

Panel

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Governance — Animation — Finance

“A Brief Personal Presentation”

I belong to the Society of African Missions (SMA). This year I am giving thanks to God for my 25 years of priesthood (July 4). I worked for almost 14 years in the Central African Republic (CAR) with the Pygmies and also as Bursar of the Diocese of Berbérati. Since May 2011 I have been serving at the Generalate in Rome as Treasurer General.

I come from Togo: Lawson Didier Têvi.

Governance, Animation and Finance

Governance, Animation and Finance are three topics or themes that constitute the refrain of the song of cohesion, of unity, of cooperation in our current missionary life despite our different charisms and vision.

I shall now present the two important factors that affect the reality of missionary or religious life as we live it today: *changes* in the social order (GS, nn. 5, 6) and *innovation*.

1. In the context of the changing landscape in religious missionary life.

In the first place, **what has changed** in the face of our congregations and our missionary societies is the origin of the active members. *At the start they came from the West; today some come from Africa, Asia and others from Latin America. Everything depends on the geographical region of the missionary apostolate or presence of each Congregation or Society. The following small Table, which summarises our Society, shows the current statistics of this reality:*

| | 2012 | 2021 |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| WEST | 580 Members | 327 Members |
| AFRICA— ASIA | +200 members | 401 |

NB — *namely, that over the last +-10 years the number of members from the West has decreased by half while the number from Africa and Asia has doubled!*

— **Governance** — within our framework, what does this imply for the members of the Society of African Missions with a majority of confrères of African origin, Asian confrères and elders of the old ‘*entities*’ (*West — America*)?

— **Animation** means promoting reflection in common, as well as taking the decisions to be implemented together in keeping with the directives set out in our Laws and Constitutions, [which are constantly updated at the Annual General Assembly (AGA), or at the Plenary Council (P.C.)]. *This would be a graph of our GPS.*

— **Finance**: — to cover the expenses of recruitment, basic training (including propaedeutic education), on-going education (ICOF-ICMA, etc.). — Full instruction and training by professionals (higher education of all kinds), including their responsibilities at the level of

international formation in cooperation with other Institutes and ecclesiastical associations (cf. *Ad Gentes*, nn. 26-32, pp. 843-847).

2. What's new?

For many, 'new' means that the areas of apostolate are now entrusted to us by the local Churches (formally our Institutes proposed the distribution of personnel and territory). Thus, we are also led to open Missions in Europe. Actually, the local Churches now entrust us with parish territories in Africa, Europe and America.

— **To govern** means, that while living our charism, we ensure our insertion by supporting our members who engage in parish or diocesan works. We make sure that each of our communities fully respects the pastoral directives of the local clergy and their bishop (reference to our Constitutions, etc.). Furthermore, our duty consists in ensuring that our original charism enriches the proclamation (*Ad Gentes*, nn. 33 – 42, pp. 849-856).

— **To animate** means that the Superior of each of our entities guaranties the quality/integrity of the clergy lent to a diocese. This is shown by their readiness to participate in the reflection, even to arouse it, within the local Church to promote a dynamic that is open to the world of today in order to bring Peace and the Joy of growing in the Love revealed by Christ Jesus.

— **Finance**: the key word for the future is **self-sufficiency**: each entity “should be so organized that it is able to provide for its own needs as far as possible” (*Ad Gentes*, nn. 15, 30, pp. 829: 847). We must not forget that the will to share everything in common is the Gospel rule (Acts 4:32).

The texts of the Second Week of Easter led us to meditate on the spirit of sharing and solidarity in which the first communities lived, “*Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. ... Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the Apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the Apostles' feet*” (Acts 4:32, 36-37).

But there were also those who did not respect the community of goods. “A man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the Apostles’ feet. But Peter said, ‘Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God’. When Ananias heard these words, he fell down, and died” ... (Acts 5:1).

We are all moved by Ananias’ reaction.... Today, with the search for easy gain and quick access to modernization, if we do not let ourselves be guided by the spirit of fraternal sharing we will fall into the same trap. This fraternal sharing can only be achieved if the General Accounting can be certain that all the Accounts are clear and transparent (Financial Directory — updated Charter for Good Management promulgated, etc.).

Note:

The above factors may lead us to make heavy financial investments in order to assist communities, people, religious who live in materialistic societies. Indeed it is necessary for them, and with them, to address a heterogeneous social fabric by training reliable guides with a dual concern: the Universal and the Call.

The future of the Christian faith is at stake in the West, since materialism can gain ground in the heart of every man very quickly if one does not pay attention! No one can serve two Masters.

3. I am only pointing out the urgent need for the total renewal of the means of communication. One should re-read the Decree of Vatican II on the subject so that, while being at the forefront of progress, one may have the wisdom not to run after fads in the manner of the world. How many consecrated people are “addicted” to the point that not only do the finances suffer but also their life in the liturgical community.

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