



## THE GENERAL CHAPTER

08-O-06

On Monday, April 7, 1986, one hundred and seventeen Brothers of the Christian Schools will gather together at the Mother House in Rome for an assembly whose duration is expected to be about two months: *This is the General Chapter.*

### Who are these representatives?

The composition of the group of 117 representatives originates from three sources. First of all, there are eight members by right: the present Superior General, the former Superior, Brother Nicet Joseph, and the six Brothers Councilors, elected in 1976. The second group is the most numerous: 105 delegates elected by direct vote by all the Brothers in the 64 Districts and the 8 Delegations which constitute the administrative elements of the Institute. Finally, four can be designated by the Brother Superior General and his Council. The maximum number then is 117, which will be verified, but there may be a few delegates less because certain delegates may find it impossible to attend.

### What does the Chapter do?

The Chapter fulfills two principal functions. The first is *elective*: to choose the Superior General and his Councilors; the second is *legislative*: the Chapter is the only authority which has the power to decide upon the norms and the orientations which regulate the life of the Brothers and that of the communities.

But before doing any electing or deciding upon directives, the Chapter must first define its policies. To do that, it begins by verifying the impact of the decisions of former chapters, the manifest needs of the apostolate, as well as the conditions of individuals and communities which make up the Institute. It will particularly give an attentive ear to the suggestions which every Brother or every group of Brothers has the right to propose. From this investigation as a body, a general program of action will be decided upon which will be broken down by Regions and Districts. It is only after having defined this general political set-up that the Chapter will be able to choose the men capable of translating it into reality.

The Chapter meets every ten years, but there are quite a number of suggestions for reducing this period so that the Institute can benefit more often from the impetus which such an assembly generates.

### A particular task for the 1986 Chapter

One particular task incumbent on the Chapter of 1986 is that of approving a «Rule» which will be presented to the Holy See for approval. Actually, a Chapter does not invent all the legislation which governs the Brothers. Every religious family possesses «Constitutions» or «Rules», which are a combination of spiritual texts and regulations expressing what this Institute is, what it does, and how the life of the Community and its religious are organized. Generally, these texts come from the Founder and have been approved by the Church. Still, the ravishes of time render some of these regulations burdensome or even warped.

Therefore, Vatican Council II has asked that all Institutes rejuvenate their Constitutions. Accordingly, the Brothers adopted in 1966/67 a provisional Rule. After twenty years of experience, the moment has now come to enact a definitive text which will be submitted to the pontifical organization which concerns itself with religious: the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (C.R.I.S.).

### The essential for the Chapter

The alert reader will already have noticed that every serious enterprise which is preparing for a general assembly sets up a parallel apparatus. It suffices, in the case of religious, to sprinkle about a little bit of prayer and the model seems ready for operation. It functions so well that it constitutes a trap into which more than one Religious Order has fallen. While it is necessary to oil the mechanism, one must go a step further to what is most essential.

Still, the essential lies elsewhere. It is tied up with the original nature of the vocation of the Brother and that of his Mission. Vocation and Mission come from God and from Him alone, but He has confided it to men of flesh and blood. Vocation and Mission include a human profession, socio-educational activities, and the like.

The essential work of the General Chapter, is then to take into account this original reality which has sown the divine seed in the ground of human realities. The Chapter ought, at one and the same time, to listen to God and answer the appeals of men, then to decide in favour of both. This is possible since the Risen Christ has opened the way.

Faith enables the Brothers to evaluate everything in this world in the light of the Gospel. They see that the totality of creation, with Christ as its centre, is ordered to God and destined through His love for the happiness and salvation of all mankind.

The above quotation, taken from the Brothers' Rule, demonstrates that this task should not take the capitulants by surprise, for it is nothing other than putting into operation the spirit of faith and of zeal, which is the spirituality of the Institute. The Rule continues elsewhere in these terms:

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.

The capitulants, therefore, are called upon to live together the spirit of faith and of zeal in the three well-known stages: beginning with realities, seeing the spiritual meaning in them, and translating them into action.

### **...Beginning with realities:**

A Chapter never leaves ideological positions, but rather examines: the youth, particularly the poor ones, together with their needs and their appeals—the living conditions of the world in which we exercise our apostolate—the paths and the obstacles which educators meet—the daily life of the Brothers—the appeals and aspirations of the lay people around us—the Church and its demands, etc. In brief, a «cloud of witnesses» which are invisible to the eyes of the capitulants, but very much present to their heart, since they constitute this part of Creation confided to their care.

### **...Discern the spiritual meaning:**

Our God is not the Sphinx questioning Oedipus. Discernment is not the deciphering of an enigma, but the result of listening and a coming together. It is listening to the word of God in silent meditation, and the convergence of the elements of response perceived in the course of this meditation. Nobody possesses the Spirit as his own exclusive property, but it is given to those who come together in the name of Jesus. The rise of these convergences is one of the most impressive moments in the course of Chapters: the group of capitulants little by little gets together on the manner in which such and such an event, which depends on us, can be directed so that it will serve the cause of justice and truth, and will lead to God. Little by little it becomes of one mind on the way of helping youth, the Brothers, our friends the laity to give to their life the fullness of the love of God intended for them, without forgetting about their individual human differences.

### **...Translate the spiritual meaning into action**

The Brothers have enough texts at their disposal, so they would rather get down to practical measures. For example, the Chapter of 1976 refused once more to define the ideal community. On the contrary, it asked each community, at the beginning of the school year, to come together to decide their prayer program, apostolate, and social life. These are *practical* measures which concern daily life, but they are also inspired means, carrying with them clear spiritual significance: the unity among the Brothers and among those with whom they come into contact.

### **By way of conclusion**

As far as we can determine from listening to the Brothers and from reading their suggestions, this is a rapid review of the great agenda to which the Chapter will probably address itself:

1 - The Chapter of 1986 is not going to discover America, others before them have already done this so it will be up to them to fall into step lest they become incoherent. It seems useless to launch into new endeavours and seems more profitable to bring to fulfillment those already started.

2 - *Spiritual renovation* seems to be the major priority: we must take the time to *pray* better and to better *discern* the meaning of events. Certain currents of renovation lack inspiration, or, at least, the inspiration, which is the Holy Spirit: we must take the time and make the effort to receive it and listen to it.

3 - *Service to the poor and the promotion of justice* through education has greatly caught on among the Brothers. It is hoped that it will reach a «critical mass» in which the majority of the Brothers will be engaged in this work. A true contact with the poor ought to inspire the prayer of the Brothers, simplify their life style, and direct their activities better.

4 - The Brothers participate in the *educational ministry* of the Church. The Chapter will set about drawing all the logical conclusions from this participation: the practical priority of catechesis and evangelization, more «pastoral» relations with youth, mutual enrichment between the religious life and the proclaiming of Jesus Christ, more decided overtures toward the Church for constructing faith communities, etc..

5 - For the past fifteen years or so, a growing number of *lay people* have been discovering in Saint John Baptist De La Salle a source of inspiration. This will be one of the major questions to be discussed by the Chapter and one which will lead the Institute to pass through a historical stage: that of sharing, without any confusion, our spiritual richness and our apostolate with the laity.

6 - The Institute is making an effort to *extend its service* to the young countries. In other countries, the Institute is ageing. Elsewhere its presence is sparse: how can mutual help be better organized from the center towards the communities and between the districts and the regional centers? How can we better assure our service to the Church by a better cooperation between sectors and with the local Churches?

7 - Finally, the question of *vocations*, their awakening, their growth, and their formation are all linked to all the movements of renewal. The Chapter will give the Brothers an opportunity to more clearly give witness to who they are and will invite them to enthusiastically transmit this appeal for future service within their ranks.

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If some of these paragraphs have proven of interest to the readers and has moved them to pray that the Kingdom of the Lord progress among the youth, then this will be the first positive result of the Chapter even before it opens!

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