

**Some points of reference
for a theological reflection
concerning Shared Mission (1/2)**

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It has become clear through various sources just about everywhere that there needs to a clarification based on theology of God's providential call which we have chosen to call "Shared Mission".

This is a new concept and it is a reality that we sometimes admire and other times puzzle over. And so it is right to discern and measure very carefully each of the steps and commitments that this call of God demands for us.

On the other hand, this movement is something that is alive, and sometimes it goes faster than its conceptualization. And when some steps have been taken, when one looks back one may question whether what is being said now is really correct or not.

Perhaps that is the reason that various parts of the Lasallian world are seeking "a theological basis" for this "Shared Mission" movement. My purpose in this article is to contribute a simple reflection to the common effort.

I think that in any theological reflection concerning the "Shared Mission" some basic points should be clarified that will serve as a basis for further discussion or reflection. These points are:

1. The nature of the Mission. When we speak of Shared Mission, what Mission are we talking about? To put it another way, what is the mission that we share?
2. The identity of those who share in the context of the Shared Mission:
 - on the one hand, the Brother, the Community, the Institute;
 - on the other hand, the lay colleague who assists in the work with his/her own dedication.
3. The levels of participation as seen within the Shared Mission; in other words, how is the mission shared?
4. The involvement of the person in the Shared Mission; the relationship between mission, charism and ministry.
5. The demands of the Shared Mission for each of the two groups who are sharing.

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1. What is the mission that we share?

This point is fundamental and needs to be carefully defined because it will impact on the discussion of the remaining aspects of shared mission.

From a theological point of view there really is only one mission, which is the mission of Christ given to the Church: "Go throughout the whole world and proclaim the Good News".

But in fact, in the Church, that mandate, that mission which is always the same one, is diversified in different "facets" which are also given the name "mission". And so one can properly speak of "the mission of a Congregation", "the mission of a particular saint", "the mission that the Church entrusts to us", etc.

All of these missions are united together in the only true mission but they are diversified in the forms and in the areas in which they are exercised. Some theologians call these facets of the one mission by other names, such as "ministry" or "function". What is important is that we understand what the term means.

When in our own specific situation of the Institute we speak of "Shared Mission", are we referring to the sharing of the universal mission of the Church or are we talking about a more specific mission, namely that of the Institute?

If we are speaking about sharing the universal mission, we can apply the expression "shared mission" to any one of the faithful in his or her own working situation, for example someone in health ministry or missionary preaching.

If we are speaking about a specific mission, in our case an educational one, we can refer to those who with us realize their work carrying out the purpose of the Institute that has been assigned to us within the Church.

I think that it is clear and unambiguous that our Institute has a specific and well-defined mission and that it is part of the "universal mission" and this mission consists in "evangelizing through the Christian school", and by extension, "through Christian education".

The Rule clearly states this "mission of the Institute" and the "mission of the Brother": 13d, 15a, 16, etc. And it leaves no room for doubt that the mission of the Institute and the Brother is part of the "mission of the Church": 12.

Our mission, the mission of the Institute, is a mission that is real and well differentiated from other missions or ministries. It is a mission that sprang up within the Church at a very specific historic moment and it had two milestones:

- The first was the foundational moment when God confided to John Baptist de La Salle and his first companions the mission of evangelizing the Christian school together and by association. This was done by means of the response that they gave to the Lord's call.
- The second milestone was the official approbation of the Church when the Institute's mission that was entrusted by God was recognized and endorsed by the Church.

So then when we speak of "sharing the mission" among ourselves I think that we are referring to this specific mission of the Institute and not just to the universal mission of the Church. This is the foundation in virtue of which we are able to share our particular mission.

2. With whom do we share "our" Mission?

Given the fact of having received a mission from God and the Church, it is the Institute's responsibility to fulfill it faithfully.

The Brothers join together specifically for the purpose of realizing this mission: "I promise to unite myself and remain in the Society...in order to keep schools together and by association..."

Those responsible for this "mission" are the Brothers:

- each one of them individually: "I promise to unite myself"... "to keep schools"
- all of them together, corporately: "I unite myself to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who are united together to keep schools".

History - the events, circumstances, needs and above all the Providence of God - has brought us to the point of

seeking the collaboration of lay colleagues in order to realize “our mission”; but generally this was done only in the sense of asking them to take on “their job” in exchange for remuneration, which was logical. And all this began decades ago and in many cases this was considered a “lesser evil”.

Then Vatican II came along proclaiming, or better yet, recalling that all Christians are called to and have the duty to extend the kingdom of God. And for our part, we were beginning to catch on to what the presence of lay colleagues meant in our institutions - whose purpose consisted precisely in extending that kingdom of God.

This was not a sudden inspiration but rather a more or less slow interpretation of the “sign” that God placed in front of us in those historic moments. We asked ourselves “what was God saying to us” through the presence of the lay colleagues..., and little by little a new vocabulary was incorporated and among this new lexicon was the idea of “sharing the mission”. This was a vocabulary, on the other hand, that denoted a change in attitude in order to come face to face with reality.

It is important to keep this journey in mind while considering “the two parts” that are involved in “shared mission”. The word to share is eloquent because it indicates that many are participating in the same thing in a common way and then it is parceled out.

In the case of “our shared mission” there are two types of persons who are involved in it in order to fulfill a role, to realize it together but from two distinct positions: on the one hand there is the Brother as the one in charge of the mission by means of a total commitment of his existence (guaranteed by his vows); on the other hand there is the lay person who is called, invited - “associated” as suggested in the Rule, number 17 -, offering his work that can be transformed into a ministry, the same as that of the Brother.

Within the “shared mission”, are the Brother and the lay person the same? Is there any basic difference in the way they both participate in the sharing of the mission? Or perhaps it would be appropriate to suggest that both the Brother and the lay person share the Institute’s mission on the same level with the same fundamentals and with the same title?

The answer to this question is dependent upon another one that has been formulated already in some area. If the response is that effectively both are involved in the shared mission with no difference at all, another question is immediately raised: “Then, is it worth the trouble to be a Brother to share a mission that can be realized in the same way as a lay person?”

To my way of thinking the response is not a difficult one because there is an important and even a substantive difference and the difference is equally important for the Brother as well as for the lay person.

The difference comes from the fact that the Brother and the lay person both participate in the mission according to difference “states”, with distinct obligations and commitments.

In effect, the Brother has committed his whole life to the realization of that mission. The commitment has led him to consecrate his entire life and all that he is as a person to God. It is as if at one time in his existence, he said to the Lord: “You have made me understand the importance that Christian education has for the extension of your Kingdom in such a way that I leave behind all things in order to engage myself in the existence and efficient running of schools. I

give up the formation of a family of my own and I commit myself to put my own personality, my work and all my goods in common in order to maintain this enterprise and I offer myself to go wherever I am sent in service to that mission”. And in virtue of this response, “to maintain the schools”, the Brother makes vows celibate chastity, poverty and obedience.

From this time on, the Brother has the obligation to devote all that he is to maintain the Christian schools. And this commitment is so substantial that it is referred to as a state of life - a new way of living - and it called a religious “state”.

The lay person, who is in another “state” also is committed but this response is different. It is as if the lay person were to say to the Lord: “You have made me understand the importance that Christian education has for the extension of your Kingdom in such a way that I put all my work and effort at your service”. But the lay person cannot put more at the Lord’s service (he cannot abandon his family nor renounce his temporal goods nor go to other places...), because he is part of that other “state of life” the secular one and it imposes other obligations and duties “of state”: he must live in harmony with his family, feed the family, provide a future for his children, he cannot himself lay out his own future...

Consequently, he does not associate himself with his entire existence in order to keep schools. He cannot nor should he do this because he has other obligations by reason of his state.

Therefore, the Brother and the lay person share the mission from two different lifestyles each with different commitments and obligations.

They are two distinct vocations each of which is followed by a personal response which is given to God’s call.

This discussion has nothing to do with who contributes more to the shared mission but rather it defines the way that both are involved in it.

Neither does this discussion have to do with skipping over the differences between the Brother and the lay person or assuring that they participate in the mission in the same way and with the same title. This does not seem right from the moment in which the Brother becomes intrinsically responsible for the carrying out of the mission, because he has committed his life to this work; whereas the secular cannot be expected to take on that responsibility intrinsically because he does not make vows nor does he become a member of the Institute.

This does not mean that the lay person’s effectiveness in the fulfillment of the mission and his work in ministry is second class; it simply means that his involvement is rooted in a different way and his responsibility is also distinct.

We all know that the lay person, given his state, contributes elements that are complimentary to those that the Brother contributes to the mission, given his own personal and family experience, relationships, formation, etc.

The conclusion to this line of reasoning could be a response to the question that was raised earlier: Is it worth the trouble to be a Brother in order to share a mission that can be realized in the same way as a lay person?

My response is: Of course it is! Of course it is meaningful to be a Brother in order to participate in the mission of the Institute such as it is since by means of his total consecration to God he takes responsibility for that mission and he dedicates himself totally to it with his whole life and all his strength.

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