

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS



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EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE POOR
AND
THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE

GENERAL COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

In his letter of May 15, 1979, Brother Superior General gave a preliminary report, together with some comments, on the responses received from the Districts and Delegations in reply to Proposition No. 14 of the General Chapter of 1976 (1). « *Each district will submit, before December 1978, a report to the General Council in which it will show how it has put into practice (and in the immediate future will do so) the principles of the Declaration and the orientations of the present Chapter concerning the educational service of the poor and action on behalf of justice. Annual review and updating by the district itself is also called for* » (2).

In themselves, the comments presented by Brother Superior already constitute an important and stimulating statement. However, he himself said that additional material regarding this matter would be forthcoming: « *As already mentioned, a formal circular or document from the General Council will be forthcoming, containing a full account of the answers provided by the districts. This material will be sent to each community in early 1980* » (3).

The present dossier has been prepared in fulfillment of this commitment. If the document is appearing somewhat later than previously announced — early 1980 — it is simply because comments from various sources and different parts of the Institute indicate that the preceding dossiers (Consecration — Mission — The Young Churches — Formation

(1) Cf. Letter of May 15, 1979, pp. 20-46.

(2) Cf. Circular 403, p. 78.

(3) Cf. Letter of May 15, 1979, p. 21.

— Community Life) had not as yet been adequately studied and that it would be preferable to allow a further lapse of time before undertaking the publication of a new document.

Coincidentally, circumstances are such that the dossier is now appearing at the start of the Tercentenary year. Its appearance at this time is more than a symbolic one; rather, it provides us with an opportunity to highlight this particular year by a more active study and commitment on our part, by making us re-live the call of him whom God raised up « *to give a Christian education to the poor* ».

Ten districts or delegations did not submit their reports as called for by Proposition 14. So we can see for ourselves the extent of the response, which though not unanimous, is nevertheless considerable.

However, since the request as formulated in Proposition 14 allowed for broad interpretations, the reports submitted are very different from one another, as regards both their format and their content.

Some reports were drawn up by the Visitor alone. Others were developed by the District Council or by an « ad hoc » committee. A number of reports were based on actual research surveys, e.g., the economic status of the pupils' families, the social classes represented by the student population of the school, and, in one case, the manner in which the Brothers and the school are perceived by the local people.

The reports vary still more as far as their contents are concerned. At times it is very difficult to distinguish between what is actually being done and what is merely desirable, or between the reality and the plans. Furthermore, the reports often lack the adequate quantitative data needed to enable

a reader to determine whether the project cited is unique, or whether it constitutes part of a widely implemented program.

General Impression

In his letter, to which reference was previously made, Brother Superior has already given his *more salient impressions*. These will not be repeated here. Rather, this circular will present an initial glimpse of themes, as well as some observations and suggestions which we will have ample opportunity to develop subsequently.

A General Concern

The reports give clear evidence that educational service of the poor is a matter of *general concern* throughout the Institute. The programs are varied, the projects numerous, and explicit reference to the Holy Founder is constant. However, here it is not a matter of overstating our activity in this area, or of engaging in triumphalism. Nevertheless, this general concern for the poor permits us to identify a common thread in the thinking of the majority of the Brothers. Therefore, in this context, the criticisms that will subsequently be presented are in no way intended as a reproach or a condemnation. Rather they are intended to express the *desire* to live *more profoundly* a type of service of which there are already so many examples.

Still Inadequate Results

We have just said that there was no question of engaging in triumphalism. In fact, a careful reading of the re-

ports only confirms the conclusion formulated by the Chapter of 1976: « *Despite such efforts, we must admit that in many countries and in numerous regions, the Brothers are still mainly engaged in institutions which serve the middle classes and even the rich* » (Circular 408, p. 41).

Therefore, what remains to be done greatly exceeds what has already been accomplished. And the former persists as a challenge to the Institute to re-establish the balance between our apostolates on behalf of the poor and those that we maintain in favor of those social classes that are less in need of our services. What is of greater importance than this latter situation and the commentary and nuances it evokes is the global affirmation of the Chapter, which is supported by statistical data, and which shows that the major portion of our work involves youths belonging to financially stable families.

On the other hand, some fifteen reports indicate that in these districts this challenge has been taken up and that in each a bold and sound district-wide policy has been developed in an effort to redress the situation. Yet, we also understand why after a period of only two years (1976-1978), results are still somewhat intangible. And this is why quite often only what is being planned is described, rather than a project in operation.

A Variety of Approaches

Their differing ways of considering service to the poor serve to bring out some *striking differences* among the districts. For some it involves a *group approach*, developed at the district-wide level and then ratified by a District Chapter. Such a district has set up a ten-year plan which envisages an evolution within our institutions and requires the training of the Brothers needed to direct and supervise these new apostolates. Also, for some years now, other

districts have implemented a policy that systematically gave preference to technical schools and programs in agriculture. On the contrary, in other districts — and unfortunately they are the most numerous — educational service of the poor is seen only as a *special project* to compensate for the fact that a large number of the Brothers are working with the well-to-do classes. Or it involves the work done by *individual Brothers* with district support, and, at times, as a result of a district initiative. But neither of these situations represents a real collective commitment by the Brothers.

An Added Thought

Another important feature found in the majority of the reports is the citing of facts which seek to explain the deficiencies identified and acknowledged. However, when this is done, rarely is mention made of any *study or reflection* by the district, regarding our service on behalf of the poor, and, even to a lesser degree, regarding the promotion of justice. Obviously, nobody expected to find theoretical considerations in these reports, since after all they are reports, not learned treatises. Nevertheless, in face of the tangible difficulties which are mentioned and that hamper our service to the underprivileged, the reports do not give the impression that adequate study-reflection has been made, either among the Brothers themselves, or in conjunction with the local Church as also various civic or social groups. Certainly such reflection and study have taken place. But the failure of the reports to mention this indicates the minor importance attached to such study or reflection.

The Promotion of Justice

The promotion of justice is seldom mentioned in the reports, at least in an explicit manner. And from the obser-

vations made and the programs described, it is obvious that little connection is made between the service of the poor and the promotion of justice. This failure to mention the promotion of justice in an explicit manner, and the fact that no analysis has been made of its relationship to service of the poor seems to indicate that the various dimensions of this perspective have not yet been fully grasped. Far from considering the promotion of justice as a sort of separate — and extraneous — issue, we should view action on behalf of justice as essential to the broader view of service to the poor that is desired by the contemporary Church, since it gives this service a firmer social dimension.

THE PRESENT DOSSIER IS COMPOSED OF SIX PARTS:

1) *A summary of the reports involving service of the poor in the schools* — the content of the reports, the thinking of the Brothers regarding this service, and some reflections of the General Council.

2) *Service of the poor outside the school* — a presentation of ongoing activities and their objectives, the relation these have with the school itself, the need of support for these by the Community and by the district.

3) *The promotion of justice* — what the reports say about this matter and the conclusions that can be drawn from the brevity of these comments; action on behalf of justice which includes service of the poor and gives it a broader meaning.

4) *Sensitization of the Brothers* — the request for this is found throughout the reports. This topic will be presented in two parts — the role of the Founder in this sensitization process, and the various elements involved in acquiring a *social conscience*, the fruit of the sensitizing process.

5) *Guidelines* — this portion of the document summarizes the ten major guidelines or directives that have crystallized during the course of our study while preparing this dossier.

6) *Examples*.

PART ONE

THE SCHOOL AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE POOR

The reports mention a great variety of activities and undertakings in the different sections of the Institute, and these are accompanied by accounts which reflect on them and evaluate them. We shall consider successively: the contents of the reports, how the Brothers judge their activities, and some reflections of the General Council.

THE CONTENT OF THE REPORTS

The Economic Status of the School

The reports indicate an important feature — the effective acceptance of pupils coming from low-income families is largely influenced by the status or type of school in which the Brothers are involved, i.e., whether and to what degree it receives aid from the Government.

Current situations differ widely in this respect. The spectrum goes from those that are fully supported, including construction and maintenance of buildings, to a minimal degree of assistance, often a mere token, and which frequently is in no way related to real factors of the actual cost of living. There are also a number of countries where

the school receives no aid whatsoever, because of political or even constitutional reasons.

However, while it is impossible to draw up a complete list of the variety and nature of aid programs, it is interesting to note that the number of countries that are providing substantial assistance to Catholic schools is significant and that the number has increased over the past twenty years. Such is now the case with all the countries of Western Europe, as also with Canada, many in Latin America, and several in Africa and Asia.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that most of the countries which provide no such assistance are found in the Third World. In these instances, the issue is one of economics rather than politics. Yet, the problems arising from the receipt of government support are very evident to the Catholic school, even in those countries where support is actively being sought, in order to make the institution accessible to all regardless of financial position.

Three comments on the subject are in order at this point:

1) In those countries where there exists a fairly satisfactory level of support for the Catholic schools, the situation is generally the result of a long process of negotiation. In other instances, the initiative was taken by the institutions themselves and the government's involvement in providing support has been subsequently forthcoming. The aforementioned are at once an appeal to and a source of encouragement for those who do not as yet benefit from such subsidies, to inspire them to initiate or undertake efforts toward obtaining a just share of aid. It is evident, moreover, that in all such efforts, the initiative must be shouldered by all concerned. In effect, the role of the Brothers in such efforts is to make the parents of the pupils, the teachers, and the friends of the school aware of the need for organizing and planning a

concerted action on the civil and political levels, an action that is peaceful, but necessarily demanding patience, and one that keeps in mind the possibilities available vis-a-vis the constitution of the nation as also the economic potential of the government.

2) It is not enough that a school be supported financially by the government for the former to be accessible to needy pupils. A number of reports point out that the Catholic school continues to be seen as a school for the elite, even though its fees are modest or have been eliminated completely. The collective memory of the people in the surrounding areas maintains the impression of that *school where you must pay*. Inversely, some *tuition* schools that are better integrated into the area and that are more open to the people in the neighborhood are more accessible *psychologically*, in a manner of speaking. It is a matter of the image that the school projects — either as an individual institution or as part of the Catholic school system within a given country. We will have occasion to return to this particular issue later, when referring to types of schools and the pedagogical adaptations involved.

3) This last comment is based on remarks found in the reports of many of those countries which have succeeded in obtaining financial aid from the government. Frequently such assistance involves « quid pro quo » arrangements, with the government saying: « We will subsidize you, but also impose some measure of control ». The point in question is the extent and type of control so that the Christian school may be assured of the freedom proper and necessary to its sound functioning, especially vis-a-vis its programs, its methods, and its hiring of appropriate teachers. This is why the civic-political activity of associations of parents, administrators, and teachers' unions must exercise careful vigilance in this matter.

Solidarity in the service of the most needy

Imaginative undertakings are many in those countries where the schools receive no financial help from the public treasury.

One of the oldest types, and one well known in the Institute since it dates back to St. Yon, consists in the *twinning* of a tuition school and a free school. From the reports two observations can be made concerning this particular idea:

Firstly, this form of twinning is possible in those countries where the economic conditions warrant it, obviously, but also where the social situation permits this. The worth of the arrangement depends on the manner in which the *free school* is treated, on the attention given to its organizational structure, on the quality of the personnel involved, and on the type of education offered therein.

Secondly, this type of arrangement is diminishing. It affronts the sensibilities of many countries that seek to tear down social barriers and to make all schools accessible to all young people. Moreover, in no report do we find this solution presented as a model for future use, but rather it is mentioned as the result of existing socio-economic conditions within a given country over which the Brothers have no control.

On the other hand, many reports describe the development of a *solidarity fund* involving Catholic schools. This fund is contributed to by the larger institutions or those more financially sound, and is so structured that no one institution is said to be in a position of superiority or in a state of inferiority. This compensation fund doesn't necessarily involve only FSC institutions, but more often than not includes the Catholic schools of a particular geographical area.

The other types of financial resources are well known — the collection of donations from benefactors, some of the

latter involving the Communities themselves, e.g. the giving of scholarships. Also, programs and social activities are organized by parents' associations, which, in addition to contributing to better social relations, help appreciably in an economic fashion.

One of the innovative forms introduced in some institutions consists of a *graduated schedule of fees*, based on the financial resources of each family. This approach requires a great deal of tact in terms of the manner of obtaining the information required to determine the different level of fees to be paid.

Numerous reports refer to the value of *programming* in the area of funding. Such programming looks to limiting to only a few institutions the funding provided, instead of spreading it out over all the schools. The programming also looks to the establishment of more permanent sources of financial revenue, e.g. endowments, agricultural production, donors who subscribe to a regular on-going drive for funds, and so on.

Such schemes are evidently not inexhaustible, and so many are brought up repeatedly in the various reports. This rather cursory enumeration of possible procedures should not in any way hide the anguish that is frequently expressed in the face of the problem of accepting pupils from low-income families, as also the arduous efforts that an impressive number of Brothers have undertaken to meet the challenge of this problem.

FOR WHOM ARE WE WORKING?

The poor:

« They are the persons having a marginal existence, whose security depends on a menial job, of which the wages are insufficient to provide a minimum standard of living for their family. They are also those who live in subhuman conditions of hunger, violence, and sickness, left at the margins of organized society by a variety of handicaps » (Report of the General Chapter, 1976, Circular No. 408, p. 38).

The various District reports explore the issue of poverty in its many different aspects. Many mention that the lack of material resources is the most pressing need because it frequently leads to deficiencies, both intellectual and affective, and that such poverty always aggravates tangible manifestations of such deficiencies.

The most frequently mentioned situation is that of pupils coming from *families with low or inadequate incomes*. Within this category of families, obviously, are those of daily wage-earners, but also, and this more and more frequently, are those of peasants or farm workers, and, in general, all those who have no fixed or steady source of salary.

The current world-wide economic crisis is closely linked with the problem of unemployment. The latter problem entails two particular dimensions — one involving parents who strive to send their children to tuition schools, the other, relating to the young adults of working age who suffer considerably from the serious uncertainty viv-a-vis the question of what type of work to choose and how they should prepare themselves for it. Frequently, they do find employment, but it is work for which they have not been trained or offers little job security.

Another type of socially underprivileged people make its appearance in the reports, above all from the developed coun-

tries of the West: *immigrants*. This particular group will be discussed in the portion of this dossier dealing with the educational service of the poor outside the school (see p. 34). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the reports do consider the school itself as being a means which can and must be adapted to meet the service needs of this socially deprived group. Unfortunately, many educators tend to relegate too quickly any remedial action on behalf of the latter to non-school agencies.

The activity on behalf of the children of immigrant families described by many districts is varied and of high quality. Such activity is based on the need for respecting the original culture of these groups. Such activity also leads to interesting research on the manner of reconciling the original culture of these children with that of the recipient country. Also, it forces the teacher to develop imaginative procedures for offering programs that encourage the young people to preserve the richness of their native culture, all the while adapting themselves to their new social surroundings. Clearly, this is one type of service on behalf of the poor that forces educators to be innovative.

In addition to this basic research on the adaptation of the school so that it can provide such service for immigrants, other types of activity are also described, both school-related and non-school based. Of particular interest is the assistance given to *adults* — teaching them the local language, introducing them to the local customs, informing them of their rights in terms of work, employment, health and accident insurance, salary benefits, etc. Often such activity is carried out in conjunction with other social service organizations, e.g. labor unions. This type of activity also usually involves participation in efforts to promote social justice.

The reports coming from the United States point out the necessity of giving attention to ethnic minorities, especially the blacks and the hispanics. Programs developed for these groups combine the psycho-social resources of acceptance and

the adaptation of the content matter of courses to the needs and level of the pupils. A number of such programs are already functioning, while others are still in the planning stage. The socio-religious problem involved is one of major proportion.

Similar views have come from Australia. As for the Districts of Latin America where large indigenous populations dwell, the apostolic efforts of the Brothers are more and more geared to the Indians, especially in terms of their culture and languages.

Finally, mention should be made of the indirect assistance provided by those institutions who make their athletic facilities available to organizations working with the underprivileged. This type of service was frequently mentioned.

OTHER URGENT NEEDS TO WHICH WE ARE RESPONDING

Among services for the poor that the reports often list is the activity undertaken on behalf of the young who are mentally retarded, physically handicapped, deprived of affection, and so on. While recognizing the quality of such dedicated service and the urgency of the needs of such persons, we categorize such activity as being outside of service *to the poor strictly speaking*. This, because though such activity appears to us to be inspired by a sound Christian spirit, and it is laudable and necessary, it can be provided in Christian schools that charge tuition, as well as in those that give priority to the poor.

The Mentally Handicapped

Numerous reports refer to the efforts being made to assist those pupils whose intellectual capacity is deficient or those who are mentally retarded. This work is carried out in collaboration with the parents, psychologists, and doctors. It also entails the use of institutional academic resources, e.g., the opening of classes or sections specifically adapted to serve such pupils, the development of specialized academic courses, the offering of special supplementary courses (often given gratuitously), the establishment of special schools to care for those unable to cope with the regular instructional programs.

The enumeration of our efforts in these areas demonstrates that concerned educators are alert to existing situations. Frequently, it is in those very countries where instruction is the most sophisticated that the organizational structures are so elaborate that a significant number of young people are effectively shunted aside. The affective attention of interested educators allows for identification of these deficiencies in school systems that are seemingly so well organized.

In many countries, the Catholic schools, and among these the Brothers' institutions rank high, seem to be characterized by a greater concern for such cases, i.e., slow learning students, cast-offs from the official school system, the maladjusted pupils, etc. Having to send a student away, for want of an academic program appropriate to him, is considered by many as an *anti-Lasallian* sin, calling into question the very reliability of the system within the school.

The Physically Handicapped

Approximately ten institutions are involved exclusively in serving the physically handicapped — the blind, deaf, cripples. The trend that manifests itself much more clearly, though statistically it is not possible to quantify, consists in

the *inclusion of such handicapped persons* in the daily normal living routine of their healthy companions, looking to the reciprocal learning benefits arising therefrom. In some instances, a specialized residential program sends its interns to follow courses in a regular school. In other cases, our own schools seek out such collaborative activity, confident that their pupils will benefit significantly from direct contact with such handicapped persons.

Youth with Affective Needs

The lack of emotional affection and love that many young people suffer from is often mentioned in the reports. However, this particular problem appears more frequently in some social conditions. Among the latter, the most common are those of broken families or families where one or other parent is away for periods of time. Such conditions exist among the wealthy as well as the poor, and it is important to perceive this situation when it exists. At times poor scholastic results are a very clear indication of the interior suffering of such pupils. In such situations, the reports indicate the need to know, with moderation and discretion, the living conditions of the pupils and their families, as also their social milieu.

Often such young people live in *boarding schools*. As indicated in many reports, the organizational structure of these institutions must be so adapted as to avoid adding to the problems created by the existing unusual family situation. Other Communities involve themselves with foster homes, and, especially in English-speaking areas, they assume responsibility for schools seeking to rehabilitate youths remanded by the judicial system. In many countries, the latter type of rehabilitation is no longer carried out in institutions for delinquents, but rather the task is confided to educators who work with the young in their *own social milieu*.

The services made available to assist such young people entail, in addition to academic instruction adapted to their mental ability, organizations providing psychological orientation, social services, employment opportunities, community activities, etc. Such programs require close contact with society and cooperation with educational personnel that is not strictly *school related*.

Development of a Broader Perspective

In seeking to provide assistance for the needy, many reports mention the initiatives undertaken to sensitize the pupils of the upper social classes to the reality of poverty and the needs of the poor. It was thought preferable to list this information and the descriptions of such activities in that section of this document dealing specifically with the promotion of justice. This activity can be better appreciated in that context.

HOW THE BROTHERS JUDGE THEIR ACTIVITY

1) Prudent Satisfaction

A frank evaluation of the resources at their disposal and their activity on behalf of the poor has led some Districts to express a degree of satisfaction with the efforts undertaken. In reality, the school is a veritable center of social relations and, as such, it can encourage action not only by the young, but also by parents, teachers, former students, friends, etc. A significant network of persons can thus be sensitized to the value of and need for service to the poor.

Nevertheless, quite frequently, this certitude quickly gives way to an attitude that is still questioning and searching. Here we quote from a report to which many Brothers undoubtedly would subscribe: *The affirmation occasionally made at meetings that we are doing all that we can on behalf of the poor is illusionary or is the result of a conscience that is too easily placated. We do meet some poor people and some categories of needy persons. We must continue to search for means to serve these to a greater degree and in a more evangelical manner. Yet, we must also keep an eye out for discovering the new needs that are surfacing all around us.*

2) Awareness of some Limits

The reports highlight the obstacles that affect and constrain our activity in favor of the poor. Those mentioned most frequently are the following:

- *The Status of the Schools*

We have already discussed at length the significant role that governmental assistance — or its absence — plays in our schools. If we summarize the consequences of this role, we can state the following:

- The need for requiring tuition fees imposes limits to the admission of the most underprivileged students. This fact is so well known that there is no need to comment further about this topic.

- Occasionally, the government controls the admission of students, requiring, for example, the admittance of those who reside in the area near our school, whatever might be their religion or the economic status of their families.

- It also happens that the government controls the hiring of teachers, and in some cases reserves to itself the

right to do so. It is in this context that some Western nations note the following: as a result of the decrease in population, there is a surplus of teachers, and the government allocates teaching positions according to criteria designed to combat unemployment rather than those designed to foster development of a sound teaching corps.

— Inversely, in those countries facing a growth of population, the increase in the school age population leads to a dearth of teachers, which leads to the hiring of anyone who is available, rather than the individuals whom it would be preferable to hire.

— According to some reports, in those countries where no possibility of government assistance is foreseen, a resignation to the situation as it develops. It seems nothing can be done to change the existing situation. One becomes accustomed to this condition and attention to the poor wanes.

- *The Organizational Rigidity of some School Systems*

A significant number of countries have school systems that are highly controlled by the government, quite independently of whether or not financial assistance is provided. Such control is exercised via regular visits for inspecting the schools and by examinations organized by the official academic authorities. Very often such systems are elitist. One report submitted states the matter thus: *We very much wish the school to be of service to everyone, but we observe that through its system of selective admissions, the school rejects those who have the most difficulty in gaining admission, i.e., the poor. What can we do to be of service to such young people?*

- *The Geographical Location of the Schools*

The reports often mention the utility of establishing our schools in areas populated by low-income families. Nevertheless, the world-wide contemporary phenomenon of the shift

in patterns of migration to the urban areas and of changes within the urban sectors themselves plays a very influential role in this matter.

The schools established in well-to-do sections frequently experience a shift in environment when less affluent families move in. Yet, such schools do not succeed in altering the *class of pupils* that frequents the institution. It seems that the image of the school, as being one for the financially comfortable, is difficult to change, despite the good will of the administration and teachers of the institution, and their desire to welcome the children of the new residential class into their school.

The opposite situation is also mentioned, where schools have benefited from such social changes to open themselves to the less financially favored families, or where the institutions continue to welcome lower income families, even though the neighborhood itself has become populated with richer family groups.

While the location of the school is an important factor, generally it is of lesser importance than the *image of exclusivity* that is projected.

Another, aspect linked to the issue of the population shift, to or away from the city, involves the surplus of school facilities in some localities that have been depopulated along with the serious lack of Catholic schools in newly developed areas, especially when low income and/or young families constitute the local community. In some regions, a *geographical school plan* has been organized among the Catholic institutions in order to deal with this problem.

• *The Consequences of Success*

Many reports mention the following phenomenon: schools were established to serve the poor and low-income people some twenty or more years ago. Subsequently, our graduates, thanks in part to the fine education that we have given them,

have moved up the social ladder. Out of affection and gratitude, these persons continue to send their children to our schools. However, such persons now belong to a totally different social class.

No one would think of reproaching a school for the success it has achieved. Yet, the issue of its pupil clientele still remains. When this type of loyalty among our former students becomes excessive, it deprives us of the freedom necessary to welcome the new classes of poor which we find in every society.

• *Our Methodologies*

A reading of the various reports evokes the following observation: there is little mention made of pedagogical research into the possible adaptation of our academic programs to the culture, language, and social habits of the young coming to us from poor families. Frequently, these pupils find in our schools a culture and a language quite different from their own. The dossier on our mission underscored this fact when it spoke of *acculturation* or of *inculturation* (1).

On the other hand, we realize that such research is going on. One report specifically stated that the Brothers are very interested in this matter, even if they don't seem to discuss it among themselves. In any case, we want to call attention to this deficiency, without drawing any unfair conclusions. Since pedagogical research in general concerns us **very much**, perhaps we have simply failed to pay adequate attention to orienting such research toward how we might better welcome and accept these young people whose condition of poverty makes it difficult for them to benefit fully from their presence in our schools.

(1) Circular no. 408, pp. 91-96.

● *Ignorance of the World of the Poor*

A number of the reports received seek to delve further into the cause of the limited involvement of our schools in service to the poor. These reports identify such causes as arising from what many refer to as *ignorance of the world of the poor*. Some even seem to deny the very existence of such a world, believing it is merely an extreme fringe of society.

The reports state that frequently such ignorance stems from the formation we have received, as also from our tendency to ensconce ourselves in the academic world which we have developed.

The *formation* received, in effect, caused us to grow up in the protected world of the religious life. Now we must become more aware of current ideas that will help us appreciate the situation of the men of our times. Without in the least way reflecting anti-intellectualism, some reports stressed the need to keep in mind the apostolic ministry for which we are preparing ourselves when we choose our higher studies. It is necessary to note that at times this choice was guided mainly by a concern for one's individual advancement. As a result, some Brothers were turned away from service of the poor because of the studies they made and directed themselves more toward a scientific research independent of any apostolic purpose.

As for the *academic world* in which we live, it is well known that it has a tendency to become a microcosm closed in on itself. There only with difficulty are young people perceived in their global reality. Rather the teacher is inclined to think of them only in terms of the ease or the difficulty they have in assimilating an academic program. We will have occasion to return to this matter.

Irritants: Also, there are Brothers who are irritated by this insistence on service to the poor. They find it historically inaccurate because, they say, our holy Founder occupied himself

with all, rich or poor. Others simply find this insistence to be unfair, because, they say, the Brothers have not chosen where they will teach, and they should not be blamed for practicing obedience by working among young people who are better off financially. District Councils have remarked that we cannot lightly abandon commitments to conduct schools that were freely accepted in the past. Others, finally, see in this insistence on teaching the poor a craving, a passing mood, a deluge of words that has to be endured while waiting for a return to a position more in keeping with their own ideas.

REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE CONTENT OF THE REPORTS

In large part, the following reflections are inspired by what is found in the reports and concern the service of the poor through the school. But they are also based on first hand knowledge that the General Council has of different situations. In effect, visits to Districts, reading the reports of Chapters and Councils, as also the bulletins published by Districts and houses — all have provided us with abundant material that is included in this account.

1) A rich common heritage of initiatives and of attitudes

We have already said that the section dealing with the service of the poor through the schools is the most complete part of the reports. It shows a very great concern for fidelity to the ideas of St. John Baptist de La Salle. This fidelity has shown itself very strongly through the many initiatives which seek to make the school accessible to young people of modest social standing, as also in the questions raised by the Brothers.

As was shown above, here we are not giving in to any self-satisfaction; numerous questions were raised, asking whom we should teach and how we can do this. Very many insist that the evolution of society and of the institute, characterized by a deeper concern for justice and attention to the disadvantaged, has by itself brought us to a decisive stage in our history.

The image given of the Institute then is one of a general fidelity, but of a self-questioning fidelity. And it is on this questioning that we want to reflect for a while. We base this on our understanding of our vocation and our desire to increase this understanding. This creates between the General Council and the Brothers a common language based on understanding, confidence, and sincerity. The movement toward the service of the poor must be purified and strengthened, but it is very much alive among the sons of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

In the words of the Rule, the school is *the preferred field of action for the Brother's apostolate* (Rule, 1, ff.). It is important that it remain so. And it is in this perspective that we must place ourselves and in which we must read the reflections that follow. Because it is not enough to have schools, it is also necessary to ask ourselves once more what type of school we want to have.

2) Are our schools open?

The reports give the general impression of well functioning schools, in which there is great concern for the educational programs and the total educational environment. But very often these schools seem to exist in a world of their own. This tendency was noted in a preceding paragraph, entitled *Our Ignorance of the World of the Poor*.

From among the suggestions found in the reports, we would like to point out two main trends of thought:

An open school is one in which a young person is accepted and known with his natural abilities, but also as regards his

family, the company he keeps, and the social and economic conditions in which he lives — in effect, all that makes him an individual, including his *needs*. Often we use this last word without giving it its full meaning. A school has a very natural tendency to concern itself first and foremost with the needs related to teaching. Service of youth and particularly that of the poor requires that we go beyond such a *limited* point of view.

An open school is also one that knows how to find its proper place among all the various educational institutions. There is a multitude of organizations working for the total development of youth along with others engaged in the war against poverty. An open school will know how to find its proper role and exercise a useful function in this situation.

Here we would like to call to mind a statement of the "Declaration" dealing with this topic: *The work of education is achieved by many influences over the course of a lifetime. The modern school therefore endeavors to collaborate with every educational agent.* And the document mentions specifically parents, other educators — especially those involved in leisure time activities, priests, promoters of apostolic movements or other associations.

3) Why a school?

We are concerned with the good functioning of our schools, and have no intention of downplaying this in any way. But having occupied ourselves with the legitimate concern of *How*, ought we not also to ask ourselves *Why*? What are our consciously chosen objectives in all this? What is our educational plan? Here we want to concern ourselves not with nice sounding words, but with the real meaning of our activity. All the Rule of the Founder is to a large extent impregnated with this concern: *The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, that, having the children under their care from*

morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, . . . (Cf. Cahier lasallien no. 25, p. 16).

Besides, we know quite well that this question about the role of the school, even if it irritates us a bit when raised by armchair theoreticians, is an important matter — one about which each of us has questioned himself from time to time, perhaps in a very pointed manner. It is good then that even the Church has asked herself this question. And it is in this perspective that we propose here a text from the Synod of Bishops of 1971, which treats of education and the school:

. . . The method of education very frequently still in use today encourages narrow individualism. Part of the human family lives immersed in a mentality which exalts possessions. The school and the communications media, which are often obstructed by the established order, allow the formation only of the man desired by that order, that is to say, man in its image, not a new man but a copy of man as he is.

But education demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin in its individual and social manifestations. It will also include a truly and entirely human way of life in justice, love and simplicity. It will likewise awaken a critical sense, which will lead us to reflect on the society in which we live and on its values; it will make men ready to renounce these values when they cease to promote justice for all men. In the developing countries, the principal aim of this education for justice consists in an attempt to awaken consciences to a knowledge of the concrete situation and in a call to secure a total improvement; by these means the transformation of the world has already begun.

Since this education makes men decidedly more human, it will help them to be no longer the object of manipulation by communications media or political forces. It will instead enable them to take in hand their own destinies and bring about communities which are truly human.

Accordingly, this education is deservedly called a continuing education, for it concerns every person and every age. It is also a practical education: it comes through action, participation and vital contact with the reality of injustice (2).

Reflection on the *Why* of the school, then, can usefully be organized around three interrelated questions:

- What type of Christian do we want to form?
- What type of society do we want to foster in our schools?
- What means do we have at our disposal, and with whom can we work to realize these objectives?

4) To study and to develop the possibilities of the school

Responding to the first two questions posed above can appear easy. What is most important and most urgent is *to translate their answers into action* in a particular and distinctive school situation.

What can the school do to meet the need for forming the Christian committed to justice?

For certain there are educators who will mislead our Christian youth. When an educational system puts too much emphasis on competition, success, and possessions, it denies the Gospel. When adult life is presented mainly in terms of stressing the level of studies achieved, even beautiful religion programs lose much of their effectiveness. What is done will speak another language and much more loudly: happiness consists only in always having more.

Individual relations with young people are also very important. Here, just being a friend is not enough. In practice, there is an educational approach which destroys human beings, by not paying attention to the varied talents and possibilities

(2) Synod of the Bishops of 1971, chapter III, p. 19.

of the other person. This is particularly true when the student is not taught to express himself and thus take the responsibility for his own development.

If then you want to help train a responsible person — open, relating well with others, and an active Christian — it is important to select certain pedagogical techniques and to avoid others. This dossier is not a pedagogical text. What is said here has as its purpose only to stimulate reflection among those who are in daily contact with these realities. It seeks only to influence our everyday activity by the spirit of faith which will help us animate all our actions with Gospel motives. Its concern is not an other-world spirituality, but is an effort to make the Gospel present in everyday life.

Suggestions found in the reports tend to take the following positions:

— *Maintain a quality school*, a cultural center, but one having a culture open to the language of all, particularly those who are most disadvantaged (3).

— *Analyze the functioning of the school*: Many educators are on guard against nice sounding rhetoric expressive mainly of good intentions. They want to know what is really going on by an analysis of the functioning of the school. How do our schools really promote justice through their programs? their discipline? their structures? the information they circulate? the human relations they foster? the manner in which they make decisions? even the manner in which they administer corrections? How do they help the teachers better to know the needs of their pupils, and to become more aware of the problems of the latter?

— *Analyze better our freedom*: It is evident that just about everywhere intervention by the state is increasing,

(3) Regarding this problem of acculturation, see the ideas set down in Circular 408: *Our Mission — The Institute in the Young Churches*, pp. 91-96.

reducing the freedom we require to organize and to direct a school. But is it not rare also for the reports to indicate that teachers do not make full use of the latitude given them by the official directives. Besides, creativity is the most effective means of obtaining an improvement and an increase of that liberty to organize our schools which is vital for us.

— *Animation of service of the poor*: The idea of gathering all the teachers, religious or lay, in a single educational community unanimously dedicated to the service of the poor and the promotion of justice appears impossible in the greater number of instances. That is why the creation of a core group of animators seems necessary and realistic if the school is to accomplish its objectives concerning service of the poor, as well as provide opportunities for the continuing formation of the teachers. Obviously, this core of animators must not function as a “subversive” body. Its role of animation in pursuit of clearly stated objectives must be understood by all.

* * *

The issues discussed above perhaps are numerous, but they are very relevant and closely related to one another. It suffices to respond to one, and immediately the others demand answers. Moreover, they are based on life as it is in the school, on the experiences of the teachers, and on a knowledge of young people to-day. We hope then that these reflections are relevant to our goal: a school that realistically questions itself regarding its assets and its possibilities — in the light of the criteria for the Christian education of the most disadvantaged and for the promotion of justice.

PART TWO

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR THE POOR OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

1) A Lasallian tradition

As we have seen, the majority of the Brothers work in schools, and this remains the preferred field of our apostolate. But at the same time, above all since the General Chapter of 1966-67, the Brothers consecrate themselves also to non-school activities which today assume numerous forms. Besides, as the "Declaration" says: *From the beginning the Brothers devoted themselves to the Christian education of youth in various ways, . . . Apart from the school, or as an extension of it, the Institute has always provided for a variety of educational or apostolic activities* (43 and 51, 1).

The "Rules" are also very explicit when they state quite clearly so as to leave no doubt: *The school in the preferred field of action for the Brother's apostolate. However, the Institute is open to other possibilities for teaching and education that may be more adapted to the circumstances and needs of the times.* (Rules, 1, f.).

The example and the teachings of the Holy Founder show it is important to discern the educational needs of today and

to respond to them in an adequate and efficacious manner, as he himself did: *It is important for them [the Brothers] to recognize that the signs of the times stress the urgency of their mission in the world today, the necessity to renew their religious life, their apostolic ministry, their presence among men.* (Declaration, 8). *The context of the world today makes it possible for us to discover a new dimension in these original insights; it allows us to see new ways in which the Brothers can exercise the ministry of the Word of God, ...* (Declaration, 41).

This attitude of the spirit of faith *which unceasingly arouses and rejuvenates the apostolic commitment of the Brother* (Rule 2d) appears as a constant invitation throughout the documents of the Institute. In particular we find it in "The Rules and the Constitutions," the "Declaration," the reports of the 40th General Chapter on "Our Mission" and "The Institute in the Young Churches » (1) which reminds us of the exigency *profoundly to renovate the school and to devise new means for the education and the evangelization of the young* (2).

2) A growing urgency today

In addition to this fidelity to the best Lasallian tradition, we have *the real situation in the world today which strongly urges the Brothers to diversify their educational activity.* Can they act differently when both private and public organizations (governments, unions, businesses, etc.) are creating new educational centers and providing modern means of teaching in order to meet the urgent needs for **combating illiteracy**, for continuing education, for professional up-dating, and for cultural and artistic advancement?

(1) Circular 408.

(2) Circular 408, p. 42.

The Church herself uses with success and recommends the media, workshops, and small communities, as well as youth movements and other flexible means for evangelization, the family apostolate, and social change.

Finally, it is necessary to keep in mind that in a number of countries, the encroachments of the state and of totalitarian governments make it difficult or impossible to conduct non-state schools. All of this calls for new methods of teaching and for other ways in which the Church can be present to the young (3).

Lastly, is it not the Holy Spirit himself, acting in each of us and in the Institute, who invites us through two General Chapters to *frequent moments of self-study, constant readiness to examine and accept new ideas and the rejection of any complacent reliance on a purely mechanical technique?* (4).

For this reason they [the Brothers] must search for and develop other types of apostolic activity. These new apostolic initiatives, developed in accordance with the charism of the Founder, will permit us to respond in a realistic manner to the urgent needs of the young, of the Church, and of the world of tomorrow (5).

3) Some criteria to consider

This quest for new means of the apostolate must conform to the criteria clearly stated in the "Declaration" and restated in the reports of the last General Chapter in the document "Our Mission." These criteria give us sufficient freedom to hear new calls, and, at the same time, they assure a dynamic fidelity to the Lasallian inspiration and to our specific mission.

(3) Circular 408: Propositions 27 and 28, p. 56.

(4) Declaration, 15, 2.

(5) Report on "The Institute in The Young Churches," Circular 408, p. 57.

In addition, reference to these criteria happily remains a constant factor in the many non-school activities in favor of the poor which the Districts describe in their reports.

A GREAT VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES AND FEW BROTHERS

4) A great range

Few or many, in the great majority of Districts there are non-school activities for the poor. Taken together, considered on the level of the Institute, these constitute a large range of activity which brings out the variety of situations in which the Brothers live and their creative spirit in responding to the needs of the poor as they perceive these.

5) Different rhythms and times

For some of the Brothers engaged in these activities, this is their principal work. They have been released to do this work, alone or in community. Others, the majority, work mainly in schools and devote only a part of their time, as to a secondary task, to these non-school projects, either daily, only on weekends, or only during vacation time.

6) The reduced number of Brothers

How many Brothers are there who devote themselves to the activities mentioned above? According to the information furnished by the Personnel Office in the Generalate, 3.5% of

the Brothers work outside the school in such educational apostolates, as *their principal work*. But not all of these are engaged explicitly or exclusively in the service of the poor, and this number includes those working for other social groups.

Altogether, if we add in the Brothers who devote a small part of their time to non-school service in favor of the poor, the percentage increases, but remains less than 10%. At least this is an approximation that can be made, based on the less than precise numbers provided by the reports. It is easy to understand this lack of precision because proposition 14 did not request any strictly statistical information. So all things considered, our estimate has a good chance of not being too inaccurate, and it calls for at least some reflection as to why the number of Brothers engaged in such work is so small at this time.

7) Active even in retirement

In certain Districts there are Brothers who after reaching the age of retirement have devoted themselves with enthusiasm and success to apostolic activities such as parish catechism programs or the family apostolate. It seems to us that this attitude deserves to be encouraged and imitated, assuming one has the competence required for apostolates of this sort.

FORMS OF ACTIVITIES

Specifically, exactly what are these non-school activities? They relate to all the *different areas of human and Christian development*: beginning with works of human and social

development such as teaching people to read along with other educational activities, as well as including purely pastoral activity such as evangelization, teaching catechism, and helping with liturgical activities. Below they are presented and grouped according to the principal types of work being done. Our purpose in this is not to make some sort of artificial breakdown, but simply to present in a concrete manner the total of all these works.

First Group: evangelical and catechetical activities

- Catechesis in poor areas, in parishes, or in the schools, including work done by Brothers, subjects in formation, laymen, and our students.
- Serving as a leader for various church groups in a parish while doing catechetical work as well as a variety of pastoral works.
- Diversified catechetical work: teaching catechumens, serving as vocational director in schools, in parishes, or for families, or catechetical work in mission areas during vacation time . . .
- Pastoral work among young people in poorer areas, active involvement in youth groups or movements such as the J.O.C. or the J.A.C.
- Living in a community giving witness in a poorer area of a city.
- Awareness activities or pastoral and spiritual updating of the Brothers.
- Apostolic work in mission countries and aid to the missions.

Second Group: teaching and educational activities.

The second group includes those teaching and educational activities seeking to provide means of personal development that will make it possible for individuals to become actively present in their milieu. This is done by means of:

- Teaching reading and writing to marginal groups such as migrants or aborigines, and by developing and using new pedagogical methods.
- Providing centers of reception, direction, and professional assistance, placement bureaus, or help in finding lodging.
- Educational activity in professional associations or other groups providing intensive instruction.
- Directing or working in diocesan organizations engaged in a special way in the education of the poor.
- Re-education of delinquents or drug addicts, assisting youth in general, be it in our own or in other organizations.
- Caring for children in special institutions.
- Serving as inspectors or as teachers in poor schools.

Third Group: social-political activities

The third group includes those social or political activities in favor of the poor which seek to help them create better living conditions for their group:

- Assistance to families: teaching elements of domestic economy, of health and of hygiene; giving social, religious, or educational direction; teaching or popularizing home or artisan industries. In some instances, giving information on family planning in conformity with the teachings of the Church.

- Training activists for social and cultural action: teachers, leaders, directors . . . Training our pupils in view of their future involvement in this work.

- Organizing and directing community centers in poorer areas. Establishing villages.

- Social research and developing projects for assisting needy people.

- Trade union activity: some reports mention participation on occasion in strikes, in boycotts, in youth protest movements, or of working with Amnesty International.

Fourth Group: social and charitable activities

- Help given through collections, drives, and the distribution of basic necessities such as food, clothing, and medicine.

- Help in construction projects.

- Offers to do work.

- Preparation of meeting places.

- Organizing medical dispensaries or hospitals as well as help with sanitary projects. Brothers work in **these** projects and make visits.

- Financial help, alms, contributions to build up funds to assist the poor.

- Organizing special houses to care for exceptional individuals, such as paraplegics, mutilated persons, and so on.

8) Placing in relief

Also, we wish to point out the *evangelical witness*, almost always heroic and silent, given by a great number of Brothers

who live in a hostile environment if not one of open persecution. As they are not allowed to conduct schools, they must work elsewhere to earn a living. In as much as they are allowed to do so, they discreetly perform humanitarian works in a Christian manner. We want to assure them of our fraternal solidarity with them.

9) A clearly Lasallian way . . .

In certain of the projects we have just listed, the Brothers have integrated, in a clearly Lasallian way, social work or education with evangelization and catechesis. In many instances, this integration is not always that evident. The Brothers are asked to examine more closely the spirituality left us by the Founder to sustain us in our work (6). In addition, it might be appropriate to compare the teaching of Paul VI, who, in keeping with the ideas of Vatican II, said that between evangelization and human development, there are strong anthropological, theological, and evangelical relations (7).

10) . . . with different emphases

It is easily seen that the type of activity chosen varies according to the country, the region, or the continent, and in keeping with the types of poverty found in each. So, in developed countries, the Brothers devote themselves most often to youth on the fringes of society, such as the retarded or those with drug problems. Also, often they organize drives to obtain financial assistance and other help for people in the in the third world.

(6) Cf. Circular 408, pp. 86-88.

(7) "Evangelii Nuntiandi," n. 31.

In developing countries, the priorities change in favor of farm workers, the aborigines, the inhabitants of shantytowns, or others on the fringes of society.

In the first instance, in the developed countries, more attention is given to specific projects of development, evangelization, or catechesis. This is so in Europe, Canada, and the United States. In the second instance, the trend is to more comprehensive projects which integrate social development, evangelization, and education. In Africa, the Brothers devote themselves to projects of agricultural development. In Asia and Latin America, emphasis is given to projects for improving the areas where the poor live or to those devoted to helping the aborigines.

11) Question awaiting answers

Certain of these activities cannot fail to raise some questions: up to what point are these works the fruit of Christian charity, and when do they become simply a form of paternalistic assistance? In other instances, we can ask if these educational activities are directed toward evangelization, or are they simply social-political activity inspired by a questionable ideology? What were the criteria which led to their being undertaken? Did they take note of the charism of the Holy Founder? Here, these questions are simply mentioned. More attention will be given to them in that part of this dossier devoted to sensitization.

FOR WHOM ARE WE WORKING?

In an effort to be more precise, we are grouping the individuals for whom we are working as follows:

1) *The Poor*, or victims of economic and social conditions, who are rejected by society:

- inhabitants of slums or poor urban areas;
- workers without jobs or who are underemployed;
- rural people, farm workers without resources or deprived of any assistance;
- people in isolated or backward areas, as in some mission countries, or aborigines;
- migrants or members of minority groups.

2) *People suffering from various handicaps*: physical, psychological, or affective...

- the abnormal, paraplegics, mutilated persons, or the mentally deficient;
- the deaf, the mute, the blind;
- the sick or lepers;
- orphans or abandoned children.

3) *Other categories*:

- refugees or displaced persons;
- beggars, alcoholics, or prisoners;
- victims of misfortunes, impoverished people, those suffering from injustices, and those in general on the fringes of society.

These individuals are found in *all age groups*, from very young children to the very elderly. In a word, they are the poor!

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

12) To serve the poor?

What motives lead the Brothers, the communities, and the districts to undertake these non-school activities?

The reports give little information on this subject. The context of what is said leads us to think they act to meet *the need for both individual and community effort... to discover new and adapted forms of education of those among the poor who are most neglected* (8). In certain cases, *The spirit of faith helps us find, in all situations of injustice and poverty, the presence of the suffering Christ... The spirit of zeal provides us with educational answers, and involves us to the point of alliance with the world of the poor* (9).

13) Different motives in action

It is also possible that other motives have inspired such action: providing the possibility of an apostolate to our retired Brothers, who are quite numerous in some districts; looking for new ways to do things, above all where the educational system allows little opportunity to organize and to conduct schools according to the Lasallian spirit. In the presence of these motives and of other similar ones, it is good to recall the warning in the «Declaration» regarding *the danger of self-deception and individualism, the temptation to escape to something that seems to be easy* (10). But it is also necessary to make the positive point: the majority of the Brothers involved in these apostolates in favor of the poor,

(8) Declaration, p. 39: 33, 1.

(9) Circular 408: p. 40, 322.

(10) Declaration, p. 68: 51, 3.

undertake them as part of our school work or as a complement to this work, but not as an alternative in opposition to the school.

14) To involve oneself ... and also to prepare oneself

Another positive preoccupation to note is that of *involvement*. Some schools organize activities to help the people of the area and obtain the assistance of various school groups for this work in poor areas, collaborating with local centers working toward the same goals. In some districts, certain Brothers do their educational updating in low-income or rural areas. But, unfortunately, this is not generally done, and the reports say almost nothing about a *suitable preparation* for this new type of apostolate. It is important that the districts assign to these non-school apostolates those who have had a suitable preparation, more than just good will to serve and to accept personal hardships.

15) Discovering the real needs of the poor

In order to find out what are the real needs of the poor, it is not always necessary to send out a questionnaire. A comparison of the resources at our disposal will make it possible to initiate some *realistic activities*. An accurate perception of the problems will help us find suitable solutions for them. For example, in a situation where there are many « run aways », we could organize a residence to receive them, to counsel them, and to encourage them. Where there are many migrant workers, we could organize a center offering aids to acculturate them, assist them to find places to live and to work, or help them to obtain the proper legal papers. In a rural area, we could give pertinent instruction by means of a model farm.

16) Lack of an essential aspect

In certain activities the question as to the motives behind the action remains without a satisfactory answer. Above all, *in the greater number of instances, there is the absence of the essential element of working to promote justice.* It seems that we will not go so far as to seek out the roots of the evil of poverty, that we do not perceive why the poor are in this situation, or how this has come about. Because, in effect, they are victims of both poverty and injustice, and this calls for specific action to promote the cause of justice. When this commitment to justice is absent, the service we render to the poor lacks depth or any durable effects.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR THE SCHOOL

17) A school open to the milieu of the poor, a school renewed

St. de La Salle wanted a new type of school, one undergoing a constant renewal. *This renewal of the school implies an effort to be open to the life of the world and of the Church.*

The many non-school activities for the poor tend to confirm the reality of this openness for a certain number of schools. As we have already said, most of these activities are school related, and they complement, inspire, and enlarge its life. These institutions are not closed in on themselves, but by opening themselves to the needs of their milieu, they find the inspiration and the enthusiasm needed to renew their own educational activity. They develop a profoundly human and Christian environment whose influence spreads all around them.

18) The students learn to work for the poor

Numerous schools involve their students in school related work in favor of the poor with a double objective: giving some practical aspects to the social training of the students, while also doing something useful to help the poor. Frequently, things are done in such a way that the students themselves organize and carry out these programs of assistance and development.

Certain other approaches make it possible for the Brothers to multiply their educational activity in the schools: inspecting schools in poorer areas, providing up-dating for their teachers, and helping to train group leaders or directors.

19) A source of pedagogical experiences

The strong desire to respond in a suitable way to these new needs makes this *work outside the school a real source of pedagogical experiences*. Here one finds and applies more easily new teaching and educational procedures which later on prove useful even in the schools. Examples we might mention are the new methods of teaching reading and writing, teaching courses by radio, or mobile teams doing evangelization work.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT

20) Together in the service of the poor

Happily, a number of communities *have agreed to devote themselves as a group*, on weekends, to social, catechetical, or liturgical works.

Others have taken as part of their life plan to follow a *specific nonschool apostolic project* such as helping immigrants or the young people in a poor area, or giving pastoral direction in a parish, in keeping with a given situation and the request of the local bishop.

Once again it is good to mention those communities of Brothers who direct institutions for deaf youth, young people in dangerous moral situations, and so on.

Also, it is good to mention those communities who support financially activities for social assistance or development. One district has established a community apostolic fund. In another, each community contributes to a project according as its finances allow.

Communities established in poor areas

It is good also to recall here the communities *established in poor areas*, providing a presence that assures service, witness, and evangelical activity. These enter into dialogue with the poor and live their commitment simply and in privation. Special note should be made of those districts in which such communities were established as a result of a chapter or a council decision.

For sure, these districts and particularly the Brothers who live in those communities understand that the *conversion of the poor*, the *return to the poor* requires a change and a compliance of our hearts in order to *go to the poor with the heart of a poor man* (11). Direct contact can impel us to make such a conversion.

(11) Declaration, pp. 40-41: 34, 2 and 4; Circular 408, p. 38.

And individual commitments?

Secondly, note must be taken of the *numerous individual commitments* among which a certain number are effectively supported by the community or approved by the district. At times, it is question of a special work. Other times, after the community hesitates for a while, the group takes responsibility for these individual initiatives. In certain instances, these initiatives are under discussion and a cause of some tension.

The fraternal spirit of dialogue, joined to study and discernment, must be united with a readiness to accept the decisions made by those in authority in the district, regarding the continuation of these individual initiatives. In effect, there are situations in which we often find different ways of understanding our mission as a Brother and above all how to carry it out in action. These differences can create an urgent need to seek for a better understanding of the needs to which we must respond, to accept pluralism in our activities, or to choose suitable means for living our special inspiration in a given situation.

Here the eighth proposition of the last General Chapter seems particularly appropriate: *The community and the district council must use discernment regarding all new apostolic undertakings. This reflection should be carried on in an evangelical spirit, considering the apostolic goal of the Institute, and with a great respect for individual persons* (12).

(12) Circular 408, p. 43.

ATTITUDE OF THE DISTRICTS

In general not a well defined policy

Few districts seem to have defined, through their chapters or in other ways, a clear and precise policy regarding service outside the school in favor of the poor. Nevertheless, the « Declaration » is not ambiguous in this matter: Different historical and sociological contexts provide opportunities for chapters on the local level to define clearly and according to a realistic plan how to engage personnel and structures in the service of the poor (13). Also, the « Constitutions » state: Districts and communities are responsible for adapting the forms of their apostolate and the manner of their collaboration with others to the needs of times and place (14).

Occasionally, some indications for a new road

A good number of districts, without formulating a position clearly covering all situations, have created a commission to deal with this subject. Or again, they have made decisions and initiated projects which, practically speaking, trace out guidelines for non-school apostolates. Among those mentioned above are a *district committee on sharing, a district fund for the poor, or a district social work committee*. Some chapters have undertaken to invite the Brothers to the direct service of the poor, to create a community to live in a poor area, or a library for the blind to which all communities have contributed according to their means. Two districts have joined together to open a residence for young immigrants.

Also, some Districts have undertaken to specify the criteria set down in the « Declaration » regarding non-school

(13) Declaration, p. 34: 28, 3.

(14) Rules and Constitutions, p. 26: 9, 14.

activities (15), as far as they refer to the *community*. The 40th. General Chapter also established such criteria and suggested means of doing this: *an attitude of openness and of confidence to assist all positive efforts at renewal, a more open fellowship when new situations develop, so as to authenticate what is positive and not leave it in an uncertain situation* (16).

However, clarification is necessary

If a good number of districts have already determined a policy or are in the process of doing this, the majority have not done so — if the reports are to be believed. *In the absence of clear policy, some districts have been unable to resolve conflict situations:* when for example individual initiatives have been undertaken without any reference to those in responsible positions, provoking useless and excessive tension. Or again, when through lack of discernment, poorly thought out or adventuresome undertakings have given a bad name to the serious activities of the Brothers. Most of these difficulties could be avoided by a clear explanation of the criteria in the light of the local situation, or by a well-defined policy for such activities.

Also, often some individual Brothers or a particular community have felt themselves pressed to act because of the existing situation and the urgent need for action in favor of the poor in the local church. Unable to remain insensible to these calls, they have devoted themselves to many different activities, thus spending their energy in all directions at one time.

A wise district policy will prove very useful in such instances when there are Brothers who find themselves torn

(15) Declaration, pp. 69-70: 52, 2.

(16) Circular 410, pp. 20-25.

apart by the need to decide among the many appeals for help which they are receiving.

We leave to the districts the task of determining their policy in this matter, bearing in mind that *every level of authority, then, every dialogue and decision in the Institute, must be in harmony with this orientation — towards working for the poor —, so that all our plans and work will show in deed and in truth our « return to the poor »* (17).

PASTORAL TOGETHERNESS AND WORKING AS A GROUP

Building the Church together

A certain number of these out of school activities are clearly Church oriented and belong to the totality of pastoral work. At times, they are undertaken in close cooperation with various parishes, constituting as they do an integral part of the pastoral activity devoted to building the Church at the grass roots level. Others fit better into pastoral activity on the diocesan level: pastoral teams, direction of youth movements, or the training of seminarians. All give special attention to people in modest circumstances or those living in deprived areas.

An important matter that is forgotten

It we are to believe the reports, the situation described in the preceding paragraph *is not always valid in the major-*

(17) Declaration, p. 41: 34, 4.

ity of instance: the greater number of our activities outside the schools have no direct relation with the Church or any direct connection with the pastoral activity of the local Church. Certainly, our ministry in the Church is not characterized above all by active involvement in all types of pastoral work, but primarily by a lively faith which impels us to accomplish our evangelical mission. On the other hand, though, we do not help build the Church by working in isolation: we must show our solidarity with all the people of God in the areas where we live. We must collaborate in our own ways in the total work being done, thus showing we are united with the pastors of the local Church.

Fellowship with others working in human development

Circular 408 on « Our Mission » (18) recalled the concept and the importance of working together. It is when our service to the poor is integrated into the totality of such work that it is effective. But, in practice, only a small number of our activities seem to be integrated into the total work being done, in such a way that the Brothers cooperate with others involved in social training and development, both by working as a part of the entire group, and by also doing their specific educational and catechetical tasks.

Such integration is not always easy or possible. But whatever the situation, it is necessary to remember that *the self-improvement of the poor as a group... requires the preparation of leaders who will not abandon their people but remain among them as a leaven to assist the less favored in their progress as a community* (19).

(18) Circular 408, p. 100.

(19) Declaration, p. 37-38: 31, 6.

A SIGN OF THE VITALITY OF THE INSTITUTE

Under the movement of the Spirit

Conscious that the mission of the Institute is to work by preference among the poor and that *the context of the world today makes it possible for us to discover... new ways in which the Brothers can exercise the ministry of the Word of God...* (20), a good number of Brothers, working under the guidance and movement of the Spirit, have as individuals and as communities made use of their imagination as well as of some research to find new means of being present to and of meeting the educational needs of the most deprived (21). They understand that a narrow point of view, one opposed to all activity outside the school, does *not conform to the traditions of the Institute. It would run the risk of opposing the action of the Holy Spirit among us, and it would paralyze the very initiative that is capable of renewing the schools themselves* (22).

A source of renewal

The effort to diversify our educational services in favor of the most disadvantaged *appears to be a means of renewal capable of revitalizing the Institute* (23). In effect, the Brothers are invited *to consider this commitment as an essential element in the spiritual renewal of each Brother* (24).

The vitality of the Institute shows itself and reenforces itself through the foundation of new works... (25); this appears

(20) Declaration, p. 50: 41, 1.

(21) Declaration, p. 39: 33, 1.

(22) Declaration, p. 68: 51, 4.

(23) Circular 408, p. 40.

(24) Circular 408, p. 45.

(25) Declaration, p. 65: 49, 5.

to be the greatest significance of the many activities in favor of the poor.

An indispensable part of our planning

What has been said in this second part of this dossier clearly shows that the educational service of the poor is not limited to instruction given in school. A response suited to the needs of the poor often requires of us other forms of presence to them and other educational activities. The districts and the communities have a serious obligation to include these types of non-school commitments in their plans for the future.

PART THREE

THE PROMOTION OF JUSTICE

Proposition number 14 requested from the districts a report not only on the educational service of the poor, but also one dealing explicitly *with efforts made to promote justice* (1). Again, in his letter of 15 May 1979, the Brother Superior, on the basis of a first look at these replies, could write: *In this section of the letter wherein I treat of the reports received, I would also like to comment briefly on a second point concerning the promotion of justice. I say briefly, not because this is less important or less timely to deal with, but simply because the answers received are clearly of less consequence. One district declares that our contribution to this social question is worth nothing, or very little! The overall impression given is one of awkwardness in the face of the problem — we are just not ready to confront the issue. Therefore, we feel a certain reluctance to talk about it in a natural way; we experience a certain fear of drawing from such a confrontation consequences requiring too much commitment* (2).

Replies with a very limited scope.

Of the 63 reports which serve as a basis for this study, 33 say nothing about the *promotion of justice*, while at the same time they have much to say about the first topic, the *educational service of the poor*. Thirty say something, at times very brief, about this subject.

(1) Circular 403, p. 78.

(2) Letter of the Brother Superior General, 15 May 1979, p. 41.

WHAT THE REPORTS SAY

The enumeration that follows might appear both to substantiate and to contradict the preceding paragraph. Always it is necessary to keep two compensating factors in mind. In certain reports it is difficult to distinguish the *utopian* language, describing what one wishes to do, from the *more realistic* language, stating what is being done. Finally, each activity described is somewhat unique, while the part dealing with the educational service of the poor mentions many activities that are practically identical.

With these important reservations, here is an illustrative listing of these activities:

Changing the structures for which we are responsible

First of all, several reports suggest we apply the criteria regarding the *promotion of justice to the internal administration of the Institute*. One district has even established an economic committee to work in this area. Its tasks include:

- A *clear accounting* by the institutions staffed by the communities of the district and by the district administration. This provides accurate information which makes it possible to give each budget item its assigned percentage of funds, keeping in mind total receipts and expenditures.
- Making *investments* so as to avoid helping businesses which work against the interests of the people of the area, or against those of the international community (armament industries or multinationals notorious for their *anti-social* activity).
- A fairer assignment of *district taxes*, going so far as to exempt some poorer communities from any taxes so as to ensure they have the necessary financial resources.

- *Putting in common the accumulated savings* of the communities or the works dependent on the Institute, in view of using these to support our apostolate.

The school and justice

Very evidently *the school* is a structure which, it is suggested, can be changed so as to contribute more toward the promotion of justice. Proposals made here are very similar to the ones made before to make our schools more open for the service of the poor. Always, they are concerned primarily with the organization of a scholastic society that will be seen as the first place where justice should be present, the first place where young people should encounter institutional arrangements seeking unambiguously to promote justice in the relations among the teachers, the young people, and their two groups.

In this light, the suggestions deal with the manner in which the young people should be led progressively to make decisions regarding their education, how information is to be provided, how decisions are made, how the school can contact outside organizations and movements fighting for justice, how young people can be invited and helped to involve themselves in these, and so on.

The school certainly has not the ability to change the social environment. But it can offer the model of a different life style, one which will help young people to adopt an attitude at once critical and constructive regarding the society in which they are called to live.

Training the young

Quite often the reports mention programs directed toward the *social training* of young people. Here three different elements are cited:

○ *Teaching*: it appears this is the most common element, one through which *the social doctrine of the Church is taught*. In many instances, this seems to be the only activity that is being considered.

○ *Charitable activity*: to make young people from more favored surroundings aware of social problems, they are sent to visit and to assist the poor. Most explicitly cited here is the activity of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

○ *A personal involvement*: the limits of this, in view of the possible dangers associated with activity of this sort, are often mentioned. It appears more suitable to suggest to a young person a personal involvement, in keeping with his capability and age certainly, but one requiring direct involvement in the struggle for justice in the milieu in which he lives. This involvement should be made in connection with those youth movements associated with the Church that are working toward the same end. So it was that when faced with a situation in which ten or twelve year old children were forced to enter the work force, one of our schools in a third world area organized groups for these young people. Here they were led to discuss their life situation, to understand better how by working together they could improve their position, and to wait for the time when they were older and would be able to take suitable action in **this matter**.

Our employees and our teachers

Efforts toward *social justice in favor of our employees* or our lay teachers are frequently mentioned. Doing this so

as to give them a voice in making decisions concerning their status is somewhat rare. It is not uncommon for reports to mention how opposed the Brothers are to teachers' unions.

In some countries, particularly in the third world, a serious problem often arises when quite inadequate salaries are fixed or paid by the state which controls the schools. This leads to a strong and understandable tendency among the teachers to obtain money by other means, such as requiring students to take special instruction from them, or by exacting what is called « *tea money* », an unofficial payment by parents if they want the teacher to give their children special attention. This example is given to show the complexity of a problem which cannot be dealt with or resolved by good intentions alone or by a verbal exhortation.

In this area of providing help for our lay teachers, one district has a training program, built around assigned readings and meetings.

Joining with those who fight for justice

A small number of reports stress the fact that the movement in favor of justice — be it social, national, or international — has become very extensive, without our involvement! It would be an error, they say, and one we have made, to imagine we are the first to involve ourselves here, or that we are the leaders in this movement. Entire countries have committed themselves to this movement. For her part, the Church has joined in this movement, for example, following the Synod of Bishops in 1971, or by the extensive assistance she has given those engaged in the struggle for justice. It is not necessary, then, for us to innovate, but to catch up with what has been going on. How can an educator ignore what is vital for a very large number of his contemporaries? How can he be content to view this in a speculative manner without taking an active part in this movement?

The necessary sensitization

Several districts mention creation of a committee to promote justice. One objective, among others, of this committee is to include in the basic formation programs of the Brothers some sensitization regarding social justice.

One report insists on the role of the Brother Superior and his Council in this sensitization. It calls upon them to stress the directives of this sort found in the propositions voted by the last two Chapters.

REFLECTIONS SUGGESTED BY THE CONTENT OF THE REPORTS

The content of the reports warrants some reflections. In effect, the affirmation we made at the beginning of this study evokes some questions: the reports, after having listed numerous achievements in the area of the *educational service of the poor*, become incomplete or even silent regarding the *promotion of justice*. *Does not this silence and this incompleteness suggest a number of things:*

Some objective difficulties

The reports coming from countries with authoritarian regimes bring out the difficulty of establishing any educational program for justice differing from that taught by the official ideology of the country. At times even, simply mentioning this subject leads to one being accused of Marxism or of capitalist imperialism, depending on the dominant political doctrine of the country concerned.

When visiting these countries, the General Council could see the frequency and the seriousness of this difficulty. In addition, this explains the discretion of certain reports. Brothers living in areas enjoying freedom of expression should avoid peremptory judgments about these delicate situations and understand the difficulties faced by their Brothers.

On the other hand, neither is resignation in face of the existing situation a possibility. Being a prophet has never been a comfortable task, and the end of Christian education is not to reproduce educational, civic, or social models imposed by force. The directive we have given in all these instances is to reflect and to act in close union with the local Church. If the reflection of this latter is insufficient, let us turn to that of the universal Church, working thus to awaken the social consciences of those around us.

Like the Kingdom of God, of which it is one of the clearest indications, justice is sought for and realized with scanty means, those that are at the disposal of the educator, in daily patience, but in union with all who hunger and thirst for this justice.

An unknown land?

In order to explain this relatively brief mention of the *promotion of justice* in the reports, at first glance it is tempting to say that this is an unknown land for the Brothers, one where only a few explorers have gone. *We are just not ready to confront the issue. Therefore, we feel a certain reluctance to talk about it in a natural way* (3), while the *service of the poor* is more familiar to us, rooted in our thinking by a tradition coming from the Founder and still very much alive.

(3) Letter of the Brother Superior General, 15 May 1979, p. 41.

However, a slightly more attentive reading of the reports leads us to discern that, quite often, *the reports mingle the two things, service to the poor and the promotion of justice*. In fact, what does it mean to serve the poor, if not to begin by establishing a minimum of justice in their regard through facilitating their access to education, thus helping them develop their skills through the use of a pedagogy adapted to their culture so as to make the Gospel available to them in their own language? *Service of the poor and the promotion of justice* far from being incongruous depend on one another and complete one another.

A parenthood affirmed by the Declaration

The Chapter of 1966-1967 expressed itself clearly regarding this subject in the Declaration: *Service of the poor requires that a Brother use the opportunities of his apostolate to oppose all forms of poverty of frustration, to maintain a special concern for the full human development of those who suffer poverty, and to stimulate their desire to improve the milieu in which they live. Sensitivity to the needs of individual persons and a preference for an apostolate to serve the poor can never dispense with efforts to establish a more equitable social order which is aimed at the elimination of poverty* (Declaration, p. 36: 30, 3).

The spirit of the Chapter is unambiguous. The obligation to work toward establishing a more just social order, not only is in keeping with *service to the poor*, which is an essential element of our consecrated life, but it proceeds from it: *The orientation by preference of the Institute towards the education of the poor does not exclude the Brothers from involvement with other social classes. They may even be sometimes obliged to this type of work because of special pastoral needs, or because of the demands of the total operation*

poor directly, it is important that they nonetheless be identified of the district. But when the Brothers are not teaching the identified with concern for the poor and the work of the Institute in their favor. This identification will be assured by the Brothers' efforts to develop a sensitivity to the problems of justice and peace through doctrinal and social teaching, in order that their students participate effectively in the mission to which the Church calls them in the world today (Declaration, p. 38: 32, 1).

A fundamental change

The difficulties experienced by the Brothers in working toward the *promotion of justice* are undeniable. They indicate how much time is needed for the new orientation in the Church, one supported by a Chapter and voluntarily accepted in principle by the entire Institute, to become a fact in our actions and in our decisions.

But, on the other hand, we have just seen that, in large measure, there is an intuitive effort toward the *promotion of justice* which is carried out through *service to the poor*. This indicates that the change desired by the Chapters, as well as by the contemporary Church, is beginning to make itself seen, be it only in an implicit manner.

The lack of information provided by the reports allows us to grasp the importance of the time in which we find ourselves, a time at once rich and uncertain, when a change is beginning to show itself in a visible way, while it is also far from being completed and not certain to take place.

In these conditions, you can understand that the General Council wants to use the opportunity provided by the reports to stress the *urgency of pursuing this change*, decreed by the Chapters, and to try to do this with a new enthusiasm: *the promotion of justice is an objective that must be accepted in practice in the entire Institute so as better to achieve*

the service of the poor. In the field of education, *service to the poor* is an integral part of the *promotion of justice*, but this latter goes beyond that. It is not content simply to help the poor, it seeks to fight against the things which unceasingly cause poverty and injustice, even in the richest nations.

One of the specific roles of the educator in this matter is to awaken — or re-awaken — many of our contemporaries, who, as a result of living in a world full of injustice, have become accustomed to it while not perceiving that individual advancement or national wealth is in great measure achieved to the detriment of the weaker individuals in a given society.

That is why reflection on the *promotion of justice* appears to us as a *central idea* in this dossier. This is so because we must have this far reaching view in order to direct our apostolic action in keeping with the tradition coming from the Founder and directed to the *service of the poor*.

FIRST ORIENTATIONS

Before proceeding in the section that follows to a fuller development of sensitization, we would like to present some ideas that will summarize our reflections at this point:

The road to follow in our changes:

To enter more fully into the spirit and the practice of the *promotion of justice*, we would like to reflect a bit on our own experiences. A Brother who gives himself sincerely to the service of the poor through education quickly learns not to content himself with assisting the poor person as an individual to overcome his poverty. Because, tomorrow, when he leaves school, the poor person risks being the victim of

the implacable processes which create poverty. It is sufficient to recall the problems facing any young person trying to find a first job or to avoid unemployment. The Brother educator, then, is forced to become part of a bigger effort to combat the causes which incessantly create poverty and injustice. In this he must join with those already working to help the poorer classes to deal collectively with their life situation, to obtain a more equitable sharing of wealth, as well as better to safeguard the rights of the individual and of all people.

The road to follow in our change here is not an ideological one, but that of evangelical service, in its most profound and most efficacious way.

A clear choice: the struggle for justice must take place in very diverse areas, such as in the economy, politics, and the internal relations of a country, and even in international relations. And evidently, it also takes place in the area of education.

Consequently, it is up to us clearly to choose those means which conform to our vocation. Other means are good. Not only can we not ignore them, but we must coordinate our efforts with those who pursue the same goal by such different means. But it remains equally true that we cannot do all the good, and that by choosing to become Brothers, we chose explicitly to work for the *promotion of justice* through Christian education.

An inspirational view: For any educational activity to be vigorous and legitimate, it must be inspired by a great purpose. The *promotion of justice*, in connection with evangelization and making Jesus Christ known, can be the purpose which will animate the Brothers' activity, in school or out of school. *The Brothers are sent to prepare the way of the Lord in much the same manner as St. John the Baptist. Their consecration constitutes them as messengers to the young to declare the*

PART FOUR

SENSITIZATION

After having stated what is being done for the service of the poor and for the *promotion of justice*, the reports deal with the future of this service. The wish most frequently expressed is to help the Brothers become more attentive, more sensitive, and also more competent in these two areas.

Like many words which catch our attention, the word *sensitization* does not have only one definite meaning. It refers to our intuition or often even our feeling toward things. So in the pages that follow, we will try to make its meaning more explicit.

To do this, we will recall certain elements, remarks, or suggestions found throughout the reports, and to which allusions were made in the preceding pages. By bringing these together, we will progress toward the final part of our reflections, which we will conclude in the next Chapter, by means of more systematic directives.

As was stated in the introduction, we will present this part in two sections — the first, dealing with the role of the Founder in this sensitization, and the second, endeavouring to analyze the principal elements involved in acquiring a social consciousness, an indication of progress in our sensitization process.

At the school of St. de La Salle

Reference to the doctrine of St. John Baptist de La Salle is a consistent element found in all the reports. Evidently it

is the best means for the sensitization of the Brothers. On one hand, it is the source of the tradition of *service of the poor* in our Institute. And at the same time, it is still the reference point toward which all the reports turn in order better to understand our present commitments. So we will turn first to this doctrine.

The limitations of this dossier will not allow a complete study of St. John Baptist de La Salle and the *service of the poor*. So we propose to limit ourselves to selecting certain essential points which could lead to and inspire our meditations on this subject.

Here it is very clearly a matter of inspiration, not of repetition. We cannot even dream of doing again in the twentieth century what was done during the seventeenth. On the other hand, the Spirit which directs us to the *service of the poor* is the same one which inspired John Baptist de La Salle. According to the very words of the Founder, it is the Spirit of Jesus which wants all men to be saved and which makes us his ministers, and it is through us that the salvation brought by Jesus must be made more available to all men, and, particularly, the most deprived among them.

The pedagogical creativity of John Baptist De La Salle

If there is a topic on which we do not want to repeat ourselves here, certainly it is that of teaching methods and the content of our teaching. And we do not want to deal with these in what follows. Rather, what interests us is how an educator can employ pedagogy in the service of youth, above all the most disadvantaged among them. Our concern is the style and the spirit of our pedagogy. And here John Baptist de La Salle remains the source of our inspiration.

When rather frequently we hear said: *The Brothers must do again in the year 2000 what St. de La Salle succeeded in*

doing in his time, that is, create a new type of prophetic school, many think privately that it is impossible to have "genius on demand". However, St. de La Salle is a very suitable model for us, in spite of the way he is often presented to us by panegyrists who know but little history, because he did not create his school "ex nihilo". Rather, he made himself part of a then on-going movement.

The Founder made himself part of an on-going movement. He knew how to select from among and to use successfully the best pedagogical innovations of his times. He knew the situation of youth and believed in their capabilities. And it was for the poor that he organized his school (1).

He made himself part of an on-going movement: Since the end of the sixteenth century, in England, in France, and in the Low Countries, primary schools or "petites écoles" — charity schools for the service of the poor — were created, congregations or associations of men and women were founded to teach in them, and books dealing with methodology such as the famous *Ecole paroissiale* of 1654 were written. This total movement inspired John Baptist de La Salle.

*He knew how to select from among and to use successfully the best innovative elements found in these schools or developed by this movement. The charity schools inspired him with the idea of gratuity. The schools of the writing masters furnished him with teaching programs in writing and in arithmetic, the latter even including elements of accounting. From the "collèges" he borrowed the community organization of his schools, from Port-Royal, the idea of first teaching the mother tongue, and from the academies for training young nobles, the ideas for his *Bienséance et civilité* . . .*

What young people could look for in different schools, as their wealth and the limits set by their social class al-

(1) See PHILIPPE ARIES, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Edition du Seuil, Paris, 1973, and particularly the second part, "La vie scolastique."

lowed, he made available in one and the same school. And this school he made accessible to all through one of its essential characteristics: an absolute gratuity which appears to be the most decisive of all his innovations.

He knew the situation of youth and believed in their capabilities

Basic to the thinking of St. De La Salle was a *knowledge* of the *situation* in which the children of *artisans and the poor* found themselves, and *which he invites the Brothers to ponder in passages set down in the Rules and the Meditations for Time of Retreat which are to form the basis of our reflections* (2). He warned them that in many places these young people were at times *libertines*, that is youths of doubtful faith and morals. He said that many of them were *disorderly*, that is difficult to control because of the bad habits they had acquired.

These are the young people he knew so well, and for whom he proposed the programs we recalled in the preceding paragraph. This shows how much *he believed in their possibilities*. Here it is sufficient to recall what he proposed in the "Meditations for Time of Retreat" regarding their spiritual formation: that they be filled with the Spirit of God, *so that when this is poured out on them they would possess fully the spirit of Christianity* (III, 3), *that they be invited to live the Beatitudes* (IV, 2), *and to be living members of the Church* (VII, 1).

It was for the poor that he organized his school

A precise study of those social categories included under the terms of *the artisans and the poor* would be enlightening.

(2) See "Règles," chapter I. cahier lasallien, no. 25, p. 17. See 2^e Méditation pour le temps de la retraite, in its entirety, cahier lasallien, no. 13, pp. 11-15.

In unpublished notes sent to the General Council by two researches (3), we find the following information: the term *the poor* meant those inscribed in the *registry for receiving alms*, those individuals receiving assistance from different associations and institutions. This was the lowest category in the social hierarchy of the time, comprised of those who had lost their jobs, the victims of the terrible instability among the workers. As for *the artisans*, this term designated those who had some of the tools of their trade, who looked for someone to employ them, and who sold what they produced. Here then were two social categories of modest standing, certainly, but also quite distinct. The Lasallian school received them both, on equal terms.

John Baptist de La Salle then had not limited access to his school to a single social class, the poor. He opened it also to the artisans and even to those who were more fortunate. Several times there are allusions to the *persecutions* which were the lot of the Brothers. Most often these persecutions came about because they freely opened their schools to others than the children of the poor. If they were persecuted, it was not because they taught the poor, it was because they refused to teach only the poor. The pastors in Paris themselves were not allowed to open schools other than those reserved exclusively for the poor of their parishes. It is easy to understand, then, why at times it was difficult for the pastor of St. Sulpice to defend De La Salle and the Brothers when they went beyond the terms of the agreement made between the "grand-chantre" and the pastors of Paris (4).

But, if John Baptist de la Salle did not want his school to become a ghetto for the poor, he knew how to organize it and found means to make the most deprived feel at ease

(3) Frères Henri Bédel and Yves Poutet, "Etudes réalisées au moment du Chapitre générale de 1976."

(4) See G. RIGAULT, *Histoire...* Vol. I, p. 242.

there. The example of Rouen is enlightening (5): the poor were served first. And it was after seeing the good that was being done in their regard that the bourgeois requested that the same thing be done for their children. In response the Founder opened the boarding school of Saint Yon.

As mentioned before, John Baptist knew how to find the institutional means for making the school accessible to all, without reproducing the stratification found in contemporary French society: it was *absolute gratuity for all*.

We really think that a paragraph such as this can clarify our present reflection: John Baptist opened twenty-three houses (6); only one, Saint Yon, was for the service of the more favored classes. In the others, it was the children of the artisans and of the poor who were received in effect and on a priority basis. These objective historical facts help us understand the invitation addressed to the districts by the Chapter of 1976: *It invites the districts to see to it that the orientation towards the direct service of the poor becomes the rule rather than the exception in district priorities* (Proposition 13).

A prophetic school

It would be an amusing anachronism to picture John Baptist de La Salle as a sociologist of our day analyzing the relations between the school and society. He was not an ideologue seeking to organize his school on the basis of some philosophical or even pedagogical theories. His school became prophetic and even controversial because it responded to real needs according to an evangelical inspiration. This evangelical

(5) Blain, tome II, livre 3^e, cahier lasallien no. 8, pp. 28-34.

(6) This number of 23 "houses" is based on the account of the visits made by Brother Barthélemy in 1717: twenty-two houses with schools and the novitiate. But certain of the "houses" were **responsible** for more than one school.

spirit led him to develop in himself a commitment to justice, concern for the lowly, a basic respect for individuals, and a quest for social relations characterized by equality and a spirit of gentleness. This good seed, cultivated by John Baptist de La Salle with faith and realism, developed its potential.

Fifty years after his death, his work had already sufficiently shown its possibilities so that the partisans of the Enlightenment and of the intellectual aristocracy denounced it as being dangerous.

By 1763, the movement for Christian and popular education had borne fruit. A representative of the philosophes, La Chalotais, after complaining that children of the workers were attending the "collèges", more directly attacked the Brothers. *The Brothers of the Christian Doctrine, who are called "ignorantins", are striving to achieve the destruction of everything. They teach reading and writing to people who need to learn only how to draw and to handle the plane and the file, but who are not content to do only this* (7). And Voltaire congratulated him: *It is proper that the people be guided, and not that they be given instruction. They are not worthy of this latter* (8).

A comparison between the Brothers' accomplishments and Voltaire's opinion is enlightening about how an educational system becomes implicitly prophetic, because of the concept of man which it advocates. On one side are those who think the people should only be told what to do, on the other, those who want to lead them to the point where they can take responsibility for directing themselves. On one side, we have a society which opens its schools only to a small number of people, on the other, a society which brings itself to offer all, without any distinction of class, a school not seeking to form an elite group, but one which through its

(7) L.R. de Caredenc de la Chalotais, "Essais d'éducation nationale ou plan d'études pour la jeunesse," (1763), pp. 25-26.

(8) Voltaire, Letter dated 19 March 1766.

organization and its programs asserts the basic equality of all men.

The society of the Christian schools

In the circular on *Our Community Life*, we were able to state: *The legitimate glory given to the Founder should not hide the role of the Brothers in the beginnings of the Institute. This was a role knowingly given them by the Founder himself* (9). The vocation of John Baptist de La Salle had its origins in his concern to form school masters suited for their important task. The continuation and the success of his work is explained by the creation of this Society dedicated to gratuitous education. In the life of St. de La Salle, the men were more important than the institutions so that he is as much and more so the Founder of the Brothers as of the schools.

In 1691, it was to ensure the success of the newly founded gratuitous schools that John Baptist made the vow of association with two of his companions. Three years later, it was for the same end that with twelve Brothers he pronounced the first perpetual vows: *We make the vow of association and of union in order to maintain the said establishments* (1691). *I promise and vow to unite myself and to live in society with ... to keep together and by association gratuitous schools...* (1694). *Service of the poor* became the very substance of the Brothers consecration. And from this they received very many characteristics of the consecrated life, particularly the essential consecration toward the glory of God and the service of men in the Church, as also the impulse toward community life (10).

(9) Circular 410, p. 54: "The Brothers Involved in the Foundation."

(10) For a more complete study, we suggest either circular 410, pages 48 to 53, or "Cahier lasallien," no. 11 by Brother Maurice Auguste, "l'Institut lasallien à la recherche de son statut canonique." Here we are interested only in the role played by the *Society* as regards *service to the poor*.

The Society of the Christian Schools was seen as the place in which the Brothers were formed and in which they made their commitment.

That is why during the various stages of their formation accomplished in the novitiate, to which the Founder did not hesitate to recall them, the Brothers were asked as a group to help develop the *Rules* and the *Conduct of Schools*.

In his preface to the first printed edition of the *Conduct* Brother Timothy wrote: *This "Conduct" was not brought together and put in order by the late M. de La Salle except after a great number of discussions between himself and the older Brothers of the Institute, those most capable of teaching school well, and after a number of years of experience. It contains only what has been well thought out and tried ...* (Cahiers lasallien, no. 24, preface).

The society of the Brothers, then, was the place where what we call to-day the *educational plan* was developed. Also, it was in the Society that the teams which directed all the schools were formed. At times these were very small groups, but groups in which each member was sustained by a collective dynamism based on the knowledge of the original model of the school and the Christian education it was designed to provide.

The frequently invoked Lasallian realism invites us to take note of the force represented in our days by an International Institute of more than ten thousand members, working in union with thousands of educators and parents, and devoted to the *service of the poor and of justice*, a movement characterized by originality, good training, and commitment.

The spirituality behind this work

The spirituality of John Baptist de La Salle as regards the poor has been studied in a masterly fashion by Brothers Sauvage and Campos in their book, *Annoncer l'Evangile aux pauvres*. Here we will be content to indicate some of its high points by drawing on two texts: that called *Memoire on the Beginnings* in which St. de La Salle exposes his own spiritual journey, and, secondly, the 86th. meditation, written for the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The value of both of these texts is in the forcefulness with which they synthesize the inner life of the Founder.

The *Memoire on the Beginnings* was composed by the Saint himself and was used by both Blain and Maillefer. *It was, says he in the memoire cited, because of these two events, the encounter with M. Nyel and the proposal made to me by this lady (Mme. de Croyères), that I began to take care of the school for boys. I had not thought of doing this before, but not because others had not suggested that I do such work. Several friends of M. Roland had tried to inspire me in this direction, but the work had no appeal for me, and I did not feel inclined toward it. And if I had ever thought that the care I took of the school masters, simply out of charity, would impose on me the duty of living with them, I would have stopped doing this. For, naturally, I ranked lower than my valet those whom I was forced to employ in the schools, particularly in the beginning, and the very thought that it would be necessary to live with them would have been insupportable to me. In fact, I felt a great pain when first I had them come live with me, and this lasted for two years. Apparently, then, it was for this reason that God, who directs all things with wisdom and gentleness, and who is not accustomed to force the wills of men, but who wanted to lead me to take complete direction of the schools, did this in a very imperceptible manner, and over a period of time,*

so that one commitment led me into the next one without my having foreseen this in the beginning (11).

In this text, John Baptist de La Salle reveals at the same time the way in which he became our Founder and the spiritual power which here sustained him.

The journey he made is brought out by his very choice of words. At first, in the *beginning* period, to use his term, the Saint considered the fellow workers of Adrian Nyel to be inferior to his valet. He decided to interest himself in them only progressively, finally forming a community with them. With only one or two exceptions, these young people left and were replaced by others who were more highly motivated. From being fellow workers of Nyel, inferior to his valet, in a few years they became *brothers*. This difference of terms itself indicates the journey he had made.

Little by little John Baptist de La Salle discovered poverty, be it through the school masters, be it by direct contact with the youth in whom he interested himself more and more while founding the schools. The consistent element present in this spiritual progression is the way in which John Baptist established his relations with God. This was not with a God who revealed his plan to him from the beginnings of the enterprise, but a God who made the journey with the Founder, as Christ had accompanied his disciples on the road to Emmaus, a God who *gently and in an imperceptible manner* created the new identity of his servant (12).

This spirituality is a source of inspiration for us, for the God who accompanied John Baptist de La Salle accompanies us also. It is the spirit of faith that allows us to respond to the many invitations we receive from men and from events. As regards the promotion of justice, it seems to us in partic-

(11) See *via* par Blain, tome I - Cahier lasallien no. 7, p. 169.

(12) See in Circular 406: "Our Consecrated Life," the reflections on the manner in which God fashions our identity all during our life, pp. 76-87.

ular that this spirit of faith, this attention to God who makes known to us new commitments, invites us to respond to two calls: the first is one coming to us from all that happens in the world because of the lack of justice, whether inside various nations or among them. The second is one coming to us from the General Chapters, in the name of the Institute, and of which the General Council is trying to be a faithful echo.

In other words, it would be an error to believe that the content of our mission is determined for good at one moment in our lives. Within our very vocation, God invites us to proceed, to discover, and to become converted, in full faithfulness to our religious consecration and in union with our Brothers.

The *Meditation for Christmas Day* (13), the second text cited as a fundamental source of inspiration, is not isolated. It describes all the life and all the experience of De La Salle and of his co-workers, when they found themselves confronted by the poor and their social condition. It should be read — and prayed — against the historical background it takes for granted. Here are some of its more salient passages: *The poverty which Jesus practiced so strikingly at His birth should induce us to have a great love for this virtue, for it was to make us love it that Jesus was born in this condition. Let us not be astonished, therefore, when we lack something, even what is necessary, since Jesus, at his birth, was deprived of everything. In this manner we must be born spiritually, despoiled of all things. As the Son of God wished that the sacred humanity, which He had assumed, should be reduced to this state, so He desires that we also should be in a similar disposition, that He may take full possession of our heart.*

In choosing our present state, we should have prepared ourselves for abasement, like the Son of God when He became man, for lowliness is the characteristic of our profes-

(13) "Méditations pour les Dimanches et les Fêtes," Cahier lasallien no. 12, pp. 234-36, méditation no. 86.

sion and our employment. We are poor Brothers, forgotten by the world and esteemed of no consequence. Only the poor come to us, and they have nothing to offer but their hearts prepared to receive our instructions. Let us love all that is most humiliating in our profession, in order to share in some degree in the abjection of Jesus Christ at His birth.

Rest assured that so long as you have a sincere love for poverty and for all that is humiliating you will produce fruit in souls; that the angels of God will make you known and will inspire parents to send you their children to teach; that by your instructions you will touch the hearts of these poor boys, and that the majority of them will become good Christians. But if, on the contrary, you do not resemble Christ at His birth by these two outstanding virtues, you will be little known and little employed; you will be neither loved nor appreciated by the poor, and you will never be for them a saviour, as your profession requires, for you can attract them to God only in so far as you resemble Jesus at His birth.

The first text, the *Memoire on the Beginnings*, makes it plain to us that John Baptist de La Salle entered into the world of the poor. It is this which gives a special aspect to the meditation for Christmas. The one who writes and reflects before us is not a stranger to the poor, a benefactor who helps them and then returns to his other everyday activities. He made himself one of them, poor with the poor. This text is so rich that you will have to pardon us for calling attention to only some of its aspects (14).

At the origin of the vocation of the Brother who dedicates himself to the *service of the poor*, there is a making his own the love of Jesus who *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped* and who took flesh in order to save

(14) On this subject, we can only recommend again the book of Brothers Sauvage and Campos, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle — Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres* (Beauchesne, Paris). See in particular pages 305 and after, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres du dedans du monde des pauvres*.

mankind (see Phil., 2: 6 and following). He acts as one who has a *religious* vocation, who wills to cooperate in the salvation of men, and not from a philanthropic motive having no explicit reference to Jesus our Saviour.

It is necessary to enter the world of the poor in order to acquire in their regard the characteristics of a Saviour. The sign of this integration is not essentially material, as would be a change of dwelling or of clothing. It is in the area of our relations: the poor themselves must recognize us as saviours.

The salvation we offer is not perceived by its brilliance. It is accomplished through humility and our daily patience. The only ones who will give us anything are the poor themselves, and they will give us their hearts. It is necessary to be attentive to this remark. We cannot go to the poor with the spirit of superiority of those who think they know and who feel strong in their own culture. We must hear what the poor say and allow ourselves to be instructed by them. Only under this condition will our knowledge be useful to them.

The relationship between living a poor life and the *educational service of the poor* is emphasized forcefully. The present Rule stresses it thus: *Those who seek after riches can never hope to win the love of the poor but will always remain as strangers to them* (6a). This passage establishes clearly the relation between the vow of poverty and the educational service of the poor.

The need to save the poor from inside their world does not mean that outside help is not necessary. But this should not be, except in an urgent situation, a paternalistic assistance. With hearts converted to the poor, the rich must help them to act for themselves. And those among us who go to the rich should attempt, if necessary, to change their thinking in this matter.

It should not astonish us if certain confreres find it painful to read this meditation. Certainly its language is at least somewhat characterized by the sorrowful approach so

common to spiritual writings of that time. But above all, this meditation challenges us. Perhaps we find its blunt and somewhat harsh tone to be threatening. However, if it is necessary to seek support for these ideas, we can cite Paul VI's message to religious men and women in *Evangelica testificatio*:

17: THE OUTCRY OF THE POOR: *You hear rising up, more pressing than ever, from their personal distress and collective misery, "the cry of the poor". Was it not in order to respond to their appeal as God's privileged ones that Christ came, even going as far as to identify himself with them? In a world experiencing the full flood of development this persistence of poverty-stricken masses and individuals constitutes a pressing call for "a conversion of minds and attitudes", especially for you who follow Christ more closely in this earthly condition of self-emptying. We know that this call resounds within you in so dramatic a fashion that some of you even feel on occasion the temptation to take violent action. As disciples of Christ, how could you follow a way different from his? This way is not, as you know a movement of the political or temporal order; it calls rather for the conversion of hearts, for liberation from all temporal encumbrances. It is a call to love.*

18: POVERTY AND JUSTICE: *How then will the cry of the poor find an echo in your lives? That cry must, first of all, bar you from whatever would be a compromise with any form of social injustice. It obliges you also to awaken consciences to the drama of misery and to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church. It leads some of you to join the poor in their situation and to share their bitter cares. Furthermore, it calls many of your institutes to rededicate for the good of the poor some of their works — something which many have already done with generosity. Finally, it enjoins on you a use of goods limited to what is required for the fulfilment of the functions to which you are called. It is*

necessary that in your daily lives you should give proof, even externally, of authentic poverty (15).

Acquiring a social consciousness

The lessons found in the life of St. John Baptist de La Salle furnish us with a fundamental common heritage: the Brothers as a group accept them as an authentic, most important, and common source of their inspiration in favor of *service to the poor*. The Chapter of 1976 verified this: *The spiritual pilgrimage of John Baptist de La Salle is the same which is offered to the Brothers by the Rule: "Faith makes it possible for the Brothers, little by little, to see in everything that happens, in every person they meet, especially the poor, the unwanted and the persecuted, a sign and an invitation of the Holy Spirit"*. ("Rules and Constitutions", 2g) (16).

We must be ready, then, to begin a change, to embark on a journey similar to that made by the Founder, in order better to discover our responsibilities in face of the calls for more justice heard in the world to-day, and to make use of those means of responding that are suited to our specific vocation.

The following reflections can be made regarding social consciousness.

1) SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Social consciousness requires that we be constantly and readily attentive to those things which cause poverty, injustice, and oppressive situations, as also to the possibilities available to men, organizations, and events to prevent these dangers and to promote positive action.

(15) Apostolic Exhortation, "Evangelica testificatio," pp. 24-25: 17, 18.

(16) Circular 408, p. 40: 322.

2) THE BROTHERS AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Given the nature of the reports, it is not possible to draw any very clear conclusions, much less to reach any generalization, regarding social consciousness and the greater or lesser extent of its presence among the Brothers. However, on the basis of the numerous comments made, it is possible for us to form some impressions :

- As a result of the direction taken by the Church and the Institute during the last twelve years, the Brothers seem to be more sensitive to the poor than they were prior to the 39th. General Chapter.

- The emphasis given to this commitment of the Institute by the 40th. General Chapter, as well as the efforts made by the Brother Superior and the General Council, seem to have increased the sensitivity of the Institute to the *educational service of the poor*.

- At the same time, there remain important differences in understanding this service, conflicts of priorities, and considerable dissatisfaction.

- Also, it appears clear from reading the reports that very many retain a quite narrow concept of our *service to the poor*. These continue to voice an almost fundamentalistic interpretation of the Founder, even though the world and the Church have changed in three hundred years. Now what is important is to reproduce this spirit by measures suited to a social and Church context requiring different activities.

Some regions, districts and communities have already taken the initiative through meetings, seminars, and contacts with the poor organized to help develop this social consciousness. The manner of introducing the subject varies: Church and Institute documents, discussion of local events which can arouse our social consciousness, contacts with individuals involved in social action such as priests, educators, or union

leaders, or activities to increase our knowledge of the people among whom we live, and so on.

Many universities or Catholic institutions offer programs of this type in which the Brothers are invited to participate. Practical experiences of different lengths are made available to the young men in formation and to older Brothers as well, so that they can become aware of the problems related to justice and poverty by sharing in the life and activity of deprived people. Generally these programs are organized during vacation time.

3) OBJECTIVES TOWARDS WHICH TO WORK

Before reflecting at some length on those things which favor the development of social consciousness, we want to present here a rapid summary of the principal objectives toward which we should work:

- *Grasping the dimensions of the problem:* The Brothers must develop a greater awareness of the importance of social justice. It is good to ponder the effects of economic poverty, oppression of all sorts, violence, war, unemployment, hunger, sickness, the sufferings of immigrants and refugees, and so on. Also, let us consider how necessary it is to join with all those who fight against these evils.

- *Becoming conscious of our own prejudices:* These can include racism, dislike for certain social classes, nationalism, a certain fondness for violence, war, or a spirit of revenge.

- *Changing with the Church:* The Brothers must be aware of the social teaching of the Church today, and of its important changes, such as are brought out in "Gaudium et Spes", "Populorum progressio", "Evangelii nuntiandi", "Redemptor hominis", or the report of the Synod on justice. To these can be added documents published by various Conferences of Bishops, Major Superiors of Religious Orders, or individual Bishops.

● *Accepting the challenge of the Gospel:* Charged with the evangelization of youth, particularly the poor, we cannot separate the announcing of the Word from working for their human development. We must allow ourselves to be challenged by the Gospel, by all the Gospel without change or diminution.

These four objectives will be developed at length on the pages that follow.

GRASPING THE DIMENSIONS OF THE PROBLEM

1) We have already stated how the simple exercise of our ministry for the most deprived will lead us to discover the complexity of this service. It does not suffice to provide immediate assistance to fight against poverty, it is also necessary to combat those things which unceasingly cause poverty and injustice (see above, p. 58).

2) One of the first things we must perceive is the existence in the world today, without any reference necessarily to the Church and its institutions, of a *general movement* to fight for justice and against poverty. Whether it be on the national or the international level, this movement has made itself felt as one of the most important in our time. It is directed by various governments or by international organizations, such as the UN, FAO, UNESCO, BIT, Amnesty International, among others. Also, it is a preoccupation of labor unions and political parties. Certain fundamental problems such as hunger, freedom, work and pay, are the concern of these movements, each of which deals with them according to its proper ideology. In other words, they are not waiting for us to become involved, and we must become part of history as it is being made before

our eyes. To remain indifferent would be to ignore or to misunderstand the situation in which our contemporaries live. We would deprive ourselves of the source which inspired our Founder if we only refer to the allusions he made about the situation of the poor and the workers of his time and the place they had in the founding of the Institute.

The normal attitude of the educator must be to interest himself in these matters and to show solidarity with those working toward the *promotion of justice*.

3) The vocabulary common to this subject brings out both the difficulty and the breadth of this undertaking.

Difficulty: Often we hear such terms as *struggle, combat, violence, oppression, colonialism, slavery*, and so on. While all these form parts of various ideologies, it is good to note that the Church documents, and even Papal discourses, have also employed this vocabulary, as a means of describing a situation, but not as a statement of principles. However, it is a fact as shown by the history of the last two centuries that often it is only through a struggle that the poorest among men and nations have acquired their liberty, dignity, and rights.

Breadth: The breadth of the undertaking is brought out by the words which state its objectives and which are at once necessary and insufficient, since the matter is complex: *service of the poor, promotion of justice, liberation, development, human progress*, and many others more or less notorious or well remembered. And it is not simply a matter of using catchy words, for here we have an accurate expression of a fundamental concern of the men of our times.

4) *The sphere implied:* The problems then are many, and their causes as also their effects are intermingled. This dossier cannot be made into an introductory manual for setting forth the many elements involved in the term *promotion*

of justice. However, we want clearly to call attention to the principal ones among these, even if in doing this we must limit ourselves to enumerating them. What follows in no way pretends to be complete.

- *Riches*: Their production and distribution, as also the technical and political problems related to them, particularly the perverted structures which make their just distribution impossible ... the blind power of many multinationals.

- *Salaries*: The manner of determining them, the guarantees of work, the unemployment, the migrant workers,...

- *Business*: Its equivocal advertising policies.

- *International relations*, fixing the prices of raw materials, the way in which the developed countries enrich themselves at the expense of those which are not, neo-colonialism, the price of manufactured goods ...

- *Racial and ethnic problems*.

- *The arms race*, even in poor countries.

- *Freedom* inside a country, particularly for the Church and her mission, for the weak. Arbitrary arrests.

- *Unions*: Their functions, their ties to ideology, the liberty they enjoy, the organizations available to the poor for their advancement ...

- The *political parties*, the *system of government*, the *ideologies*.

- The *political instability* in a large number of countries, its causes, the administrative corruption, the corruption associated with coming to power ...

- *Ecology* and the waste of natural resources ...

An educator, certainly, cannot be a "one man band", a *specialist in all areas*, about which we wrote in *Our Mission*

(17). What he can develop is a comprehensive view of the problems and of their basic nature, so as to respond to them in a suitable manner and with fidelity to his vocation (18).

5) *The means of initiation*: In brief, we think there are two principal means of *grasping the dimensions of the problem* of justice, as we have suggested be done in the title of this chapter: *Making oneself aware of these matters through study, and involving oneself*.

Making oneself aware of these matters through study, needs no explanation, and we have already insisted on the necessity of reading, exchange of ideas with experts, taking part in courses and short sessions (see above, p. 85). The information acquired will bring out the problems, certainly, but along with them various models that have been suggested as means for individual and national development. That is why we have quoted at length from *Populorum progressio*, less because it expresses the **thinking** of the Church than because it suggests some development models which would allow educators to organize and to direct their activities. It is for the same reason that once again we suggest you reflect a bit regarding the *new international economic system*. (Cf. Circular 408, pp. 129-130).

For a long time, training religious in economics, and above all in politics or social activity, was considered as a luxury or as something very original. Now it is important to insist on the necessity of such training since it would be an error to involve religious in activities for justice without furnishing them with basic knowledge of the subject and warning them about the ideologies which have as their ob-

(17) Circular 408, p. 96.

(18) Good introductory books on this topic are available in many languages. We recommend, as an example, the excellent book by Rudolf H. Strahm, *Pourquoi sont-ils si pauvres?* (Editions de la Baconnière, Genève).

jective something other than evangelization and the integral development of man.

Involving oneself: *Our background as teachers tends to qualify us very well for drawing up and spreading the message, the written word, the truth that enlightens, the explanation that appeals to the mind, or the masterly presentation. Here it is not a question of minimizing the importance of teaching subject-matter, but of balancing it by relating it to life experiences.*

For example, to discover the needs of youth, or of any given group, what is better? study in books, spending some time in their milieu, generally little or badly known? In order to learn about the poor, should we talk about them, define them, or meet with them and share their life? In order to renew oneself in the life of prayer, is it better to begin by a long study of its conditions and its nature, or to plunge into it? or to share the life of a praying community? Similar reflections can be made regarding the common life ...

But once again, it is necessary to do one thing without omitting the other. To integrate one it is not necessary to exclude the other. The same is true regarding the conditions for sharing life in a new milieu. It is not a matter of Brothers blindly jumping into impossible situations. It is necessary to prepare and to work with those who live in such situations. To do this we must think things through with them and assist them to integrate these things into the totality of the Lasallian life. Far from replacing formal training in school, life experiences such as these give it meaning and substance (19).

(19) Circular 392, "The Fostering of Vocations — Formation", pp. 26-30.

RECOMING CONSCIOUS OF OUR OWN PREJUDICES

A reading of the reports reveals the mentality of their authors. Often, this is not done in an explicit manner since this is not what was intended by the writers. But the ideas expressed do form a real part of the usual thinking of the authors on a subject, or they are implicit judgments which control decisions in practice or positions the writers take without knowing why. What follows is intended as an honest examination of this matter, not a series of accusations or efforts to place some blame on someone.

Limits on the content of our faith: What is apparent in the first place is *how limited* is our faith as regards a number of its important and fundamental teachings on such topics as *justice, sin, and a spiritual life*. This latter we tend to associate only with high sanctity or our personal morals. In effect, this creates a gap between *this world* and *the next*, at the expense of what is repeatedly taught in the Gospel, that the Kingdom, without being of this world, is already present here as a very active seed.

Contamination by the world: As regards the manner in which we view the world and our human relations, we can apply to ourselves the severe warning of the Founder: *If you wish to persevere and to die in your vocation, never have any relations with people of the world; because, little by little, you will acquire a taste for their way of acting, and you will become so involved in their conversation that you will not be able to prevent yourself, as a matter of policy, from applauding what they have to say* (20).

(20) Life by Blain, Cahier lasallien, no. 8, p. 174. Compare this warning as regards the *world* with the *incarnation* among the poor that is recommended by the Founder in his 86th. meditation, cited on pp. 80-81.

In fact, it is striking that a number of our judgments or our actions reflect the judgments and the mode of acting of the worldly powerful, of the worldly influential, of those with whom our social or family ties lead us to associate.

Indications of this state of mind are not lacking. One of the most important to point out here, because of its influence on the direction given to our ministry, is the opinion that the progress of society is due to an elite, and that this elite can only be formed in the more culturally developed milieus, among the more favored classes whose members already have a ready access to culture and to power. In keeping with this line of thinking, *service to the poor* consists in giving them help during emergencies, and the *promotion of justice* should be confided to the rich and the powerful, who are entrusted with building a just society for us.

This attitude *excludes all collective advancement*, while on the contrary, in keeping with the directives given by our Chapters (21), the advancement of society should be brought about through the cooperative efforts of all its members. As we stressed in the preceding chapter (see p. 54), *a man is truly human only to the extent that he himself is the author of his progress*. And, we add here, this applies to societies as well as to individuals. Each social group should find within itself the authors of its progress, though evidently with the assistance and the cooperation of the other groups forming part of the same society. For we are not here advocating class conflict, but the ability of each class to find its leaders from among its own members.

Various ideologies, particularly Marxism, have well understood the ability of every social class to promote its own advancement, so that they are past masters of the art of raising up leaders on all levels, even among the poorest peoples. Are we going to leave to them the privilege of doing this, or will we show the prophetic attitude of St. De La Salle,

(21) "Declaration," pp. 36-38: 30,1-31,6; Circular 408, pp. 100-101.

who was considered by the world of his time as a dangerous innovator?

Our practical judgments: Our daily contact with the young people who come to us gives considerable importance to the influence of our practical judgments, to those opinions we express in the course of a conversation and which deal with the real aspects of life. It would be worthwhile to seek out their source: is it evangelical? is it the world, particularly that of the press and the mass media, among others? What do we think about money, publicity, or the importance of social success? If, in our practical judgments, we think that success consists above all in having the best paying position possible, and we direct all the efforts of the school in that direction, are we pursuing a Christian objective or simply a human goal?

Possibly this examination can include other dimensions of our consecrated life: do we show an excessive concern to ensure a good retirement for ourselves, an ability to build a comfortable nest for ourselves in the community? Do these not proceed from the same contamination by worldly ideas?

Certain aversions: Many reports also show the aversion of the Brothers toward the vocabulary, and still more the activity, whether near or far away, which could possibly lead to some *disorder*. For some, formal order seems to be more important than justice. And perhaps this is the source of some of our reticence as regards labor unions, strikes, salary demands and so on. No one is thinking of canonizing all that has been done by certain organizations; here we are speaking only of the acceptance or the rejection of certain principles.

Certain distortions: Our profession as teachers carries the danger of causing a certain number of distortions in all this. This danger is found in every profession and develops unconsciously among the members. To avoid these distortions teachers must give proof of openness and a critical

spirit. Our vocation includes a profession, that of teacher, educator, administrator. So it is necessary for us frequently to ask ourselves what comes first: care for the good functioning of our schools? hiring qualified teachers? Both are necessary, but they make an education Christian only in so far as they are made part of a perspective of Gospel service and human development.

Corrections in detail? Finally, some districts appear to have adopted very quickly an organizational plan, under which what is being done is certainly good, and in which it will suffice to make only *secondary corrections* in order to conform fully to the intentions of the Founder and the obligations of our consecration to the service of the deprived. For example, it sometimes seems that some significant work for the *service of the poor* is used to justify a majority service of the middle and upper class. What we ask for is the courage to make an honest study, not to canonize "a priori" what is being done, and to judge everything objectively according to Lasallian criteria. But in fact, when the situation described by the reports is compared to the demands formulated by the Chapters in the area of fidelity to the Founder, we do not get the impression that a patchwork job will be sufficient. What is very much needed is a collective effort by the Institute, which while recognizing its insufficiencies, commits itself to a substantial transformation in order to remain faithful to itself.

TO CHANGE WITH THE CHURCH

We are not prepared! The remark quoted by the Brother Superior in his letter already mentioned summarizes a good number of statements in the reports which stress that our formation has not prepared us for this work in favor of justice. As always, it would be as unfair as it is useless to

attack those in charge of formation in past years, because in effect this deficiency in formation is found in the entire Church, as a result of a change in her thinking and her practice.

Practically speaking, social Catholicism emerged during the nineteenth century. We will not go further back in history and discuss the role of the Church in preceding centuries. Particularly since Leo XIII, the Popes have intervened in the struggle for justice and invited Christians to take a leading role here. The first area of interest was for justice as regards labor and the distribution of its products, and then later, justice in its effects as regards the rights of individuals and nations. In this respect, we know that during the nineteenth century, some of our Brothers took these directives to heart by giving priority to the education of the masses, and also in several countries, through the impetus they gave to the creation of labor unions, which to-day have expanded and now influence considerable numbers of persons.

Change in the Church: In a heavy and thick book, the theologian M.D. Chenu (22) gives a good idea of the course followed by the Church, beginning with *Rerum Novarum* (1891) up to our days. He notes that during the nineteenth century, after Marx published the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, Pope Leo XIII, under an impetus from the Christian Socialists, made a solemn intervention into the social domain. Forty years later, in *Quadragesimo Anno* (no. 8), Pius XI again stated that the economic order itself falls under the authority of the Church: *The deposit of truth confided to us and the very grave obligation of disseminating and interpreting the whole moral law, by urging it in season and out of season, bring under and subject to our supreme jurisdiction not only social order but also economic activities.* The Church has a

(22) M.D. CHENU, *La Doctrine sociale de l'Eglise comme idéologie*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1979.

social doctrine which can offer practical solutions to problems, by proposing an economic system.

Eighty years after Leo XIII and forty years after Pius XI, Paul VI, in 1971, commemorated the anniversary of the appearance of *Rerum Novarum* with *Octogesimo adveniens*. The tone had changed: *In the face of such widely varying situations it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. And a little further on: In the face of so many new questions the Church makes an effort to reflect in order to give an answer, in its own sphere, to men's expectations. If today the problems seem original in their breadth and their urgency, is man without the means of solving them? It is with all its dynamism that the social teaching of the Church accompanies men in their search. If it does not intervene to authenticate a given structure or to propose a readymade model, it does not thereby limit itself to recalling general principles. It develops through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel as the source of renewal when its message is accepted in its totality and with all its demands. It also develops with the sensitivity proper to the Church which is characterized by a disinterested will to serve and by attention to the poorest.*

Finally, it draws upon its rich experience of many centuries which enables it, while continuing its permanent preoccupations, to undertake the daring and creative innovations which the present state of the world requires (23).

The change is characteristic: The Church does not disinterest herself in the social question, she does not renounce the work done during eighty years since *Rerum Novarum*. But she no longer has an official social doctrine, a political-economic system which she proposes as a replacement for

(23) Letter, *Octogesimo adveniens*, p. 7: 4, p. 51: 42.

the existing systems. She works with her members and helps explain their ideas, as also those of all men of good will, and she helps men to find solutions suited to different events and places. But from now on, it is more accurate to speak of the *social thought* of the Church.

The Synod on justice, also held during 1971, expressed an identical idea: *Of itself it does not belong to the Church, insofar as she is a religious and hierarchical community, to offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world. Her mission involves defending and promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person* (24).

On the basis of this change in the Church, we are now ready to make two sets of conclusions. The first will cover our teaching on the social thought of the Church; the second, our place in the work for the *promotion of justice*.

Our teaching: Numerous reports mention the teaching of the social thought of the Church. It is important, then, to take note of the change in this thought and in the practice which accompanies it. A Christian living in his local Church is not given a prefabricated and universally valid model of the ideal society, but he is invited, through his Baptism, to join with others who are working for justice to seek out, *hic et nunc*, solutions adapted to his milieu. As a result, we must now take our part in the search being made by our people and our Church, without seeking to impose, *in the name of our ministry*, political or economic solutions. *The pluralism henceforth envisaged is not only a practical consequence of the diversity of situations of Christians in the world, it is a matter of principle, proceeding from the very nature of the Church, which defines herself by her presence in the world, and not as an absolute reality in her institutional identity. The world is the place in which the Christian discerns*

(24) Report of the Synod of Bishops (1971), p. 15: chapter II.

the call of the Gospel. We are on the route traced out by "Gaudium et spes" (25).

Our place: It is in reference to the role proposed to priests regarding the *promotion of justice* that we can better understand our specific role here. This is not because we are part of the clergy, but because quite often there is in practice a similarity between their area of activity and ours in this matter.

In fact, a division of labor was established after World War II. It called for a certain distribution of tasks: lay people were attributed the role of working directly in the midst of society to make it more just, by participating in its political and economic life. Priests were attributed such tasks as providing inspiration, teaching, and evaluation. These ideas were found, among other places, in the philosophy of Jacques Maritain, who was very influential in the Church prior to Vatican II.

It is very evident that the contemporary Church, that of the synod of 1971, of Medellin and of Puebla, of "Evangelii nuntiandi" has undergone an important change in this area. In effect, this distinction of functions between clergy and laity was tending to a sort of "angelism" which is quite different from the age old practice of the Church, whose hierarchy has not been sparing of its interventions into the political life of nations during past centuries.

But to return to what concerns us, we are not clerics: our consecrated life includes practicing a profession recognized by society, that of educator, teacher, administrator. This profession plunges us into a multitude of social relations and leads us to take positions regarding social or political issues. The reports speak of our relations with teachers or employees unions, or our meetings with political figures in order to defend or to promote the freedom of our Christian educational activity. Required by our mission to be involved

(25) M.D. CHENU, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

in human affairs, we cannot assume the role of savants, who are content to give good advice or to evaluate the work others do for the promotion of justice.

The present situation is not simple. In effect, we have to find our proper place, and that is what we will try to do in the pages that follow. For a practical rejection of the theoretical distinction of tasks does not do away with the tradition of complementary functions in the Church, by which one task is that of the priest, another that of the Brother, and another still that of the union leader or the political activist animated by faith. Nothing will be gained by replacing meaningless distinctions with a state of confusion. The text of the synod of 1971 shows an awareness of this difficulty when it says: *While in such activities (professional, family, social, political) . . . (Christians) generally act on their own initiative without involving the responsibility of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in a sense they do involve the responsibility of the Church whose members they are.*

In practice, our Institute, and each of us jointly and severally, must go ahead with the entire Church, while seeking our special role. In this respect, it is a matter of conversion and of going ahead as a group.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE GOSPEL

The consecrated life is an evangelical life. It is even a profession of this life, since what we live should manifest among the people of God the power of the Word and give a sign that Jesus is truly risen, in as much as the effects of his grace are visible through the daily life of religious. At the same time, the restrictions placed on a certain number of Gospel notions — to which we made allusion (p.) — have filtered the meaning and the challenge of the Gospel for

religious. These have a tendency to concentrate only on its *spiritual* aspects, while taking a very narrow view of the "spiritual", meaning only those things which withdraw the Christian from the cares of *this world*.

On the other hand, in its document, the synod of 1971 devoted a chapter to what the Bible has to say on this topic, in an effort to explain the commitment of the Christian to the service of justice. It sets forth an emphatic statement which we will quote here: *By his action and teaching Christ united in an indivisible way the relationship of man to God and the relationship of man to other men. Christ lived his life in the world as a total giving of himself to God for the salvation and liberation of men. In his preaching he proclaimed the fatherhood of God towards all men and the intervention of God's justice on behalf of the needy and the oppressed (Lk 6: 21-23). In this way he identified himself with his "least brethren", as he stated: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me". (Mt 25: 40).*

According to the Christian message, therefore, man's relationship to his neighbor is bound up with his relationship to God; his response to the love of God, saving us through Christ, is shown to be effective in his love and service of men. Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand of justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every man is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a brother of Christ, the Christian finds in every man God himself and God's absolute demand for justice and love.

The present situation of the world, seen in the light of faith, calls us back to the very essence of the Christian message, creating in us a deep awareness of its true meaning and of its urgent demands. The mission of preaching the Gospel dictates at the present time that we should dedicate

ourselves to the liberation of man even in his present existence in this world. For unless the Christian message of love and justice shows its effectiveness through action in the cause of justice in the world, it will only with difficulty gain credibility with the men of our times (26).

The synod, then, did not consider the Gospel, or on a broader plain the Bible, message as a forceful call to flee from the realities of the world. This requires that we do not read and meditate on the Word of God in a manner "reductionist". For example: as described in the Gospel of St. Luke, Christ lists the signs of his mission in terms taken from Isaiah (Lk 7: 22): "*the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the Good News preached to them*". The passage is often interpreted in a watered down way that makes these physical maladies simply signs of *moral* maladies. The Gospel must be read in its purity and its entirety: Christ lived among real poor people and was moved by his contact with them. He lived in a political context much affected by Roman *colonialism*. And without becoming an agitator himself, he nevertheless affirmed his individuality in relation to the political attitudes of the zealots, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees.

We can, also, by a failing directly opposed to this false spiritualism make the *Magnificant* to be only a political document. Without falling into this trap, it is necessary to recognize the extraordinary impact this text can exert. For Mary, the Lord *has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away* (Lk 1: 52, 53). Gustavo Gutierrez could write: *The future of history belongs to the poor and the exploited. True liberation will be the work of the oppressed himself; in him, the Lord*

(26) Report of the synod of Bishops (1971), pp. 13 and 14.

saves history. *The spirituality of liberation has as its starting point the spirituality of the anawim* (27).

Speaking of the impact of the Gospel, another theologian devoted to the promotion of justice, Pere Cosmao, writes: *When God makes himself known as God, the gods fall into dust, and their sacred objects become obscure and crumble. Before God, who alone is God, nothing else is sacred except man, in the same measure that he consecrates himself to God in the service of his brothers ... Caesar has the right to collect the taxes necessary to support the life of the group, but he does not have the right to pretend to be god ... Thus it was that the first Christians knew from the beginning how to find their place in the Empire and to ignore one particular ordinance while respecting all the other laws* (28).

It is in the name of the Gospel, then, that we must commit ourselves to promoting justice and to serving the poor. It is this Gospel accepted and announced in its fullness, which reveals salvation and the kingdom as fruits of the death and the resurrection of Jesus. This Gospel does not furnish us with political or economic systems, and, we will come to see, this is not the mission of the Church. But, it permits us *to integrate into the attitude man takes toward God, his attitude toward other men*. This integration is not an objective only of our consecrated lives, but also one for the youth to whom we address ourselves and to whom we want to transmit *the spirit of the Gospel* — to use the words of the Founder. Certainly, the kingdom cannot be confused with the world here and now, but the kingdom is already present and at work in the world. It is what gives meaning to life, and it invites the Christian not to separate into two distinct efforts his work for his salvation and that of his presence among

(27) GUSTAVO GUTTIEREZ, *Théologie de la libération*, French translation, Ed. Lumen Vitae, p. 211.

(28) V. COSMAO, *Changer le monde, une tâche pour l'Eglise*. Paris, Ed. Cerf, 1979.

other men: *Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these by brethren, you did it to me* (Mt 25: 31 to 46).

The announcement of the kingdom and service to men present themselves then as two coordinated efforts, yet not to be confused with each other. This can result in a happy tension which we should not seek to reduce by omitting one of the two elements (29).

This Council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in reponse to the gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation.

Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age (30).

(29) See the orientations given in Circular 408, "Our Mission," pp. 86-88.

(30) "Gaudium et spes," 43, 1. See also, "Gaudium et spes," 39, 2-3; 40, 2-3. "Evangelii nuntiandi," 31, 1; "Declaration," 25.

PART FIVE

ORIENTATIONS

This fifth part, which contains some conclusions, will restate and organize the main orientations that have been given from time to time in this dossier. It is hoped that this will make them clearer and more evident to the reader. As representative of the Chapter, the General Council wishes that in practice the Brothers will maintain all the positive aspects of *service to the poor* and the *promotion of justice* presently found among us in such a way as to give them the breadth desired by the capitulants in 1976.

Basic convictions: The first two orientations reaffirm the place that *service of the poor* and the *promotion of justice* have in our consecrated life.

1) An essential element of our vocation

The *educational service of the poor* and the *promotion of justice* constitute an essential element of our consecrated life (1). To justify a situation in which service to the well-to-do becomes the general rule and service to the poor the exception, on the grounds that the Founder did not refuse

(1) "Rules and Constitutions" (1977) 8, c.

to teach the children of families who were better off, is to misinterpret both the Founder and Institute policy.

In fact, the Founder defined his Institute as: *a Society in which profession is made of keeping schools gratuitously* (2), that is to say, a society which organizes all its efforts to make the school accessible to the most disadvantaged, thanks to its essential characteristic of gratuity. Elsewhere, the Founder says: *They shall manifest equal affection for all the pupils, more even for the poor than for the rich, because they are intrusted by their Institute much more with the former than with the latter* (3).

It was to this society that St. John Baptist de La Salle wished the Brothers to consecrate themselves by vow to assure its foundation. *The concern to create for the poor a school adapted to them is integrated into the consecration of the Brother for whom it is the preferred field of his apostolate: I promise to unite myself and to live in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are associated to keep together and by association, schools for the service of the poor ... That is why I promise and vow ... for the educational service of the poor ...*

The vocation of the Brothers is a total gift to God, directed toward the educational service of the poor ...

2) Promotion of justice — A major objective of our educational activity

In keeping with the directives of the Church, which says that: *The mission of preaching the Gospel dictates at the present time that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of man even in his present existence in this world* (4),

(2) "Common Rules" (1947) p. 3: I, i.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 37: VII, 12.

(4) Report of the Synod of Bishops (1971), p. 14: Chapter II.

the Brothers integrate the *promotion of justice* as a major element in their educational activity with all young people, in union with others who are working toward the same end. Having this perspective will make it possible for them to carry out the stipulation of the Declaration and the Rule, which state: *Sensitivity to the needs of individual persons and a preference for an apostolate to serve the poor can never dispense with efforts to establish a more equitable social order* (5). In fact, *the promotion of justice is service of the poor in that it strives for the human advancement of the poor*. It also seeks, at the same time, to lead those of our students who are better off to undertake a similar and complementary effort in this direction with a view toward establishing a social order that is more just, whether inside a given country, or on the international level.

LINES OF ACTION

In what follows we are seeking to summarize and to present to the Institute what needs to be done so as to respond to the invitation expressed by the General Chapter of 1976: to reconvert the Institute, through a prophetic solidarity with the Church and with all peoples in view of training responsible and united Christians, to begin work on educational projects designed toward the promotion of justice, and through our community witness.

(5) "Declaration," p. 36: 30, 3. See also "Declaration," p. 38: 32, 1; "Rules and Constitutions," p. 25: 9, g - k.

3) Reconvert the Institute

On the Institute level, taking note of the directives given by the Chapters of 1966-67 and 1976, and of the situation to which the documents addressed themselves (6), the perspective of directing our educational activity toward the *promotion of justice* implies a *reconversion* of the Institute. According to the evidence on hand, the *service of the poor* is not — and is far from being — a major preoccupation of our institutions.

This reconversion must include two elements: the commitment of a majority of the Brothers to the service of the poor, and the commitment of all the Brothers to the promotion of justice.

This reconversion cannot be the result of individual efforts more or less coordinated. It must be undertaken by the body of the society, the central government, the district, the community. It assumes plans for progressive changes in our work and in our formation of individuals. Along with consensus on the part of the Brothers, it requires a patient and tenacious intelligence, animated by the breath of the same Spirit which raised up John Baptist de La Salle to give a Christian education to the poor.

4) Through a prophetic solidarity with the Church and with all people

Our action to promote justice must integrate itself into that of the contemporary Church. The Church herself joins with those peoples who are struggling to promote justice. This indicates that we cannot act in isolation, but that we must *join with* all those who work toward this same goal.

(6) See "Declaration", pp. 8-13: 9,3 - 13.4; Circular 408, pp. 37-38 and pp. 44-45, proposition 13; and pp. 34-35.

This fellowship requires that we merge our efforts with those being made by the local Church where we live, and furthermore, in the name of that Church and with her consent, we collaborate with government organizations that have goals similar to ours. When these groups are motivated by an ideology which we do not share, our collaboration will limit itself to the area of practice, while we unambiguously show that we do not adhere to the ideology in question (7).

All collaboration becomes prophetic *when it stirs the local Church to give more attention to the service of the poor and to justice*. It becomes prophetic when it makes available *to the society* in which we find ourselves *service of a high quality, done in the name of the Gospel*. It becomes prophetic when it knows how to go beyond local limits and to achieve *a catholic dimension through help given to other local churches*, which have fewer resources and less personnel at their disposal.

5) Toward the training of responsible and united Christians

Our mission as Christian educators must be inspired by a sufficiently precise idea of the goal we are pursuing: what type of Christian do we want to form, in view of the society in which this Christian is called to live? Certainly, realism suggests a modest goal on our part since we know the limits of what we can do and the difficulty of this undertaking. This provides all the more reason for us to develop an inspired vision.

To work for the complete formation of youth is to help them discover and to express the best in themselves, so that they will become capable of receiving the gift of faith, take

(7) Regarding this important and delicate point, see the orientations given in Circular 408, pp. 88-90.

the responsibility for their own advancement, and enter into fellowship with others.

Knowledge of the society in which youth must live allows us to prepare them to be useful and competent members of that society. Also, it will lead us to invite these young people to make a responsible commitment by suggesting that they involve themselves progressively in various movements — particularly Church-related ones — which take an active role in the service of justice and in the name of the Gospel. In this way, the gap between the school and society will be reduced and the necessary transition will be carefully prepared.

Often also, the Brothers work with young people who are not of our faith, for example Moslems and Buddhists, or again with others who reject all religion. As regards those who have other religions and in view of the workings of grace, the experience of the Brothers shows us that it is possible in these cases to work for the *promotion of justice*, by taking as a common starting point the dignity of man and of the family, as also the necessity of working to build a society whose structures are conducive to progress in this area.

6) Beginning work on educational projects designed to « promote justice »

A) After having decided upon the type of Christian to train, we must establish an educational plan in which we can implement the principles agreed upon through programs of educational activity. Definite establishment of a plan is the work of the local community charged with directing a particular apostolate. But the local program should be enriched and given direction based on the experience of the entire Institute, which on each of its levels, particularly those of the center and the district, should facilitate an exchange of experiences, information, research, and the restatement of directives.

Such planning is the result of the reflection of a community involved in an apostolate, which wants to make available to other educators, clerical or lay, some specific and high-quality collaboration in our common work.

These plans are indispensable to the schools certainly. But they are also important for activities outside of the schools. They are the means of giving these the consistency they need and of integrating them into the activity of the district or the local community.

Our research should always be conducted in an open manner, in union with the many other working groups who are pursuing the *promotion* of justice in the Church or in civil society.

B) These project descriptions should be characterized by *realism* and *truth*, for the biggest danger here is taking refuge in utopian or idealistic language. That is why they should be built upon a *non-complacent analysis* of the contents of the program, of the style of its educational methods, and of the working of the institution.

C) These plans should be *compatible with the concept of man* we sketched above (§5): complete growth within a society seeking to liberate itself. *Complete growth* (8) consists not in having more, but in being more. This requires a non-egotistical concept of personal growth. This growth is associated with the development of all human faculties. It includes a spiritual dimension, among others, because the possibility of receiving the Word of God is a fundamental right associated with justice.

This *development is based on fellowship*: it seeks the advancement not just of individuals, but of social groups and

(8) Evidently we have borrowed this concept from *Populorum progressio*, and particularly from sections 6, 13-21, 30-35, 40-47, 64, 65, and 77.

of entire populations. This fellowship shows itself in common action and goes beyond the boundaries of its country of origin.

Our planning should envisage permitting young people to take direction of their own development, in union with that of others, because *man is only truly man in as far as, master of his own acts and judge of their worth, he is the author of his own advancement* (9).

D) Our plans will be *attentive to the type of society* which can favor this advancement. It is not enough to train individuals; at the same time it is necessary to influence *social structures* so as to remove from them, to some extent, any characteristics which are instruments of oppression. Although educational institutions, schools or others, cannot accomplish this program by themselves, they have two obligations: the first is to establish within themselves a society free from such hindrances. The second is to prepare youth to work toward this objective and little by little to involve themselves in the organizations that are working toward this goal, whether in the Church or in society (10).

7) Through our community witness

We reassert emphatically the urgent need for our individual and community witness. *Enough of taking about the poor, let us be logical with ourselves. Let us begin by our conversion to a poor life style!* This is the idea which we hear just about everywhere and which is found throughout the reports.

(9) *Populorum progressio* section 34.

(10) See in the Circular N. 408: *Our Mission — The Institute in the Young Churches*, p. 125: Instrument No. 4: analyzing an actual instance of injustice in order to find the means to work for a more just society; and p. 129, Instrument No. 5: The New International Economic Order.

The Rule affirms the relationship between poverty and the service of the poor. *The Brothers choose to be poor because Christ was poor. They choose poverty in order to understand and practice Christ's teaching more completely and to serve men as their brothers, especially those most in need. They strive to keep free from possessiveness, so as to be at the disposal of God; they do not seek wealth, that may seek the poor effectively and be accepted by them* (Rules and Constitutions, p. 21: 6, a).

This witness includes our life style, our food, our clothing, our trips, our vacations, our parties, our circle of friends, and so on.

An important criteria of this witness consists in the fact that ordinary people, and the poor themselves, are at ease with us when exchanging ideas, or even when praying together with us.

All the districts could take inspiration from what has already been done in a number: to establish communities in poorer areas, communities valued and supported by the entire district.

Community witness evidently should not limit itself to simplicity of life style and to openness to the poor. Our communities must be recognized as centers and signs of concern for the *promotion of justice*, in the name of the Gospel. Without any uproar, but with real effectiveness, they must visibly take the side of the poor and the oppressed.

SOME SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

The two orientations that follow are addressed to the districts: to the Brothers Visitors, the Chapters, the Councils. Their purpose is to assist all those who, on the scene, must

attack the very difficult problems of making changes in institutions and communities, and to help the Brothers to become ready for this type of work.

8) A district plan for evolutionary change

The Institute wide change to a predominant service of the poor and a unanimous service for the promotion of justice cannot be done through individual initiatives. It must be undertaken by the district, at times even by the region.

This change implies a transformation of our apostolates and of our formation programs. The section that follows will limit itself to a discussion of the first of these.

HOW TO FORMULATE A PLAN FOR EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

A) The district must begin by considering, in conjunction with the local Church, what are the evident needs in the area of Christian education as regards the *service of the poor* and the *promotion of justice*. This sensitization is an indispensable first step without which further planning will remain only a dream.

In the planning process it will be useful to call on various experts, such as priests, sociologists, activists, people in government service, and so on.

The entire district should be involved in this activity. But finally, the District Chapter must assume its responsibility by determining the programs and fixing the time span of each.

B) It appears that the apostolates can be divided into three different categories:

- *Works to be preserved*: These are the ones which evidently already contribute to the *promotion of justice* and which, at most, need to be strengthened.

But there are also ones which can be changed, either because of their favorable location, or of the possibility of working with the state or with the local Church, so as to meet the evident needs of the area. Also, there are ones which can be moved elsewhere so as to benefit from conditions favorable to their being changed.

- *Works to be created*: Some regions of the Institute hard hit by the vocation crisis have reacted by deciding to found new apostolates, because they know that in this difficulty God is with them in the search for *new forms of service to the poor* that are more faithful to the spirit of the Institute. With more reason, districts which have vocations should think how useful such works would be.

Taking this same perspective on the international level of the Institute, some districts have been led to free personnel to help *build* our religious family in the young Churches which presently do not have enough Brothers.

A living body cannot continue to exist without creative work.

- *Works to be transferred to others*: Finally we have arrived at this point. Changing the Institute depends on the personnel which can be freed in view of the predominant service of the poor. And doing this will require a certain number of *withdrawals*.

This suggestion raises a serious objection. Have we the right to break an agreement binding us to an institution, under the pretext that our Institute must change? Is this not unjust?

In general orientations such as these it is impossible to evaluate fairly the nature and the obligations of each such

agreement. This evaluation must be done on the district level. But this difficulty must not become an excuse for hindering an overall change, one based not on caprice, but on evangelical exigency.

TRAINING AND SUSTAINING THE REPLACEMENTS

The experience of those districts, forced by hard necessity to withdraw from schools that were functioning successfully, because of a lack of personnel, can be useful to those who have to do the same thing so as to assure better *service of the poor*. What follows is not simple theory, rather it is a descriptions of what is actually happening.

In almost all instances of our withdrawal, the school is not closed following the departure of the community of Brothers. Instead it is entrusted to other teachers who share our spirit.

We, then, are called upon to expand our educational activity by devoting ourselves more than we have done previously to the training of lay people so that they can replace us where necessary. Also, we can expand our efforts by establishing centers or groups where we can meet with them to continue to assist them, or by taking administrative action to ensure that a school will continue to achieve its original purpose of Christian education (11).

THE ALLOCATION OF THE BROTHERS

It is not sufficient to give high priority to some apostolates, it is also very important to assign to each a sufficient

(11) It is in this way that the "Lasallian family" could become more of a reality, in the manner suggested by the Chapter of 1976. See Circular 403, p. 54 and p. 86, propositions 44 and 45.

number of qualified personnel, particularly Brothers. Quite often this requires a *different allocation* of the men actively working in the district.

Likewise, with this same end in view, the district *should establish* a plan for assisting other districts of the Institute that are less well off or are more burdened than it is.

We are not unaware of the human problems created by an orientation such as this. That is why this action must be undertaken with realism and without precipitation, and carried out only after obtaining reliable information and the advice of a large number of people.

9) A Plan for sensitization and formation

Justice in regard to the poor requires that we be well prepared to serve them. Justice in regard to the Brothers requires that they not be sent into an apostolic adventure which is beyond their capabilities.

The change we must make requires in the first place that we understand our vocation in a new way, one more faithful to our tradition. What this effort requires, then, is a conversion of our hearts and our minds.

This sensitization, then, is required of all the Brothers, each individually, but also on the community and the district level, so that as a group they can study the elements of this conversion. Here we can distinguish three stages.

- The call for new vocations, more sensitive to the *promotion of justice* through Christian education.

- Initial Formation, from postulancy to final profession, so that young men can be informed as to the end of the Institute and trained for this work.

- Continued and on-going formation, constituting as in the case of the Founder, a sensitization to the poor and to justice, and continued throughout a lifetime.

This formation can be given through courses, shorter sessions, or meetings, organized either by Catholic institutions of higher learning or by secular institutions. Our readings and the mass media can also furnish us with abundant material for our reflections on this topic.

But this formation *will become part* of our life when we become personally involved in working for justice. At times this commitment will include spending some time in a poor milieu, under conditions in which we can learn valuable lessons to incorporate into our lives as Brothers. But in a more enduring way, this commitment will become a normal part of our ministry when a sense of responsibility leads us to perceive in our surroundings instances of injustice and signs of poverty or oppression. Formation in social justice or for service to the poor always begins with this *change of outlook* that leads us to see in a different light the persons with whom we come in contact or the events which we observe or in which we participate.

CONCLUSION

10) A spirituality to sustain this effort

It is because they believed that this was the will of God that the Chapters of 1966-67 and of 1976 invited us to undertake this collective conversion of our minds and of our apostolates. But a major undertaking of this sort must be supported by a lofty inspiration. Before all else, this must be seen as the work of God, carried out under the movement of his Spirit, and the manifestation of his loving plan for all men, particularly the poorest among them.

The Brothers must reread, apply to themselves, and live the recommendation of the Founder: *In order to fulfill your*

responsibility with as much perfection and care as God requires of you, frequently give yourself to the Spirit of our Lord to act only under his influence and not through any self seeking. This Holy Spirit, then, will fill your students with Himself, and they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit (12).

The heart, the center of our effort, then, is recourse to God who has chosen us to be his ministers. The example of the Holy Founder, with which we are so familiar, teaches us to respond to the invitation God gives us and to go forward from *commitment to commitment*. Let us not be content to stay where we are, but rather let us go on our way, directed by the Holy Spirit, with the aid of our Brothers and the guarantee of the Church: *Faith teaches the Brothers to realize that God is supporting them in their work; in life's joys or sorrows, He is always present since He has called them to help realize His loving plan to save mankind. Faith makes it possible for the Brothers, little by little, to see in everything that happens, in every person they meet, especially the poor, the unwanted and the persecuted, a sign and an invitation of the Holy Spirit (13).*

(12) *Meditations for the time of retreat* (1975 ed.), p. 54, meditation 3, point 2.

(13) "Rules and Constitutions," p. 16: 2, g.

PART SIX

EXAMPLES

I

**REPORT ON THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE OF THE POOR
AND THE PROMOTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

As its follow up to proposition 14 of the General Chapter of 1976 and to several Institute documents, the district of São Paulo submits this report on what it is doing in the area of educational service of the poor and the promotion of justice. In this area our district cannot present a triumphal report. We must be content to indicate what we tried to do.

1) Sensitization of the Brothers of the District of São Paulo:

a) Among the Brothers of the district of São Paulo there does not appear to be a real inclination to serve the poor and to promote justice according to the thinking of the Founder. This could be seen during the different discussions when there was question of assuming the direction of certain specific apostolates, as for example when a group of Brothers in Rondonopolis proposed to found a pastoral service in the interior of the state of Piauí, in response to the request made by the local bishop. In this and similar instances, the first

question raised was: *How will these Brothers be able to support themselves? Or, we have very many poor people here where we are working, . . .* There was a very strong tendency to consider all projects of this type as utopian.

Another example of the same sort. On 30 April 1978, the Brother in charge of paying the employees of our house proposed increasing the minimum salary (ø 1,560.00) in order to make this a sum which, based on calculations made by various unions, would equal the actual minimum wage, taking into account the devaluation (ø 2,401.00). The immediate reaction of the community was to oppose this idea, and that was the end of the matter.

b) After that, an effort was made to sensitize the Brothers of the district regarding these questions. This was done through the individual initiative of some Brothers who wrote brief pieces for the district bulletin (see *Mensagem* 1978). It is not possible to evaluate how effective this was because we lack a suitable instrument for doing this. However, when an article was written, dealing more directly with the question of institutionalized injustice, which dealt with specific instances and gave the names of those concerned, there was a reaction by some Brothers of the district. And this article was destroyed without being published because of a fear of its consequences. Notwithstanding all this, you get the impression that the ideas of *service of the poor* and of social justice are little by little becoming stronger in the district.

2) Sensitization of the educational community

It is easier to look for means of convincing others that they should devote themselves to the poor and struggle for justice than to commit oneself to do this. So we have exerted ourselves to show others the sinful situation in which all of Latin American is steeped.

a) The exploitation found in the industrialized countries of Latin America cries out with a loud voice. The reality of this situation is described in practically all the newspapers in these countries which show the profits made by the rich in exchange for what they give or do. This crisis of conscience daily becomes clearer to those who read the newspapers that refuse to condone this exploitation, or to those who read papers coming from Europe or the United States.

b) A second instance of injustice is found in the eagerness for gain, the thirst for wealth among the upper class and the owners of big business — often the multinationals, a great number of which have established themselves in Brazil in order more easily to make large profits. When these find themselves forced to raise salaries, they unjustly send away a large number of workers (who after this never find comparable jobs), or, instead, they compensate themselves for this loss of profits by increasing the price of their manufactured goods. Such means of making an easy profit have been used since the discovery of America.

When trying to educate their students for real life, the Brothers find themselves under an obligation to deal with these matters and to try to help their students and the educational community to escape from this sinful situation.

3) Definite activities to assist the poor

a) The community of São Carlos, SP, decided to open a gratuitous school in a poorer sector of that city. This undertaking was approved and praised by the District Council. This project was realized in 1980.

b) In the district, we have succeeded in making contracts between the Institute and the academic authorities. Presently our colleges in Curitiba, Pato Branco, Rondonópolis, and Ma-

chado operate under such contracts. In our colleges the students enjoy all the advantages of being in state supported schools, especially that of being taught gratuitously.

But now it is necessary to state that our principal motivation for entering into these contracts was to guarantee our living expenses and not the love of the poor as such. However, this original intention seems *to be changing*. When at one time there seemed to be a danger that the contract for Machado would not be renewed, the District Council decided we would continue to work in that institution, even at our own expense.

c) In Brasilia, the district of São Paulo conducts the La Salle Agricultural Institution, in reality an orphanage for ninety young orphans who are given everything by the institution. Unfortunately, certain misunderstandings forced the district to withdraw from the educational institution D. Duarte in São Paulo, which had 580 students, and in which the Brothers had worked for more than ten years.

d) To help some of the poorest students to attend our schools several of these institutions have established scholarships for them. Since it is the Brothers who took the initiative in creating these scholarships, certainly this is a service to the poor — even if the school receives some money to support each such student. During 1978, more than 1500 students profited from this arrangement.

e) At the *Instituto Abel* in Niteroi, we have founded a Lasallian Center for human development which has these objectives:

- To further education for justice by sensitizing individuals to the reality of the situation and to the teachings of the Church in this area.

- To channel the community efforts toward a more direct commitment for the promotion of justice and toward social assistance in what concerns the poor.

To achieve these objectives, the Lasallian Center for human development seeks to provide:

- training sessions through which to make known the existing situation and the teachings of the Church;

- improvement of material conditions in suburban areas, the organization of means of communication, and the furnishing of suitable books;

- visits to centers and groups which work for the poor;

- campaigns organized by the community to sensitize the public regarding what concerns human development;

- drives organized by the community to collect funds and materials to be used for immediate help to the poor: a donation of ø 5,00 per month by each student; drives to gather special materials on a bi-monthly basis as well as food, clothing, toys, medicines, and so on;

- assistance to groups conducted by doctors, teachers, social workers, recreational directors, and others.

In 1978, the money raised during the different campaigns totaled ø 52.600,80. Donations in kind, such as food, furniture, or clothing were valued at approximately ø 40.253,00. The Lasallian Center for human development collaborated by raising the sum of ø 92.853,00.

f) By means of the activities mentioned above, but mainly by means of the contracts with the state, the schools are able to help a certain number of students. Thus, among a total of 14,193 students,

13,09% received a 25% reduction of their school fees,

04,45% received a 50% reduction of their school fees,

00,49% received a 75% reduction of their school fees,

00,15% received a 90% reduction of their school fees,

26,69%, that is 4,214 students, were charged no fees at all.

Without counting the students who received scholarships from different organizations thanks to the work of the Broth-

ers, the allowances and reductions totaled more than two million cruzeiros (ø 2,000,000,000).

District of São Paulo

II

DISTRICT OF ARGENTINA

0) Some details

This report is a follow up to proposition 14. It describes what our district has done since the publication of the Declaration of 16 December 1967.

Plans *for the immediate future* were made for the period during which the present District Administration will be in office: three years or until the next District Chapter.

1) Our way of performing educational « Service of the poor »

Among the new district activities in favor of the poor, we can point out:

1.1 Opening of the La Salle Technical School in a poor section of the San Martin area. The school continues to grow. Actually, enrollment in this institution comprises 572 on the primary level, 357 on the secondary level, and 185 in the evening session for adults.

1.2 The district has sent four Brothers to work in Paraguay and given financial help by means of a monthly subsidy, which is adjusted periodically. In 1978 the total subsidy was \$ 11,500.

In addition, the district has assumed the main responsibility for the sub-district of Paraguay, and in general endeavors to direct its apostolates toward a sincere *service of the poor*.

1.3 Creation of the community of Jujuy on 23 March 1971, which has undertaken pastoral work in a poor sector of the city. The pastoral work of the community is done under the direction of the parish in which it is situated.

1.4 The opening by the *Association of the Friends of the school* of a "baccalauréat" level technical program in agriculture at our college of San José de Villa del Rosario. Direction of a catechetical program for this institution has been assumed by the Director of the primary department of this school, which serves as the preparatory section of this secondary institution.

1.5 Opening a section of evening classes for poor workers in the La Salle Technical School in the San Martin area. Its purpose is to help them qualify for better positions.

1.6 Two schools have organized courses to improve the level of the professional training of their workers.

1.7 A school has organized a remedial program for those students who lack sufficient preparation.

1.8 The novices and aspirants direct the catechetical program in nearby areas. The Brothers of the Gonzalez Catan and the Marin school communities are working on the development of the catechetical programs in the poorer areas near their respective schools. The Brothers of the San Jose Villa del Rosario community are teaching religion to the mentally disabled and are providing spiritual help to the sick.

1.9 As regards *education for justice*, our religion programs deal with this topic in the course offered during their final

year to students in our secondary schools. Our last Chapter requested preparation of a suitable program in this area: At the moment, this is still only a project.

2) What we have considered doing to increase our « service of the poor » and our efforts for the « promotion of justice »:

We foresee five areas of activity:

- Aid to the indigent who leave our schools.
- Support for our schools that work for the poor.
- Activities outside the schools for the Brothers during vacation time.
- Training of our students for justice.
- Opening new *services for the poor*.

2.1 Aid to the indigent who leave our schools

This help will be given by means of:

A) Activities designed for human development.

Drives will be organized in our schools to collect funds to support human development activities in the areas where there is the greatest need. The criteria which gradually will inspire these activities will include:

1) The Brothers will participate actively in these drives since they will be a means of entering into the spirit of *service to the poor*.

2) This activity will be coordinated on the district level as regards choice of the situations in which to work, setting up the project, coordination of the activities.

3) These human development activities will be joined with an evangelical work in which members of youth groups will take part.

4) These drives will be completed in our school through explicit activities related to training for justice.

N.B.: The counselors who assist in pastoral work for youth will take charge of coordinating and preparing the involvement of young people in these drives as also in the programs of human development and evangelization.

B) *Catechetical activity for the indigent*

1) The school will be asked to organize catechetical programs suited to the needs of the localities in their vicinities:

- by offering this service to the very poorest sectors;
- by setting up in one school or the other a catechetical program for students in the state schools or those private schools with no religious affiliation.

2) At the beginning of I.P.A., by making use of outside financial help, to offer a program providing direction and training to catechists in less developed areas that lack the means of providing such training programs.

C) *Other activities*

1) To encourage and to organize on the part of the communities and the schools a greater participation in the national drives to assist the missions and other similar works.

2.1 *Support for our schools that work with the poor*

We place in this category these schools: Santo Thomas de Aquino (Gonzales Catan), the La Salle Technical School (San Martin), San Luis Gonzaga (Jauregui), and San Jose (Villa del Rosario).

1) As far as is possible, to assign to these schools some Brothers working for the *service of the poor*.

2) To assist the schools to adapt their educational programs to the needs of the poor. To do this:

2.1 Each of these schools will have a social assistance program or some other resource which will make it possible: *a)* to recognize the types of poverty found among its school population; *b)* to locate and to describe the poor in its immediate locale; *c)* to assure access to the school by poor people; *d)* the District Administration will keep tab on the progress of the *service of the poor* in these schools.

3) Make available to these schools any assistance they request as regards methods of teaching catechism.

4) Other specific activities:

- At the school of Santo Tomas de Aquino (Gonzales Catan) to determine the boundaries of our agricultural estate and to separate it from the school area so as to facilitate access to the school by people in the vicinity.

- At Jaurequi, to maintain the presence of the Brothers.

- At San Jose (Villa del Rosario), to rebuild the primary school.

2.3 *Providing new "services for the poor"*

1) In view of the number of Brothers who have asked to work with the poor, to open a gratuitous school in a poor sector of the city of Jujuy.

2) To study the feasibility of evening (or daytime) classes designed to improve the professional qualifications of the employees in some colleges, such as Gonzales Catan, San Martin, Villa del Rosario, and so on. To study the nature of the work being done in each of these schools.

3) In regard to the work of human development and evangelization one Brother is doing in a area of Gonzales Catan, to make this a district work as far as this is necessary. To take note of what might be needed in the future to continue this work of development and evangelization.

2.4 Brothers' work outside the schools during vacation time.

1) To organize a group of Brothers who from time to time can provide assistance in deprived areas by doing pastoral work such as organizing youth groups, helping the catechists, giving spiritual retreats, and so on.

2) To organize a group of Brothers to carry out the program of human development mentioned in 2.1.a.

3) To arouse the generosity of the Brothers so that they will provide gratuitous help to the students preparing to take examinations.

4) To contribute to the formation program for the aspirants in Paraguay.

5) To encourage the Brothers to assist those parishes which need help in preparing for the celebration of Christmas.

6) To arouse certain Brothers to make their services available to help with the catechetical program in some schools that have their vacations at a different time from our own.

2.5 Promotion of justice

1) To organize as part of our initial formation a program to train the Brothers in social justice.

2) To draw up a program of training for justice to be given to our students as part of the religion program or elsewhere in the course of studies.

3) To support the yearly drives that take place in our schools to raise funds of to support the human development programs in the destitute areas. This provides an excellent opportunity to sensitize the students as regards social justice.

III

Community of Khoronfish - (Cairo, Egypt)

The community of Khoronfish was induced to specify its apostolic project in 1971. This was the occasion for it to take action as regards the appeals made by the General Chapter of 1966, particularly in the Declaration.

Since theirs is a gratuitous school, since 1957 the Community has felt a need to increase its involvement and its activity among the common people.

For us, what we are doing here provides a new occasion to see where we are in our program and to state some questions that have been raised for us because of our activities.

The activities to which we have chosen to give priority in our project can be summarized thus:

- priority to the Egyptian common people;
- priority to the group development of the common people;
- priority to raise up and to train lay leaders among the common people;
- priority to community effort and witness.

How can we do something definite as regards these matters in our daily actions:

— The priority we have given to group development led us to join with other movements which have chosen the same

priority for their activities, such as the Catholic Action movement, the ACE, JOC, MMTC.

Each of the Brothers works in this area with one or several groups by following a group step by step in its activities, and by helping its members to become involved in a still larger movement — which is also that of the Church.

For example, groups of acquaintances meet with one Brother or the other to examine how they live and what they are doing on their own level to free themselves from what oppresses them. Such groups are formed among young people at school, in the university, or at work.

For adults in this area, particularly the women, the same concern is shown in working with them in the small projects financed by Caritas or others donors, such as providing electricity or water, purchasing sewing machines, and so on. The Brother's role is to help these women to work together in an effort to resolve their problems — particularly those of a financial nature.

During the afternoons, some young boys and girls in the neighborhood have formed and directed works of social development for people living near the school:

- ⊗ evening courses for men and women;
- ⊗ teaching reading and writing to boys and girls;
- ⊗ courses in making clothing.

Giving priority to the common people has not meant neglecting those young people who are better off. This work has been joined with that for the common people through the search for greater justice and a better world.

In the school, priority is given to the children of the lower class. This is done by:

- the choice of students, as far as this is possible, particularly when receiving new students;

• the teaching of all courses in Arabic, the language spoken by the people;

An effort has been begun and is being continued to make the teaching of foreign languages more suited to the clientele of the school.

For several years now we have worked to train responsible laymen to conduct the school by assuming positions such as director of instruction or division head. The school is administered on a collegial basis by three Egyptians and the Brother Director.

Several times the community has discussed with the District Administration the economic situation of the teachers in the school, who perhaps are less well paid than those teaching on the secondary level. This has resulted in increasing their salaries.

We are trying to develop a dialogue with the teachers and the school chaplain. This dialogue has resulted in meetings to discuss our educational outlook, for instance, in regard to class committees, and to a session during which we explained our educational goals and the means we are taking to achieve them.

The majority of students in the school are Orthodox Christians. The Eucharistic celebrations and group prayers are according to the Coptic rite and by age groups. In this way they are adapted to the students' level of receptivity and respect the Egyptian religious mentality.

During these same times, the Moslem students meet with a teacher who instructs them regarding their prayers and religious practices.

As for the catechetical program, given in Arabic, here care is taken to show the relationship between faith and life. Evidence of doing this is very visible in this part of the school program.

What each Brother experiences in his apostolic action is made part of community exchanges and sharing. Weekly

meetings, common Eucharistic celebrations, reviews of our life, and daily prayers in common provide the occasions for a constant evaluation of what we are doing along with an affirmation of what constitutes our faith.

Our concern to criticize and to extend our action at times leads us to make a choice among the activities which take place in the area around the school.

In order better to be able to perform the work we have chosen to do among the young people and the adults of the lower class, during recent years we have taken advantage of opportunities to learn and to perfect ourselves in Arabic.

Also, we can mention the religious and pastoral renewal programs which almost all the members of the community have followed. These have been valuable aids toward the better realization of our apostolic project.

Our community has been enlarged by the priests, other religious, and lay people with whom we share and evaluate our activity.

Some questions:

- We want our school to serve the people. But we note that through its system of selecting students, the school rejects those who are most difficult to serve, and who have most need of our help, that is the most deprived. What can we do to be more available to help these children?

- As regards the activities of a social nature which we direct, how can these lead to a real group consciousness and development? How can we move from a situation in which we assist these people to one in which they take full charge of the activities?

- We want to be more open and to meet more people, but at the same time we are a community composed entirely

of foreigners. How can we facilitate better encounters with local people and groups, keeping in mind the real differences of language and mentality?

(Community of Khoronofish)

IV

Some efforts toward increasing justice in the world: collaboration among Brothers, teachers, and students

(Superior Agricultural Institution of Beauvais).

The students of the I.S.A.B. [Institute supérieur agricole de Beauvais] cannot come from disadvantaged groups:

- the "baccalauréat" is required for admission;
- selection of students is determined through a competitive entrance examination;
- the financial outlay demanded of the parents is quite large.

In any case, no matter what their social origins, the young people who graduate from the school find themselves in the social-professional class of administrators.

However, we can point out that a significant number of the students are on scholarships, some 19% in all. And among these 81% are on complete or practically complete scholarships.

In addition, 51% of the students are from farm families, which are not among the most well-to-do.

Finally, in recent years about ten students from Third World countries have graduated from the ISAB.

The role of this school in establishing greater justice can only be in one area. It is not less important because of that.

A sense of justice and the proposed training

The training given in an advanced agricultural institution can tend to reinforce a highly technical rural society, directed toward maximum production, for the exclusive benefit of a limited social group. Members of other groups will find themselves reduced to a subsistence level of existence or forced to leave their farms under very unsatisfactory conditions.

Or there is also the possibility of striving toward a *more equitable situation, more in conformity with the good of the entire rural community*. Many social, ecological, and even economic reasons presently favor some revision of the patterns of agricultural activity, the laws of land inheritance, and the principles of land management.

Whence the importance of the orientation to be given in the training we provide. An indoctrination will have little effect. *It must be so structured as to foster contacts and discoveries, or to introduce systems of analysis.*

Likewise, technical advancements have the potential of being used for the service of man, and not for his enslavement.

In this perspective, the role of the Brothers, in keeping with the work each one does, such as organizing the program of studies, or teaching different courses, consists in instigating, encouraging, or facilitating everything which contributes to bringing out the human factors:

- study and reflection on these topics;
- visits to farms and discussions of what was seen;
- other possible opportunities ...

In addition, the students are invited *to assume responsibility for one facet of their human development*. They do this by organizing, in collaboration with the teachers, meetings with individuals in various professions, particularly members of those groups experiencing some difficulties. These

opportunities for training are all the more valuable since it is the students who select the topics for discussion, the discussion leaders, and those who will evaluate the results.

Great freedom is allowed in all these areas.

Also, we can mention that the students are allowed total freedom in forming groups for *sharing* the Word of God, prayers, reflections, and spiritual retreats.

Specific activities involving collaboration to promote justice

What we are referring to here is *actual service* which has equal importance as a means of *human development*. It involves learning about situations through a sharing of life style, commitment and so on.

These activities allow the Brothers and the other teachers to see the students in quite different situations from those common to the school, while living with the students and relating to them in a different way. These activities include:

- groups to teach basic literacy;
- groups to visit the elderly;
- groups to work with Amnesty International;
- groups to contact and to work with the destitute in the big cities and/or those who live in shanty towns;
- associations of young people to provide mutual assistance and development (AJED): working to repair and to distribute used objects or to perform small services for Third World peoples;
- the Association Gorom-Gorom - Beauvais which has established a pairing between this village of Upper Volta and the city of Beauvais;
- the Association "Kaya Exchanges", which is a pairing between the school and a village of Upper Volta;

• on a more specific religious level: taking part in the catechetical program and directing the liturgy in nearby rural parishes; taking part in rural Catholic Action (C.M.R.); and various similar activities;

• about sixty of our graduates have contracted for lengthy periods of service in the Third World, while ten have contracted for shorter periods of service, to replace their service in the armed forces.

Specific activities more proper to the community

Some Brothers take part in the activities mentioned above, while others have expressed their approval of these, encouraged those participating, and at times assisted them in various ways.

In addition, two Brothers correspond with individuals working in the Third World, regarding different religious, social, and school plans.

When the occasion presents itself, the community receives Brothers who are working in the Third World.

The community has provided financial assistance to missionary Brothers working in foreign countries. One Brother sends 1% of his salary to help support the movement to sensitize the French regarding the promotion of justice in the third world (see the Movement of 1% to the Third World, a world tax of fellowship).

The community has furnished money to assist some individuals in a difficult and more or less marginal situation.

(Institute agricole de Beauvais)

PHILIPPINE DISTRICT CORPORATE PLAN

(The district chapter of 1977 approved a ten-years plan "with the end in view of having a substantial number of Brothers working directly with the poor at the end of the ten-year period of transition").

I. Key concepts

Apostolic Thrust: This refers to the areas of the apostolate which the Brothers consider their top priority as a district. Thus, without in any way denying the inherent worth of other apostolic endeavors, we believe that our most important mission is to serve the poor directly, particularly as catechists. As such, a significant portion of our resources should be channeled in the direction of our apostolic thrust.

Materially Poor: This refers primarily to those who fall within the lower socio-economic groups in the Philippine society.

Renewal Within Present Institutions: This refers to two main types of renewal.

Type A: This type of renewal pertains to the establishment and/or strengthening of curricular, cocurricular and extracurricular programs within our schools which could contribute to the implementation of our apostolic thrust. Some examples are:

1) Curricular Programs — De La Salle University's Professional Catechists; La Salle Bacolod's Agri-Business and Action-Oriented Theology programs.

2) Cocurricular Programs — The Youth for Civic Action Programs.

3) Extracurricular Programs — The social action projects in our schools.

Type B: This type of renewal refers to the creation of clientele within our schools who are predominantly from the working class and the poor. Examples are St. Joseph's, where such clientele already exist, and La Salle Bacolod's College Department, where a working class is strongly emerging.

Renewal Beyond Present Institutions: This type of renewal refers primarily to a twofold district commitment:

1) A commitment to an active search for educational apostolates outside our present institutions where the needs of the Philippine poor can be met; and,

2) A commitment to an active recruitment, training and deployment of a significant number of Brothers to work in such apostolates.

Exposure Programs: This refers to a continuing program of living and working with the poor. A minimum of three day's initial exposure is recommended to start bringing about desired levels of involvement with and commitment to the service of the poor.

II. Assumptions

The *first assumption* behind our Corporate Plan is that we must realistically work with a set of constraints, namely:

1) The expressed desire of the Brothers to continue owning and working in our present institutions;

2) The need to consider administrative and financial feasibility and constraints;

3) The need to consider implications for our community life; and,

4) The need to consider implications for our formation program, both initial and continuing.

The *second assumption* follows from the first. If the above factors are to be considered, our Corporate Plan must have a built-in mechanism for regular evaluation and revision.

The *third assumption* is that we want our Corporate Plan to be relevant and responsive not only to the peculiar charism of our Founder and the Institute, but also to the concrete historical realities in the Philippines today and in the foreseeable future.

III. The corporate plan proper

A) Phase 1: *Renewal Within Present Institutions* *Renewal of the Apostolate*

1) *De La Salle University*: Strengthen student aid program. — Develop as a powerhouse for urban extension programs. — Strengthen teacher re-training programs. — Strengthen programs for professional catechists and supervised schools.

2) *La Salle Bacolod*: Strengthen student aid program. — Continue social mix programs. — Strengthen agri-business and rural studies programs. — Strengthen action-oriented theology program. — Set up extension services. — Strengthen system of supervised schools.

3) *La Salle Greenhills*: Set up sensitization programs for faculty and students. — Improve social mix through more scholarships. — Orient curriculum towards social justice and national development. — Set up adult education and social action centers.

4) *St. Joseph High School*: Study feasibility of setting up a comprehensive high school with two tracks, one academic and the other technical-vocational.

5) *La Salle Lipa*: Study feasibility of opening a junior agricultural college and/or a two-track comprehensive high school.

6) *La Salle Iligan*: Study feasibility of setting up a two-track comprehensive high school. — Study feasibility of setting up an educational center for the retraining of teachers, priests and religious in conjunction with the local hierarchy.

7) *Manpower Deployment*: Ideally the minimum requirements for 1978-81 are as follow: Bacolod 8, Greenhills 7, Iligan 5, Taft 8, Villamont 5, Provincialate 2, Vocation Recruiter 1, Aspirancy Director 1 and Formators 6.

Implications for Community Life:

1) The Brother Visitor and Brothers Director should exercise a more direct hand in community animation.

2) Communities should set aside sufficient time for prayer, dialogue, spiritual reading, recollection and retreat.

3) Brothers engaged in apostolates outside our schools should be based in a community of at least four members.

Implications for Formation:

1) The Brothers are encouraged to participate in a series of exposure programs.

2) At least one Brother per year should be identified and trained to acquire expertise in some non-academic field.

3) In order to help the Brothers plan their study programs, the district should make known its needs and priorities through the Studies Committee.

Implications for Administration:

1) Brothers assigned to do administrative work should be given at least a five-year term.

2) To ensure the full and active support for our apostolic thrust, the Brother Visitor and Council should take steps to inform and solicit the support of the Boards of Trustees in our schools.

B) Phase 2: *Intensification of Renewal Within Present Institutions and Preparation for Renewal Beyond Present Institutions.* The time frame for Phase 2 is June 1981 to May 1984.

Renewal of the Apostolate:

1) Each school should intensify its social mix program.

2) Each community should listen to the needs of their local poor and help them seek creative solutions to meet those needs.

3) Education for social justice should be an integral core of each school curriculum.

4) Minimum manpower requirements for 1981-1984 will remain the same as the 1978-1981 levels. Any surplus manpower should be released to start setting up educational apostolates outside our present institutions that can best meet the needs of the poor.

Implications for Community Life:

1) Working in an apostolate outside our schools must include living in a recognized community whenever possible.

2) All communities should live a life of simplicity, regardless of the personal income of their members.

Implications for formation:

1) At least two Brothers per year should be trained and/or encouraged to work in non-traditional apostolates.

2) There should be an annual program for the direct exposure of the Brothers to the poor.

3) The scholastics, especially the seniors, should be encouraged to go into fields of study that are considered district priorities vis-a-vis our apostolic thrust.

4) To increase our numbers, each Brother should actively recruit young men to join us.

Implications for Administration:

1) All individual apostolates outside our schools should be self-supporting financially.

2) This Corporate Plan should be evaluated and revised no later than 1981 and every three years thereafter.

C) Phase 3: *Renewal Beyond Present Institutions*

Renewal of the Apostolate: By 1984 the district should have a significant number of Brothers working in educational institutions, the clientele of which are predominantly poor and lower middle class. These institutions may or may not be owned by us. Schools will remain our preferred institutions, but we should not be limited to them.

An ongoing feasibility study of options open to us, such as orphanages, boys' homes, schools for lepers and the children of lepers, boys' protectories, adult education centers, labor centers, should be made by an ad hoc committee of interested Brothers designated by the district council, so that even before 1984 a definite listing of such projects will be available for priority considerations to implement our apostolic thrust by a creative and faithful response to the Spirit, in consonance with the district Corporate Plan.

VI

THE SECONDARY SCHOOL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

(from the Regional Council on Social Justice, 1980, United States/Toronto Region)

Introduction

The mission of the Regional Council on Social Justice (RCSJ) is threefold. First, *support* Brothers and institutions presently conducting effective programs in the area of social justice. Second, *communicate* throughout the Region information on effective programs and projects. Third, *develop* materials requested by Brothers and/or institutions to improve their response to the Church and Institute around the justice issues in our local, national and global communities.

This project focuses on the high schools. Its purpose is to assist the high school develop in each student an awareness of his/her global citizenship, and a commitment to the social teaching of Jesus and His Church. It is a compilation of courses, curricula and projects which are effectively being implemented in one or more of our high schools. The RCSJ expects that every school in the Region will recognize several items which are already being attended to in that particular school. This project should also present a challenge, namely, to improve and expand each school's response to social justice concerns.

Part I is an outline of a four semester course on Social Stewardship. It is basically a broad outline of the particular issues, grouped into four major categories, that comprise the social justice agenda. Schools may compress the course into two semesters; teachers may pick and choose among the

issues; new categories may be used to group issues; schools may use an interdisciplinary approach; etc. This is not what a Social Stewardship course *must* be. It is rather an overview of the social justice agenda and a guide for the development of the social justice course.

Part II shows how the issues on the social justice agenda should infuse the entire curriculum of the school. Again, the RCSJ does not intend to mandate, but rather to suggest. The creation of a more just world order necessitates well-informed world citizens. Each teacher, in his or her own discipline, should inform students in a professional and apolitical manner of the facts and judgments, pro and con, about the issues on the social justice agenda which relate to his/her discipline.

Part III is a listing of service opportunities that are usually available in the neighborhood and school settings. It is meant to suggest possible avenues for active participation by our students. Part III also includes a brief listing of student projects that are being implemented in the Region. This inexhaustive list suggests some means for individual and class projects that could help make the study of the issues on the social justice agenda more concrete and applicable to their own lives.

Lastly, Part IV is a partial listing of some of the more valuable centers and organizations from which teaching materials can be obtained.

The comments above include a caveat of the RCSJ. This project is *not* designed to present any one-best-way or all-inclusive-program on Social Justice. It is proposed as a concrete compilation of what is happening and what could happen. As always, the local Administration and Faculty are the best judge of what is most appropriate for the local scene. Hopefully, this project will challenge school staffs to review their present response to social justice concerns; will provide concrete and workable suggestions for additional avenues of response; and will serve as one small aid in continuing to

make all our schools the best that Catholic education has to offer.

Part I: SOCIAL STEWARDSHIP: a four semester program

1) *National Issues and The Kingdom of God:* - Urban Crisis - Housing - Welfare/Welfare Reform - Community Reinvestment - Domestic Food Shortage - Health Care - Care of the Aged - Crime Prevention/Capital Punishment - Penal Reform/Law vs. Justice - Discrimination/Sexism - One Industry Cities - Migrant Workers/Immigration Restrictions - Politics/Levers of Power.

2) *Human Development and The Sermon on The Mount:* Human Rights - Religious Freedom - World Hunger - Land Reform/Ownership of Resources - Poverty/Unemployment - Population - The Rich-Poor Dialectic - Education - Addictions - Alienation.

3) *Global Interdependence: All God's Children:* Use of earth's resources/Ecology/Consumerism - International Trade - Foreign Exchange/Monetary Systems - Transnational/Multinational Corporations - Economic Dependency - Foreign Ownership/Investments - Foreign Aid - Military Sales - War Prevention/Disarmament - Non-Violent Resolutions to Conflict - World Law - U.N./International Organizations.

4) *Economic/Political Systems and The Gospel:* A) *Systems Analyzed:* Capitalism - Socialism - Communism - Marxism. B) *Systems Critiqued:* Gospel Values - Church Teachings. C) *Systems In the Future:* Responsiveness to Change? - Alternative Systems? - The N.I.E.O.

Part II: The OVERALL CURRICULUM and SOCIAL JUSTICE

1) *Religion: Old Testament:* Jubilee Year, Suffering Servant, Prophets. *New Testament:* Beatitudes, Last Judgment, Good Samaritan. *Church History:* Development of Church's Social Teaching — Encyclicals, Synodal Documents, Vatican II; The Immigrant Church in the U.S., American Bishops Statements, the NCCRI. *Morality:* Human right, Bio-ethics, Christian pacifism, Just War Theory, Capital Punishment.

(2) *Science: Earth Science:* Ecology, Pollution, Reclamation, Weather Control, Energy — Non-renewable and Renewable (Wind, Solar, Geo-thermal). *Biology:* Biomass, Bio-ethics, Food Sources, Malnutrition, Aqua-farming, Oxygen Cycle, Carcinogens, Drug Addiction, Seabed mining. *Chemistry:* Pollution, Chemical Wastes, Ozone Deterioration, Carcinogens, Synthetic Fuels. *Physics:* Nuclear Power Safety, Radiation, Nuclear Weapons, Satellite Communication.

(3) *Mathematics: Business Math:* Consumer math literacy, interest and mortgage rates, loans, payback periods, consumer pricing,

present value analysis. *Statistics*: Analysis of public opinion polls and social statistics.

4) *Social Sciences: Asian Studies*: Culture, Population, Poverty, Decolonization. *World History*: War and Its causes, Limits of National Sovereignty, United Nations, World Law. *American History*: Immigration history, Depression and New Deal, Labor Movements, "Big Stick" Policy, Monroe Doctrine. *Current Events*: Liberation movement, Developing nations, Terrorist movements, Penal reform and Capital Punishment, Economic Imperialism. *Sociology*: Family values, Welfare, Work Ethic, Crime and penal reform, Unemployment, Social classes, racism, sexism. *Psychology*: Violence, Alienation, Addiction, Conflict, Consumerism, Sexual Identity. *Political Science*: Levers of Power, Comparative political systems, immigration, social welfare legislation, social engineering, Lobbying.

5) *Business: Accounting*: Profits, Tax Laws, Inflation. *Economics*: International Trade, Boycotts, Unemployment, Capital vs Labor-intensive investments, Foreign exchange, Transnational corporations, Poverty Level, Fixed Income, Economic conversion, Anti-trust legislation, Mergers. *Marketing*: Consumerism, Sexism in advertising, Media, Subliminal advertising. *Management*: Participation, Unionism, Conformity, Technology, Corporate Social Responsibility, "Readlining," Personnel Practices, Affirmative Action, Retirement and pensions.

6) *English*: Language, Sexism, Cultural Expressions, Roots of Language. *World Literature*: Cultural Understanding and Appreciation. *American Literature*: Themes of Prejudice, Sexism, Violence, Alienation, Exploitation, Revolution, Social Change. *Media*: Advertising, TV Morality, Print vs Visual, *Editorializing* vs Reporting.

7) *Foreign Language: For each Language*: Cultural Understanding, National Viewpoints vs U.S. Viewpoints, Decolonization, Current Events in light of people's cultural heritage, History of Sexism, Racism, Castes etc.

8) *Health: Health*: Diet, Food Chain, Drink, Addiction, Wholistic Health Care, Preventive vs Curative Medicine, National Health Insurance.

Part III: SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES AND INDIVIDUAL CLASS PROJECTS

A) 1. *Community service activities*: Homes for the elderly - Hospitals - Child Care Institutions - Foster Homes - Meals on Wheels - Shopping For the Elderly - Tutoring - Visiting the Sick - Work with the Handicapped. 2. *School activities*: Service Awareness Day - Special Assemblies - Blood Mobiles - Hunger Days - Blood Mobiles - Food Drives - Guest Lecturers - Films - Themes for Retreats.

B) *Individual class projects*: Role playing and simulation games - Research own ethnic tradition, social class, etc. - Justice of school rules and procedures - Study of local pollution sources - Research sources of energy used in area - Study employment problem of neighborhood/city - Research military spending/contracts with city businesses - Research local critical poverty areas - Study local government budget - Contact Congressman - Study crime problems in area/ interview local police officials - Health studies - Debate boycott issues - Study advertisements as seen in local environment - Analyze own weekly diet - Plan annual budget on welfare levels.

Note: Part IV is omitted here as the addresses are all within the United States Region.

CONCLUSION OF THE DOSSIER ON THE POOR-SOCIAL JUSTICE

This long reflection of the General Council on the responses of the Institute to proposition 14 of the General Chapter is a work of analysis, and, at the same time, a meditation on the life of the Institute itself; on its life, such as it was defined and willed by the Founder, and on the actual life of our religious family in what concerns an aspect that without doubt is quite important.

We entrust these reflections to each community and each district, so that, everywhere they will become more meaningful and more effective. It is fortunate that these reflections are being diffused during the tercentenary, while we are seeking to assure a unity which will draw its values from our approach to the truth. And the real essence of our vocation is presented to us in the examples and the doctrine of our Founder which we have recalled in these pages. At the same time, the truth and the sincerity of our life today are best examined and defined in the light of these events and these principles.

Giving first priority to caring for the poor, a concept which comes to us from our Father, is truly what characterizes us. But not only us, it belongs also to the Church which received it from Jesus Christ himself as its mission and as a pressing invitation. Coming as a repeated and clear echo of the voice of the Savior, we have the words of his present Vicar on earth, John Paul II. As proof of this, for example, we have what he said in New York's Yankee Stadium before 80,000 people on 2 November 1979: *The social thought and practice inspired by the Gospel should be characterized by a very definite sensitivity toward those who find themselves in the most painful situations, for the poorest, for those who suffer as a result of the physical, psychic, and moral evils which afflict mankind: those who hunger, those who are fallen into despair. These are the people who are found in profusion in this world.*

Sensitivity and action must go together. Regarding the programmatic encyclical of this same Pope, *Redemptor hominis*, it is said that no one could have written some of its paragraphs — above all numbers 13 to 16 — if a series of sorrowful historical experiences had not preceded the document. (14) . . . *Since this man is the way for the Church . . . the Church of today must be aware in an always new manner of man's "situation" . . .* (15) *The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces . . . All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is . . . subjected to "alienation," it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, . . . the exploitation of the earth, the planet on which we are living, demands rational and honest planning . . . The development of technology and the development of contemporary civilization . . . demand a proportional development of morals and ethics . . . These are the essential questions that the Church is bound to ask herself, since they are being asked with greater or less explicitness by the thousands of millions of people now living in the world.* [English text, pp. 44-45, 46, 47, 49].

In face of these considerations of the Supreme Pastor of the Church, who would dare to organize his social and apostolic action as if he ignored these problems.

We who are called to continue the work undertaken by De La Salle know that our service must not neglect what has happened in the course of history. Like all responsible Christians, we must understand correctly what the theologian P. Alfaro wrote at the time of the 1971 synod: *There are Christians today who have not perceived yet that the signs of the times demand a profound change of mind and attitude. We must, in effect, pass from an individualistic Christianity, a stranger to the enormous human problem . . . to a Christianity seriously involved in the liberation of all men, because all — especially the poor and those on the fringes of society — make Christ incarnate for us* (1).

Let us reflect, analyze, and pray together. This is the means to become more aware of these human truths and realities. Let us do this so as to overcome the polarizations and tensions which arise when certain things are studied or become a field for our activity. Let us strive to achieve that profound unity — mentioned above — which can only be achieved in response to a profound need, that of fidelity to our origins, and also, that which comes from the urgent appeals of the human situation in which we are working.

We strongly hope it will be thus, and, in this hope, we once more extend to you our fraternal greetings in De La Salle.

*The Superior General and the
Members of the General Council*

(1) JUAN ALFARO, *Cristianismo y justicia*. Ed. PPC. Madrid, p. 42.

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