



Letter of Brother Superior

8 December 1981

CASA GENERALIZIA
dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane
Via Aurelia, 476 - C.P. 9099
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Rome, 8 December 1981

Dear Brothers,

Once again the end of the year finds us feeling the usual dissatisfaction for not have done all we intended to do during 1981. At the same time, our desire for your greater happiness in the year soon to begin leads us to multiply our messages wishing you peace and success in 1982.

I would like to express in this letter my wish for your happiness and promise you my sincere affection and service during 1982. On such an occasion I make my own the marvellous invocation of the Apostle and ask for all the Brothers that *“the God of hope bring you joy and peace in your faith and the power of the Holy Spirit remove all bounds to hope”* (Rom. 15,13).

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As usual, the first section of my letter will recall the happenings of the year which is coming to an end. It has been for us a continuation of the Tercentenary started in 1980, a time consecrated to the remembrance and analysis of the origins of our history in order to practice better the “return to the origins” of our common vocation.

At the beginning of the Tercentenary, the Holy

Father sent us a most affectionate letter with a wealth of fundamental directives. He has just shown an even more extraordinary proof of his esteem and love for the Institute by visiting the Generalate as a pilgrim to the relics of the Holy Founder who so much wished to come to Rome personally to pay his respects to the Vicar of Christ.

The next issues of our regular information media, *Intercom*, and the *Institute Bulletin* will be devoted to the visit and will give full literary and graphic details of the event.

The two hundred Brothers and the thousands of friends and pupils from various places who had come together in the generalate had the privilege of being able to express that profound fidelity to the Vicar of Christ which distinguished the Founder of the Institute in those "calamitous times", and hear from the lips of His Holiness himself words of encouragement and affection as well as fundamental principles for the times in which we live.

In his talk to the Brothers who filled the chapter room to capacity, he insisted on the actuality of our community witness by the exemplary living of this spirit within our own community, by the *"charism which leads us to consider the school as an educational community available to all and especially the poor, by generous participation in the local community and in union with other Congregations devoted to the education of the young and with so many laymen, as sharing in the joint pastoral work for which the bishop and the episcopal conference have the foremost responsibility"*. Such a short description of the visit cannot in the least convey what we saw and felt in our inmost being, but we wish simply to mention our profound joy

and gratitude to the successor of St. Peter who encourages us and confirms us in our cordial desire to be faithful to his person and his teaching.

November 21, 1981, will always be recognized as a day of great significance in the annals of the Institute.

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I will continue now with some unadorned and general impressions of my visits during the year to the different districts and regions of the Institute.

1. In January, I visited the District of **Orient** (Lebanon and the Holy Land) and the Delegations of **Greece** and **Turkey** with Brothers Patrice and José Cervantes.

1.1. In **Lebanon** the 49 Brothers continue teaching amidst surprises and uncertainties due to the warfare which has more or less been declared. Their presence and efforts are an encouragement and support for the Christian community there and a pacifying influence which makes it less difficult for Christians and Muslims to lead tranquil and constructive lives together.

Thus in spite of a great shortage of religious personnel, it was decided to open a middle school for the Zgortian Maronite community who are isolated and unable to provide a Christian education for their children because of the extreme tension between them and the neighbouring Muslim community. The Sacred Heart College in Beirut, whose imposing chapel even provided a physical defence for the neighbouring Christian quarter, has had to remain closed for a year. Its large school population now frequents the Mont de La Salle school whose enrollment has increased to 6,000. The courage

and decision of our Brothers and of the pupils and former pupils are admirable.

1.2 In **Greece**, the Brothers provide education in Sira, Pireus Thessalonica and Rhodes. The Catholics are in a minority, 50,000 in a population of nine and a half million, and their position is far from being the ecumenical ideal. This demands that evangelization be discreet. Although it is modest it is far from being inoperative. Our Brothers' work is precisely that of trying to establish better ecumenical relations and dissipate prejudices, of promoting comprehension and better relationships, of showing always a disposition towards mutual understanding which mitigates long standing intolerance.

The appointment in such a milieu of Brother Francisco Vartalitis to take charge of the Catechetical Secretariat for the Catholics in Greece has filled us with delight. It is a practical and concrete recognition of our catechetical charism and I am sure it will be a privileged instrument for the animation of Christian youth in our schools and outside.

1.3 In **Israel**, education and evangelization take on a different character in each of our schools. It extends from the advanced level of studies in the University of Bethlehem, through primary, secondary or commercial schools in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Jaffa, to the humble task of rehabilitating the 60 Arab boys in Nazareth. An enormous undertaking for 21 Brothers from 12 nations, all united in the same apostolic zeal and true brotherhood.

After lengthy and difficult negotiations, Bethlehem University has been recognized by the League

of Arab Universities. This means official recognition of the efforts of all who work there and valid academic diplomas for the students. Brother Joseph Löwenstein has retired as Vice-Chancellor of the University and has been replaced by brother Thomas Scanlon. During Brother Joseph's term of office, university installations and programmes have gradually been completed to the satisfaction of the inhabitants and especially of the students.

1.4 **Turkey** continues to be a missionary post calling for special abnegation and the keen spirit of an evangelist from our Brothers in charge of our schools in Stambul and Smyrna. There, "*the ardent zeal in teaching children and educating them in the holy fear of God*" (Rules 1718, Chap. 2), has to be manifested with extreme circumspection and is generally reduced to an apparently fruitless presence and witness.

In the spirit of *Ad Gentes*, 6f, and *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 21, the Brothers continue to support and encourage the humble Christian communities living there and provide everyone with the Christian response to "the perennial questions of mankind regarding present and future life" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 4). In consultation with the Conference of French Visitors, we have resolved to maintain this disinterested missionary effort, and continue to rely on volunteers, who will make up in generosity what they lack in numbers, to staff these schools.

2. A month later, this time with Brothers Pedro and Benildo, I visited the **North American Districts**. It took a full seven weeks to visit the communities and during this time a very tight programme allowed us to appreciate the life and work of the Brothers

and to give particular heed to the problems and desires of the region. With the brevity and simplicity called for by a letter of this nature, I will refer only to what most impressed us among all we saw and admired during this time.

2.1 The excellent development and organization of our educational establishments at all levels is most impressive. Most Brothers work in secondary schools of which there are more than eighty, crowded with pupils who generally have an excellent spirit.

Their numerous clientele is composed of adolescents and young people from widely differing social classes, but predominantly lower middle class. The Catholic Church in America has to use all its ingenuity and effort to maintain the popular character of its schools, and teachers and students are very generous in their cooperation. The continual increase in the cost of education is a source of anxiety to all but especially to the Brothers, for there is no possibility of obtaining appreciable and direct state grants. The Brothers make great sacrifices and resort to all manner of means to see their schools remain available to families in the lower income bracket.

2.2 The work in our "Colleges" of higher education enjoys exceptional standing. But there are difficulties which increasingly put to the test the enthusiasm and devotedness of those who direct and animate them.

Apart from the financial problems, and the cost is easy to imagine, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a real and corporate identity which explains and motivates our presence and cooperation in such establishments at the university level. There

are many factors conspiring against the Christian and Lasallian aspect of our "colleges". As they develop beyond all bounds, their programmes become more complicated and the number of lay staff increases excessively. Generally speaking, they are highly qualified and of a fidelity beyond reproach, but the inevitable and sometimes ambiguous pluralism is increasingly compromising the animating influence of the Brothers whose numbers are decreasing in such establishments.

2.3 One of the most salient points in appreciating the districts of the United States is the marvellous organization of the general services through the central office in Lockport, but this is not the place to describe this in detail. We were given clear and comprehensive information about the organization on the national level of initial and continuing formation programmes and were able, once again, to visit Sangre de Cristo and see the extraordinary influence it exerts both within our districts and without. We learnt of the initiatives of the Education Office. Among the very painstakingly produced publications, I must mention in passing the work being done at the St. Mary's Press, Winona. Also, a great effort has been made over the last few years to translate the works of the Founder or works on the Founder. Lastly, I must limit myself to praising the directives and programmes of the Regional Commission for the Promotion of Social Justice. Here is an example of regional organization and animation which should become more generalized.

2.4 There is also an excellent community spirit throughout the length and breadth of the eight

districts. It is well known how carefully our American Brothers have always cultivated the fraternal atmosphere which corresponds so well with our title.

One of its present practical manifestations is a general practical and efficacious interest we noticed in recruiting. I met quite a number of boys in groups studying and developing the vocational idea, and their desire to know the Brother's vocation in depth seemed to me very praiseworthy and significant. North America has, of course, suffered from the world wide crisis in religious vocations of the last few years. But this renders even more laudable the faith and zeal employed in maintaining a good recruiting programme and perfecting the methods used. Programmes of formation have also been examined and re-adapted to meet the psychology of these young men and the requirements of our mission today. Results are very appreciable and we look forward to even better results in the future.

2.5. There is a special call or sign for each epoch and there is no lack of work in the Lord's vineyard... The American Brothers today are sensitive, in and with the Church, to the challenge of so many immigrants who come from their countries of origin in desparate straits seeking hospitality: Cubans, Vietnamese, Afghans, Cambodians. The perennial invitation, so well understood at the beginning of the Institute and so well heeded by our predecessors in the United States, is again being made to provide for their human, cultural and Christian needs as the principal means of helping them to surmount their difficult situation today. There are projects and apostolates to cater for such needs, and new foundations are being considered, like the school in Miami for Cuban refugees, to provide an adequate response.

2.6 In concluding this review of our visit to the United States, I would point out that it coincided with the Tercentenary and we were thus able to participate in its principal celebrations. Well attended and magnificently organized ceremonies enabled us to appreciate the cordiality and depth of feeling of those who bore witness to their attachment to the Brothers: hierarchy, civic and academic dignitaries, parents, former students and friends and present pupils. It would be difficult to surpass the beauty, spirit and solemnity of the commemorative ceremonies we attended in the cathedrals of San Francisco and New York. All the events of the tercentenary were an eloquent testimony to the sincere affection and high esteem the Brothers have acquired during the last 150 years of Lasallian history in the United States.

3. The last of my visits was made to the districts of **Lille, Besançon and Paris**, thus concluding my meetings with all the districts of France. It is difficult to make an adequate summary, but I will try to detail what seemed to me to be most noticeable in the three above mentioned districts.

3.1 I was struck by the effective and generous coherence with which social outcasts, such as the mentally retarded or deficient and those experiencing other kinds of poverty, be it in rural or suburban areas, are considered and cared for. To try to give examples or even lists of names would be tedious and insufficient and would exceed the limits of a letter such as this. But why not, at least, refer to what is being done in the industrial area of Roubaix where unemployment is particularly high, the rural areas of the district of Besançon or Garges les

Gonesses in the Parisian suburbs, or the work being done with drug addicts in Neuchâtel? This is but some of the work which deserves study, praise and imitation by many others.

3.2 We discovered inestimable treasures in the educational communities of the schools and colleges we visited. We met groups of teachers who are very courageously associated with the Brothers' work, as well as former students and some directors who are even more deeply imbued with the Lasallian spirit and have become members of "Signum Fidei". Likewise, the Christian leadership by parents of pupils, like that in Buzenval, is a guarantee of a profound Christian influence and provides a suitable response to those who question the future of the Catholic school in the acute crisis with which it is menaced by the present political situation in France. I think I can truthfully say that the catechetical organization, entitled SAMUEL, in Buzenval, is one of the most complete and best conceived that I have ever come across in my visits to the districts.

3.3 I had occasion to speak with various members of the hierarchy, among them Cardinal Etchegaray and the Archbishops of Paris and Cambrai. After studying the different aspects of the crisis we came to the unanimous conclusion that we must concentrate above all on maintaining the character and identity of our schools so that they fulfil the role allotted to them by the Church in the overall work of evangelization of the poor and the young.

3.4 The average age of two of these districts is the highest in the Institute as a result of a prolonged period when no new vocations contributed new

blood. This fact and the readjustments imposed on the distribution of personnel, and the future of numerous major undertakings in which the Brothers are engaged, were mulled over during my visit and are being studied and given serious consideration. A large part of the work of the 1982 regional assembly will be devoted to finding suitable solutions. More determined and more hopeful recruiting is noticeable in the above mentioned districts, and, as in so many other places, the young are showing greater interest in the subject of vocations.

3.5 We also noticed a growing and increasingly practical awareness of the *region* as a means of cooperation, solidarity and animation (Cf. Bk of Govt. 9), particularly useful in dealing with major problems affecting everyone which cannot be dealt with by each individually. Above all this is so for studying and providing an adequate service for missionary priorities, initial and continuing formation programmes, finding suitable personnel for establishments whose staffing and organization requirements are more exacting because of the special characteristics of their courses.

Serious preparations for the 1982 assembly I have just mentioned are especially important as a guarantee for regional structures which are proving efficient but need suitable finishing touches, and as a means and special opportunity for examining and resolving problems which concern all. And so I renew my heartfelt wishes which I formulated during my visit, that the assembly may be a complete success.

4. During the last few weeks Brother Vicar and Brothers Benildo and Vincent has been visiting the

French speaking districts of Canada. I will mention a few points from their information and assessments which I had already known previously.

4.1 The schools have almost completely come under the control of civic education committees, and thus the Brothers have, in company with other religious, lost the control and leadership in them. Coincident with this and at once a determining factor and result of it, the increase in the average age of our Brothers due to a complete lack of vocations over the last few years means that their presence and influence in the schools are progressively decreasing. In spite of the drawback of declining numbers and increasing age, they are valiantly devising ways of doing serious apostolic work among the young. But with the pressures and efforts of lay masters and trade unions, theirs is an uncomfortable situation.

4.2 There are very active and praiseworthy catechetical and educational activities of various kinds, which are undertaken in the Lasallian spirit of education for the young and especially for the lower classes... Notre Dame La Rouge, Ottawa; Saint Jerome, Montreal; the "Ville des Jeunes", Quebec, are isolated examples of this apostolic creativity. The objectives of the "Rond-Point" communities in Trois Rivières, which are not entirely exclusive to the district, are "to help the young grow in faith, to help them express their faith in prayer and by specific commitments". And their membership has already passed the 500 mark.

4.3 You have no idea of how much is being done for the most deprived, and they are not lacking

in Canadian society in spite of its generally flourishing economic situation. One can mention the "Maison Miguel" in Trois Rivières where eight handicapped are lovingly cared for by four Brothers. "El Tramite" in Sept Iles is a temporary refuge for anyone, adult or youth, who is experiencing a difficult moment in his life. A community in Ottawa has just adopted four Cambodian orphans, victims of the endless war ravaging their country. The Canadian districts are very generous in using their financial resources for this kind of initiative.

4.4 The Brothers in Canada are still doing admirable missionary work. Of those of the right age for this apostolate, 30% are at work in such missionary posts as the Cameroons, Haiti and Tortuga, Japan and Guadeloupe.

The crucial and worrying problem is that of vocations. Happily, the realization of the gravity of the situation has led many to work tenaciously and intelligently at getting spiritually nearer to the young, in houses of prayer and charismatic groups, for example, besides the centres of assistance mentioned above. They are sure that a more direct and genuine challenge continues to be efficacious and a stimulation in our days for young people seeking a meaningful destiny for their lives.

As I write, Brother Vicar and Brothers Pedro and José have just returned from visiting **Belgium and Holland**. There has been no time to write up a report as yet, but I have gathered some information. The aims and organization of the large establishments built up by the Brothers in the past can no longer determine the existence and life style of a community. Thus, there are a considerable number of Brothers who have formed small groups

and are endeavouring to establish more authentic communities sustained and encouraged by a common evangelizing impetus and a better defined community plan. Also to be noted are the various generous initiatives for poor and handicapped young people, according to the spirit of Juan Vanier and his work, "Faith and Light", and, in spite of the diminishing numbers and high average age, the continued interest in foreign missions such as Zaire, the Camerouns and Aruba.

The crisis in vocations is more serious and more widespread in these countries which were once so extremely fruitful in religious and missionary vocations. Let us hope, in spite of all, that the above mentioned community revival, charitable care for the handicapped and renewed interest and help for the third world will revive among youth the desired interest, heed and esteem for a life consecrated to God and the universal service of mankind under the emblem of the Gospel. A major factor in this will be the gesture of those laymen and lay teachers who become members of Signum Fidei and take up other kinds of religious and educational leadership.

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Having summed up the Institute experiences, I will end this first part of my letter with news of a different kind.

Firstly, a new Delegation was established on August 15, comprising the communities in **Ethiopia**. There are 51 Brothers in this country, 38 Eritreans, 8 Americans, 2 Italians and 2 French. Brother David Detje, Visitor of the L.I.N.E. district has been appointed Delegate of the Superior General and Brother Yemanù Gehar, President.

It is a step on the way to autonomy and self government which, in the not too distant future, will fall to the local Brothers. Consistently good recruiting and constant improvements in training the young Brothers give grounds for hope that it will be so, as also does the satisfactory development of other Institutes in this country where vocations are coming forward and are proving very rewarding.

Finally, there was an international meeting of young people from various countries in **Paderno del Grappa** at the end of August. By including this among the most relevant events of the past year, I am expressing the importance I attach to this youth movement whose ideal is the Lasallian message. The call which brought together these young people, for the most part older students and former students, and inspired them with a keen sensitiveness for understanding what La Salle represents and announces to the world, is indeed a Lasallian vocation complementary to our own as Brothers. It is, moreover, a matchless preparation for understanding better and fully appreciating our own vocation which frequently enjoys only superficial esteem. Good luck and heartfelt thanks to those Brothers who take a special care of such groups.

OUR MISSIONARY SERVICE TODAY

In each of my previous letters I have tried to deal with some practical point of our life and mission and lay before you a few pertinent ideas and directives. There is nothing further from the spirit which inspires these letters than to distract the attention of Brothers and Communities from the important subjects dealt with by the Council in preceding circulars. Rather do I try to dwell on some portion of the same subject which seems to be of special importance and interest.

If today, for example, I am writing about OUR MISSIONARY SERVICE TODAY it is because I think it is of great urgency and always risks being relegated to second place in the apostolic discussion and planning of quite a number of districts. For quite some time I have been thinking of making this the central theme of my letter at the end of the year in which the Intercapitular Meeting and circular 415, which describes its discussions and conclusions, have just rekindled everyone's prior interest.

The section of the circular which refers to "*Openess to the Young Churches*" ends with an invitation to the General Council to "*define missionary options*" and to all districts to "*inform the General Council as to what increases it intends to make, prior to the General Chapter of 1986, in the percentage of its Brothers assigned to work in the Young Churches*". (Cf. Circ. 415, p 32).

I am referring to **Missionary Service** here as responsibility and action, in which each of us has a share, for the salvation and development of the whole world: as showing a practical interest in alleviating and remedying as far as possible the evils suffered by mankind and deprived peoples, and in helping to reform the unjust organizations by which they are oppressed. And it matters not whether they be at a great distance from us or live and suffer in our immediate neighbourhood. It requires an international open heartedness which is consistent with the universality of Christian love, which at times is only too ready to restrict itself to local problems for its own convenience. A service inspired by deep faith, nourished and fired by the innermost conviction that it is the saving will of God who "*wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth*" (I Tim. 2,3) (1). It is a reasoned service one tries to render, whose effectiveness is measured by the degree to which one realizes that the Church is a community open to all, created by Christ as a universal means of salvation, to announce and communicate the good it has received from God, to prepare the establishment of true Christian brotherhood in which man, every man, can better fulfill the designs God had for him when He brought him into being.

It assumes service and assistance, not unidirectional, but by all and for all, but which logically induces the better off to help those who are less favoured.

(1) It is on the solid rock of this universal conviction that St. John Baptist de La Salle bases his educational thought, for the service of all. (Cf. Meditation on the School. 1st point).

It is a service which is complex because of its world wide extent and the extreme diversity of the situations and problems to be dealt with. For this same reason it needs true and sufficient information, an accurate analysis of such problems and situations, profound and responsible reflection on what such information and examination reveals, extreme care in avoiding improvisation and in basing one's options on rigorous discernment. And it is the participation of all which will assure that the discernment is positive and opportune.

To understand this service well and provide for it in a fitting manner the conclusions of the May Meeting recommend "an awakening of consciousness" and the better definition of a properly coordinated missionary policy". It must be promoted and developed by permanent and active dialogue.

The various kinds and the complexity of poverty which inspire a desire to serve, and the fact that some of the responsibility it imposes falls on each one of us, requires this exchange and systematic communication of experiences, studies and contributions.

The coming year provides a stimulus for this world wide communication. The Brothers Visitors, as I have just recommended, have been asked to send in a report. We do not want this to be a mere mechanical calculation or simply a source of information. We want it to be an occasion for reflection and examination. The Institute Bulletin will publish a number dedicated to the missions, and it should also be a useful source of information and a means of exchanging ideas. I myself have just asked the Brothers Visitors to send the most

up-to-date details on some of the points mentioned in this letter. My thanks for a prompt reply.

Such is the background of this simple letter and its directives. It also fulfils the requirements of this "greater awareness" and "better definition of a well coordinated missionary policy". This is also the aim of the motives suggested for everyone and of the data in the last section which illustrates our situation and the possibilities of providing such service.

Preliminary note. — I shall always be referring to Africa, Asia or Oceania, and often use classical terms which are not always exact or comprehensive, such as "the missionary world", the "third world". I do not intend to be restrictive in any way, nor can I ignore the problems and penury of the "fourth world", nor the drop outs in the industrialized nations. This letter is a call to take a greater interest in those countries where Christians are in a minority, sometimes a very small minority, and those in the greatest need.

On the other hand, I am not referring to Latin America. And this in no way implies forgetfulness or ignorance of the enormous missionary possibilities nor of the strong missionary impetus there. Latin America is for the most part Catholic. And though they are glad to have specific kinds of cooperation from abroad to help them with their evangelization and developmental problems, the time is long passed when they had to rely on personnel, initiative and decisions from other countries.

I know and encourage the missionary movement which has been started among the native people, so often neglected in the plans we used to make, as also among the newly discovered tribes in the vast Amazon basin. And I know the excellent role played by our Brothers in the last Latin American Missionary Conference. The Latin American districts are here included among those to whom we address our suggestions and pressure to provide a service for those who being less wealthy in personnel and resources need more assistance.

A. Missionary awareness

The 1976 Chapter document on "The Institute in the Young Churches" ended with a Conclusion in which the following question was posed. It is as valid today as it was then. "*Is the Institute missionary enough?*" (2). It then went on to furnish data, slightly modified here, as an answer.

Europe	5725	} 8,035 (3)
North America	2120	
Australia	190	
Latin America	1310	} 2,225 (3)
Asia	490	
Africa	405	
New Guinea	20	

We must continually ask ourselves the same question and not let the answer become a denouncement of a lack of this "missionary awareness" we are speaking about. Various data and more or less precise and abundant figures are not an answer as far as I am concerned. To measure up to the importance of the subject, we must also verify the extent and manner of our practical response. We will try to do this at the end of this letter, above all as regards the motives which inspire and impel this movement towards serving the missions. We

(2) See Circular 408, p. 64.

(3) More in keeping with the missionary situation according to data furnished by the inquiry of October 1981. Brothers working outside their district to help others number 200 in Africa, 107 in Asia, 274 in Latin America, 16 in Oceania. Total 597, or 6% of the total number of Brothers.

need to know "how" we accomplish our participation in universal missionary service and "why" a greater or lesser number of Brothers, communities and districts offer their resources to help such service.

Our Institute will not be sufficiently missionary if the Brothers do not effectively feel the gravity of the missionary responsibility proper to all Christians and therefore to ourselves. We take it for granted that all know the solemn declaration of Vatican II, "Ad Gentes," 40, and the insistence of "Evangelii Nuntiandi," 13, on the universal duty of this unavoidable participation: "*The command to the Twelve to go out and proclaim the Good News is also valid for all Christians, though in a different way*".

Once again we feel conjointly challenged by the call of "Ad Gentes," 24.2, and the above mentioned chapter document, Circular 408. Both insist that we examine ourselves before God to see if we cannot increase our work for the extension of the Kingdom of God among the Gentiles... if the Brothers cannot give up some ministry or other and dedicate all their energy to the missions... if they share in missionary work according to their possibilities" ("Ad Gentes," 40). This is a serious matter. It is the perennial basis for our missionary awareness. As we said, we presume that all this is known. But is it sufficiently effective?

The most usual thing today, the most widespread, is to examine the above mentioned "how" we deal with missionary problems. I feel the urgency of this practical aspect very deeply. To respond in truth to our vocation, we have to maintain the equilibrium between the "motives" and the "projects" of service to the missions. If the "why's"

are feeble and inadequate, we shall not get far in making a practical response. And we run the risk of confusing what is expected of us in our profession with some other kind of human cooperation, whatever it might be, to alleviate the said problems.

In fact, a rapid inquiry I made with the help of the Brothers Visitors in view of this letter showed that the most urgent motives inducing the Brothers to share in missionary work were overwhelmingly their interest in promoting justice and *better serving the poorest*. This is the conclusion gathered from the answers given. This is encouraging in that it coincides with the results from other wider international inquiries. But I should also point out that other motives put forward in the answers from many districts had a very low rating. This does not mean that I attach an absolute value to the results of this inquiry. But the indications lead me to recommend a closer examination and much improvement in the motives which should arouse our missionary interest.

Poor or insufficient motives could explain the adjective "modest" with which many districts or sectors qualify their missionary efforts. Only a few state that there is a notable movement. The great majority qualify it as modest and ten say it is nil. Again, I do not want to exaggerate when quoting out of its context a sentence I read in the circular letter of one Brother Visitor. I quote it to show there is an opinion all too widely held. Here is the sentence. "I do not wish to approach you, Brother, with lengthy theological exhortations on the missions". If we make such a difference between theology and action in missionary considera-

tions and analyses, should we not end up by studying the human realities and look for remedies without evaluating the motives which should inspire us?

The complexity of the missionary problem, the experience of previous failures and their lamentable consequences, new situations and plans of action, difficulty in embodying the message and thoroughly understanding it sufficiently to explain it adequately... result in the organization of innumerable study sessions on missionary subjects and problems, and from every point of view: theological, anthropological, socio-cultural or methodological. My question is as follows: "How much interest do each of our sectors, districts, or communities show in these meetings, and how frequently do they take part? A missionary conscience needs training. How often does this subject with its associated problems come up in our community discussions or prayer meetings?

The limits of a Christmas letter preclude even a summary of the motives and circumstances claiming real priority of interest in this missionary service. The aim of this letter is not to present a study... but to suggest and encourage that it be done regularly.

I would like, however, to propose some motives on which we should all agree and which should inspire deep missionary preoccupation. Generally speaking, they are in themselves valid for anyone, but it is easy to ascribe to them a close relationship with the constituent and specific elements of our own vocation. Let us consider some of them.

1. **Aware of God's plan to form one people out of all races and nations** (Rule 1.d.).

We find the profound motivation for our common mission in the Meditations for the Time of the Retreat. It is interesting to note that the first idea in the first meditation is the well known passage from St. Paul. "*God is so good*" says St. John Baptist de La Salle, "*that he not only brings us into existence by His act of creation but desires that all of us come to the knowledge of truth.*" (1 Tim. 2,4) (MTR 193,1). "*... established to 'bring the means of salvation within the reach'* (MTR 193,3) *of youth who are deprived of educators and whose evangelization has been neglected... This first intention which determined the very existence of the Institute has to be translated into a generous missionary impetus,*" comments the Declaration (24,2).

In our views and plans, we cannot sin through short sightedness or irresoluteness and limit ourselves to the most immediate realities. Seeing so much wretchedness around us, it is but natural that we should feel a strong and healthy inclination to concentrate our efforts on them. But true embodiment in the world of the poor and Christian awareness of its problems and claims normally develop a positive international momentum. This takes on one kind of characteristic or another according to the religious or ideological motives which are its fundamental inspiration. In keeping with the logic of its own specific inspiration, love of the poor as a priority directs us to the poorest of the poor, to those whom we cannot overlook just because they are to be found in places far removed from us.

2. **"The community is open and generous to others... [It makes itself aware] of the great part of humanity that still has no knowledge of the faith..."** (Rule 3,h; 9,i)

It is a fundamental rule of our religious profession and an obligation imposed on us by Christian and Lasallian brotherhood. One of the genuine ingredients of the missionary spirit is the bringing about of a more equitable distribution of what the minority possess with exclusive egoism among those who live on the fringes of society due to the many historical and cultural circumstances. The Christian mission attempts to establish real brotherhood and amend so much inequality which impedes it.

2.1 Inequality in religious advantages. Those who have not heard about the Redemption made by Jesus Christ and do not benefit from the valuable teaching with which he gives meaning to our lives are growing in real numbers every year. This should not leave us indifferent even if God does have other means of directing and saving souls. Thinking of them, we feel that the Apostle is referring to us when he says: "But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom. 10,14-15).

"Knowing Jesus Christ has been an experience which has so changed my life that I cannot allow anyone to be excluded from such an experience. I believe that others also can obtain enormous benefit from their vital relationship with Christ". Every conscientious Christian repeats these words of Emilio

de Castro in one of his declarations. We cannot passively agree to a world divided between those who benefit from the advantages of Christian revelation and those who have never even heard that Christ came to save us.

2.2 Inequality in educational opportunities. "Because 40 per cent of the poor world's population is under the age of fifteen (as opposed to only 27 per cent in the industrialised world), an even greater effort will be called for in the 1980s if enrolment rates are to be even maintained at present levels. On the most optimistic projections, the number of adults without the ability to read and write is due to increase by about 46 million between 1980 and 1990, even though the percentage of illiterate people in the developing world will fall from about 52 per cent to about 49 per cent in the same period... In most developing countries today, more than half of all the resources available for education are being used to create an educated minority for the modern sector of economy... As a concept of education it is like a religion in which many are called but few are chosen" (4).

We must not forget that "hunger for instruction is no less debilitating than hunger for food. An illiterate is an under nourished mind". (Populorum Progressio, 35). The very heart of our vocational call grieves because of the 800,000,000 illiterate people at present in the world. And we know where most of them are to be found...

In the complete process of decolonization, we are very regretful of the criticism levelled against

our schools in the third world. They have sometimes been the means of maintaining privileged minorities, they have encouraged absenteeism on the part of the better prepared who have gone to seek more favourable opportunities abroad, they have not played their part in remedying unjust situations and organization, they have not directed their educational systems towards the real needs and interests of the country... Such criticisms concern us in so far as they are true. They urge us to establish new systems under the Christian sign which will help those countries to attain a healthy collective cultural development.

2.3 Economic inequalities. These are better known thanks to information from recent analyses, congresses and publications. We must give them all the attention and sensitivity inherited from the Founder, in harmony with the Church and present day society.

We are constantly being told that 30% of the world population acquires and consumes 80% of the available food resources. We ourselves cannot limit ourselves to making recommendations which are as unfruitful as they are easy to make... We know that the gross national product of some countries is 1% of that of others, and, to be consistent, we personally must make our contribution to remedying such disorder.

Authentic missionaries will always try to remedy such wretchedness rather than go to excessive lengths in condemning it. We cannot be at peace with ourselves when we realize that every fortnight 17,000 million dollars are spent on arms and that this amount could provide food, water, education and medical care for the whole world. And as we

(4) *New Internationalist*. January 1980, p. 14.

know that the best way of helping the poor is to make them aware of their own problems and to equip them to solve them themselves, the desire germinates to help the nations on the fringe to surmount their age old indigence.

2.4 Inequality in the distribution of suitable personnel for training and helping others. We, thank God, are to be found in this category of persons... but we have the duty of thinking how we can distribute the resources in personnel and materials which this fact puts at our disposal.

It is calculated that by the end of the century, Asia will have 65% of the world's population... Africa, according to UN estimates, will have 589 million inhabitants with about 175 million Catholics by the same date (5). If we now return to the present distribution of our personnel, how can we not feel the urgent need to correct our proportions and percentages?

Father Bühlmann's well known book, "The Third Church", shows that we "are in the middle of a process of change as a result of which the Church, at home in the western world for almost 2000 years will, in a short time have shifted its centre of gravity into the Third World, where its adherents will be much more numerous". And among other data, he shows that between 1900 and 2000 the percentage of Catholics in the Western World will fall from 51% to 30%, while in the Third World it will rise from 48% to 70%. The proportion of priests and religious administering spiritual as-

(5) D. Barrett. "International Review of the Missions." January 1980.

sistance to Christians is far from following the same ascending graph... This is another fact inducing us to reflect on the need to contribute our generous assistance.

After reflecting on this point, we feel that it is extremely urgent that well trained Brothers from other districts help in improving the initial and continuing training of young men in the Third World who, happily, are coming forward and expressing the wish to become Brothers. They should be initiated into the religious life by Brothers of their own country and culture so that there may be a better integration of their religious and cultural values, and that communication between training staff and trainees may be facilitated. But such training staff have evidently to be prepared in sufficient numbers over a suitable period of time so that they may be able to take on such a delicate responsibility with guarantees of success. We are at an especially momentous time. A further step is being taken from passive receptivity by those who used to welcome the missionary to their speedy and serious qualification of themselves to assume responsible self government. As Circular 415, p. 31, so well puts it, "*tomorrow will be too late*", if we do not provide this good and indispensable training today.

There are various ways open to those who wish to contribute their assistance, differing according to the circumstances in which one is placed. It could be permanent dedication, joining one of the missionary sectors; or by providing the personnel who for a few weeks can give short courses and sessions to enrich this training, etc.

3. **“True community life constitutes a living sign of the central reality that it is the Brother’s mission to announce”.** (Declaration, 26:4).

The foremost objective of the mission, according to the Conciliar Decree “Ad Gentes”, is to establish true communities. Number 15 of this document states it with a beauty and conciseness of doctrine worthy of being known and appreciated: *“A congregation of the faithful, endowed with the cultural wealth of its own nation, profoundly rooted in its people... present and established in it... to proclaim Christ by their words and deeds to their fellow non-Christian citizens and help them towards full acceptance of Christ”.*

More generally speaking, we agree with Moon-eyham (International Review of the Mission. Jan 1980, p. 68) that development should take place by communities. The community is the basic unit and should be the initiator and principal agent of the whole process of development... Development must be sensitive to culture and conform to the framework of national culture... in dialogue with local leaders... respecting local traditions... Our membership in the local community should allow us, as far as possible, to learn from those we try to help. Readiness to engage in reciprocal communication will help to abolish paternalism...”.

Is it not, by chance, our duty always and everywhere to form a community, in keeping with what has been handed down to us from our foundation and through our traditions? “A community serving mankind through the education of youth shows the Christian understanding of the temporal in this way and radiates a message of peace and love” (Rule 3i).

Who, by placing limits on it, would jeopardizes the profoundest meaning of universal readiness for service and the transmission of the message?

We are expected to form a community which generates new communities. There is, as “Ad Gentes”, quoted above, says, an enormous field awaiting us in the missions. Our cooperation is needed for real development.

Only by fulfilling the conditions for true inculturation shall we be able to meet the challenge adequately. Inculturation, or “contextualization”, is today considered to be essential for missionary work. It is said that there are something like 2,000 different cultures in the world today (6). Each one believes itself to be the centre and point of reference for all the others with which it comes into contact. The “kenosis”, or renunciation of one’s inmost sentiments, which is required of the missionary if he is to establish sincere dialogue with various cultures, is not easy. However, when one realizes that this is the condition for being really accepted and understood, it is fully acquiesced in. It is thus that the “Word” became an evangelizer when “he erected his tent among us”, inculturated in a specific place and determined time, to save the world. The missionary knows that this renunciation is required of him by the very nature of the values and message he wishes to communicate and have people live. These are not imported values but a seed which has to germinate and grow in any soil in the world.

The times have passed when it was considered

(6) Eugene Nida: “Why are Foreigners so Queer”. International Bulletin. July 1981.

a "luxury", or left to one's own discretion, to learn the language of the people being evangelized. Today, anyone who goes on the missions is expected to make a generous effort and be able to understand the language and how to express himself and make himself understood by the natives, to have a sufficient knowledge of their history and culture, of their mentality, beliefs and customs, as a prime condition for establishing evangelical contact with them. It has been rightly said (7) that "Christianity is not incarnated because it is accepted by men, but because it accepts them and integrates them by converting them to the liberating dispensation of Christ."

"Insertion in overall pastoral work" (Rules 3h), in the life and work of the local Church, is an essential aspect of this actual inculturation, the object of much emphasis today, a condition for any valid incorporation in the missionary world.

It is obvious that we cannot improvise if we are to develop our missionary work in community and in other cultural communities. No one believes that any missionary work can be undertaken with but a vague kind of preparation. Once again, consistency and responsibility require serious, animated, directed and specific preparation for a rich and balanced motivation.

4. **"At the service of the whole world through the education of youth"** (Rule 3,i).

We are educators by vocation. We are especially concerned that a well run school has a special

(7) Th. Kergamihigo. TELEMA, October-December 1977.

importance for initiation in living together, assimilating and moulding standards and mentalities, in order to prepare a true community of people able to lead a worthy and responsible life... There have, of course, been exaggerations in mission history when trying to attribute to the school a key role in forming a Christian community or multiplying the possibilities of conversion in the most easily influenced strata of the developing world.

There are perhaps today too many trying to deny its value and efficacy in fulfilling what is expected of it as regards culture and living together with one's fellow man. Would it not be easy for these slanderers of the school to measure the true value of the culturizing and evangelizing effect of so many different kinds of mission schools, among which are to be counted a great number founded and directed by our Brothers?

Our educational charism is today challenged and called upon for vast areas of missionary work. I refer to the people of mission countries who have such a cultural insufficiency: millions of illiterate, who proportionally speaking greatly exceeding those in more or less industrialized nations.

We are asked to cooperate in schools which, while practicing no reprehensible discrimination, train a minority to conduct the development of their peoples responsibly and competently; to help organize and direct Catholic school systems, often run by teachers who, themselves, are in need of counselling and orientation to make up for what was lacking in their basic professional training; to show a creativity, more necessary here than in Western countries, for renewing school which were, in their time, champions of an education

foreign to the country; to establish new kinds of educational and cultural promotion — rural, modestly industrial, family and community — which meet the requirements of their own characteristics and their needs at a critical time in their development. It hurt, for example, to hear an African Bishop, who had just received a distressing negative to his request for Brothers for an educational project, say with bitter resignation. “We will leave it to the Russians: they are sending their specialized cultural agents...” With a different gospel, of course.

5. **“Evangelization and catechesis of those among the young who are most neglected (Declaration 38,3).**

If the principles of the Declaration, numbers 35 to 42, Education in the Faith and Human development, are accepted in our intimate personal reflection and assimilated in our prayer, we should normally experience the challenge of the missions, and this is perfectly consistent with our Lasallian vocation. “By the very fact that God calls the Brothers to consecrate themselves to him, he sends them into the world to work for the spread of his kingdom”... (35). The Brothers are catechists by vocation, this is their principal function”... (38,1). The general Chapter calls upon the Brothers in a very special way to undertake the evangelization and catechesis of those among the young who are most neglected”. (38,3).

Catechesis... catechists,... schools for catechists are at once the means and the first requirement for the evangelization of vast areas where the very small number of priests is insufficient: indispensable

cooperation required to reach the great numbers who are awaiting the proclamation of the Good News and to help “to make the baptized Christian more conscious of his involvement in the mystery to which baptism has introduced him”. (38,2).

The last part of this letter refers to the more notable achievements of this kind, such as our involvement in the Gaba Institute in English speaking Africa and the schools for catechists in Pakistan... These stand out from the many lesser initiatives. But while they fill us with rejoicing, they also reveal the great needs waiting to be met in other fields in the third world. It is another kind of hunger, no less distressing than bodily hunger, which missionary dioceses suffer from. Do not our options and professional training invite us to supply a remedy?

* * *

This simple panorama of the extreme poverty of so many millions of human beings in our days leads me to prolong this letter beyond the usual bounds of a Christmas message, The field is an important one, as important as it is vast. I am just trying to point out the perfect harmony that exists between our distinctive vocation and what the missionary world is clamouring for.

Having a missionary conscience consists precisely in “awakening one’s consciousness”, in “becoming aware”, that the problems are so numerous and of such a type. ... and that God and the Church summon us to make ourselves responsible in one way or another for seeking and offering a solution.

With each day that passes, this responsibility is falling more and more on each individual church,

on each and every church in the world which is suffering from a shortage of evangelizers. No less obvious is the fact that each by itself is unable to meet this huge commitment.

The missionary call is a law of fraternal charity requiring a more equitable distribution of resources and attention, urging those who have more to share with those who have less, or nothing at all. And this applies not only to the universal Church, but also to the Institute.

Our religious family has responded generously to this appeal. Let us take a glance at what our Brothers have done in the missions, and not through vain complacency. Rather, when we see how much has been done, we shall see how very much still remains to be done. We would be culpably guilty not to take notice of these two aspects of an Institute which is missionary. It is to be hoped that the analysis will produce practical consequences.

B. The present situation in our missionary world

Our Brothers are working in 32 so called missionary countries in Asia, Africa and Oceania, where there is a Christian minority among a vast pagan majority. Besides helping in development and evangelization in the various local Churches, they direct and animate 68 primary schools, 109 secondary schools and 4 centres for higher education. They also direct two catechetical centres and play a decisive role in them.

The many thousands of young people attending these schools belong to a diversity of religions: Islam, Buddhism, Animism, etc. We do not have

information about the proportion of these various groups on hand, but from what we ourselves have clearly seen the schools are well attended and the education provided is highly appreciated.

It is understandable that in such circumstances reciprocal harmony and mutual acceptance offer great opportunities for dialogue between the different beliefs. The same can be said of our schools in countries for the most part of Christian persuasion, as in Greece, where ecumenism is vital and difficult to establish, but where the results are highly beneficial.

There are in Asia 323 missionary Brothers from other countries. In spite of the grievous blow to our development in Vietnam, 795 of the religious personnel are Asians. The proportion varies from country to country. In the District of Colombo, for example, it is 92%.

In Africa, the overall proportion of native Brothers in the Black Continent is 41%; 168 Africans to 242 foreigners.

This wide difference in the number of native Brothers in the districts of these two continents leads me to divide the districts in mission countries according to the greater or less numbers of native personnel.

1. The first group comprises districts in which native Brothers are for the most part responsible for their own organization and work, helped, of course, by a greater or lesser number of Brothers from other regions.

In Africa:

Madagascar with 61 Malgache Brothers, including the Visitor, and 10 foreigners.

Zaire with 21 Zairans, including the Visitor, and 23 foreigners.

West Africa (Upper Volta and Niger) with 27 Voltan Brothers, Visitor included, and 27 foreigners.

In Asia:

The District of Colombo with 133 native Asian Brothers, including the Visitor, and 11 foreigners. In this District, the Ceylonese Brothers have started missionary work outside their own country in India and Pakistan.

Malaysia with 61 Asian Brothers, including the Visitor, and 30 foreigners.

The Philippines with 30 native Brothers, including the Visitor, and 30 foreigners.

Vietnam, with the honourable mention of being the most developed missionary country and so severely tried, as we well know. Its 110 Brothers are all Vietnamese. (8) The sub-District of Thailand, with 3 Europeans, 3 Asians and 3 Thais, has its own scholasticate and novitiate and 4 young men in training.

These districts are still very pleased to have Brothers from abroad to help in various ways with initial and continued formation. It would be desirable to have foreigners in some sectors or for specific projects who would work in establishments dedicated to the people of the country. In any case, perfect coordination and a willingness to cooperate in what is decided by those in charge of the districts is indispensable for efficient work and a positive witness.

(8) Not included are the 44 Vietnamese Brothers outside their country.

2. Another group comprises missionary districts which have some difficulties in expanding, though with good prospects for an increase in numbers and the maturity required for self government because of being able to rely on local vocations.

In Africa:

Ethiopia with 40 native Brothers, including the President of the Delegation, and 12 foreigners. This Delegation was constituted on Aug. 15 with Brother David Detje, Visitor of L.I.N.E., as Delegate of the Superior General. They have 4 Brothers in the novitiate and scholasticate. This is a major step towards self government.

Ruanda with 4 Brothers in the novitiate and scholasticate.

The Cameroons with 4 native Brothers and 4 novices.

In Asia:

Southern India has 19 young Indian Brothers and 3 foreigners.

Pakistan with 4 young Pakistani Brothers.

In Oceania:

Papua/New Guinea with 12 young Papuan Brothers, 6 of them novices, and 16 foreigners.

The faith of the Australian Brothers has achieved this encouraging result in spite of difficulties and disappointing defections.

There are still sectors where it is quite evident that personnel from outside the region is still needed. The chief preoccupation of the Brothers working there is the pastoral of vocations, care in recruiting and selecting candidates and the drafting of programmes adapted to these young men.

What has started to become a reality in the

previous category is not without its problems, however. Particularly this is so as regards the adequate training of the native Brothers so that they can assume responsibility for the management and work in their own districts for the benefit of their own people. In this second category this is the final objective which must not be lost sight of.

Faith in the possibility of integrating these local vocations into the Institute has made possible the happy crowning of the missionary work as testified by the hundreds of Brothers from Africa, Asia and Oceania who share our vocation and collective charism. The future of our work in some countries has been seriously compromised by doubting such a possibility and renouncing a lively hope. And it is a great grief that local work, in which the labours of our members has produced so much and such good fruit, should be extinguished.

3. There is a third group, always to be found somewhere, where there is little guarantee of native vocations for the future.

In Africa:

Egypt, Mauritius, South Africa, Togo, Nigeria, English speaking East Africa, Djibouti and Chad.

In Asia:

The Holy Land, Lebanon and Japan.

In these places the percentage of native religious is minimal, 2% or Nil at present.

In some places, like Japan, there used to be vocations. But these have ceased and the situation is a cause of anxiety.

Elsewhere, as in the Near East, the Brothers are making superhuman efforts to overcome their

difficulties and find native vocations. Their efforts are beginning to bear fruit and inspire new hope.

In any case, as always, plans for future missionary work depend on working for vocations and obtaining practical results. The drastic reduction in the number of expatriate missionaries going to work in these countries makes it very difficult to foster evangelization and development. At the same time, however, it is seen as a call to those working in countries where Christians are in a minority to seek vocations on the spot. It is certainly true that, at times, too much reliance has been placed on people from other latitudes for this apostolate.

Another aspect of the problem is to see whether, in those countries where native vocations cannot be counted upon for the future, we should continue our efforts or give up. Such countries would be, for example, those with a majority or totality of Moslems. According to some criteria, the solution is simple, concentrate our work where we can secure local vocations. That is easy of course, but runs counter to the testimony we should give in the name of the Church and the disinterestedness which should be the character of all missionary work even in countries with no native vocations.

Let us recall what the General Chapter (Cf. Circular 408 p. 55) has to say on the subject. "The Institute, in a spirit of disinterested generosity and hope, is also established in those sectors where, humanly speaking, there exists neither the possibility of development nor expansion for itself. Something would indeed be deficient in its missionary character if it were not equally present in such areas of difficulty and privation... The work of the Brothers

must give witness there of a Church stripped of its grandeur and at the service of the poor”.

This considerable reduction in our missionary front is determined by the reduction in our forces. But our policy is that it should not be precisely these poorer sectors which should be the first to suffer the consequences or bear the greatest brunt.

There are still volunteers for the missions even in districts experiencing a dearth of vocations. This is an authentic sign of life and a guarantee that our vocation is not being frittered away in bureaucracy and a search for profitable results. There is no doubt that this is another and very efficacious means of inviting young men to join us and share a vocation which provides an evangelical response to present day problems.

As I have just said, novices and scholastics in mission sectors are training to become Brothers. And I have the general impression that they are working with faith and method, and that the results assure replacement for the missionaries from abroad. I could quote, though not here, quite admirable examples of this. I can state, however, that, because of the faith and hard work of those who have been in this field for so long, we are one of the congregations with the highest number of Asian and African Brothers.

I cannot omit a passing reference to a practical, even painful, problem affecting those going to the missions or those responsible for their own destiny and organization, and which could compromise the efficacy of their valiant efforts.

There are those who look on missionary cooperation from a very personal point of view. They are

ready to work on their pet project, or on those of which they are, or claim to be, the authors, but refuse to work in institutions or establishments which are our joint responsibility.

It is not a question of a conflict of “charisms”. Such an important word runs the risk of being abused. I simply refer to a confrontation of points of view and criteria about something so vast and varied as a missionary service which is, at the same time, evangelizing and promotional. The conflict will continue and is a sign of life and active zeal, nor is it exclusive to the missions. The immense capacity for dialogue which I mentioned as a fundamental requirement for missionary consciousness, must be exercised in community so that its image and exterior work should not be impaired. It is always possible to find compatibility of views and real cooperation since our missionary work is so varied.

It is of particular importance today to leave the initiative and definite organization little by little to the local Church, the local establishment, both of them “young” in our case. Without becoming simply a “yes man”, the foreign helper should offer his aid and cooperate in what is already in being and consider himself invited to improve it. He should consider himself invited to start new works in which he is not usually the principal actor, but to which he will generously contribute his talents. And remember, without a reverential, exaggerated or “superstitious” respect for what is already in existence and functioning, that our responsibility for an established and valid commitment imposes a continuity meriting every one’s respect. To work in the Lasallian spirit, “together and by associa-

tion", increases our efficiency and commends our testimony, though, at times, it does inhibit some of our personal options.

"Sent" to carry out certain projects in the Church seems to make us feel more "missionary", to be bearers and servants of a "specific mission" which proceeds from Another and is manifested through others.

Similar considerations apply to the dialogue between the centre of the Institute and the districts or regions about the selection of territories or missionary plans. It is no use for the centre to take on a new missionary commitment without previously consulting the district or region which is to take charge of it. In the same way, new missionary undertakings should not be embarked upon, nor existing commitments be terminated, without previously discussing the matter with the center of the Institute which assures the requisite coordination and continuing responsibility.

This is the meaning of the discreetly centralized equilibrium mentioned in proposition 31 of the capitular decisions. It runs as follows:

"Every establishment depends on the 'Body of the Institute' and must therefore be authenticated by the different levels of structure, of government and of animation which engage to assure its future".

But what is the diversity of missionary projects to which I have referred? We can see something of what our missionaries are doing in the regions mentioned, even if only in their ensemble.

In Africa, the 410 brothers mentioned conduct 17 primary and 43 secondary schools, 5 agricultural schools of various kinds, 4 technical schools, likewise

of various kinds, 3 training colleges, 1 commercial school, and help in training seminarists.

They play an extraordinarily large part in catechetical activity in English speaking East Africa.

In Asia there are 49 primary and 64 secondary schools and 4 institutions for advanced studies, 1 training college, 1 agricultural school, 1 school for catechists in Pakistan.

These bare figures are just an indication: they cannot describe nor distinguish, for example, between the different kinds of agricultural development programmes in the Cameroons, Ruanda, Tami, Anababe or Sri Lanka. Nor between the various catechetical services provided, be it in training catechists or directing and generally organizing diocesan school catechesis, or of training groups of active catechists. Nor such activities as the J.O.C. for young Christians in need of adult and religious coordination and support. Nor the originality of a school and catechetical initiative like that of 7 brothers and 35 lay teachers in schools in rural areas, and of other teachers directed and "supervised" by Brothers in the Negro island in the Philippines. These are just a few isolated examples.

The mere fact of quoting, in bulk as it were, such diversification in so many different cultures is impressive and calls for admiration... It is even rather frightening when one considers the disproportion between the numbers of Brothers and of projects. Much excellent missionary work has indeed forged ahead because its authors and promoters were not overmuch concerned as to whether the work was proportionate to their strength and human potential. And God intervened and contributed his share... This does not, however, authorize us

to forget the urgent need of help from outside which I mentioned, nor that of good vocations in the countries themselves, nor that of establishing priorities and examining the ways in which we can make a worthy response to the confidence placed in us by so many pastors and young Churches.

C. How much can we do together

This short insight into the Lasallian missionary world shows the value of its work in the Third World, as also the vast amount still to be done if we wish to render service.

To find a fitting response, districts and regions organize their missionary cooperation in various ways.

1. There are regions and districts which have for a long time had their own particular areas confided to their care and especially catered for by their volunteers. France, England, Ireland, Belgium, Holland, Canada, Spain, the United States... have sent their Brothers and directed their young missionaries to specific places in the developing world where they still maintain their commitments after having devoted enormous energy and perspiration for their well-being. In general they have continued a generous tradition shared by the other religious and other members of their particular churches. This does not lead them to close their eyes to what they might be able to do for those in even greater need. We ask these regions and districts, in spite of their difficulties, to continue to see how they can help in other, but no less practical ways, those

countries or churches which already owe them so much.

2. Other districts have not inherited such commitments from the past but have found a practical way of showing their missionary responsibility by helping through twinning with sectors or districts in the young churches. This is also done by some of the districts mentioned in the first paragraph to diversify their missionary activities and make them more universal. And there are other districts getting ready to take on similar commitments, often by using the good offices of SECOLI.

It is an excellent, realistic and specific way of helping the missions. There is always the danger, however, of operating a closed circuit, selecting a congenial sector without too much prior consultation or analysis of the situation and concentrating on it all their care and attention. This could be to the prejudice of others which are poorer, and it shows a shortsightedness not in harmony with the universality of the missionary spirit. One must take this into account when preparing for twinning and putting it into effect, so that everybody has a fair share of all the advantages.

3. There are still some sectors which have not thought of either of the above ways of being directly concerned with the problems of one missionary area or another, who have not perhaps the manpower or the means even to think of such a commitment. This does not prevent them from contacting our Central Service, SECOLI, or from seeing how they can better contribute to the efforts of all. There is no lack of means as I shall show in what follows.

Different possibilities of missionary cooperation

1. To begin with the most tangible and external, here are a few data on material help for our missions. I have often repeated that if the term used is "our missions", it does not imply any exclusiveness, nor that there are not other initiatives worthy of being helped. It just happens to be a priority called for by our fraternal communion.

There is no need to state that any kind of help for poor countries requires enormous sums of money and many urgent projects and services depend on its being forthcoming.

From the information received, including that provided by the Brothers Visitors in response to the last inquiry, the total aid given to missionary districts through various channels amounted to an equivalent of \$1,809,276 in 1979 and to \$2,017,275 in 1980. SECOLI sent out \$190,946 in 1979 and \$109,798 in 1980 for the Institute mission work from funds received from the districts. It also obtained \$232,576 in 1979 and \$109,798 in 1980 from various organizations. This means that SECOLI has, with everyone's help, contributed 10 to 11% of the total missionary aid quoted (\$1,809,276 and \$2,017,275).

These are the bare facts, without comment, which lead to some interesting conclusions. I leave them aside, however, in the interests of brevity and limit myself to a short reflection on the centralization and consolidated disposal of such financial assistance which SECOLI furnishes and, in a way, seems to represent.

With no claim to a monopoly, and with due respect to local or personal initiative, I would like

to insist on the undoubted advantage of the centralization of our subsidies through a world wide service such as SECOLI.

— Better distribution according to a scale of priorities which can be established only from complete information.

— More balanced and enlightened criteria in determining priorities.

— Rejection of the "mendicant" system where the cleverest and most importunate in making requests are often better served than those who really are in need of more assistance.

Congratulations and thanks, therefore, to those who send material aid to the poorest, and see that it arrives in time. There are evidently notable differences which do not always reflect the differences in financial resources. But this is not meant to be a role of honour, and I confine myself to expressing my appreciation to all those who do in fact support us (9).

2. It is *help with personnel* which is much

(9) Since some remarks have been made on the subject, I think that this is the place to recall the distinction between the "Sharing Fund" and the "Secoli Fund". The former was inaugurated by the General Chapter, proposition 81,3, as an expression of an equitable distribution of wealth between the districts, the less poor making a spontaneous promise to send a sum periodically to a fund to help the poorer sectors. This money is used for *Brothers, communities and districts* who ask for and need assistance. SECOLI on the other hand, receives and administers sums for *missionary work or projects* under the management of the Brothers in the Third World. The decision as to the amounts to be allotted from both funds is taken at a meeting of the General Council.

superior and very much more urgent and specific for us.

The 597 Brothers who, as I have already said, have spontaneously offered themselves for work outside their districts and personally help the poorest, need to be helped in their turn and in many cases replaced by others who will volunteer to alleviate those unfortunate and frequently unjust inequalities I mentioned when speaking of missionary awareness. When there is a general shortage of personnel, can we still think of such volunteers and obtain them at a moment's notice?

Happily, volunteers still come forward, not as many as necessary, but generously offering their much needed services. According to the inquiry I mentioned, there are none from some districts, a modest number from others and a notable number from eight of them. There should, in fact, not be any district which is not willing to release some of its members so that they can go to the help of those in greater need. The work of the kingdom has often prospered more from the widow's mite than from the ostentatious gifts of the rich (Mark 12), and that in different ways. Sharing with one who is poorer than oneself has never ruined anyone... And numbers will not increase by refusing to send a Brother to the Third World, but rather by showing our disinterestedness and our generosity for the salvation of the world to those young men who are seriously thinking of consecrating their life to something worthwhile.

But it is not necessary that this volunteering should be strictly individual. It is rather the district, the community in general, which should represent itself as "volunteering" help for the missions. When

such and such a Brother offers to help other churches or sectors of the Institute, he will be respected, trained and sustained by the spirit and behaviour of all if they show real interest in his initiative. It is always the district's responsibility, and the region's where the case requires, to stimulate and help in this fraternal assistance. Generous provision should be made in the "community plan" as to the manner in which it should be offered.

I would remind you that there are two kinds of volunteers, a missionary for life, or a volunteer for a more or less lengthy period of time, or for such and such a specific project. In either case we continue to rely on those who feel moved by the Spirit to consecrate their lives to the missions. It is easy to understand the continuing importance of this kind of missionary work when we analyze the complexity of our missionary service and the requirements for good inculturation.

But we also count on a larger number of volunteers, like "Fidei Domum" or similar, serving for a limited time in the Third World or in quite specific and practical activities as mentioned above; or for service or projects such as holidays spent in providing our personal assistance for the alleviation of needs in given areas. Problems multiply and their urgency clamours for a decisiveness and a charity which go beyond frontiers and take no account of distance. Such a contribution also provides an experience of the realities of the world, especially the world of the poor, which no theoretical study of the question which does not involve one personally, could equal, much less surpass. I have already indicated on page 31 the urgency of the help we should be most interested in giving for the

more thorough training of our young Brothers in the Young Churches.

Refugees are an example of a very present and worrying problem in the world, especially the millions in extreme poverty in Africa and Asia. Father Arrupe, in his report to the 6th General Assembly of SCEAM in Yaounde, June/July 1981, mentioned more than 5 million, of whom more than 60% live outside the camps organized for them. The Pontifical Commission, Cor Unum, has spoken of the duty "of the local Church to be always on guard to see that these refugees in their territory do not become the victims of wretchedness and injustice". But this is just one more case of the Young Churches being overwhelmed by the size of the problem and the extreme limits of their own resources in men and materials.

Once again the generosity and availability of religious have come to the fore to alleviate such needs. There are diocesan or national movements, as in Rome, where the Union of Superiors General has set up a Secretariat to coordinate assistance and to distribute it more in accordance with the needs. If you wish to do something similar, address yourself to SECOLI, Rome, for useful information on how to set about it.

I would add that this movement for help and care for the developing world will be much more efficacious if we, religious and teachers, associate pupils, former pupils, friends and associates in such work. The Christian education we provide for our disciples, and this is the aim of our vocation and ministry, would be seriously inadequate if it did not include this missionary concept and practical initiation in the exigencies of charity and justice.

The Gospel induces us to remember and understand (Matt. 25) that "at the end of time we shall be judged on our love" (St. John of the Cross). We know of some practical examples such as "holidays spent on some project in the third world", very much in keeping with what I have just said. My only wish is that there may be more of such activities and that they continue to be better coordinated. SECOLI is also available here and can supply very useful information.

But I must stop somewhere and forego all that could still be said on the subject for fear of making this letter excessively long.

D. Some conclusions

And now to a few unadorned and practical conclusions. What I have said is not mere spiritual or theoretical reflection, but calls for more concerted action and fellowship in initiatives and projects inspired by motives intimately shared by all.

1. If we feel a common call to specific service to the world in the Church, and such service requires that it be not confined to domestic circles,

It the immense problems and needs of the world are there facing us like a challenge and a "cry of the poor", be they near or far away, and it would be unrighteous to turn our backs on them,

If Christian charity, with the characteristics of our Lasallian vocation as recalled in number 4, impels us to go out of our way and be open handed to those who for centuries have been on the fringe of society,

We, then, are called upon to participate in these activities and responsibilities for the the salvation of all men and for human and just living conditions for those who have had and continue to have difficulty in attaining access to the cultural, religious, economic and social resources we enjoy.

2. To have a precise understanding of such situations and for our response and cooperation to be valid and adequate for the most part, we must see that we have a thorough knowledge of such situations of moral and material poverty. We must broadcast such information, accompanied always by a Christian and exact analysis, among those with whom we live and whom we want to evangelize in one way or another.

And we need to start thinking about serious and appropriate training if we want to take part in the fight against religious ignorance, wretchedness, lack of culture and injustice among those peoples seeking ways of improving their development, in order to facilitate the promotion of Christianity among those who have not yet heard the Good News.

We wish, and it is our duty, to come to their aid with a specific contribution in accordance with our vocation, with profound respect for the culture and the churches we want to help, cooperating in this service rather than developing our own pre-determined plans, generously open to any others seeking the same results, provided they do not clash with our fundamental fidelity to Christ and his Church.

3. Strength and guarantees of good work and even better results will come from **coordinating our**

projects and experiences by means of dialogue and structures of mutual support. These will assure and animate the information, training and improved communication at all levels. There must be groups for animation and a special secretariat in each district or region to guarantee such objectives. At the world level, SECOLI will always be ready to perform this service for the benefit of all in their various undertakings, as was re-affirmed by the last Chapter. (Cf. Circular 403, pp. 85, 86).

4. Faced with the wide front of our missionary work and the constant changes in situations and problems, we must each year compare what we can do with the requirements and needs of our times and of the Third World. This requires from all of us close attention to reflection and dialogue, dialogue especially between the centre of the Institute and the mission sectors, and the districts and regions in a position to give such aid.

In a few cases, we see that we need to create some new work so as to be better able to respond to new needs and new questions and thus satisfy some of the requests from depressed areas. In isolated cases there is no other choice but to abandon what we cannot care for adequately or what is not an absolute priority. Such priorities are always in keeping with our own characteristics: educational service of the poor, catechetics, promotion of those on the fringe of society, elimination of injustice which prevents them from understanding and achieving their dignity and destiny. And all of these things are in accordance with urgent needs which have been thoroughly examined and in harmony with existing commitments which continue to be

valid if the work is renewed and adjusted to present realities.

The work will normally be promoted by the animating bodies already mentioned whose task is usually to take decisions and bring about their realization. (Visitors and councils in mission countries and those working with them). It will be followed up and urged on by SECOLI and, definitely, by the Superior and his Council with particular attentiveness.

As an extraordinary measure, and with a view to the next General Chapter, we are thinking of calling the competent representatives of such sectors as are in closer relation with missionary service to *two international meetings*, one in 1983, the other in 1985. The agenda and programmes of evaluation and planning for these two meetings will be well prepared in advance.

May all this work of information; training and coordination serve to increase the efforts and tone of all that is being done for the so-called Third World by those working in it and those who are aware of so much effort and give it their support. In this way the vast amount of good accomplished by such service in the Institute during more than 150 years of missionary expansion will continue with renewed vigour.

* * *

This letter was finished on the feast of St. Francis Xavier and is published on the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. May the inspiration and assistance of her who is the "Mater Ecclesiae", and the passionate ardour and total commitment of the

Patron of the Missions encourage our increased creativity and the more generous participation of all in the service of all nations. And may the Spirit "who gives life" make it really evangelical.

Such is my wish and prayer as

I remain cordially

Your brother and servant in St. John Baptist de La Salle.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "H. José Pablo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left from the start of the name.

INFORMATION OF INTEREST

for the first quarter of 1982

I shall be away from Rome, visiting the communities of Asia for the first three months of the year. Those who need to communicate with me urgently can write directly. Some dates and addresses are given below. But write well in advance because of postal delays.

From Jan. 12 to 24	Colombo (Sri Lanka)
From Jan. 24 to Feb. 4	Bangkok
From Feb. 4 to 11	Manila
From Feb. 11 to 17	Japan
From Feb. 23 to Mar. 4	Australia
From Mar. 7 to 21	Singapore and Penang

The addresses are those of the Visitors as given in the MEMENTO.