



Letter from Brother Superior

Rome, 31 December 1978

CASA GENERALIZIA
dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane
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Dear Brother,

This end of year letter comes to you a little later than usual as I wished to make it coincide with the eve of the International Year of the Child since this is of special interest to us. My Christmas card, sent in this festive season in answer to those of so many communities, Brothers and friends, symbolizes the relationship between the feast of the Child par excellence and the child of today. This child is stretching out his arms towards us as a sign of his aspirations and rights, this child to whom the year 1979 is dedicated. The liturgical text, so well known, so often sung, "Puer natus est nobis", at the foot of the card, has a twofold signification as also has the date of this letter which is about midway between the two commemorations which have a bearing on each other.

This slight delay also gives me the opportunity of thanking you for so many signs of affection and the greetings received during these days. I thank you in my own name and in those of my immediate helpers. For our part we have prayed and continue to pray that God will pour out on every Brother the abundance of blessings which have been the object of your wishes to us.

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It is natural that, in a letter written at the end of the year, we should cast a look back on what has happened and especially on what has most affected the life of the Institute.

Eve of the Tricentenary 1978 has brought us a year nearer the tricentenary of the birth of our religious family.

In my previous letter we considered the foundation of the Institute and its commemoration more as a series of providential events woven into a single historical process than one which could be assigned to a single year. 1978 saw the preliminaries. The meetings held this year, like the steering committee of the World Congress of Former Pupils, which have a more direct bearing on the tricentenary, and the numerous letters we have received, all bear witness to the seriousness of the tricentenary celebrations which have been foreseen and their underlying significance. They will thus recall to mind the events, and still more the spirit, by which Providence called our Founder and his work into being three hundred years ago.

Visits to the Districts My visits to various Districts during the second half of 1978 enabled me to perceive their life and the circumstance in which they live and to get to know better the Brothers and the communities and the difficulties they have to face. I was present at the eighth National Lasallian Assembly in **Spain** for the ceremonies which brought the centenary celebrations there to a close. Ideologies and party

politics are menacing the independence of the Christian School. Everyone is worried and all are doing their utmost to establish and encourage truly responsible educative communities to carry forward and improve the epic of the 1000 Brothers who consecrated their lives to the education of youth during the first century.

In July and August, Brother John, Vicar, and Brother Benildo visited the Brothers of the District of Australia, comprising Australia, New Zealand, and Papua-New Guinea. They returned very encouraged by the vitality of the Institute in these sectors. The Brothers in New Zealand have begun anew an intensive program of recruitment and formation in view of establishing more firmly the Institute in that sector. The work of the Brothers in Papua-New Guinea, not well-known in the Institute, is outstanding. The fact that there are now five novices gives much hope for the future. The Brothers in Australia itself have an excellent spirit, strong community life, and effective apostolic activities.

Brothers Patrice, Pedro and I visited the Districts of **Belgium** and **Holland** and saw the exemplary competence with which the admirable ensemble of works has been created and is maintained. Their problem, more acute there than in most other countries, is the shortage of vocations which is threatening the survival of such good seed. We discussed together the possible ways of making a more modest, yet deeper and more specific contribution, to educative and evangelizing communities which have continuously expressed the wish to

receive this type of spiritual leadership from the Brothers; how to find new ways of cooperating in the promotion and education of the less fortunate young people. The complexity and urgency of their religious, cultural and economic integration into a united (?) Europe is a serious problem. Their need inspires the generosity and creativity of the Brothers in the same way as a comparable situation inspired and sustained the founding spirit in St. John Baptist de La Salle.

In December I attended the diamond jubilee celebrations of the arrival of the Brothers in **Malta**. The Brothers had the happy idea, and one full of promise for the future, of founding their own novitiate as a memorial of the occasion. It is a sign of the growing consciousness of the need for more intense pastoral work of vocations, adapted to the Maltese people and to the future development of the Institute and its mission in the Island through its own sons and among the nearby peoples to whom their activity should extend. Moreover, the inauguration of new services to modernize, facilitate and complete the work of training shows the desire to continue with new spirit the educational service of the youth of the Island. It is to them that we look for choice and numerous candidates to increase and extend these same services.

Brother Vicar lent his assistance to the Asian Renewal Program in Singapore. He was delighted to see the serious work done in the session and was able to make his contribution towards its success, very competently and to the satisfaction of the Brothers. The situation of the District of

Penang in the South East corner of Asia, with its problems and trials, stimulates the consciousness, sense of responsibility and devotion of the Brothers, both native and missionary, in the five sectors into which the District has been divided for better leadership and government.

African Lasallian Centre (CLAF) Under the direction of Brother Vincent Rabemahafaly last summer, 23 Brothers (6 missionaries and 17 natives) passed a month in reflection and renewal in the catechetical apostolate in present day Africa. This short course was attended by another 7 Marist Brothers and a small group of 3 Sisters and 2 Laymen engaged in catechesis. One of the major organizations helping the developing world has promised its assistance so that this kind of course can be prolonged and extended to bringing up to date pedagogy and promotion centred on circumstances in Africa today.

The Regions Another memorable event in our history last year was the definite constitution of the **French Region**, comprising the Districts of France and the Delegations of Turkey and Djibouti-Reunion and one remaining community of the former District of Algiers. One particularity of this Region is that it has a Regional Director who not merely acts as coordinator between the Districts but also has authority defined by the Constitutions of the Region and confirmed by Brother Superior in his obedience. The first Regional Director to be elected is Brother Michel Sauvage, who is well-known and esteemed in the Institute.

The Latin-American Region, RELAL, is preparing for a general assembly in January to examine and give definite approval to the statutes by which they have been governed provisionally for the last two years. Thus, slowly and surely, these Regional Groups are taking shape from the definitions and directives in Chapter IX of the Book of Government as decided by the 40th General Chapter.

Three Popes in a Year

The Institute has felt deeply the sadness and the joy at the extraordinary succession of papal deaths and elections in 1978. To have three different popes in one year is a rare occurrence, three popes who, in the unity of their fundamental directives and through the diversity and complementarity of their personal characters and charisms, seem to demonstrate the nature of the supreme pontificate and have brought much interest and prestige to the See of Peter in the last months. It has already been remarked, as well it should, that Rome has never before seen so many different representatives from different states and creeds. Intuitive catechesis on the Church has been made easier and the mass media have dedicated an unusually large proportion of their programmes to ecclesial and religious subjects. I could not omit such important events from the panorama of our Institute's history in the past year. Nor can I fail to reaffirm explicitly our unswerving adherence to the cathedra and magisterium of the Vicar of Christ, echoing and repeating at the same time that moving profession of faith of the new Pope at the solemn inauguration of his ministry: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Thus, these primordial mediations willed by God

in His plan of salvation guarantee our ultimate and definite fidelity to Him.

Three Events of Special Interest I think it is equally of interest to mention three outstanding and significant events here in Rome which have a bearing on our activity in the world.

a) The **two meetings of the Union of Superiors General (U.S.G.)** in May and November respectively. I think that the very subjects studied reflect the great preoccupations among religious today. In May it was the "Commitment of Religious to Human Development" on which I have already commented at length, last May. In November it was "Central Government, Animation and Team Spirit," as the characteristic and responsibility of any religious government today. It is the fulfillment of these conditions which in a special way conditions the service to the world which was the subject of our sincere study in May.

b) The **meeting of men and women Superiors General** of institutes consecrated to education, with specialists and responsible people from the various curiae, to concentrate on the realities and problems of the Catholic School today. These studies are programmed to continue in a series of regular meetings. The subject treated at the first meeting was the "Insertion of the School in the Local Church and Culture." My first idea was to devote this letter to our educational responsibilities. But this had to give way to the papal directives which are of more immediate interest and on which I shall comment further on. I hope to deal with the former subject in May.

c) The publication of a document of special interest because of its right understanding and correct application for living and acting better as Church. This document is that of 14 May 1978, **Mutuae Relationis**, on the relations between the bishops and religious. Various committees, one of which was constituted by the Union of Superiors General, set to work on this study to make sure of the aforementioned right understanding and correct application. The idea was to obtain the best possible cooperation and coordination between the hierarchy and religious institutes, so necessary for successful evangelization. In his speech to the Superiors General, of which I shall speak later, John Paul II said: *"It is a document of great importance to which special attention must be given in the next few years."*

To end this recitation of a few of the events of our Institute in 1978, I will give a brief account of our Brothers in sectors which are particularly suffering from persecution or from the adverse public situation.

Vietnam From letters recently received, the Brothers in Vietnam are in general reacting with exemplary serenity and abnegation, which in some cases attains a quiet heroism, to the difficult situations imposing dispersion and penury and laborious work. Some of the groups of Vietnamese Brothers who fled their country are trying to find some apostolic project or some project for human development on which to work together as far as their present circumstances permit, and facing up to painful and

complex problems. We have a well-founded hope that these dear Brothers, brutally uprooted from their country and culture, may be able to take a big step forward in assuring their integration. The big obstacle to this up to now has been the need for a certain lapse of time before being able to obtain the necessary personal papers or for the younger ones to complete an adequate training programme.

Lebanon During the last few months our Brothers in Lebanon have had to suffer a new calvary and share in the hard lot of the people. Thanks be to God, there have been no casualties so far. But the situation of the communities and the Brothers is becoming more and more challenging and difficult as war and plunder continue with the consequent worsening in the economic and social situation. Sharing in the misfortune of their country stimulates the generosity of our Brothers and encourages them to a life of greater devotion and renunciation. They and we all suffer much from the practical difficulties in communications which prevent a stimulating dialogue which could give them directives.

Eritrea As to our Brothers in Eritrea, the latest news is that, within the limits imposed by war, their situation is improving in both Asmara and Keren. They are granted sufficient freedom to fulfil their educational and catechetical role. This is not so easy in Keren where the army are occupying part of the Brothers' house.

Iron Curtain Communications with the constantly diminishing group of Brothers behind the Iron Curtain is reduced almost to nil. Poland, however, is a well known exception to the rule and I propose to visit the Brothers there with Brother Pedro Ruedell to see the situation and their future prospects. The future is assured for this small District of 30 Brothers by the constant flow of new recruits. There are now 7 novices in Czestochowa, almost a third of the number of Brothers with vows.

Nicaragua Finally you may have heard echoes about the lot of our Brothers in Nicaragua during the recent war. Apart from those in Leon, who had their hardships to bear and some danger of losing their lives, the other communities survived the war with no serious harm from the recent disorders, which were mainly confined to cities and areas where we have no houses. Brother Edwin Madariaga played a special and specific part in the Emergency Committee of the Catholic Church of Nicaragua which was organized to obtain aid and transmit it where needed to those who had suffered from the war and various outrages.

Cuba To end this reference to those countries where the Institute is experiencing special difficulties, I welcome with joyful hope the recent news that negotiations are under way to prepare for the return of our Brothers to Cuba. It is as yet but a hope, but it is a pointer to what could become a reality. May God bring it to fruition this year.

This quick reference to the most sorely tried sectors of our great family in no way substitutes for the usual information sent regularly throughout the year to our districts and communities, more particularly through Intercom and Secoli. We just wish to call to mind those areas and Brothers who merit our special consideration because of the difficulties they are experiencing.

Though our mention is brief, and it may well be incomplete, let it serve to assure the Brothers in those districts of our union with them and of the desire of all our Brothers and of our own especially to help them in any way we can. And a call on all to facilitate that fraternal charity, one of whose requirements is that we especially concern ourselves with those of our members who are suffering most.

New Perpetually Professed I renew my congratulations most cordially on the decision and confidence of those 115 Brothers who during the year have consecrated their life to God by perpetual vows. And I thank them in my own name and in that of the whole Institute, for their act of faith enriches our family and increases our spiritual and human forces. If you who read this letter are among these newly professed may these words find a special echo within you. This number of 115 coincides by chance with the number of those who have asked for their dispensation this year. We would all have liked to see the former exceed by far the number of the latter. Nevertheless, in this time of general and alarming crisis in the value of

irrevocable fidelity to one's commitment, it is a consolation to all to see so many thus witnessing to the value and nobleness of such a commitment within "the duel between life and death," between stability and abandonment which constitute a constant counterpoint in human history.

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It is time to make previsions for the coming year. But before doing so I would like to mention one more interesting fact of 1978. And that is the numerous and meaningful reactions we have received, orally or in writing, to our letter of May 15 as also to the documents numbered 406 and 408 among the Institute circulars. It is particularly satisfying to see how these normal methods of communication and leadership really do contribute to establishing a close link of spiritual communion between the communities of the Institute and the central community of the Council. Moreover, the reactions we get are an indication of your mentality and attitudes which we endeavour to share and constantly to improve. They also furnish us with new suggestions for the better realization of the objectives set us by the Chapter which are for the service of all. Your ideas motivate and inspire new responses and these will appear gradually.

Previsions for 1979 Here are some of the points taken from our diary for 1979.

1) During the coming months, on the eve of **the tricentenary of the Institute**, we shall decide on the ceremonies and celebrations

which will commemorate the event and dispose ourselves to receive new light and renewed strength.

2) The numerous **meetings between the Superior and his Council and the Brothers Visitors** of the different regions is of special significance for the life of the Institute. We shall meet in turn the Visitors of Europe in January, those of the U.S.A. in May, of Canada at the beginning of June and a few days later those of Africa. In July those of the Mediterranean Region and in October those of Latin America. There is much to be hoped for from this series of meetings for a better knowledge of the different situations and for mutual enlightenment in seeking suitable solutions. Let us recommend these sessions to God in a particular manner and ask that they fulfil the objectives aimed at when the General Chapter recommended them and included them in the Book of Government, art. 29, as a means of leadership and government in the Institute.

3) 1979 will see **two sessions of C.I.L.** instead of the usual one. Both are aimed at those responsible for formation in the Institute. We expect much from vocational pastoral work and from a serious formation well adapted to our constant mission and its special characteristics today. Moreover, it is quite obvious that the Institute is taking a great interest in this particular service, for the exceptional numbers wishing to enroll already exceed the limits of admission to our International Centre.

4) Finally, and on this I would like to dwell a little longer, 1979 is the "**International Year of**

the Child.” I think that this initiative coming from outside our own little world finds a special echo in a religious educational institute.

International Year of the Child It was on December 21, 1976 that the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the resolution proclaiming 1979 as the International Year of the Child, 20 years exactly after the universal proclamation of his rights. Pope Paul VI expressed the Church’s approval last June in an address to Mr. Henry Labouisse, Executive Director of UNICEF. He took the Christian attitude towards such an initiative and summed it up when he said: *“In spite of technical progress, children continue to suffer and die for lack of basic nutrition or as victims of violence or of armed conflict. Others fall victim to emotional neglect. There are those who poison the minds of the young, transmitting to them prejudices and worthless ideologies. And children are being exploited to the point of being used to satisfy the lowest depravity of adults... There are those who consider the child as a burden and a curb on their freedom, others who deny the child the right of having a father and mother united in wedlock. But the whole of society must insist vigorously that the child has a right to be born, the right to a father and mother united in wedlock, the right to be born into a normal family. This year is destined to promote the inestimable value of the child in the world today. The child as a child and not as a potential adult.”* And at the end of his letter the Pope expressed his gratification at seeing so many Catholics and Catholic organizations and local

churches taking an active part in preparing for the International Year of the Child. *“Our greatest contribution will be to dedicate ourselves — more intensely and in the spirit of fidelity to the Gospel — to the needs of the child and to promote programmes to help children in the various aspects of their life. We trust that these programmes will give first priority to children in misfortune, to the physically or mentally handicapped, to those who have been abandoned or who are in special situations of misery and suffering.”*

This is a long quotation and other important ideas have been omitted. But it is worthwhile repeating it here as it gives views and programmes which could inspire initiative and interest in those who up to now have not felt themselves to be very much affected by this special year. By our vocation we are called to concern ourselves with youth from an evangelizing point of view and, therefore, we must not remain indifferent to what this year asks and proposes. There is much we can do for those with whom our educational work is directly concerned or for those who are underprivileged and neglected and who, for that very reason, always have first claim on the attention and interest of society, the Church and ourselves. Can we close our ears, we who have taken on ourselves the noble task of promoting such campaigns and overcoming such shameful lethargy? The words of Paul R. Garrido, secretary of the International Year of the Child are pertinent: *“Shake off your lethargy this year and help revive the call made on you: There is little we cannot do when we are all united round the world: Divided and lacking in*

spirit there is little we can do and that little will become harder and harder: Help us, therefore, before it is too late, so that the future be not one of destruction, when it will be too late to satisfy their hunger, to give them an ideal, to touch their hearts..."

Because of our professional conscience and educational priorities we could possibly underestimate and even forget the value and urgency of direct action for the child and his well-being and be carried away by well intentioned considerations and the analysis of the important priorities of adult education. We run the danger of polarizing our action in favour of one or the other and coming to a radical choice. We have to be realists and not overlook adult education which must never be neglected. But we cannot deny the problems of children and young people the respect and attention they deserve. They are so much a part of our common mission. This year could lead us to pay more attention to such important problems... If we consider that in countries like Brazil, children and young people form 50% of the population and that in others, abundance and wealth are on the increase and are in inverse proportion to the number of children, we can see that there is much to be considered, said and done to see that the rights of the child are better protected. Let us become more and more aware, and make others aware, let us examine situations of neglect or abuse which are very probably not far removed from us, while not forgetting those in distant lands of course, and seek and propose ways of finding

solutions (1). We certainly cannot remain indifferent. We must also likewise see that campaigns to influence public opinion and activity are not confined to purely material and economic levels because they have been promoted wholly or principally by agencies which are neutral from a religious point of view.

St. John Baptist de La Salle found his vocation by seeing the spiritual and physical wretchedness of the children of his time. A deeper and more positive consciousness of the same wretchedness today would renew our own vocation and mission, individually and as a community. But we need to open our eyes and ears well in order to perceive their real needs and priorities. And again we would educate those who benefit from our training very badly indeed if we did not open their minds to the knowledge and problems of the world and to their effective responsibility for them. The International Year of the Child can help us in all this in the measure in which we help it to attain its objectives.

(1) Know and make known, for example, that the developing countries import arms worth six thousand million dollars a year which is about equal to the amount they receive in aid. Or that President Carter stated that in the richest country in the world there are more than a million children whose rights are abused. Know and let it be known and understood that children form 35% of the world population and will reach 1,500 million in 1979. These are data giving food for thought and help to form people's consciences.

The Pope's Address to the Superiors General In the SECOND PART of this letter I want to speak about what Pope John Paul II told us Superiors General in the audience of 24 November. It was the first to be granted to the U.S.G., in the second month of his pontificate. It was a talk of special interest, being, as the Pope said to begin with, *"the first opportunity to meet the Superiors General of the male Orders, a meeting to which I attach particular importance."* And John Paul II continued, *"it brings to mind the figures of the Founder (and among them he explicitly mentioned St. John Baptist de La Salle) as well as the host of generous souls who have chosen to follow their example"* and exercise their beneficent influence in the world today. It was obviously a good occasion for the Pope to expound his ideas which, in his view, sum up the essentials of the programme of religious today to maintain their fidelity to the spirit and requirements of their specific vocation.

Perhaps those reading these words in a hurry will hasten to say: *"There is nothing new in what has been said, they are but oft repeated ideas,"* and absolve themselves from any further analysis and careful thought. It is certainly not the novelty of the ideas which most recommends them to our consideration. No, we give *"infinite attention"* as St. La Salle reminds us, in Med. 106, 2, *"to the words which proceed from the Pope, precisely because it is from him that they proceed."* I think that, in this particular case, our application is

recommended not so much by a profusion of new ideas, as by the precision and definition of those guide-lines about which our understanding and living of our life and mission to which we have been called should revolve. Therefore, it seems fitting to insist somewhat on those points in the Pope's address which seem of greatest importance to those of us who heard the warmth and strength of his voice. I think I am thus fulfilling the wishes and hopes of John Paul II when he said not to *"fail to transmit to our Brothers the thoughts he felt called on to put to our consideration in this first meeting."*

Vocation to Sanctity

Particularly noteworthy was the Pope's direct call to sanctity as the end and main objective of the religious life. We must move beyond dichotomies and distinctions which endanger a clear perception of this insistence of the Church. Religious men and women are called to witness to holiness: *"Without religious Orders, without consecrated life, by means of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the Church would not be fully herself."* This call is not confined to the religious but it is urged on him more especially as *"that spiritual fullness which the Spirit himself — the spirit of Christ — brings forth and moulds in the People of God."* Quoting N° 69 of "Evangelii Nuntiandi," he continued: *"Religious, in fact, at the deepest level of their being are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life, which is thirsty for the divine Absolute and called to holiness. It is to this holiness that they bear witness. They embody the Church in her desire to give herself completely to the*

radical demands of the beatitudes. By their lives they are a sign of total availability to God, the Church and the brethren."

This is certainly not the rhetorical or conventional use of terms which we easily impoverish or distort, or simply avoid, in our current vocabulary. When speaking of sanctity as a vital and continual call, John Paul II immediately goes on to examine the practical consequences of such a challenge. We have to ask ourselves frankly how we can help religious life become aware of its true self and function today in the Church.

Prevalent Dimension

Going deeper into this fundamental characteristic of religious life, the Pope said that in the life of the Church, religious life represents and realizes above all the vertical aspect. We all have to admit the conventionalism which this language referring to the horizontal and the vertical often has as a meaning analytically distinct from the intricate weave of our motives and objectives. But in the sentence above quoted it has the inescapable meaning of a call to transcendence, an immediate reference to spiritual values and above all, and at the centre of everything, to God Himself as the source and supreme object of our existence. The Pope himself explained that this "verticality" is in practice translated by a "*a particular co-responsibility for the real presence of Christ, who is meek and humble of heart, in the world of today — of the Crucified and Risen Christ — Christ among brothers.*"

There is no doubt that here is one of the essential elements of that specificity mentioned, for example, when studying the temporal commitment of religious, in helping the marginalized, in the promotion of justice to which I referred in my last letter. "*With the Gospel reread authentically,*" one thinks and acts in a way "*which is differentiated from any socio-political radicalism.*" One gives silent witness to the Christian virtues. And the Pope rounded off firmly, "*Testificatio — sic, contestatio — non!*"

Start from within, from the profound dimension and intimate light of faith which God enkindles in those who seek Him sincerely and to whom He makes known the true value of the "signs" which speak to us from without, calling on us for more generous and sacrificing action rather than promising easy, comfortable benefits.

Prayer

What the Pope went on to say is fully consistent and along the same lines: "*Allow me to return to a point which I consider a fundamental one in the life of every Religious, whatever may be the Family to which he belongs: I mean the contemplative dimension, the commitment to prayer. The Religious is a man consecrated to God, by means of Christ, in the charity of the Spirit. This is an ontological datum which demands to emerge to consciousness and to orientate life, not only for the benefit of the individual person, but also for the advantage of the whole community...*" Linking this affirmation to the binomial expression "witness-contestation" the Pope added significantly that a

pause for true worship is *"the most urgent contestation that Religious must oppose to a society in which efficiency has become an idol, on the altar of which human dignity itself is not infrequently sacrificed."*

In our various contacts and visits and in the numerous reports and letters we receive, the Councillors and I can see that there are many attempts made at renewing this value which, as I reminded you in my letter of 15 May 1977, page 21, the Chapter referred to as a value in crisis (cf. Circular 403, p. 53). Such attempts have not been sufficient nor sufficiently intense. May John Paul II's insistence, backed up by the moral strength of his pastoral authority and personal charisma, be a knock on the door which opens more doors, at present closed or scarcely ajar, to a more generous spirit of prayer. During this year in our houses, may this indispensable and definitely Lasallian "sign" be in evidence. May our houses be, in the words of the Pope himself, *"centres of prayer, meditation and dialogue — personal and of the whole community — with Him who is and must remain the first and principal interlocutor in the industrious succession of your days."* For, if it is very encouraging to see Brothers going to houses or circles of prayer — charismatic or otherwise — it would be distressing to learn that in our own houses there does not exist that intimate climate which encourages recollection and prayer... When it becomes habitual or necessary, could not such an inclination to try and find outside what we ought normally to find within lead us to ponder a while on what La Salle says in his meditation N° 77?

Insertion in the Church

Another point particularly recommended in this address of 24 November is the integration of the religious community in the universal Church through the local Church. He referred especially and concretely to the previously mentioned document of the Congregation of Bishops and Religious published in May 1978. A document, says the Pope, *"of great importance to which special attention must be paid in the coming years, since it tries to put us in an attitude of maximum availability which, moreover, harmonizes with the humble docility which should be the hallmark of the authentic religious."*

My dearly remembered predecessor, Brother Charles Henry, often repeated this sentence of La Salle as the key to his charism. *"Remember it is for the Church, the Body of Christ, that you are working."* If we profess that our work and mission acquire their authentic Christian and Lasallian meaning when realized in the Church, we cannot neglect a serious personal and communitarian attempt at analysing and studying the fundamental theological view and actual directives referred to in the second part of the document quoted. I have already mentioned the group formed in Rome by the interest parties, among them the U.S.G., to draw up an outline of the applications of such directives. The way of avoiding many sterile and often scandalous conflicts and to affirm, on the contrary, our witness to the unity which is a sign of the presence of Christ among us (John 13, 35; 17, 20) is always to go to the root of the problem and investigate the sure principles and essential

truths which enlighten and balance such "mutual relations" always important and not without their difficulties.

I expect that by now the concise and urgent ideas in Circular 408, p. 72, on "A ministry within a Church" will have been the object of thorough personal and community study. And that the examination proposed on p. 112, n. 4. "Are we truly sensitive as to whether our school and we ourselves are part of the Local Church?" will have provoked very concrete answer and reactions. One of the things the last Synod insisted on when speaking about school catechesis was the necessity of the Christian School to be really part of the local Christian community (1). If this were not so, its existence would be questionable and ineffective.

It must not be said of us with any truth that we remain outside the overall pastoral work or only lukewarmly share in it.

In a Divided World In his conclusion, the Pope referred very energetically to the attitude religious should have amidst the tensions dividing and confronting humanity today, to the specific way in which they should share in finding solutions to these problems, where our abstention or inhibition would be anti-Christian.

As a result of his "*habitual contact with God and moving within the warm range of his love,*"

(1) We trust the Synod document prepared for Pope Paul VI at his request and deferred because of the deaths of two Popes, will shortly be published.

the religious "*can easily protect himself from the temptation of particularism and oppositions, which create the risk of painful divisions.*" His intimate peacegiving and spiritual equilibrium is in no way an easy neutrality but rather "*an option for the poorest and for every victim of human selfishness.*" Not an indifferent one, but one inspired "*in the right evangelical light.*" Once again the highest authority in the Church reaffirms the direction in which our priorities lie, those same priorities which I mentioned in my letter of 15 May.

The reports requested according to Proposition 14 of the General Chapter are beginning to flood in. The Council will analyse them during the first months of the year and we will then be able to give the Institute as correct a picture as possible of the state and condition of our preferred service to the poor and our participation in the promotion of justice as reflected in the reports. It will then be easier to deduce in all sincerity the practical consequences and correct directives which result therefrom.

Political Implications

John Paul II, as is recognized throughout the world, moves and speaks from very special personal experience in this field and he definitely stressed the criteria of "*without surrendering to socio-political radicalizations, which in the long run turn out to be inopportune, self-defeating and often causes of new forms of tyranny.*" He reminded us of the difficult and delicate but absolutely necessary balance the religious must maintain according to his profession when he actively intervenes in finding

solutions to man's problems today. I must unite with the Pope and remind a few Brothers who are led to exceed such limits that a condition deriving from the fundamental choice expressed in our common commitment is that we avoid engaging in particular and exclusive politico-socio activities. These are not our concern and prevent us being open and available for the service of all. Each religious Institute is asked to know how "*to approach people and take its place in the midst of the people, without questioning its own religious identity, or dimming that specific originality of its own vocation, which derives from the peculiar following of Christ poor, chaste and obedient.*" (As regards the political implications of our concrete and actual service of man, described in Circular 408 as a **vast and sensitive one**, p. 88, we need to read pp. 88-90 of this Circular again carefully).

Invocations to Our Lady

The Pope ended his address with an explicit and moving invocation to "*the Blessed Virgin! She, whom my Predecessor Paul VI of venerable memory indicated in his Apostolic Exhortation **Marialis Cultus** as the Virgin in prayer, the Virgin who begets Christ and offers him for the salvation of the world, remains the unsurpassable model of every consecrated life.*" This invocation which occurs naturally and frequently in the speeches of John Paul II can in no way be regarded as a simple refrain or burden, as a suitable way to bring a speech to an end. It is conviction and recognition of the singular and privileged role that Our Lady plays throughout our entire life, in our afflictions and problems, above all in all that concerns the

service of the Kingdom, a role which is sometimes in danger of being forgotten or underestimated, just as at other times it has tended to be somewhat overplayed. The Pope quoted the apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus* of Paul VI (2 February 1974, Nos 16-22). Would it not be an interesting test to see how much and in what way we have used this timely and substantial document for our personal prayer or for the catechesis we give to children and young people? We need vitally to revive this form of Christian spirituality which our Holy Founder esteemed so much, always held in honour in the best traditions of the Institute and clearly recommended in our Rules (Ch. 10, j). I make my own the final invocation of the Pope and invite you to address it to the Most Holy Mary, that she may continue to be light, inspiration and hope. "*May it be She who acts as your guide in the laborious but fascinating ascent towards the ideal of full assimilation with Christ the Lord.*"

Conclusion

Such was the Pope's message to the Superiors General of male religious orders, and through them, to all religious in the world, two months after starting his pastoral ministry as head of the Church. His words are more for meditation than for study. And, as he expressly said, they are meant to be the initiation of continuing, stimulating and useful dialogue.

Our best response will be our sincere application to living what he so earnestly recommended and showing that the renewal of our religious and community life needs to be more deeply shown by

our actions than in long discussion on the nature and condition of what we profess. For in this dialogue mentioned by John Paul II in his speech, God reveals Himself in so far as we simply and unconditionally open our hearts to Him. It is thus that He leads us, like La Salle, on the path of the Gospel and enables us to reveal Himself to those whom we serve.

Pray to God through the intercession of St. John Baptist de La Salle that it may thus be so and improve daily throughout the new year we are just beginning. That will be the best present the feast of Christmas that we have just celebrated could bring us.

Cordially in De La Salle,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "José Pablo". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name "José Pablo".

APPENDIX

FACULTY TO AUTHORIZE MODIFICATIONS TO WILLS ALREADY MADE

We informed you (1) that the Decree "Religionum laicalium" of the S. C. of Religious, 30 May 1966, grants Superiors General of non-clerical religious orders a certain number of faculties. Some of them can be delegated to major Superiors in the same Institute by proclamation of the General Council after a majority deliberative vote.

These faculties refer principally to the following points:

- a) Permission for absence from the community (Rel. Laic. I, 4).
- b) Renunciation of inheritance (Rel. Laic. I, 5).
- c) Modification of wills (Rel. Laic. I, 6).

The ruling regarding the first two points was incorporated in our Book of Government, 1976 edition, Nos. 182 & 200.

As to the third, modifications of wills already made, the General Council has recommended the following ruling accepted by Brother Superior and communicated to all so that it now has the status of law.

(1) (Cf. Circular 387, pp. 92-98 and Circular 392, pp. 38-39 of the English version).