



Letter of Brother Superior

8th December 1982

CASA GENERALIZIA
dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane
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Brother,

Old expressions never lose their force even though they are repeated annually on seasonal occasions. Once again the commemoration of the coming of our Saviour to the world invites us to show more openly than usual our love for one another. May these days of the Christmas festivity be for all of us days full of peace and joy and may the new year they open up for us bring an abundance of happiness as well as many opportunities to serve all our Brothers in a spirit of generosity.

I would like to begin this annual letter with the usual summary of experiences lived at world level in the Institute and likely to be of interest to all. The different visitations made to some of our regions will serve as an introduction to this survey.

During the first quarter of 1982, thirteen countries of **Asia** where the Brothers are working, were the chosen destination of our first and longest visit. Our Institute in Asia forms part of a Church which, as is well known, is very much a minority unit. In statistical terms, there are 58 million Catholics, forming only 2.3% of a total population of 2,495 million. The majority of these Catholics, some 36,500,000, are to be found in the

Philippines. The 350 Brothers who are working in Asia care for many thousands of students belonging to a great variety of religions. Sometimes, especially in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Hong-Kong, Japan and the Philippines, the number of students per school exceeds the 1,500 or even the 2,000 mark, and such schools very often have only 2 or 3 Brothers to provide the animating spirit of the school. In general, the lay teachers who help in these establishments show exemplary devotedness and loyalty to the guidelines given by the Brothers, in spite of the diversity of religions they profess.

In almost all of these countries, indigenous vocations are possible and occasionally, as for instance in Southern India, abundant. Often, however, vocational work is difficult, particularly in **Japan** — a fact which is due to the fewness of Catholics there and to religious and social circumstances which greatly hinder a normal fostering of vocations, and this notwithstanding the very high esteem the Brothers and their educational work enjoy in the country. In general, there appears to be an increase in the numbers of our candidates and, especially, a more active and a more widely-shared interest among the Brothers for the fostering of vocations.

The education of youth, the cultural and religious development of these peoples through the formation of the new generations, absorb almost entirely the efforts of the Brothers. Within the normal organizational range their work is carried out in schools of different grades, the large majority being of secondary level. Among these latter, our two Japanese establishments at Kagoshima and Hakodate may be especially mentioned for the prestige they have gained by the efficiency and results of their work for the Church

in a country where the academic and technical training of young people is so efficiently organized and fostered.

Burma, however, represents a major exception to this general involvement of the Institute in school work. There the Brothers are scarcely able to conduct schools of their own except in areas removed from the capital. Neither are they allowed to participate in teaching in state schools. But the Brothers show great creativity, as well as fidelity to the charism of the Institute, by engaging in other apostolic enterprises such as catechesis, the care of youth centres and co-operation with pastoral movements initiated by several local churches, especially in rural areas. Despite the many restrictions imposed on our work in this country there is a steady flow of vocations to our Institute: at present, 2 novices and 13 scholastics. We hope that such candidates will increase in number and be able to ensure our presence and service to the people of Burma in the years ahead.

As examples of the various types of educational work being done in the rest of Asia, I would like to mention the following:

— A school of Catechists in Khuspur (Pakistan), where a group of Catholic adults are trained as Christian and evangelizing leaders of their fellow-countrymen, in an atmosphere of poverty and faith. The influence of these animators, spread out over different areas of Pakistan, is highly beneficial and very much appreciated.

— Two Boys' Towns, in Madurai (India) and in Ragama (Sri Lanka), which continue to overcome the difficulties presented by their complex and meritorious work for the poorest of the poor

in these areas. Their labours and their specific objectives are increasingly appreciated by the Brothers of the two sectors of the District of Colombo.

Not far from Madurai, Brother James Kimpton is engaged in an impressive work of development and training among very poor children and families (including a group of lepers) in the "Saint Joseph Village" of Genguvarpatti. This type of work deserves our fullest admiration and our whole-hearted support, inspired as it is by an authentic Lasallian spirit on behalf of people whose needs are extreme.

— In the **Philippines**, the La Salle University, our only centre of higher education in Asia, trains its 5,000 students with fully recognized competence. It enjoys a wide range of cultural and social influence. We had the opportunity of greeting its group of catechists who, with the University as their base, spread the wonderful influence of their work of charity and evangelization to many areas of Manila.

To conclude this survey of the extensive activity of our Brothers in Asia, we would stress their need of generous support to enable them to continue their work for so many young people of school age, work which is at once essential and greatly appreciated in all its aspects. The average age of the missionaries there is approaching a high level and there will not be sufficient vocations to maintain the vast enterprise. At the moment we have 245 Asian Brothers among the 350 members of our religious family who constitute the overall strength of our service in these countries. It is an encouraging proportion which does justice to the foresight and open-mindedness of our missionaries. In most of our

districts the help of more Brothers, generous and adequately prepared, is as much desired as it is needed. Such help is essential to enable our Asian Brothers to complete their formation and prepare themselves not only to continue the work done by their predecessors but to open it up to new initiatives suggested by the needs and aspirations of their fellow-countrymen.

From Asia we continued our voyage, accompanied throughout by Brothers José Cervantes and Pedro Ruedell, passing through Australia, New Zealand, Papua-New Guinea and New Caledonia.

In **Australia**, our educational work continues to grow with an efficiency and an enthusiasm highly appreciated. The main difficulty we find there derives from the limited personnel, numerically inadequate for such an extensive field of action. Our 220 Australian Brothers face heavy demands in terms of their commitments and the great number of their students. Pressures are exerted also by the need to compete with the high standards imposed by the prestigious educational system of their country.

In the vocational area we have a novitiate which, when we visited it, had 4 novices and 16 postulants. It inspired a feeling of hope to see these young people sensitive to the values of the Gospel and also to notice an appreciative interest among the Brothers for the fostering of vocations.

The difficulties caused by lack of personnel do not prevent the Australian District from maintaining a constant number of 29 missionaries in Papua-New Guinea, in accordance with what they had planned some years ago in their District Chapter programme.

I have just mentioned the newly independent country of **Papua-New Guinea** in which an exemplary campaign of cultural and evangelizing work is being carried out. The Primary Schools, and especially the Boarding and Secondary Schools of Bomana, Goroka, Kondiu and Bereina, are educational establishments which provide excellent formation to the youth of the country.

In these schools, as well as in the Training College for teachers at Mount Hagen, the influence of the Australian Brothers has proved very positive. Every year they send to the Novitiate candidates for the Institute: six novices to quote this year's figure. However, perseverance has not, so far, matched the forecasts made or the efforts deployed... But, fortunately, these setbacks are not enough to overcome the tenacious persistence of our missionaries in their efforts to see the Institute integrated into this young nation, where the majority are Christians, but who belong to a culture totally different from that of Australia. Such is the effort required to attain a genuine inculturation, considered as the supreme aim of any missionary work. This objective is sought there with determination in the knowledge that the difficulties will never be solved with quick and improvised formulas or solutions. We commend the steadfast resolve and the intelligent solicitude which we witnessed in Papua-New Guinea. It is our wish and hope that in time an appreciable number of young men, indigenous to this country, will join our ranks.

The most recent mission of **New Caledonia** (founded in 1980) is an enterprise in the care of a group of generous Vietnamese Brothers, men keenly alert to future possibilities for the spreading of the Gospel. Fortunately, they are settling down firmly

after having received a ready and warm welcome in Thio, on the Eastern coast of the island. A short time ago a second house was opened, near Numea, the capital, its purpose being to care for candidates who, happily, are beginning to emerge from among their own students. Families, not a few of them Christian, travel to New Caledonia from the smaller oceanic islands, in search of work and educational facilities. Thus, little by little, new perspectives of evangelization and new horizons for missionary work begin to appear. The small group of Vietnamese Brothers working in this remote outpost of the Far East, New Caledonia, deserve congratulations, and their example is worthy of imitation.

We owe the Brother Visitor of Australia an expression of gratitude for the help and pastoral care he offers to these communities that are relatively close to his District.

Towards the end of July I paid a visit to the Brothers of **Nicaragua** and **Guatemala**, concerned as I was about the precarious circumstances they find themselves in today. In both countries they are facing difficulties of diverse nature and are suffering the consequences of recent or present unrest and painful tensions.

In Nicaragua they are making efforts to help the peoples come forward and open themselves up to a life of greater social progress and justice, and caring at the same time for the deep religious values rooted in the hearts of the people.

In Guatemala the Brothers share the hardships of the indigenous sector of the population who are victims of atrocious abuse.

Vocations are on the increase. Some of them are of Indian race and culture. They come from

the different republics of Central America. The influx is such that the enlarging of the house of formation is being considered.

Although it is a matter concerning a regional area, I cannot here resist making a brief reference to the second National Assembly of the **Region of France**. Having been especially invited I was able to spend a day with the Brothers gathered in Beauvais. I was greatly impressed by their responsible and calm approach to the delicate problems that affect our Institute in France today.

Towards the end of September and the beginning of October, I visited, with Brother José Cervantes, the districts of **Germany** and **Austria**. These are two districts with a long tradition of good work and excellent service to youth but which are now faced, to different degrees, with the enormous difficulty of finding candidates.. Evidently, the vocational problem, as seen in Central Europe, is a matter of great concern. The Brothers maintain their fidelity and they can still rely, in their respective regions, on areas where the Christian family is not just a bygone memory... Nevertheless, it is also true that new styles of family living and an increasingly generalized birth-control, are among the factors that complicate matters.

We had the opportunity of studying with the Brothers how to present with greater determination and boldness the way our community life bears witness to the values of the Gospel, and how to adapt our common effort to objectives which meet the real needs of young people today. We should urgently ask ourselves why our life and our work make little impact on young people seeking solutions to their problems and a

worthwhile meaning for their existence: young people living and seeking in our midst and holding the key to the future which is our concern as well as theirs.

As a final reference to my personal visits to different sectors of the Institute, I would like to mention the contacts I have had with the Brothers of **Egypt** and **Lebanon**. The Egyptian Delegation was finishing its chapter during the first half of November and was taking stock of its difficult situation. At the same time the Brothers were proposing the appointment of the new Delegation president. I commend the seriousness of the analyses and conscientious planning of the capitulants. However, I am more pleased still to mention the promising announcement of a new vocational drive in Cairo and Alexandria. For many years the Brothers have kept faith and hope that vocations would come, though the signs were not easy to discern. But now, a more evident interest in the Brothers' vocation is noticeable among young men, university students included. What was viewed with scepticism some years ago, now seems possible and even feasible.

I made a short visit to **Lebanon** in order to be able to evaluate at first hand the situation of our establishments and communities after the recent war events. I admired the determination of the Lebanese people to give a new life and vitality to the areas of Beirut which had been reduced to ruins by intensive bombings. Vigorous signs of life and work can be seen around this zone, so recently the scene of death and destruction.

Where our establishments are concerned, Mont La Salle is working at full strength, with its building and installations all intact. The College

of the Sacred Heart and that of Furn-el-Chebbak, situated on the very line of fire, have quickly repaired their damage and are running normally. All the schools are full to capacity, the numbers frankly in excess of what the best efforts our insufficient religious personnel can do for them. Fortunately our lay teachers in Lebanon are notably sensitive and open to associating themselves with the Brothers in the pursuit of Lasallian educational aims.

Towards the end of April, Brother Vicar, accompanied by Brothers Patrice and Benildo, visited **Malta**. Thirty Brothers, four communities, two of them in charge of two important schools, a house of formation and a retreat centre — these constitute the strength of our presence in the small and densely populated island of the Mediterranean. At present, Catholic schools there are suffering harassment from a hostile government. The situation is delicate, especially when, as now, there are signs of a revival in religious vocations, a gradual result of the diligent efforts of vocational directors. At the crossroads of different cultures, Malta remains profoundly Catholic, not, however, without struggle and confrontation, more acutely felt in the reduced space in which the life of the people evolves. We would lay stress on the vital interest for the Brothers there to have a missionary outlet, as is the case with other religious communities of the island who care particularly for the Arab population in the Mediterranean area.

From Malta the visiting team went to the districts of **London** and **England**. These districts have a total of some 230 Brothers distributed in 30 communities. Distinct in origin and in their

administrative organization, the two districts are becoming more and more united in their activities, especially in the areas of formation and animation. Their apostolate and initiatives are very much the same. Likewise they are faced with the same problems, such as the decreasing number of students, due to the birth-control phenomenon. Both districts are striving for a better integration of their lay teachers in their pursuit of Lasallian ideals. Both, also, are struggling with similar difficulties in the area of the fostering of vocations — the results fluctuating and rather low. The spirit of the two districts is excellent and the rapport with students and families of the very best. We hope that the united efforts of all sectors of the Lasallian community will lead to a more effective recruitment. We are also confident that the spiritual retreats for young people in Pastoral Centres like that of St. Cassian's will help with the vocational work.

Repeatedly, and practically in the case of every region, I refer to the fostering of vocations as a vital issue and a very significant factor in our mission to youth. The problem is a general one which is deeply felt in the Church at large and, as such, it calls for serious consideration and appropriate initiatives. In the first place there must be a sincere faith in the actual meaning of our life and mission and then a determined will to make these more authentic and relevant to the aspirations and needs of the world today.

Is it not significant that the Union of Superior Generals chose « **Vocations** » as the theme of their recent meeting and spent the three days of their assembly on the study of the question and of the issues it raised. In fact, among the many considerations that relate to its solution or to its

extreme complexity, we are particularly interested in those many and important ones which depend on ourselves. Some reasons, because of their sociological scope, are beyond our control. We accept them as part of the historical framework in which Providence has called us to live and as difficulties, among others, which are presented to us as a challenge to our hope.

It is an established fact that reflection on the intimate nature of our consecration and mission, and a constant attitude of renewal and authenticity, grow in the measure of our common effort to promote and merit the vocations we need and for which in our love for the Church and our Institute and for a better service to the world we do not cease to hope.

We cannot dispense with such reflection if we want to give meaning and efficacy to this common effort, since our lives should be signs of specific and transcendental values and provide convincing witness to others.

To refer to other kinds of initiatives connected with the general services of the Institute, I would like to mention in this brief annual report two undertakings of special interest, which are now almost complete and which respond to the wishes expressed by the majority of those present at the Intercapitulary Meeting of 1981.

First there is compilation of testimonies selected from a number of development programmes of various districts, a selection based on the information received from the different regions. The work is being carefully prepared by a team led by Brother Patrice. It should be available for perusal by February or March and the Brothers will certainly find it an eloquent docu-

ment bearing witness to our vitality and creativity. This publication will deal with concrete facts that transcend in significance mere theoretical speculation on our mission and on the different ways of updating our approach to it.

The other project is the preparation of a Directory on the Fostering of Vocations and on Formation. This will contain in a clear and methodical way the essential principles and guidelines which should guarantee and validate the formation of the Brothers throughout the entire Institute, proposing fundamental criteria to safeguard our common identity and inspiration, due account being taken of legitimate cultural differences. For this task a working party of international experts met with the Brothers Councilors Patrice, Pedro and Vincent to study and elaborate on the reports received from many districts in answer to the first draft of the work, distributed some months before.

Such are the outstanding happenings of 1982 and, having perused our account, you will naturally find yourself wondering what the New Year 1983 has in store for the Institute.

Leaving aside mere forecasts and wishful expectations, let me mention a few projects which are of no less interest to the Institute than those I have hitherto commented on.

1. During the forthcoming months the second series of meetings of the District and Regional Superiors with the Superior General and his Council will take place in Rome, in accordance with article 29 of the Book of Government. These are meetings of special importance aimed at evaluating our situation, unifying our criteria, finding solutions, studying plans of renewal and

progress through the exchange of experiences and opinions at international level.

2. During the month of August, Africa will be the scene of the first of two symposiums on the missions, as was announced in my letter of last December (page 58). The districts have already received the first indications for the nomination of representatives for each region. As from next January the chosen members will begin consultations with SECOLI in view of a thorough preparation of the sessions of the proposed assembly.

3. During the course of the year, the Lasallian Associations and their moderators will continue with their preparations for the Lasallian World Congress to be held in Mexico in July 1984. The groundwork for such preparations was laid down at the meeting of the Confederation Committee with the Brothers of the "Mixed Commission" last September. I had the pleasure of being able to attend their gathering.

4. For my own part, I shall begin next August a new cycle of visitations, shorter than those of my previous tour and beginning with the southern cone of Latin America. It will be a means of getting in touch, in order to perceive better the basic realities of each sector and of encouraging all to an ever greater fidelity to our vocation. We hope that with a programme of activities and meetings, within appropriate limits, the objectives we aim at will be achieved.

5. But for all of us a common effort will be called for and encouraged, not only by the forthcoming documents I have just mentioned but also by those already published, like Circulars 412, 415 and 416. For a written communication is not

to be seen as an invitation to forget previous ones but rather as a call to implement them and to adapt them to the changing times we are living in, always in the spirit and solidarity of our common vocation. Written documents and personal visits alike have both the same objective in view, namely, to unite us in thought and action and to sustain, by mutual support, the fidelity we owe to God and to the world in the spirit of St. de La Salle.

The remaining part of my letter will, precisely, be centred on the urgent task which I recommended to you in the Circular 416 « THE REVIEW OF THE RULES ». The calendar proposed for this purpose (and many districts have already sent me information about their plans) will cover for all communities the first half of 1983.

It is very important to realize that such a task cannot be carried out without due appreciation of its significance; it involves much more than the mechanical fulfilment of instructions received. It is a work of discernment, of study in depth, of metanoia, and in order to assist the interiorisation this calls for I propose here to offer a few reflections on the meaning of our Rules as we now have them. What follows is intended as a simple contribution to this end.

1. CURRENT RELEVANCY OF THE RULES TODAY

Rules, Constitutions, Rule of Life... The names change slightly but the reality is the same. And in this connection the question has arisen: Do we really need a Rule? Indeed, suggestions have been heard of "a general breakdown in the traditional love for the Constitutions, so much so that some say that we have gone, almost imperceptibly, from an excessive cult of the Consti-

tutions, which practically placed them above the Gospel itself, towards an almost total indifference towards them". (1)

In many states of life, an allergy for structures has led many to reject them systematically, without realizing that they are indispensable for the organization and maintenance of life in common. Father Edward Malatesta was right when he commented, in reference to the consecrated life: "The presence and activity of the Holy Spirit within a religious community will be manifested — among other things — by the structures chosen by the community for its internal life and for its ministries. No community can have an existence worth the name without some organizational structures in the lives of each member and of the entire body... Deprived of such help we are without direction, without grounds upon which to stand when faced with new choices: victims of every wind that blows, of every fad and fashion". (2)

Let us admit from the start that, as we shall see more clearly after reading the following reflection, "the religious cannot remain indifferent to the Constitutions. He has the responsibility of knowing them, of meditating on them, and, above all, of integrating them into his personal and community life. By living the charism he is faithful and responsible to the Constitutions. By assimilating the content of the Constitutions he is

faithful to his charism and, thereby, to Christ". (3)

The directives of the Church, quoted in circular 416, page 2, should not be seen at all as inopportune requirements, but rather as ways of re-establishing the true meaning of the Rules, insofar as they are orientations born of life and meant to guide and develop that same life as basically a community experience and commitment.

With praiseworthy discernment this is coming to be understood by the many districts, among others, that have already sent us some indications on the organization of their work on the review of the Rules. As the District of Paris newsletter rightly puts it: "Each one of us, throughout the Institute, is invited to share this work on the review of the Rules, in preparation for the definitive approval. Is it a question of a vast undertaking to attempt a portrait of the ideal Brother... such as we have little hope of ever becoming? The review of the Rules is, first of all, an appeal to what is best in each one of us..." It is a question, continues Brother Alain Houry "of **discernment**, of **self-conversion** and finally of **proposing whatever practical amendments** may seem likely to enable us the better to live 'together and by association' the reality of our vocation". (4)

This is an eminently communitarian undertaking which we are invited to and responsible for. It is a necessary task, the more so since the Institute extends throughout the world and is

(1) Alvarez Gómez: "Las Constituciones, libro de vida para los Religiosos", en la "Vida Espiritual de los Religiosos". Instituto Teológico de Vida Religiosa. Madrid, 1981, p. 155.

(2) Edward Malatesta: "The need for Constitutions". Supplement to the Way, no. 37 (Spring, 1980), pp. 13.11.

(3) Palacios, Jesús María: "Responsabilidad de los religiosos ante las nuevas Constituciones". Vida Religiosa (Madrid, 1978) p. 62.

(4) "Paris, FSC", Octubre 1982.

conscious of belonging to many and varied cultures.

2. SOME NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

It is obvious that there exist some more or less conscious attitudes which militate against this community effort and which are widespread enough to justify an attempt to eradicate them. I shall mention, among others, the following:

2.1 One frequently finds today, as I have mentioned before, a certain allergy for all that is institutional or structural. It is a phenomenon that has been noted and analysed by psychologists and sociologists: it is manifested in the individual who insists on free scope for his personal whims and fancies; or in one who feels threatened by powers and structures which he sees as trying to manipulate him, methodically and efficiently, for their own ends and aims.

Seen from this angle, it is easy to regard the Constitutions as something strongly coercive and juridical, stifling the spontaneity and creativity of persons or particular groups. Sometimes the right to preserve a personal charism is claimed against the demands of a collective charism expressed and safeguarded by a Rule.

2.2. Those who by temperament or conviction are reactionary to change are prone to reject a type of Rule presented to them in a style much less strictly normative than that of traditional Rules, although certainly not less demanding than they in its objectives and aims. It sometimes happens that they question themselves on the worth of having new common norms, while those which seemed to them untouchable, because sa-

cred in their traditional formulation, have suffered diverse transformations, which they deem more or less unjustifiable.

Or there are those who cast doubts on the trustworthiness of the persons who prepared the new texts or on the methods they used to formulate them. They readily conclude that the new Rules are not so much the expression of the thought of the Founder or of the will of God for our Institute but rather the product of the thought-structures of persons or particular groups, who were clever and influential enough to impose their own opinions.

Obviously such evaluations, which are far from being merely hypothetical, will prevent those who hold them from seeing the exact significance of what the Rules really are and what they mean, and from accepting them with the love and respect to which, according to the thinking of the Founder and of the Church, they have a claim. There is no doubt that such opinions would paralyse the common endeavour to do everything possible to ensure that we have texts that correspond in the best way possible to our genuine sources and to the authentic objectives proposed to us. The effect of such negative attitudes would be to jeopardise the ultimate result of our communitarian review and risk our arriving at only a partial or inadequate version of the norms that should orientate our lives.

We should all try to understand clearly that changes in the regular or constitutional texts are not motivated by some whim or some questionable idealism. They are changes desired and demanded by the Church since they are requested by life itself and by the transformations, either of expression or of cultural forms, presented to us by the very evolution itself of our religious

life and mission. It is a question of translating into the language and style of today the eternal exigencies of the Gospel and the thought of our Saint, of correcting or suppressing also whatever previous epochs and styles have added to our legislation in the unfolding of our history. It is a matter of inventing in order to guarantee the same fidelity.

3. WHAT OUR RULES REALLY MEAN

3.1 Any attempt to study or review the Rules should clearly be seen as an effort to **return to the Founder** in order to understand better his fundamental inspiration, to penetrate deeper into his way of thinking, his style, his concept of our mission, his manner of organizing community life for the service of that mission.

The Rules should help us to be of one mind with the Founder who always sought to understand fully what his disciples aspired to and what they are capable of, so that they could accept his vision with generosity and sincerity. Every Founder wrote his Rule in close collaboration with his followers. Any necessary re-adaptation or re-edition of the Rule, if it is to be undertaken in a responsible manner, must be accompanied by a profound re-thinking of what he felt and intended.

In the first editions of the Rule, published during his life-time, our Saint left us the fullest expression of his will for us. Every new edition of the Rule should be a clear and direct re-writing in the language of our times, of what he thus bequeathed to us. We are called upon to undertake, as has often been said, a constant "re-founding" of the Institute in order to maintain its life and relevance: but we cannot build, in St. Paul's

phrase, on foundations different from those God chose for it. (I Cor. 3: 10-15)

Only if we take into account such considerations may we justifiably embark upon a re-reading and a contemporary formulation of what is the eternal plan of the Spirit for our religious family, a plan given temporal and historical reality at every stage of our own personal or local history.

3.2 By wishing to mediate through the Rule the Gospel experience and the spiritual journey lived by the Founder and proposed by him to his disciples, we enter upon an eminently communitarian and all-embracing project — the first and foremost "community project" as a whole, the one which is to serve as the basis and guide of all our future individual "community projects"

In existential terms the project is a sign and an expression of life and hope, of eternal youth always looking towards the future, but informed also by a realism which carefully weighs the particular circumstances and capacities of persons and groups in order to place before them a spiritual challenge that has its origin in the example and earnest wish of our Founder and of his most faithful followers.

3.3 With our Founder, and accompanied, in a sense, by his personal experience, we begin a **re-reading of the Gospel** in the Rule: our Saint's life-journey is a guide for us to follow, enabling us to find the one and only Way which is Christ. "The ultimate norm of religious life is the following of Christ, such as is proposed to us in the Gospel". (Perfectae Caritatis, No. 2b)

The particular understanding of the Rule which we discern in the Founder's life provides a specific model for us to follow, a convenient guide

which in no way hinders our relationship with that unique Guide in whose steps our religious profession placed us. Indeed, "it serves the best interests of the Church for communities to have their own special character and purpose" (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 2b). "The very charism of the Founders appears as 'an experience of the Spirit', transmitted to their disciples to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them, in harmony with the Body of Christ continually in the process of growth". (*Mutuae Relationis*, No. 11)

And this charism is a sacred legacy which, as our quotation shows, is not to remain a mere cherished deposit but to be a source of new life.

It is the gift and the perennial power of the Spirit which continues to live and work in the Institute as it does in the Church. Thus, the Rule seeks to be, and must be, the permanent, determinant and faithful expression of the Institute's charism. The Rule defines the particular qualities of that charism and guides its authentic integration into the actual life of the individual communities.

3.4 Therefore, it is more than a mere juridical compilation or statement of rights and duties designed to ensure a peaceful and worthy community life. It is a spiritual guide, **breviary of the spirituality proper to each Institute**. It does not stand in opposition to, nor is it an alternative form of, that spirituality, common to all other religions, which has been described as "a particular way of placing ourselves before God, our brothers and our temporal concerns and which consists in dispensing with what other persons — including Christians radically committed to the Gospel — rely on to organize their life

in the world". (1) It constitutes a particular attitude learned from La Salle and enriched by the contributions of the generations that have preceded us in following him; an attitude which gave existence and continuity to our identity. Such a spirituality, according to Moltmann (2) "includes the whole of life, soul and body, individual and community, the inner life and the outward one".

In defining this attitude our Rules will not only articulate the spirit proper to our Institute as a "spirit of faith... and, secondly, an ardent zeal for the instruction of children..." (3), but will suggest motives for, and ways of, animating and understanding our mission and of living our religious consecration in a manner appropriate thereto.

3.5 In its formulation, **the Rule defines what a Brother of the Christian Schools really is**. It is — if I may be allowed an expression current today — an "identikit" of the disciple of De La Salle. Even the general use of the indicative in its normative formulation instead of the traditional imperative, seems to underline better how the Constitutions produce a portrait which is ideal but, at the same time, feasible as a life programme of the Brother.

I have already taken occasion to point out the importance for us of establishing these defining characteristics in an authentic and realistic manner. We must ensure that our common identity is not endangered by a diversity imposed by dif-

(1) Alvarez Gómez. Volume quoted, p. 170.

(2) Moltmann, Jürgen: "The Church in the Power of the Spirit", p. 276.

(3) Rules of 1718, Chapter 2.

ferent circumstances which should only enrich and not obscure our specific character.

There is no question here of forcing our personality and mode of behaviour into a single mould, but rather of giving them direction by means of indications at once general but sufficiently precise. Creativity and spontaneity must remain intact as precious assets but within certain parameters applicable to us all. Flexibility in implementing principles and norms of life according to circumstances and times is no obstacle to the formulating of such principles in harmony with the purpose and objectives of our vocation. In the last analysis, the very use of the expression "definitive approval of the Rules", as the final aim of the work we are concerned with, cannot be understood in an absolute sense. This is shown by what we have already mentioned about the changing character of the norms we are now considering. What we are trying to do is to reach a "stabilised definition", which can be valid for another period of the Institute's history, to open up pathways sufficiently clear and well defined for all of us to follow.

Recent experience of abnormal situations, in which the identity of the Brother has been blurred by the supposed need or convenience of being less conspicuous, has sadly and negatively convinced us of the importance of a clear definition of ourselves, a distinctiveness able to serve as a sign to the world. Where such ideas have prevailed a painful consequence has been that religious vocations are now no more than a nostalgic memory. With nothing of particular significance to show, there can be no possibility of arousing the interest, still less a decisive option, which clear-cut and well defined exemplars would

have awakened in young men searching for values which give a meaning to life.

3.6 The Rule is also **a book of prayer...** in the sense that it can be properly written only in an atmosphere of prayer; but prayer, certainly that is open to the actual and concrete realities that surround us. It was thus that every Founder wrote his Rule, and thus, as we are well aware, that La Salle wrote his, so that through it God's will would be made manifest to us.

It is a book of prayer in the sense, also, that its texts, the motivation it offers, the suggestions it gives, can provide substantial and rich nourishment for our own community prayers. They can be, as with the Liturgy, simultaneously "lex credendi et operandi" and "lex orandi". By praying with the Rules, by introducing some of its texts into our prayers, we make good in another way, and with greater spiritual profit, that community reading of the Constitutions which was a weekly obligation in the past. Prayer which inspires the communitarian review of the Rule, and in turn is nourished by the same Rule, can be of great help to us in forming an exact understanding of our vocation, in forging the union of mind and heart, and in making our Lasallian charism a shared reality.

4. SOME CRITERIA AND CONSEQUENT ATTITUDES

From some such reflexions on the significance of our Rules, let us draw inspiration and conviction about certain valid criteria so that we may be strengthened and encouraged for the task of our community review of the text.

4.1 It is a question, then, of seeing and deciding how we are going to reshape our style of

life and our mission in accordance with the Gospel teaching (Ecclesiae Sanctae, 12), how we can best live our religious life as the harmonious development of a charism, that is, of an experience and way of life in Jesus Christ, searching with all sincerity in the Gospel for the fundamental criteria to guide us in our task. It will be helpful to recall in this respect the text of "Mutuae Relationis" (No. 51): "When judgment regarding the establishment of an institute is formulated only in view of its usefulness and suitability in the field of action, or simply on the basis of the comportment of some person who experiences devotional phenomena, in themselves ambiguous, then indeed it becomes evident that the genuine concept of religious life in the Church is in a certain manner distorted... To pronounce judgement on the authenticity of a charism, the following characteristics are required: ...a profound ardour of love to be confirmed to Christ in order to give witness to some aspect of His mystery..."

Let us see how far we are going to be sincerely influenced by the truth in the observations or notes we shall deem suitable to contribute.

4.2 The thought and the example of our Founder, his own understanding of his life and mission, should be the point of reference which will decide whatever doubt or discussion we may have on the suitability or spirit of this or that article of the constitutions. To stray from this criterion would be to betray the founding inspiration of the Institute and seriously jeopardise its life, its very *raison d'être*. Let us, as Ecclesiae Sanctae (No. 12) recommends us, seek only the suitable expression by which the spirit and intentions of the Founder may be acknowledged and

preserved, as well as the sound traditions — all of which make up the heritage of each Institute". Let us keep our attention fixed on the Founder and on our "sound traditions", on the experience, options and decisions that have gone to the shaping of a consciousness and a history in which the original idea of the Founder gained progressive fulfilment.

4.3 Careful attention should be given to the communitarian dimension of our life. The Rules define and regulate a life which essentially we profess to live in common. Whatever affects our interpersonal relationships and the conditions that make the communitarian experience possible and agreeable will be studied diligently and incorporated generously into the constitutional texts. The fundamental rights and responsibilities of every member of the community will be adequately defined and will be a permeating presence in the different parts of the Constitutions even when they are not directly alluded to.

A spirit of love must inform the work throughout, or else the result will but poorly define a life whose essence is to give witness of love to the world: such a love as is inspired and sustained by faith and takes its origin from the trinitarian model, as is made clear in Chapter 3 of our present Rules. We have always considered as the type of an evangelical community the one described, in ideal terms, in the classical text of the Acts (2: 42-47). The two predominant emphases in these verses — **the giving up of one's claims for the benefit of all** and **perseverance in prayer**, should be matter for pre-eminent consideration and be given strong emphasis and clear presentation in texts intended to guide and inspire the life of a religious community. We know

how emphatically our Founder and his first Brothers implemented them in the first drafts of our Rules.

4.4 An attitude of deeply sincere brotherly love should, therefore, characterise the work of the study and review of our normative texts, and should be reflected throughout a document which is to regulate and define the life of a community called to give witness of Christian love before the world and to serve it with this same love: a community which these same texts will vigorously remind of its mission to foster, in a spirit of love, greater justice in the world. And this by the very example of its internal organization, by the use of its man-power and by the various ways it provides help for the underprivileged and marginalized of society: by the sincerity also of its preference for the poor, inspired by La Salle.

We refer to an eminently practical love, reflected in the readiness of everybody to participate to the best of his ability in the first stage of the proposed agenda. To remain unconcernedly aloof would constitute an initial infidelity to the kind of "covenant" which the Institute wishes to sign with the Lord, and which is to determine its way of serving Him. The same charity should inspire a total sincerity in the expression of one's personal opinions, as well as a genuine respect for whatever our Brothers contribute for the better preparation of the notes and amendments to be submitted. Without this love it would be impossible to attain the necessary understanding which, among Brothers of so many different cultures and outlooks, can produce unanimity as to what should be included in the Constitutions.

This does not imply that such a fraternal at-

titude will eliminate the possibility of tension. In the sincere and world-wide dialogue to be maintained in the study of our Rules tensions will be inevitable, but it will be for us to resolve them in a spirit of love based on higher motives.

We shall have to accept in the first place, the inner tensions which are signs of the innate struggle in our own self, that duality described by the Apostle (Rom. 7:13-25). We may here recall with profit an excerpt from the preface to the Rule of Taizé: "You are afraid perhaps that a common rule will stifle your personality, when you should free yourself of useless fetters in order to accept more readily your responsibilities and to exercise better the challenges of your own ministry. Like every Christian, you should accept the tension between total freedom, given by the Holy Spirit, and the impossible situation in which fallen nature — your neighbour's and your own — puts you. If the grain of wheat does not perish, you cannot expect to see yourself achieve the fulness of Christian life".

* * *

Brother, let us pursue with generosity and determination, in fraternal and purposeful collaboration, this preparation for a "definitive" writing of our Rule, following the trial period of the texts produced in 1966. Definitive, let us repeat, as far as that term can be applied to a rule designed to regulate and inspire our permanent vocation over a period of centuries. The drafting must aim for a degree of "stability" appropriate to a fundamental and defining text, which will be a source of inspiration for our projects and for our particular way of life and which will have something of the eternal permanence of the Gospel truths which are its own inspiration. It

will have also that indefinable element of adaptability imposed by human conventions, which necessarily follow the subtle changes of time and the variations which distinguish peoples of different nations. The diligent care we shall bring to this eminently communitarian task will facilitate and ratify the docility and love with which we shall receive the orientations and precepts of our Rule of life, once it has been granted approval.

We rely on you, Brother, and at the same time we ask you to rely on our own great desire to be of service to you as fully as our means permit and our responsibility requires. Let us remain united, assisted by the help and inspiration of the Immaculate Virgin whose permanent attitude was a "Fiat" to accept the divine will, and by our filial invocation of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, whom we love and honour best by keeping constantly in mind the spiritual testament he left us.

In him, I remain,

Fraternally yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "H. José Pablo". The signature is written in black ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.