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Pope Francis speaks into a microphone while sitting in a large cream chair and holding a piec

Pope Francis talks about the life of St. Daniele Comboni, an Italian bishop who served in missions in Africa, during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 20, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)



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Inspired by the dignity of each human being as revealed by Jesus, Christians are called to fight "every form of slavery," whether physical, social or spiritual, Pope Francis said.

"Jesus, God made man, elevated the dignity of every human being and exposed the falsehood of slavery," the pope told people gathered in St. Peter's Square for his general audience Sept. 20. "As Christians, therefore, we are called to fight against every form of slavery."

Continuing his weekly catechesis on zeal for evangelization, the pope discussed the life of St. Daniele Comboni, a 19th-century Italian bishop who dedicated his life to establishing and supporting missions in Africa, where Francis said the saint witnessed the "horror of slavery."

"Comboni, by the light of Christ, became aware of the evil of slavery; he also understood that social slavery is rooted in a deeper slavery, that of the heart, that of sin, from which the Lord delivers us," he said.

Francis stressed that "slavery, like colonialism, is not a thing of the past," and recalled his address to South Sudanese political leaders during his visit to the country in February in which he called for an end to the economic colonialism that followed the end of political colonialism in Africa.

St. Comboni, the pope said, understood that those he evangelized in Africa were "not only 'objects' but 'subjects' of the mission" and praised the saint's philosophy about evangelization in Africa contained in his missionary slogan: "Save Africa through Africa."

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"How important it is, even today, to advance the faith and human development from within the contexts of mission instead of transplanting external models or limiting oneself to sterile welfarism," Francis said. "Take up the way of evangelization from the culture of the people. Evangelizing the culture and enculturating the Gospel go together."

The pope highlighted St. Comboni's efforts to involve laypeople, families and catechists -- "treasures of the church" -- in evangelization as a way of "making all Christians protagonists of evangelizing action" and preventing clericalism.

After his catechesis, Francis mentioned a meeting he had before his general audience with Brazilian lawmakers working on behalf of the poor. "They do not

forget the poor; they work for the poor," he said. "To you I say, 'do not forget the poor,' because they will be the ones who open the door to heaven for you."

The pope also noted the "worrying news" from the South Caucasus region "where the already critical humanitarian situation was aggravated by further armed conflict" after Azerbaijan attacked the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh Sept. 19.

"I call on all involved parties and the international community to silence weapons and make every effort to find peaceful solutions for the good of people and respect for human dignity," he said.