

**Study Group on the theme:
“The Pauline’s identity in its dual expression: priest-disciple”**

To the communities of the Society of St. Paul:

A week of work, intense and tiresome, but also fruitful and stimulating. If at the start we had a rather vague idea of the task entrusted us, now we have acquired a much clearer and well-founded view and we are ready to face the big task that still awaits us. This, dear brothers, is in short the activity of the study group designated by the General Government that met for the first time in Rome, at the General House, from 28 February to 7 March.

Perhaps it is worth recalling the reasons for which this study group on the Pauline’s identity in its dual expression priest-disciple has been established. As you will remember the matter was an object of a special “recommendation” of the 7th General Chapter (1998). The Inter-chapter assembly of New Delhi (2001) reaffirmed the need and the urgency of dealing with it; even more, it solicited the General Government to entrust to an adequate number of confreres the duty of further studying it. Were there, perhaps, very serious problems that induced the Chapter and the Inter-chapter assembly to insist on this? Or else, has the awareness of our identity become so vague in our congregation as to make us feel the need of studying and understanding it once more? There is nothing of all this. As the Superior General, Fr. Pietro Campus, has himself said as he opened the work of the group, “It is not asked of you to raise or resolve ‘problems,’ but to ‘study more deeply,’ in all directions, the proposed theme, in order that, in due time, there emerges... a framework of orientations for the congregation: directions in formation, development of prospects updated to the demands of the times wherein we live.” Attention to the signs of the times, therefore, in the era of globalization, attuned with the general renewal movement that is shaking all the religious institutes today. At its roots, as Fr. Campus has underlined, there is “hope that rests on faith: faith in the promises of God to our Founder; faith in the intercession of him whom we hope would be beatified soon; faith on the fruitfulness of our charism and in the expectations of the People of God.” As we know, in the religious life, a renewed awareness of our identity is a condition for genuine fidelity to our charism: a creative fidelity that is of orientation and of stimulus to the old and the new generations of Paulines.

Comforted by the words of trust and of encouragement by the Superior General, we started our work on Thursday, 28 February. The group, it is worth recalling, is made up off Paulines coming from different circumscriptions, everyone engaged in apostolic or formation activities: Here are our names: Fr. Andres Arboleda, (Filipino), Bro. Luis Barrios (Chilean), Fr. Carlo Cibien (Italian), Bro. Luca De Marchi (Italian), Fr. Jose Luis Quintana (Mexican), Fr. Antonio Rizzolo (Italian), Bro. Blaise Thadathil (Indian). Two councilors General, Bro. Francesco Chessa and Fr. Juan Manuel Galaviz, assisted us by coordinating the entire activity.

So, on February 28, work was started with the greeting of the Superior General, with an initial exchange of experiences and expectations and with the presentation of the available documentation. From the start we came to understand that

our days would be particularly intense. In the morning, work began from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and, in the afternoon, from 3 to 6:30 p.m., though at times we were still busy after lunch and sometimes after dinner.

The first task we did was to attentively read and evaluate all the suggestions and considerations regarding the topic that came from confreres from throughout the world, a considerable documentation that has made us understand how dear the matter is to the heart of all Paulines. Then we took into consideration the considerably vast documentation available: writings of the founder, norms of the congregation, General Chapters, Inter-chapters, International and national seminars, writings of Pauline authors, books of non-Paulines on consecrated life, documents of the Church magisterium, magazine articles, etc. Certainly, it was impossible for us to read everything, but it gave us a less superficial idea regarding the theme and to identify some of the fundamental nuclei on the matter.

We also listened to the testimonials of Sr. Antonietta Martini of the Daughters of St. Paul and of Sr. Regina Cesarato of the Pious Disciples. Both shed light, from their particular and yet very “familiar” point of view, on the theme at hand. Then, two experts helped to open our minds regarding those issues that are currently at stake today regarding consecrated life: Fr. Jesus Castellano Cervera who spoke to us of “Identity awareness of the religious” and Fr. Amedeo Cencini, on “What identity elements the vocation proposal has to contain.” These were not just conferences but moments of dialogue and exchange of opinions.

All this work served to make us fully aware of the theme and its importance, to establish the areas that we need to further study, and to set up the necessary methodological choices, in view of the final objective: a renewed proposal and formulation of the theme, in accessible and stimulating terms, fruit of a well-founded work, in order that all the practical consequences could be easily drawn either for the vocation-formation area, or for the fulfillment of our mission today, or for the life style and the witnessing of our consecrated communities. Quite enlightening is a statement of the document *Religious and human promotion* (1980, along the lines of which we have outlined the tasks that await us. Today, so the document states, four fidelities are asked: “Fidelity to humanity and to our times, fidelity to Christ and the Gospel, fidelity to the Church and to its mission in the world, fidelity to religious life and to the charism of one’s own institute.”

Work was put to a close on Wednesday, 6 March, but only for the first session. The study group, in fact, shall meet again from 16 to 27 June in order to draft a final text. More than a new document, it must be an instrument of work for the General Government and for all Paulines, that it may serve as a stimulus for a new and vital and apostolic thrust. The major part of our work shall be done during the time that separates us from the appointment in June. This consists in the drawing up of reference materials, further studies, exchange of views and advice, done mostly through e-mail. It is during this period that we truly need the contribution and the assistance of everyone so that our study may truly be fruitful and useful for the congregation.

The Participants of the Study Group