

APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER A COMMUNIQUE FROM LAGOS, NIGERIA

The first Pan-African meeting of the National Secretaries of the Apostleship of Prayer was held in Lagos from March 11-13, 2002. Eight representatives from Africa assembled under the leadership of Fr. Aloys Van Doren, S.J., Father General's Delegate for the Apostleship of Prayer. Our meeting was held just before the Second Nigerian National Congress of the Apostleship of Prayer/League of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so that we could attend and contribute to some of the sessions of that Congress.

In the course of our discussions, we shared what was going on in our regions or provinces, the ways of promoting the Apostleship of Prayer that were most successful, and also the challenges, questions, difficulties we faced in our work. Rather than try to review the entire course of our discussions, we will try to present what we take to be the key insights, the key suggestions and ideas that we found most helpful and will try to introduce into our work. At the same time, we will set forth some of the problems we face, and try to offer the beginning of solutions or ways to approach them.

Thus our goal and hope in this presentation is threefold. 1) to put together what we ourselves experienced as a group. 2) to share this with other African delegates of the Apostleship of Prayer who could not attend our meeting, as well as with African Superiors and members of the Assistancy, and 3) to offer the fruit of our discussions to those of other Assistances, indeed all persons, Jesuit and lay, involved with the AP.

One fact became very clear as we began our discussions, namely the rich diversity of our group and our experiences. Some of us are from Africa, others are expatriate missionaries. Some of us have been involved with the AP for many, many years, indeed, many

have grown up with the AP. Others are less familiar with the AP and its history. Some see clear links between the Apostleship of Prayer and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus while others wish to examine those links more closely. Some are more comfortable with the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, while others are searching for new ways and means to promote what is intended and aimed at through this devotion. Some of us are assigned full time in this apostolate while for most it is one of our many tasks and missions. The cultures in which we work are rich and diverse, the political, social and economic realities of our nations vary greatly, and the particular Churches which we serve are also very diverse in regard to the possibilities of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. We found this diversity to be challenging but enriching, and enabled us to learn much from one another.

Important challenges that emerged

1. To assure that the Society of Jesus continues carrying out and indeed intensifying its mission from the Holy Father in regard to the AP our concern is that many of the younger Jesuits are not familiar with this work, and not sufficiently informed of it. If this is the case, it will be difficult not only to find Jesuits to carry on the work as Secretaries, but also to carry it on in our various apostolates.

- We appeal to major superiors and to formation assistants, and to those in charge of novitiates and houses of study, to invite the National Secretaries of the AP to visit annually those houses and address the scholastics and novices on this mission of the Society.

- We might also invite novices and scholastics to assist the Secretary in writing brief articles on the Pope's General and Mission Intentions.

- The annual feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus should be a special occasion to renew not only our consecration of the Society, but to examine and reflect on our particular Jesuit mission to spread the Apostleship of Prayer and devotion to the Heart of Christ.

- During the long retreat and the annual retreat, where we move from the colloquium with Christ crucified in the First Week to contemplating the Crucified Christ and his open Heart in the Third we might more consciously and explicitly recall that in these meditations we see the basis of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

2. In a world that is becoming increasingly secular - and this is also true, perhaps to a lesser extent - in Africa, how do we help the younger generation to discover and come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

- In a world of struggle, poverty, illness, we all need the love of God. We must creatively use many ways and images to reveal the love of God so clearly disclosed in Jesus. Our goal is not in and by itself devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, but a personal, prayerful relationship with Jesus Christ, an experience of his love - based upon the Scriptures and the many ways Jesus Christ is present, found and served in our world today. A few pertinent images to complement those of the Heart of Christ would be the image of Jesus Christ breaking bread at the Last Supper and at Emmaus, Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, and Jesus beginning his ministry by proclaiming good news to the poor (Lk 4:16 ff).

3. In Africa where there is so much sickness, and the widespread pandemic of AIDS, and the growth of healing or miracles Churches, what is the importance and the message of the spirituality of the AP and of the Heart of Christ?

- We are convinced of the positive contribution the spirituality of the Apostleship of Prayer can make in the Church's pastoral care of the sick. The daily offering might frequently include the intention of offering our day and work and praying for the sick. In regard to those who are themselves ill, through the daily offering they begin to see their own suffering not as a rejection by God, but positively as redemptive, joined with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. They will see themselves, in solidarity with others who are ill, with the special mission both to prayerfully offer their sufferings for the intentions of the Holy Father and to pray in a special way for the sick. In this way they continue to make their contribution as active apostles of prayer.

- In addition to praying for the sick, members of the Apostleship of Prayer should express solidarity with the sick by visiting them in homes and hospitals, and by urging, enabling and preparing them to receive the Eucharist.

- To support and assist those who are ill, we will print and share simple leaflets to show the sick their important mission of prayer, and how they are to continue to seek, find and serve God through their illness, in accord with the spirituality of the Apostleship of Prayer.

4. In Africa, where there is tremendous growth among the charismatic Catholics and Christians, and strong presence of Pentecostal Churches, how do we assure that the love of God in Jesus Christ remains strong, as well as the outpouring of God's love and power in the Holy Spirit?

- There is no Christian without Christ - and there is no Christian without the Holy Spirit. In our teaching and preaching, we must show that this is never an either/or. We must see and teach that those who trust in and are led by the Spirit, must also grow in the

knowledge, love and personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Following the recommendation of Pope Paul VI, that the Apostleship of Prayer might more easily accomplish its aim, if it includes greater devotion to the Holy Spirit as well as active participation in the liturgy (Letter of Approbation of New Statutes, 1968).

- One way to show this unity between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is to include reference to the Spirit occasionally in the formulation of the Daily Offering.

5. What are the major characteristics, components, elements of the Apostleship of Prayer and devotion to the Sacred Heart that we wish to be effectively present in the Catholics we serve?

- A deep, growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ, having the mind of Christ, as Saint Paul explains.

- A Catholic sense - concern for the universal Church, achieved through the constant prayer for the Pope's intentions, creating a universal communion of prayer and concern for the local Church by praying for the intentions of the local Bishop.

- Seeing one's whole life as apostolic and missionary, as priestly people, through the daily offering and all that it leads to -- a life of open hands.

- A joyful life receiving nourishment and strength from Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

6. Contextualizing our work. In leading persons to a deep personal devotion to Jesus Christ, in our writing and teaching, we explore ways of using images, stories, and methods of prayer (and of

course the vernacular) that are more African based rather than imported. In this difficult process of inculturation, we work patiently with the people to move together in this direction.

7. To assure that the Apostleship of Prayer and devotion to Heart of Christ remain deeply Eucharistic.

Indeed, it was acknowledged that one way into the devotion is not by starting with the Sacred Heart, but beginning with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist - for example, as the bread broken and shared. Fr. Kolvenbach put it this way: "During the Last Supper, Jesus was able to sum up his entire life in one gesture. He took the bread, broke it and distributed it to his disciples. Through this gesture, even more than through his words, he revealed the Father's love to them" ("Characteristics of the Members of the Apostleship of Prayer," 1998).

Many Catholics in Africa do not receive Communion because they are not in marriages blessed by the Church. We encourage these Catholic members when at Mass to commune deeply with the Word of God, and then unite themselves in spiritual communion with Jesus, if not by the reception of the Eucharistic Bread of Life.

8. To see and explain that the Daily Offering is also a prayer and commitment for transformation, continual conversion and a life of justice.

If one has truly made the Daily Offering for oneself and the Society, and pledges to live in union with and in imitation of Jesus Christ, then during that day there should be public witness to the way of Jesus and not a life of sin, corruption, or self-centredness. Indeed, through the Daily Offering we not only pray for justice, but

commit ourselves to work for the transformation of the world, and to engage in the struggle for peace and justice. We imitate and cooperate Jesus Christ who was sent to bring good news to the poor, sight to the blind, and freedom to those in captivity (Lk 4:16 ff). In the words of Pope John Paul II, reparation, a key element of the Daily Offering, can be understood today as "apostolic cooperation in the salvation of the world" (Message for the Centenary of the Consecration of the Human Race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus," 1999).

9. The Eucharist has always been at the centre of the Apostleship of Prayer. During our meeting we learned much of the ways in which the Eucharistic Youth Movement fosters love for the Eucharist at an early age. We felt ourselves challenged to introduce elements of this into areas where it is not present, and also challenged to see how the EYM can be seen in continuity with and leading our children to active, adult commitment as Apostles of Prayer.

10. We explored the many ways of making known the Apostleship of Prayer, especially through leaflets and other publications. In addition to further publications, we are aware of many other possibilities such as video, radio, and the internet. Yet we also find ourselves limited by financial constraints not only in trying to continue our present ways, but in exploring and utilizing new ways of making the AP known.

11. A recurrent question was on the nature of the link or links between the Apostleship and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We see the historical link was clearly made by Fr. Gautrelet in 1874 when he republished his booklet of 1846 with the enlarged title, "Apostleship of Prayer in Union with the Heart of Jesus". As he

explained and as we see today, "the AP is the apostolate of Jesus Christ that continues among its members. But it is in his love, in his Heart, that their prayer draws its efficacy. This divine heart is the foundation of their trust".

12. The ways we have found most effective in promoting this work.

- Invite the bishops to draw up intentions for their nation or diocese, by suggesting, offering them some intentions. This will encourage members to pray even more fervently for intentions that are of more direct concern to them and the local Church.

- Seeing that the AP and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus are not missions or works separate from our other works, but they might well be linked with, and inform our works in every parish, every school (faculty, staff and students) every religious publication. We should be in dialogue with Jesuits involved in Christian Life Community (CLC), retreat work, and Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM). Our homilies should speak from, and at times consciously refer to the spirituality of the Apostleship of Prayer.

- Much of the success of our work depends on collaboration with the laity and with diocesan clergy. We are most grateful for their support, dedication, and example. Thus here in Africa where there is such good will and enthusiasm for the Gospel, and love for Jesus Christ, we must put even more energy into training lay leaders, promoters of the AP with whom we collaborate in our ministry.

- Trying to guide people from seeing the Morning Offering, or devotion to the Heart of Christ as "devotions" to seeing them as authentic spiritualities, or ways of life.

- Regularly inserting the Pope's intentions to the Prayer of the Faithful at Sunday or daily Masses.

- We should join and complement the Daily Offering made in the beginning of the day with the Prayer of Life or consciousness examen, made towards the end of the day.

- In places where the Angelus is regularly recited in the morning, noon, and evening, we might think of joining the Daily Offering to that morning recital of the Angelus.

- The Bishops of Africa beautifully have described the Church as Family. In this context, we have seen the importance and the success of not only consecrating individual members as Apostles of Prayer, but in consecrating families to the Heart of Christ.

Conclusion

We were all enriched by our discussions, learning much from the experience, the successes and questions of one another. One conclusion is that there is no one formula, no one way, to promote the Apostleship of Prayer and devotion to the Sacred Heart in the diverse and varied situations where we find ourselves. Creativity, energy, commitment is called for - a holy boldness, or as Pope John Paul II has often repeated, the need to "Due in altum," "launch into the deep". We leave the meeting at Lagos with renewed energy and support to take up this most pleasant mission (*munus suavissimum*) entrusted by the Church to the Society of Jesus in general, and to us in a special way. We pray that Mary, Queen of all Apostles, and Queen of Evangelization, will intercede with her Son Jesus Christ, to bring success to our efforts.

Recommended reading

In the course of our discussions, several key articles and books were continually referred to. We think it helpful to list here these key documents for gaining insight into the meaning, structure, and work of the AP and of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

- Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter on the Sacred Heart, *Haurietis Aquas*, 1956.

- Pope John Paul II. *Message to the 1985 Congress of National Secretaries. Message to the Society of Jesus, Paray-le-Monial*, 1986. *Letter on the 150th Anniversary of the Apostleship of Prayer*, 1994. *Message for the Centenary of the Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 1999.

- *Statutes of the Apostleship of Prayer with Papal Letter of Approbation*, 1968.

- Albert Vanhoye, S.J. *Messe, vie Offerte (Edition Vie Chretienne)*.

- Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. *A Most Pleasant Mission*, 1988. *Characteristics of the Members of the Apostleship of Prayer*, 1998. *Letter to National Secretaries*, 2001.

- Aloys Van Doren, S.J. *The Holy Father's Thoughts Concerning the Apostleship of Prayer*, 2002.

Participants:

Steves Babooram, S.J.	Mauritius
Mariano Dorairaj, S.J.	Tanzania
Romani Amin Hendi, S.J.	Egypt
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Hans Putman, S.J. Peter	Sudan
Schineller, S.J. Jose	Nigeria
Uranga, S.J. Aloys Van	Democratic Republic of the Congo
Doren, S.J. Joachim	Rome
Zoundi, S.J.	Cameroun

Could not come

Julien Rakotosoa, S.J.	Madagascar
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Asked to be excused:

Roy Thaden, S.J. Leslie	Zambia
McKenna, S.J. James	Zimbabwe
Fitzsimoms, S.J.	South Africa