

ΚΟΙΝΟΝΙΑ

...together on the journey

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EVANGELII GAUDIUM

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This year, 2014, the "Koinonia" bulletin will have as its theme the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

The themes to be developed and their presenters will be, for the next four trimesters, the following:

- N. 1/2014. Theme: A Church transformed: joyous and missionary (N. 1-49). Br. Amanuel
- N. 2/2014. Theme: The spiritual motivations and the temptations of pastoral workers (N. 76-109 and 262-283) Br. Martin
- N. 3/2014. Theme: The social inclusion of the poor (N. 186-217) Br. Amando
- N. 4/2014. Theme: **Peace and social dialogue** (N. 217-258) Br. Amando

A CHURCH TRANSFORMED: JOYOUS AND MISSIONARY Evangelii Gaudium: 1-49

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INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church surprised the world when Pope Benedict XVI, "the humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord," on February 11, 2013, in a simple consistory for the canonization of the martyrs of Otranto and three other blessed, following the rule foreseen by Canon 332 of the Code of Canon Law, which requires in section 2 "that he makes the resignation freely and that it be duly manifested", declared his retirement from the papacy. The event raised, both in the world and the Church, a great surprise and also a certain fear for the future of the Catholic Church.

The preparation for the election of the new pope involved the whole world, especially the mass media and the journalists, in guessing who could be the new pope. One year ago, when, on March 13, 2013, after the *Habemus papam*, the new pope, Card. Jorge Mario Bergoglio, showed himself on the balcony, it was a surprise for all. In fact, after the announcement of the new pope and of the name that had been chosen, the people in St. Peter's Square remained with open mouths and in silence for some

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seconds. But after the applause and the first simple words of the new Pope, right away the mass media and the whole world began to follow him with insistence and to discover who he really was. After the retirement of Benedict XVI, this was the second surprise of the Holy Spirit who blows where he wills.

A year after his election, Pope Francis continues to surprise us with his innovations, his simple gestures and especially his talks that emanate love, joy, tenderness, and mercy, lifting up in simple people as also the mass media, a strong attraction and curiosity.

Let us look briefly at Franciscans and the papacy in these more than 800 years since the birth of the Franciscan family. From St. Francis until today only 5 Franciscans of the first Franciscan order have risen to the chair of St. Peter to guide the universal Church. What is amazing is that none of these wanted to be called Francis, even though they were Franciscans and despite how much they knew of Franciscan spirituality! In the history of the papacy there have been popes that have not only admired St. Francis and his spirituality, but have wanted to live according to the Franciscan charism and became popularizers of Franciscan spirituality. There are the 7 Supreme Pontiffs who were SECULAR FRANCISCAN TERTIARIES.

Supreme Pontiffs of the First Franciscan Order	Supreme Pontiffs of the Secular Franciscan Order
Nicholas IV (1288-1292)	Pius IX (1846-1878)
Sixtus IV (1471-1484)	Leo XIII (1878-1903)
Julius II (1503-1513)	Pius X (1903-1914)
Sixtus V (1585-1590)	Benedict XV (1914-1922)
Clement XIV (1769-1774)	Pius XI (1922-1939)
	Pius XII (1939-1958)
	John XXIII (1958-1963)

It is not the intent of this presentation to comment on the genesis and on all the content of the first Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, but I would like right away to enter into the theme assigned to me: A CHURCH TRANSFORMED: JOYOUS AND MISSIONARY, which includes the thoughts of the Pope spread through numbers 1-49 of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

I would like to linger on the first chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation with two brief reflections: (1) "Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium* and Franciscan Joy" and (2) "The Franciscan Gospel Life and the New Evangelization."

1. Pope Francis's *Evangelii Gaudium* and Franciscan Joy

If Pope St. John Paul II is known for his mantra, "*Be not afraid!*," and Pope Benedict XVI as the "theologian Pope," surely Pope Francis will be remembered in the history of the Church as the pope of the "*poor Church for the poor*." In fact, he does not tire of exhorting Christians to announce with joy the Gospel of salvation to everyone in closeness to the poor. Both his name as his first words and especially his first Apostolic Exhortation make us understand that the new Pope has chosen a Franciscan spirituality to renew the universal Church. For us Franciscans this fact, more than a reason to boast, must be an encouragement for a renewed commitment to our charism to "live the Gospel" and in our mission to "rebuild the Church."

It is easy to note that this exhortation, a key document and "pastoral rule" of Pope Francis, touches on the sources and great documents of the Council: *Sacrosanctum Concilium, Lumen gentium, Gaudium et spes*. It is also the continuation of the great encyclicals of his predecessors: *Pacem in terris* of John

XXIII, *Evangelii nuntiandi* and *Popolorum progressio* of Paul VI, and *Redemptor hominis* of John Paul II.

We see that in the exhortation the term "joy" occurs a good 59 times. That evangelization should be characterized by joy Pope Francis had already said some time before his first exhortation and on various occasions. For example, commenting on the passage of Luke 10:1-12, 17-20, during the Sunday Angelus on July 7, 2013, he had this beautiful expression: "Dear friends, be glad! Do not be afraid of being joyful! Don't be afraid of joy! That joy which the Lord gives us when we allow him to enter our life. Let us allow him to enter our lives and invite us to go out to the margins of life and proclaim the Gospel. Don't be afraid of joy. Have joy and courage!"¹

This exhortation seems to repeat the same words when he writes: "I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church's journey in years to come." (Evangelii Gaudium 1)

According to the Pope, "[the] great danger in today's world," (EG 2) is to fall into "an individualistic sadness." To the Christians "whose lives seem like Lent without Easter" (EG 6), to Christians "who look like someone who has just come back from a funeral" (EG 10) and especially to priests and consecrated persons, the Pope cries, "But please: never sisters, never priests with the face of 'hot peppers in vinegar,' never! The joy that comes from Jesus...the root of sadness in the pastoral life is precisely in the lack of the paternity and maternity that comes from living this consecration badly, which rather must bear fecundity. A priest or a sister who is not fecund cannot be thought of: this is not catholic. This is not Catholic! This is the beauty of the consecration: it's the joy, the joy..." And he concludes: "Ahead with joy, with consistency, always with the courage to speak the truth, that courage that goes out of self to meet Jesus in prayer and goes out of self to meet the other and give them the Gospel. With pastoral fecundity! Please don't be 'old maids' and 'grumpy old men."²

The words of the Pope seem to repeat literally those that Francis said to his brothers 800 years ago. The Mirror of Perfection speaks of St. Francis and Franciscan joy: "Blessed Francis always had this as his highest and main goal: constantly to have in himself spiritual joy, internally and externally, outside the times of prayer and the divine office. This is also what he especially liked in his brothers, and he would, moreover, frequently rebuke them because of their acedia and sadness. He used to say: 'If a servant of God always strives to have and preserve internally and externally the highest spiritual joy that proceeds from purity of heart and is acquired through the devotion of prayer, the devils could do him no harm. They would say: 'Since the servant of God has joy both in tribulation and in prosperity, we are not able to find an entrance to enter him and do him harm. The devils would be delighted when they can extinguish or prevent devotion and joy in the heart of a servant of God which spring from clean prayer and other virtuous deeds. For if the devil can have something of his own in a servant of God, he will in a short time make a single hair into a beam, always making it bigger, unless the servant of God is wise and careful, removing and destroying it as quickly as possible by means of the power of holy prayer, contrition, confession, and works of satisfaction. Therefore, my brothers, because spiritual joy springs from integrity of heart and the purity of constant prayer, it must be your primary concern to acquire and preserve these two virtues, to possess internal, as well as external joy. I so fervently desire and love to see this both in myself and in you, for the edification of the neighbor and the defeat of the enemy. It is the fate of the devil and his minions to be sad, and it is our lot to rejoice always and be glad in the Lord." (A Mirror of Perfection, 95. FA: ED III, 342)

¹ Quoted in Italian from PAPA FRANCESCO, *Le parole di Papa Francesco: La gioia di evangelizzare*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2013, 65.

² Quoted in Italian from ANDREA TORNIELLI, *I fioretti di Papa Francesco*, Edizione PIEMME, Milano 2013, 145-47.

Also for Secular Franciscans, Franciscan joy must be a *modus vivendi*, for their Rule says, "Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father." (OFS Rule II, 19)

The joy that Pope Francis preaches is not the joy that the world gives or that comes from well-being or from the worldly or material development which is characterized by: a divinization of the economy, an economy of exclusion and the throw-away culture (EG 53-54), the idolatry of money (EF 55-56), the manipulation and degradation of the human person (EG 57-58), the inequity that generates violence (EG 59-60), but instead comes from the cross, for it is the sole cause of paschal joy: "*The Gospel, radiant with the glory of Christ's cross, constantly invites us to rejoice.*" (EG 5)

We have already said that in the Exhortation of Pope Francis the word 'joy' appears 59 times. On the other hand, the word 'cross' appears only 15 times. This is to say and to make understood that the joy of the Gospel and of the joyful evangelizer is caused by the cross: "Faith always remains something of a cross; it retains a certain obscurity which does not detract from the firmness of its assent" (EG 42)... Christian triumph is always a cross, yet a cross which is at the same time a victorious banner borne with aggressive tenderness against the assaults of evil." (EG 85)

"In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today's world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised Land and keep hope alive". In these situations we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink. At times, this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!" (EG 86)

The joy that shines through the gestures and the words of Pope Francis is the same "true and perfect joy" of St. Francis, for both have chosen poverty to accompany them on the journey: "*The Cross for Francis is the most genuine source of true and perfect joy. In the Cross he found, in a paradoxical but thus evident way, together with a very great pain, also the most eloquent and sublime expression of Love. Now the true and perfect joy flows precisely and only from true and perfect Love. Francis is the saint of joy in the cross. It is enough to turn attention to the conclusion of the dialogue with Brother Leo, lamb of God, according to the redaction of the most beautiful chapter VIII of the Fioretti."³*

2. The Evangelical Franciscan Life and the New Evangelization

The new evangelization, according to Pope Francis, must be not only joyful, but also: "to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the "peripheries" in need of the light of the Gospel." (EG 20) The new evangelization must be founded on the Word, a Word with an "unruly freedom", "which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking." (EG 22)

That the church be truly a joyful transformation of evangelization, Pope Francis urges: "*Let us try a little harder to take the first step*" (EG 24) and encouraged the Church to not content itself with self-preservation, but to involve itself, accompanying humanity all the way to having pastors who have "*the smell of the sheep*." Pastoral service in conversion (= an impelling ecclesial renewal) must include the parish, base communities, small communities, movements, associations, the local church

³ Quoted in Italian from AA VARI, *Dizionario Francescano*, Edizioni Messaggero, Padova 2002, 347-48.

and its bishop. The papacy shall not be spared from criticism either, which, according to Pope Francis, must opt for a healthy decentralization by means of conversion.

The Church of the new evangelization of Pope Francis is a Church in transformation that has need of a generous and almost impatient renewal and amendment, of a spontaneous desire to be faced with the ideal image of the Church which Christ wants, sees and loved, as his holy and immaculate Bride. (Eph 5)

The Church of Pope Francis has to be a reality that, avoiding "the complacent attitude that says: 'We have always done it this way" (EG 33), enters into "a resolute process of discernment, purification and reform." (EG 30) If the Church must be a "mother with an open heart", she must be a church that knows how to distinguish the essential from the secondary, the substance of the Gospel from its various incrustations. Therefore, "the confessional must not be a torture chamber but a place of the mercy of God," priests must not be "controllers of grace, but facilitators," the Church "is not a customs post, but the paternal house where there is a place for each," and finally the poor "are those privileged to receive the Gospel."

"Let us go forth, then—cries the Pope—let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. Here I repeat for the entire Church what I have often said to the priests and laity of Buenos Aires: I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures." (EG 49)

The humble and simple words of Pope Francis and the revolutionary innovations caused in the Vatican seem to be a photocopy of the "simple and evangelical revolution" introduced by St. Francis in the church of his time. The evangelical experience of St. Francis was "revolutionary" such that it touched all the states of Christian life: regular, secular, monastic, and apostolic. Francis in his time was the symbol of the new man, because he chose for all those who follow a life according to the gospel a life for announcing the gospel; that is, he chose evangelical life and evangelization.

By EVANGELICAL LIFE is meant simply, "LIVING THE GOSPEL." Moreover, it is the charism of all Franciscans (I, II, III Order), as expressed in the first words of their rules: "The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ." (Later Rule, I:1) "The form of life of the Order of Poor Sisters that Blessed Francis established is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (The Form of Life of St. Clare, 1), "The form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ." (TOR Rule, 1), and "The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi" (OFS Rule, II, 4).

EVANGELIZATION is then the activity of PREACHING the Gospel, with is the mission of the three Orders founded by St. Francis: "As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually among the Saracens and nonbelievers in two ways. One way is not to engage in argument or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord, in order that [unbelievers] may believe in almighty God." (Earlier Rule, XVI, 5-7)

Evangelization (preaching) seems to not pertain to the Order of St. Clare, because they are enclosed, nor to the seculars of the Third Order, because they are committed in the world, but it is not so. Evangelization "even though is actuated in the particular condition of women consecrated to the Lord

in cloister, these announce the Gospel by their persons and their lives; as do the rest, as indicated by the history of the primitive community of San Damiano."⁴

In the prologue to the Rule of the OFS, the Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, the evangelizing mission of the brothers and sisters is clearly delineated and made concrete in various forms of social commitment: "We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give life to others by example." (OFS Rule, prologue)

CONCLUSION

What has been said of St. Paul can easily be applied also to St. Francis: he is "the first after the One." Walter Nigg, cited by the *Dizionario Francescano*, almost prophesies about our time, speaking of "Franciscan possibilities" in order to say that St. Francis is repeatable. In the text it says: "*Francis is not a figure in the past appearing exclusively that he might be admired. Also today there exists the Franciscan possibility, even though not for the vast masses, certainly for some individual. The Franciscan possibility flourishes from time to time in history, knocking at the door of Christianity to ask permission to enter, and when there is not an opening, it disappears for a while, so to sound again in its time. It is not reactionary, nor revolutionary; it does not bless what is, nor erect barricades; it crosses everything and transforms bitter to sweet, calls all people to liberty, this possibility that consists in religious poverty, and the that gift of ineffable joy that comes from the eternal legacy of Jesus Christ."⁵ It seems that this possibility might be realized in the person of Pope Francis.*

"The principle of evangelical life and evangelization asked of society and the Church of today is fundamental in order to qualify the rule of all religious of the new evangelization; this goes especially for the Franciscans – friars, sisters, and lay – because it represents a return to the origins. To this 'return,' Franciscans are called continually by events, and by the explicit calls of the recent Popes",⁶ and we can say: right now that appeal has been launched toward us by Pope Francis in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*.

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITATIONS – MEETINGS

Malaysia-Singapore – National Assembly

The National Assembly of the OFS in Malaysia-Singapore was held from January 10 to 13, in Papar, Saba, and was presided over by Doug Clorey, as delegate of the Minister General. Later on, the members of the Presidency were consulted and they approved the request of the Secular Franciscans present in the assembly to be recognized as the emerging national fraternity of Malaysia-Singapore, which includes West Malaysia, Singapore and Saba.

Mozambique – First National Chapter of Mozambique

The first National Chapter of Mozambique was celebrated from January 21 to 25 in the city of Chimoio, at the "St. Anthony" Seraphic Seminary of the OFM. The program was carried out with the participation of 53 capitulars, among them the members of the provisionary National Council and three Regional Councils, representing the Local Fraternities and YouFra. Two National Assistants also

⁴ Quoted in Italian from *Dizionario*, ibid., 658.

⁵ Quoted in Italian from *Dizionario*, ibid., 652-653.

⁶ Quoted in Italian from *Dizionario*, ibid., 658.

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took in part in the persons of Br. Orlando António, OFM and Br. António Ernesto, OFMCap and two other Regional Assistants. The General Minister delegated Maria Aparecida Crepaldi, Councilor of the Presidency for the nations of the Portuguese language. The delegate of CAS was the same National Assistant, Br. António Ernesto, OFMCap. The elections were carried out on January 24. The following obtained the trust of their confreres: National Minister and International Councilor - Bonifácio Muiaia Paulino; Vice Minister and substitute International Councilor - Rita Francisco Jossanias Chico; Secretary - Lourenço Miguel Ribeiro; Treasurer – Alexandre Nhama Sande Sanhai and Formator – Manuel Carlos Langa. The National Fraternity of Mozambique is made up of 10,182 temporary professed and 8,743 perpetually professed. The Franciscan Youth are 494.

Spain – Course for Formators

The customary annual course of formation for formators of the National Fraternity of the OFS of Spain was held in the retreat house of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Mother of the Good Shepherd from January 24-26, 2014. To give welcome to the participants was Manuela Berciano, National Director of Formation. About 80 Secular Franciscans participated, coming from various Zones and Regions, as well as all four National Spiritual Assistants together with other members of the National Council of the OFS. The first theme, presented by Br. Martin Bitzer, OFMConv, General Assistant to the OFS-YouFra, was: personal relations in the Fraternities of the OFS. The various questions which were posed to Br. Martin both at the end of the presentation and after in the working group, allowed all to deepen the particulars of a very current theme of interest to all. The second theme, presented by Juana Díaz Martínez, many times National Minister of the OFS of Spain, was: Content and perspectives of the various services in the OFS Fraternities. There was a need for a theme such as this to clarify that exercise of Secular Franciscan offices at the service of the local, regional, and national Fraternities. The days were marked by liturgical prayer, in particular by the Holy Mass celebrated every day. The sharing of experiences of the directors of formation of the various Zones, which concluded this course, showed all the richness, the beauty, and the range of their service.

Assisi – Formation Course for Spiritual Assistants

The XV Course of formation for the OFS-YouFra-Araldini Assistants of Italy took place in the "Domus Pacis" in S. Maria degli Angeli in Assisi on January 27-30, 2014. The theme, with the title "Give me Perfect Charity," had the purpose of illustrating the role of the Spiritual Assistant. The speakers who contributed to the carrying out of the theme were: Br. Giovanni Marini, OFM: "Assistance and Assistant: Which Spiritual Approach?"; Br. Giovanni Salonia, OFMCap: "Fraternal Dynamics in the Admonitions of St. Francis, Fraternity and the Evangelical Counsels. Assistance and Assistant: Which communication-relational approach?" The concluding Eucharist was celebrated in the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels, with Br. Amanuel Mesgun, OFMCap, General Assistant, presiding.

Lomé, Togo – II OFS-YouFra Congress of Francophone Africa – West Region

The II Congress of Francophone Africa, west region, was held form February 8-15, 2014 at the *Leo XIII Spirituality Center* of the Canossian sisters, in the outskirts of Lomé, Togo. Some representatives of the countries of English and Portuguese language also participated. The African countries present were: Benin, Angola, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Togo, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, and Cape Verde. There were also present members of the Presidency of CIOFS: Encarnación del Pozo, Michèle Altmeyer, Ana Fruk, Br. Amanuel Mesgun Temelso OFMCap, and Br. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR. The objective of the Congress was to reflect on identity and the situation of Franciscans (OFS-YouFra and Spiritual Assistants) in the African culture, improve communication (local, regional, national, and international) and find a way to adapt to the linguistic problems in Africa. The opening Eucharist was celebrated by Most Rev. Denis Komivi Amuzu-Dzapah, archbishop of Lomé. The schedule of the Congress included various formative moments, facilitated by members of the Presidency of CIOFS, on various themes: the organization of the OFS,

the International Fraternity, the meaning of profession in the OFS, YouFra, spiritual assistance, the rule of Major Superiors of the First Order and TOR towards the OFS and YouFra, the Africa project, etc. The various participants shared during the discussions and in working groups. There was also a visit to the city of Lomé, to the monastery of St. Clare at Aképé, and to the autonomous port of Lomé, where a fraternal welcome was offered to the participants. In the footsteps of Pope John Paul II, the participants visited Lake Togo and there consecrated their various National Fraternities to Our Lady. In the vigil of the conclusion, the participants celebrated an African evening. The conclusions were approved on the final morning before the concluding Eucharist in which the General Minister sent the participants. The generous service of the National Fraternity of Togo is noteworthy in the preparation and carrying out of the Congress. After the event, said Fraternity was recognized by the General Minister of the OFS as a constituted National Fraternity.

Ivory Coast, Abidjan - Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation

The Fraternal and Pastoral Visitation to the National Fraternity of Ivory Coast was conducted from February 17 to 23, 2014 by Michèle Altmeyer, delegate of the General Minister, and by Br. Amanuel Mesgun, General Assistant. The National Fraternity of Ivory Coast was founded by the OFM in the 1970s. It is not yet recognized as an emerging fraternity because they still do not meet the requirements. Notwithstanding the fact that the Secular brothers and sisters are well prepared and have fervor, their number is small and their organization is still incipient. The two Visitators noted that none of the Fraternities is canonically erected and that there are some fraternities without spiritual assistance due to the insufficient number of religious. It is important for the YouFra fraternities assisted by friars of the First Order to know each other and to be connected to the local OFS fraternities, and for these to be ready to welcome and accompany the youth. A headquarters for the National Fraternity exists, but none of the First Order and by Poor Clares. The two Visitators thank in a particular way the National Assistant, Br. Simon Pierre, OFM, the Poor Clares and the Capuchin Friars of Abidjan for their cordial and fraternal welcome.

Ivory Coast, Abidjan - Appointment of Provisional National Council

Before formalizing the previously prepared decree of recognition of the community as a "emerging fraternity", both Visitors appointed a provisional National Council. In order to know the expectations of our brothers and sisters gathered for the fraternal and pastoral visit, at the end of the work, they carried out a consultative vote. The members of the Provisional National Council appointed by the Visitors on February 24, 2014 are:

National Minister and International Councilor: Lobognon Dabe Christophe Vice National Minister: Ezan Akissi Monique National Secretary: Avi Kisito National Treasurer: Youkpo Viviane National Formator: Brou Joseph Fraternal Animator of YouFra: Edoh Gade Djisso Pierre-Claver.