



Plenary General Council

Rome, June 10-18, 2013

Number 4

And four...

You undoubtedly know the Chinese proverb that states "with time and patience the mulberry leaves are transformed into a silk dress." Time does its work and patience also, and the silk dress takes its form and its beauty. The fourth Plenary General Council (PGC) already gives to the Congregation its new vestment. It is firstly a vestment of service and mission. The adoption of the statutes, as much in certain redeployment zones such as in Africa, in the vast Province of North America – Philippines and in the two future provinces: that of Europe and of Madagascar, will allow a better adaptation and a greater flexibility in facing the multiple stakes of mission and solidarity.

Step by step we go forward and we learn to walk better in the same direction with determination and energy. That is the price to pay to obtain what we desire.

One of the results of the PGC will, without contest, the instauration of the first ten apostolic nominations that touch four provinces of the congregation. Through them, it is the consciousness of a body that is growing; it is the common belonging and the apostolic communion that has taken a significant step forward.

Beyond a council or a simple governmental organ, this fourth session was also an instance of reflection on our missionary ambitions. Certain foundations, recent or to come that require the total attention of the Assumption, were reviewed. We want to be present to the person of today, and that is what dictates our choices "in solidarity with the poor and the little ones". With the laity, it is a question of maintaining a spirit of co-responsibility in the stages of development of our mission whether that be in Goma, in Uganda, or yet in our desire to work with the migrants on the USA-Mexico border. How can we *head out to the open sea* also in Asia or in South America? We are not lacking in projects, initiatives and ambitions. We must not kill them in the egg with defeatism!

BLL

«May our joy be perfect....»

The Superior General concluded by noting how the PGC was a meeting characterized by mildness, surely the temperature but also the fraternal climate. He recalled that in his view, our fragility was revealed on the occasion of his visit to South America. But that should not make us fear the future. Our fragilities must not make us fear living our religious consecration with more intensity and interiority. We will be effective only in the measure that we are fully men of God: working, towards greater interiority in the Congregation, fighting against the secular and individualistic tendencies, not allowing ourselves to be contaminated by the spirit of the world, such is the duty of vigilance that should serve as ramparts that prevent us from falling into anti-community behaviors.

Internationality is making progress in the Assumption and the welcoming of a new Major Superior from Madagascar is a sign of vitality for our Congregation. We are at a turning point in our history in Colombia and in the Philippines where we must be attentive to our weaknesses. The generosity of our Congolese brothers here and there must not be forgotten. There we are without news of our kidnapped brothers and we cannot resign ourselves to reduce the number of novices for financial reasons.

We want to walk on the path of the apostles. The first apostolic nominations are intended to mobilize in that sense and make our co-responsibility progress. They should allow us to better welcome the Spirit that penetrates this body that we call the Assumption. The mutation continues in the Congregation and the changes are not to be feared for they are signs of vitality.

The financial questions, very present during the PGC, reveal the importance of the work of Brother Didier, the General Treasurer. How can we share better our financial potentialities? A Marshall Plan for the Assumption in Africa is needed to permit our brothers on that continent to have the means for their mission. That mission of the Assumption was the subject of a reflection on our future ambitions. How can we accept the numerous requests that we receive? How can we answer them?

Daring, generous and unselfish... As usual, some will present themselves saying: "Here I am; send me." We will abolish borders and we will redouble our efforts to answer the call. To fulfill our Assumptionist vocation, Father Benoît gives us the keynote: "May our joy be perfect."

A Significant Step

The First Apostolic Nominations

Father General in the PGC proceeded to the first apostolic nomination of:

- Bro. Danca Mihail Iulian (Province of France)
- Bro. Reyes Delgadillo Roberto (Province of North America-Philippines)
- Bro. Mabou Simo Serge Patrick (Province of France)
- Bro. Nguyen Khuong Duy (Province of France)
- Bro. Francisco Javier Sepulveda Contreras (Province of Chile-Argentina)
- Bro. Jesus Tlecuile Mixteco (Province of North America-Philippines)
- Bro. Joseph Mumbere Mahamba (Province of North America-Philippines)
- Bro. Barbosa Diaz Wellington (Province of Brazil)
- Father Pham van Duong (Province of France)
- Father Nicolas Potteau (Province of France)

Three Questions for Father Etienne Ratalata The Malagasy Assumption Is Sixty-years Old

The Assumption in Madagascar will celebrate in autumn its sixtieth anniversary; what does that represent?

Yes, we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the arrival of the Assumptionists. That happened on October 25, 1953. The Assumption there remains young. The average age of the religious is 42 years-old. The 55 religious of the Great Island are of three nationalities: the natives, the French and the Congolese. We are present especially in the Diocese of Tuléar in the south of the country. Our scolasticate is in Fianarantsoa and the house of studies in Antananarivo. The religious work in teaching and serve in three parishes and two chaplaincies. They serve in eight bush districts where they animate several schools and a college. At the moment we also have nine Malagasy religious in exterior missions.

What is the economic and political context of the Great Island today; what are the challenges the religious face?

The country, rich in natural resources

is made fragile by successive political crises. The last one began in 2009 and began a long four year transition. The protagonists of this crisis cannot reach an agreement to organize free and transparent elections. The political problems and the instability promote corruption, insecurity and misery for the population, even if, curiously, the daily life of the people seems normal.

What about the Malagasy Catholic Church? What are the characteristics of the Catholic presence in the country?

Catholics comprise half the Christian population. There are 23 million inhabitants in Madagascar (of which 41% are Christian, 52% have ancestral beliefs, and 07% are Muslim). They constitute a vibrant and practicing community. The Church is very engaged in the areas of education and health. In Madagascar, the churches are full on Sunday, but much remains to be done to penetrate the culture with the Gospel and allow the Christians to live a more coherent Christian life.

«ACCOMPAGNER»

Fr. Guy LEROY with Mr. Roger VANDEBRUL, Gerard PIRENNE and Dominique VANDERLINDEN, members of the Executive Committee, presented to the PGC this mobilizing work of the Congregation. A presentation recalled the aim of the association for people among the most needy of Brussels and area. Because of the economic crisis the requests to it have multiplied. Housing is one of the first problems to solve; modest revenues are no longer enough and vulnerability is increasing. The volunteers of the association seek above all the quality of the aid given to people. In Brussels, 30% of the population lives below the poverty level.

The Superior General thanked the association for what it means to the Assumption, inviting it to continue its work that corresponds to one of the great orientations



of the General Chapter of 2011: to be men of communion, witnesses to the Faith, open to the respect of other religions in a multicultural society, in solidarity with the little ones and the poor. "Thanks to you, lay friends, this integration to the realities of the old continent of the Assumption is made manifest."

Interiority

In philosophical terms, interiority is the quality or character which is interior, of what is within us. We live in a world that is losing more and more the sense of interiority, that essential value that is the capacity to become God Seekers until our last breath. Our little family needs to cultivate this capacity and find anew its initial fidelity. “The time has come for a bold interior re-foundation,” Fr. Benoît told the GPC. We are dispersed in the world where we live in a diaspora; we need to create links, without multiplying trips. That is created by interiority. In this year of Faith, how can we not remember that to become men of faith, the General Chapter of 2011 insists on personal prayer: “Prayer that makes us intimate with Him (Christ), makes us attentive to the others, the most humble, and in solidarity with those who suffer and struggle for justice and peace. Prayer unifies our lives. It makes our actions and our words coherent. It also makes us able to commit ourselves and become signs of hope despite the difficulties of the task.” (No. 39) Faith is a gift of God that we need to ask for in prayer. (No. 119) Interiority is our way of persevering in prayer; it is its means.



Insecurity in DRC: the Drama Continues

Our captive brothers were present in our reflection and in our prayer. Father Protais, Provincial of Africa, gave the PGC a broad picture of the insecure situation that reigns in the North Kivu, they various armed factions that are in a permanent struggle. The village conflicts call the militias that settle their differences in blood. Our brothers there want to be agents of reconciliation and help in the dialogue among persons. The Provincial stated with precise determination: “We want to remain in our posts.” The situation remains elusive and dramatic for the populations. How can we relay information so that our brothers will not be forgotten? We remain close to them and we want to speak for them.

Openings and Closings

In Europe, two communities are officially closed: the community of Agen in France and the community of Awenne in Belgium. A page has been turned. The community of Agen was heir to the prestigious presence of the Assumptionists at the Saint Caprais College since 1927 (the Assumption retains the ownership). Among the alumni of the fathers is the historian of science and French philosopher Michel Serres. The community of Awenne (Belgium) was founded in 1989 with the fathers who continued to teach at the college of Bure.

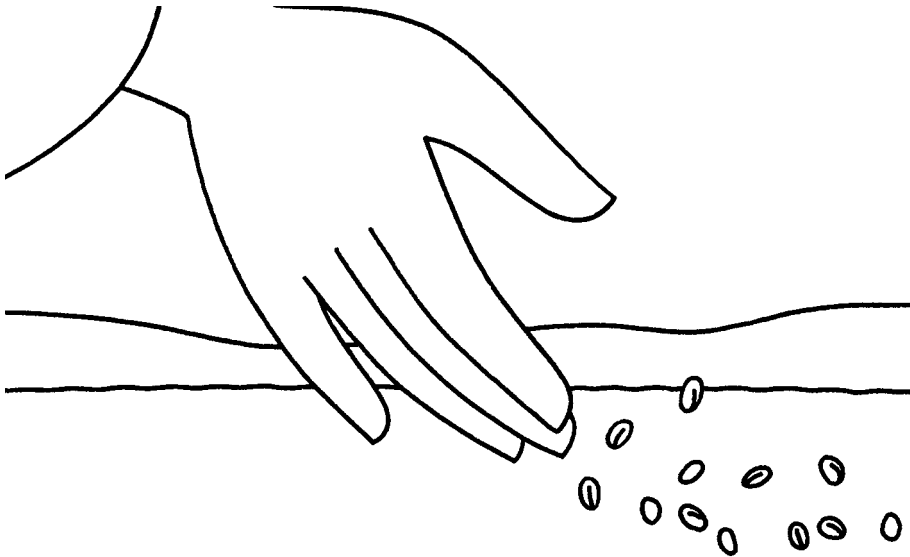
In Africa our expansion continues: soon the community of Kisoria in the diocese of Bunda in Tanzania will be opened.

South America remains the object of all our attention. After the visit of Father Benoît in the four countries of the Chile-Argentina Province, a visit that coincided with the election of the first Pope from that continent, the PGC manifested a special concern for everything about the Assumption in that part of the world. From the broad debate that was initiated, certain important decisions were made. If the Latin-American Portuguese-language novitiate should open its doors in January 2015, the “theologate” of the sub-continent will be inaugurated at the start of 2016 in Santos Lugares (Argentina) in the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires where Pope Francis had been the pastor.

The Statutes

The PGC was also a legislative body. Its members studied the statutes of the Province of North America-Philippines and those of the future Provinces of Europe and of Madagascar. The statutes of the East Region of the Province of Africa were approved.

Our Missionary Ambition



“A mission without borders” was the slogan given by the 1993 General Chapter. Already twenty years have passed and it is still a question of being more open to the universal mission. The Assumption wants to grow its faith, its daring and its capacity to welcome in the service of evangelization. This PGC was a moment of profound reflection on our missionary ambitions. We must go forward even more in unknown territory and start again in some places and elsewhere...

We took the time to review our projects: those of Riobamba, of Goma, of Kampala, of West Africa, of the Philippines and of Vietnam. Many of these areas are outposts of today’s evangelization where we go forward as scouts for the Gospel.

In Ecuador, it is in the midst of youth in poor milieus that we have chosen to plant the Gospel, in a population that is 80% native.

In Goma, (DRC), declared Fr. Protais, “Our apostolic ambition is to be present in a border zone that is multi-ethnic in which we can be in contact with youth from everywhere.”

In this border area between the Congo and Ruanda, the city is sits

on a volcano and our brothers are at the mercy of all the troubles that can erupt from one moment to another, but also the eruptions of lava that rumble under their feet. More to the north, in Uganda, our brother have implicated themselves in the pastoral mission of the diocese of Lugazi where they have been given a parish; but everything remains to be done.

Thanks to their perseverance, the roof of the church has been completed (Congratulations are in order!), even if they do not yet have a residence.

They are filled with ambition in their work among the youth. Our postulants from the land of the martyrs are still in Kenya, while waiting that their future house can be built on the land that has already been bought, and that the house for Ugandan postulants can open. In West Africa where we have returned in two countries: Togo and Burkina Faso, the foundation is growing rapidly.

Asia is not absent from this redeployment. Vietnam already has three houses and some fifty brothers throughout the Congregation.

To be present to the needs of the poorest, in particular those of the Migrants: we dream of being ferrymen on the banks of the Rio

Grande where Mexico and the United States meet, to come to the aid to this population in Exodus.

Must Old Europe be excluded from these ambitions? One African brother dreams of seeing young Flemish men received in the Congregation! We recall then that in his closing speech for the Chapter of 2011, the Superior General had spoken about a foundation in a Portuguese-speaking country of Africa. All that seems to be developing: in a few months two African brothers are going to study Portuguese in Brazil and will stay there for a few years.

We are in a period of re-foundation, as Fr. General underscores, with 340 young people in formation in the entire Congregation. We must be ready. “We are all called to the mission” was the title our capitular text of twenty-years ago. It invites us still today to make of our fraternal life the ‘first characteristic of our foundation’, in a supernatural spirit, as was the case for the first Christians. We also are called to write a page in the Acts of the Apostles.

The 2014 Lenten Campagne

The Lenten Campagne changes continent. If in 2013, we supported La Palmba, in North Kivu, this year in 2014, our eyes and generosity turn to Brazil. No! This choice is not dictated by the World Cup of Soccer, or by the Olympics, but by the help we want to give to the restoration of our center in Eugenopolis Minas Gerais. This center is the only large space in a diocese that is among the poorest in Brazil. We must all mobilize!