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# In memoriam

Xaverian biographical profiles



## Fr. Savino Mombelli

3 April 1928 ~ 13 August 2016



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## Fr. Savino Mombelli

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*Pontevico (BS – Italy)*  
*3 April 1928*

*Ananindéua (North Brazil)*  
*13 August 2016*

Fr. Savino Mombelli died on 13 August 2016 in Ananindéua, a municipality of North Brazil in the State of Pará, which is part of the Metropolitan mesoregion of Belém. He died of heart problems that had been affecting him for some time. The diocesan weekly newspaper of Brescia, *La Voce del Popolo*, thus reported his death on 17 August 2016:

Fr. Savino Mombelli, a Xaverian Missionary who went to South America in 1966, died a few days ago in Belém, in the heart of the Amazons. He was 88 years old. Born in Pontevico, he grew up in Bassano and was an example of charity for all those who had the good fortune to know him.

When he arrived in Brazil, Fr. Savino immediately saw the extreme poverty in which the people were living; for this reason, in addition to spiritual assistance, he did his utmost to provide houses for orphaned children and adolescents and set up a “market of solidarity”, without forgetting his generous commitment in building houses for the homeless. His figure will always be associated with remote adoptions.

The Mayor of Bassano, Giampaolo Seniga, commented, “We mourn the death of the last indomitable missionary from Bassano, a zealous pastor

who left home and family to dedicate his life to the poor and marginalized”.

In order to understand Fr. Mombelli it is important to remember the important elements of his biography. He was born in Pontevico, in the province and diocese of Brescia, on 3 April 1928, in a family of farmers, the sixth of ten children born to Battista Mombelli and Antonietta Febbrari. He lived for three years in San Gervasio before his family moved to Bassano Bresciano.

He attended elementary school in Bassano Bresciano and preparatory school at Manerbio and Brescia. In 1942 he began four years of study at the diocesan seminary in Botticino Sera (BS). In 1946, after overcoming the opposition of his family, he decided to join the Xaverian Institute. This is confirmed in a letter he wrote to the Superior General, Fr. Giovanni Gazza, on 23 September 1946:

I am a seminarian at the Seminary of Brescia. For some time now I have been aspiring to a more perfect and generous form of life. After meeting the Fathers at Grumone, I aspire to their religious-missionary life.

I have spoken about this with my Spiritual Director and he approves my desire, as do the Superiors of the Seminary. Although my parents do not agree with my decision, they have finally given me the freedom to pursue my vocation, albeit with some disappointment.

I therefore ask you, Reverend Father, to accept my application. My sole desire is to consecrate my life to the many poor people who are bereft of the light of the Faith [...].

On 24 October 1946 he began novitiate in San Pietro in Vincoli (RA). At the end of the first semester of the novitiate year, he wrote once again to the Superior General:

I have now completed the first half of my novitiate and I can only thank the Lord and Our Blessed Lady for the great love they have shown me. They have granted me many graces and I fear I have not always reciprocated.

However I am not sorry I have received these graces: I never asked for them nor did I deserve them. I therefore ask them to be patient with me and bear with my infidelities. I pray to them every day that they will always keep me close to them.

Only here have I experienced how wonderful and consoling it is, at the age of twenty, to serve only the Lord and I have fallen in love with it. Even when things are difficult I cannot bring myself to abandon the Lord and I persevere as best I can: He called me to this life and I am resolved never to abandon it, no matter the cost.

The missionary ideal, which inspired me to fight and win the first struggles, sustains me always and I believe I am truly on the right path.

In the meantime, my desire is to know and love the Xaverian Family more and more. I thank you for allowing me to be part of it.

He made his First Profession in San Pietro in Vincoli on 25 October 1947. He then attended three years of senior high school (1947–50) at the Xaverian house in Desio (MB) before being sent to the Mother House in Parma as assistant to the aspiring and professed Brothers (1950–52).

He made his Final Profession in 1950. The rector of the Desio house said in his report to the General Direction: «During these years of initial formation, he has stood out for his creativity and initiative. Feisty and determined, he is very enthusiastic about the missionary vocation [...]. He has absorbed our spirit and loves the Institute».

He studied Theology in Piacenza and was ordained priest there on 4 June 1955. After his theology studies, Fr. Savino served in various roles in Italy: vice-rector, teacher and vocations animator in the minor seminaries of Udine (1956–57) and Brescia (1957–59). Later, in Parma, at the *Centro Saveriano di Animazione Missionaria* (CSAM), he was Director of the *Centro Educazione alla Missionarietà* (CEM)<sup>1</sup> and *Didattica Missionaria*: aids and resources for elementary schools (1959–64).

Savino traveled the length and breadth of Italy, proposing to pupils and teachers a Christian experience sympathetic to the cultures and religions of the poor. With this goal and vision in mind, he published articles and didactic books, for example, *Vele nel porto* — a didactic work plan by CEM —, *Tappeto volante* — an annual work plan for elementary school teachers — and *Liberi tutti* — the history of humanity in its quest for freedom —. He said of these experiences in the schools: «I travelled around Italy clocking up 30.000 kilometers a year, giving conferences to high school teachers and selling subscriptions. Whenever possible, I also appointed a CEM delegate in every group».

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1942 in Parma as the result of an intuition of three young Xaverian theology students (Augusto Luca, Mario Sguazzi and Alessandro Pataconi), CEM was an attempt to put into practice the ideal of the Institute's Founder, St. Guido Maria Conforti: "Make the world a single family". In a letter dated 21 October 1942, the Superior General of the Xaverians, Fr. Amatore Dagnino, appointed Fr. Alfonso Begheldo as the first Director and co-founder. In its first decades of existence, the acronym CEM meant *Centro di Educazione alla Missionarietà*. It stood out for its strong internationalist commitment in the Italian school system, by producing innovative materials, promoting conferences and seminars, working for the formation of a new mentality based upon the values of interculturality, which is fundamental for a healthy development in a multi-ethnic society, and setting in motion a lively debate that involved many of the greatest pedagogues of the times. Towards the end of the 1960s, its name was changed to *Centro di Educazione alla Mondialità*.

In the meantime (1964–65) he worked at the AVE publishers in Rome, compiling a three-volume anthology for High School, entitled *Il mondo è tutto mio*. The work develops three fundamental topics: the world presents itself, the world speaks to us, the world calls us. The presentation of the peoples of the world with all their most authentic characteristics and aspirations helps adolescents to understand that we all belong to the great human family and to ask themselves what they can do for it.

The still valid contribution made by Fr. Mombelli to CEM is due to the fact that he was convinced of the key role of education, especially in a time of transition. Since «CEM's method is interculturality, its *mission* must be the “conviviality of differences” in its various meanings: *the conviviality of cultures* in order to educate people to acknowledge the others through the method of interdisciplinarity and narrative pedagogy; *the conviviality of religions* in order to promote dialogue among the religions with the method of listening, knowledge and mutual respect; *the conviviality of freedoms* in order to educate people to the differences between the sexes and the promotion of the weakest members of society with the method of deconstruction, the nonviolent management of conflicts and the recognition of multiple intelligences; *the conviviality of responsibilities* in order to educate people to the great issues of peace, the environment, human rights and planetary solidarity with the method of the pedagogy of gestures, good practices and active involvement».



On 23 March 1966 Fr. Mombelli wrote to Fr. Giovanni Bonardi from Belém, the capital of the State of Pará / North Brazil:

I am very pleased to tell you that I am very happy here in the Amazons and I believe that this will continue.

I am learning the language, which is very easy to speak, but very difficult to know and write. I have been preaching in church for some time, with the help of notes, and I hear confessions too.

I am full of enthusiasm for everything I see and hear; indeed, it has gone to my head. In the Congo I would have found Africa and in Japan I would have found something of Asia. Here I have found Europe, Asia, Africa and America for the first time. After six years of work on behalf of the universal human family, I believe that there is no better place for me than this one. All the races of the world are here, fused together in every combination with the most unexpected results. And they are fused together not only by the blood of Adam, but also by the baptism of Christ: these two things are the premise of a more profound fusion that is exemplary to the entire world, especially to the world of the future.

The natural landscape is, as you can imagine, very fascinating. The climate is hot and humid, but not excessively, at least until June [...]. There are also cool, spring-like moments, in the morning, after the rain, in the evening and during the night.

[...] For a few months now I have been here in the parish of Bujaru, a municipality of the Brazilian State of Pará, with roughly 23,000 inhabitants scattered over 80 villages. We have about 20,000 people, scattered over thirty navigable rivers, and a territory as vast as the province of Latina. The river Guamã passes in front of the church and it is our highway: it is about one thousand kilometers long and twice the size of the river Po in width. It takes us into the heart of Belém in five or ten hours, depending on the tides [...].

I remember you always with great affection.

In February 1965, Fr. Mombelli had been assigned to the Xaverian Region of North Brazil. He stayed there for just 21 months (1965–67). He worked in the pastoral ministry as a collaborator in the parish of Bujaru, in the church of Our Lady of Mercedes in Belém (1966–67), and in formation as spiritual director and teacher at the Xaverian Seminary of Jaguapitá (in the second semester of 1967).

In 1966, upon the request of Dom Alberto Gaudêncio Ramos, the archbishop of Belém, Fr. Mombelli represented the prelature of Abaetetuba at a meeting of bishops from the whole of the Amazons, which was held in Santarém; this meeting discussed the creation of an Institute of formation for native and foreign pastoral agents, who were to work in the North Regions I and II. This project was taken up again by the bishops a few years later, when they set up the SENESC in Manau and the IPAR in Belém.



Fr. Mombelli returned to Italy at the beginning of January 1968, where he served once again as the Director of CEM and was put in charge of the academic publications of the AVE publishers in Rome. In the meantime he also enrolled at the Urbaniana University in Rome for a Doctorate in Missiology, which he obtained on 8 January 1971, with the thesis “L’Umbanda<sup>2</sup> nell’ambito delle religioni afro-brasiliane”, which was published by the EMI,

<sup>2</sup> “Umbanda” refers to a quite recent and totally Brazilian religion, which combines African traditions with indigenous traditions and those of Kardec Spiritism. In Umbanda, ritual is always based on incorporation, but the agent is no longer the African spirit Orixá, but the spirits of the Indios called Caboclos, the Velhos Priests (spirits of the old negroes), who with their patience and wisdom contribute to the evolution of man.

Bologna in 1972. He was also the Director of “Fede e Civiltà”, the magazine of the Xaverian Congregation (1970–71).

However it was the CEM movement that took up most of Fr. Mombelli’s time during these years. After a thorough discernment, and inspired by Vatican II, he replaced the word “missionarietà” (emphasis on the mission) with “mondialità” (emphasis on the world), and renamed the *Centro di Educazione alla Missionarietà*, which became the *Centro di Educazione alla Mondialità*. He had come to understand that the world was changing and that openness to dialogue would make it possible to discover new paths of peace and coexistence.

Fr. Mombelli thus explained the decision to his confrere, Fr. Arnaldo De Vidi: «The change from *missionarietà* to *mondialità* became possible and compulsory when I became aware (during the first 21 months spent in Belém, between 1966–67) that Brazil was no longer a country, but a continent and that we had to begin looking at it in the context, and from the perspective, of the whole world».

The word “mondialità” did not yet exist in the Italian language: it was invented by Fr. Mombelli, and taken up again and re-launched by Fr. Domenico Milani. Behind the word there was a strategy of intervention to focus on the academic curricula. «Thanks to their brilliance and organization skills, both of them, broadened the horizons of CEM, setting in motion the subsequent evolution to sow the Christian ideal of universal fraternity throughout the world without being denominational and with a commitment to *mondialità* and interculturality».



In the almost forty-five years between 1972 and 2016, Fr. Mombelli lived «an adventure of solidarity in the spirit of evangelization», in Belém, North Brazil, serving the Gospel among the poorest and most needy people. In an interview with the monthly publication *Missionari Saveriani*, on 1 December 1977, he spoke about the value of two ideas, Liberation and Evangelization, which summed up the identity and the culture of his pastoral activity:

For me the two ideas are fused together, but, before I explain myself, I will say that I become annoyed when I hear people speak of evangelization only in a certain manner. It seems that evangelization means to preach and unload ideas and moral principles into empty heads. People speak only about what we have to do, how our action should be, without saying anything about those to whom the Gospel is proclaimed.

To evangelize is to proclaim the Gospel to people; it means to announce to them that Christ has come and is close to them. In our case, to evan-



gelize means to tell people that they already belong to Christ, that they are already suffering his passion and death and that they have a right to immediate resurrection. In short, Christianity is not so much what we say, but what already exists, independently of admittance to baptism or religious matrimony [...].

To evangelize is to liberate the Christ who is a prisoner in the human condition of these poor people. It is to say to them that Christ is among them and is each one of them. It is to give prominence to him in such a way that he becomes their Head and he can lead them on the journey to full resurrection, to a more dignified life that is in closer harmony with the nature of the children of God.

On 7 November 2010, he spoke once again on the relationship between “liberation” and “evangelization” in a reflection he had been asked to prepare on the occasion of the Founder’s canonization. The question referred to what aspect of Conforti’s life should be highlighted and proposed to the sensitivity of the Church:

In response to this question, I believe it is important to highlight and propose, to Christians and non-Christians, the idea and the practice of the universal fraternity that was a great desire of Conforti; until now it has not been given great attention and has not been well explained by the authors who have written about him.

What do I mean by universal fraternity in connection with the spirit and ideals of Conforti?

By universal fraternity, I mean a more up to date and modern version of the missionary project to bring all the peoples into the flock of Jesus. I mean a religious, social and political version of that project, a proposal to all the countries of the earth that they come together and resolve to bring about a world society in which all human beings have the same rights and duties. Such a fraternity can be seen as the result of preaching the Gospel and as an ideal goal which, in harmony with the Gospel and Christian morality, becomes universal, preparing humanity to form and become the Kingdom of God on earth.

Guido Maria Conforti spoke often about universal fraternity, as if this idea was his pet subject, his way of making the missionary ideal accessible to all, an idea that is still too reserved to groups or specialized individuals. He spoke most frequently about universal fraternity when the missionaries were departing for the missions, as if he were handing to them the secret of his life or the secret of Christianity. “Make the world your family, make the peoples a single family”, he said, foreseeing, together with universal fraternity, a universal vocation extended to all categories of Christians and non-Christians. I would like to say that, on this point, Guido Maria Conforti was a prophet of the new times, of the Second Vatican Council

and the new mission that is emerging before our eyes. A mission to which all the human professions, social categories, sciences, arts, technologies, cultures and religions are called to make their own contribution.

Finally, I wish to point out that the ideal of universal fraternity was, and still is, the pet subject of the Xaverian missionaries. About fifty years after the Institute was founded, the Xaverians began to ask themselves if it would be possible to translate the missionary ideal or the idea of universal fraternity into academic or didactic language, suitable for primary and secondary schools. We can say that they succeeded brilliantly in this endeavor, not only by introducing the topic of the mission into the schools, but by extracting from the school and its subjects anything that could help Italian children to become citizens of the world and friends and supporters of the mission.

In the name of «liberation» and «evangelization», Fr. Mombelli threw himself into the school, pastoral ministry and assistance to the most needy people.

From 1974 until 2005 he taught Philosophy and Theology at UFPA (Federal University of Pará), at the IPAR (Pastoral Ministry Institute), at the SENESC of Manaus, at the St. Pius X Seminary and at the IRFP (Regional Institute for Priestly Formation). Although he was busy with daily teaching, Fr. Mombelli never neglected the ordinary pastoral work in which he helped his confreres, serving as parish priest of St. Maria Goretti, a parish of marshlands with five thousand shanty town dwellers and a total number of forty thousand inhabitants; or in the “favela” of Guamá, as the coordinator of the urban area, as prison chaplain, as animator of the university pastoral ministry and as preacher of retreats to the religious communities and seminary of Belém.

Finally, he had various initiatives for the integral wellbeing of needy people. Worthy of special mention are the social-humanitarian initiatives, such as the NGO “Provida” (Promoting Life and Citizenship), with its headquarters in Ananindéua / PA, which was founded in 1976 together with Carlo Giuseppe Dal Maso, a volunteer from Vicenza whose principal projects are: Remote adoptions (P.A.D.), professional training for adolescents and adults, the Market of solidarity, a supermarket managed by Provida and the Construction of small brick houses to replace the huts made with mud and straw, in order to provide a dignified and healthy life to the poorest families. The social-humanitarian activities of “Provida” are financed by friends and benefactors of Fr. Mombelli and other Italian citizens who decided to help Brazilian children through remote adoptions.

In connection with PROVIDA, on 19 May 2004 Fr. Mombelli wrote to Fr. Giancarlo Lazzarini, who was then a member of the General Council:

You will be wondering why I am writing to you. The reason is quite simple: no one asks me anything and, since I believe that I am working very hard, I would like there to be at least one document in the general archives that can bear witness to what I am doing [...].

For example, do the confreres know what PROVIDA is and where it is? Some come to the door of the house in which I work for the entire day, but are afraid they will be contaminated if they come inside. Some ask me what PROVIDA is, but when they hear that it does charitable work they immediately interrupt me and tell me that it is useless because charitable works die with the person that created them. I am not saying that I will have to continue my work even when I am dead in order to ensure it goes on. These people only want to avoid showing an interest in what a confrere is doing, and perhaps even offer him some words of encouragement.

PROVIDA is a NGO of Brazilian and foreign volunteers. Among other things, it is responsible for the upkeep of about eighty children, adolescents and young people on a residential basis and it helps seven hundred poor and destitute families each month.

I believe that this is an eminently eucharistic and missionary work because it appeals to the sharing of material resources, the principal proposal made by Christ to the world. Furthermore, I believe that the bread becomes Christ only when it is shared with others. Is this doctrine not implicit in the episode of Emmaus?

Let it be clear, however, that PROVIDA is not directed by me, even though, for the time being, it cannot continue without me. The administration is in the hands of the organization's directors, whilst I remain in charge of the finances that come from the Parma Procura, the ministry and my pension [...].

What news is there of our Congregation? I feel I am a Xaverian to the backbone and I hope to die in the Congregation, but I do not always agree with its current tendencies. I have the impression that the Congregation is more inclined to the "ad intra" than the "ad extra". What would be of the Trinity if it hadn't overflowed into the "ad extra"? The mission is, first and foremost, the Trinitarian life extended to, and shared by, the global human family. This truth is well expressed in the formula of baptism that we could translate as follows: «I plunge you into the dynamic power of the holy Trinity». This gives value to the Church, the other religions and cultures and history. It is precisely for this reason that the Son became the missionary of humanity: to communicate to us the life of the Trinity.

Fr. Matteo Antonello, the Regional Superior of North Brazil, wrote to the Directors of PROVIDA on the occasion of Fr. Mombelli's death:

On behalf of the Xaverian Missionaries, I wish to express my deep gratitude for all that you did for our confrere Fr. Savino, especially during the last two years.

On 17 August 2015, Fr. Savino wrote to me: «I am being well looked after here at PROVIDA (editor's note: Fr. Savino had been experiencing heart problems for some time), each one shows concern for me in his own way». His love and enthusiasm for the people and the PROVIDA movement led him to live in your community.

The Xaverian Congregation authorized Fr. Savino to reside at the headquarters of PROVIDA, in Ananindéua, PA. Fr. Savino always lived his life as a Xaverian religious missionary in the consecrated life, with all its challenges and always striving for what is best. I thank God for the example, witness and enthusiasm of our confrere, who gave himself heart and soul to the formation of the local clergy for the growth of the Church, and to the defense of the poor people and families, in an attempt to overcome the problems caused by profound social and economic differences and achieve the justice and charity that are the doors of the Kingdom of God on this earth [...].

May God welcome our brother, Fr. Savino, into his Kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Ermanno Facchinetti, a former Xaverian student, wrote after hearing the news of Fr. Mombelli's death:

Ciao, Savino! You are in my heart forever. You were a great master of life and culture. I was one of the first students, in a group of fifty, to enter San Cristo (editor's note: the minor seminary of the Xaverians at that time), in Brescia, on 1 October 1958.

I still remember that day: you were the vice-rector and the weather was awful, but under your guidance we played "table tennis", table football and hide-and-seek under the cloisters. The day closed with prayers of thanksgiving and everyone was happy.

Most of all, I remember your enthusiasm, your desire to teach and your missionary commitment. I will always remember your literature and Latin lessons and the readings from the Divine Comedy. Your lessons of life were unbeatable.

Unfortunately, our spiritual relationship ended after just one year because you were transferred to Parma. Too little to be true, but enough to acquire a taste for art, literature, poetry, music, painting, the Christian doctrine of solidarity, respect for others and help to the needy of the Third World.

I never completely lost sight of you after our paths separated. I kept in contact with your mission in Belém, in Brazil. Now that you have left those who loved you, including your students of the class of 1958, I am sorry I could not bring a flower to your grave, but you will remain always in my heart. *Ad maiora*, Savino!



What remains of Fr. Savino Mombelli, the restless “good and faithful servant” of the Gospel? He has left behind him the memories of his many-sided and serious work, enriched by his life and thoughts: «the work of a modern hero, a man used to embodying his faith in the most concrete work, marked by toil and sweat, the dusty roads, the mud and the rain of the tropical forests; the work of a missionary priest, the director of countless initiatives: from remote adoptions to houses of refuge for children and adolescents at the risk of becoming “meñinos de rua”, from the Mercado Solidario to the construction of houses for shanty town dwellers and homeless people». This is the tribute paid to Fr. Mombelli by Magda Hussein in the film-documentary “Vida provida”, which she directed.

Another reply to this question comes from the homily by Fr. Mario Menin, who was then the rector of the Xaverian community in Brescia, during the Mass for the repose of the soul of Fr. Savino, in the parish of Bassano Bresciano, on 20 August 2016:

When a young person dies, people say that “he died too early” and become indignant; when an elderly person dies, they say “he had a good innings” and accept it too easily, almost as if life had nothing more to ask and death no questions to pose. Yet every death puts the seal of silence on a treasure that is mostly hidden, even from the person who embodied that treasure. We, the Xaverians, and all the relatives and friends of Fr. Savino, are aware that he was a precious treasure of faith, hope and love. We therefore ask God to forgive us, especially for not appreciating it fully [...].

Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, the city that persecuted and killed the prophets and which condemned him to death on the cross, when someone said to him: «Lord, will those who are saved be few?». Jesus replied: «Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able»<sup>3</sup>.

How can I save myself? How can I be saved? This is the question that inhabits the heart of every one of us; the same question that inhabited the heart of Fr. Savino, who answered it by becoming a missionary, not to preach about the “narrow door” in the mistaken sense of something accessible only to a few, but to proclaim the most profound and evangelical meaning of the adjective “narrow”: the measure of a child, the little ones and the poor.

<sup>3</sup> Lk 13:23–24.

Fr. Savino's lifelong struggle for salvation was victorious only because it passed through the "narrow door" of mercy, trust in God, not focusing on himself, but placing himself with the last, the little ones, the excluded, all those who cannot rely on themselves, but who depend in everything on others, just as a child depends on its mother [...].

Fr. Savino was never on the side of the "good" and the "capable" who feel secure by virtue of their ecclesial belonging, or by their participation in the Eucharist («Lord, we ate and drank in your presence and you taught in our streets»<sup>4</sup>).

Fr. Savino never acted as the master of the house, who can open or close the door to others whenever he likes. He lived the Church and the mission as a "field hospital" and "a work of mercy" long before Pope Francis coined these phrases; he believed that the "narrow door" had to be opened above all to the poor who, like Lazarus, are left to rot at the door of the rich: «They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and take their places at table in the kingdom of God». And to those who said to him: «The poor are deceiving you», he would reply with a happy smile: «Yes, but it is better to be deceived by the poor than to deceive them» [...].

The "narrow door" of Luke's Gospel opens up to the feast of the "final banquet" announced by the prophets. Jesus has inaugurated this banquet, by sitting down at table with tax collectors and sinners: with his scandalous behavior, Jesus tells us what a saved life looks like: a fully human life that is capable of loving the earth and serving God.

We end this biographical profile of Fr. Mombelli, "a restless missiologist", with one of his last contributions on interreligious dialogue, entitled *The one hundred Brazilian religions and the new missions*.

For twenty long centuries, the Church has tried to convert the faithful of other religions to Christianity, but the situation of the modern world, and a new way of understanding the Church, advise us to take the opposite approach: to convert Christianity to other religions and convoke them so that they fulfill the Kingdom of God on earth with us.

All religions have their origin in God and, instead of clashing with each other as they have done for centuries, they must encounter each other, dialogue, work together fraternally in order to renew the world with the dynamics of the Kingdom.

<sup>4</sup> Lk 13:26.

<sup>5</sup> This text is taken from the introduction to the book *Molte religioni, un solo Regno* — an original theological "lexicon" — by Savino Mombelli; it was printed in *Missione Oggi* / August-September 2016, 3.

The time has come to listen to the religions and find out what they think of our centuries-old arrogance and our exclusivism. In any case, to listen to the religions is to listen to God. And to despise the religions is equivalent to despising God. This does not mean the end of the mission, but the beginning of another, the most beautiful and engaging mission that we can imagine, also for the Xaverians in Brazil. I wonder why they plan the missionary work focusing on themselves and their numerical potential, instead of allowing themselves be influenced by the reality in which they are inserted, in the case of Brazil, by interreligious dialogue, which could open up unimaginable opportunities for the benefit of the entire world, as well as the Institute to which they belong. However, as we know, interreligious dialogue is correct and bears fruit only if certain conditions are fulfilled.

The first condition is, without a doubt, the appreciation of others as equals. Instead, Christianity believes it has the right to primacy among all the religions, something which has a negative impact on those involved in dialogue, preventing them from reaching beyond themselves in an exodus of noble abnegation and renewal. For this and other reasons, it is essential that dialogue be held among equals, among religions that consider themselves democratically as sisters, so that those who wish to live eternally as brothers and sisters may begin to do so already in this life.

In the second place, dialogue must not be used to convince others to change religion, despite the fact that such conversions are legitimate and should be respected.

In the third place, dialogue must help us to know other religions better, striving to promote an exchange of values and, above all, reach an agreement on how to work together and exert an appropriate influence on public authorities, so that they commit themselves to build a more just and fraternal world.

I would like to end these considerations on dialogue with an observation that might upset both the Brazilians and the missionaries who come here from overseas (as is the case of the majority of the Xaverians).

At a time in which the world is experiencing a compelling tension towards justice, fraternity and the encounter among different languages, cultures and religions, and in a country like Brazil, which for at least 150 years has been welcoming numerous and different peoples, it is disappointing to see that there are no well thought out and planned attempts at dialogue among the religions and the cultures to transform this country into a convivial nation, capable of promoting human rights, such as the right to land, study, work, housing and health. Could this not be one of the specific projects to entrust to the foreign missionaries?

Today, interreligious dialogue is recommended by the documents of the Church and by our own Xaverian documents too, and we should therefore welcome this opportunity with open arms. Brazil is the synthesis of various continents and a dialogue among the one hundred Brazilian

religions would be the premise and the proof of an interreligious dialogue at world level.

«The memory of the just man is an act of justice». Fr. Giancarlo Lazzarini wrote to Savino to mark the 50th anniversary of his Ordination to the Priesthood: “Every day of your life we have seen you committed to the service of the Gospel among the poorest and most needy brothers. We thank the Lord for giving you to our Congregation. We must acknowledge that, despite the understandable and normal differences of opinion, you have always inspired us to be faithful to our vocation as celebrants of the Eucharist, of fidelity to God and his people in the New Alliance, of justice and fraternity among all the peoples”.

*A cura di p. Domenico Calarco S.X.*





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