

Editorial



Dear Members and Readers,

The March-April issue of the SEDOS Bulletin is based on the theme, “Mission of Hope: Gifts from different Continents” which has been the theme of the

SEDOS Spring Seminar held, on 21 March, 2024 at the UISG. This topic is very relevant and significant as we see and experience all around us various escalating conflicts. In the tumultuous panorama of global conflict — ranging from territorial disputes to ideological clashes, the simmering tension of ethnic discord, and the ceaseless struggle for resources — a Mission of Hope emerges as a beacon of resilience and reconciliation. Indeed, in such a situation it is a challenge and opportunity for a missionary to be a real disciple of Christ, to bring his compassion and love to the world that is wounded.

Spring, that symbolizes hope and new life, was also the theme of the Opening Prayer prepared by Geni dos Santos Camargo, SFB, who said, “In this context of violence against Life, both human life and life in all its manifestations, we feel the effect of global warming. But Spring is a fact that fills us with hope.”

In a world rife with conflict that ranges from personal struggles to global confrontations, Christian Hope stands as a steadfast beacon, illuminating a path toward reconciliation and unity through the power of faith and love. This hope is rooted in the Teaching of Jesus Christ, emphasizing forgiveness, compassion, and in the relentless pursuit of justice and peace. It calls upon individuals and communities alike to transcend their differences, see the divine image in every person, and work tirelessly for the betterment of all humanity. Christian hope is not passive; it is active and transformative, inspiring acts of kindness, charity, and the courage to stand up against injustice. It embodies the belief that, even in the darkest of times, God's love prevails, guiding the world towards a future where harmony and understanding will triumph

over division and hatred. Through this hope, not only missionaries but all Christians worldwide are motivated to be agents of change, contributing to the healing and unification of our fractured world.

In her welcome Address, Mary Barron, OLA, President of SEDOS, put the theme in the right perspective saying, “Christian Hope, is the beacon that guides us.” She reminds every member that we need to learn from one another, celebrate our diversity, and cooperate in hope. The mission gifts are not meant to be hoarded but to be shared. Let us keep our hearts open to hope and our hands ready to serve.

In his keynote Address, His Eminence Graham Bell, spoke about the Jubilee Year 2025, which has an appropriate theme, “Pilgrims of Hope.” He spoke about the various programs that are being prepared to rekindle Hope among Christians.

Answering, from the theological perspective, the question of how missionaries, women and men of faith, bearers of Christian hope, can engage in these situations, Fr. Stanley Lubungo, M.Afr., in his article affirmed that, “As a theological virtue, hope is called to be the foundation of our missionary commitment. It is called to drive this commitment and to characterise it (CEC 1813). Thus, we understand that as missionaries we are called to become messengers of hope.” He further stated that “Christian Hope is not merely a communication of things that are known – it is one that makes things happen and is life changing.”

Christian Hope, as manifested across the different continents amidst rising conflicts, embodies a unique blend of universal faith and localized responses to adversity. In Africa, amidst ethnic tension and political strife, Christian communities often become sanctuaries of peace, advocating reconciliation and providing aid to those affected by conflict. Churches and faith-based organizations play a crucial role in mediation and peace-building efforts, drawing on Christian hope to inspire forgiveness and unity.

In Latin America, where social inequality and violence persist, Christian Hope fuels

movements for social justice and human rights. It motivates individuals and churches to challenge systemic injustices and to support the marginalized, reflecting Jesus' Teaching on love and solidarity for the poor and oppressed.

Reflecting upon the situation in Latin America, Márcio Flávio Martins, CICM, in his presentation entitled, "Hope from a Latin American Perspective", explains that, "Our hopes are similar to those of every human in any part of the planet. Our hopes are not different from the hopes of Jesus in the Gospel. "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). We hope for a missionary Church concerned with history. We hope for real human development. We hope for the dignity of everyone regardless of the colour of his/her skin and ethnic background. We hope for peace and reconciliation. We hope for just political and financial systems that will prevent corruption." He also alerts missionaries "to realize that material poverty is destructive and goes against Jesus' proposal that everyone should have life and life in abundance. We cannot spiritualize and undermine what deprives human beings of their dignity."

In Asia, facing religious persecution and geopolitical tensions, Christian Hope is often expressed through perseverance and resilience. Christians engage in interfaith dialogue, aiming to build bridges of understanding and respect among diverse religious communities. Their hope is a testimony to their faith, encouraging tolerance and peaceful coexistence in a region marked by religious diversity.

Speaking from the Asian perspective, Mikaelin Bupu, SSpS, in her presentation, "Missions Amid Natural Calamities", mentioned the disasters caused by natural calamities. She recalled the real experience of some missionaries who were scared, traumatized and left alone in darkness, which made them realize the plight of the people and the presence of God. She says, "In times of natural calamities, our hearts beat for those who suffer. We stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters, feeling their pain as if it were our own. Our empathy binds us together, transcending the barriers of distance and difference."

In her presentation, "Mission of Hope: Mission gifts from each Continent Today" Virginie Habib, Congregation of the Rosary Sisters,

shared her experience of hope in Middle Eastern countries. She defined hope, as "the fruit of a firm belief that is nourished by the Word of God in the Bible, shown by our attitude towards daily life events, acts of charity, tolerance for those who practice different religions, who belong to other races, or cultures, and work to transform reality in accordance with God's plan for humanity." She spoke about the devastation caused by various wars in the past and now in Gaza. She said, "Today, as Christians in the Middle East, we find ourselves at a crossroads. Either we choose to deal with these circumstances out of our faith, keeping the flame of hope alive, or we surrender to frustration and despair." She added that in the face of all the tragedies, although "we may not be able to change the decisions of the powerful; or have a direct influence on them, we can, however, intervene where our communities work, by building alternative forms of peace, development, and progress in our local context." Emphasising the role of Christian educational institutions, she said that they are "factories" of hope and that each student is a glimpse of hope for the future of the Church and society. No matter how tiny and fatigued, our communities maybe they will not give up shaping the destiny of many of the least and poor on their territory. Affirming her hope, she says, "We Middle Eastern Christians are currently going through a period of hardship that is analogous to what Jesus' followers went through on Good Friday afternoon after his Crucifixion; we are experiencing it both in its spiritual and material forms, in the hope that the region of the Middle East will rise with the Risen Christ on Resurrection Sunday.

Europe, with its secularizing societies and the challenges of migration and integration, sees Christian Hope influencing efforts towards community cohesion and the support of refugees and migrants. Churches open their doors to provide not just spiritual solace but practical support, advocating policies that reflect compassion and human dignity.

In her presentation, "Speranza Missione In Europa", Giuliana Bolzan, OLA, explained the deeper meaning of hope, saying, "The term Hope, in addition to being a theological virtue, means: feeling of confident expectation that one can realise what is desired. We have learned

that everything starts from an ASPIRATION. From making faith more active and religion less. Have fewer precepts, more education in love.”

In North America, amidst political polarization and social divisions, Christian Hope inspires action for racial equality, environmental stewardship, and the protection of human rights. It propels believers towards community service and political engagement, motivated by a vision of a more just and merciful society.

In every context, Christian Hope transcends mere optimism. It is an active force for healing, justice, and reconciliation, grounded in the faith that, despite the darkest of circumstances, transformation and redemption are always possible with Divine guidance and human solidarity.

In such a context, the role of a missionary is not just to provide aid but to build a foundation for lasting peace and prosperity, in order to transcend traditional evangelism, embodying a holistic approach to address spiritual and temporal needs.

In these articles we have seen that a lot is being done by missionaries in various parts of the world. But there is still a long way to go. The challenge is to rekindle missionary zeal and refresh our commitment.

A missionary need to play the dynamic role of one who can advocate Peace and Reconciliation. Missionaries are called to be peacemakers in a world torn by conflict. This involves mediating between opposing groups, fostering dialogue, and encouraging forgiveness and understanding based on Christian Teaching. Their mission is to build bridges between divided communities, promote peace in line with the message of reconciliation central to the Gospel.

They need to reinforce their support for humanitarian efforts, providing food, shelter, medical care, and other essentials to those in need. They work through the churches, mission organizations, and international partnerships to mobilize resources and aid for the most vulnerable, reflecting Jesus’ command to care for the least among us.

They are called to be champions of Social Justice confronting issues like poverty, inequality, and the abuse of human rights. They need to be the voice of the voiceless. Inspired

by biblical principles, they uphold policies and practices that uplift the marginalized and oppressed, challenging systems that perpetuate injustice.

They need to combat Religious Fundamentalism in areas where religious fundamentalism threatens peace and security. They strive to promote religious freedom and tolerance. They engage in interfaith dialogue and educational initiatives that highlight the values of love, respect, and coexistence, countering extremism with messages of hope and unity.

Understanding that poverty and the lack of opportunity often lie at the heart of many conflicts, the missionaries need to engage in efforts to promote sustainable development. They should invest in community projects that enhance education, healthcare, and economic opportunity; aim to empower individuals and communities in order to break the cycle of poverty and dependence.

Recognizing the deep wounds conflict and loss inflict, they need to provide spiritual and sympathetic support. Through prayer, counselling, and community-building activities, they offer hope and healing, helping individuals to find strength and solace in their faith.

Missionaries need to play a crucial role in education, offering both formal and informal learning opportunities. By equipping people with knowledge and skills, they can empower them to improve their lives and communities, fostering a sense of dignity and self-reliance. Above all, the role of a Christian missionary must be modelled on Christ, and show unconditional love and compassion. Through their actions and interactions, missionaries embody a living testament to the transformative power of love, inspiring others to pursue a path of faith, hope, and love. In fulfilling these roles, Christian missionaries contribute significantly to addressing the multifaceted challenges of a world in conflict, offering not just immediate relief but working towards long-term change and reconciliation. Their mission is a reflection of the Christian call “to be the light and salt of the world” (Mt 5:13-16), making tangible the hope and love at the heart of the Gospel.

Dr. John Paul Herman, SVD
Director of SEDOS