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**INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS
FORMATION.**

**DISCIPLESHIP AND FORMATION:
COMBONI AS A MODEL**

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DEDICATION

To my parents
and to my confreres
with much love and dedication.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material herein has not been submitted for
academic credit to any other
institution.

All sources have been cited in full.

Signed C. C. Besigye

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	i
Student's Declaration.	ii
Acknowledgement.	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Abstract	1
CHAPTER ONE	
0.1 INTRODUCTION	2
1.1 Who is a Disciple?	2
1.2 What is Discipleship?	3
1.3 What is Formation?	6
1.3.1 Religious formation before Vatican II	7
1.3.2 Religious formation during Vatican II	8
1.4 Who is Comboni and Who are Comboni Missionaries	9
1.4.1 Comboni	9
1.4.2 Comboni Missionaries, CM	11
CHAPTER TWO	
2.0 DISCIPLESHP IN THE BIBLE	13
2.1 INTRODUCTION	13
2.2 The Old Testament	13
2.3 The New Testament	16
2.4 Formation of Disciples	17
2.5.1 In the Old Testament	18
2.5.2 In the New Testament	19
2.5.3 The Cost of Discipleship	21

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 COMBONI AS A MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP	25
3.1 His call to discipleship	25
3.2 The cost of his discipleship	27
3.3 Comboni, an Ideal Disciple	34

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 THE FORMATION OF COMBONI MISSIONARIES IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP	40
4.1 Formation of Comboni Missionaries	40
4.1.1 Basic formation	41
4.1.2 On-going formation	42
4.2 Challenges of our formation	43
a) Fear	43
b) Culture	44
c) Discernment	44
d) Large number of Candidates	44
e) Motives	45
f) Parents and Relatives	45
g) Prejudice	45
h) Poverty	46

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, PROPOSALS AND SUGGESTIONS	47
5.1 Summary	47
5.2 Proposals and suggestions	50
5.2 Suggestions	50
a) Family visits	50

b) Worries	51
c) Pressures	52
d) Pressure from benefactors	52
e) Assignments	53
5.3 CONCLUSION	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56

ABSTRACT

This essay argues that to become a disciple, one should be willing to listen, learn and be with the Master. What we have found challenging is to go beyond our human limits and abandon ourselves into the hands of the Master. This helps the disciples to follow the Master in facing whatever difficulties and problems in their Christian life. Daniel Comboni an ideal disciple challenges us in his life to be faithful disciples.

Religious formation should help the Candidates to be themselves, and to avoid pretence. This enables them to grow to Christian and religious maturity.

This work is divided into five Chapters. In Chapter One, we explain the terms *disciple, and discipleship* with emphasis on formation in the formation house. Secondly, we also present Daniel Comboni and Comboni Missionaries.

The second Chapter deals with discipleship in the Bible. We underline discipleship and the formation of disciples in both the Old and the New Testaments. We conclude this Chapter with the cost of discipleship.

The third Chapter presents Comboni as a model of discipleship, his call, and his cost of discipleship and as an ideal disciple for the Christians. This is followed by Chapter four, which deals with the formation of Comboni Missionaries and the challenges of our formation.

The fifth Chapter presents the summary of the previous Chapters with proposals and suggestions regarding the formation.

CHAPTER ONE

0.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Who is a Disciple?

The word 'disciple' comes from the Latin Word *Discipulus*, which means a learner. In general, the term refers to a person who follows his/her master or one who knows better than him or her in order to acquire the same knowledge. It is also used to designate anyone who follows a great movement or leader; thus, the Sacred Scriptures speak of the disciples of Moses, (Jn. 9:28), the Pharisees (Mt. 22:16; Lk. 5:33), and of John the Baptist (9: 14; Mk. 2:18; Jn. 1:35; 3:25).¹ The society considered figures like Moses, the Pharisees and John the Baptist as great people and followed them. However, in the New Testament, the word carries a specific connotation, as we shall see below.

The designation given by the Gospels shows that a disciple is a person called by Jesus, totally committed to him, accepts his teaching and lives by this teaching. A disciple is then linked with or associated with Jesus, especially the historical Jesus. Therefore, when one talks of disciples, according to the Gospel understanding, our minds leap to the twelve who closely lived with the historical Jesus of Nazareth. This concept sometimes extends to the seventy-two followers of Jesus recorded in the New Testament and these included the twelve. According to Melvyn R. Hillmer,

¹ M. L. HELD, "*Disciples*" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia IV*, (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1967), 895.

the disciples in St. John's Gospel are those who responded to Jesus in his earthly life and those who were believers in Jesus when the Gospel was written.²

Without denying the understanding of a disciple expressed in the Gospels or New Testament in general, we have to go beyond the confines of the Gospels. We need to look at a disciple in a broader context as a person who follows his/her master through listening, and reading and then doing what the master does. It cannot necessarily be restricted to having followed the historical Jesus; otherwise the word 'disciple' would be null and void to use today, since we do not have the historical Jesus of Nazareth living in his physical body with us nowadays. Finally, a disciple is a pupil, a learner, and a witness of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection to all nations, and that is effective even today. When we talk of disciples, we are referring to the vocation of all the baptized who have made promises to be followers of Jesus. This wider understanding of a disciple will be discussed under the topic of discipleship.

1.2

What is Discipleship?

Discipleship is a life of commitment that binds one into communion with the demands of one's promises that are to be lived and fulfilled. The four Gospels emphasize different aspects of discipleship. The Gospel of St. Mark emphasizes that discipleship means following Jesus with total surrender to God the Father. Discipleship not only consisted of learning from him, but also in living with him and making a serious and genuine commitment to following in the footsteps of the Master. A similar view is expressed in the Gospel of Matthew where discipleship

² R. N. LONGERNECKER, ed., *Pattern of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 74-75.

was seen as people who were associated with Jesus in his life and who responded to his call for the mission.

St. Luke goes beyond the two and views discipleship in the wider context of involving all the believers in Jesus. His concept of discipleship is characterized by a commitment of lifestyle that is reflected in people associating themselves with Jesus as their Master regardless of the time in which they live. For Luke, what a person does is more important than a person's physical presence next to Jesus. Discipleship is concretely expressed as a commitment to liberate the poor, the imprisoned, the oppressed and the blind from their suffering, and bring them to Christ.

As liberator, Christ stands out as the teacher, model and focus to be followed by all. This does not limit discipleship only to liberation from suffering, but it also involves the accompaniment of all the baptized by their master, Jesus Christ. Discipleship, therefore, means being with Jesus, saying *yes* to his demands, and imitating his compassionate attitude in our relationship with each other.

What is worth mentioning is that discipleship is a call to holiness that is addressed to all. There is no privileged group that can claim more access to holiness than others because of their way of life. Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium* stressed this aspect by asserting that:

The Lord Jesus, divine teacher and model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of his disciples without distinction. The followers of Christ, called by God not in virtue of their good works but by his design and grace,

and justified in the Lord, have been made children of God in baptism through faith and partakers of divine nature, so are truly sanctified.³

What really constitutes the quality of discipleship? The fundamental constituent of discipleship is the invitation of God that is referred to as the call. This call takes different forms and dimensions in the sense of a call to marriage, evangelical religious life, and also a call to leadership; all these calls serve the same purpose when faithfully lived. The quality of being a disciple depends on the total dependence and availability of the individuals to the call.

A person can be called but if the person does not detach himself or herself from the past form of life style to embrace the new life style proposed by Christ, then the quality of his or her discipleship is affected. We have such concrete cases in the Gospel of Luke where people came to Jesus with the intention of becoming disciples but they failed because they remained bound to their previous forms of life⁴.

This implies that there is no qualitative distinction in terms of a call to holiness between the religious life lived according to the evangelical councils and non-religious life. Hence every body is on the same footing in front of Christ responding to the same demands. The qualitative difference is brought about by the degrees of faithfulness to the Lord lived by each individual.

We could say much about the different dimensions of discipleship but our main interest in this paper is the formation of Combonis who are a missionary

³ In Vatican II, by FLANNERY A. "*Sacrosanctum concilium*", 360, no.40.

⁴ H. WEDER, "*Disciple and Discipleship*" in the Anchor Bible: Dictionary, Vol. 2, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 207.

religious congregation. We have, therefore, limited the scope of our discussion on discipleship to religious life, leaving all other dimensions aside.

1.3

What is Formation?

Formation is a process of growth in faith, which leads to, and results in, Christian maturity. It is a journey during which a person becomes aware of God's call and of the radical demands it entails. The person in return responds to this call and these demands with a love and fidelity which never ceases.

Formation can be applied in many different fields. There is religious formation and formation in various areas of one's interest. My interest here is religious formation.

The goal of religious formation is the growth by the power of the Holy Spirit into unity with Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of the Father and into a missionary community; this growth is a life long process, a shared responsibility to be faced both by the individual and the community. In this way, the candidates become capable of carrying out the missionary task of the society: to be witnesses of the gospel of Christ to all by their personal lives, their community living and their preaching, so that Christian communities may be built up.

The means of achieving the goal of religious life usually focus on aspects like human maturity, academic, professional and pastoral maturity, community life and religious maturity.

Throughout this growth process, the aim of formation is to help the candidate follow Christ according to the teaching of the Gospel and to meet Him in their everyday life.

1.3.1 Religious formation before Vatican II

Formation before Vatican II consisted mainly of strictly following rules and laws, without any dialogue. The candidates were placed in a structure that was like a prison, where, any suspicion from the superior of a candidate meant automatic expulsion. Usually this formation did not allow someone to grow into human, religious or Christian maturity.

The formation house was isolated from society, unlike today. Interaction with the people was very much limited and yet they were trained to serve the people. Liturgy and prayers were in Latin; seminarians were dressed in black cassocks, even when playing football. What was important were the structures and not the person, and yet the structures were supposed to be the means to help the candidate to a mature decision in their call, not to imprison them and separate them from the world.

Formation was more on spiritual matters than on any other aspect of life; psychology, and systematic theology were less stressed at that time, leaving people half-baked and ill-equipped to face the demands of the world.

Effective formation needs a wholeness of development of the person as a human being, as a Christian, and as a religious. During formation, the candidate should be given sufficient time to develop his or her growth towards maturity in the psychological, theological and pastoral areas of life.

According to *Vita consecrata* one of the central characteristics of formation that the synod wished to underline was “wholeness”, or formation of the person in every aspect, not concentrating for instance, on spiritual and professional formation to the neglect of the human, the theological and the pastoral⁵.

We are living in a world of science and technology. To many, it seems that there is no stability in one’s life, no balance. Morality seems to be declining at a rapid rate in the society. We often think in terms of the individualistic, and materialistic. It seems that God has no place in people’s hearts. Integration of the human and the Spiritual in our daily life becomes difficult and sometimes it is not evident at all.

We must acknowledge that religious formation is being challenged by the values of the mass media. Formation then becomes a process where a candidate is helped to grow and to develop the spiritual gifts in order to relate to others in a community.

As candidates join the congregation or institute, they come from families with a particular background of religious experiences, culture and personality. They need sincere help to integrate all the aspects of life with the Gospel.

1.3.2 Religious formation during Vatican II

The Vatican II acknowledges the importance of religious formation. The Decree *Optatam Totius* (Decree on formation of priests) states that the formation to

⁵ C. MCGARRY, S.J., *The Consecrated Life: A Simplified Text*, 35.

priesthood must be carefully observed in the case of religious clerics, with the necessary adaptations demanded by the particular character of each institute.

Vatican II stresses the importance of a systematic formation right from post novitiate, according to the character of each institute. For institutes of brothers and for the sisters in institutes dedicated to apostolic work, the formation should cover the entire period of temporary vows, as is the case already in many institutes under the name of Juniorate or Scholasticate.

This formation must be given in houses which are suitable for the purpose. Formation must not be merely theoretical but should be also practical, involving for their educational value, various activities and duties which fit in with the character and circumstances of each institute.⁶

1.4 Who is Comboni and Who Are Comboni Missionaries?

1.4.1 Comboni

Daniel Comboni was born on the 15th March in 1831 at Limone sur Garda, northern Italy. The following day he was baptized with the name of Anthony Daniel, but he preferred to be called Daniel. His father was Luigi, and his mother Domenica. They had eight children. Only Daniel survived to an adult age. On the 20th February 1843 he was received at Verona by the Servant of God, Fr. Nicholas Mazza, who educated him for the priesthood and missionary life in his own institute.

⁶ Vatican II, by A. FLANNERY, *Norms for Implementing the Decree on the up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life*, 631.

At the age of 17, when sure of his vocation to priesthood, he desired to consecrate himself to the missions of central Africa, though his first contact with the missionary work of the Church was the life of the Japanese martyrs written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori.

As a consequence he oriented himself towards his future apostolate. Among other subjects, he studied Arabic, Spanish, French and English. Ordained priest on 31st November 1854, he dedicated himself to those suffering from cholera in Verona.

The decisive year for his missionary life was 1857, three years after his ordination. At the end of a retreat, Fr. John Marani of the stigmatine Society assured him that he certainly had a missionary vocation for Africa. With all the courage of an Apostle, he was able to face the painful separation from his parents who remained behind, poor and alone; he decided to leave for Africa on September 6th 1857 as a member of the Mazza Institute expedition.

Fr. Comboni reached the Holy Cross mission station in present Southern Sudan on the 14th February the following year. It was here that Comboni, in all the intensity of his apostolic enthusiasm, had his first living contact with the black African world.

Comboni had felt the desire to embrace missionary life when he was 15 and had read a book about the martyrs of Japan. He thought that country could have been his Promised Land, but during his early years in the Mazza Institute his missionary desire was clarified and it was the environment of the institute which allowed this to happen.

One of Mazza's former pupils, Fr. Angelo Vinco, had a chance of sharing his personal experience about Sudan in Mazza College. This experience touched the feelings of Comboni so much that in his diary, he links it to the birth of his missionary vocation.

1.4.2

Comboni Missionaries, CM

The Comboni Missionaries of the Heart of Jesus are an international congregation, a community of brothers whether priests or lay people, called by God and consecrated to him through the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience for missionary service in the world, and it arises from the apostolic zeal of Bishop Daniel Comboni. Its charism is directed towards the "poorest and most abandoned of the universe". Comboni Missionaries intend to bring Christ and his Church to those human groups to whom God directs them. This is in conformity with the spirit of the founder. In this way, the Comboni Missionaries can put into action God's marvelous plan for the salvation of all people.

All Combonis share the same life with equal rights and duties except those deriving from the Sacrament of Orders. The Missionaries make a life-long commitment to missionary service. Their profession of the evangelical counsels offers them a more stable way of life in order to develop their missionary commitment.

Through their evangelical counsels, which lead to the perfection of charity, the Comboni Missionaries are united in a special way to the church and her mystery. Their life becomes therefore a concrete witness to the unbreakable bond that unites

Christ to the church, and an expression of that love which urges the Church to spread the Kingdom of God to the farthest corners of the world.⁷

By their community life, the Comboni Missionaries witness to that new brotherly community in the Spirit, which they are sent to proclaim and to make present among the peoples they evangelize. They constitute an international congregation that is composed of people from four continents, Europe, Africa, America, and Asia in which they work presently. The variety of cultures of the different countries enriches one another thus rendering their evangelizing efforts more complete and effective.

Their charism derives from the charism of their founder Comboni. Hence they choose the poorest and most abandoned of the universe, especially in the matter of faith, and with a special concern for Africa. The unbreakable link with Africa is a part of Comboni's personal charism, it being tied to a particular moment in history. From its very foundation the congregation was called to work for the evangelization of Africa, as long as there exists the need for evangelization, in the continent.

The Comboni Missionaries remain faithful to their choices, preferring "the poorest and most abandoned" with a wise interpretation of the signs of the times and openness to the guidance of the Spirit. Their pastoral action tries to be relevant to the people and the times by responding to the particular situations in which they work.

Presently there are about 3000 Comboni Missionaries, priests, brothers, and professed students bringing Christ's love, mercy and charity to many people in nearly 40 countries.

⁷ Vatican II, A. FLANNERY, *Lumen Gentium* 44, 403.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 DISCIPLESHIP IN THE BIBLE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

As already mentioned in the first chapter, discipleship is a broad term that encompasses all the baptized who commit themselves to follow Christ in the new way of life he has offered. This chapter examines the unique character of Christian discipleship from the biblical perspective. The Old Testament lays for us the foundation of Christian discipleship of belonging to Yahweh, which is fulfilled in Christ and realized by his promise to humanity of a new life, lived in the spirit.

This call to new life is the essence of Christian discipleship and it entails the formation of new communities who walk in the footprints of the Lord. Religious formation, therefore, refers to the change from old ways of life in order to put on the new way in Christ. This radical change is what brings about the cost of discipleship. Our main focus here is the concept of discipleship and its formation both in the Old and New Testaments plus the costs involved.

2.2 The Old Testament

Strictly speaking, the word “disciple” belongs to the terminology of the New Testament applied to the seventy two who followed Christ more generously than any other average believer but not as closely as the twelve⁸. We cannot find direct

⁸ M. L. HELD, “Disciples” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia IV*, (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1967), 895.

treatment of the themes of discipleship in the Old Testament as such, while on the other hand, we cannot even talk of discipleship independently of the history of the people of the Old Testament. All the themes of discipleship in the New Testament fulfill the promises of the Old Testament. Bearing this in mind, we have to make it clear right from the beginning of this section that we are only going to transfer the meaning and application of the terminology of discipleship from the New Testament into the relevant themes that are found in the Old Testament.

As mentioned before, the fundamental quality of discipleship is the call to follow the master. When we look at the books of the Old Testament, we find that they are full of the covenant-theme, which means that they talk of a call to build a close relationship between Yahweh and his people. The content of the covenant is an invitation for people to come and follow Yahweh as their God ready to lead them. Therefore, our focus in the Old Testament is on the covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people as a call to follow him. Since a disciple is one who is called to follow Christ, the people of the Old Testament were called to follow Yahweh as their only God who gave them both life and the destiny of their life.

The concrete examples of such themes in the Old Testament are highlighted first in the book of Genesis. This all started with the story of creation where man and woman were created and were supposed to follow the orders of Yahweh to collaborate in the creation activity with him. This basic purpose of the creation of humanity was not easy for human beings to follow; hence Yahweh started choosing specific persons to accomplish the vocation of humanity.

In the light of this, we see Abraham who was called to leave his country and go to a place God would show him. This marked the beginning of God's intention to

call Israel as his chosen people and make them disciples to other nations to renew the covenant. He did not only stop with the call of Abraham, for in *Exodus*, he called Moses to liberate Israel from slavery. In the Exodus experience, Yahweh revealed himself to Israel as their only God who would guide them and deliver them through Moses.

God also intervened in the lives of his people through prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel. All these were the attempts made by Yahweh to establish a fresh covenant with his people by calling them to follow him as their only savior and God. Through the prophets, Israel was chosen as the light to the nations. This is an explanation of what discipleship means in the Old Testament. It is a people following a calling in life that leads them to their final destiny and it is done through mediation.

The individualization of this principle is found dramatically presented in the Book of Job, and in the lives of the prophets. The story of Jeremiah's vocation is dominated by it: 'To all to whom I send you, you shall go and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says Yahweh.' (Jer. 1:7-8).⁹

These were people directly called by Yahweh and he made promises of being with them during the execution of their duties. This is the group that prefigured the twelve disciples of Christ in the New Testament who were directly called by Christ to be his close companions. The second category included the collective call of nations as the chosen race to lead others and this prefigured the seventy two Disciples of the New Testament. In the Book of Deuteronomy, Israel is described as

⁹ J. F. Moloney, *Discipleship and Prophets: A Biblical Model of the Religious Life*, 134.

the holy nation that has been chosen by Yahweh as his people for his own possession out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth.¹⁰

These are the groups we would describe today as the prophets of the Old Testament. This term is only taken in the technical sense of the word discipleship applied in the New Testament without disregarding the fact that the whole of humanity is called to follow and build communion with Yahweh. This universal call of humanity to follow Christ is clearly expressed in *Genesis* where Adam and Eve were called to be co-workers with the Lord to fulfill his plans for creation.

2.3

The New Testament

Turning to the New Testament, discipleship is again mostly linked with Jesus of Nazareth and this means that the people of the New Testament understood discipleship as a special and intensive relationship with the earthly Jesus¹¹. The verb used means to 'walk behind' or 'to follow' somebody.

The verb characterizes the central quality of existence as a disciple. All 261 references to "Discipleship" in the New Testament are found in the Gospels and Acts. The emphasis clearly lies in the Gospels, inasmuch as only 10 percent of the references occur in Acts. The case is like that of the word *akolouthein* "to follow after": Of the 90 occurrences, 79 are found in the Gospels, the rest in Acts (4), Revelation (6), and 1Corinthians (1). This discovery already indicates that discipleship is a phenomenon, which demonstrates a close association with Jesus himself.¹²

¹⁰ J. F. MOLONEY, *Discipleship and Prophets: A Biblical Model of the Religious Life*, 49.

¹¹ H. WEDER, "Disciple and Discipleship" in the Anchor Bible: Dictionary, Vol. 2, 207.

¹² Ibid.

The basic concept expressed here is that one is made a disciple when Jesus calls him/her to follow him. Jesus takes the initiative while the individuals only respond to Jesus' call. The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience.¹³ Jesus called his disciples simply by saying, 'follow me' and this phrase appears 20 times in the Gospels alone. In Matthew, the phrase appears six times as follows: Mt. 4: 19; 8: 22; 9:9; 10: 38; 16: 24; 19: 21; In Mark, it appears 4 times: Mk. 1: 17; 2: 14; 8: 34; 10: 21; In Luke, it appears 4 times: Lk. 5: 27; 9: 23; 9: 59; 18: 22; In John, it appears 6 times: Jn. 1: 43; 10: 27; 12: 26; 13: 36; 21: 19; 21: 22

In all these calls, Jesus takes the initiative to invite people to follow him. This is the same thing that people refer to even nowadays when they talk of religious life. Jesus is the fullness of God's revelation that started way back in the Old Testament. The disciples described, in the technical sense of the term used in the New Testament, are the 72 followers of the historical Jesus that included the twelve who were his closest companions.

2.4

Formation of Disciples

The formation of disciples in the Bible cannot be described according to the standards of the style of formation we have today. The biblical formation had its own unique trends presented both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament had its own approach quite different from the approach of the New Testament. We shall, therefore, discuss the two separately.

¹³ D. BONHOEFFER, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 48.

2.5.1

In the Old Testament

There were no formal lessons provided for the formation of the disciples. It was a kind of contract made by Yahweh in terms of promises that moulded and guided the disciples. The formation was a matter of dialogue between Yahweh and the disciple and each style of formation was conditioned by the particular need. The disciples had no seclusion for formation, but they were instead formed on the task. Yahweh explained the situation to the individuals whom he called and at the same time promised to do all that was needed to accomplish the mission.

On the part of the disciples, they were only asked to trust and have faith in the Master and follow him. There was enough room for those being called to express their limitations to Yahweh and the Lord continued to explain to them what they were supposed to do, on their part. *This mutual dialogue between subject and Yahweh consisted their formation for ministry*

The unique character of this Old Testament formation was manifested in the conditions that were agreed upon between Yahweh and people of Israel. Taking Israel as the chosen nation, Yahweh promised to remain their God if they remained faithful to him. The nature of the formation was based on *if you do this, then I will do that*. The effectiveness of this formation depended on the faithfulness of the one called. The formation was based on the interaction of *call* on the part of Yahweh and *response* on the part of Israel.

For instance, God called Abraham and promised him descendents but he would only get this reward if he left his country and went to the Promised Land. In Exodus, Moses demands surety for people to believe that his message was really from

Yahweh and he was given a series of miraculous powers to confront the pharaoh of Egypt. Miracles play some role in the formation of disciples in the Old Testament. This could be seen better in the sense of building the community of Israel as a nation through miraculous acts. Israel kept demanding miracles in their exodus experience and they saw this as the presence of the power of God in their lives that could make them trust and follow Yahweh. Knowing that Israel was stubborn, the prophets demanded a sign to convince Israel and this was the longed- for miraculous act or intervention.

What we have seen in the miracles is the fact that they caused fear and inspired trust in the Yahweh who was perceived by Israel to be a powerful God who could liberate them from enemies. The miracles then drew Israel nearer to Yahweh. In spite of all these, it was only when one condition was fulfilled that the resultant promise would take place or occur. Yahweh had promises for Israel that would only be actualized when Israel had fulfilled the condition prescribed for her.

2.5.2

In the New Testament

The formation of disciples in the New Testament was quite different from that of the Old Testament. It was characterized by a call to come to be with, and to see what the Master was doing. There were no *if* conditions laid down in order to determine one's discipleship. Jesus' school of formation for the disciples was simply to be with them, and participating in all their life activities. It was a formation of life witness where the students could see and copy what the Master was doing.

As in the Old Testament, the formation was characterized by learning “on the task”, learning by doing. The method used was *see and act*. This meant seeing what Jesus was doing and the disciples imitated him to reproduce the same activity or work. The most important element of the New Testament formation was first, the call. This was followed by the response of obedience. This was an act of obedience simply because there was no pre-knowledge of Jesus that could have evoked in them the act of faith.¹⁴ It was this act of obedience nourished by the formation programme of witnessing what Jesus was doing that produced in the disciples their faith in Jesus.

In today’s theological terminology, we would say that Jesus used *the method of insertion* to form his disciples. He spent his public life moving all over with the disciples, proclaiming the reign of God among the people. He was not only proclaiming the message of God but also teaching his disciples the ministry they were called to participate in. At the end of his intimate stay with the twelve, St. Matthew tells us that the risen Jesus commanded his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28: 19).

The disciples learnt by walking after Jesus. They gained their knowledge and sense of mission by being with Jesus (Mk. 3: 14). This is the importance of the physical connotation of the verbs *to follow* or *to come after*. The disciples, right from the first moment, as we can see from the close link between Mark 1: 14-15 and 1: 16-20, are not just *with Jesus* but they are closely associated with all that he has come to do.¹⁵

¹⁴ D. BONHOEFFER, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 49.

¹⁵ J. F. MOLONEY, 141.

The universal call to holiness is lived under different forms and demands of life but leading us to the same God. There is the general call of all the baptized to follow Christ while this is sometimes lived in specific forms of life as we had discussed before. Among all other forms of Christian life, is the call to religious life that is lived with its specific condition. This is lived by practicing the evangelical life of poverty, chastity and obedience to him who calls us to the life. The *Vita Consecrata* says that the vowed life means we consciously choose with the help of the Lord to live as single persons for Christ, and we share our love with all the people of God.

We need a lot of catechesis to understand and embrace this form of life, but in the gospels, Jesus only commanded his disciples to leave all they had and treasured, and follow him. This does not mean that they were called to a better form of life but were chosen for a specific task that needed only this condition. This is the aspect we are going to discuss in the next chapter when we shall look at the formation of Comboni Missionaries. Jesus lays the foundation of religious life through the call of the twelve that abandoned not only their old riches but also the old form of life, and followed him.

2.5.3 **The Cost of Discipleship**

Discipleship is a commitment to a new form of life that entails a life long relationship with Jesus. This includes the participation in the uncertain life of a travelling preacher and then also in the suffering and death of the teacher.¹⁶ The word *die* already sounds negative and painful. As Jesus says, unless the grain of

¹⁶ H. WEDER, 200.

wheat dies, there will be no new life. The death endured in discipleship is a passage to new life and it opens us into the glory of God. The aspect of dying to oneself is the first cost of discipleship and unless a person experiences this, the person cannot have the taste of the life of Christ. To live in the love of Christ means whatever form of life we were used to must be replaced with what Jesus is proposing to us now.

The second aspect of the cost of discipleship is the fear to open up and surrender our lives to new situations. We are afraid of new challenges and we want to avoid the challenges by remaining within ourselves. It may be a genuine fear of not wanting to lose what we have and what we are now, to changes that can bring trouble to us. But such attitude still cannot make us grow and we shall always remain babies in the wombs of our confines.

The Gospel is quite clear on the terms that make a person to be a disciple. To be a disciple of Jesus, one must be willing and ready to surrender and abandon one's father, mother, children and previous form of life. It is not only enough to abandon oneself but one must also take up his or her cross to follow Jesus. (Cf. Mt. 10:37ff and Lk. 14: 26ff). Like their master, the disciples had to leave their homes and had no place to lay their heads. They were not even dispensed to go and care for their aging fathers and mothers. (Mt. 8: 19f). The bible story expresses different types of costs of discipleship that becomes a necessary step to salvation.

In the Old Testament, we have the example of Abraham who was asked to leave his country, land, animals and his father's house and his kindred. One can imagine what option he was left with! He was asked to go to a strange place, which he did not know. Abraham's life was exposed to risk. In human eyes, we would say that Abraham was stripped of all that he was, and left helpless without the security

of wealth, shelter and human friendship. All these were replaced with promises that Yahweh would fulfill but the terms of the promises sounded unreal. Abraham was promised many descendants while he was already in his old age without any single child. But his great faith in the Lord made him embrace all this in spite of the fact he really did not know what the future life would be like.

There is also what we call our own created costs in discipleship. This is basically caused by our own fear of losing the prophetic vision, and thus we tend to compromise. We are afraid to speak the truth or get involved in fighting for the truth when we know that it is risky, forgetting that life itself is a risk to be lived. Such cases include our refusal to be involved in the fight for justice and peace. There is also lack of proper motivation in the process of formation where our hidden agenda is reevaluated. For instance, a person may desire to follow Christ with hidden motives such as education, living in good a house, and forgetting the demands of life itself. We are convinced that a disciple needs to be free from obligations to their families and their society insofar as possible. Once Jesus said to a man 'Follow me' but he answered 'Let me go and bury my father'. Then Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their dead'. Mt. 8: 22.

It is not easy to love, because love involves sacrifice. A person who loves usually makes sacrifices in the interest and for the sake of the other. This is seen in all the people who have followed God in their lives. For instance Abraham had to leave his country, his people and environment to follow God who leads him to a new country. In his leaving he left behind many things to which he was personally attached, but this was the sacrifice that he had to make to follow God.

In the New Testament, the disciples of Jesus had to abandon all they had achieved and were doing, to follow the Master. We could reflect on the example of the sons of Zebedee, Peter and John, who at the call of the Master left their finishing nets, families and followed Jesus. Usually the content of discipleship is love; without it, it becomes impossible to be a committed disciple. The disciple needs to love every one without discrimination, though we are humans who are weak and in the process of growing. We find it hard to love every body and this costs us a lot if we want to be faithful disciples. Normally we are attached to certain persons thus having an exclusive love. This contradicts the love of Jesus that embraces everybody. As true disciples we are invited to reproduce Jesus' love that includes all people without exception. This is very costly in the sense that it is often difficult.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 COMBONI AS A MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP

3.1 His call to discipleship

Comboni's call to discipleship was certainly a product to the era in which he grew up.

The 18th and 19th centuries introduced great changes in Europe. It was the age of rationalism in which there was the need of explaining religion in a way consonant with reason, or treating reason as the ultimate authority in religion. It was also the time when scientific advances were making people question what they believed. Shortly after Comboni's birth, Europe experienced what was known as *the year of revolution* in 1848. Germany and Italy were struggling to become unified nations. In England, the Industrial Revolution was taking place. It was during this period that the gap between the poor and the rich was daily widening. It was the period when workers were maltreated; and while slavery was on the decline on the east Atlantic seaboard, its evil effects were everywhere obvious. Many Sudanese slaves were destined for the factories of England. Comboni's concerns were the enslavement of the Sudanese in Europe and America. It was also the period when independent nationalist movements were springing up in Latin America. Of course Africa was not spared simply because "the nations of Europe were venturing into the Continent and struggling for influence there".¹⁷

¹⁷ B. WARD, *A Heart for Africa*, 5.

It was also the time when the wealth of England and USA grew at the expense of the slaves especially of those slaves that were deported from Sudan. Great upheavals were taking place in the world especially in Africa. Living at that time, one was also destined to be part of the upheaval. It was in this situation that Comboni's discipleship and missionary concern for Africa came to the surface.

Comboni's response as a disciple to this situation was clear and precise.

In 1865 Comboni wrote to a friend: "Bear in mind that I cannot live except for Africa and what concerns Africa. The pitiful wretchedness of the poor Africans weighs most heavily on my heart and there is no sacrifice that I would not be ready to accept for their sake".¹⁸

In a letter he wrote to Cardinal Barnabo, he said the following; "If your Eminence does not approve one plan for Africa, I will draw up another; if you do not accept this, I will prepare a third, and so on until my death".¹⁹

These convictions and many others like the situation in which he grew up, the satisfaction which he found in reading about the martyrs of Japan and in dreaming of doing similar things; all informed his missionary vision. It is however important to note that it was not out of a spirit of adventure that Comboni's desire arose but out of a specifically missionary spirit to discipleship.

Influenced by the lives and deaths of the Japanese martyrs, Comboni felt that he too wanted to be a martyr. Gradually this desire was clarified when he became aware that it was not a question of martyrdom; a missionary needed the same type of

¹⁸ A. GILLI, *Daniel Comboni, the Man and his Message*, 36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

consecration to God as martyrdom. This desire found its fulfillment in Sudan as a Disciple of Christ, a missionary.

It was in 1857, that Comboni made his first journey with six other missionaries to Central Africa where he moved deep into Southern Sudan to a place known as Holy Cross Mission.

As a missionary and a disciple, Comboni's immediate task was to make the cry of the Africans heard in Europe.

3.2 The cost of his discipleship

Christian discipleship always involves suffering and the cross, and this is very obvious in the life of Daniel Comboni. We are created to enjoy life but we are surrounded by difficulties. It is impossible for a human being to live without problems as a consequence of original sin. Suffering, therefore, becomes a part of our life. Suffering can also occur for the common good, and in order to attain what we are longing for, we have to undergo suffering. Discipleship has its own goodness as well as its difficulties. Following Christ has its own demands. As Jesus and his disciples went on their way, a man said to him "I will follow you wherever you go" (Lk 9:57). Probably this person wanted to follow Jesus, but he did not know the situation in which Jesus was living. Jesus answered the man "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:58). In following Jesus one must accept any situation of life, be it hardship or happiness.

People may desire to follow Christ with a hidden motive, such as education, having an easy life, forgetting the demands of life itself. I am, however, convinced

that the disciples need to be free from these attachments to their families and society for Jesus.

“When Christ calls a person”, says Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “he bids him/her come and die”.²⁰ There are different kinds of dying, it is true; but the essence of discipleship is contained in those words.

As Christian disciples, we must have the spirit of readiness and perseverance. Jesus tells us “Whoever puts his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God”(Lk 9: 62). The disciples are to be associated with the poor, the sick, the dispossessed, the outcast, the handicapped, and deformed (Lk 14: 18-19), and they are to love even their enemies (Lk 4: 18-19).²¹ It is in this context, that I am going to talk about the cost of discipleship in the life of Comboni.

For Comboni, to leave his parents, being the only surviving child out of eight children and go to a Mission in Africa, is seen as his first sacrifice in following Christ. Writing to the parish priest of Limone he says:

There is a great turmoil in me. As I have sometimes told you, I feel that I want to follow the difficult career of a missionary. And for the last years I have been thinking of Central Africa... but I am concerned about my old parents. If I give up the idea of the foreign missions then I'll be a martyr for the rest of my life because of the desire which has been in me since I was fourteen. However, if I go to the missions, I'll make martyrs of my parents.²²

²⁰ D. BONHOEFFER, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 7.

²¹ T. KENNEDY, *Doers of the Word: Moral Theology for Humanity in the Third Millennium* Vol 1, 308.

²² B. WARD - A. MONDINI, *He Lived only for Africa: The Life of Bishop Daniel Comboni*. 3.

In deciding to become a missionary, he knew that he was adding an extra pain to his parents, who would lose him to Africa and never see him again.

Another cost of discipleship was his disagreement with the Superiors of Mazza institute; he had to painfully disagree with the Superiors to buy his way to Africa. Comboni never used the *cheap grace* in giving in to the demands of his Superiors, but relied on *costly grace* as a cost of discipleship.

Comboni thinks that in the midst of this serious conflict of his ideas, it would be wise to make a retreat so as to seek light from God. In fact after his retreat he says the following: "Having taken counsel (sic) from God and from men, I believe that the idea of the missions is my true vocation...Fr. Marani, my spiritual director, has told me that, having had a clear picture of my life...he can assure me that my vocation to the African missions is the clearest and most evident that he has ever seen".²³

Comboni needed this confirmation of his vocation from God by making the retreat. To Comboni, this advice seemed not only a heavenly guarantee of his vocation, but it was a solid motivation for his whole life journey, with the trials that were eventually to come his path. What this sacrifice meant in reality for Comboni and his parents came true to him when news of his mother's death reached him five months after the fact. Before receiving news of his mother, Comboni had witnessed the death of his colleague, Oliboni, after only five weeks in Holy Cross Mission. These two deaths were the kind of events, which led Comboni to see that being a missionary was a kind of martyrdom.

²³ B. WARD - A. MONDINI, *He Lived only for Africa: The Life of Bishop Daniel Comboni*, 3.

Comboni made sense of his loss by seeing life as a reliving of the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. His ability to see the Lord in these events of his life meant that he felt the Lord was with him in these happenings. For Comboni, it was not the pain of the Cross, which was important, but its power. He saw the “Cross as the summit of Golgotha, which filled the universe with the power and strength to transform Central Africa into the land of blessing and salvation ... From the Cross there comes a strength which does not kill, which comes down on souls and renews them like a refreshing dew”.²⁴ The second cost of his discipleship is known as *the year of death*. Many of his missionaries were affected by a violent fever that broke out all over Sudan. People fell sick and died within an hour. In less than six months, eight of his missionaries had died including two of the newly arrived sisters; and those who did not die were infected, including Bishop Comboni. He was struck more by the deaths of his beloved missionaries than by fever.

A week before his death, Comboni writes a report to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda, in which he described how the mission was being transformed into a cemetery by the deaths of the missionaries. Yet he was still able to see everything in the light of the Cross, a sign of love and of redemption:

I was right when I gave orders for the catafalque to be left intact after the office and Requiem Mass for the three whose deaths I mentioned in my last letter. This morning the lay-brother, Paul Scandi of Rome, died of typhoid fever in a most edifying way... As I write, Father Francis Pimazzoni has asked me for the last sacraments; as regards true piety and sanctity he is certainly the first in the mission, and has also admirable good sense and talent... So we have begun to pray most

²⁴ B. WARD - A. MONDINI, *He Lived only for Africa: The Life of Bishop Daniel Comboni*, 13.

fervently to St. Joseph, ardently begging him that Fr. Francis should not die. Fr. Baptist Fraccaro, my future Vicar- General, immediately after the funeral and after having been with the dying Brother all night, as he was his confessor, had to take to his bed with a fever. My God! Always crosses! But when Jesus gives us the cross he loves us; all these crosses weigh terribly on my heart; but they also increase its strength and courage in fighting the Lord's battles, because God's works have always been born and grown like this; the church was founded in the blood of God made man, the apostles and the martyrs.²⁵

The life of Comboni was full of set backs and crosses but also full of hope and joy as he was aware of Jesus accompanying him. Another cost in following Christ came about when *Propaganda Fide* betrayed him by redefining the boundaries of the Vicariate that it had entrusted to him. A big part of it was given to Archbishop Charles Lavigiére; this caused great pain to Comboni, as he felt distrusted by *Propaganda Fide*. He expresses his anguish in the following terms:

Naturally, it is understood that this (that is the previous consultations) is not a duty of Propaganda, but a prudent custom, because Propaganda is absolutely free to give and to take and to do what it wishes, without listening to or consulting anyone. Now, should Your Eminence or the Sacred Congregation believe me to be mistaken in my judgment or not to have judged rightly; and should Your Eminence and Propaganda think that the decisions concerning the four above-mentioned Pro-vicariates are well and judiciously made, then at once I beat a retreat and I say with all my heart: *a sinus ego*, and I readily

²⁵ D. COMBONI, *The Letters and the Writings* Nn. 7223-25, 2116.

acknowledge that the action of your Eminence and the Sacred Congregation is very well, wisely and prudently taken.²⁶

One wonders why Comboni should feel pain when a vast vineyard has been divided up in order to make the harvest easier? Doesn't this prove to us a weakness in him? Shouldn't we rejoice when our burdens of endless journeys to cover the vast territory has been halved? This however shows that saints were also weak human beings.

Sudan had meanwhile been hit disastrously by famine, and this resulted in many more deaths of missionaries; another cost of discipleship. Comboni expresses his deep affliction and sorrow. In this situation however he stands firm in his vocation and perseveres more than ever with the cry *Africa or death*. Writing to Rome during the same period he said: "I am writing only a few lines because I am worn out by fevers, difficulties, fatigue and a heavy heart. I am determined, as I have been for these last thirty years to suffer everything and give my whole life a thousand times for Central Africa".²⁷

The last of the costs of discipleship to Comboni was paid when he became the object of many false accusations in Europe. These accusations were in relation with Sr. Virginia Manzur and Mother Bollezzoli. Virginia asked to become a Verona Sister when her own order withdrew from the Sudan. She had been sent to Verona where she taught Arabic. Because of her long missionary experience she became the object of great jealousy.

²⁶ D. COMBONI, *The Letters and the Writings* Nn. 6760-6761, 1971.

²⁷ B. WARD, *A Life of Bishop Daniel Comboni*, 48.

Comboni reproached the attitude of the sisters who chased Virginia away, since it was an advantage for them to have a teacher of Arabic in the Institute. However, the interest shown by Comboni in the case was misunderstood. Some of his critics questioned the quality of his relationship with Virginia. This woman, who had already worked for twenty years as a missionary, had asked to join Comboni's Institute when her own order withdrew from the Sudan. He accepted her and defended her. This provoked such opposition to him that he became increasingly ill.

He expresses his anger and suffering in the letter he wrote to Father Sembianti:

The other day I received the mail and this brought me the very greatest anxiety and pain, far surpassing all the afflictions God has sent me since 1878. In fact, I had to take to bed for a full three days and who knows when I will be able to breathe again. The missionaries think that the trouble is backache, because I am tired after the explorations I have been making on horseback. But the true cause, known only to God and to me, is a deep and fearful affliction, which surpasses all the humiliations I have been subjected to, and all the injustices and hurt I have to suffer. But I am altogether not too unhappy. Jesus will certainly help me, the Immaculate Virgin and St. Joseph will help me. But my heart is petrified. But Africa will be converted and Jesus will help me to carry the Cross.²⁸

Following the example of Comboni, his followers cannot ignore the lessons he gave us on how to face the great sacrifices and crosses that we encounter on our journey following Jesus.

In all these costs of discipleship in the life of Comboni, one thing was clear; the suffering Christ was present in the life of Comboni but so too was the risen Lord.

²⁸ D. COMBONI, *The Letters and the Writings*, Nn. 6790; 6795-6, 1982.

Hope, affection for people, joy in the world around him, are some of the ways in which Comboni met the risen Lord in his own life as a missionary.

3.3

Comboni, an Ideal Disciple

As already discussed in the previous Chapters, a disciple is a person who follows the master while an ideal is that perfect example which stands out as a challenge to mould and encourage others in pursuing the values in question. It is in this sense that we are going to talk about Comboni as an ideal disciple who faithfully followed Christ closely in all the events of his life despite the challenges he encountered.

The focus is not on his successes and achievements but rather on the zeal with which he fought all the challenges of his time to follow Christ. We look at his example to challenge us to realize and bear witness faithfully to Christ in the encounters, experiences and events surrounding our world today.

The problems and challenges that Comboni encountered in his time were unthinkable in the early centuries. The first Christians only heard the word of Christ preached to them by the apostles and disciples and they continued to nourish it through the liturgical celebrations. There were no questions of analyzing the contents of their beliefs. It was a total submission to the spirit of Christ working in them.

The fruit of this was the beginning of the consecrated life in the early centuries without any drama of education. We had the virgins and ascetics who came from the Christian communities to embrace a special manner of life to follow Christ. They

started to live a private life but with time, the Church felt the need for them to live in communities with special regulations for the welfare of the entire Christian communities. This was the beginning of the monasteries. The underlying principle that produced this success and development in the early church was the open attitude of the people to the word and Spirit of Christ. It was a question of believing what you heard and fully trusting in the Spirit of the Lord.

This was no longer the common practice at the time of Comboni. Beginning from the 16th Century, the Christian faith met the challenge of rationalism that swept the whole of Europe. It was no longer believing what you heard but rather believing what you understood. The individual was placed at the center of life at the expense of the community. Each one started fighting for his/her own good without paying attention to the effects on others. This was the society in which Comboni grew up and lived. There were a lot of injustices and oppression of the powerless and voiceless. He focused on the situation of the Africans who were oppressed and taken to Europe to work as slaves. It was not a question of people moving freely to Europe for greener pastures but they were deported to Europe to work as servants who deserved no pay for their labour. In all this, Comboni saw the face of the suffering Christ in the lives of the people.

Today, we still have similar situations. Take the case of slums, street children, and workers in our communities, in the government, and the voiceless children and women. Do we have any sense of Christ being persecuted in the lives of these people? With this in mind, we can look at what Comboni did and this will inspire us, in our time, to respond to such similar situations.

Comboni did not simply remain at the level of contemplation and prayer for the situation of Africa to improve, but he publicly made it known in Europe and exposed the evil of the slave trade on behalf of the voiceless Africans. He combined his efforts with those of the abolitionists in Europe to stop the slave trade and oppression of the Africans. Without fear of what the authorities would do to him, he fought for the dignity and rights of every human person before the Lord. This was a great step made by Comboni to transcend continental borders and national interests and see the equality of all persons before God. Comboni's exceptional vision is seen in his positive convictions for Africa and Africans, at a time when Africans were seen as objects of gain. In his time many people, including some Christians in Europe wondered whether Africans were apes or human beings. Some wondered if they had souls!

As ideal disciple we must ask what he would say to us in our societies today, the governments, non-governmental organizations, and super powers who are oppressing and exploiting the poorer of the world. As Christians and Christian leaders, are we afraid to speak out to the right persons? Do we bring it up in our petitions during the Mass and share it indoors in our communities and families only? We have lost the courage and the promises we made at our baptism to bear witness to Christ. The police are killing innocent people daily in Nairobi city, but nobody confronts them. Apart from Comboni, we have persons like Fr. Kaiser, the American Maryknoll father who was killed in 2001. He was killed for political reasons. He was interested protecting young girls who were abused, and of tribal clashes and land victims. He chose the cross rather than go back to America. In our work place

we are caught up in nepotism, racism, favoritism and so on. We do not look at qualities but tribal relations.

In the month of December 2007, in Nairobi, people were instigated by political leaders to kill one other in Kibera slum and we remained watching and following the events at a distance on televisions. More than 60% of the population of Kenya is Christian and we have many religious communities and groups working in Kibera. Where is the witness we promised to Christ? Peter said, "Lord I will not deny you," but when he was arrested, he denied him three times (Lk 23:54-62). Comboni challenges us to be vigilant and stand straight for the rights of each individual whatever it costs.

We don't even look for injustices done outside there, but what about our relationships with our workers in religious communities and parishes? Do we pay them what they deserve, or are they the modern slaves in our societies? What about our casual relationship with the workers, our conversations, our desire to know their family situations and paying personal visit to members of their family. Through baptism, we enter into one big Christian family where we take care of each other. It was by baptism that Comboni realized that the Africans were also his brothers and sisters in Christ and he came down to them in their situation to live with them and share in their joys and sorrows.

Our ideal disciple also confronted the religious superior to let him come to Africa. They were afraid that they would lose him if he came to Africa. Comboni remained strong on the discernment of the movement of the Spirit. He preferred suffering and death for the sake of Christ to human protection. This is where we are caught up with the vow of obedience. We doubt whether we are always obeying the

movements of the Spirit or sometimes the desires and aspirations of our Superiors. Comboni had the strong courage to let go what was precious to him for the love of Christ. He also struggled with the issue of his parents but at last he surrendered them to the Lord. He totally united himself with the family of God and saw everybody as his brother, sister and parents. Jesus Christ teaches us the following: "For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Mt.12: 50). Does this saying of our Lord make sense in today's society, more especially in our religious communities?

Comboni, our ideal disciple, challenges us on the attachments we have to many things: attachment to people, places, parents, cultures and particular kinds of skills and duties. If we are not able to let go then we cannot listen to the movement of the Spirit to direct us in following Christ. Comboni courageously struggled with his health until death without giving up the mission. His confreres died one after another in Africa. He asked for more crosses and these increased for him the graces of God.

To be a good disciple, we need to be flexible, courageous and depend totally on the dreams and plans of God. Our own plans and designs will take us nowhere. Comboni entrusted his mission to the Lord and promised that after his death the mission would still carry on. Today when we see the Comboni missionaries, we confirm his statement. He was only a steward but not the protagonist of the mission work. Though he is gone, the protagonist has got new stewards in his place.

Our ideal disciple greatly treasured the cross in his life. For him Jesus saved humanity through the event of the cross. It is on the cross that evil is defeated. We should not shun crosses and look for easier life or things. The cross is the center of

discipleship. As Comboni always said, “What is important is not the pain of the cross but rather the power of the cross”.

In conclusion, we can say that to be an ideal disciple is not only a challenge to Comboni Missionaries, but also to all the Christians, and in a special way to those who have opted to follow Christ more closely. We can no longer let go situations, events, injustices, and oppressions which overwhelm our society today, but must have courage to speak out and fight the evils that make the human being a slave. Following our ideal disciple, we have to denounce evil and proclaim the good news.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 THE FORMATION OF COMBONI MISSIONARIES IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

4.1 Formation of Comboni Missionaries

A missionary formation is a progressive process of acquiring and assimilating new values related to the project that God has for each one he calls: “It aims at keeping the missionary in his journey towards an experience of God that will permit him to give witness to him with his life. It also enables the missionary to know the people of his time in order to communicate to them the Good News in their own languages, cultures and experiences.”²⁹. Formation helps Candidates to deepen their experience of God and to be able to share this experience with others.

In the Institute of Comboni Missionaries, the formation is basically divided into two block phases:

a) The basic formation that aims at checking, verifying and purifying the initial desires and motivations of the Candidates.

²⁹ Rule Of Life No 81 *Constitutions and General Directory*.

b) The on-going formation that assists the missionary in continuing to verify and confirm his deep-rooted disposition, and adapt to the structures and programme, demanded by the Church.³⁰

4.1.1 **Basic formation**

In verifying and purifying the desires and motives of the Candidates to join the Institute, the basic formation program presents to them the demands and style of life of Comboni missionaries in following Christ in a consecrated form of life. This is based on the identity and specific manner of following Christ derived from the charism of the founder; that is, evangelizing the poorest and most abandoned sections of the society.

To foster efficient growth during the formation period, the Institute has divided the basic programme into three levels and the Candidates are guided to discover their true vocation of bearing witness to Christ in their missionary lives.

The first is the Postulancy, that aims at providing a reasonable degree of human and Christian maturity that will help the Candidates to adapt to missionary identity. If a person shows growth in human and Christian maturity in this stage, then the decision to continue verifying his vocation is commendable.

The second stage is the Novitiate. Here the emphasis is on a deep experience of God in prayer, the meaning and value of consecrated life in the Comboni way lived according to the evangelical counsels, and a deep knowledge of the Institute and the

³⁰ Rule Of Life No. 85 *Constitutions and General Directory*.

founder. Also to be studied are the values and meaning of the vows of Chastity, Obedience and Poverty properly grasped and lived in the Spirit of God revealing himself through them for his own services.

The third stage is the Scholasticate, for future priests, or the International Centers for Brother Candidates to deepen and verify their commitments to the Lord in the Comboni way of life with temporary vows. This now enables the Candidate to affirm his specific identity in the Comboni family before making the final commitment to the Institute. A person must now be able to show or demonstrate, human, Christian and missionary maturity in all the specific identities.

The key to all these stages is objective knowledge of one self and the Institute at large. One must be able to perceive the Comboni Institute as one's family with all its strengths, weaknesses and the demands lying ahead of the person. One should have cultivated some degree of flexibility to accept and realize the different movements of the Spirit in his life through the consolations and desolations experienced.

This means that he should have acquired and assimilated in grace some sense of belonging to the Institute, have greater zeal for mission which is the center of his vocation and be open to a community of cultural diversity and perceive the vows as the means of living this form of life. (In agreement with No. 97 *Rule of Life*)

4.1.2

On-going formation

The basic formation only opens a person to the Comboni way of life but the whole formation is an on-going process as discussed in the previous chapters. This is

now the individual renewal of commitments in the daily living of life to the Lord as directed by the Spirit.

The on-going formation gives the person the possibility of realizing the dynamic movement of the Spirit in his apostolic commitments. It renews the mission to see the new demands of mission according to the environment, situation and the signs of the times.

4.2 Challenges of our formation

a) Fear

Fear may be a big factor, both on the side of the candidates and the Formators. There may be fear of being sent away if one is sincere, and open to talk freely about his weakness, and for this reason many Candidates hide their feelings, opinions and desires in order to reach the end. They become yes men and women to their superiors in order to remain in the formation house.

This no doubt destroys the personality of a person and blocks the verification of the motives of wanting to become a missionary. In fact it produces bad effects such as anger, regret later in life, rejection, and strong rebellion when one is out of basic formation.

Another source of fear may be structure; Formators may want to have things run as stipulated or as a part of a bargain and agreement, thus forgetting the uniqueness of individuals. We are called missionaries but with our different talents and gifts.

Some of the fears are brought about by the structures that only give way to a particular form of expressing our Christian living; it becomes even dangerous when

formators do not go beyond the structure to see the feelings and desires of the Candidate. Some formators say: *The General Administration has put up the structure of formation and therefore, no change.* Yet the structure is to guide and help the person be himself or herself, but not to oppress him or her.

b) Culture

People are uprooted from one culture and taken for formation to another culture for missionary work. This normally produces stereotype missionaries who go to new cultures with the mentality of imposing their own ideas and of thinking that they are superior to others. The weaker cultures are overshadowed and killed by stronger cultures, especially those with superior media of communication.

c) Discernment

Formators may be in a dilemma to really see the real movement of the Spirit at work and in discerning the vocation of the Candidates. Lack of openness makes it difficult to enter into the lives of the Candidates so as to assist them positively. Most issues are based on assumptions without any proof or valid reasons. When can formators be certain that their decisions are truly the work of the Spirit?

d) Large numbers of Candidates

Many Candidates followed by too few formators makes it impossible to have a deep interaction with each Candidate. Some Candidates finish their formation without really being formed because the interpersonal relationship with the formators is not there due to the sheer number of Candidates.

e) Motives

Wrong motivation: Some of the Candidates join religious formation with the aim of finishing the formation programme, hoping that once it is finished things will be better in the mission. The motivations should be verified right at the beginning of the postulancy, and not in the Scholasticate as many of our confreres think.

f) Parents and Relatives

There is no proper involvement of the parents and relatives of the Candidates in their formation journey: The relatives and parents have a strong influence on their children. This can distance the process of genuine discernment. Some parents tend to force the children even if the Candidates begin to see a different way of life for themselves. A statement like, “do not disappoint us” makes some Candidates stay and become missionaries even if they realize that it is not their way of life. Direct contact with extreme social problems of one’s family enables the candidates to clarify their motivations for joining the Institute. If the parent’s dependence on their son for material support persists, then it must be respected. In such a case, the Candidate must be helped understand that he cannot continue in the Institute because his parents have no other way to survive except, through him. Parents should be also given a chance to express their feelings on the suitability of their child to religious life.

g) Prejudice

Prejudices on the sides of formators and Candidates based on peoples’ background and personalities block out proper discernment. Who has not heard

remarks like *These people are impossible to live with; they are slaves of the clock!*
Or: *It is impossible to work with them, because they have no sense of time.*
Prejudices are labels that are usually unjust, applying to the whole and to each member of a group what is applicable only to a part. Not only do we pick up prejudices from our surroundings, but also *most of us* tend to put new ones into circulation. One negative experience, with one or two Candidates, can easily lead to extending a judgment to the whole of the group to which they belong.

h) Poverty

Non- African formators should be sensitized to richness of indigenous cultures; they must appreciate the differences between material and cultural poverty and wealth.

The dignity of our Candidates should never be assessed in purely materialistic terms; their indigenous cultures offer them a superior value system.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, PROPOSALS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 SUMMARY

The word *disciple* as described in the Gospel is a person called by Jesus and completely committed to him. We have also seen discipleship as being with Jesus, saying *yes* to his demands, imitating his compassionate attitude in the way we relate with one another.

We saw that discipleship to religious formation is the growth by the power of the Holy Spirit into unity with Jesus Christ, the Incarnate word of the Father and into a missionary community. This growth becomes a life long process that is a shared responsibility of the individual and the community. The formation should facilitate the candidate in the following of Christ according to the teaching of the Gospel.

In order to be effective formation needs the development of the whole person as a human being, as a Christian and religious. The structure should not in any way block the growth and freedom of the Candidate.

i) In the Old Testament we have talked of the covenant, which means a call to build a close relationship between Yahweh and his people. The content of the covenant is an invitation to people to follow Yahweh as their God who leads and guides them. In the New Testament discipleship is linked with Jesus of Nazareth, and indicates a closer association with Jesus himself. One becomes a disciple when Jesus calls one to follow Him. The initiative comes exclusively from Jesus and the individual responds to this call.

ii) Formation in the Old Testament was a kind of contract made by Yahweh in terms of promises that moulded and guided the disciples. It was a matter of dialogue between Yahweh and the disciple and each style of formation was conditioned by the need. The disciples had no seclusion of formation, but instead were formed on the task. The unique character in the Old Testament formation of the disciples was manifested in the conditions that were agreed upon between Yahweh and people of Israel. Formation was based on the condition: *if you do this, then I will do that*. The effectiveness of this formation depended much on the faithfulness of the one called.

In the New Testament, the formation was a call to come to be with, and to see what the master was doing. There were no *if conditions* laid in order to determine one's discipleship. Jesus' school of formation for the discipleship was simply to be with them, participating in all their activities. It was a formation of life witness, where the students could see and copy what the Master was doing. We would say that Jesus used the method of insertion to form his disciples.

iii) The cost of discipleship becomes a commitment to a new form of life, a life long relationship with Jesus. This embraces the full participation in the uncertain life of a traveling preacher and also in the suffering and death of the teacher.

Comboni remain a model of discipleship, especially the way he handled difficult situations in his missionary life. This situation included detachment from family, conflicts... He contributed a lot to stop the Sudanese slaves that were destined for the factories of England.

Comboni stands to challenge us as Christians and religious. All who follow Christ cannot ignore the lessons he gives us on how to face the great sacrifices and

crosses that we encounter on our journey. In all challenges in the life of Comboni one thing was clear; the suffering Christ was present in his life but so too was the risen Lord.

Hope, and affection for the people around him are some of the ways that Comboni met the risen Lord in his own life as a missionary.

This is the challenge that Comboni puts before all the followers of Christ. Comboni remains an ideal disciple who encourages us to follow Christ closely in all the events of our life through the challenges we encounter.

We have seen that the formation of a missionary aims at keeping the missionary in his journey towards an experience of God that will permit him to give witness to him with his life. A missionary is called to know the people of his time in order to communicate to them the Good News in their own language and cultures.

Formation embraces both deep personal experience of God and the sharing of this experience with others. The main issues and challenges we have seen were Basic formation that aims at verifying and purifying the first desires and motivations of the candidates; on-going formation; and challenges of formation, such as fear, culture, discernment, large number of Candidates, motives, parents and relatives, prejudices and poverty.

These challenges should be looked at critically to help us review our formation programs.

5.2

PROPOSALS AND SUGGESTIONS

A Candidate the formators think does not have the missionary vocation should be helped in starting a new form of life or another type of vocation. It has happened many times in the Institute when Candidates have been sent away without any help. Those who managed to go to other Institutes were followed by bad reports and eventually sent away. This is not Christian and has created hatred and enmity between those sent away and the formators, even leading some Candidates to leave the Catholic Church.

It is highly recommended, not only for the formandee, but especially for the family who should feel, as much as possible, members of the new and bigger family which their son or brother is joining. Usually, the links between the congregations and relatives are very weak.

5.2.1

Suggestions

a) Family visits

I would suggest meetings, celebrations and so on with the families and visits by a formator or a confrere to the family. During the holidays especially in the basic formation, (postulancy) there should be a report of formandee's activities by the formators to the family. Their role should not be that of a policeman but in order to assess the continuity of living the life in the formation house and how much the Christian values learned inside the formation house are being shared in the family. It is important to observe how the Candidate is bringing the values of religious life to the family. This could be a source of joy, love and generosity. In this way, it will

facilitate growth in the formandees rather than just roaming around without considering the value of their vocation. This will also give them a sense of belonging as the formandees learn a lot more of community living in their own family. Eventually, it will be very easy for them to adjust to community living in any circumstance.

b) Worries

Attention must be given to candidates' fears and worries. Indeed, Candidates should be helped to confront their fears and anxieties. Some Candidates do have fear in opening up. They think that once their true image is known, they may be misunderstood and eventually dismissed. It is because of this that some Candidates would prefer to live as though nothing is happening in them, and yet they are getting burnt within. For this reason, Candidates should be helped to face their fears and know about the future. Some should be helped confront their anxieties about their future. Some worry about: *What is going to support me financially as a missionary? What will happen if I happen to go far away and my parents get into a serious social problem with no one to help them? What will happen if formators tell me to go?* The fears or the worries of the Candidate should be one of the main points to be given attention in the formative process. But they should have the freedom to express freely themselves, an aspect that is missing. For that purpose, the figure of the formator has to be one of a Companion on a journey towards the discovery of God's will in the candidate's life and not one of a person who selects and decides whether the candidate is suitable for religious life or not.

Sometimes, fear in the Candidate is caused by the many years in the Institute or formation house. One finds it hard to start a different form of life and continues to pretend that he/she has a vocation while the contrary may be the case.

c) Pressures

There may be a lot of pressures arising from the expectations of one's own family. I would suggest that there should be education of the family; to know that their son can come back and that there is nothing bad in that. They should be ready to accept whatever makes him happier. Another pressure is from the environment/village /society in general. I would suggest providing the Candidate with enough self-confidence and maturity so as to face the challenges coming from unavoidable social pressure. The pressure from one's province: The provincial superiors should show that they are interested in the happiness of the Candidate more than in the completion of his formation and be proud of having formed him into either a priest, a brother, or a lay Christian who has much to say in a church that needs to be de-clericalised.

d) Pressure from benefactors:

It is perhaps a mistake that benefactors are given the names of the Candidates they are supporting financially. This creates great pressure on the Candidate who knows of the sacrifices his/her benefactors make so as to pay for his/her formation. Let benefactors help without knowing who they are helping; this avoids disappointment on their side and pressures on the Candidates.

With proper assessment, a scheme could be drawn up at the level of the Institute to help those whom they think have no vocation. This would remove some of the fear of being sent away. Instead, a person will know he has been helped to discover his true vocation.

e) Assignments:

The assignment of confreres into the mission should pay attention to the cultural background, environment, and set up of one's formation. You cannot post a person being formed in Nairobi to work in England. Though we say we should be ready and free to be sent anywhere, this is not realistic to the practical life of Evangelization.

What has emerged from this research is that to be a disciple, a Candidate should commit him/herself fully to the Master. He/she learns from the Master, listens to Him and follows Him. This commitment embraces the whole personality of the disciple. The life of the disciple should reflect the life of the Master who is Jesus Christ. The disciple associates him/herself totally with Him.

Being a disciple demands a lot of sacrifices. It involves detachment from our old life and ways of seeing and doing things. The disciple takes on him/herself a new life that the Master proposes. This kind of life touches the aspect of dying to self and rising to a new life. A disciple too participates in a life that is uncertain, that involves the suffering and death of the Master.

True discipleship in religious life can be achieved when formation becomes a process of growth in faith that leads a Candidate to Christian maturity. This process of formation should touch important aspects of one's life, such as human maturity, academic, professional and pastoral maturity, and community and religious life. Formation should help and facilitate a Candidate in following the Master according to the teaching of the Gospel. The structure too in the religious life helps the Candidate to be transparent and aware of his/her vocation. It should not in any way block his/her spiritual and intellectual growth.

If the formation of Comboni Missionaries is in keeping with Christian discipleship, it helps the Candidates to take the challenges of formation seriously and to discern well their vocation. At the same time this formation helps the

formators to be more transparent in reading the signs of the time while accompanying the Candidates.

The challenges and suggestions in my research should receive serious consideration in order to make the formation a success.

Comboni remains for Christians an inspiring example of discipleship. He followed the Master, Jesus Christ without ignoring the hardships and crosses that he encountered on his spiritual journey. There are many aspects in the life of Comboni that I did not touch; such as a plan for the regeneration of Africa, becoming a founder of the Institute, looking for help, and the eight journeys he made into and out of Sudan. These aspects can be pursued by those interested to know more about his life.

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