

The SCJ Missions In Madagascar

The Dehonian of South Italy and Portugal

AA.VV.

1 The mission in Madagascar, the youngest of the dehonian missions, began in November 1974 in the diocese of Ambtandra, to be precise, in Imerimandroso, 300 kilometers north of the Capital Tananarive. Madagascar which had experienced an intense evangelization in the past is only twenty per cent Catholic and is still a country to be evangelized.

THE BEGINNING

2 The missionary work of the dehonians was marked by a close collaboration between the SCJ priests of South Italy and the laity of the Third World of Naples. In the beginning, there was a learning process to come to an adequate knowledge of the surroundings, the language and the local culture. At first, there was some fundamental pastoral service in the existing structure which has been almost abandoned. Thanks to the help of the good Madagascar catechist, many communities were quickly revived.

THE DEVELOPMENT

3 After having reorganized the center at Imerimandroso, the missionaries entered into a renovation and deepening of the faith of the Christian community and a revival of the evangelization of the more remote villages. In 1977 in response to the appeal of the Bishop of Mananjary, they undertook the care of the mission of Antsenavolo for two years. In the beginning of January 1982, the care of this mission was assumed the Portuguese Dehonians who then took the missionary district of Ifanadiana on a permanent basis. The apostolic work of the Dehonians of the Southern Italian Province, according to Fr. Andre Perroux who visited the mission in

Madagascar, is developing and improving continually. In 1984, a fine bibliography of Father Dehon was translated, published and distributed throughout the country in the local language, Malagasy. In the middle of January 1986, the Dehonians of South Italy, in conjunction with the Portuguese confreres founded a new work in the Capital Tananarive for the formation of young men who have asked to join our community.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

4 The Dehonian mission in Madagascar numbers four centers (Imerimandroso, Andreba, Ifanadiana, Tananarive) located in three different dioceses staffed by ten priests and two brothers. In addition to the SCJs and some sisters, there are some volunteers from the Third World whose dedicated presence, in a far from easy situation, assures the people of social promotion and assistance.

5 Since its founding eleven years ago, the mission has borne good fruit. Among the Christians an understanding of the faith has grown, calling for even more attention to giving a coherent testimony and dedication to persons and social realities.

6 The Dehonian community in its pastoral service is engaged with a population of over a hundred thousand inhabitants. They hope soon to devote more time to the work of vocations. Within the last four years some young Madagascans, desirous of becoming dehonians, are being formed in our mission in Andreba.

7 The work at Tananarive should undertake the same task with the Italians and the Portuguese SCJ. The future seems to give hope.

Fr. Enrico Jemma, scj

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MISSIONARY ANIMATION IN ITALY

8 The Provincial Council of the Central-South Italian Province has assigned to the missionaries of Madagascar the task of missionary animation in the province.

9 In turn one or two of them will return for a period of two or three years to carry out this pastoral task.

10 On the invitation of the Provincial Superior, the community in Madagascar has selected Fr. Giampietro Nicola as the first to fulfil this task. He will return to Italy in May or June 1986.

11 In the meantime, a Capuchin television group from Turin will film a documentary on our young mission in Madagascar. This will be a valuable instrument for developing a missionary spirit in Italy.

THE PASTORAL OF VOCATIONS IN MADAGASCAR

12 Aspirants. The recent Provincial Chapter has entrusted the whole community in Madagascar with the duty of working for vocations and has entrusted the community of Andreba with the duty of working with the aspirants.

13 Actually, we have six aspirants and others have requested admission. Among these there are two diocesan seminarians. At the same time the Portuguese confreres have some who have asked to enter as aspirants.

14 During the school year our aspirants reside at the diocesan seminary and follow the Lyceum courses at the college of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The rector of the seminary asked for some priests to come frequently to give spiritual direction and to establish personal contact with the aspirants. During vocation our aspirants live at Andreba with the religious community.

15 The Provincial Superior has asked the Madagascan community to become more deeply involved in vocation work by way of concrete initiatives which involve the young such as retreats, vocation weeks, camps and the like.

16 During the school year our aspirants must reside at the diocesan seminary and not live by themselves or lodge with a family. The cost is high (20,000 Madagascan francs a year). The diocesan seminarians who intend to join us must on their own responsibility speak to the Bishop about it. They can be accepted only after the completion of the courses in the Lyceum. The State of Madagascar requires all, our aspirants also, to perform military service or some civil service. This helps to mature them in their vocational choice.

17 Novitiate. This year our three aspirants should have finished the Lyceum and have begun the novitiate. However, they have been prevented. The State of Madagascar has prevented them. The university is not able to accept about 94 per cent of the students and; further, the state wants to avoid the mass abandonment of the rural areas on the part of the young. So, it has been decided that the three aspirants should repeat another school year. Next year, if they are still prevented, they can enter the novitiate.

18 As far as the place of the novitiate and its surroundings, we can not organize on our own novitiate in Madagascar because of the lack of formation personnel and the small number of novices. It is not advantageous to have the first novices join the inter-congregational novitiate in Andreba. It would be better to have our first Madagascan novices receive their formation in a specifically Dehonian setting. For this reason, we are inclined to the idea that our novices make the novitiate in Cameroun in our inter-provincial novitiate.

19 Fr. Cuomo will take part in the meeting scheduled for next February in Cameroun where the method and circumstances of the participation of the different missionary provinces in the formation program will be discussed.

20 It has been decided that the novitiate should not be made in Italy in order to avoid Westernizing the mentality and customs of our aspirants.

21 The **Study of Philosophy and Theology**.

There is no immediate urgency as there is for the novitiate and it is better at present to come to commonly accepted positions on the future of theological preparation.

22 The community in Madagascar has decided that philosophy and theology should not be made in Zaire to prevent uprooting our clerics for a long time. On the other hand, the philosophical and theological seminary at Tananarive functions well for both diocesan and religious students. The choice of Tananarive seems obvious.

23 Consequently, the Southern Italian Province must plan to send two new fathers in the next three years. With the opening of our religious community in Tananarive, the development needs, including vocational ones, to which the Province is committed in Madagascar are met.

THE DEHONIAN PRESENCE IN TANANARIVE

24 The SCJ presence in Tananarive is called for by a twofold necessity. The future presence of the scholasticate and as the place of a single dehonian community with the Portuguese confreres.

25 In recent years, different religious institutes have established their scholasticates or central houses in Tananarive. The Madagascan community decided that the time has arrived for the various goals we wish to achieve to acquire some land since the prices are continually rising. Thus, the principal aim is to have a place for the future scholasticate and a place for a community house for the Italian and Portuguese confreres.

26 It was decided that the scholasticate should not be attached to a parish so as not to interfere with the formation activity. It should be a religious house separated from other activity yet always providing the opportunity for

pastoral experience for the scholastics and taking into account the need of the students to study. The Cardinal has not made taking a parish a condition for permission to have a religious house.

27 The community of Madagascar is divided over whether to have a place in the city with certain restrictions of space or outside the city with a large agricultural field at its disposal.

28 After some available areas in Tananarive were visited by a group of the Italian and Portuguese confreres, it was decided that the place for the scholasticate should be in an area within easy access of the seminary either by foot or some public transportation.

THE REVIEW OF PASTORAL ACTIVITY

29 Reviewing the ten years of pastoral activity in Madagascar, the Provincial Superior has asked the community to reflect on their pastoral activity.

30 Fr. Giampietro presented their pastoral plan, with its emphasis on catechetics as the principle characteristic; Christian formation of the young, retreats and weekends for the study of the Word of God, formation for married couples and the Sacrament of Matrimony for those who request it. The principle and fundamental activity remains the formation of catechists by means of monthly meetings and other longer sessions.

31 The Provincial Superior asked the community of Madagascar to select the theme for the monthly meetings of the missionaries for the coining year. The examination of the pastoral activity has been chosen as the theme. It will consider how much has been done in the past ten years; especially, to search for an orientation and the common thread of their pastoral work as a common initiative. Consequently, they will be able to define the dehonian style and establish an identical content for the two missionary districts, drawing on an SCJ spirituality which will reflect the dehonian charism.

From "Incontro", 1/1986)

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MADAGASCAR: THE CHURCH DESIRES TO PROMOTE CATECHETICS ON ALL LEVELS

1. The Pastoral Direction of the Church

32 The **State of Fact**. The announcement of the Gospel arrived in Madagascar with the colonists and the military. As a result, the Gospel was considered as part of a foreign ideology. The military chaplains were also missionaries. In fact, the people, Catholics and Protestants, were constrained by force to participate in Sunday worship. It is only natural under these circumstances that the origin of the faith was weak. Hence, it failed when the first difficulties appeared or there was less external stimulus.

33 The family bonds are not very strong. They easily pass to second marriages. There is no engagement period as in Europe. Marriage is celebrated according to local custom and after some time, even years, the existing unions are regularized by registering them with the state or by receiving the sacrament of matrimony in the Church. Children are very important for the stability of marriage which will not last if the wife does not bear children.

34 In our territory, the announcement of the Gospel began in 1910. It is not possible yet to speak of a mentality of the faith or a Christian tradition. Part of the territory is rich in rice as a result their relative wealth is an obstacle to a Christian testimony. Being preoccupied with the harvest, the spirit passes into second place. A materialistic mentality is entrenched.

35 **Pastoral:** In face of this situation the principle objective of the Church is to promote a catechesis on every level in order to form a faith mentality which will penetrate and vivify the local customs and practices.

36 On the national level there is a national catechetical center and a school of theology for the laity and sisters who work with the priests in catechizing in the various zones.

37 In our diocese there is also a diocesan catechetical center with courses for the catechists, aspiring catechists and community leaders. The courses are held in the diocesan center and in various districts of the diocese.

38 In each district there is a monthly meeting for the catechists for lectures on formation and arranging the program for the visit of the priest to the communities. There is also a reflection on the various problems of the Christian community. In addition to these monthly meetings, the catechists meet three times a year to study and plan. These sessions last for three days.

39 The **Christian Community**. Generally, the communities organize themselves independently of the priests. There is a “committee” of the

community formed by the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, the catechist, the leaders of the sections and, lastly, the presidents of the various associations. This committee provides leadership for the faith life of the community and is responsible for the charitable and social economy of the community. Together with the missionary, they decide on the readiness or lack of it in the candidates for the various sacraments.

40 The catechist has a special and essential role in the life of the community. He is the representative of the priest in the community, announces the Gospel, is responsible for catechizing and leads prayer on Sunday. The catechist does not receive a salary, but lives by his own work. The community reimburses him for his travel expenses and for the cost of the various up dating courses. Once a year a collection is taken up for him and his family. In the work of catechizing, he is assisted by volunteers from the Christian community.

41 The priest usually visits the community once a month, remaining for two or three days in each community. He visits the families, holds meeting? of the various societies, reviews the catechizing, celebrates the Eucharist and the other sacraments and, lastly, evaluates the life of the community. Surely, every thing is not perfect and the ideal is not always attained. As with St. Paul in the Church of Corinth, the missionary frequently has to exhort, reconcile and repair. Only recently have we priests begun to reflect on the various ministries. We are not yet prepared to present this idea to the Christian communities. It will not be difficult to convert the role of the catechist into a ministry. Perhaps the day is not long off given the preparation required of our catechists. However, it is still premature to speak of ministries in the other functions.

42 The **Community of Imerimandroso**. The community consists of two priests, two brothers and two lay people. We have as our community project catechetics and social concerns. The community has as its program of prayer; Morning Prayer, Mass and Adoration. Periodically, we have a meeting of the leaders of the sectors. The catechetical and social work is carried on in conjunction with, the community of sisters and a lay woman who received a diploma in catechetics from the National Theological School for the Laity in the National Center. The catechist also takes part in the planning Even in the area of social service there are times for prayer and catechizing. All of this requires a certain commitment to the community and the group is subject to constant examination. The catechetical program is developed in harmony with the diocesan program. Each one of the priests has the care of a particular section which gives him the possibility of following the life of the community and enables him to understand its problems. However, this division

does not prevent the priests every so often from alternating with the young lay woman and the sisters.

2. The Local Church and the Political and Social Difficulties

43 It is difficult to provide an exact picture of the political situation. We live in the “bush”. The press and the radio are subject to government censorship. Officially, the Constitution (The Red Book) follows a socialist line in policy and but does not place obstacles to the Church’s activities if these favour the socialist revolution. In practice, however, it is, after all, men who make political decisions. These generally follow the Russian, Cuban and Chinese school. The nation maintains relations with the West because they are economically dependent on the West. There is in existence a proposition to abolish all private schools within three years. The Church considers private schools a necessary means for catechizing and forming a Christian mentality. The government wants to reserve to itself exclusively the right to educate children and young people. There is some knowledge of a plan which envisions institutions, some type of residences to receive young people who are leaving school, in which they would receive a continuing training and formation in socialist ideology. The press, the radio and these institutions for continuing formation in socialist ideology, which all state functionaries must attend, are dedicated to this end: to inculcate socialist ideas very close to Marxism. However, a certain situation is present which does not favour the government program: the Malagasy people are very attached to their traditional practices and are attached to their land of origin which they consider their exclusive property, they believe in God, they preserve the cult of the family in the fullest sense of the word.

Attachment to the Church

44 The Episcopal Conference in the main is composed of Malagasy bishops, 15 Malagasy and 3 foreigners. For this reason they are able to speak with authority and without fear of expulsion. Basically, they are disposed to collaborating with the government and to educating people in Christian socialism. Their directives aim at encouraging the people to collaborate with the government in order to overcome the economic difficulties, the racial and tribal divisions, to participate in the local committees so as to promote undertakings that favour the spiritual and material progress of the nation.

45 Yet, at certain times, they adopt a critical attitude towards those in authority (cf. “The Declaration of the Bishops of Madagascar” in *La Documentation Catholique*, n. 22, December, 18, 1977).

46 The Church has its own newspaper which, however, is subject to censorship and is often not able to appear. There is a commitment on the national level to prepare the laity and to form a faith attitude and a Christian social conscience so that they may be a ferment among the Christians. There is a school of theology for the laity on the national level and a center for catechetics. We foreign priests are considered “strangers”. For this reason our efforts are especially dedicated to catechetics. We are willing to collaborate in initiatives that we consider a matter of justice. For other undertakings, we prefer that the Malagasy priests, sisters and laity make their voices heard.

3. The Future of the Church

47 There are some tribes that are active and some that are less active. The most active are those of the high plateau with its cooler climate who have had domination over the island and are considered as a noble race. They were the first to be conquered by the colonizers and to receive the proclamation of the Gospel towards the end 1870. These tribes are especially concentrated in three dioceses well-staffed with native clergy. The other dioceses depend almost exclusively on foreign clergy. Our diocese has only one native priest among twenty five priests. Others have, for example, five among thirty priests, one of ten priests, two among fifteen priests. Some diocese have no native priests. In these dioceses the announcement of the Gospel came much later because of the harsh climate. The native priests of Meseta tribe of the high plateau do not want to transfer to the other dioceses. On the other hand, the tribes of these other dioceses are not well disposed to accept the native priests from the other dioceses which in the past were the dominant power in the island and still today hold the administrative and better paying positions. The heart of the matter is that something of the old antipathy remains and it reopens old wounds. This is where the matter stands and, naturally, the Malagasy Church continues to need missionaries.

Native Vocations

48 This is a summary of the state of vocations with a special reference to dioceses of the coast and our diocese.

1. The families lack a strong or stable unity. Second and third marriages are common.
2. The desire for marriage is very strong and fidelity to celibacy demands great sacrifice.
3. The desire to have children is also very strong. It is a sign of prestige and a sure help in old age. For this reason parents do not give consent

to their sons and daughters who have a vocation and will not give their blessing which is important in the native mentality.

49 In the face of this situation we can not say that serious efforts are being made. In our diocese there is a committee which has been charged with this problem but they are only taking the first steps. We who have been here only a short time, not knowing the language, the culture and the customs have not yet organized the usual initiatives: vocational days, theatrical vocation presentations, slide shows, catechetical homilies.

A Letter from Fr. Nicola Giampietro, scj

50 *N.B.* - *We have taken advantage of the presence of Fr. Jardin among us to give us an updating of this article of Fr. Nicola Giampietro. The following is his response.*

51 I have read Fr. Nicola's article on Madagascar with attention. I can say that in the main it is still actual even though it was written a few years ago and we Portuguese work in another diocese more than a thousand kilometers away.

52 In general there is a greater development in the parish of Imerimandroso and Andreba (of the Italian Fathers) than in the parishes of Ifanadiana and Andreba of the Portuguese Fathers. Perhaps this is due to the greater continuity of those working in them. Even though the organization of the Christian communities and the pastoral priorities are the same, our parishes encounter greater difficulties. We hope to succeed in a few years with the help of God.

53 For example, our catechists do not meet every month but every three months for four days, the great majority of our Christian communities do not yet have effective committees, our catechesis is not continuous but only in preparation for the sacraments. The center at Ifanadiana is certainly more advanced than the other small communities and here the laity (the church committee) collaborate especially in social and economic matters.

54 I believe that the charitable activities are not at the moment satisfactory even though on the occasions of feasts the laity are open to extending hospitality to the Christians who have come from a distance.

55 Further, the visits of the priests to the "bush" are less frequent, every three months. Finally, the priests work as a group without a specific sector assign to one or the other.

56 Fortunately, in the social and political field we are witnessing a more positive evolution than the one described in the article of Fr. Giampietro. The

study of Marxism is no longer the only one in the official program. Notwithstanding the various attempts to abolish private education, the government has not succeeded because of the strong reaction from the Christian Churches and public opinion.

57 The revolutionary ardour is cooling. There is a stronger critical sense and, above all, there is more serenity among the young and the intellectuals.

58 Censorship continues but it is somewhat softened. The Church has its programs on the state radio as do the other religious bodies.

59 The Church's attitude toward the government continues in the same manner, collaboration up to a certain point and a prudent critique in what is found to be unjust. This can be seen in some of the recent documents on the situation in the country, a criticism of the autocracy (which is really the present government of Madagascar), the general wide spread corruption which continues to grow.

60 Happily, the growth of native vocations is better compared to six or seven years ago. In the high plateau area actually there is an **explosion of vocations** which has caught the religious congregations unprepared. The communities of religious women have a certain number of novices and many aspirants making it difficult to select and train candidates.

61 The dioceses and the congregations of men have not had difficulty in recruiting vocations except, perhaps, the dioceses on the coast which are still affected by family instability, the idea of marriage and the desire for children.

62 On the other hand the confreres at Ambatondrazaka have developed some vocational promotion and one of the fathers is occupied with a group of young men who want to join the community. At present, they are studying in the diocesan seminary. We look forward to giving a greater emphasis and effort to the work of vocations.

Fr. Manuel A.G.R. Jardim, scj