gulu and eventually Archbishop of Uganda before he was tragically killed during Idi Amin’s reign of terror.

However, there was one group of people he developed an enduring working and personal relationship. These people were the Verona Fathers and the Catholic mission stations, talented men and women, who dedicated themselves to God and to the African people. Dad described them as ‘men and women who were surely fashioned in pattern of the first disciples’.

Dad saw how effective the Verona Fathers Catholic mission schools were operating and, in his role as the district education officer, he forged a strong working relationship with Father Tarantino. Father Tarantino was both the supervisor of schools and in charge of the mission station at Ngeta.
Together they built schools, held teacher’s conferences and brought education and its associated opportunities to many children throughout Northern Uganda.

A few years later Dad returned to Northern Uganda and once again formed a strong working relationship with Father Tarantino, now the Bishop of West Nile, and also with Sister Anastasia, who was in charge of the newly formed order of African sisters. In particular he developed a strong friendship with Father Bruno Marcabruni whom he spoke of often in recounting his experiences in Africa, and during the regular visits he paid to the Verona Fathers Community in Horsforth. Together they formed teacher’s clubs to exchange ideas between old and new teachers, next they invited parents to get involved in activities such as sports coaching, girl guides and cooking classes. Their philosophy was to include the whole community in educating and preparing their children for their future.

What shines through is that for Dad anything was possible and everyone became part of his team. For example, he built a church, called Christ Church, in Gulu, and as part of this process he got contributions from all religions and all places, from Celtic FC to the Sikhs and Muslim communities throughout Uganda. It was during this time that Dad developed a strong relationship with Bishop Wani, who later replaced Archbishop Luwum as the Archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. In the background, however, all was not well in Uganda, assassination attempts were common and opposition members disappeared. Yet we were always safe, a reflection of the respect the Africans had for Dad, and for our Mum who, in their words, “always listened to them”.

So, to his final chapter, teaching and preaching in Yorkshire. It was tough initially, after Africa he struggled to get a job. At one interview he was asked if he had already given his best years to Africa, he replied that in fact Africa had given him his best years. But he still had much to give and he eventually became headmaster at Markington school, a job and in a community, he loved. On retiring he continued to teach and preach, including a year with no pay teaching children in a makeshift school in Dewsbury during the 80’s, and right up until two weeks before passing away at Pannal Primary School, Yorkshire. Moreover, he was preaching each month as part of the Methodist local circuit. Dad’s mantra was, “a preacher has to do as well as preach” and possibly my favourite, “solutions not resolutions.”

Living with Dad was an adventure, full of stories and possibilities. Dad always had a twinkle in his eye and loved to share the funnier moments in his life. One story he often recounted was related to his role as a preacher. A preacher arrived at a rural church to find only 1 person in the congregation, a farmer. He asked if he should proceed, the reply "if I only had one chicken would I starve it?" The service proceeded. At the end he asked the farmer for his opinion. The reply, "I wouldn't have starved the chicken, but I wouldn't have given it a bucket full either."

In closing my fondest memory was travelling by steam train from Kampala to Mombasa in 1968, marvelling at the pink sheet of flamingos on Lake Naivasha as we descended to Nairobi. This was Dad’s Africa and we marvelled at its splendour together. I can imagine Dad standing there now.

Celtic football club contribute to the building of a church in Uganda

Footnote from Father Franco Mastromauro:

As a sign of his appreciation for our missionary work, every time he sent his personal donation to me for our missionary work he would also enclose three other donations from some of his friends in Harrogate and Dublin, who through him had come to know our work. In his little way he was promoting our work among his friends, the Sunday congregations to whom he preached regularly and the schools he was visiting in North Yorkshire.

Verona Fathers, Horsforth, Leeds

Every time he paid us a visit here in Horsforth, on his arrival to the house after greeting the Fathers he would ask me if he could spend a few minutes in our house Chapel “to greet the Boss!”

Colonel Martin Dransfield, ONZM
Director, Joint Exercise Planning Staff, New Zealand Defence Force
The Brazilian Committee of the World Social Forum 2018 launched an Open Letter to convene the people, organizations, social movements, networks and platforms of movements in Brazil, Latin America and the World to join the construction of the next world edition of the forum, which will be held in Salvador, Bahia (Brazil), from March 13 to 17, 2018. The proposal of this forum, in the midst of so many setbacks, loss of rights, democratic guarantees and freedoms throughout the world, is to think of common solutions for humanity, in a solidarity, democratic perspective, respect for diversity, to face the causes of various forms of violence, social and regional inequalities. The motto of WSF 2018 is to Resist is to Create, to Resist is to Transform pointing to the need for alternatives for another possible world.

The Open Letter emphasizes that in Brazil and Bahia, in particular, resistance has increased in recent months, in an attempt to respond to conservative attacks. Democratic and popular forces have been reevaluating their strategies in the latest historical period, reassessing mistakes, achievements and necessary corrections. Therefore, an edition of the WSF in Salvador will be an important opportunity to meet the various experiences of resistance and proposals to face authoritarian thinking in Brazil and in the World.

The motto of WSF 2018 is to Resist is to Create, to Resist is to Transform pointing to the need for alternatives for another possible world. The systems that rule the world have not worked for the people nor the planet. That is why the International Council of the WSF and the Facilitating Committee in Brazil CALL on everyone to join the construction of the 2018 World Social Forum; March 13-17, 2018. In Salvador, Bahia.
Letters from readers are most welcome but we regret we cannot publish them all. Some may be shortened due to lack of space.

You can also email us at:
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Dear Editor
My very special thanks for your impressive story: “Sister Pauline, Marist Sister, celebrates her Diamond Jubilee” in the recent edition of your magazine. As the saying has it: “A picture says a thousand words”. I should know as I am her brother – a priest of sixty-three years serving in the Diocese of Cheyenne, Wyoming, U.S.A.

May God bless your community and all your do.
Gratefully

Msgr. James O’Reilly.
Wyoming, U.S.A.

Julius Nyerere
Dear Fr John
Your magazine came today and I thank you for it.

The quote from Julius Nyerere was God’s helping hand to me as I hear again of how my granddaughters have fallen again into alcohol abuse and drugs.: “Whatever be the drawbacks and disappointments, we must not give up!”

Thank you for it gave me great hope.
Please pray for my granddaughters.
Respectfully,

Gillian Barber,
Ilindir, Burton
Dear Fr.
I say the prayer in honour of the Servant of God, Fr Ezekiel Ramin.
Please pray for me.
In order to save money I don’t require a reply.

M. O’Brien,
Co. Donegal

Dear Fr.
May the Lord continue to bless your Order with men and women engaged in challenging work in so many missions.
United in prayer.

Sr Margaret Mary Galvin,
Cork

Dear Fr John,
Thank you so much for your magazine received during the year and also for your lovely calendar 2018.
How wonderful it is to see that the cause of Fr Ezekiel for Beatification is going ahead. I continue to pray for that intention.
Renewed thanks and God bless all your great work.

Sr Thomasina

Dear Fr John,
I hope you are well. Thank you so much for the very interesting Comboni Mission Magazine Winter edition – it was interesting to read about the ‘Opening of the Nile Basin’ and I wonder if this book is available.
Also, the article on Fr Daniel Moschetti describes the terrible violence and it is so difficult to comprehend such evil. Sr Valentina is doing such great work in Syria. Fr John you are doing such great work commuting between Wales and Manchester each weekend. Keep up this good work!
Radio Pacis was and is a great inspiration of Fr Pasolini in Uganda – there seems to be so much happening and may it continue.

With best wishes,
Anne Marie Allen

NB. The book ‘Opening of the Nile Basin’ R. Hill. E. Toniolo is available from Amazon.co.uk price £30.00
Our Readers contributions towards Mission Projects 2017

The cry of the poor comes to us in many forms. The need for basic education, funds to support catechists as they spread the Good News amongst their own people, helping voiceless women to be heard and become leaders in their families and Christian communities, dialoguing to build bridges between different faith groups. These are some of the desperate situations met and aided through the help and generosity of readers and benefactors of the Comboni Missionaries. Our heartfelt thanks.

In 2017 a special contribution was made towards South Sudan to help in facing the challenges of war and ensuing refugee and famine consequences. The London Province forwarded £20,000 towards this humanitarian crisis.

1. Contribution towards the purchase of computer software for the Centre for Missionary Animation in Lima (Province of Peru-Chile). GBP 4,000 Pounds Sterling.

2. Contribution towards the running costs of the inter-faith ‘Tente d’Abramo’ (Abraham’s Tent) in N’Djamena (Delegation of Chad). GBP 5,000 Pounds Sterling.

3. Contribution towards the running costs of ‘Leadership’ Magazine in Kampala (Province of Uganda). GBP 5,000 Pounds Sterling.

4. Contribution towards the financial support of catechists in the Parish of Amakuriat in West Pokot (Province of Kenya). GBP 5,000 Pounds Sterling.

5. Contribution towards the cost of extending and re-equipping the kitchen facilities of St. John Bosco Technical School in Lira (Province of Uganda). GBP 5,000 Pounds Sterling.

6. Contribution towards the cost of completing two classrooms at St. Daniel Comboni Secondary School in Juba (Province of South Sudan). GBP 5,000 Pounds Sterling.

7. Contribution towards the running costs of the ‘Inua Mama Project’ which seeks to empower women through promoting self-reliance in the Kware, Gataka and Bangladesh Slums around Nairobi (Province of Kenya). GBP 10,000 Pounds Sterling.

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