

*The Present Situation  
of the International C.P.P.S.  
and Challenges for Formation*

**Preliminary Remarks: Putting Formation in a Context**

As we begin this Course I would like to give a sort of overview of the situation of the C.P.P.S. in the world today. What I will attempt to do in this presentation will be to paint a picture of how I see the Congregation and indicate some of the main currents which run through the fabric of our Society of Apostolic Life. As Moderator General I am in an unique position to do so, as I have visited every unit of the Society and have personally spoken with nearly 100% of our membership and most of our students in formation. Such a description of the Congregation today is important since in order to speak about formation we need to put it into a context. Formation is not done in a vacuum or in a hothouse, but is inserted in the heart of the realities in which we live and minister. Our formation programs must be geared to preparing our future members to live in these concrete realities in order to become active agents in their transformation. Thus I will also attempt to indicate some of the challenges which face us and issues to be dealt with in formation so as to prepare our future members for life in our Society.

**Our Present Status: Statistics**

Who are we? Where are we? According to the latest statistics, prepared by the General Secretary and recently published on our Web Site, as of June, 2003 we were **532 members**: 2 bishops, 468 priests, 43 brothers, and 19 incorporated students. To date, our mean age internationally is **58 years**. And we are serving in 19 countries. There are approximately

200 candidates in the different stages of our formation programs, the largest groups being in Tanzania and India. These statistics show that our overall numbers have actually increased by about 21 members during the past year and a half.

If we were to study comparative charts of the different regions of the Society, it would be clear that: 1) we are growing older and smaller in Western Europe and in North America, while we experience growth in the newer areas as in Tanzania and in India. At the same time, growth in Western and Central Europe, as well as in North America and Latin America is slow.

2) If these trends continue, the C.PP.S. will indeed have a “changing face” over the next decade or so as we experience a significant demographical shift in our membership. We will be increasingly “southern and eastern” with the younger faces of the CPPS being in their majority, African and Asian. While English will continue to be the official language of the congregation, it will not be the first language of any of the members from these younger areas. It is, however, the common language of communication of India and of Tanzania, where we are experiencing our greatest growth.

### **Our Identity**

Newer areas. These statistics and the gradual shift in our demographics pose unique challenges to both the newer as well as the aging units of the Congregation. In the newer areas, the main challenge is to acquire our C.PP.S. Identity, rooted in our traditions, but at the same time being open to the challenges of inculturation. Our C.PP.S. charism will take on new forms and expressions according to the cultures and historical/social situations in which the Congregation takes root. In these areas where vocations are more plentiful, the

membership has the unique opportunity to discern new apostolates without the weight of needing to maintain the long-standing commitments of the past.

We need to develop local leadership and government structures that permit and invite the participation of the members. And we need to encourage and assure the participation of the newer sectors in our international gatherings, so that they become aware that they are part of a larger picture and a broader C.P.P.S. family.

Older areas. The challenge in the older and often aging units of the Society is how to care for our membership and discern what ministries to keep and how best to confirm our presence in those places which best respond to our charism, while at the same time creating spaces for our younger members so as to be able to respond to new challenges and to the cry of the blood as it is being heard today. This is quite a challenge to our membership and to our present leadership. However, if we are to survive as a vibrant presence in the Church we must remain open to the signs of the times. As we relinquish some traditional commitments and discern opening new ones, it affords our communities a special opportunity to reflect on what our identity is and what our specific contribution to the Church and to society can be.

We who are from North America and Western Europe will continue to face diminishing numbers and the need to relinquish more and more places of ministry as we adapt to our changing situation. A spirituality of John the Baptist would be helpful at this time: namely, the ability to *let go* when need be and to discover our place in a changing situation. It will require *flexibility* as we adapt and as we learn to work together in multicultural groups and continue to encourage growth in our newer areas.

At our last General Assembly, we were still predominantly Western European and North Americans representing our membership, even though during the past decades we have grown in a sense of our internationality and cultural sensitivity. However, by the time of our next General Assembly more of our Major Superiors will be from our indigenous vocations, and the configuration of our elected delegates will have a much less Anglo-Saxon configuration. And this particular gathering of formators now reflects this *changing face of the C.P.P.S.* as the local membership have now assumed the responsibility of formation in these newer and younger units of the Congregation. This Course is a real celebration of our cultural diversity!

#### **Regional Meetings and Extraordinary General Assembly (2004)**

I see the present moment as a marvelous opportunity to *focus on our identity and to restructure ourselves* (personnel and resources) so that we might better serve the Church from the strength of our charism. For this reason, and at the request of our Major Superiors gathered in Niagara Falls in September of 2002, Regional Meetings of our Congregation are being planned for the next year and a half. During these Meetings the membership will explore together the challenges faced in each region and how best to respond to those challenges in a collaborative mode, in light of the spirituality of the Precious in a truly missionary spirit. These Regional Meetings (a first in the history of the C.P.P.S.) will culminate in an Extraordinary General Assembly to be held here in Rome in September of next year (2004). In view of our changing demographics we may well have to re-examine our present structures and the way we organize our life and mission so that those structures truly serve to further the mission entrusted to us by the Church. And we hope to give a courageous response to the challenge posed to us by the Holy Father when he greeted the

participants of our Seventeenth General Assembly: “*(this Pope) summons the sons of Saint Gaspar to be no less bold in their decisions and actions – to go where others cannot or will not go and to undertake missions which seem to hold little hope of success.*” (Castelgandolfo, September 14, 2001)

In fact, our Congregation has been experiencing a gradual but significant renewal over the past thirty years thanks in great part to the development of a new and dynamic understanding of our spirituality and the rediscovering of our missionary charism. The Precious Blood of Christ is calling us to an exciting adventure. Personally, I would prefer to call the present moment we are living as one of ***refounding*** rather than restructuring, reconfiguration, or simply renewal. We are being called to rediscover for our world today the missionary charism of St. Gaspar and to incarnate our spirituality of the Blood of Christ in the different cultural contexts in which we serve. As we discern together the ***cry of the blood*** and we discover therein ***the call of the Precious Blood*** we are being called to new and exciting realities and to new commitments always in ***creative fidelity to our Founder and the charism entrusted to us!***

We should not consider this discussion on restructuring simply as a way to solve the problem of our diminishing numbers. The dialogue on restructuring should be framed in a spirit of hope and creativity as we discern new ways of presence and action which respond to present-day sensitivities and needs, which arise from our renewed spirituality of the Blood, our rediscovered sense of being missionaries, the option for the poor, and the presence of our lay companions and associates who share our spirituality and mission. It is for this reason that I have invited representatives of our seminarians from the different regions as well as for the very first time, lay associates/companions to participate with us in

our reflections both on the Regional levels as well as in the Extraordinary General Assembly.

Our challenge is to seize the moment as an *opportunity* for growth and rebirth. Above all, we need to be open to the movement of the Spirit among us, realizing that charism is a gift of God for the Church. It is our responsibility to unleash that charism on our world and on society today!

### **Planting our Roots in new lands**

We will be hearing during this Course from our formators who are working in the newest areas of the Congregation where we are in the first attempts to plant our roots and to inculturate our charism. Since 1999 the Iberian Province has founded a mission “ad experimentum” in West Africa in Guinea Bissau. And also the Kansas City Province, through its two Vietnamese members, are making efforts to establish our presence in Vietnam. While we have no official mission in Mexico, we do have two Mexican seminarians studying with us in the Chilean Vicariate.

The future of these newest ventures depends on many factors, but one thing is becoming clearer: that new ventures in the future will very likely be “joint commitments,” that is, made of members from various Provinces, Vicariates and Missions. The formation of “international communities” seems to be part of our future, as it already exists in the Brazilian Vicariate where the C.PP.S. presence consists of eight members, hailing from six countries!

## **Particular Trends in C.P.P.S. Today**

**Collaboration** is one of the signs of the times in which we live. Collaboration must be lived on different levels: among Provinces, Vicariates and Missions, as well as with other religious women and men, and with the laity who wish to share our spirituality and many times our mission. To live in collaboration is a call to live a *spirituality of communion and solidarity as Blood sisters and brothers!*

Already a certain “restructuring” has been taking place, especially on the level of formation in some of our regions: in the North American Provinces on the level of Special Formation and in Advanced Formation. Our Latin American Confreres make a Year of Special Formation together in Lima, Peru. The younger members who grow up thinking across-borders, will probably find restructuring more of a natural thing as they are not usually locked into a strictly “provincial” mentality. This coming September, our seminarians from the Iberian, Teutonic and Italian Provinces and our Polish Vicariate will meet for sharing and fellowship in Schellenberg, Liechtenstein. The theme they will treat is: *what are the cries of the blood in Europe today? And how can we respond to those cries as Missionaries of the Precious Blood?* These different experiences on the level of formation are opening up new and creative ways of being in relationship and adapting our structures to fit our current needs. It is an expression of our Gospel interdependence and sharing of human and material resources congregationally.

**Our internationality.** Another sign of the times is that of a growing awareness of our internationality, that is, of belonging to an international congregation. This awareness has been developing over past three decades and accelerated in recent years. Important in forming this new consciousness have been the different Workshops held over the past thirty years: for formation ministers, spirituality workshops and symposiums, gatherings of our

recently incorporated members, and our Meetings of Major Superiors held now on different continents and cultural settings are among the principal factors in this growth of consciousness. Added to this, of course, is the immensely improved means of communication, first by telephone and fax and now with email and internet. And we must mention our CPPS Communications widely shared across the borders of our regions, and, in recent years the Generalate Publication, *The Cup of the New Covenant*, published in five languages and received by every member of the Community. Our membership is beginning to think “internationally.” Frontiers are being crossed, the walls of Provincial lines are coming down, and we are more conscious of being an *international family*.

This development while positive, is not without its challenges. It calls all of us to stretch our mentalities, to broaden our horizons, to think beyond territorial boundaries, and to be open to communication and collaboration, as we experience our “connectedness” in the bond of charity.

### **What are some of the challenges for formation?**

#### **Conversion to Jesus Christ and Gospel Values**

Given the particular situation of vocations in many parts of the world today, in which our candidates come from an every changing and varied educational and religious backgrounds, it is important that special care be given during the years of formation to knowing the person of Jesus Christ and having a personal experience of Him. Special time for prayer and for reflecting together the Scriptures must be central to any formation program. Experience shows that sometimes we receive candidates into our programs who



have a very minimal knowledge of Christ and the Gospels and little or no previous experience of Church.

And I have found that in formation communities, as well as in our community at large, many of the problems we face in community could be solved if we were only rooted more deeply in Christ and in the Gospel we preach. Thus one must always strive for a continual conversion in our personal lives and to build our formation communities first of all, upon Christ, the only true Rock and Foundation of our lives.

### **Collaboration**

The experience has shown that collaboration is not always an easy task! Even among ourselves we need to learn to open up to each other in trust, to respect our different “cultures,” and to work together. In a collaborative effort, each party must be willing to “die a little” in order to “give birth” to a new reality. But the difficulties should not discourage us. We need to see them as an opportunity to live our charism and to love one another in the bond of charity, living the reconciliation which we preach to others. In doing so, we will offer a positive model for our membership and candidates of **how to “live in covenant relationship” in the Blood of Christ.** This involves helping our candidates to learn to work together, “team work,” and to discover the richness of working in collaborative efforts with religious women and to appreciate the lay vocation. The formator should be sensitive to detecting attitudes of “clericalism” in himself and in the candidates and work to overcome them. Only thus can we truly assume the Mission of the Church in a collaborative model in which the uniqueness of each vocation is recognized and appreciated.

## **Cultural diversity**

The more fluid communication on the world-wide level of the C.P.P.S. has also made us aware of *our cultural diversity*. Our diversity is certainly an enrichment. The Blood of the Covenant calls us to form communion with one another in our diversity, while respecting our differences. To live in an international, multicultural congregation is, on the one hand, **a marvelous opportunity** to witness to God's plan for all humanity, but it also is **a constant call to conversion**. We need to develop our understanding of culture and the dynamics involved in it. We need to recognize our prejudices and sometimes masked racisms, a sense of cultural superiority and excessive nationalism, which can cause hurts and can build walls between us. In order to grow in cultural sensitivity and appreciation it is recommendable that the candidates have an experience of a culture other than their own before definitive incorporation.

## **Language skills**

As a key to understanding another's culture, **language is essential**. Echoing a concern of my predecessor, Fr. Anton Loipfinger, I also want to stress the importance that our candidates learn at least one other language spoken in our congregation. This will become increasingly important as we are more and more interconnected and work in collaboration with one another.

## **Community life**

People today are searching for **community**. They look for it as a place of hospitality and dialogue. And it becomes a very important aspect of our mission as we witness to communion and interdependence as an antidote to the individualism and

loneliness of today's society. The Spirituality of the Blood of Christ summons us to be covenant communities, united in brotherly love, anchored in God, and living simple lifestyles.

How can we make our communities more simple, closer to the people, more in solidarity with the poor? How can we create communities which are "safe spaces" in which the candidates can learn to share their dreams and their sufferings and where they can learn to value of respect for the sacred ground which is the life of the Other? How can we be communities in which forgiveness is experienced and wounds are healed? We need to open our doors to the world, to mission, to the laity, to the great needs of today's society, with creativity and courage.

### **Models of leadership**

We also need to promote and to model new forms of leadership, based not so much on a hierarchical model but one in which dialogue and participation are essential. Our formation communities should be communities in which our candidates learn the value of dialogue and where they learn to grow in respect and trust and learn to assume the responsibility for their decisions.

### **Our C.PP.S. Identity**

During these years we have been engaged as a Congregation in *an on-going deepening of our C.PP.S. Identity*. We are beginning to speak a "common language", while at the same time recognizing the need to incarnate our charism in the diversity of cultures. A rather new development during these years has been a better understanding of our canonical identity as a Society of Apostolic Life. An ongoing task is to explore forms

of prayer and community life which are an expression of our reality as communities in and for mission.

We are in the process of **rediscovering the missionary dimension of all of our ministries** and need to deepen our reflection on central themes such as “the Ministry of the Word,” and “Mission House.” From generalized notions of Precious Blood Spirituality we now reflect upon it **within the specific ministries** in which we are involved (parish ministry, education, hospital chaplaincies, work with the poor and marginalized, etc.) in order to make the connections between the theory and the practical implications for our ministry. We need to discern on the local level how we can contribute from the richness of our charism to the pastoral plan of the dioceses in which we serve.

For the greatest challenge we face in the area of our “identity” is that of **making the connections** between our Precious Blood Spirituality and our everyday lives and ministries. This is an ongoing challenge and I believe, the greatest one we face. That our charism is needed in today’s world, I have no doubt. That we are called to share it with the Church, is a fact by the very nature of charism, which is entrusted to us by the Spirit, not just for ourselves, but for the enrichment of all. We must not horde it. But before we can share it, we have to appropriate it ourselves. We have to breathe it until it becomes, as it was for St. Gaspar, the driving force of our lives.

How to incarnate it into our lives? Community life, our personal and community prayer, and reflections are major supports for discovering the cry of the blood today and in discerning our response to that cry.

I have attempted to point out some of the challenges we as a Congregation need to face at the beginning of this new millennium. What particular challenges does this general context present to us in the realm of the formation of our candidates as well as in the ongoing formation of our membership? I have named but a few. It is our hope that during the next weeks of reflection you will contribute to this list and together we can search for ways to respond to the many challenges in creative ways.

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