

Greetings and Welcome of the SIF President

Welcome dear brothers to this Meeting convoked by our Superior General, **Fr. Valdir José De Castro**.

We are gathered here to join forces, to work as a team, to share experiences, joys, challenges and many other things. We are aware that the apostolate of formation of the young generations is now a matter of concern for all religious institutes and not only for the Society of St. Paul.

Evidently, the General Government of our Congregation is not foreign to this preoccupation. Interest for vocations and their formation is always at the centre of the commitment of the Society of Saint Paul. The theme has always been confronted and developed, and with the passing of time, new formulas and new possibilities of response have been indicated, always however with the concern to maintain firm and solid the principles on which to base a solid vocation promotion and the Pauline formation.

Because of this we can affirm that the Society of Saint Paul, starting from the celebration of its first General Chapter from 4 to 16 April 1957 (called and concluded by the Founder himself, who was fully in possession of his physical and intellectual faculties), and until the realization of the X General Chapter (25 January to 14 February 2015), has never stopped insisting on this theme so important for its survival.

This preoccupation for the formation of Paulines was already pointed out by Primo Maestro himself in the First General Chapter of 1957: *«The need to guarantee serious studies even in the formation of the Disciples. The exclusion of types about whom there are founded doubts. The need to discipline the use of the means of social communication so that they may not end up being harmful to formation and religious discipline. The importance of spiritual direction»*.

Becoming evident was the value that the Founder attributes to vocation and to its formation above all when, in his concluding discourse, he recognized that: *«The number one problem is that of vocations. This must remain well fixed in our minds because the houses belong to vocations and we must always think that people are born babies and not adults, and therefore many rules come out subsequently»* (CISP, p. 176).

Twelve years later the Society of St. Paul, gathered in a **Special General Chapter 1969-1971**, recognized the following:

«**Deficiencies** – The meagre number of young men who persevere and the departure of many others particularly put in evidence the following deficiencies:

- a) an insufficient vocation promotion;
- b) structures and methods of formation that are inadequate;
- c) insufficient or incompetent formation personnel;
- d) environments that do not favour but obstruct enthusiasm for our ideals (DC, n. 526).

Needs – There is need to:

- a) make better the spiritual, pedagogical, cultural and apostolic preparation of the formators to make them adequate for their task;

b) make perfect, even by trying new ways, criteria and methods in individual and communitarian formation, by adjusting to the needs of the times [...] so as to collaborate responsibly in the salvific plan of God;

c) bear in mind the positive talents of modern youth;

d) equally bear in mind their negative aspects...» (DC, n. 527).

The Church has been aware of it for many years already. The following phrases belong to a Decree of the Vatican II Ecumenical Council, *Perfectae caritatis*, of fifty years ago, but we hear them like a refrain repeated so many times that it loses the meaning of its content. They tell us without doubt a truth that we cannot neglect: «The updated renewal of the Institutes depends principally on the formation of the members. [...] It is also the duty of the Superiors to select with care the Directors, the spiritual Masters and be concerned that they are prepared in the best of ways» (PC, 18).

For all this, we can affirm that the Society of St. Paul, from the celebration of its first General Chapter until the X General Chapter, has never ceased to insist on this important issue for its survival. Fruit of this interest is our presence here convened by the Superior General.

It can be said that the main concern in this formative apostolate has always been to strengthen and, in some cases, to recover a specific, charismatic Pauline formation.

This is always more urgent because in many of our Circumscriptions the canonical formation of our formandi (philosophical and theological) is imparted in the academic Centres of third parties, wherein a formation rather suited for «*diocesan priests*» is being offered. From here come out a series of not slight problems, not last the one of the loss of our charismatic identity, which the authorities of the Congregation, both the ordinary and the delegated, try to confront with results more or less efficacious.

Welcome dear collaborators in this formation apostolate.

Fr. José Salud Paredes

SIF President