

A worldwide overview of

Apostleship of Prayer and the Eucharistic Youth Movement

*A report to Father General
after two years in office
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(revised edition of a previous report)*

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I have been on the job since May 23, 2007.

What do I do?

- *Office work in Rome (54%):* letters, coordination for international meetings, working on the Pope's intentions, studying, preparing talks and articles, building and keeping up the website, meeting Jesuits that go to Rome, preparing travel connections (visas, tickets, setting up my agenda, etc.).
- *Travelling (46%):* to international meetings and/or to make an official visit to local AP / EYM centers.

Countries visited so far (33):

India, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, South Africa, Malta, Spain, Portugal, France, Poland, England, Ireland, Sweden, Netherlands, Italy, Chile, Mexico, Guatemala, Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Canada, USA, Philippines, Australia, Chad, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Croatia, Switzerland, Angola, Egypt.

The present report considers basically the places I have visited, so it is necessarily a partial view.

Apostleship of Prayer

In 87 countries we have an AP National Secretary, usually a Jesuit. AP is surely present in more countries. It is very difficult to say how many we are worldwide, but the number could well be about 40 million. This considers membership merely by the fact of living the basic practices of AP, meaning the daily offering, the Eucharist and praying for the Pope's intentions, in love of the Heart of Jesus. In most places, the vast majority of these members are elderly women. Men and younger people are the exception. In spite of the high numbers and of the fact that we are present in so many countries, there are signs that show AP is in a deep crisis and needs a renewed face so as to survive and keep helping people with its spiritual proposal.

A flourishing AP

The first promoters of AP were extremely successful in implementing AP's spiritual insights through a well organized array of concrete devotional practices. After its foundation in 1844, and especially under the strong leadership of Fr. H. Ramière, AP grew at an explosive rate. At the time of his death in 1893, there were about 13 million members in 35,000

centers. And it grew quickly in Europe, Latin-America, the US, India, Philippines and other Asian Countries, and in some African countries. Starting the XXth Century, most traditional and old-rooted Catholic communities, if not in all of them, had AP as part of the standard Church program.

Technically the AP was not a Movement but a spirit, an ecclesial service, a pious association of those who lived that spirit. All could be apostles of prayer if they practiced the Daily Offering and prayed for the Pope's intentions. Popes Pius XI and then Pius XII clearly stated that all Catholics without exception should belong to the Apostleship of Prayer (the latter, in 1948, in a letter to Father Janssens). All should live this missionary, ecclesial, Eucharistic and Heart of Jesus proposal. It was grounded of the basics of Catholicism, and it was a good way for all to be united through prayer to the Holy Father and the rest of the Church.

People were invited to live this individually or in groups, for AP had also grown as a visible Church Movement, with parish groups or sodalities, with big gatherings, with a clear diocese-based hierarchical structure, with specific symbols and practices. It had a clearly devotional profile, based on the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its traditional images, practices and prayers, and was very popular.

Following the Pope's instructions, the bishops were responsible for installing the AP in their dioceses, and each appointed a local priest as Diocesan Director. The latter's mission was to visit, promote and serve the AP parish groups that flourished everywhere, and to call for Diocesan Gatherings. In each country, a Jesuit "National Secretary" would be in charge of the overall direction of this Movement and inspiration of this spirit. The AP member's identity was fostered through other catholic practices like the First Fridays Holy Hour of adoration (or reparation), Sacred Heart Visitations and Enthronements, the Messenger of the Sacred Heart magazine, among others. The AP was practiced in the family, in the convents, at Church, in school.

It's peak may have been in the first half of the XXth century, with God knows how many millions of members all over the world. From this time on, and especially after the Vatican II Council, signs of decline began to bring the numbers down and show the need for a renewal.

An AP in crisis

Today few of these parish structures and practices remain active. In some countries it has completely died out. In most places that used to have a strong diocesan structure, some "old lady groups" survive in certain parishes that are not being renewed with younger people. Most dioceses no longer have Diocesan Directors. Today AP is still a big organization and strong in numbers, but is in a crisis for lack of renewal.

Which causes could be pointed out for the crisis of what had been a highly successful formula? The "devotion to the Sacred Heart" lost the appeal it once had. Old images and traditional practices lost meaning before new religious sensitivities. The times changed, the Church renewed its language and its way to dialog with the modern world. Devotions were left behind as they did not seem to respond to the present world's complex demands.

Especially in the time close to the Vatican II Council, among illustrated Christians, clergy included, faith became more intellectual and less devotional. The Church stopped offering the old devotions and did not replace them with new religious practices. This created a void for popular piety, based on simple and concrete devotions.

Traditional AP members along with other members of the people of God clung to the old practices for lack of new ones, or adopted those that appeared along the way: the Divine Mercy, Metjugore, and others. These limited personal opinions certainly require a deeper sociological study of popular religiosity, which I cannot do here, but it could shed interesting clues to explain the decline of AP and its practices.

Summing up, AP had become for many a set of pious practices that did not offer adequate answers to the new problems. Its people got old, the globalized culture brought changes they were not prepared to handle. No new practices were being proposed to update to modern expressions the original spiritual insight of AP.

Today, newer generations of Catholics have not heard about AP, or identify it with a traditional piety good for old ladies, that should die out soon. A “Sacred Heart Devotion” that belongs to the past. This includes priests and religious sisters, be they Jesuits or from other congregations.

The AP in the world

There are nonetheless some places that maintain in healthy form the diocesan structure and have active AP parish groups. The two countries where AP is strongest and most numerous, still very much alive, seem to be **Brazil** and the **Philippines**. Here it still contributes actively to the life of the local Church, counting millions of members (mostly women, we must say) in practically every diocese of the country.

For the third place in my worldwide ranking, several contenders compete:

Angola, with over 100 years of AP history, has active parish groups, some dynamic Diocesan Directors, a clear unity and sense of belonging of the Eucharistic Youth Movement for the younger ones, consolidated traditional practices. It is a good example of an African inculturation of the AP giving a service of spirituality to the poorest of the poor.

Italy and **Portugal** are not doing bad, even though their members are aging. They are still strong and well structured Church Movements, that gather many people. The challenge is the renewal of the people and of their practices so as to keep offering a relevant answer to today's needs for spirituality.

The same can be said to a lesser degree in other countries, like some in Latin America, or Spain and Poland. In northern Europe it has completely disappeared, if it was ever there.

Africa is a different reality, given the evangelization of the continent in some places is only 100 years old, or even younger. Many things in the Church are new or starting out. After a first period depending on the missionaries from Europe, the African Church now seeks its

own cultural roots and expressions to live their faith. Besides Angola above mentioned, Tanzania (and from what I have heard, Nigeria and Congo) have active and well developed AP groups throughout the country. Here these groups are lively and not at all in decline. They seem to respond well to their local African Catholic cultures.

Among African Catholics, I have sensed in certain places a great love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In others, like **Chad**, the symbol of the heart says little or nothing to the local culture. To them, the stomach would be much closer to the symbolic value we attribute to the heart. (By the way, AP is nonexistent in Chad.) As for the rest of Africa, I cannot say much more, besides the fact I found people interested in AP and EYM among Jesuits and non-Jesuits I met.

India's Catholicism is very traditional in its language and in its practices. Doing the morning offering and praying for the Pope's intentions are standard Church practices, even though AP as such is not known. The rich spirituality of Indian culture makes it easy to understand that our lives belong to God and that we are in his hands. They don't need AP to tell them that, they already know it very well and live it quite 'naturally'. They take on our practices, especially the daily offering, which is also a standard prayer and practice in the Hindu religion, but without even hearing about Apostleship of Prayer. There are practically no AP parish groups. On the other hand, they have very strong and widespread youth programs offered by the AP. They do not use the name "Eucharistic Youth Movement", but they have literally millions of children and young people in their "Eucharistic Crusade", or "Crus Vir", also called "Soldiers of God" (vide infra), all over the country.

Leaving out the Philippines, which has peculiar characteristics, as mentioned, the other three Eastern countries I visited (**Japan, Taiwan, South Korea**) present similarities. All three are highly successful economically, also highly secularized, "materialized", and Catholics there are minorities (from less than 1% - Japan - to 8% of the population - Korea). AP is not strong nor does it have a long tradition in the local Church. But those in charge are willing to take the challenge of offering their people new meaning for their lives through AP. These three countries are living deep crisis and changes in their traditional values. This can mean for AP an opportunity to offer an adequate response to their spiritual searches.

Australia is in the neighborhood and I visited the local AP, and not much is going on. A website and 16000 monthly leaflets being distributed by the aged National Secretary contribute to make AP present in the local Church. The same could be said of **Canada**.

In the **United States** a very active National Secretary and his team have seen the virtual community of AP grow every year. There are not many parish groups and diocesan structures of AP in the US, but an excellent website, frequent reflections on You-Tube and a growing mailing list for the monthly leaflets offer our spirituality to an increasing number of Catholics.

Membership and Models for installing AP

There are different levels or degrees of belonging to AP, from those who simply pray this way on their own, to those who belong to AP groups, to those that are committed through

their personal consecration to the Heart of Jesus and can be animators of AP for other members. All can be considered members of AP, even though we would normally consider as such those that at least are on a National Office's mailing list for the monthly Papal intentions, through the leaflets or the Messenger magazine.

Knowing that AP does not define itself as a Movement, there are basically two models by which AP can function:

- **The Movement model**, made of the traditional parish groups and an official diocesan structure, still active in many places, as mentioned. It maintains most of the traditional practices and is still the way most AP centers work (here is where we still find the greater number of our members). But in general its members are aging and its numbers decreasing. This model requires registered membership to a group, having regular meetings and common practices, and in some places even a uniform.
- **The Service model**, that could also be called the 'spirituality for today' model. With no groups of its own, it is simply spread and proposed as an invitation to serve the Church through prayer and the offering of the daily life, regardless if the person belongs to other Church groups or not. Registration for membership is not required. A person can be considered a member of AP from the moment he or she takes on the basic practices proposed.

This second model works more on an individual basis, stressing the invitation to live a spirituality that can help modern day Christians find meaning to their lives. AP is offered to people who cannot or do not want to belong to Church groups, but wish to live an ecclesial spirituality. At the same time it proves useful to those who do belong to Church groups (be they AP groups or others) and are engaged in different activities. AP for them does not add a new group or a new weekly meeting, it helps them discover the key of meaning for all they do during the day. Their lives are already being given out for the Lord. AP helps them find coherence between their commitments and the Eucharist, between their personal engagements and the mission of the rest of the Church. It offers them a guideline or a 'spiritual backbone' that can bring unity to their day and their life. In most places, the two models coexist and the National Secretary must be keen to serve two different audiences, that in fact may require different religious languages and practices.

In the Society of Jesus

AP was standard practice in the spiritual life of the older generations of Jesuits, starting from the novitiate. An in-between generation has heard about it but seems not interested in what they consider a merely devotional and old fashioned piety that is no longer useful. Most of today's young Jesuits have never heard about AP, or if they have, they share the poor image of the previous generation. Little by little, young Jesuits start hearing of the renewed spiritual proposal of AP seen as a Eucharistic, apostolic, Heart of Jesus spirituality helpful to them and to all Christians.

Anyhow, it is clear that currently the AP is not a priority in Jesuit ministries nor is it considered a first-line apostolate by most Provincials. It is not uncommon to find that the

Jesuit National Secretary is in his late 70s, or even well in his 80s. Many Provinces don't have anybody appointed. In other cases the man in charge accumulates another or several other "more important" jobs, having little chance to promote and develop AP.

Among the difficulties our active National Secretaries are facing in some countries is the lack of interest and consequently the lack of knowledge on what AP is and proposes (or vice-versa, because of the lack of knowledge, no interest). This can be found within the Society of Jesus, and can also be said of other Church authorities.

Even though we see this lack of importance given to AP ministry, with a simple and humble heart we joyfully commit ourselves to it, for we are aware it is helping millions of simple and humble Christians find God in their daily lives. For us this is a grace.

The Eucharistic Youth Movement

The Eucharistic Youth Movement (EYM or MEJ, as in its initials in Spanish and French) is the youth branch of AP and it shares the same spirituality. It is the renovation of the old Eucharistic Crusade, starting as *le Mouvement Eucharistique des Jeunes* in France in 1962. It is present today in 44 countries, according to my records. Maybe only in half of these we have a Jesuit in charge as National Director. The other places are in charge of religious priests (Mexico) or sisters (Poland, Canada, Ethiopia) or diocesan priests (Burkina Faso, Benin, Vietnam)

The EYM usually works with a wide spectrum of age groups, from ages 4 to 25. In some countries, like in Chile and in most of India, it is clearly a Movement for Children. By and large, though, EYM members worldwide are teen agers.

EYM offers a Eucharistic spirituality to the youth, based on community life, prayer and service experiences. The objective is to lead a Eucharistic life. Our spirituality teaches them to acknowledge God's love and respond with generosity giving out their lives, just as Jesus did and as we celebrate in the mass. EYM has proven to be helpful for pastoral ministry in schools and parishes: it provides a spirituality, a methodology, guidelines, follow-up, formation material and invitations to different activities from the national office (such as retreats, summer camps, training courses, etc).

EYM usually operates not so "Movement-centered" as other youth movements. EYM groups are rooted in the local Church structures, and are always to the service of the local bishop and parish priest. Since it is clearly grounded on what could be considered the basic spirituality of the Church, EYM is easy to spread and promote, beyond the normal reach of Jesuit works. It catches on well among the poor, who readily feel at home in the Movement. The pedagogy applied succeeds in conveying to them a simple and profound way of life, in friendship with Jesus and love of the Eucharistic.

Unlike AP, EYM is clearly a Movement and needs to have the structure of a Movement. This responds to the gregarious nature of young people, looking for friends and for a clear sense

of belonging. Their formation requires explicit guidelines, a central direction, groups, visibility, a regional structure and the other elements stated above.

Even though EYM is a worldwide Movement, and even though it is active and lively in many places, it has no international coordination whatsoever. Many communities are not even aware that EYM exists beyond the boundaries of their own country. There is no authoritative central direction for the Movement on a worldwide level, no regular meetings, no shared visions, no common plans. For the first time, in April 2006 the Roman office summoned the National EYM Directors of 4 countries to meet and discuss what they had in common. The countries chosen were those where EYM seemed to be strongest and best organized: Madagascar , France, Italy, Chile (the most numerous being Madagascar, with over 200.000 members). The fruit of this meeting is a two page document that states some shared orientations of what the EYM is or should be. EYM in Egypt, Lebanon, Argentina and Paraguay are important in numbers and organization. I have been told that in Vietnam EYM is very strong. Elsewhere, with the exception of India, as mentioned, EYM is not big in numbers.

The future of AP

What will happen to AP and what do we hope happens to AP? These are two different questions that may go different ways.

As for what will happen, I think that inevitably our numbers will go down, and if today we speak of 40 million members, in ten or twenty years those numbers could be down to maybe 10 million or less. The old members of AP will die, and not so many will have joined.

It seems quite certain that the Society of Jesus will maintain the mission to head the AP for the oncoming years. All indicates the Holy Father will keep entrusting us his monthly prayer intentions for us to spread in the Church. As Jesuits we are still especially linked to the promotion of the Heart of Jesus spirituality within the Church, a mission we have willingly accepted (*Munus Suavissimus*). The AP was born among Jesuits, and is rooted in Ignatian spirituality. In fact, it is the only Jesuit work that has been assumed officially by the Holy See as something of her own, and that has in turn been handed back by the Pope to the Society to run it. I mention these facts just in case anyone would come up with the idea that the AP is dying out, and that we just need to wait to close it down and bury it. This cannot be the correct option.

What do we want or hope should happen? First I answer negatively: we do not want to keep alive an old structure with its traditional practices just for the sake of avoiding its death. We are interested in maintaining a spiritual tool that is helpful and meaningful to today's Christians. This is, we want to offer this simple and profound spirituality to all in the Church as an aid in the challenge of living the faith in today's world. We also want to collaborate actively and creatively in spreading the Pope's intentions so that all may pray for them. We as the Society of Jesus want to work for a renewal of AP practice today. This follows what Pope John Paul II asked us to do in 1985:

The Apostleship of Prayer can bring a meaningful and concrete contribution to the diffusion, at all levels, of the great and consoling truth that all Christians can be intimately united to Christ the Redeemer by offering their own life to the Heart of Christ. I do not doubt that the Society of Jesus will continue to put its strength, its talents, its organization and its obedience at the service of such a high spiritual end. (In Rome, April 13, Address to the AP National Secretaries)

It is not difficult or far-fetched to renew AP. Our theological framework offers modern day people an attractive spirituality. It is basically a Jesus program, molding our lives to his likeness in the Eucharist, living our baptism and our priesthood with the apostolic sense of sharing the Church's mission. We need not change this. We do need to find new expressions and practices, that this theological content may reach today's perplexed Christians in a meaningful way and be helpful for their life of faith.

Ways of renewal

It is a fact that this renewal of AP is under way in many places. A renewed language, a new focus, is being proposed and is working well for many people. This focus basically recovers our original foundational insight, as proposed in 1844 by Fr. Gautrelet. The message would be: "your life, your simple everyday chores, your joys and sufferings, are all important to God and are helpful to the Church as they can be joined to Christ's Eucharistic offering. You are invited to be an apostle in all you do and to live your life as a project and a mission (regardless of who and where you are). AP will help keep you stay tuned in prayer and service."

Dynamic National Secretaries in several places (not too many) are working on adapting the languages, the practices and the images to modern religious culture. Many times they count on lay teams which assist them in their reflection, pursuing the right symbols and expressions for today's world. Young Jesuits in many places have discovered the potential of the AP for spiritual ministries, and are showing interest in developing it further.

Currently the tendency is to favor the Service model described above, even though in some local contexts, the Movement or group model is very useful and lively. Today's Christians are in fact discovering through AP a new clue of meaning for their lives as they join their efforts, sufferings, hopes, etc., to Jesus and to the rest of the Church.

The traditional monthly leaflets and the Messenger of the Sacred Heart magazine (the official publication of AP in 35 countries) have been renewed in most places and are a good means to propose the modern perspectives.

The internet is an increasingly important means of renewal. With new websites in many places, digital AP communities are growing. Through the internet we can be of service to people around the world. If we offer to people a "good product" they will respond. In several places the AP is working well with the new media, and as we move on this way, the "community of the AP" will look very different from the parish and diocesan groups of the past. Radio programs have also proven to be very effective AP platforms. Recently (June 4th, 2008) we launched the international AP website: www.apostleshipofprayer.net

After a period of relative silence, today there is a renewed interest in theological reflection on a biblical-spiritual approach to the Heart of Jesus. Now it seems easier than a few years ago to reflect deeply on the meaning of God's human and divine love for us through the symbol of Jesus' Heart without getting entangled in the discussion over the bad artistic taste of the images or the old devotional aspects linked to them.

Another path of renewal is the interest to strengthen the connection and unity between AP and EYM. The young people should be made aware they belong to something bigger, as the youth branch of AP. This identity and this awareness is far from commonplace.

Two projects are under way for the international EYM. Thanks to the possibilities of internet technology, we hope to set up a world coordination or a world council for the Movement. We could discuss and progress on what should be considered by all as the common traits of EYM, along with sharing ideas and planning activities.

The second project is the idea of a world gathering of EYM to be held in 2012, possibly in Dublin (connected to the Eucharistic Congress that year). We would hope to gather EYM representatives from most places of the world. This event could be a decisive standing point to advance as a fortified and united Church Movement.

What lines am I stressing when I speak of AP today?

Finally, let me add a more personal note as to what discourse could convey a renewed vision of AP.

1 Spirituality

AP and the Heart of Jesus is a **spirituality** and not a just a devotion among others. It proposes a way to live the basic spirituality of the Church. We may need certain devotional practices to make it concrete, but AP is more than the devotions and its practices. You start your day offering your life, you end the day in the examination of what God has done with your offering. AP is proposed as a way to sanctity for the Christian of the Third Millennium.

2 Jesus

It is a **Jesus-program** (and not simply a methodology for prayer). AP guides the Christian to the Heart of Jesus, to live as he did, in him, with him. It invites us to identify our lives with him, all day long, in everything we do. AP helps us achieve this (or better, helps us receive it as a gift). This is the ultimate goal of the daily offering. We learn to renounce our own way of looking at things, as we express our desire to do things his way (the Offering prayer is thus a will-act, the expression of a desire). We ask for the grace to be accompanied *by him* and to live *as he did* all day.

3 Meaning

In a broken and confusing world, AP helps bring **meaning** and unity to everyday life, giving Christian consistency and coherence to all I do.

4 Service

AP is an apostolic spirituality that helps the committed Christian lead a life of prayer and **service**, inspired in and nourished by the Eucharistic to give my life out to others.

5 *Ecclesial*

It makes us aware that sharing Christ's mission is sharing the Church's mission. AP gives us the tools to put our lives to the service of the Church, regardless of our position within the Church. We learn to be apostles through prayer and service. Furthermore, AP guides us to live this vocation in a communitarian way, as opposed to an individualistic one.

6 *Ignatian*

AP is an **Ignatian** spiritual proposal officially taken in by the Church, entrusted to the Society of Jesus, offered to the people of God. It is not difficult to recognize the Ignatian roots of our spirituality. The morning offering wishes to prolong on a daily basis the same contemplative attitude that runs all through the Spiritual Exercises. From the Preparatory Prayer to the Contemplation to Attain Love, the Exercises guide us to put our lives in God's hands and live according to his will. To find, love and serve God in all things is also the objective of the AP and its daily offering prayer. (AP can be understood as a way of doing the Sp. Ex. according to the 18th annotation, and is helpful for the 19th annotation way.)

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