

Quality, Identity and Mission of Comboni Schools in Sudan

Saint Daniel Comboni and his successors created dozens of schools in Sudan, a country where 97% of the population are Muslims. How these schools developed their mission in such a context? Did they renounce or watered down that mission in order to be accepted by the local population? Why were they so well accepted by Muslim Sudanese people?

This study responds to these questions through a historical review of the development of Comboni schools in Sudan, of their identity and mission, and through the application of an assessment tool based on the European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model.

1. Historical Development of Comboni Schools in Sudan

1.1 The Educational Vision of Comboni

In Comboni's vision educated African people were called to be the evangelizer-educators of their own people. This idea was already present in the first Catholic school founded by a Lazzarist priest in Khartoum, Luigi Montuori in 1843 (letter written by Fr. Montuori on March 12, 1843, reported by Bano, 1979, pp. 201-202; and quoted by Ballin, 2001, p. 96). The German geographer Carl Ritter explained that at the school of Khartoum, "in addition to the usual subjects they would be taught agriculture and handicrafts. After their training they would return to their tribes and become the instructors of their own people" (Ritter, 1852; cited in English by Toniolo & Hill, 1974, p. 4).

That school of Khartoum would be the only Catholic school in a country with 2.5 km² of extension until the beginning of the work of Saint Daniel Comboni who would enlarge that school (Toniolo & Hill, 1974, p. 21) and open others in El Obeid (1871); Dilling (1874) and Berber (1874) (Comboni, 2006, pp. 1187-1188).

In order to understand the sources of the educational vision of Comboni, it's important to recall the context in which he was educated. One of the pillars that imbued the Institution where Comboni was educated from Primary School to his priestly ordination, the Mazza Institute of Verona, was 'the centrality of the free human person' (Valente da Cruz 2007, 69).

Mazza's Institute was also the field of the existing conflict inside Catholicism at that time on the way of understanding the relation between religion and modern civilization. Pope Pius IX had issued on December 8, 1864 a document called the 'Syllabus of Errors' (*Syllabus Errorum* in its original in Latin) that condemned some ideologies of the time like liberalism, modernism, moral relativism and the political emancipation of Europe from the tradition of Catholic monarchies.

An Italian priest and philosopher called Antonio Rosmini (1797-1855), a close friend to Don Nicola Mazza, Comboni's mentor (Valente 2007, 67), held a more dialoguing attitude with those ideologies. Rosmini tried to reconcile Christian religion with modern philosophies of the time and fought against the use of 'religion as a weapon of temporal

power' (De Giorgi 1999, 28). He was not afraid of human progress. According to De Sanctis, the Lombardian approach to education that Rosmini also represents, considered that 'in order to regenerate Italy, the education of the bourgeoisie is not enough but there is need of the instruction of all the people' (De Sanctis, 1953, pp. 222-223). These educators opposed those who proposed an 'education proportional to the social class' (De Giorgi, 1999, p. 98) and defended the '*universality of charity*' (Zovatto, 2002, p. 534). Moreover they implemented curricula that integrated scientific and religious subjects.

On the pedagogical side, the ideas of Rosmini meant 'a pedagogy of freedom, inner autonomy and reinforcement of character' (De Giorgi, 1999, p.31). In fact, 'responsibility and freedom' (Valente da Cruz, 2007, p. 69) were two key words to understand the educational style of Mazza's Institute.

An Italian journalist, A. Caperle, after visiting Mazza's Institute, states in the newspaper *L'Eco del Veneto* on May 18, 1865 that a main educational principle at the Institute was 'the respect for the student, who learns in this way to respect himself and the others' (cited by Valente da Cruz, 2007, p. 69).

A sign of the impact of these ideas on Comboni could be his preface to the Rules of the Institute for the Missions of Africa. Far from a legalistic understanding, Comboni states that these rules

Must be based on general principles. If they were too detailed, either necessity or the desire for change would soon undermine the foundation of their structure, and they would become a heavy and unbearable burden for those bound by them (Comboni, 2006, p. 834).

Another input that may have had an impact on Comboni's educational vision was the proposal of Giacomo Giovannetti, written in 1840, of passing from 'relief charity to empowering charity through the instruction of people' (quoted by De Giorgi, 1999, p. 99).

In the XIX century, many Religious Institutes or Congregationsⁱ that were founded in Europe 'addressed a specially neglected sector of society: the popular instruction of women' (De Giorgi, 1999, p. 95). De Giorgi mentions the example of one of the biggest cities in Italy in 1825, Turin, where 'no woman was registered in public primary schools' (1999, p. 95).

Daniel Comboni's Institute will transfer these principles to the education of Sudanese people and Sudanese women in a special way. Moreover, the dialogic attitude of the Mazza Institute with the 'modern world' could be compared with the dialogic attitude of Catholic Schools in Sudan with their Islamic environment.

In addition to this, we also can say that Comboni's religious motivation to make Christ known in Africa went along with the dissemination in Europe of liberal and humanist ideas "that proclaimed the universal rights of man" and "the fight against slavery and trade, from both Western and Oriental" powers (González, 1993, p. 157). Consequently, also African people had the *right* to eternal salvation and education.

After looking into the writings and the work of Comboni, we can draw some principles (Naranjo, 2019, p. 89) that shaped his educational vision and have had an impact on the identity, mission and understanding of quality of Comboni schools in Sudan until today:

- It is a practice oriented education where the students experience and practice already during their learning process what they are studying. In fact, Comboni defines his Institutes of Cairo as ‘schools of experience’ (Comboni, 2006, p. 815).
- It is holistic as it deals with the spiritual, the intellectual, the social and the moral dimensions of the person.
- It is contextualized for the needs of Central Africa.
- It respects the inner freedom of the student to choose the way and state (catechist, Priest or Sister, craftsman...) in the light of the personal gifts and after a personal dialogue with God (Comboni, 2006, p. 718).

1.2 Comboni Schools during the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium

The return of the missionaries after the *Mahdya* was tolerated by the colonial government with some restrictions, especially for what concerned their work in the north of a country that still included the Republic of South Sudan. In the south the Anglo-Egyptian administration left the provision of education to missionary societies, tried to cancel any kind of Arab-Islamic influence and allowed the development of local cultures (Vantini, 2005, p. 532), even if public funds were not invested there until 1926 (Sanderson, 1962, p. 105). In the north instead, Arabic and English were the media of instruction and there was a reluctance to allow the missionaries to work because of the fear of provoking a reaction from the Islamist sectors of society and of the resistance to provide good education to local population.

An example of this caution was the document that authorized the opening of Comboni College Khartoum. This High School was opened “on the conditions that the school is for non-Sudanese [sic] boys” (Director of Education, May 27, 1929).

It was after the thirties of that century that the Colonial Government yielded to the demands of the local population and understood the need of paving the way for an independent Sudan.

On April 19, 1944, the Colonial Government canceled the restrictions for Muslim Sudanese students to register in church schools (Vantini, 2005, p. 517).

The last colonial decade (1947–1956) implied “the alignment of Southern curricula on Northern programs and the introduction of Arabic into Southern schools” (Seri-Hersch, 2017, p. 1).

The schools founded by the Comboni Missionaries and the Comboni Missionary Sisters developed very quickly in spite of the above mentioned caution because “there was more demand for boys’ education in the northern Sudan than the government could provide” (Sanderson, 1963, p. 74) and they offered a high standard of quality.

Table 1. List of Catholic Schools created in Sudan until 1957. Source: Own elaboration based on Vantini, 2005.

School	Foundation
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Comboni Boy's Omdurman (closed in 1925 and reopened in 1952)	1901
St. Joseph Girls' School (closed in 1925 and reopened as Comboni Girls' Omdurman in 1931)	1900
Catholic Mission Boys' School - Khartoum	1902
Saint Anne School - Khartoum	1903
School for foreign families - Port Sudan	1904
Comboni Girls - Halfaya	1904
Sisters School Khartoum	1928
Comboni College Khartoum	1929
Comboni Girls – Atbara	1929
Comboni Girls - El Obeid	1947
Comboni Boys - Port Sudan	1948
Comboni Boys – Atbara	1948
St. Francis School – Khartoum	1951
Schools at Dilling, An-Nahud and El Fasher	1954
St. Joseph Technical School - Khartoum	1952
Comboni Boys - El Obeid	1953
Villa Gilda School – Khartoum	1953
Comboni Girls Port Sudan	1957

1.3 Comboni Schools during the Independent Sudan

Immediately after the independence of Sudan in 1956, the new ruling elite supported the ongoing process of Arabization and Islamization. This trend and the application of the Islamic Law to the whole of the country were among the factors behind the First Civil War (1955-1972) and the Second one (1983-2005).

Nonetheless, the most abrupt change in the educational system happened in 1992 when the Islamist Government of Omar El-Bashir issued the General Education Organization Act that defined “objectives, examination regulations, educational policies and general administration” (Unesco, 2012, p. 2). From that moment on, the government emphasized the policy of Arabization and Islamization at all the educational levels.

The violence and insecurity caused by those two wars forced thousands of Southerners to seek refuge in the north and in other countries. The estimated number of displaced children in 2002 was 792,000 in the metropolitan area of Khartoum (Wani, 2002, p. 16). Displaced families from the west of the country, in concrete from the Nuba Mountains and Darfur, were also moving to the outskirts of the capital because of the insecurity caused by the armed conflicts. In addition to that factor, the progress of the desert in Darfur had deteriorated the living conditions of thousands of people and forced them to emigrate.

The General Education Organization Act decentralized the educational administration and distributed competencies to the States and Municipalities. But the latter ones did not have enough resources to face such a huge wave of displaced people.

The Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Khartoum tackled this challenge with the creation of an emergency program called “Save the Savable” that aimed at facilitating the integration of the displaced children in the northern educational system. This is why most schools of the Program were planned in principle to go just until the fourth year as, after that, students were supposed to be ready to join the public system. But in front of the lack of resources, some municipalities asked the Church to extend its educational offer up to Primary eight (Wani, 2002).

From 1987 to 2001 the number of educational centers of the Program grew from 48 to 90 and the number of students passed from 8,500 to 48,172 (Wani, 2002, p. 35). Thus, paradoxically church schools developed in numbers especially when the Islamic Law was applied in a more radical way.

This trend continued until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005 between the two warring parties, the central Government of Khartoum and the Sudan People Liberation Movement. This agreement included the elaboration of “a national curriculum framework that addresses the multicultural, multiethnic, and multi-religious context of Sudan”(Dulvy et al., 2012, p. 26).

This new curriculum was never implemented and the Independence of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011 opened the way to a new emphasis in the Islamic and Arab character of the Sudan.

In 2010 the Archdiocese of Khartoum decided to finish the Save the Savable Program. Some donors withdrew their support as the justification of the civil war was not there anymore. Consequently, every Parish was supposed to reduce the number of schools that were under its territory and choose two as maximum. These selected schools would become “Community Parish Schools” under the responsibility of the Parish Priest. Normally, the Parishes identified the schools with better premises and a community that had showed readiness to pay the school fees and ensure, in this way, its self-reliance.

Thus the effort to make education accessible to all gave way to the struggle for the improvement of quality and the reflection on the identity and mission of those schools. These schools, created to respond to an emergency, were invited to align with the “old schools” established by the Comboni Missionaries and the Comboni Missionary Sisters before 1957 as the distinction between the two kinds was not meaningful any more.

In spite of the above mentioned reduction, Catholic Schools, known in Sudan as Comboni Schools, are still numerically meaningful:

Table 2. Students at Catholic Schools of Khartoum State. Source: Education Office of the Archdiocese of Khartoum.

Date	Total	Boys	Girls	Muslims	Christians	Sudanese	Foreigners
29/9/2017	18,839	8,799	10,040	6,458	12,372	10,634	8,196
	%	46,71	53,29	34,28	65,67	56,45	43,51
25/11/2019	16,848	8,417	8,431	5,485	11,363	10,187	6,661
	%	49,96	50,04	32,56	67,44	60,46	39,54

Most of these schools are located in the outskirts of the metropolitan area, where South Sudanese, now foreigners, and displaced families from the Nuba Mountains and Darfur dwell. Even if in the last years, international schools with foreign curricula have multiplied their number in the capital, some Comboni schools, among those of old foundation, still educate children of the elite of the country: Sisters' School Khartoum, Saint Francis and Comboni College Khartoum-Primary Section.

In April 2019, a popular uprising overthrew the Islamist regime of Omar El-Bashir and opened the way to a Transitional Government that announced in November a new educational reform. The new system is entering gradually and goes along with an increase in the educational budget that passed from 2 to 20% of the national budget. This new stage in the history of Sudan will also open a new era in the history of Catholic and Comboni schools in the country.

2. Assessing their Quality

With the scope of assessing the quality of these schools, the researcher prepared a tool based upon the European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model (EFQM) and selected a sample of three of them.

Every school appointed five members for its respective quality team that would work under the direction of the researcher to apply the assessment tool and produce and improvement plan.

2.1 School Planning and Strategy: Catholic Identity

The second criterion of the EFQM Model, planning and strategy, is usually divided into four or five sub-criteria. This research defines the sub-criterion “School Catholic Identity” as one of them. The answers to the different questions of the questionnaire can be summarized as follows:

Table 3. School Catholic Identity

No.	Question	School		
		1	2	3
1	Is there a census of the Catholic students who have not received the Sacraments of initiation?	N	N	N
2	Are there catechism classes for children of Catholic families who have not received the sacraments of initiation?	Y	N	N
3	Are there pastoral activities for Catholic students of the school (Eucharistic celebrations, retreats, catechesis...)?	Y	N	Y
4	Are Catholic symbols visible in the school?	Y	N	NR/DK
5	Does the school prepare appropriate Christmas decoration?	Y	N	Y
6	There is an strategic planning that includes the care for the Catholic identity:	Y	Y	Y

7	Does the academic calendar include Christian celebrations?	Y	Y	Y
8	Does the Parish priest or the competent ecclesiastical authority regularly visit the school?	Y	Y	Y
9	Does the school day start with prayer?	Y	Y	Y
10	Are pictures of the current Pope and Archbishop displayed and visible?	Y	N	Y
11	Is the staff ethnically diverse?	Y	Y	Y
12	Is the student body socio-economically and ethnically diverse?	Y	Y	Y
13	In which level does your school find itself as for Catholic identity is concerned? (1 to 5)	3	1	2.75

Concerning question 6, the majority of the members of the Quality Teams of School 2 (4) and School 3 (3) affirm that their schools have a strategic plan that includes the care for the Catholic identity. The members of School 1 are more doubtful about as three members do not answer. Notwithstanding, it is worth mentioning that the three schools have affirmed not to have any strategic plan in another question not included here and that no document was presented to support the answer as requested.

As for question 13, the different answers have the following meaning: 1= Quality depends solely on the individual; 2= Process awakening; 3= Vision through processes; 4= Systematic assessment and improvement; 5= Excellent processes.

2.2 School Results in Relation to Strategic Goals.

The ninth criterion of the EFQM Model has to do with the key results of the organization. Along with financial and strategic goals, the adaptation of the model tested in this research includes a third sub-criterion: “strategic goals”.

No.	Question	School		
		1	2	3
1	Christian celebrations with Catholic students (Masses, Christmas Carols...) (1 to 5)	3	1	4.6
2	Number of Christian celebrations with Catholic students (Masses, Christmas Carols...) in the last year	50	1	3
3	Students from Catholic families who received catechism and Sacraments of Christian Initiation inside or through the school (1 to 5)	3	1	1
4	Number of students from Catholic families who received catechism and Sacraments of Christian Initiation inside or through the school	20	0	0

As for questions 1 and 3, the different answers have the following meaning: 1= Results are not measured and/or no information is available; 2= Results are measured and show

negative trends and/or results do not meet relevant targets; 3= Results show improving trends and/or most relevant targets are met; 4= Results show substantial progress and/or all relevant targets are met; 5= Excellent and sustained results are achieved. All relevant targets are met. Positive comparisons with relevant schools for all key results are made.

School 1 has a chapel where a daily mass is celebrated before school time. Once a week Catholic students are accompanied by the Catholic teachers to participate in that mass.

This section also included the following question: “Which celebrations do you make along the school year?” The question was open to Christian, Islamic, academic or civil celebrations, but the answers show the care for Christian celebrations as a way of expressing the school identity:

Table 4. List of School Celebrations

School	Celebrations
School 1	St. Daniel Comboni, Christmas, national feasts
School 2	Christmas, graduation
School 3	Saint Daniel Comboni; Our Lady (15 th August); Christmas; Other national and church celebrations

3. Data Analysis

From the historical background of Comboni Schools in Sudan and from the application of the assessment tool, some particular characteristics have emerged that shape their identity and mission. In this section, these features are put in confrontation with the results of the data collection.

3.1 Did Comboni Schools in Sudan Renounce to Their Mission?

Comboni, as a son of his time, was educated in the conviction that “outside the church there was no salvation” and therefore it was urgent to evangelize African people. If the concepts of mission and evangelization were so limited, Catholic schools would logically be understood as strategic instruments to implement a plan that had the conversion of African people from paganism into Christianity as final objective.

This restricted vision was enlarged and better understood with the documents of the Second Vatican Council and more recent documents of the Catholic Church that reveal that salvation is not limited to the explicit belonging to the Catholic Church or baptism.

Mission is not just the activity of the Church to convert people to Christianity: “The Church serves the kingdom by spreading throughout the world the "gospel values" which are an expression of the kingdom and which help people to accept God's plan” (John Paul II, 1990, n. 20).

The relation between Comboni schools and local population in Sudan has always been good. The main reason according to Sa’ād ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz is that these schools renounced to their goal as they: “were aware of working in the midst of a Muslim community of extreme sensitivity to religion and, for this, didn’t implement their goals”

(Aḥmad, 2002, p. 76). This attitude allowed the people to appreciate their “efficient contribution to the field of education” (Aḥmad, 2002, p. 76).

In the view of Sa’ād ‘Abd Al-‘Azīz, the restrictions of the Government to the work of the different churches in the North obliged them to play an indirect role in society through their commitments in “schools, hospitals and social service, and this by giving practical example to Muslims about the extent of Christian Western progress” (Aḥmad, 2002, p. 49). Moreover, their great contribution to the education of women was just a strategic decision that targeted one “fundamental factor of social change” and main door to access families (Aḥmad, 2002, p. 56).

For Beshir “the conversion to Christianity was their only justification for educational activity” (1969, p. 121). These ideas extended among many northerners in Sudan. But no Muslim student converted to Christianity in a Catholic School.

It is true that the objectives of the opening of the Vicariate of Central Africa in 1846, stated in the decree of Pope Gregory XVI of April 3, 1846, were: “the conversion of Africans to Christianity, the bringing of assistance to the Christians who were in the Sudan as traders and officials, and the suppression of the slave trade” (Toniolo & Hill, 1974, pp. 1-2). But with the passing of time, missionaries in Sudan and the Church in general developed a wider and more dialogic concept of mission and evangelization and therefore of conversion.

As designed by Pope Gregory XVI, those schools have brought assistance to the Christians who were and are in Sudan. Through these schools they had and have the possibility of enjoying the right to a Christian education. The Catholic Church considers that “parents must possess a true freedom in choosing schools” (CIC, c. 797). Similarly, the Comboni Schools Statute states that they “were opened and are run by the Catholic Church in the Sudan first of all to cater for the educational needs of the Christian community” (Figli del Sacro Cuore di Gesù, 1967, p.7). A similar statement is found in later summarized editions (Puttinato, 1994, p. 8; Puttinato, 1995, p. 21).

Government schools do not offer Christian religion as alternative to Islamic religion in the school curriculum. Just Christian schools offer both possibilities so that every student can choose according to his religion.

It is also important to notice that these schools, even if they are an answer to the need of the parents who wish a Catholic education for their children, did not limit their mission to keep the already existing Christian community nor were they a means of proselytism. They really did and do a service to society. In this sense, their mission is in tune with the document, *Gravissimus Educationis* (GE, n .10), the Declaration of the II Vatican Council on Catholic education, that affirms, even if it refers to Catholic universities, that they should serve societies, and not just the Church (Vatican II, 1965a, p. 735).

As for the third goal defined by Pope Gregory XVI, it is worth mentioning that most of those Christian students belonged to the so called Black tribes of the country, who were particularly targeted by slave traders especially during the nineteenth century. This wound has remained open in Sudan all along the XX century (Shiakh El-Din, 2007). Through their education, Comboni schools have contributed to their process of liberation and empowerment.

Pope Paul VI (1975) defined evangelization in these terms: to bring the Good News of the love of God “into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new” (Paul VI, 1975, n. 18). These schools may

not have converted Muslim people but surely have brought Good news to thousands of marginalized families and empower them to stand by themselves.

3.2 Catholic Identity Features

The Congregation for Catholic Education defines Catholic schools as “a place of testimony and acceptance, where faith and spiritual accompaniment can be provided to young people who ask for it” (2014, par. III).

This fact does not imply that non-Catholic teachers are not supposed to work in Catholic Schools. According to the Canon Law, Catholic Schools can engage non-Catholic staff as far as they have integrity of life and teaching skill (c. 804, §2). This point is especially relevant in the Sudanese context, where the majority of the local population, and consequently potential staff, are Muslims (97%).

The Statute of Comboni Schools defines these schools as “pluralistic communities, with students of various nationalities, races and creeds” (Puttinato, 1994, p. 9).

As stated by the three quality teams, the three schools have staff and a students’ body socio-economically diverse. This diversity is surely one of the characteristics of these schools. In a country with 97% of Muslims, Catholic schools have a 65.67% of Christians and educate a 43.51% of foreigners, mainly South Sudanese.

The Congregation for Catholic Education states that Catholic schools should aim at fostering “anthropological and ethical values in individual consciences and cultures, which are necessary in order to build a society that is based on fraternity and solidarity” (2014, Introduction). The fact of educating Sudanese and South Sudanese students together during the two civil wars surely has built fraternity and solidarity.

Other features of these schools are the presence of Christian celebrations, visible Catholic symbols, Christmas decoration and a picture of the current Pope and Archbishop; the visits of the ecclesial authority (Parish Priest, Bishop,..); and the beginning of the school day with a prayer.

Among those Christian celebrations is particularly characterizing of Catholic schools in Sudan the memory and devotion to Saint Daniel Comboni.

Catholic Schools in Sudan have faced the tension between academic achievement and service to the marginalized people. Some of these schools have been and are still famous for their high standard and educate today part of the Sudanese elite.

At the same time, Catholic Schools located in the outskirts of big cities like Omdurman, Khartoum, Bahri, Port Sudan, Kosti,...have focused on the education of refugees and displaced children with good academic results. This fact has not meant disregard of quality as they have also been recognized by their high standards “in terms of equipment and disciplinary system” (Silverio Julu, 1995, p. 29). In this way, they have not fallen in the trap that states that fostering an academic success culture necessarily leads to neglect the centrality of Christ, who firstly served the poor.

The questionnaire shows that no school has elaborated a census of the Catholic students who have not received the Sacraments of initiation. This process could help them to improve the expression of their mission.

The answers to the questionnaire also show that just School 1 organizes catechism classes for children of Catholic families who have not received the sacraments of

initiation. Since it is the only non-Parish school, it looks logic to think that the Parish fulfils that task in School 2 and School 3.

It is precisely School 1 the one with a higher self-perception in relation to the performance level as for Catholic identity is concerned. Nonetheless it does not reach the level of having a systematic assessment and improvement on this matter.

The same can be said in relation to the students from Catholic families who received catechism and Sacraments of Christian Initiation inside or through the school where the self-perception is defined as: “Results show improving trends and/or most relevant targets are met” while the two Parish schools recognize that “Results are not measured and/or no information is available”.

3.3 Some Quality Aspects

When applying the assessment tool to the schools of the sample and after comparing the results, we get some characteristics that reflect the quality of these schools in the local context:

1. Continuous students’ assessment through periodical tests and homework;
2. Good facilities and material resources management;
3. Pre-service Training: 89% of the teaching staff holds a Bachelor’s Degree.
4. Staff commitment and attendance;
5. Low dropout percentage of students (0.4-1.6%)

Conclusions

This study shows that Comboni schools in Sudan did not renounce to their goals. They have provided Catholic education to Christian students in an Islamic majority country even under the Islamic law and they still do it. Nonetheless, they did not become a ghetto but have also educated Muslim children from marginalized areas of the country whose families settled in the outskirts of the capital Khartoum during the XX century.

They express their Catholic identity through the inclusion of Christian celebrations in the academic calendar, the visits of church authorities and the presence of Christian symbols. They are the only place where Christian students have access to classes of Christian religion as alternative to the lessons of Koran and Islamic religion. In this way they also materialize the need Comboni identify when he founded the community of Malbes to care in a very particular way for the Christian community.

While the independent governments of Sudan have stressed Arabic culture and Islamic religion as signs of identity of the country, Comboni Schools have shown special care for the cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of their staff and students based on the respect of personal freedom and the infinite dignity of every human person. In this concrete way and context, they have proposed a dialogic model of identity able to integrate diversity.

These schools have been at the service of society, without blurring in this way their evangelizing role in an Islamic majority society.

They have embodied in a plausible way the three principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church: the infinite value given to the dignity of the human person; the commitment to the common good; and the preferential option for the marginalized persons.

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ⁱ Some examples of these Congregations are the Canossian Daughters of Charity founded by Magdalen of Canossa in Verona in 1808; the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, founded in Bergamo in 1831 by St. Ignazia Verzeri and her collaborator, Giuseppe Benaglio; the Handmaids of Charity, founded in Brescia in 1840 by Maria Crocifissa di Rosa.