

«**SHARED MISSION**»**HOW SHALL IT BE ACHIEVED?**

One of the most burning questions of our present Rule concerns the fact that at present the Institute and the Brothers share their apostolic mission with lay colleagues who share the work of our Brothers' schools.

Proof of this lies in the numerous articles and conferences produced by the Institute on this theme. They are becoming so common that little by little the topic is evolving platitudes uttered almost unconsciously.

**1. Mission of the Institute and the Brother****Mission:**

We realize that to fulfill a mission in the Church it is not enough just to work long and hard. Such work becomes "ministry" when it is seen as a sharing in the "mission" of the Church.

The Brothers are fulfilling the "mission" which the Church entrusted to them when the Institute was officially recognized and approved. It is the mission to provide a Christian education for children and youth and this is identical with the finality of this Institute as formulated in the Rule.

**Consecration and the spirit of the Institute:**

In accepting that mission, whoever wants to be a Brother leaves the ordinary life of the world, accepts to live in poverty, chastity and obedience for the love of Christ and unites himself to other Brothers in order to run schools "together and by association". «The Brothers participate in the Church's mission by consecrating their lives to God in order to bring the Gospel to the educational world» (Rule 12).

These are the commitments which change a man into a Brother. Living out this reality requires one essential factor: a soul, a spirit, which in this case is the spirit of faith and zeal. The Brother acquires and deepens it during a period of intense formation in the spiritual life.

Acquiring and maintaining this spirit is so essential that he who does not have it, or has lost it, even though he lives in community and calls himself a Brother «ought to be considered, and consider himself as a dead member». It is the acquisition of this spirit of the Institute which changes a person into a bona fide member of that society. Of course, it is self-evident that

the possession of this spirit cannot be measured statistically nor can anyone infallibly know who has it and who does not.

**Mission and spiritual life**

De La Salle frequently correlates the spiritual life of the Brother and the success of his apostolate: i.e., his mission. «Secular affairs are a great source of distraction and they would render you incapable of applying your mind to those exercises which demand that our thoughts should be filled with God's holy spirit» (M. 114, §3). «Rest assured that you will do good in the Church only in so far as you are filled with faith and conduct yourself by the Spirit of Faith, which is the spirit of your Institute with which you should be animated» (M. 139, §2).

**Ministry**

As he goes about his work of teaching, a Brother is fulfilling his mission and accomplishing his "ministry" of education within the Church. «Teach them the rules of a Christian life and the means by which they may secure their eternal salvation. It is for this end that God has called you to your present vocation» (M. 87 §2). The Rule says: «The Brothers consider their professional work as a ministry» (R. 13).

Because he is entrusted with a ministry within the Church the Brother shares all the characteristics proper to "one who is sent", one who has been given a "mission" or in other words an apostle. That is why De La Salle uses terms of high esteem for the dignity of the Brother (and the teacher) such as the following: Minister of God (M 3, 2; 51, 1), collaborator with God (M. 205, 1); dispenser of the ministries of God (M. 166, 3), minister of the Spirit of God (M. 189, 1), co-worker with Jesus Christ (M. 195, 196...), ambassador, minister and vicar of Jesus Christ (M. 78, 2; 93, 3; 99, 2), guardian angel (M. 197), voice of God (M. 3; 168, 2), spiritual father (M. 110, 1; 157, 1), good shepherd (M. 33; 196), minister of the Church (M. 199, 2; 201, 2), helpers of the parish priest (M. 61, 3...), etc., etc.

\* \* \*

Therefore the mission of the Brother has a certain hierarchical order: First, the Church recognizes that the Institute has a mission which is a part of its own mission – spreading the Gospel and working at the salvation of all mankind. Secondly, the Brother consecrates himself entirely to God as a member of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and acquires its spirit. Thirdly, as a living member of that Society he becomes part of its mission and commits himself to its realization by being an educator. Fourthly, all his work is done as a "ministry" within the Church. Fifthly, as he fulfills his mission by means of his ministry, he takes on the dignity of an apostle, a minister of God, an ambassador or Jesus Christ, etc.

## 2. The laity associated in the mission

In synthesis, this is the basis on which the mission of the Institute and the Brother rests. Then, when we speak of the "shared mission" of lay collaborators, we are actually saying that they share in this total concept. They share; that is, they have a role in it. But they are a part in the sense that they are a sector of people who fulfill an educational role within the schools.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools confide to the lay teachers of their schools the responsibility which it has contracted with the Church, which involves fulfilling its mission of educating by exercising its "ministry" of education.

With ideal logic, that would mean that these lay persons would also "be formed" as the Brothers are, for the fulfillment of their ministry. This would involve a preparation consisting the acquisition of the spirit which "animates" their life and mission as teacher.

In other words, if the Institute invites lay teachers to exercise its apostolic mission, it must also make it possible to acquire the spirit of the Institute by which it fulfills its mission.

The Rule (N° 17) tells us that «The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission.» Then in N° 146 it repeats that «The Institute can associate with itself lay people who want to lead the life of perfection that the Gospel demands, by living according to the spirit of the Institute and by participating in its mission».

It is evident that the Rule does not make a distinction with regard to lay people as our collaborators between the mission and the spirituality of the Institute. Rather, it presupposes them. Further, it could be said that there are two pre-conditions for a lay person to be associated with our mission:

- a) A desire to strive for evangelical perfection, (it being understood within the lay or secular state).
- b) Acquisition of the spirit proper to the Institute.

Naturally, the first condition can be met by any Christian. However, for the second, some means must be provided: some way to become acquainted with that spirit, in what it consists, the way in which it can be acquired, etc.

## 3. The responsibility of the Institute and of each Brother

The lay teachers who work in the Brothers' schools have little knowledge of the spirit of the Institute and they are not going to acquire it by osmosis. In this regard, the Rule is very clear: the Institute and the Brothers «are to provide for those who so desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit» (R. 17).

This article of the Rule is not simply an advisory. It does not say "they may offer", "it is proper to offer"... It says specifically: "they provide". And this is directly in reference to "association with our mission".

Therefore, although "shared mission" is an appealing expression, it cannot remain just a bit of currently popular terminology. While all the Brothers and even the entire Institute become aware of this reality as though it were a new discovery made in this third centenary of our existence as an Institute, we must accept that our lay collaborators have a right to whatever may be necessary for them to fulfill the mission which we confide to them.

It would be easy to yield quietly to the temptation of saying that this should be handled by Superiors, the Region or perhaps each District. We could be satisfied to hear that "a center of formation for lay teachers is being organized", or that certain Brothers "are arranging for it". This might put us at ease, but it is not enough.

If the Institute wishes to be faithful to its mission in the Church and if that mission is fulfilled in large part by lay teachers, then it becomes necessary that we give them all the best possible means to make their work pleasant and effective. It is always possible that some of our collaborators would want no part of it. Others might be satisfied to do their teaching or professional work with no reference to Gospel values... This is sad, but it is not a valid reason for the Brothers and the Institute to neglect «offering them the means of knowing the Founder and of living according to his spirit».

\* \* \*

In view of all that has been said, it might be in order at this point to answer a few pertinent questions:

- What does the statement "The Institute willingly associates lay people into its mission" mean to me?
- Is my community happy to associate lay people into its work?
- What is my attitude with regard to the lay people who work with me in my school?
- Do these lay people know the Founder and the spirit of the Institute?
- What has the community done to provide the means thereto?
- What have I personally done to help lay teachers become aware of the spirit of the Institute?
- What difficulties or obstacles have arisen to prevent it?
- What is the District doing about it? Is this enough?
- What is being done by the Region? Is this enough?
- Are the Brothers in general sufficiently concerned about providing lay teachers with the means to "share" our mission?
- What are the goals of the Community? the District? the Region? the Institute?
- What are my personal goals?

**Brother Jose Maria Valladolid**