

# **MISSION : CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE AND CONSEQUENCES FOR FORMATION**

**A Synthesis by Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S.**

## **Introduction**

At the end of a four-week course on resources for formation as members of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, the participants drew together their experiences of work in formation, and what they had learned during the course. These experiences and learnings were brought to bear upon the formation programs in their respective provinces, vicariates, and missions. The discussions which led to this final stage of the course grew out of exchanges based in some instances on regions (e.g., formators in North America worked together, as did those in Latin America. Formators from the Iberian Province worked together with the Latin Americans as well), or among regions which found themselves in similar situations but in different parts of the world (thus, India, Tanzania, and Guinea-Bissau). In the case of Europe, while Poland, Italy, and the Teutonic Province worked separately, Italy and the Teutonic Province spent some of their time working together.

In an international congregation with foundations in nineteen countries, it is hard to give an overview which does justice to the richness and the diversity of strengths, issues, and challenges of so many different parts of the world. Yet a point stressed in many of the presentations were the commonalities discovered in the process of four weeks of exchange, of hearing from one another, and of speaking together. Certainly a common thread is the C.P.P.S. patrimony, the charism given to us by our Founder, St. Gaspar, and the common faith in Christ and the commitment to serving the Church and the wider society. A picture emerges of shared commonalities, and rich diversity.

The purpose of this final synthesis is to highlight both of these dimensions : ideals and dreams held in common, and also the diversity of experiences. Both dimensions are enriching. Participants found themselves strengthened in common commitments, and motivated to seek new possibilities in the diverse experiences with which they came into contact. While a summary cannot do justice to the entirety of what was presented, it can serve as a stimulus to continue thinking about the challenges which have been raised, and serves also as an invitation to explore new avenues suggested in the presentations.

What follows here uses the framework of the questions each of the groups used in organizing their reflections. This framework began by sketching first of all the context of Church and the wider society in which the C.P.P.S. finds itself. It then presented something on the qualities of the candidates who are coming to us in formation.

In a second step, it examined the resources of the C.P.P.S. patrimony or heritage which can address the needs of Church and society. Specifically, it presented what had been learned about that patrimony in this Formators Course, how this led to highlighting elements in the “Profile of the Missionary,” and what elements of the spirituality of the blood of Christ received emphasis as a result of all of this.

This led to a third and final step regarding how all of this would lead to a reformulation of the Plan for Formation in the different areas of the Congregation. Here a host of concrete suggestions were brought forward—some specific to different areas, but also other suggestions which appeared again and again in the reports.

## The Needs of the Church

It seemed appropriate to begin by looking at the needs of the Church in the areas where the C.P.P.S. serves, since it was the needs of the Church which prompted St. Gaspar to found the Missionaries of the Precious Blood in 1815. At the same time, the sheer size of the Catholic Church (about 1.1 billion people) makes it hard to generalize about needs. Looking at commonalities and distinctive features will give something of the picture of the needs of the Church as the C.P.P.S. finds them at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A recurring theme was *evangelization*. In places such as India, Tanzania, and Guinea-Bissau, this means especially first evangelization, that is, helping people hear the Good News of Jesus Christ for the first time. In India, a country of a billion inhabitants, only 2.1% of the population is Christian. At the same time, however, the parishes which the C.P.P.S. serves in that country are extraordinarily large.

What Pope John Paul II has called the “new evangelization” is a challenge for the Church in North America, Latin America, and much of Europe. The new evangelization is about strengthening the faith of those who already are practicing their faith, and also calling back to a greater fullness of faith those whose practice of faith is diminished or has disappeared altogether. It was noted, for example, that unchurched Catholics constitute a larger group of Christians in the United States than any single Protestant denomination. In secularized Europe, many have stopped any Church involvement, either because they feel they can live without God, or out of sheer ignorance of their faith. Poland represents here a special case, in that Church participation continues to be very strong, and is something upon which the C.P.P.S. in that country can build in a special way.

The Church faces a variety of challenges in different parts of the world at this point in history. The Church in the United States has been shaken recently by scandals regarding sexual abuse of young people by the clergy. The Church in other parts of the world has had to deal with these challenges as well, albeit not at the same level of intensity. In Latin America, the bishops appear to have pulled back from the commitment to the poor and marginalized, a prophetic movement which had been an example to the entire Church in the latter part of the twentieth century. There the Church had retreated more into itself. In a number of instances, the Church is beset by a clericalism that makes the Church aloof to the problems which engage most of its members. It also inhibits lay people from greater participation in the life of faith.

The rise of groups and movements in the Church which have been divisive of the Body of Christ is also a feature of recent years. Groups like Opus Dei and the Neo-catechumenate divide parishes and regions. In struggles over the direction of reform in the Church in Central Europe, there has been a growing intolerance among progressive and conservative elements.

An important development in the past two decades has been the rise of charismatic forms of faith. These forms are present both within the Catholic Church but even more so outside of it. Within the Church, there are often strong divisions about how or whether these forms should be welcomed. Pentecostal groups outside the Catholic Church try to lure Catholics away and are sometimes hostile to Catholicism itself. Clearly greater efforts need to be made to understand this phenomenon, weigh its positive and negative aspects, and prepare our candidates to engage this reality.

In those instances of scandal and of indifference to the suffering of the poor, the Church has become alienated from its own people. Where the laity are made to be passive recipients of Church ministry or experience the Church as ritualistic and removed from the concerns of the people, we find people

leaving the Church in search of something more satisfying. Consequently, there is a great need for reconciliation and healing which addresses the wounds people have experienced, and offers the possibility of greater communion.

At the same time, the Church enjoys admiration and respects in certain parts of the world. The way which the Church stood with the people and protected a cultural heritage in Poland gives the Church high regard there. The way the Church has embraced reform and addresses itself to the needs of society has gained it similar esteem in Portugal. How missionaries stayed with the people in the midst of a civil war has accorded the Catholic Church in Guinea-Bissau special respect.

The need for evangelization in all its different forms is a theme which strikes a special chord for C.P.P.S. Missionaries. We define our mission in our *Constitutions* as the apostolic and missionary ministry of the Word (C3). Reconciliation is also a theme that has come to the fore in recent years in our spirituality. The C.P.P.S. worldwide finds itself therefore, in different ways, at the center of the needs of and challenges to the Church today.

### **The Needs of Society**

The needs of the Church are at least in part reflections of issues in the larger society in which the Church finds itself. Given the C.P.P.S. presence in nineteen countries, the range of needs of society are bound to be diverse. Nonetheless, there were some recurring themes which, as C.P.P.S. Missionaries, we are called upon to address. There are three such themes which stand out especially.

First, in North America and Europe one finds largely wealthy and stable societies. While this would seem to result in prosperity and contentment, the picture is far more complex than that. The wealth and stability of these societies are to a great extent the result of the forces of modernity which have been at work over the past three centuries. Wealth was created by a shift away from agricultural to industrialized forms of societies. These economic developments went hand in hand with the development of democracy and an acknowledgment of human rights and individual freedom. Modernity has been committed to an ideology of progress and greater autonomy of individuals within society. The achievement of progress and autonomy has, however, not led to the utopian dream which fueled such ideas. A number of the presentations from these regions noted some of the negative features which have emerged out of this. Greater wealth and freedom have often led to individualism and a vision of the human being as consumer, rather than as someone responsible for the well-being of others. Assuming the stability of social structures has made it possible to ignore the needs of others. In what is now called postmodernity, those negative consequences become more clear. The bonds of solidarity in society become increasingly weakened. The sheer breadth of choice leads to fragmentation, relativization of values, and indifference to others around us. On the other hand, postmodernity has had its merits. Modernity was often hostile to religion, especially in Europe (this has been less the case in North America). The fragmentation of postmodern society has made it possible for religion to find a place in human life, but it has also fostered the fragmentation of religious traditions, leading to highly individualist forms of faith, New Age phenomena, and experimentation with Satanism and other debased approaches to the transcendent.

Second, *poverty* is the experience of most of the world's population outside North America and Europe. As the reports from Latin America, Africa, and Asia noted, poverty not only diminishes the flourishing of human life, but also brings in its wake greater conflict, corruption, breakdown of families and social life, and escape into destructive behavior (such as alcoholism and drugs). In

some of these places, the Church at the level of the hierarchy has retreated from solidarity with the poor and turned in upon itself.

The *effects of globalization* constitute a third phenomenon in society today. Three features are affecting rich and poor countries alike. Migration is a major feature of societies around the world today. It is creating, on the one hand, multicultural societies that raise new challenges for social coherence and stability. Canada and the United States are now the second and third most multicultural countries in the world (Australia is the first). Europe is experiencing profound changes in countries as immigrants become a prominent feature of once fairly homogeneous societies. People have to cope with a great deal more diversity and difference than had been the case before. Poor countries are experiencing depopulation of rural areas, and the loss of some of their best educated young people to wealthier societies elsewhere.

A second feature of globalization is the spread of neo-liberal economic forms. For the poor countries this has meant disruption of local economies, loss of control over national priorities, and even greater poverty in some instances. It has divided poor societies within themselves, as the gap between rich and poor grows ever wider. Even wealthy countries, who are the major beneficiaries of neo-liberal economy, suffer disruption as well. People in those settings have less job security, and the gap between rich and poor also grows. Nonetheless, poor countries are the hardest hit by these developments.

Third, globalization is shot through with paradoxes. While making the world more and more alike in some ways, it has heightened local resistance to these homogenizing forces as well. The sheer speed with which it moves destabilizes societies. This leads to the experience of dislocation and fragmentation. And globalization, as a social phenomenon, has no goals other than more globalization. Progress and change become values unto themselves, and do not have a clear vision of what it means to be human, other than to produce and to consume.

Missionaries of the Precious Blood find themselves engaged with all three of these aspects of the world today—of wealth, poverty, and globalization. In wealthy countries, they struggle with developing consciousness and care for the disadvantaged. In poor countries, they work toward greater solidarity with the poor in their suffering. Globalization leads to greater plurality, multiculturalism, and conflict in society, and the C.P.P.S. is in the midst of all of this.

### **The Candidates Coming to the C.P.P.S.**

The candidates coming to the C.P.P.S. reflect the Church and the world of today. In North America and Europe, they are concerned and committed, but often ignorant of their faith. The pressures of a wealthy and secular society mean that committing oneself to a religious vocation is to struggle against the mainstream of society. Consequently, the numbers of candidates in those areas is quite small. In places where the Church seems to have turned in on itself or away from the poor, people committed to social justice may look elsewhere than to a Church vocation. In poor countries, vocation to ministry can become conflated with seeking better education or higher social status (as was once the case in Europe and North America). This sometimes results in high numbers of candidates, but the drop-out rate is likely to be high. The instabilities caused by globalization are evident in all of our candidates as well. Some seek respite from constant change by embracing a rigid or authoritarian lifestyle. Others are seeking a haven from bewildering change and choice.

Many of the regions pointed to special challenges in working with candidates today. A good number of candidates come from dysfunctional or broken families. Consequently, a good deal of “remedial” work must be done in their human formation before they are able to move more deeply

into aspects of spiritual, community, and ministerial formation. In areas where there are few candidates, the differences in age, experience, and education of the few candidates can also pose major challenges for forming these candidates as a group together.

Some places, such as Poland and India, noted the effects of accepting candidates who had been previously with other religious orders or with dioceses. Often their previous experiences of formation become disruptive in our formation programs.

At the same time, it was noted that candidates come to us eager to serve and to learn. They carry with them their past as both resource and as burden. Helping the candidates to understand themselves and the larger society in which they find themselves is an important part of formation work, so that the call to service and to witness can flourish and be to the benefit of bringing about the Reign of God.

### **The Resources of C.P.P.S. Patrimony and Heritage**

A recurring theme in the reports was that this Formators Course opened up for many the breadth and the depth of the C.P.P.S. reality. Greater understanding of the origins and history of the C.P.P.S., and appreciation for the variety and range of C.P.P.S. presence and witness in the world today, expanded everyone's horizons. This new awareness is something nearly everyone wanted to carry back to their candidates.

Along with this appreciation of the C.P.P.S. reality, a number of elements of our spirituality were frequently noted. One such area was the interplay of devotional practices and spirituality of the blood of Christ. There was a greater awareness of these two dimensions, how they interact, and the potential and the limits of both. There seemed to be widespread interest in exploring these two dimensions further. Interacting with that was the challenge of charismatic forms of prayer in a variety of settings, apparent in nearly all parts of the C.P.P.S. except North America. Exploring the positive and negative dimensions of charismatic faith, and preparing our candidates to deal with this, was something many wanted to see addressed in greater depth.

Among the themes of C.P.P.S. spirituality (covenant, cross, cup, reconciliation), covenant and reconciliation found special resonance. The fragmentation of society and the loss of solidarity in many societies, as well as the increasing multicultural and multireligious realities, make the theme of the covenant especially salient. The alienation and conflict of societies give reconciliation a new centrality to our spirituality. Other themes, such as the Lamb and the wound in the side of Christ, were mentioned as needing further exploration as well. It was also noted by some that a new appreciation of Mary in our spirituality was emerging.

### **Future Directions in C.P.P.S. Formation Programs**

The experiences and the reflections of these four weeks prompted much thinking about future developments in C.P.P.S. formation programs around the world. A number received special attention.

Perhaps most striking was the call for greater collaboration among regional formation programs and even internationalization of aspects of the formation programs. North America and Latin America already have extensive collaboration in their respective areas. Both groups called for a greater enhancement of this. European seminarians have been meeting on a regular basis in recent years. The development of an explicitly international component, emphasizing our common heritage and

appreciating more explicitly our cultural differences, came from a number of countries in this area. Tanzania and India are already investigating a common year of formation together.

Equally frequent was a call to acquire an additional language or languages to permit greater communication and collaboration in the future. Along with this, greater exposure to different cultures was also seen as an important value. All of this calls formation directors to be trained in skills of intercultural communication and intercultural living. Attention to this area is something which has emerged in religious formation in general only in the past two decades. It is incumbent upon the Congregation to see to the preparation of formation directors in this important area.

Certainly this matter of greater intercultural and international collaboration needs further study and exploration. It needs to be on the agenda of formation programs in the years ahead. This will involve not only setting up programs of exchange, but also in learning the skills of intercultural communication and living. Important especially for formation directors will be the skills to accompany candidates as they undergo movement both into new cultures, but also in accompanying them in their return to their home culture.

For countries where preparation for the priesthood is almost exclusively academic, the need to have greater pastoral exposure and a variety of pastoral experiences in formation was also noted.

Another feature which touches both the training of priests and the training of all future members is the need to involve Brothers in the Congregation and also dedicated laypersons in the process of vocational discernment and in the formation process itself. This is already happening in some parts of the Congregation, but needs to spread to all regions of the C.P.P.S.

Continued emphasis on the preparation and training of formators was also voiced. An appreciation for the wealth of the C.P.P.S. heritage, the many dimensions of the spirituality of the blood of Christ, and the greater sense both of being missionary and being part of an international Congregation was voiced by many participants.

Much progress has been made toward preparing candidates as Missionaries of the Precious Blood, of immersing them in the charism St. Gaspar has bequeathed to us. At the same time, some noted that what it means to be a priest in the C.P.P.S. needs greater attention. Correlative to that is the need, in some areas, to appreciate the vocation of the brother as a Missionary in his own right is needed. All the human dimensions of formation, while best viewed within the specific cultures in which candidates are rooted, will continue to need attention.

A final theme which recurred again and again was that of forming candidates for community life. Community life is always a point of contention in a Society of Apostolic Life, oriented as it is in the first place to mission. Many look to a revival of the concept of the mission house as key to a greater understanding of what community life means in a Congregation such as ours. Reflection on that topic did not achieve the level that many desired to see. That continues, therefore, to be on the agenda for C.P.P.S. formation.

### **Concluding Reflections**

The greater awareness of the international and multicultural dimensions of the C.P.P.S. came through in the discussions and the reports time and time again. It should be noted that this corresponds to larger discussions now underway throughout the Congregation. Special regional meetings in 2003 and 2004 are leading up to a Special General Assembly in September, 2004. In that Assembly, greater collaboration among the regions of the C.P.P.S., and reconfigurations of

Provinces, Vicariates, and Missions will be discussed. Such collaboration between the regions is already underway is already happening, as members from one region now work with other C.P.P.S. members in another. Brazil is perhaps the most striking example of that today, as members from Poland, the Teutonic and Iberian Provinces, and the Central American Mission have gone there to work. Tanzania is sending members to Guinea-Bissau and Chile, as well as Italy. Our formation programs must prepare our future members for these emerging realities. Thus, the hopes voiced for greater collaboration among regional programs, as well as internationalization of aspects of formation programs, fits well with larger realities developing in the C.P.P.S. today.

Second, the commitment to learn languages and appreciate cultures can be seen as a part of a larger phenomenon as well. The Catholic Church is the largest transnational institution in the world. While talk about “transnational corporations” as exploitative of peoples and indifferent to human suffering is widespread, transnational institutions are also the hope of a greater unity in humankind and the hope of a world committed to justice and solidarity in the face of conflict, environmental degradation, and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The C.P.P.S., as an international Congregation, has a role to play in this hope for humanity. Our commitment to a ministry of the Word, and our living a spirituality which builds relationships, walks with those who suffer, and offers healing and reconciliation are essential parts of what we have to offer. Our dreams have to be big enough to encompass that. Having our ears attuned to the cry of the blood in different parts of the world today, our hearts ample enough to welcome the breadth of humanity, and our actions committed to a just and more holy world have to be of a scope and range to meet the world as we find it.

Third, the explorations of our history, our present reality, and our spirituality have created a hunger for going even deeper into these matters. We will continue to need to produce resources which can be used widely throughout the Congregation. All of this will enhance our C.P.P.S. identity and our capacity for solidarity among the different regions of the Congregation around the world.

At the audience he gave to the General Assembly in 2001, the Holy Father challenged us to be true sons of St. Gaspar : to go where others cannot or will not go, to put out into the deep of the world today, to bring the message of hope and reconciliation to all. As persons responsible for the formation of future C.P.P.S. missionaries, we have a special vocation in all of this. We must share this dream and these challenges with those who come to us. We have at times also the responsibility to remind our directors and our confreres of this charge given us by the Holy Father. And above all, we must deepen the bond of charity which holds us together, and the spirituality of the blood of Christ which gives us the strength to move forward. We have a great past. But we have even a greater future. May St. Gaspar guide us. May the love of Christ impel us. And may the promise of the Reign of God draw us all forward to that fullness of life, that reconciliation of all things, which God holds out for us in Jesus Christ.