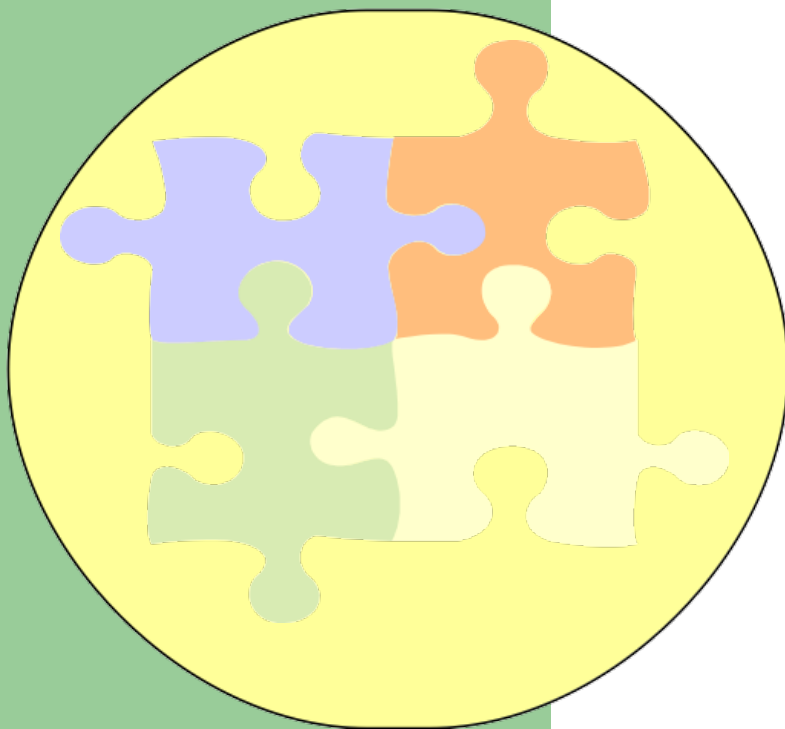


In Dialogue...



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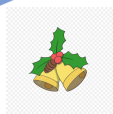
IN DIALOGUE

Dear readers,
after a period of silence, *In Dialogue* returns to make itself present to continue to offer reflection from the PROSPECTIVE OF MISSION AS DIALOGUE, and to be a space for interfaith, ecumenical and intercultural knowledge and spirituality, and also to offer the possibility of sharing the experiences that in each province we live in our experience of encountering peoples, cultures and religions.

The present issue of "In Dialogue," focuses on the theme of Reconciliation at a time when we strongly yearn for Peace among peoples.

First section: the Dialogue of Knowledge, intends to consider not only the terminological-biblical meaning of the term, but also the dynamics of conflict and the solutions reserved for reconciliation in being a way to build Hope and Peace at the level of human relations and among peoples.

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Second section: The Spirituality of Reconciliation is considered from the perspective of different religions also with respect to the lived experience of the peoples who welcome us.

Third section: Life Dialogue. In this section we listen to the experience of sisters and brothers who, although currently outside Sudan, tell us that reconciliation is possible despite conflicts. In everyone's commitment to peace, we wish you: happy reading!

The Commission

Dialogue of Knowledge:

Reconciliation and Dialogue for Peace

by sr. Annamaria Sgaramella, smc



In a history plagued by wars and conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the longing for Peace and Reconciliation becomes an existential need, a cry that cannot be ignored, although until now, the cry has not been given a real answer. The reflection that follows, intends to consider reconciliation in its terminological-biblical meaning, in its relational dimensions at the level of individuals and peoples; reconciliation as dialogic action and premise for building peace.

1. *Reconciliation: Meanings of the Term*

Reconciliation might be an obvious term; it is actually a word to be rediscovered, to grasp the various nuances of its meaning. Since it is a term belonging to Judeo-Christian doctrine, the concept of 'reconciliation' recurs in the Bible eight times: five in



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the Old Testament and three in the New. In the former case we find it in Leviticus, Second Book of Chronicles and three times in the prophetic books (Ezekiel and Daniel), expressed in the Hebrew language three times by *kafar* and twice by *chatá*. The first word literally denotes the action of 'covering' (e.g., a road with bitumen) and in a translational sense that of 'forgiving,' 'condoning,' 'canceling,' 'erasing' etc. The second refers to similar actions, such as that of 'purify,' 'bear a loss,' 'atone,' also designating concepts such as 'wrong' or 'commit sin'.

Reconcile as a word used by Paul of Tarsus is *katallaghé*, from the verb *katallàssō*, the literal meaning of which denoted the exchange of trade, the exchange of coins, while in the translational sense it connoted actions such as: 'to reconcile someone,' 'to return into someone's favor,' 'to be reconciled with someone.' From the verb *allàssō* with the prepositional *katà* the term takes on the meaning of 'to transform', 'to exchange', 'to make other'¹.

Thus, a new concept appears in the New Testament: that of mutual transformation/exchange, as overcoming a conflictual situation by seeking a point of understanding that is "other", entirely new.

In our reflection we might ask what and how we understand the term Reconciliation today.

Linguistic analysis defines reconciliation as:

"Action, result and manner of reconciling or being reconciled [...] Synonymous with reconciliation" in general: reconciling, the reconciling, being reconciled. Making peace [+ with], "Resumption of good or proper relations after a quarrel or a

¹ Cf. Reconciliazione- *kafar*

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=H3722&t=KJV>
Reconciliazione-

chatá. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=H2398&t=KJV>



phase of detachment; end of military, political, ideological hostilities, etc."².

In all cases, in fact, reconciliation is defined as an action aimed at:

- (a) re-engage correct relationships;
- (b) ra-pacifying conflicting subjects;
- (c) re-cover lost harmony;
- (d) re-establish amicable relations after an argument.

The meaning of 'reconciliation' and the synonym 'appeasement' would seem incomplete; it is about promoting attitudes and behaviors that bring back, subjects in conflict, to previous relationships of friendship and understanding. The question remains open whether 'reconciliation' consists of something different and deeper. If conflict is a sign of the absence of communion, 'reconciliation' and 'reconciling' should be, a stepping back to a better past to be restored, or giving oneself a new, original and forward-looking perspective?

² Cf. "re- conciliazione", in *Treccani – Vocabolario online*. <http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/re/>; Id. in <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reconciling>



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2. The Dialogue of Reconciling... and Organizing Hope

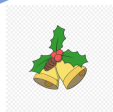
In the echo of these questions and having in mind conflicting relational situations both at the personal level and at the level of communities and peoples, reconciliation sets us with an eye to the positive past, to the awareness of the today of conflict and opens to the "horizon other," of peace, of harmony for which we yearn. Enrico Peyretti, philosopher-theologian and peace researcher, states:



*A reconciliation is true if it takes place on the basis of truth (recognition of facts) and justice (recognition of rights) [...] A mere peace (pax = covenant) is not necessarily reconciliation; [...] The very **idea of reconciliation contains a hope**, the recovery of a reconciliation that has been there and has been cracked, or lost [...] To reconcile is to meet again. A **true reconciliation is a great horizon, it is the re-humanization of each other, denied by the relationship of hostility** [...] A true reconciliation implies forgiveness ... that is, the conscious overcoming of hostility, hatred, destructive feelings, negative images, that is, a **nonviolent transformation of the conflict**³.*

The **reconciliation** process, in fact, is a tree that has its roots in the conflictual past, **develops its stem in the present of encounter and dialogue**, but should extend its branches into the future of alternative and entirely new solutions.

³ E. PEYRETTI, "Appunti sulla nozione di riconciliazione" in AA.VV., *Teoria e pratica della Riconciliazione*, Torre dei Nolfi (AQ), Ed. Qualevita, 2008, 35-36.



The **dialogue of reconciliation** involves three aspects that integrate the temporal dimensions of a dynamic and creative process:

- (1) critical and self-critical analysis of negative past experiences;
- (2) effort of empathic understanding to seek, together and in the present, a point of encounter and mediation;
- (3) exploration of alternative attitudes and behaviors to overcome possible conflicts in the future, without hiding or exorcising them⁴.

The experience of conflict is natural to processes of change/growth and may seem inevitable because of the diversity associated with the identity of individuals and peoples. In fact:



*The problem is not the emergence of conflict but dealing with it as a shared problem. [...] The sources of conflict are as follows: **interests** (what we want and what they-others want), **values** (how reality should be*

*for us and for them and how we believe and they believe it to be), **emotions** (what we feel and they feel), **identities** (who we are and who they are, as others- belonging to given social groups)⁵.*

The perspective of reconciliation takes one beyond understanding reconciliation as an ethical imperative or a desirable attitude of benevolence and forgiveness. The dialogue of reconciliation leads to the integration/harmonization of differences in a dynamic of nonviolent action. It thus comes, in the words of Don Tonino Bello, to "organize hope," to create the premises for a future of peace, Shalom, where "Peace,"

⁴ Cf. M.B. ROSEMBERG, *Comunicare con empatia*, Reggio, 2011, 31.

⁵ OPERATORI DI PACE, *Guida pratica alla trasformazione dei conflitti*, Napoli, 2011, 13-14.



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according to D. Cohn-Sherbok (a rabbi and jewish theologian), means wholeness, completion, perfection. In this sense of responsibility for the lives of all, "when Jews pray for peace, they seek not simply the absence of war, but a state of complete cosmic harmony. [...] Harmony will be the essential characteristic of the age of the Messiah, when the nations will "beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into hooks" (Mic 4:3)⁶.

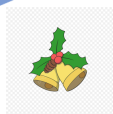
3. *Reconciliation-Peace Action*

In the usual binary logic, even when talking about 'peace' and 'reconciliation' there is a tendency to contrast the arguments of those who consider them only moral principles to be inspired by, and thus ends, or only methods of action, that is, means. The slogan, "During peace, prepare for peace," call to 'prepare' for peace is in line with the Gospel (Mt 5:9) in the exhortation to be (*eirenopoiòi*), peacemakers, not mere lovers of peace. But to build peace-and specifically reconciliation-there is a need for appropriate methods and techniques, which need to be learned, internalized, but above all applied in daily practice. Reconciliation, like dialogue and other aspects of nonviolent conflict transformation, opens a "space of re-creation," where wounds to the relationship can be healed and communication restored.



*A conflict is an invitation to the parties involved, society, and the world at large to move forward, **tackling head-on the challenge** constituted by the issues on the table, **with an***

⁶ D. COHN-SHERBOK, *A dictionary of Judaism and Christianity*, 1991, 124.



*attitude of empathy (toward all parties), **nonviolence** (also to prevent the development of meta-conflicts), and **creativity** (to find ways out). The task is to transform the conflict, upward, positively, by finding challenging goals for each party involved, imaginative ways to combine them, all without violence. It is the inability to transform conflicts that leads to violence...*⁷

Reconciliation, then, is the final step in a long journey of peacemaking, which begins with the prevention of violence, relies on nonviolent mediation between parties to conflict, and concludes by creating new relationships through 'rehabilitation' interventions.

*Transforming conflicts requires the transformation of the situation that includes and transcends the needs and goals of all parties [...] to **identify basic human needs** and to arrive at the preconditions for the **benefit of true security, respect, dignity, identity***⁸.

Overcoming conflictuality, then, means bringing out and reconciling seemingly irreconcilable interests and attitudes, imagining together 'other' solutions.

In this Advent-Christmas season of the "Prince of Peace," expectation becomes prayer that dialogue will promote relational and political processes of reconciliation in the lives of our host communities and peoples. May reconciliation in justice, guarantee the rights that affect the dignity of every person, safeguarding their life, health, identity, freedom to believe and inhabit their land or to migrate. May Shalom/Salam, be the commitment of believers of all faiths, hope and perspective of future for the lives of all.

⁷ J. GALTUNG, *La trasformazione del conflitto con mezzi pacifici*, Torino, 2006, 18.

⁸ AA.VV., *Alla ricerca di buone soluzioni; imparare a risolvere i conflitti* (Satyagraha n. 33), Pisa, 2018, 10.



Dialogue of Spirituality:

Spirituality of Reconciliation

by Sr. Yamileth Bolaños, smc

We are living in a time weigh down by wars, conflicts and violence that threatens our sense of humanity and oneness. The people in our CMS Arabic Oriental Province are suffering greatly from hostilities and clashes. The challenge of peacebuilding, reconciliation and unity questions our missionary presence.



1. Reconciliation:

The word *reconciliation* refers to re-establishment of friendly relations; conciliation and rapprochement. It denotes the action of making one view or belief compatible with another. Etymologically, *reconciliation* comes from the Latin term *Reconciliō*: from *re*, a prefix meaning ‘again’ and *conciliō*: bring together,

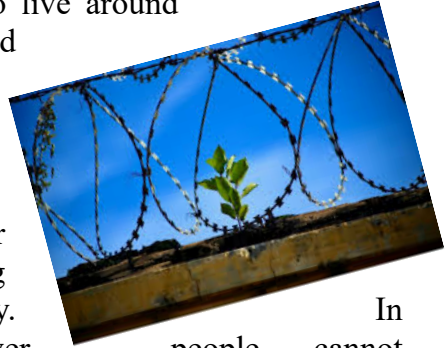
reconcile, reunite; to bring back; to recover, re-establish, restore, unite.

Furthermore, one way of imagining reconciliation is that of making space. This can be physical space, where people can feel save from harm. It can also be social space, where people can speak freely what they think and talk together about the future. It can even be internal space where a traumatised person can be



free from the heavy burden caused by something stressful that has disturbed him/her.

Unfortunately, many people who live around us, have undergone trauma and have lost personal and physical spaces in which to manoeuvre. This causes so many internal and external displaced people looking for survival. Addis Ababa, per example, is full of beggars coming from conflict areas of the country.



places controlled by military power, people cannot move as they wish; moreover, denying them human rights can likewise wipe out social spaces. The current pressures of economic globalisation can take away the social space for people bringing them to uniformity, called cultural homogenization, that is the reduction in cultural diversity through the popularization and diffusion of a wide array of cultural symbols; not only physical objects but customs, ideas and values. David E. O'Connor defines it as “the process by which local cultures are transformed or absorbed by a dominant outside culture”.⁹ Cultural homogenization has been called “perhaps the most widely discussed hallmark of global culture”.¹⁰ Therefore, reconciliation and peacebuilding are about fostering to open new spaces for people, at personal and social levels.

⁹David E. O'Connor (1 January 2006). [Encyclopaedia of the Global Economy A Guide For Students And Researchers](#). Academic Foundation. pp. 391-. ISBN 978-81-7188-547-3. Retrieved 7 December 2023.

¹⁰ Justin Jennings (8 November 2010). [Globalizations and the Ancient World](#). Cambridge University Press. p. 132. [ISBN 978-0-521-76077-5](#). Retrieved 7 December 2023.



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However, reconciliation is not only among people who were enemies in violent conflicts. It is finding spaces to make new choices that involves deep personal emotions and decisions. We can identify three elements that are important for opening up spaces for reconciliation:

1. People needs hospitable and safe spaces: basic human needs like being free from physical harm, having shelter and food are met. Without these basic needs people continue to live in fear and anxiety. When we feel secure and welcome, there we are opening spaces to reconciliation.
2. Breakdown in relationships is ultimately about trust. Reconciliation can be achieved only if we are reasonably sure that trust will not be broken again. Graciousness and kindness allow us to rebuild trust and can help us to restore our broken spirits.
3. Spaces of reconciliation are places where we can discover or build together something new.

The process of reconciliation occurs as part of our journey to peace. The term peace in the O.T. *shalom* expresses a holistic meaning that includes wellbeing, as well as right and just relationships and structures. Hence, peacebuilding is intrinsically part of achieving reconciliation.

2. Religious perspectives on Reconciliation:

Reconciliation is a concept that is found in many religions and takes on diverse nuances according to the different cultures. In our daily life we encounter people from different religious and cultural background, so we will present few points that could enhance our knowledge of how reconciliation is facilitated in the multicultural and multi-religious society in which we live.



Christianity: Christ has a central place in the Christian understanding of reconciliation and embodies the promise of God's reconciliation which Christians try to follow. It refers to a universal



reconciliation, "because God wanted all perfection to be found in him and all things to be reconciled through him and for him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, when he made peace by his death on the cross" (Col1:20). It is Jesus on the cross who reconciled the world in himself. The Protestant perspective emphasises that the process needs to start with the offender asking for forgiveness, while the Catholics highlights the role of the victim and offering forgiveness based on a restored relationship with God.

Hizkias Assefa (1993) identifies four dimensions of restoring relationships in which reconciliation can occur: spiritual, personal, social and ecological. (1) The spiritual dimension is the one in which the person creates a harmonious affiliation and restores his/her broken relationship with God. Only after that, he/she can precede restoring relationships with others. (2) In the personal aspect, the person needs to reconcile with the "self" experiencing personal tranquillity, peace and harmony. (3) Social reconciliation involves restoring relationships with our neighbours and larger communities to reflect justice, mercy, respect and love. And (4) the ecological dimension indicates that humans cannot be fully reconciled with God and with the other fellow humans, while disrespecting and abusing God's creation. This aspect is very incisive for our modern ecological crises.



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Judaism: In Hebrew *Teshuva*¹¹: forgiveness is a very important concept for reconciliation because it is embedded in a process of change that is initiated by the offender. Like the case of the sons of Isaac and Rebecca: Jacob cheated Esau out of their blind father's deathbed blessing by impersonating him, a deceit prompted by their mother, Rebecca. Esau would have killed Jacob, but Jacob fled. The feud between the brothers ended 20 years later when Jacob made a turn to face his past and his brother Esau. The reconciliation process culminates when Jacob comes face to face with Esau and the change that happens in both twins. "Esau run to meet him, took him by his arms and held him close and wept" (Gn 32:4). The story does not tell us what Esau goes through in order to be ready to forgive his brother and embraced him in a joyful reconciliation. The night before his reunion with Esau, Jacob wrestled with someone. Who is Jacob wrestling with? With himself? With Esau? Or with God? It may be that each of these wrestling partners are important in the reconciliation process. When dawn came Jacob called the place where he slept and wrestled "the face of God" (Gn 32: 31) and similarly after seeing and reconciling with Esau, Jacob said: "for truly, to see your face is like seeing the face of God" (Gn 33: 10).



Islam: It is found in the Koran: "They will not there hear any vain discourse, but only salutations of Peace: and they will not have therein sustenance, morning and evening" (Surah XIX:62). In Islam there is a reconciliation rite called *Sulh*, it consists in three stages. In the first stage, the families of



¹¹ Gopin, 2001, p.90.



the victim and offender choose respected mediators (*muslihs*). They publicly acknowledge that a crime was committed.

The second stage is the reconciliation (*musalaha*) itself (Irani, 2000). Here the mediators work to produce pardon. In the process, the honour and dignity of both parties need to be upheld and restored. In each party a large group of the community members are involved.

In the third stage, a public ritual is held. It contains four phases: (1) the act of reconciliation; (2) the parties shaking hands under the supervision of the mediators; (3) the family of the offender visiting the home of the victim to drink a cup of bitter coffee and (4) the offender's family hosting a meal. In this way, both families resume some kind of relationship.



Buddhism: Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk, in his book *Being Peace* (1987), pinpoints the importance of being aware of oneself in order to build peace and be reconciled. He writes: "I think that our society is a difficult place to live. If we are not careful, we can become uprooted, and once uprooted, we cannot help change society to make it more liveable.

Meditation is a way of helping us to stay in society" (Nhat Hanh, 1987, p.49). The Buddhist concept of reconciliation is based on the belief that humans should not harm themselves or others. This principle includes not taking the life of another, awareness of others' suffering and promoting others' wellbeing. Reconciliation within this view, consist of becoming whole again. It requests to acknowledge guilt, that is the admission that there is something is wrong, and the need to let go of that something. Nhat Hanh (1987, pp.74-79) describes a

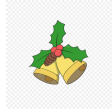


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reconciliation ritual used in Buddhist monasteries that contain seven practices: (1) the two persons in conflict seat face to face in front of the community; (2) both parties retell the whole history of the conflict; (3) it is expected that both parties will not be stubborn; (4) an appointed wise senior person speaks to the people gathered in order to moderate and to diminish the conflict; (5) each person in conflict accept and confess his/her own failings; (6) they reached a decision by consensus and (7) agree to the final verdict.

3. Reconciliation in two Ethiopian traditional cultures

From the many Ethiopian ethnic groups, I chose only the Gumuz and the Gugi societies, places where we are present. Their way of making peace with people in conflict, is very similar in both groups. They have in common many aspects of their process of reconciliation. First of all, they meet the persons involved in front of an assembly composed by the elders of the place, that is, some adults who have gained the respect of the community. Then, the elders enquire each of the persons, asking them to retell the history of the problem, according to their own perspective. Then, they spent a long time in reflecting about the source of the problem, in dialogue with each of the parties first and then with both parties together. They reach a consensus accepted by both parties. When someone injures another person, he or she will symbolically wash their hands and in doing so, the offender admits the guilt, acknowledges his/her responsibility for the injury, and binds him or herself to never do it again. After that, the elders may ask the offender for a remuneration or a



recompense that the victim will receive. Then as a sign of their reconciliation they kill an animal, a goat, a sheep, or cattle; depend on the injury. The eating together of this meal indicates the reciprocal forgiveness and reconciliation that involves their families and their clans.

In conclusion we can say that reconciliation is a very complex process that involves many layers of meanings and dimensions. It is a very slow process that needs to be supported carefully. As Robert Schreiter writes: “Reconciliation involves a fundamental repair to human lives, especially to the lives of those who have suffered. That repair takes time – time that can make the participants feel insecure, but necessary time nonetheless for beginning a new life” (1987, p.21).

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Dialogue and Magisterium:

Message of Pope Francis for the World Peace Day 2024

by Sr. Patricia Lemus, smc



“Artificial intelligence and peace”, this is the theme for the message of the World Day of Peace for the year 2024. Artificial intelligence refers to systems of machine-driven reasoning that are much more powerful than calculators or computers. Using large amounts of data and an extremely high working speed, they can be programmed to repeat tasks many times in order to become better and better in whatever we ask them to do. AI is a human creation, an invention of human ingenuity and a device modelled on human capabilities.



Machines with AI emulate mental functions rather than physical functions.

Pope Francis begins his message by pointing out the positive aspect of AI.



The remarkable advances made in the field of artificial intelligence are having a rapidly increasing impact on human activity, personal and social life, politics and the economy.

The great assistance that artificial intelligence has brought to agriculture, healthcare, education and the economy is of great importance. However, the way technology is evolving is causing fear and concern, due to the rapid changes it is provoking. In fact, artificial intelligence has developed to such an extent that, in many areas, it even controls our daily activities. Thus, Pope Francis calls for “*an open dialogue on the meaning of these new technologies, endowed with disruptive possibilities and ambivalent effects.*”

Everything that is useful to people must be known, analysed and understood in order to enter into dialog with them. Dialogue is only possible if there is openness, clarity and honesty. That is why we cannot ignore the new technologies that surround our lives. The benefits of AI are numerous, but so is the damage it can cause. The Pope urges vigilance in dealing with AI in order to avoid violence and discrimination.



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Some social media incite violence among people. The underprivileged can easily be left aside when it comes to AI, because it is created by a small group of people who see the world from their own background and needs and not from the needs of the poor. So, he recalls *“the need to be vigilant and to work so that a logic of violence and discrimination does not take root in the production and use of devices, at the expense of the most excluded: injustice and inequalities fuel conflicts and antagonisms.”*



The Pope calls to pay attention to the injustice, inequality and antagonism that the irresponsible use of AI could generate. It is therefore important to awaken a shared sense of responsibility for the use of AI. In fact, regulations are needed to protect privacy and human rights: *“The urgent need to orient the concept and use of artificial intelligence in a responsible way, so that it may be at the service of humanity and the protection of our common home, requires that ethical reflection be extended to the sphere of education and law.”*

AI must be at the service of humanity, emphasizes Pope Francis. AI should not outgrow our ability to control it. Humans should be the ones who control AI, not all the other way around. There are needs to do proper reflection in the field of education. The younger generations must develop their digital skills; but the importance of socio-emotional skills must not be forgotten while educating the youth. Young people need to develop a mature and critical awareness of the use of social media. The use of AI can lead people to thinking less and less. The alternative is to endow them to start reasoning in order to learn how to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong.



In some social media, there is a confirmation in the form of a “like” after a post. This ensures that users keep returning to the platform to check how many likes their post has received. This practice leads to a great deal of dependency, especially among young people. Some also become addicted to social media, with consequences that even some are led to suicide.

There are new digital boundaries that can easily discriminate against those who are not able to run at the speed of those ahead on these technologies. These boundaries can lead to conflict and discrimination, just like in real life. These new digitalized worlds need to regulate their laws clearly, to respect diversity and privacy. *“The protection of the dignity of the person, and concern for a fraternity effectively open to the entire human family, are indispensable conditions for technological development to help contribute to the promotion of justice and peace in the world.”*

AI cannot replace human dignity. A negative use of AI can lead to an increase in unemployment and a widening of the gap between rich and poor. As robotics become more sophisticated, workers will become unemployed. Interpersonal relationships will suffer from young people’s addiction to social media, which invades private lives and often leads to loss of privacy and produce great anxiety. The ability of AI to produce texts may lead to a loss of trust in information sources, news and written work at school.

A fundamental principle for the proper use and development of AI, inspired by the social teaching of the Church, is that developers should always work to ensure genuine human well-being and the global health of the planet. They should avoid working mainly to enhance their own power, wealth, or prestige. They should foresee and block all possible detrimental or even criminal use of the novelties they introduce.



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The goodness of the human family are the most indispensable conditions for justice and peace in the world. The Catholic Church follows the Lord Jesus in proclaiming the Good News to the poor. In its teachings clarifies that There are various kind of poverty, but AI is modelled on the thinking and reasoning processes of well-off people who want to increase their efficiency in living; without considering the poor living conditions of millions of people. This kind of “intelligence” many time manipulates reasoning, and AI emulates this kind of reasoning. However, the “intelligence” of the poor is different. The poor often experience the world through their own feelings, and these can include the feeling of shame, even though they do not want to show it. Developments in AI technology tend to increase the gap between the rich and poor. The interests of developers of AI are often very different from the interests of the poor.

God endowed human beings with various admirable talents, and the developments in this technology reflect some of these talents. The Church being on the side of God the creator of human kind can work:

- To counteract the widening gap between the rich and the poor,
- To highlight the unsurpassable value of the typically human way of relating to others, a way that is not centred on the efficiency in instrumental reason but on self-giving love,
- To remind developers of the positive aspects of their research efforts, especially when such efforts are clearly in line with God’s plan to allow human beings to participate in His ongoing efforts for improvement of creation. providence and creativity,



- To offer guidelines on how to discern ways of channelling human technical skills for the good of the many rather than of the elites.

Dialogue of Life: witness of ... SUDAN ...

WITH YOU I LEFT MY HEART

by Sr. Annalisi Pansini, cms

I can say that my recent, and less recent, experience of life in Sudan not only accompanies me but is part of my feeling, my thoughts, my way of looking at reality today. And I feel that only now can I better understand the words, "with you I left my heart" of St. Daniel Comboni. After walking, sharing struggles, sufferings, hopes, life with a people every separation brings suffering, but when the parting is sudden and follows a conflict that provides only hunger, destruction and death then everything is more traumatic. Everything leaves you with so many questions in your heart. Why so much violence? Where has all the sacrifice, labors, hopes, and dreams experienced by so many families, so many individuals who fought and gave their lives for a better future been lost? Certainly during my many years in Sudan I had witnessed so many political, social upheavals, coups, tensions but I never thought I would see this sad ending: the total dispersion of the inhabitants of entire cities, displaced, refugees without number, without a safe place to go. And when the faces of these people walking





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aimlessly recall the many faces that have filled your missionary life how can the heart not weep? How can the mind still accept the word "war"?

It is not within my competence to reflect on the causes of the still ongoing conflict that broke out on April 15, 2023. I carry with me the great disappointed expectations of a great people capable of struggle, of sacrificing everything to try to demand freedom, dignity, equality, a future for their children from the dictators of the day.

I saw a patient people, mobilizing in peaceful demonstrations that went on for about three years enduring abuse, extreme poverty and violence from the powers that be. A people always ready to be reborn after every defeat. A people who always communicated hope to you.

I admired in this people the ability to listen. To solve a common problem, families were capable of discussing for days on end. Their ability to welcome, hospitality, sharing was for me a reason to confront our little Western openness; a teaching, a continuous stimulus to choose what in life is most important, is essential with a

meaningful surrender to Providence.

I was so enlightened by their spirit of adaptation to the most difficult situations, to endurance in the face of difficulties.

I thanked the Lord so much for giving me the opportunity to witness collaboration, sharing, mutual help among families, teachers, doctors, poor and rich, Muslims and Christians without distinction. It all highlights that Kingdom values are made present in life and through the simple gestures of witnessing a life of benevolence and selfless service.





The Lord always hears the cry of the poor and will certainly come to the rescue of his people. A task of patient waiting awaits us in the certainty that Sudan is a great land where the Fraternity has deep roots that must be rediscovered, its values made to bear fruit. There where, from St. Daniel Comboni onward, hundreds of Missionaries have loved, suffered, given all the best of themselves there remains the challenge of Christian Witness especially in the preparation of "Thought Guides," of new Educators, at any level and for any school or health sector. The task of flanking, supporting the Church with full cooperation remains.

MY CURRENT EXPERIENCE IN SUDAN

by Sr. Florence Achieng, cms

Sudan has been surrounded by uncertainties and a lot of instability in the last few years. When I entered in 2021, there was a political crisis that resulted into daily demonstrations in different parts of the country voicing for a civilian government. This led to the loss of many lives and made life so difficult, especially economically, affecting different sectors. Among other sectors, health and Education sectors were highly affected and overweighed by the situation. In contact and interaction with the local people, especially teachers and parents in the school, everyone expressed how stressed and tired they were and were only longing for peace. There only hope and prayer was that the leaders needed to sit and bring the country back to stability. During this time, it was so difficult to plan outdoor activities due





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to the unpredictable demonstrations and strikes. We lived this moment with hope through prayer and in solidarity with people that the situation would soon change. This period was already heavy but even worsened when the heavy war broke up on the 15th of April leaving so many stranded, cut off from families while taking away many lives. It was so terrifying because everything was out of control.

The situation was affecting everyone but there was still a sense of unity among people. I personally remember a number of times where I encountered people even randomly on the streets regardless of religion asking for prayers for their families, for the country among other prayer requests. This showed me a sense of solidarity, the faith and trust in God and also the trust we can pray for each other no matter our religious differences. We endured together in patience and hope.



My Christian and missionary encounter with God in a Muslim majority reality has given me another outlook of Islam. It widened my capacity to live in an interfaith context, accepting the other and without losing my identity. My encounter with them helped understand some of the religious and the cultural values in the context that I was living in. As already highlighted above, many of them would leave you with a blessing or even make prayer requests. Praying with them and for them also nourished my spiritual growth and encounter with God in my missionary life.

I still strongly hope that soon, there will be peace again and that we can go back to our mission. However, this dream is surrounded by so many challenges that will need to be addressed in the post-war Sudan. In order to revitalize our charism and the Comboni spirituality, there will be need to review and evaluate



our priorities, to design our goals to adapt to the new reality, as well as developing dialogue at all possible levels. I think we shall also need to strengthen our unity and our collaboration capacity as Comboni family among others. This will not only help us evangelize as life witness but may also realize more our charism.

Our Interreligious context at Comboni College of Science and Technology (CCST)

by Fr. Jorge Carlos Naranjo Alcaide, mccj

1. Dialogue and inter-culturality at CCST

After the inauguration of the first building of Comboni College of Science and Technology in Khartoum in 2006, a delegation from the Ministry of Universities and Scientific Research paid a visit to it. They realized that there was no a specific prayer room for Muslim students as prescribed by higher education law.

Fr. Beppino Puttinato responded to the request and dedicated a space in the College to the prayer room as required by the Ministry. But then he met with complaints from some Christians, including the ecclesiastical authority. For them it was unacceptable to provide room for the prayer of Muslims in a church institution. Fr. Beppino found a diplomatic solution by stating that the room was the office of the lecturer of Islamic religion.



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The issue came back in 2014. A Comboni Missionary Sister, Daniela Spinelli, was teaching Christian religion in the different university programs to Christian students. In one of her classes, a group of students

asked her: "Why do Muslims have a prayer room in "our" College?" The Sister called me to discuss the matter with the students. I entered the classroom and one of them, a South Sudanese, began his argument like this:

- In the other universities, Christian students do not have a place to pray. Why should they have it in our university?

- Is what those universities do right or wrong? -, I asked him.

- Wrong, certainly-, he replied.

- Then why do you want us to repeat the same mistake? That mentality is dangerous. Let's imagine that today the Dinka seize power and appropriate the spaces or resources they can. As a consequence, the Nuer feel aggrieved and react with violence. Let's imagine that they get the victory against the Dinka and said; "Now it's our turn." What kind of society could be built in this way? What we are trying to build here is a model of society in which each person, regardless of his tribe, culture or religion, finds the conditions to feel at home and develop as a person in all its dimensions, including the spiritual one. Don't you think it would be nicer to build a society where this happens? The student understood very well the example that brought up the tension between the Dinka and the Nuer since the civil war in the South had just broken out and the main contenders were armies linked to each of the two tribes. Many South Sudanese still bore the scars of the perceived continued oppression by the Northerners and their stress on Islamic religion and Arab culture.



To deepen diversity management, we supported an initiative proposed by a group of students in 2015, the cultural week¹². One of them, Muslim, Ahmed Ali Mekki, graduated in 2018, highlights precisely this characteristic as the best memory of his time at CCST.



I remember that when I brought the idea, no one believed it, except Ahmed Malik, my classmate, and Father Jorge, who gave the green light. We started and the students joined the project. At the end of the week, joy and smiles filled everyone's face, students, lecturers and staff. We saw that together we could achieve great things.

CCST has a great way of contributing to building peace between different communities and nationalities. I was able to see how students and staff from communities that have or had wars between them sit peacefully at the same table to share food and laughter. Sudan and our continent need this.

The aim of the week was to help students reflect on their own cultural identity and discover diversity as a treasure. The identity issue was particularly challenging for students of South Sudanese, Eritrean or Ethiopian origin who had been born in Sudan and had never seen the land from which their parents or grandparents emigrated.

I used to tell them that when God created the human being He did not use the photocopy machine to replicate the person that

¹² You can watch a summary of these cultural weeks in this video: Summary of Three Cultural Weeks (2015-2017).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQSlwB9nxhQ&t=206s>



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had turned out best. God created us different. And if God, who is extremely wise, wanted diversity, this had to be something positive.

These values transformed the lives of some of our students. Thomas Batista Balash, a South Sudanese from Wau, graduated in November 2020 from the BA in English Language and Literature. Today he works in his home region as a peace and governance officer with the fundamental task of managing the “Youth Transformation Programme”. He is also a “young peace ambassador” for his country, South Sudan.

Despite all this, the famous question of “space” came up again when in 2018 we were finishing the new complex for Computer Science and Information Technology programs at the Comboni Playground. Some well-meaning Catholic informed the archbishop that I was building a mosque in the new building even if it was simple a prayer room for Muslim students and staff.

Before the archbishop called me, I went to meet him and explain what that “mosque” was about. Apart from the legal obligation related to the conditions of the Ministry of Higher Education to approve facilities as suitable for university education, I based the conviction of the need to have a prayer room on the same Gospel of Matthew where Jesus invites his followers to do others what they would desire from themselves (Mt. 7, 12).

Along the same line, I cited the Apostolic Constitution on Catholic universities “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” signed by Pope John Paul II in 1990: “When the academic community includes members of other Churches, ecclesial communities or religions, their initiatives for reflection and prayer in accordance with their own beliefs are to be respected” (Ex Corde Ecclesiae, n. 39).

Nadia Abdalla Idris, a Muslim student of Polish origin at the Comboni school of Port Sudan, explained in these words how



she experienced the management of diversity in Comboni schools:

Comboni schools have fought, and I hope they will always continue to fight, the great enemy that is ignorance, because it is blind ignorance that is behind the pain that we cause each other. The more we learn, the more aware we become of the variety of possibilities and options that can open up to us. Comboni schools, by increasing the number of educated men and women, definitely contribute to creating a climate of mutual understanding and tolerance. In our respective tribes and different cultures, we must strive to find strength and enrichment, not the reason for war and destruction. Comboni schools contribute to peace in Sudan by teaching young people that it is okay to be different, it is okay to be yourself and to be an educated person.

Another important aspect in the management of diversity both in the Comboni schools in Sudan and in the university section has been the integration of Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim religious festivities in the academic calendar and not only in the weekly calendar.

2. How is God revealing in the intercultural, interfaith context of Sudan.

Mohamed Nagib, Muslim, had been an employee of CCST since its foundation in 2001. In October 2022 he came to my office to ask me for a loan because he had to undergo a surgery.

- But do you know what this operation is about? - I asked him.

- No. The doctor only told me that he had to operate. Here I have the reports-, he replied.

I took a look at the reports and immediately found two curse words: liver and metastasis.



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- Nagib, did the doctor explain anything to you about what you have? - I asked him.

- No, nothing-, he replied.

- Do you mind if I share these results with an oncologist. I want to confirm what I think I have understood.

- Yes please.

The oncologist confirmed my impression that Mohamed Nagib had only some few months of life unless a miracle happened.

- Nagib, you have cancer in a very advanced stage. You must prepare your family for the worst.

The next day I found him again:

- I have already prepared everything Father. I have lived a long and happy life. I'm in peace-, he replied with a calm voice.

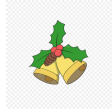
- If you feel tired and prefer to stay at home, don't hesitate -, I told him.

- No Father, I prefer to come to the College and work while I have strength.

Mohamed Nagib could not come after two or three days as he started chemotherapy sessions. The workers and volunteers of the palliative care group took turns supporting the family in caring for our beloved Mohamed Nagib until his death on January 13, 2023.

Christians believe that Jesus reveals to us the mercy of the Father while Muslims begin each prayer in the name of God the merciful and compassionate. This word, mercy, is precisely the foundation of palliative care and implies that we feel the pain of the person with a chronic and terminal illness and that we accompany that person considering him/her in all the human dimensions: physiological, psychological, spiritual and sociological.

At CCST we had courses of palliative care for health professionals and a group of volunteers that brought together CCST students and staff and other external volunteers, Muslims



and Christians. These two fruits are the consequence of a long journey that began with a trip by Dr. Nahla Gafer, a Muslim graduate from Sisters School Khartoum.

This medical doctor specialized in oncology and worked at the Khartoum Radiation Isotope Center (RICK) and at the country's first oncology center, the National Cancer Center located in Wadi Medani, 200 km south of the capital.

In 2009 she attended an introductory course on palliative care organized by Hospice Africa in Uganda, one of the few African countries where this discipline was studied academically. This course re-oriented her professional life. Upon her return, Dr. Nahla began to organize courses in this field thanks to the funding obtained from projects prepared by her and presented on behalf of the CCST.

In February 2010 she opened the first palliative care unit in Sudan and in 2014 she joined the national group who was to define national policies for pain management. That same year, the CCST organized a course in this field under her direction with 100 professionals from 22 public hospitals. On June 1, 2014, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research recognized our training courses in palliative care.

In 2018 CCST was enriched with the arrival of an Irish nurse, Geraldine Damanhuri, a lay missionary of the Neo-catechumenal Way specialized in palliative care, with more than 30 years of experience in the British health system. Geraldine, Catholic, and the Sudanese doctor Mohja Marhoom, Muslim, created the Comboni Palliative Care Volunteers Group (CPCV) in January



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2019. Both, a nurse and a doctor, were specialized in palliative care¹³.



The group of volunteers included both health professionals and students from the various CCST programs. This group became the soul of the CCST. It was a real joy to see the students, Christians and Muslims,

when returning with their eyes shining after their service to persons with cancer at the Khartoum Cancer Center because they had experienced the joy of serving.

Among the techniques that the volunteers learned was a hand massage that relieved the pain of the sick person. Our students relieved their pain in this way, listened to them and liaised with their families.

These volunteers are our "missionaries of mercy." A Catholic educational institution must educate to serve. But how to educate students to service? How to instil in them that they will find the greatest happiness in putting what they learn at the service of their communities? Without doubt, mere motivational words are not enough for a student to assimilate this value. They have to experience it and fall in love with the beauty of it. The group became our precious instrument for a service oriented model of education.

¹³ G. Damanhuri & M. Marhoom (2021). Republic of Sudan - Palliative Care - Hope for the Future. In: Silbermann, M. (ed.). Palliative Care for Chronic Cancer Patients in the Community, Global Approaches and Future Applications, Springer, pp. 231-242.



3. *Dreaming of a future of peace, what are the hopes and challenges that the Comboni mission in post-war Sudan will have to face?*

The war between a mainly Darfurian militia made of members of Baggara tribes from Sudan and neighbouring countries (RSF) and the Sudanese Army will probably cause very negative feelings towards Darfurian Arabs from the side of the Arab tribes of the Nile Valley (Ja'ali, Shayqi and Danagla) and from the Black tribes of Darfur (Masalit) and even from Zaghawa and Fur people. If Sudan remained united, this wound will cause conflicts and should be treated. Education to peace and reconciliation will be essential.

If Sudan is divided into regions under SAF control and regions under RSF control, the church will find it easier to work in safe cities like Port Sudan, Medani, Kasala, Gedarif, Atbara, Kosti under SAF control, mainly in the Eastern side of Sudan. Most of Darfur except for El-Fasher will probably remain under RSF control, particularly the areas where gold is produced, and still more difficult for any missionary presence. It is more complex to guess the future of El Obeid as frontier between the spheres of influence of both armies. As for areas controlled by SPLM-North, they will continue being suitable for pastoral work as SAF will be busier in keeping the borders with RSF controlled areas. Many local priests had to abandon the country. Some of them will not come back after the war. The Church will have lost personnel. There will be a great need of new religious personnel. It is difficult to guess if the government will grant entry visas for new church personnel as soon as the war finishes.

Many institutions (schools, hospitals,) operating before the war will not be able to re-open. Those schools and hospitals that manage to resettle their service will be very demanded.



Hanukkah and Christmas

"may the light illuminate even these dark times."

"Hannukkah: is a Jewish holiday also known as the Festival of Lights and usually falls right around Christmas at the darkest time of the year. It lasts eight days and in this 2023 it started on December 7 and ended on the 15th. December 12 saw us gathered together Jews, Muslims and Christians to pray together for the gift of peace in the Holy Land and the world.

Hanukkah (literally "Inauguration") is a Jewish holiday also known as the "Festival of Lights," whose origins date back 2,300 years. What is celebrated and more importantly what is its history? Hanukkah commemorates the new consecration of an altar in the Temple in Jerusalem and the regained freedom from the yoke of the Hellenes in the second century BCE. In 200 B.C., King Antiochus imposed a ban on religion. Hence the desecrations of temples began and this provoked a revolt led by the Maccabees. It was not until 165 B.C. that the Jews liberated and reconsecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. Julius Maccabees ordered the purification of the holy place but only oil was found here to fuel the candles. Inexplicably, however, it was enough to keep the illumination going for eight nights. That is why the traditional candelabra consists of eight candles, plus one that is the source of light for the other candles, while celebrating oil as the source of light in the Jerusalem temple. In the feast of Christmas, The New Temple the human being, is consecrated as



the divine decides to take human form and inhabit history forever to be light in the path of every living person.



2024!

**In the common quest for
peace based on Justice,
our BEST WISHES for
CHRISTMAS AND a
HAPPY
NEW YEAR**

