

Globalization of charity: the Carmelite Missions from Liguria to the Central African Republic

Riassunto. - Globalizzazione della carità: le missioni carmelitane dalla Liguria alla Repubblica Centrafricana

L'obiettivo del presente capitolo è quello di porre in evidenza il contributo dato dai Missionari della Chiesa Cattolica, e in particolare dalla grande Famiglia Carmelitana, alla promozione umana, oltre che all'evangelizzazione, delle popolazioni nel cosiddetto "terzo mondo". Si tratta di un argomento costantemente trascurato dalle scienze umane secolarizzate, che, nelle rare volte in cui accennano all'attività dei Missionari, è solo per rimproverare loro l'"indebita interferenza" con le culture indigene. Un argomento di tale vastità, quale l'Opera Missionaria a livello globale, richiederebbe molti volumi, e in questa sede può essere trattato solo presentando un singolo esempio, ma assai significativo, della vita missionaria: quello della Provincia Ligure dei Carmelitani nella Repubblica Centrafricana. In quel paese i missionari hanno portato a termine un gran numero di progetti: le scuole di villaggio a Bozoum e Baoro, il sillabario della lingua sango, il centro di promozione femminile a Baoro, la scuola del seminario e le scuole professionali (ceramica, falegnameria, meccanica), i pozzi a Bozoum, il dispensario medico e dentistico a La Yolé, il nuovo ponte sul torrente Koyali a Bozoum, la ristrutturazione delle prigioni di Bozoum, il Centro di formazione e sviluppo agropastorale a Bouar-La Yolé, la cooperativa di allevamento a Boyele-Bozoum, il centro pilota per la formazione agropastorale a Bangui-Bimbo. Come spesso avviene, le opere dei Missionari sono state largamente saccheggiate e distrutte durante la guerra civile originatasi da una faida familiare all'interno del ristretto circolo dominante, con larga partecipazione di miliziani islamici. I Missionari carmelitani, inizialmente costretti alla fuga, sono tuttavia tornati sul posto per ricostruire ciò che è stato distrutto e proseguire la loro opera di evangelizzazione e promozione umana.

Introduction

The purpose of the present paper is to provide an example of the actions for the promotion of human development performed daily throughout the world by the Missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church. This is a subject usually overlooked by the literature on development, produced by geographers, sociologists and economists. The current secularization trends bring about a style of development studies totally silent on the initiatives (and the martyrs) of the Catholic Missionaries. If the Missions are mentioned at all, it is only to stress an alleged "undue interference" of the Church with "native" cultures.

It is plainly impossible to deal in any detail with all missionary activities by the many Orders of the Church, as they build a true globalization of charity. One significant example only will be provided: the operations of the Ligurian Province of the Carmelite Order in the Central African Republic.

The Central African Republic

As the name implies, the country is at the very centre of Africa (Fig. 1). It has an area of about 623.000 sqkm. The relief is dominated by the Central African Ridge, with massifs rising over 1000 metres, which divide the land into two main river catchments, that of the Ubangui, a tributary to the Congo, and the Chari-Logone which flows northwards. The climate is tropical, with two seasons, a wet one (roughly from April to October) and a dry one, the latter being longer in the north.



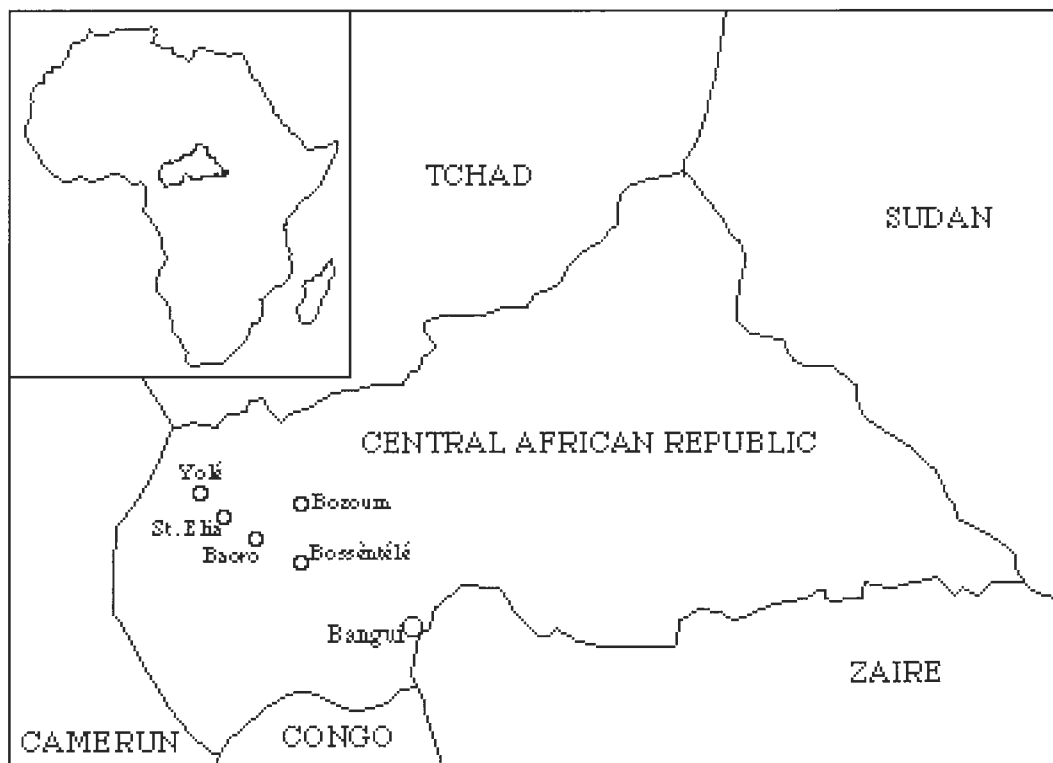


Fig. 1. The Central African Republic and the main settlements of the Ligurian Carmelites.

In the country there are about 3 million people, and therefore a population density of only 5 inhabitants to the square kilometer: the country can therefore be regarded as underpeopled. An artificial creation of the colonial age, the Central African Republic is far from being ethnically homogenous, being located in a contact area between two major language groups: the Congo-Kordofan and the Nilo-Saharan. Most speakers belong to the Oubanguian branch of the Adamawa-Ouganguian family. The main languages of the group are the Gbaya, the Banda and the Gbanziri-sere, although there are many others. Two peculiar groups are the Pigmies and the Peuls, the latter being mostly herdsmen of the north, in contrast with the peasant populations of the south. One fourth of the population is protestant, one fourth animist, while the Catholics are 17%, the Muslims 15%, and "others" 18%.

The country has been a French colony, under the name of Oubanghi-Shari, until 1960. Between 1966 and 1976 it was the "empire" of Jean-Bedel Bokassa. The ensuing political history is one of military coups d'état, civil strife and international pressure to get a democratisation process under way. The official language is French, as it would be hard, among the great number of local speeches,

to find one which would be accepted by the whole population as a national language.

The currency is the Central African Franc (CAF), lately linked to the French Franc, and nowadays to the euro (1€ = 655,9 CAFs). The gross national product per capita is US\$ 330: The rate of economic growth per capita -0.3% per annum, *i.e.* it is *decreasing*. The illiteracy rate for people over 15 is 66% (but 96% for females). With the exception of a small number of youngsters attending senior schools, the majority has practically no option except agriculture. No attempts are made either by the State or by private agencies to favour a search for alternative occupational outlets. A part of the young people try to survive by starting small trading activities, favoured by the closeness of the border with Cameroun. However, any trade of a significant importance is in the hands of Muslim Arabs who possess the necessary means of transportation on the local roads, which tend to damage lorries, because of their condition of utter disrepair, the only exceptions being some main arteries which although are not tarmacked, have been improved by a recent aid project of the German government.

Local entrepreneurial traditions are virtually non-existent, the introduction of useful innova-

tions is hindered by local resistance so that it can be described as a typical static society, according to a pattern theoretically outlined by Biagini (1981). Not surprisingly, the country is beset with social pathologies. Extreme corruption is widespread within the officialdom, and abuse of power is extensively practiced by public authorities, both civil and military. Crime is rife, with murder, robberies and thefts sharply on the increase. In spite of widespread poverty, money to buy firearms seems not to be in shortage. Outlaw bands roam the countryside, often attacking the Missions.

These features identify the country as a markedly underdeveloped one, and utterly unable, at present, to jump into the bandwagon of globalization. From the viewpoint of customs and the way of thinking, the country is experiencing a period of deep crisis. The family, still tied to solidarity within the patriarchal clan, is subject to strong social forces leading it into isolation and even disgregation. Marriage, up to recently rigorously established and controlled by the families involved, is nowadays often reduced to a very unstable relationship between two youngsters. This phenomenon is but an aspect of the social disgregation typical of young people migrant to the towns, where the difficult economic and social conditions generate a "do-it-yourself" behaviour, precariously dragged on from day to day. One of the most negative consequences is the very high number of unmarried mothers, whose children are often taken away from them to be included in the clan of the man who claims to be their father. Divorce and polygamy are increasing. Elderly people, due to their improductivity, are often abandoned in a state of utter poverty.

About 91% of the inhabitants lives under the poverty threshold. The life expectation at birth is 44 years for males and 46 for females. Infant mortality (deaths within the first year) is 12.9%. Defective preventive measures, polluted drinkwater and insufficient food cause a number of illnesses, including endemic malarial fever, oncocercosis, bilharzia and leprosy, as well as epidemics of hepatitis and meningitis. Only a 3% of the national budget is allocated to healthcare, so not surprisingly structures are in complete disrepair, in spite of some effort to intensify basic care. There are only 150 medical doctors, 108 of which, however, operate in the capital Bangui, whose district (*préfecture*) concentrates only less than 20 per cent of the total population. Urban hospitals are staffed by Central African doctors, aided by some specialized and some unspecialized nurses. Patients, however, are obliged to pay even the slightest services,

and seldom can afford surgical operations or extended care in case of prolonged illness. Medicines are very hard to find and so expensive that very few people have a chance to follow a suitable cure when needed.

The frequent occurrence of sickness and death often induce people to turn to traditional "healers", and also to black magic, whereby they seek to single out the responsible for the "evil spell" which supposedly caused the sickness and death. The alleged "sorcerer" is then persecuted by the aggrieved family, often with fatal results. In this scenario, the only viable alternative, both for medical treatment and as a supply of medicines, is the medical support provided by the Missions, through their dispensaries and village "pharmacies", or crate-pharmacies (of which more below).

The Carmelite order from Liguria to Central Africa

The Ligurian Carmelites entered the Central African Republic on December 1971. They were entrusted with the Bozoum parish (Bartolomei 2003), and later with that of Baoro and Bossentélé. Bozoum, the administrative centre of the prefecture Ouham-Pende, within the diocese of Bouar, is a *brousse* (woody savanna) town, located in a highland at a height of 700 metres, with a population of 17,000 inhabitants, of which 5,000 Catholic. Over the years, missionary work developed. The seminar of Bouar-La Yolé was established, soon followed by the house for the human formation of candidates to religious and priestly life. All these missionary settlements are located in the *préfectures* of Bouar and Bozoum, in the diocese of Bouar, in north-western Central Africa, not far away from Cameroun and Tchad.

The area is in the north-west of the Republic, where sango is the dominant language. French is used in schools and administration. The prevailing activity is agriculture which, however, is far from optimal efficiency in exploiting the available resources. Land is tilled only during the rainy season, using traditional methods aimed at a production geared to mere local consumption, or little more. Produce includes manioc, maize, peanuts, sweet potato, French beans, sesame, millet and rice. The meagre fare is supplemented by some venison, fish and stock farming (goats, pigs, hens and sheep). Cattle raising is mostly practised by seminomadic mbororo herdsmen.

The plough has been introduced by the early Missionaries and it has spread thanks also to the



agency of the ACADOP, a German-Central African aid organization. The latter has also carried out development projects such as the drilling of wells up to 70-90 metres deep. As elsewhere, the Missions have linked the work of evangelization to projects of human advancement, to support development and face the various needs arising over time. The Carmelite Missionaries have carried out a considerable number of projects, involving education, irrigation, health, transport, services, agricultural development. Each project is under the special responsibility and management of one or more of the missionary Fathers.

Development projects by the Ligurian Carmelite Missions

Village schools at Bozoum and Baoro

State education in the Central African Republic is wholly wanting. The number of schools in relation to the number of inhabitants and villages is totally insufficient. The percentage of children starting attendance at school is 56%, of which only 17% reaches the end of the primary cycle. Women are nearly all illiterate. The average teacher to learner rate is one to sixty or seventy. Often, especially in the first classes, a schoolmaster must teach more than hundred pupils. At the Bozoum secondary school, in school year 1998-1999 there were five teachers to 900 pupils.

This is the situation in terms of numbers. In reality the state of affairs is much worse as these schools fail to work at all. After three years of interruption due to unpaid salaries (the so-called *années blanches*) and the consequent nullification of all courses, in 1996 the government started to make some advance payments to teachers, and teaching started again, though without much enthusiasm. Then, in the course of 1997, such hand-outs were discontinued at first, then resumed, with the result that school year 1997-1998 began late and ended late too (in September 1998 no final results were yet known). School year 1998-1999 began in December and in a way or other came to a close; in Bangui, many parents supported the self-assessment by themselves to the tune of 300 CAFs a month in order to pay the teachers.

Financial problems are the basic reason for the lack of teaching personnel: the State cannot hire more teachers having no money to pay them. Sometimes teachers leave their post for weeks on end to seek alternative earnings. Overcrowded classes and a very low level of teaching are the inevitable outcomes. After one year at school, chil-

dren cannot yet read and write; at the end of the primary course they know almost nothing of history, geography, sciences, very little arithmetics and absolutely nothing as to music or drawing skills. This situation is made more serious by the lack of books: they are difficult to find and, when they are available (in the capital Bangui only), their cost is exorbitant for the average purse: 3000 to 4000 CAFs, equivalent to a week salary of a manual worker. The courses in all subjects, including those at secondary level, are written on the blackboard and transcribed on copy-books.

School equipment is virtually non existent. School desks are rare, and pupils go to school carrying a stool from home to sit on. Maps, libraries, gymnastic equipment are unknown. If the Centre of the space economy, *i.e.* the national capital, has little, the Periphery, *i.e.* the surrounding *brousse*, has nothing at all: school buildings are straw huts, tree trunks are used as school desks, no books are to be had, and it is difficult even to get copy-books and pens. A small blackboard is the only teaching equipment. In view of the general poverty, no improvement is foreseeable in the short term.

Attendance is a major problem in itself. In this area the concept of school was introduced by the Missionaries (one century ago for the first time in Central Africa, 65 years ago in Bozoum). Most adults do not understand the value of formal education and do not see positive results stemming from it. On the contrary, they perceive all too well what, under their viewpoints, are the negative outcomes, such as lack of interest in work in the fields and disobedience, because children would feel a kind of superiority on their illiterate parents. As to the girls, instead of beginning from their early years to work at home and in the fields, they are seeing as wasting their time, doing things of no practical value, and, above all, no longer accepting to behave submissively.

This mentality is quite evident when kids are enrolled at school. Many parents state they have no money to register their children, although the school tax is minimal (4,500 CAFs per year). Others enrol the males but not the females. Most parents, after enrolment, pay no further attention to the school necessities of their children, and do not care to provide them with clothing and even food. Few of them purchase copy-books and pens, almost no one keeps in touch with the schoolmaster on the progress of their children. At the season of mushrooms, of hunting, of caterpillars, the kids play truant for weeks on end.

Faced with a collapse of the educational system, the government, in January 1997, entered into an



agreement with the Bishops' Conference of the country in order to improve the quality of teaching and the diffusion of education.

The Carmelite Missions at Bozoum and Baoro started, in 1982-83, a teaching project in cooperation with the village chieftains and with the State school authority for fundamental education. This work is taking place in the *brousse*, i.e. in the most disadvantaged area. In these years thousands of children have been able to get some education, which the State would have been unable to provide, for lack of funds, there being no State schools in the villages at all. The Missions provided the basic wherewithal for the functioning of a school, that's to say a teacher every 30 kids in each class, with a complete set of basic didactic material: a book for every pupil and a writing desk. Teaching is taken very seriously and schoolmasters undergo an inspection every fortnight, thanks to the cooperation of a Central African inspector, a retired teacher who has been provided with a motorbike to travel from one school to another. In 1998-99, twelve schools were kept in as many villages of Bozoum, plus a private school in the Mission itself, with 144 children and 7 schoolmasters, while at Baoro three villages are served, with 47 children.

In each village the Mission organizes classes and teaching syllabuses only after contracting a "cooperation protocol" with the Parents' and Pupils' Association of the village. Such protocol provides for the finding and managing of a hut for the Association, and undertakes to give the teacher food and lodging, to send the children to classes and to enter into an agreement of cooperation with the schoolmaster sent by the Mission. The salary of the latter varies from 23,000 to 30,000 CAFs a month, according to professional seniority. During the three summer months, half salary is paid. The Association collects an enrolment tax of 1000 CAFs a year for children in the nursery school and 1500 CAFs in the primary school. The Mission pays for the stationery, the books and all teaching aids. Moreover, it refunds to the Association the schoolmaster's salary, and receives from it the enrolment taxes.

Books remain the property of the Mission. They are not to be taken home, but left in class, in order to protect them from being spoiled or destroyed. In this way, they will be available next year for the incoming pupils. The school year runs from end September/October to July; the school week from Monday to Friday. Timetable and subject matters are rationally organized. The primary cycle includes six years, with the following sub-

jects: 1st year, notions of Sango and French, arithmetic, acting, catechism, reading; 2nd, Sango, French, reading, arithmetic, catechism; 3rd, grammar and syntax, writing skills, use of the dictionary, arithmetic and geometry, elements of literature, natural science, catechism; 4th, like the previous year, plus history and geography of Central Africa; 5th, like the previous year, plus health education, civic education and notions of agronomy; 6th, like the previous year, at a more advanced level. The cycle ends with an external examination, after which the successful candidate is awarded the Primary Elementary Certificate, opening access to the secondary school.

The teaching staff in 1999-2000 included 56 teachers, all of Central African nationality and provided with a secondary school diploma (*Licée* or *Institut technique*), having a teaching experience ranging from 2 to 25 years. Some of them formerly taught in State schools, but have opted to teach in the missionary schools. Before the opening of the school year, a stage lasting three full weeks is organized for the teachers at the central Mission in Bozoum, aiming at pedagogical education and the updating of teaching techniques. Shorter stages lasting one weekend are held during the school year at two month intervals. Textbooks are discussed, as well as teaching methods, complementary practical activities, relationships with pupils and parents. These sessions are held by the pedagogic counsellor of the State schools, often in the presence of an inspector of the Public Education Department of Bangui. Teachers have a library of about 2000 volumes at their disposal, for consultation, constantly updated by the missionary Fathers, besides audiovisual material.

The Sango language primer

To ease reading to the pupils of the first class, the Missionaries have developed, in the early half of the 1990s, a primer for the local language, the Sango. Nothing of the kind had existed before. Earlier, teaching had been in French from the first year. The State has followed suite, opting too for the teaching of Sango at the beginning of the primary cycle. As in many other cases, the Missionaries are being the agency for the preservation of local languages and cultures threatened by dominant European languages. The pedagogic advantages are also quite evident: country pupils who initially only know the local speech may thus be more gradually introduced to the learning of the European language, French in this case.



The Centre for the advancement of women at Baoro

The human and Christian promotion of a Mission needs, among other things, the development of material structures. To fulfil these ends, the Carmelite Missionaries opened in 2001 a Centre for the advancement of women at Baoro. This is a continuation of a previous cooperative activity, which received government acknowledgement in 1998.

In 2001-2002, 27 girls, divided into two classes, attended the Centre; in 2002-2003 attending girls had risen to 53, divided into three classes. Primary school licence is a requisite for admission. Pupils are required to pay an enrolment fee of 1500 CAFs. The Mission provides all necessities to run the Centre, *i.e.* teachers (all Central Africans except two Italian Carmelite nuns) and equipment (textbooks, sewing machines, fabrics, wool skeins, material for cutting and sewing, stationery, physical exercise equipment).

Taught subjects include: pediatric nursing, knitting, embroidering, cutting and sewing, pastoral theology, moral theology, French, history, geography, mathematics, natural science, physical education. The school year begins early in October and closes at the end of June. Classes are held both in the morning and in the afternoon, shunning the hottest hours around midday. At the end of the school year, pupils display and sell many of the textiles, clothing and embroideries they have made: proceeds are largely used to purchase new materials.

Updating stages for continuing education are held for the teachers of the Centre, as for those of the Primary school. They also have free access to the library and the audiovisual equipment. The Centre has proved extremely effective and, as the advancement of women and their social freeing from the weight of traditional powerlessness are important aims in themselves and for the promotion of development, the most effort is spent to introduce similar initiatives in all major villages of the area. For this purpose, it is foreseen to employ as teachers the girls educated at this early Centre.

The seminary school at La Yolé

Several hundred pupils attend the seminary school, due to the always uncertain situation of the State schools. The school offers two classes of the *Cours Moyen* (the last two classes of the primary cycle), then the Middle School (4 years) and finally the *Licée* (three years). Teachers are mostly Central African, though some are Italian, both Carmelite sisters and lay people. It is not easy to

find well prepared native teachers, but the Mission is working by continuing education to promote their human formation and update their teaching skills.

Only a small part of the pupils actually enter holy Orders, but the others are well prepared to perform their future duties as citizens, employees and fathers of a family. The students of this school achieve excellent results in the State (external) examinations, with a rate of failure of 0% (zero per cent), against an average rate of 80 to 85% in the country as a whole.

Such results are only achieved by means of care and dedication to the tasks at hand, offering pupils an education as complete as possible, helping them in their human and Christian choices. State programmes are followed accurately, adding something more which the State does not contemplate: art education, necessary to educate the young to an appreciation of beauty.

The vocational schools at La Yolé

Therefore, at the seminary school at La Yolé, a ceramics school has been added, thanks to the efforts of some lay cooperators of the Missionaries. Clay deposits have been discovered nearby, and an oven has been provided, largely thanks to the contributions of the association "Talità Kum" of Desio (which supports also the dispensary and the dental clinic). The kids are enthusiastic about the opening thus offered them; and the school can be regarded as an early educational initiative granting an opportunity to develop native decorative skills.

Targeted educational projects are essential for human promotion of the poverty stricken populations of large parts of Africa. These have to start at grassroot level, providing the basic skills without which any further technical education could not be built. For this reason, at Baoro, a school of carpentry has been opened in 1986, and in 1994 another school for training in mechanical skills. The teaching staff is formed by a director and two technicians, one Italian, another from Ruanda, as the general policy is to employ African workers wherever possible, replacing it with non-Africans only when suitable local, or anyway African, technicians are not available.

Also, a basic mechanical workshop was established. It is run by an Italian technician, and it is the only school of its kind in the whole of Central Africa. Courses last an entire school year: the first six months are devoted to theoretical and practical teaching of general mechanics, electrome-



chanics and the basics of physics, with tests and simulations applying the notions being taught; and four months of practical activities on Toyota, Nissan and Suzuki engines. At the end of the year, the students who have passed the final examination can stay further at the school for training to get the driving license. Each student must be married, as a guarantee of his morality and stability. A Carmelite nun holds bi-weekly meetings with the students' wives to teach them personal health practices, children nursing, cutting and sewing.

All students licensed by the mechanics school have found a job, so this enterprise has become exceedingly popular, and has soon obtained official recognition by the government in 1995, so that the licenses it releases have full legal value. Since 1999-2000 the number of accepted students grew from 12 to 40, the school became biennial, adding the teaching of basic chemistry, electro-chemistry, properties of materials, and practical teaching on car-body repair. An upgrading of motoring skills is exceedingly necessary in Central Africa, where vehicles, both private cars and lorries, as well as public buses, are very dangerous due difficult roads, lack of maintenance and shortage of suitable spare parts.

Health problems and the wells project at Bozoum

Water is as a severe problem in Central Africa, especially from February to April, in the latter part of the dry season, when streams, and many of the wells, even to the depth of 10 metres, run dry. People use to drink water from polluted pools, while the need of precautions such as water filtering and boiling has not impressed the common mentality, so that infective diseases are rife. In 1983 the municipality of Bozoum has repaired a water supply line from a point of the river Ouham three kilometres away: the line, however, serves mostly public buildings and those of senior public officials, plus some merchants or private citizens of means and good connections. Nearly all people have to walk far in quest of water. There are no more public fountains. Private citizens provided with water exploit their privilege by selling the precious fluid to less fortunate fellow countrymen. Water has become one of the rarest commodities.

The Bozoum Mission had initially being linked to the supply lines of the National Water Society, but the latter went out of business, and the Mission had to pump water from the Koyali stream: a reddish water which had to be filtered a great many times. In 1983, the Mission obtained from the team "Sangha Forage", linked to the Swedish Baptist Mission of Berberati (exclusively engaged

in drilling wells) the support for drilling a well and equipping it with an electric pump. The water thus found at a depth of 32 metres was finally clear and drinkable. Town water had to be used only in case of emergency, such as if the pump blows out because of lightning. In 1988 the Mission installed a new hand-driven pump in Bozoum town, in the Karré Betara neighbourhood, close to St. Anthony's chapel, so that most of the town can now enjoy this service.

The pure water thus obtained has considerably improved the health of people living in the area. Such is the importance of water supply that a project for drilling about sixty wells, to be equipped with hand-driven pumps, in the Bouar diocese has been proposed by the Capuchin friars of Genoa, also deeply involved in Missions in Central Africa. The Carmelite Mission at Bozoum took charge of ten of these wells, and started promoting the initiative between 1990 and 1991, at Bozoum and eight neighbouring villages, to make people aware of the need and usefulness of the project.

This preliminary work was carried out by two Central African rural extension officers, usually involved in health projects. Village committees headed by the local chieftain were set up, with the task to provide for maintenance, by choosing a man in charge for the purpose, as well as to collect money to create a maintenance fund. This had to be planned in advance, as most people in less developed countries have little inclination to maintenance work (May 1981). Drilling was entrusted to the Sangha Forage group. The wells have become focal points in the lives of the communities: from morning to late in the night, long queues of people gather around them carrying vessels of any kind.

The medical and dental dispensary at Bouar-La Yolé and the provision of medicines

This is an initiative born out of the heroic spirit of sacrifice of an Indian Carmelite nun, sister Payton, who for years has been treating the sick in a mud hut. Eventually, in 1995, the parish of Immaculate Heart of Mary in Cuneo, North-West Italy, collected the necessary sum for building a dispensary. At a short distance from the seminary at La Yolé there were the ruins of a colonial building, a house of about 100 square metres, lacking the roof, doors and windows, but with the walls still standing and in comparatively good conditions.

What was left of the building was thus restructured, adapted and "fortified" to prevent robberies and plundering of the installations. It has a



large entrance hall, used by sister Payton for medical examinations, two rooms making up the dental surgery (equipped with an electric generator, and a hydraulic installation with specific components for a dentistry apparatus), a toilet and a verandah used as a waiting room. The new dispensary was ready on January 26, 1996, and was immediately filled with patients, especially young mothers with their children. While sister Payton catered for general medicine, the dental surgery was staffed by two Italian volunteers, Doctor Angelo Sala and his wife Stefania Figini, a licensed orthodontist, both from Desio (Lombardy), aided by a Central African male nurse undergoing training.

Many patients of the dental surgery come from distances of 70 or 80 kilometres. There were no dentists in Bouar, prior to this initiative, although this is the second town of the Central African Republic. The nearest dental surgery was in the capital Bangui, 400 kilometres away. Patients at the Bouar-La Yolé are required a fee in accordance with the national list of rates. The fee does not by any means cover all expenses, but provides an opportunity for some assumption of responsibility by the population.

In addition to these initiatives, crate-pharmacies are being provided for use in the villages. This is a customary arrangement used by Missionaries in Africa: true pharmacies in the European sense being too expensive, a simple crate is divided into compartments by means of shelves and filled with medicines for the native population. It is the best solution allowed by circumstances for countries in which the alternative is to be left with no medicines at all.

A new bridge on the Koyali stream at Bozoum

The town of Bozoum is cut in two by the Koyali stream, which forms a marsh just below the Mission. In this very area, during the years 1970-75, rice cultivation was attempted by the Chinese of Taiwan, as a demonstration to the inhabitants: for this purpose, the stream bed was lowered to lay down the paddy field. Later a new paddy field was laid 7 kilometres from the town, and the old abandoned field in the centre of town has become a marsh. To worsen the situation, the stream bed has been invaded by heaps of rubbish thrown down by the inhabitants. The upshot is that, during the rainy season, the stream floods the town, easily destroying the mud huts. The area, called GPN, formerly the seat of a pioneer Israeli association for agricultural development, is sparsely populated and has largely become a transit place for people going to work from the centre of town

to the plantations bordering the road to Bouar.

The passage over the stream was therefore of crucial importance, there being no bridge, but a simple covering of tree trunks. The Mission took therefore upon itself the task to build a bridge. After obtaining the necessary permits from the authorities, and gathering funds, construction began in February 1990. The bridge is 35 metres long, in massive brickwork and iron, with three bays. Usually the water level is so high as to overflow the bridge only during one or two weeks a year, at the peak of the rainy season. This is a considerable result towards making the crossing of the Koyali secure.

The restructuring of the Bozoum jail

The old jail of the sub-prefecture of Bozoum dated back to colonial times, and was a dilapidated building, devoid of sanitary services and of water supply. For several years the administration of the sub-prefecture had asked the Mission for help, as the finances of the Central African State were unable to shoulder the task of restructuring the jail. The inmates, usually ranging from twenty to forty, are seldom fed by the State, and are obliged to support themselves by casual work.

Fund raising for restructuring the old jail has been no easy task but, thanks to the contribution of an anonymous donor, it has been possible, eventually, to entrust the job to a local enterprise, headed by a Bouar merchant, Abbo Bello. Thanks to a donation by another friend of the Carmelites, a well has been drilled alongside the jail, in order to provide water to the inmates and the warders, and also to the surrounding population. The whole was completed in 2001. It was solemnly opened in 2002 at the presence of the highest administrative and judicial authorities, who thanked the Mission for their excellent work. Father Marcello Bartolomei, the Superior of the Mission, then answered, expressing the continuing readiness of the Mission to serve the poor, and also calling attention on the respect due to the prisoners in application of the Charter of Human Rights.

Unfortunately, 40% of the people locked in jail in the Central African Republic are accused of witchcraft, in the sense of evil eye deemed responsible for sicknesses or death. These absurd beliefs, rooted in envy, superstition or conscious revenge against an enemy, sometimes lead to persecutions or even to summary executions, once the alleged author of the spell is named. As a consequence, the jail is often used as a refuge to prevent a lynching.



The Centre for agro-pastoral education and development at Bouar-La Yolé

In the continuing attempt to promote human development, the Mission of La Yolé started in 1986 the building of a Centre for agro-pastoral education and development. After a long growth, the Centre reached a considerable size, with a total area of 250 hectares, entirely owned by the Mission, of which 10% used for cultivation and the rest for grazing. The built up area covers 20,000 square metres, of which 8,000 covered. These are occupied by classrooms, the dining hall, two dormitories, services, a common hall, the church, stores and warehouses (about 1000 square metres) for processing and storage of produce and equipment, barns for the animals (about 500 square metres).

The Centre is attended by 70 students ranging in age from 10 to 21 years, mostly from Bouar and surrounding villages. They live in the Centre and a wholesale formation is guaranteed to them, including education up to secondary school diploma (*Licée*), completed by theoretical and practical training in agriculture and stock raising. Moreover, whole families are hosted at the Centre to give them an opportunity to learn new skills and for general instruction.

The practical objectives of the Centre are the following: (i) to offer a kind of technical education that may enhance the professional skills and the agricultural vocation of the rural population, linking study with practical agricultural work in order to help the students to achieve self-sufficiency in food production; (ii) to spread the growing of new products having a high nutritional value (citrus, vegetables, fruit trees, maize, rice) in order to enrich and diversify the local diet, based exclusively on manioc or cassava; (iii) to spread stock raising; (iv) to improve agricultural techniques, introducing new and more suitable tools, including the yoke for use with cattle at work, and aiming anyway at the optimization of available resources; (v) to oversee the marketing of produce; (vi) to promote communal work among the students, in view of the organization of small agricultural cooperatives.

As it is evident from the summary elements of climatology sketched above, agricultural work in the Central African Republic must inevitably be conditioned by the two seasons, dry and wet. In order to obtain, during the dry season, the necessary water for the production of vegetables and for the survival of fruit trees, a dam has been built by the Mission on the Boboro stream. It is about 50 metres long, with a canalization of about 700

metres. Two wells have also been drilled to obtain drinking water for people and cattle.

At present, the effort of the Centre is mainly aimed at the improvement of the local diet, through plantations of maize, sorghum, rice, soy and other pulses; such plantations are in the process of being enlarged, while the cultivation of manioc, whose nutritional value is very low, is going to be reduced. The production of other local food, plants such as peanuts, sweet potatoes, gombo and other pulses, is worth preserving. A part of the land is allotted to the production of European vegetables, such as green salad, French beans, tomatoes, aubergines, courgettes. It is also planned to extend the orchard, up to 4 hectares, especially with tropical plants, such as mangoes, avocados, papayas, bananas, guavas (*Psidium guajava*) and citrus (lemon trees, orange trees, grapefruit trees). In order to achieve better quality fruits, new crossbreeds and grafts are being tested, with the technical assistance of *Cooperation Française* of Bouar, an organization that has been carrying out agricultural experimentation since colonial times. Thanks to the assistance of this organization, by crossing three species of herbaceous plants (*Braccaria*, *Xiloxantes*, *Panicum*), a new type of fodder particularly drought resistant has been obtained.

The Centre has two tractors and a considerable array of other equipment, supported by a mechanical carpentry workshop for the necessary maintenance. It is completed by a system of stock raising (milk cows, sheep, goats, pigs, hens), developed in order to achieve food self-sufficiency for the complex, as well as to stimulate and improve livestock raising outside, as this is usually very limited and neglected. The Centre gets technical and veterinary assistance from the neighbouring veterinary clinic at Bouar. Responsible of the Centre is Father Aurelio Gazzera, aided by two Carmelite missionaries, ten local teachers from Bouar and seven workers that provide unskilled labour and guardianship.

The stock farming cooperative at Boyele-Bozoum

A stock farming cooperative has been established since 1997, thanks to the financial support of the Association "Aid to the Third World", which has enabled the 22 members of the cooperative to fence a large area, sufficient as a pasture for 50 cows. The cooperative is staffed by Central African herdsmen, and it has been provided with veterinary equipment and the necessary medicines.



Jubilee Project 2000: the pilot centre for agro-pastoral formation at Bangui-Bimbo

A new important Centre for the human promotion of Central Africa has been started in 1999 under the direct supervision of Father Anastasio Roggero (Roggero 2002), after consultation with an agronomist from Cameroun, Dr. Maturin Tchataat. The Centre is located in the south-western periphery of the national capital Bangui, with an estate of 40 hectares. Its main activity is the production and marketing of palm oil for human consumption. Palms grow easily in the local environmental conditions, but they are not cultivated, except in very few plantations owned by the State. The very little oil available on the market is imported from Congo and is therefore very expensive.

The pilot centre is spiritually linked to the Year 2000 Jubilee: it aims to provide an example to be followed for the upgrading of the conditions of the many poor farmers of Central Africa. It includes three blocks of buildings: Block 'A' for classrooms, equipped with audiovisual aids and library, meeting room, dining room, two dormitories and services; Block 'B' with stores and sheds for processing and storage of produce and equipment; and Block 'C' with barns for the animals.

Through Dr. Tchataat, pre-germinated seeds of oil palms were imported from Cameroun, where their cultivation is well established. In 2002 the Centre was fully operational, with 4000 oil palms, plus 3000 palms in the nursery. A plantation of this kind can produce 3 tons of oil per hectare after only 3 to 4 years, and up to 14 tons after 10 years, and with good fertilizing production can soar up to 40 tons per hectare. In a small section of the estate (about 3.5 hectares) an orchard has been planted, and a further small section is used for the production of European vegetables. A well 60 metres deep has been drilled. Stock raising is also carried out, to ensure self sufficiency to the cooperative managing the Centre.

To be admitted to the cooperative, the partners must be introduced by a priest or nun, have to be married (as a guarantee of maturity and stability), and it is expected they buy at least one share of the cooperative (the cost of a share is 30,000 CAFs). They undergo intensive professional training, including courses on the use and marketing of palm oil, on water and natural resources management, on mechanics and vehicle maintenance, on administration and accounting.

The educational objectives to be achieved are the following: (i) to offer a level of theoretical and practical formation for the farming profession, through the study of agricultural and manual ac-

tivity, in order to let students achieve self-managing abilities; (ii) to spread the cultivation of new produce having a high nutritional value (oil, citrus, vegetables, fruit trees) in order to enrich and vary the local diet, hitherto unhappily based, as noted above, on the nutritionally poor manioc; (iii) to spread stock raising (making use also of the excellent fodder obtained from the scrap of palm oil production); (iv) improve agricultural techniques introducing new and more suitable equipment; (v) look after the management of produce (from storage to marketing and sale); (vi) to boost the communal cooperation among the partners.

Conflict problems

In spite of all the efforts of the Missionaries, the projects described above have been severely impaired by local political mismanagement and conflict problems. In that area, as in the rest of the country, the absence of the State and the curtailment of international aid have brought about widespread decline in every sector of production. For some years now, State finances have been unable to cope with the necessary expenses to pay the salaries of public officials and to make the various services work properly. Impoverishment and stagnation have been the inescapable outcomes. Notwithstanding promises of reforms by politicians, distrust towards the institutions has grown year after year, with frequent uprisings and attempted coups d'état under President Ange-Félix Patassé. The French Army withdrew, after dismantling its own bases, and peace-keeping was entrusted to UN troops, mostly made up by Africans and deployed only in the capital Bangui. After that, any hope of law and order has vanished.

On the 25th of October 2002, civil war broke out between the supporters of former Army Chief of Staff François Bozizé and the troops loyal to President Patassé, supported by the Libyans and the Congolese rebels led by Jean-Pierre Bemba. After the abortive coup d'état in the capital Bangui, the rebels, strongly supported by Muslim mercenaries from Tchad, slowly gained control of most of the northern and western areas of the country. They destroyed the missions and murdered several priests wherever they had the mastery. When they reached Bozoum on January 18, 2003, they plundered it utterly, then sounded the bells to summon the Christians and beat them savagely. A few youths who were trying to put some order in the mission were beaten nearly to death. The rebels took the liturgical vestments and



church plate making them objects of public mockery (Bartolomei 2003).

Thirty years of labour have thus been destroyed in a single month. Damage is huge and all activities, both pastoral and social, have brutally come to a halt. Eventually, on March 15, 2003, general Bozizé took Bangui and seized power, proclaiming himself new President and obliging Patassé, who was out of the country at the time, to give up his return. Bangui was plundered for two days. When the turmoil began to abate, the new President has started to lay down the foundations of a political agreement, while the country is exhausted both by the previous misgovernment and by the civil war. The Missionaries, after having had to flee to avoid being murdered by the Muslim rebels, have now returned to their appointed posts to reconstruct what has been destroyed, even if that will entail severe sacrifices. It was hoped that the change of government will ensure law and order, enabling a fresh start in the development of the country. However, the new ruling clique has made known that it was unable to control the armed bands and suggested that the Missionaries should pay the outlaws for protection.

Besides the all-important work of evangelization, the Missions have an essential role to play, by promoting development in close touch with the population, starting at the grass-root level, and

thus preparing a set of basic skills upon which the people themselves may, at a later date, build up their own original path of development, in harmony with their culture and inclinations. A scandalous silence reigns in the materialistic West on these activities and their all too frequent sufferings, and of course no protection is to be expected from secularized societies. But the Missionaries do not stand alone, since, through their world-wide labours, they expect a reward that the material world cannot give.

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The documentation for the present paper has been kindly supplied by Father Anastasio Roggero of the *Procura delle Missioni Carmelitane*.

