



Plenary General Council

Nairobi, June 2015

no. 8

On the road of the roses

For ten days, the house of the Missionary Sisters of Eau Vive hosted the PGC. Our African meeting found there the ideal situation in the midst of a well-tended park of flowers. At the end of the rainy season, at the time when the heat is soft, the place is propitious for work and study. At 150 km south of the equator, at an altitude of 1800 meters, Nairobi lives up to its name. Enkare Nyirobi in the Masai language, means "the place of fresh water", sometimes called "Green City in the Sun".

In taking the road to Kenya, we took the road of the roses. It is from this country, in fact, that come most of the roses offered in Europe on the occasion of Saint Valentine's. That was seen, that was smelled during these ten days. All the rooms of this house were adorned with the queen of flowers. And why should we not share it?

Certainly, roses have thorns and the thorny subjects were not lacking in the discussions, but that did not succeed in harming the perfume of fraternity that characterized the meeting. We know these thorny subjects; they are at the heart of our religious life, they touch on the use of goods if we speak of economy; on our passion for the Kingdom, if we speak of apostolate; to a desire for a more intense spirituality in the mission that urges us to work harder in our fields of today and to prepare those of our foundations of tomorrow.

But the rose, that is beauty, that is the perfume: the beauty that will save the world, as Dostoyevsky said, we found it in meeting the young Assumptionists of Kenya, the works and the lay people of the Alliance. The perfume, that of fraternity, we felt it during these days of sharing on our spiritual life. It filled these days with a delightful scent.

We are given the invitation to allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit and see as a subtle sign: the coincidence of the publication of the encyclical *Laudato si* and the conclusion of our work looking to the horizon of the General Chapter of 2017. In this country which by its flora and fauna is a veritable hymn to creation, we felt a new energy fill us.

Building the 20th Century Assumption

For the first time in its history, the PGC took place in Africa, in Nairobi, a city in which Fr. Protais left memorable traces of his work, Saint Monica of Njiru, the beautiful church



that he built. "We are also in some measure builders," remarked Father General in his conclusion. "We have an impressive work-site: building the 20th century Assumption. The task may appear superhuman and I believe that it is in a certain manner for without the help of God we can do nothing, "If the

Lord does not build the house, the workers labor in vain," says Psalm 126.

We cannot build a tower without knowing if we are able to do so. For that we need to sit down and reflect. To say what is fragile in the Congregation today is to practice a healthy exercise in lucidity.

We made progress on heavy subjects, as on that of the reorganization of the Congregation or also that of the next General Chapter... I invite everyone to vigilance to put into action the capitular dynamics. Re-read the article of the Rule of Life and apply them in your provinces.

We have found our theme: "For new wine, new wineskins," so that Christ speak to the men and women of today." It is a question of insisting on the apostolic vitality of our Congregation. We have an aim: the coming of the Kingdom of God. Some, starting with the study of the preparatory documents on the re-organization, had some fear, but one of us said that the Holy Spirit had breathed on the course of the work of the PGC. I sincerely believe that. We went beyond the traditional oppositions to attain a consensus... ■

A Sunday in Njiru

Saint Monica's church in Njiru looks like a cathedral. At the 8:30 high Mass, the crowd is there. This Sunday gives us the chance to meet the Assumptionist reality in Kenya. In 2001, this south part of the city was an abandoned area. On the occasion of the first Eucharist, there were only some thirty faithful with five communions. Since then the neighborhood has been transformed and the members of the Plenary Council were able to measure the difference. They were divided into three groups in the different sectors of the parish. In the center at Saint Monica's Fr. Emmanuel gave the homily and Father General received the commitment of the first group of 13 lay persons of the Alliance in the region of East Africa. The

other sector was that of Saint John the Baptist of Katua site of the postulancy of the region and where we are considering building our future high school. At the moment seven postulants are completing this stage and are preparing to go to Kizito House in Arusha (Tanzania). They will be replaced by eight new candidates: four Kenyans and four Ugandans. The last sector was that of Saint Stephan of Maliasaba. It is Fr. Jean-Marie, newly ordained, who animates this community. 400 people attended the Mass in a building still under construction next to an elementary school equally unfinished. Through the joy of its hymns and dances this meeting leaves the memory of a living Church in full expansion.

First Apostolic Nominations

Father Benoît Grière, Superior General, with the consent of his Plenary General Council proceeded with the first apostolic nomination of:

- Bro. KAHINDO SIKWAYA, Jean-Marie (Prov. of Africa)
- KAMBALE KOMBI, Innocent (Prov. of Africa)
- KAMBALE TASI, Augustin (Prov. of Africa)
- KASEREKA KAVUNGA, Emmanuel (Prov. of Africa)
- BERRACHED, Philippe (Prov. of Europe)
- KAMBALE KALONDERO, Matabishi (Prov. of Africa)
- KATSUVA TSONGO, Joseph (Prov. of Africa)
- KATEMBO LUSENGE, Richard (Prov. of Africa)
- MBUSA KALUMBA, Michel (Prov. of Africa)
- MUKWALA MUNNE, Augustin (Prov. of Africa)
- MUMBERE MUPAYA, Jacques (Prov. of Africa)
- NKWER Junior Valentin (Prov. of Africa)
- REYES DELGADILLO, Roberto (Prov. Of NA-Philippines)
- VINDUVIKUMWAWAMUHAWA, Claude (Prov. of Africa)
- WAWERU GICHUKI, Wilson (Prov. of Africa)
- WELIKHA BARASA, Jacob (Prov. of Africa)
- JACOUB, Milad (Prov. of Europe)
- KAKULE MBOKANI, Jean-Marie (Prov. of Africa)
- GODOY VASQUEZ, Manuel Alejandro (Andean Province)

The Reorganization

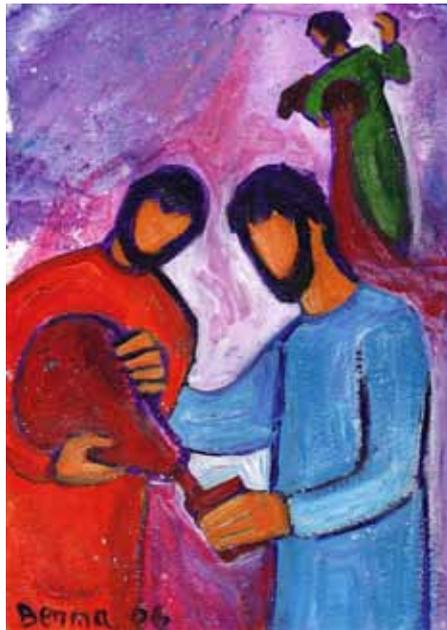
There are words that make one grind one's teeth or grate on the ears like the sound of an un-tuned instrument. The word "reorganization" is one of them. It reeks too much of structure to be accepted by the spirituals. If you add "territorial", some will think it a wound to their integrity. We often forget that the realities we live are moving and that they require permanent readjustments or risk seeing the edifice spring cracks, even collapse like a house of cards. The PGC did not avoid this cruel fact. In the perspective of the coming Chapter, we had to open our tool-box to see if the structure was still solid: how can we foster our communities as living hearths of religious life, well-animated that have the perfume of interior life and fraternity, in brief, the spirit of our Rule of Life of the Assumption. Certainly the sovereign Chapter will be in charge of offering us the directions, but to follow them, we will have to check out if the infrastructure are in good condition. The PGC arrived at a common vision, at a systematic document for a closer and better animation that considers the more fragile zones, but also the developments to be fostered. As in ecology, our Congregation is a common home whose well-being stems from both human and material resources. How can we oversee the autonomy of each part of the house while developing and favoring always more the solidarity of all who live in this common home? That is the challenge. The next Chapter will surely take up the challenge.



*Photo:
The young postulants of Katua (Nairobi, Kenya) under the direction of Father Jacob Baraso, ordained a priest last March met with Fr. Benoît Grière, Superior General and the members of his Council.*

New wineskins for new wine

The next General Chapter is knocking on the door. It does so like a light breeze. And yet, it is surely the Spirit that breathed during this PGC that inspired the theme and the orientations of his preparation for the great rendezvous of May 2017. The theme launched is thus formulated: “New wineskins for new wine”. So that Christ may speak to the men and women of these times. To say that our world is in complete upheaval is a euphemism and in order to answer it, the Assumption wants to pass it through the sieve of conversion, the one that filters the heart to allow it to better translate his charism and to throw himself into the re-founding of an apostolic project that takes up the invitation of Pope Francis “{to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to embrace the future with hope.” With the theme chose, the orientations defined, and the preparatory commission soon constituted, the countdown will



soon begin with the consultation of each religious and of each community.

Who among us has not kept at the bottom of a drawer an old sweater, used, misshapen, with holes, or old over-repaired and over-washed socks, that are just good enough to throw out! It is curious how we sometimes have a hard time to separate ourselves from these old familiar clothes. We remain attached to them without knowing why.

They are for us like a second skin! How difficult it is for us to accept the radical newness of the Gospel! The time has come to reconcile the old and the new, to enter into this interior silence and renouncing all our noises, in opening our hearts to the plans of the Father. We would like to reconcile the old and the new: welcome peace without destroying our armements, build a more fraternal world without putting in jeopardy our goods, march towards holiness without paying the price, welcome the new man without renouncing the old man, welcome the Kingdom without destroying our human frontiers... But in wanting to keep the old and the new, we end by tearing the cloth of our life. The choice is repairing our old cloth, re-vamping our little joys, remaking our old ideologies or making all things new by converting ourselves to the radical newness of the Gospel and of its Kingdom. That is our choice. So, yes: for the new wine, new wineskins.

Africa in the depths of the eye: The conference of Father Elias

To go meet Africa was the objective of the PGC. It needed someone who could help it decode this discovery. Committed for a few years to the reflection on the resolution of conflicts, Father Elias Opongo, Jesuit, allowed it to understand the African reality. His conference entitled: “Contextual Analysis of Africa: a challenge for our mission today” wanted to recall to memory the major orientations of the African Synod and of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*. Today’s Africa balances between two realities: the hope of new horizons and the confrontation with multiple challenges. Here the continent hangs on to a timid discovery of democracy, there to negotiations to permit it to end certain conflicts in a spirit of dialogue. But everywhere conflicts tear the continent apart. Injustice, poverty, unemployment, corruption produce their ravages. In the heart of the cradle of humanity, Fr. Elias tells us how the Church must be prophetic, vigilant and committed to the dialogue everywhere with the local religions and social institutions. Education is making giant steps. Malaria and Aids are retreating. The lifespan is increasing and infant mortality decreasing.



“We must be a prophetic Church, in solidarity with the population, a Church awake and ready to dialogue, present in the hot spots.”

But the violations of human rights remain too numerous and among these the most dramatic is that of the child-soldiers. Everywhere, the Church must explore the paths that lead to justice and peace by the mediators that the Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* mentions. “The youth of Africa is a bomb. It is vulnerable and ready to commit itself in the militias or traffic of all sorts, if we are not careful.” Fr. Elias also underscored. How do we work with the young? The vocation crisis

will be felt. How are we preparing to face this crisis that is on the horizon like a great hurricane? In East Africa, there are 4 million displaced persons, three million are refugees outside their country. During the summer of 2015, there will be a half million to land on the European south coast. It is a crisis of multiple visages that push these people into exile. More than 4 million persons disappear each year, victims of human trafficking. In most cases, they end in prostitution rings and forced labor. The religious extremisms have as a consequence that the young are victims of terrorism. In Kenya and in the RDC, it is Al Shabaab that rages; in Nigeria, it is Boko Haram that enrolls by force.

How do we answer this type of situation? It is important to understand the reasons for this radicalization to remedy it. “We must be a prophetic Church, in solidarity with the people, a Church awake and ready for dialogue, present on the hot terrain.” We must work with the deciders of our world. It is urgent to act where the fate of the populations is played out. The strength of a Congregation is its presence on the terrain. The Assumption cannot miss this rendezvous.