

## The Camillian Charism, the Fourth Vow and the Activities of CADIS

*br. Luca Perletti*

### *Introduction*

In this article I would like to manage to demonstrate how our presence through a multiplicity of forms and actions in response to natural and manmade disasters is a real expression of our charism and that in its implementation it allows the demands of totality of the fourth vow to be lived.

In the awareness that presence in the context of a disaster is a specific ministry, the CADIS Foundation, previously known as the *Camillian Task Force*, has evolved and developed its own pastoral practice. I will try to give an account of this through examples.

### *The Camillian Charism and Further Developments: CADIS*

What allows us to define an experience as charismatic, the outcome that is to say of a charism, is the fact that it is rooted in history, takes a definite form, and is implemented through an ongoing group of persons who have adopted it; that it is a gift of Jesus Christ whose features it reflects with the broad kaleidoscope of his rich personality; that it is developed inside a changing historical context from which it draws challenges and stimuli in order to achieve renewed forms of ministry, remaining unaltered in its being but flexible in its work in response to the needs of the world; and that it takes place inside the Church, thereby contributing to the growth and the variety of the rich initiatives of the Church.

St. Camillus himself can be seen as the initiator of CADIS. The iconography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries allows us to argue in favour of the reasonableness of this statement. In the painting by Conca hung in the museum section of the House of St. Mary Magdalene we can see Camillus and his intention to come to the aid of the victims of the plague in Rome. Subleyras in his famous painting hung in the Museum of Rome, in contrary fashion, portrays Camillus engaged in saving the victims of one of the various floods of the Tiber, a cause of ruin and death for many people. The history of the foundation of the Order is marked by a specific recognition that plagues, floods and wars (the disasters of that epoch and not only of that epoch!) were an opportunity to live our charism with such a radical dedication that it was possible to put the fourth vow into practice. Some of the most dramatic, and at the same time most moving, pages of the history of the Order demonstrate the generosity shown by very many confreres who were able to give their lives in coming to the aid of the victims of disasters. In an interesting volume that discusses *diakonia* as the constitutive core of the Order, the author (Fr. E. Spogli, M.I.), after analysing the history of the Order of Camillians (a history that was not always edifying because of the inevitable human weaknesses), observes that disasters were able to reunite the Order and to renew in its individual religious awareness of our charism, stimulating them to engage in a competition of exemplary giving in order to make themselves ready to offer their service to the victims of disasters.

The charism as a gift to the Order comes from Christ whose merciful approach to the suffering it seeks to reproduce. Jesus reveals to every man a God who is a Father who is deeply inwardly merciful and suffers when His children suffer. Mercy is the real name of the Father, a characteristic that puts in a state of crisis theological visions that are structured around the performance of precepts and reward for those who are observant. God is the Father for all of His children and He awaits them with equal affection, without partiality or distinctions. This is particularly true for those who are afflicted by physical, moral or spiritual suffering, towards whom He has feelings of privileged attention. To Camillus is attributed the phrase ‘do not tell me who you are, tell me what you have!’ This phrase echoes the approach of Jesus who did not offer explanations (‘Teacher who sinned, he or his parents, that he was born blind? Jn 9:2) or justifications (‘All of you were born in sin’, Jn 9:34a) for the drama

of suffering but, instead, bent down over wounds and came to the help of people even when others tried to dissuade him from doing so because an illness had already run its course. Jesus also cared when faced with the weeping of a mother and widow who had lost her only child, without any prejudices or sectarianism, and without excluding the possibility that others, too, can perform miraculous deeds if the Father grants this. In his behaviour, Christ demonstrated what it means to have a Father who inwardly at a deep level is mercy: to have passion for every man, independently of his condition, social class, purity or impurity. Camillus adopted this message and demonstrated this with a dedication that overcame the barriers that were imposed by the dictates of the customs of his time, such as – for example – confession before any treatment or care was given. ‘Tell me what you have!’: this is what interested Camillus and this is what drove him on at the level of motivation.

The charism given to Camillus is thus an awareness that we have to be a balsam of mercy for all suffering. Camillus well knew the sad condition of the sick in the hospitals of his epoch; he had experienced that condition personally. What changed the status quo was a group of people who – moved by love for Christ and his model – took responsibility for relieving the great deal of suffering that was to be found in hospital wards. However, suffering is especially evident where pain is without meaning to the utmost, more than where it is unjust, a matter of discrimination, and in many cases diabolical. Wars and disasters are an example of this because those who suffer because of them are always the poorest and the weakest and the way they are is always the outcome of unjust conditions of life against which these people have no protection. For this reason, the balsam of mercy cannot be held back in those conditions that most denounce the absence of God and call for His presence. Aware of all of this, starting with Camillus and continuing nowadays, the presence of the Order where there is an outbreak of war, in situations of devastation caused by nature, in ethnic conflicts, and where there are epidemics of disease, has been seen as a very high way of living the charism of mercy towards those who suffer, following the model of Jesus himself, the first to run to offer succour, to pour balsamic oil and to weep with those who weep.

Our renewed Constitution speaks about our charism as the gift of ‘reliving’ the merciful love of Christ for the sick,<sup>1</sup> pointing not to a mere imitation but to an up-to-date experience embodied in concrete reality. Our charism is flexible, a gift that evolves, a gift that is not a carbon copy of the founding experience. It relives the spirit of this experience in forms that are always new and ones that are of contemporary relevance, to the point of accepting, as a natural event, that some institutions have to be let go if they have lost their meaning. The flexibility of our charism, despite its frailty, bears witness to its riches and perennial character: only that which knows how to change can continue to survive. In contrary fashion, what is rigid falls down with the blows of life. In accepting the future as a historical rule of development, CADIS helps to enrich the panorama of ministry and includes in it activities in favour of individuals and people who undergo the dramatic experience of pain, death, and the taking away of everything. CADIS makes itself the paladin of this care – which had already been present in the DNA of the Order, as we have seen above – and raises it to the level of ordinary ministry through animation and support, the promotion of correct strategies, the vision of a specific pastoral practice, the creation of dedicated offices and support for the good initiatives of the individual Provinces of the Order. In addition, CADIS has developed a holistic approach to suffering caused by disasters by recognising needs that go from prevention (disasters are a sign of intrinsic weakness and their impact is directly proportional to vulnerability: this means that it is not the case that each disaster has the same impact on the local population) to care for mental health (post- traumatic stress disorder is one of the most frequent symptoms in disasters and it is a symptom that is often underestimated). It is between these two poles that all of the operations of CADIS are located. Lastly, CADIS allows

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<sup>1</sup>Article 1 of our Constitution, adding to the previous article 1 which only referred to witness, observes that a specific feature of the charism is ‘the gift of reliving the ever-present merciful love of Christ for the sick and bearing witness to it to the world’.

an organisation of acts of intervention that assures their continuity and their real effectiveness, as well as animating a wider participation inside the Order and the structures of the Church.

Not least, our charism is a gift for the Church and for the community of men. Our charism contributes to the riches and the various gifts of which the Church is a custodian for the good of the single human family. From this point of view as well, one can say that CADIS is charismatic because it brings a specific gift to the Church. The operations of CADIS have as their natural background and living environment the Church herself. Indeed, ever since its beginnings CADIS has developed ecclesial planning in harmony with, and inside, the local Churches, flanking their institutions and placing itself at their service. Avoiding autonomous activity connected to its own resources and means, in all of its projects CADIS has been careful to include the local Churches as reference points in planning, as the targets of projects and where possible the heirs of its initiatives in the form of the creation of new structures for pastoral care (for example the project of setting in motion pastoral care in health in Sierra Leone at the end of its operations for the victims of Ebola) or through the consignment of works that were created to implement programmes (for example the Social and Aggregation Centre for children who were the victims of the earthquake that struck L'Aquila in 2010).

From everything that has been said above, I believe that we can with confidence affirm that CADIS is a part of our charism so as to live its rooting in history and to reproduce in its activities the features of a merciful God; it is flexible and creative in its way of operating and has the Church as its point of reference.

#### *CADIS and the Fourth Vow*

The members of the Order come together in the profession of four vows, the last of which seeks to express with greater force the radical nature of a service that is provided with self-renunciation and the renunciation of possessions and personal affections. Every Camillian ministry – to be called such – must include four dimensions. The feature of the giving of one's own life may be less evident in contemporary health-care practice where the risk of contracting illnesses and of losing one's life is very low. However, the radical approach expressed by the fourth vow remains a necessary provision for us to live the charism in the absence of real risks and dangers as well. This radical approach is more evident in situations offered by responses to disasters where activity takes place in contexts over which it is not always possible to exercise control and which make the giving of one's own life more real and possible.

Differently to other ministers, action in a disaster situation does not follow planning but derives from a spontaneous and immediate response, even when people are not completely aware of what the mission could require. The unpredictable character of a chance event, the absence of prior planning and the immediacy of the response all define the response of CADIS when it is called upon as an act of generosity, in its purest form, by those who do not take their own lives into account and do not give primary place to the risks and dangers when making their decisions. This is the approach of people who have placed their trust in Christ, to whom they have devoted themselves without calculations or expectations. Obviously, this generosity of self-giving should not be accompanied by ingenuousness, by superficiality or by a lack of coordination, conditions which, were they to exist, would raise a serious question about the operational capacity of CADIS. This organisation, in contrary fashion, has developed in its own *modus operandi* and this assures, if not protection against risks, then at least the coordination that is needed to prevent them. The activity in Sierra Leone to counter the epidemic of Ebola was an example of this. This involved the prior definition of the project, logistical organisation and training before departure. The radical approach of the fourth vow, albeit with these premises, is assured by a generous readiness to descend into an inaccessible and unknown terrain.

Operating in a disaster situation assures invisibility. The short period of time of an intervention; the lack of prospects of establishing it in an ongoing way *in loco* and leaving it at the end of the project; the decision to avoid works with walls such as constructions and buildings; and team spirit in the implementation of programmes in which other men or women religious take part: all of these allow the experience to be undertaken with absolute free-giving and allows the avoidance of trying to be in the limelight which elsewhere can mark or give a meaning to ministerial activity. At the end of every project there will remain only the grateful memory of those who have been able to benefit from the programmes envisaged for it and the working member will depart aware that he or she has been a grain of wheat that bears fruit only if it dies to itself. It is this experience of dying to oneself that most draws near activity engaged in where there is a disaster to the commitments made with the fourth vow.

In activity in areas struck by disasters the normal strictures of religious life are destabilised, given that religious have to work in new contexts, often with scarce resources, and have to adapt to precarious situations of emergency. One has the sense of the provisional, the precarious and the absence of the security of consecrated life: daily order, rules, spaces and confreres. Everything is turned upside down and religious have to get used to different rhythms of work, to sudden and unforeseen decisions, to organising a minimum of religious life that will allow the situation not to get out of control and to avoiding the urgent (the many things to do) prevailing over the important (one is, and one remains, a religious). Often, Camillian religious are forced to share spaces with other men and women religious, sacrificing habits and customs, rhythms of work and spaces of rest. Religious life, in activity in areas struck by disasters, is literally turned upside down and requires a spirit of adaptation and renunciation.

Lastly, one cannot keep silent about the real risks that are encountered in initiatives engaged in to respond to disasters, risks that are of various kinds according to the disaster involved. These may involve aftershocks (Haiti); possible infections propagated by murderous and invisible viruses (Ebola); fragile terrains exposed to the hardships of nature (floods and geological disruption); and the violence produced by man (ethnic conflicts). Uncertainty and insecurity are often companions on these occasions and impede our religious from feeling safe: they thereby remember the pregnant meaning of the fourth vow.

The fourth vow requires a readiness to put one's life at stake in service to the sick. This requirement also remains valid in a super-technological health-care world where everything seems to be able to be placed under control. The Camillian presence in situations involving disasters is an opportunity to restore vigour to the highest degree to this vow, both in the concrete form of a future and evident risk and in a readiness to work without those conditions of safety that normally characterise our religious lives.

### *Pastoral Practice*

CADIS bases its operations on a triple methodology of seeing, judging and acting. In each of these three stages it is possible to give a face to what is happening (taking individual events out of the mythical area of destiny) by pointing out a pathway that involves a practical solution and offering a shared meaning to work in contexts of emergency. This process helps develop in a community a feeling of individual and collective responsibility, freeing up positive energies and the desire for improvement.

In each of these three areas, the community is the leading agent. In the area of seeing, the community is offered the possibility of sharing with, and listening to, the people affected by the disaster, allowing them to express what they are experiencing, what they would like to do, and how they could be involved in work in response to the disaster. It is from the grassroots that the response

that the grassroots need is born. We may take as an example of this approach what happened in the Horn of Africa (Wajir 2011) when drought and famine revealed to the world the chronic drama of the refugees of Somalia who for years had been located to that territory. Through the involvement of the grassroots, who were placed at the centre of attention, it was possible to set in motion a process that extended beyond the months that had been previously established as a time period and that defined this project not as a simple initiative to provide relief but as a structural response. On this topic, it may be observed that the community was able to identify and carry out the following initiatives: the activation of a mobile clinic intended to offer basic health-care services in the region of Wajir West; the strengthening of the activity of the dispensary with an increase of its personnel and equipment suited in particular to elderly people (those over the age of sixty) and children (3-5 years); helping in the repair of three wells that had been destroyed by the absence of water and the sanitisation of at least twenty shallow wells to allow human consumption of water; and the setting in motion of a programme of 'community orchards' in selected villages to allow people to supplement their diets through the consumption of vegetables.

During the assessment stage, a careful and impassioned analysis is made of the situation based upon concrete and known facts by those who have experience 'in the field'. This is an analysis that is taken part in because everyone has the right to be represented and the assessment that emerges from this (mediated through the participatory process) reflects the various parts of the community and draws near to the reality of the facts. During the stage of assessment, various ways of reading the situation come into play. Some are merely sociological and others involve projections; they reflect people's beliefs. This is a very important moment because it lays the bases for shared and binding strategic solutions. From the point of view of pastoral practice, a listening should be engaged in that is free from influences and prejudices, avoiding the risk of hurried responses and ones based upon previous experiences. Not only are the effects of a disaster not superimposable: the same may also be said of their causes and the interpretations that follow. To exclude the community from the assessment stage means to want to stereotype the action that is taken and to make it ineffective. For example, following the devastating typhoon Washi (the Philippines 2011), an initiative was organised that took into account all the social groups involved – in particular those discriminated against by this sovereign State – who indicated their priorities. In this way, at the end of the project the reconstruction was achieved of 202 habitations; the reactivation of economic activity, especially agricultural activity, in four villages in order to ensure a food surplus, took place; and a capacity was developed to deal with health-care needs, especially in the field of mental health.

Lastly, the act of intervention implements the plan that was agreed upon and approved during the previous two stages. In this sense, the action that is taken is not an automatic response to an event but, in contrary fashion, the deliberate choice of options or various decisions selected from the very many possibilities that exist. The various roles within the activities decided upon are then defined. They are different because an opportunity is given to each person to take on a responsibility. Lastly, such activities range from the acute stage to other stages and cover a spectrum that goes from prevention to rehabilitation, thereby including every member of the community. Special attention is paid to the struggle to rectify situations that are a cause of tragic events, above all conditions of injustice that undermine ordered coexistence within a community. Here one can refer to what was done following the flooding that took place in Pakistan (2010) where the action of CADIS laid especial emphasis on the parts of the population excluded from national protection – the Hindu and Christian minorities.