

CPPS FORMATION - INITIAL, SPECIAL, ADVANCED AND ONGOING FORMATION

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It is already a cliché that we find ourselves not in an "epoch of change" but in a "change of epoch." By this we affirm that the changes that confront us today are not superficial or transient, but that they go to the deepest roots of the issues of life itself. It is a matter of "paradigmatic changes" which question the foundations and models of society, of religion, of church, of ethics, of theology, of religious life - in short, of everything.

This change of epoch is manifested in the compression of space and time. How are time and space compressed?

Yesterday is already today and today is already tomorrow. The world has become a global village where everyone knows one another and is interconnected. Religious life, as well, is seen as marked by a new dimension of depth and by that which today is usually called "axial time" (Karl Jaspers), according to which humanity has made a qualitative leap in the awareness that human beings are persons; are subjects with rights and obligations.

For this reason, religious life today is confronted with the challenge of making a qualitative leap in understanding and living its identity. We note that the cosmetic retouching of the postconciliar period and the efforts of refounding have not had the

desired results. Despite all of these efforts, the crisis continues all the stronger. Vocations are diminishing in many parts of the globe. It appears that we are experiencing that which is beginning to be called a "period of sterility."

But there are also signs of hope: new experiences of religious life; new congregations are emerging; new theologies; and new commitments. There are people today who are "making new garments... and putting new wine into new wineskins" (cf. Lk 5, 36-37).

NEW WINESKINS

It appears that we urgently need a new theology of religious life. Likewise we need a new theology of mission, a new Christology, and a new ecclesiology. What do poverty, obedience, and chastity mean for the young people of today? What does it mean in concrete terms to follow Jesus Christ today? What is the radical nature of following him? What does it mean to hear the cries of the blood in today's world? What does it mean to live in community? Do these questions have the same meaning in Europe, in Brazil, or in India? How can one live the same identity in cultures so different? What is necessary? in formation so that we are faithful to our charism and faithful to God's people?

AND THE WAY CONTINUES

The present *General Council*, elected in July of 2007, met in October to plan the activities for the next six years. The various tasks of the *Moderator* and of the *Councillors* were assigned. Responsibility for assisting in the area of formation was assigned to me.

Formation embraces initial, special, advanced, and ongoing formation of candidates and of definitively incorporated members, whether brothers or priests.

Of course, we are not starting from zero. There has been important and solid work in the field of formation during recent years, at the local, regional, and international levels. One need only to recall the workshops for formators, for recently incorporated members, and the brother's symposium. There have also been international retreats and gatherings of the students of Europe and North America. There are integral programs of formation in North American and in Latin America. The *Council* recognized that the animation of formation in the various units must embrace three areas:

1. Animation in formation;
2. Formation and support of formators;
3. Care that the patrimony of the CPPS is understood

The *Council* considers animation in formation to be a matter of special importance. We are concerned that

formators are prepared well and that programs of formation are excellent and effective in forming good Missionaries.

We are convinced that formation must be accomplished in conformity with our missionary identity and must include both theoretical and practical aspects. Another conviction of the *General Council*, and mine in particular, is that animation in formation must be much more than holding formation workshops every six years. We need to assist and support formators, especially with regard to our CPPS patrimony.

The *General Council* likewise believes, and hopes that the superiors of the units share this belief, that formators must be chosen carefully and that that formation should take into account the context in which the candidates will carry out their apostolate.

In relation to the formation of formators, the *Council* believes that

- It is necessary to develop quality programs for the formation of formators;
- The *Directors* of the units must recognize the importance of preparing suitable persons for formation ministry;
- Preparation of formators is the responsibility of the entire community;

• Community life is an integral part of formation;

• Some of the newer units may require help for establishing clear criteria for admission of candidates, while other, older units can be aided in vocation animation and thus, possibly, increase the number of their candidates.

How can we give this **help to formators?**

As the Councillor responsible for animation in formation:

- I hope to know all of the formators of the CPPS.
- I will regularly visit the units in which formation is taking place. I hope these visits will be seen as an offer of help and never as an inspection to give criticism.
- I want to be well informed regarding the programs of formation in each unit.
- In relation to the **understanding of the patrimony** of the congregation, we believe that it is necessary to continue the workshops for formators every six years, but possibly it would be advisable to have meetings on an interregional level more frequently. The Council could be present and assist in the development of these workshops and in the interregional gatherings of candidates.

MY BELIEFS AND CONVINCTIONS

I offer this **profession of faith**, in which I express some of the things I understand regarding formation:

- I believe that God, Father-Mother, loves all without distinction (S. Peter).
- I believe in Jesus Christ, formator of disciples/missionaries.
- I believe that the Spirit is hovering over formation (the waters) (Genesis).
- I believe in Mary, disciple and teacher-formator of Jesus.
- I believe that there will be no formation without a formative community.
- I believe that no one gives what he does not have; one can not form others without being formed himself.
- I believe that God speaks to us in the cries of the Blood.
- I believe that there is unity only in the diversity (the Holy Trinity).
- I believe that if we are different we enrich each other (Helder Camara).
- I believe that "the dream that is dreamed together" comes to fulfilment (M. L. King).
- I believe that structure can give life but can also kill.
- I believe that in union there is strength (interregionality-internationality).
- I believe that there is no fidelity without creativity and no creativity without fidelity (JP II).
- I believe that cultures are not better or worse: they are different!
- I believe that without an option for the poor there is no Good News.
- I believe that faith moves mountains (Jesus Christ).

CONCLUDING

As a conclusion, I wish to share with you an experience I had as Vice Rector of the Interdiocesan Seminary San Gaspar and as professor of pastoral care and attendant to the seminarians in pastoral practice. The candidates for the priesthood, mainly diocesan along with some religious, were studying philosophy and theology in the Regional Pastoral Institute (IPAR). In the program, pastoral education had the same weight as the academic (fifty-fifty).

Each year, for two months, I would visit the candidates in their places of origin; evaluating, suggesting, and accompanying them in their pastoral tasks. When I began this work I felt a shiver in my spine. For a moment, I thought that the local bishops, the priests of the parishes who received the candidates and the seminarians themselves would consider me to be a "Vatican spy" or a policeman.

Happily, my experience was completely different. For example, bishops came to meet me at the airport or bus station; priests saw me as an older

brother helping them in the formation; the seminarians, in general, considered my presence very valuable for their formation. That was twenty-five years ago and even now, when I meet the seminarians of that time, now mature priests, we recall those times with joy and gratitude.

With this feeling of confidence in God, in the Congregation, in the superiors and in the candidates, I wish to continue this task. In this work, undoubtedly challenging but at the same time exciting, I want to be considered a companion (*cum panis* — one who eats the same bread), an older brother, a helper, a councilor, and never a spy or a police man.

