

**TWENTY YEARS OF
"SHARED MISSION"
IN THE LETTERS OF
BROTHER SUPERIORS 1976-1996
(1/3)**

Brother Edwin Arteaga Tobón

1. Introduction

"Together and by association".

Among the Brothers this expression formed the unifying element of their vows of religion with a view to mission. Association for the Brothers had its first historic milestone in 1691 with the heroic vow and in 1694 with the vow of association of the twelve principal Brothers when they gathered around the Founder and committed themselves as his disciples to establish and fight for the schools for the artisans and the poor...together and by association. Until recently the use of the term 'together and by association' was limited in scope and only concerned the Brothers. Nowadays it is used more and more to signify the communion that exists between the Brothers and their lay partners in the mission of education.

It is interesting to note that, for some years already, the Rule states that "The spiritual gifts which the Church has received in Saint John Baptist de La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute which he founded" (Rule 146). One could say that even the typical expressions of the Lasallian vocabulary also go far beyond and include other areas of the same semantic fields of the common mission of the Brothers and their lay partners.

This "going far beyond" had already been recognized in *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration of 1967*: "The school will be molded into a community only through a community of teachers rich in diversity and the unity of its members. For this reason the Brothers are happy to collaborate with lay teachers, who bring to the teaching community a contribution that comes from their knowledge of the world, their experience in family life, civic affairs, and labor organizations. The Brothers act in such a way as to guarantee that the lay teachers are involved in the whole life of the school: with the catechesis, apostolic movements, extra-curricular activities, as well as in administration and matters of policy." (46.3). Here the *Declaration* is a declaration (pardon the redundancy) of intention formulated in a prescriptive way: the Brothers 'should'; wise and *timid*: 'act in such a way as to guarantee that the lay teachers are involved in the whole life of the school even in administration and matters of policy'. All this has to do with the shared mission!

So the notion and practice of shared mission developed little by little beginning in 1967.

2. TEXTS

In this article we will examine all the letters of the Brother Superior Generals from 1976-1996 in order to see how the consciousness of shared mission has grown within the Institute in those documents which are considered to be of a spontaneous and informal nature. We shall cite *in full* all the texts relative to our topic in chronological order.

Circular 403 - the 1976 40th General Chapter:

"The Brothers will share the Lasallian spirituality and the leadership of their schools with all the members of the teaching community and they will see to their continuing formation and they will be certain to make known to them the varying degrees of membership in what has come to be known as the 'Lasallian Family'" (page 78).

Letter of Christmas, 1976:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of May 15, 1977:

"We Brothers and lay partners who are associated to participate in the same spirit are aware of what Paul VI said to the members of the *Lay Commission* and which he repeated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers and if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses" (page 15).

Letter of May 15, 1978:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of December 31, 1978:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of May 15, 1979:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of December 31, 1979:

"The Catholic school debate: The increasing number of lay teachers and corresponding decrease in religious personnel puts the Brothers sometimes in the situation of being in the minority. The various forms of participation which are positive and even recommended as a pedagogical principle, give rise to sensitive problems and often require a necessary unity of spirit and action. (p. 14)...The incorporation of lay teachers in our schools in such great numbers negatively influences their catechetical value. And, nevertheless, lay personnel are genuinely invited by means of the papal document (*De Catechesi tradendae* of October 16, 1979), as well as by the last Synod which inspired the document, to consciously and spontaneously participate in the mission of catechesis. It is true that as we call on the laity to collaborate with us we do so not so much that they take charge of catechesis but so they might respond to other assignments. But it is no less true that, in the measure that we consider the evangelical character as something that is essential in our classes, the selection of lay colleagues must include looking at their convictions and their ability for integration, witness and commitment". (p. 19).

Letter of May 15, 1980:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of December 8, 1980:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Circular 415:

This had to do with the 1981 intercapitular meeting. It states: "The union of Brothers and lay colleagues is a very important contribution that we give to the Church. This is a new role that we Brothers are called on to play, that of sharing our spirituality with lay partners whom we consider our

equals...it is necessary to face the potential of a great number of lay partners who work with us and the great duty of sharing this mission and spirituality with them. This is an urgent duty because it is a duty of the Church for the laity” (p. 23s).

Letter of December 8, 1981:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of December 8, 1982:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of May 15, 1983:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of December 25, 1984:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter of December 8, 1985:

“Some first blossoms:...Is there an excessive weakening of intentions and impulses without sufficient clarity and firmness in the guidelines? Rather, I believe in a certain style of the Spirit who “blows where he will” and who does not feel pressured to subject himself to well defined schemes. In fact these blossoms of life need discernment and coordination and in this a concerted effort as the time for the General Chapter draws near...In any case we are faced with sure indications of a spiritual strength. Instead of thinking in terms of a certain type of withdrawal and consequent abandonment due to the decrease of effectiveness in the Institute, we see the possibility of even increased action and influence in the areas of service to the world of the poor and young people in response to needs in which we cannot haggle over our own strength and creativity.

And this integration of lay partners in our programs of life and the apostolate, far from fostering confusion or evasion, asks of us a spiritual frame of mind, a “soul” of leaders who are capable animating those who are trying to deepen their knowledge of and loyalty to De La Salle, to imbibe his spirit more and more” (p. 61).

Twenty years after the Declaration we read in the 1987 Rule:

“Ever since the time of their foundation, the Brothers have contributed to the promotion of the Christian laity, especially among those educators who want their professional work to be a form of Gospel ministry. **The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission. They provide, for those who desire, the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit**” (Rule 17). “The Brothers’ community is ever mindful that its apostolic activity takes place within an educational community in which all the functions, including positions of responsibility, are shared” (Rule 17a).

What a contrast between this text and that of the *Declaration* and the letter of December 31, 1979, in which a certain uneasiness at the presence of lay persons was felt!

From a normative text of the *Declaration* colored by the use of the term “should” there is a shift to a descriptive style as if things pertaining to the shared mission needed time to work themselves out; this is the sense that typifies the use of the present tense in: the Brothers ‘*gladly associate lay persons with them*’... ‘*They provide the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit*’. With regard to the timidity of previous formations referring to the sha-

ring of duties and responsibilities, the ground that was covered is extraordinary!

Circular 422 - Acts of the 41st General Chapter of 1986:

“Thanks to this integration of Brothers and lay partners with respect to a common ministry, our schools will be better for it and we will be able to provide a better service to the Church and society” (page 13).

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1987:

Under the title “A new understanding of association”, the Brother Superior speaks to us of “a further, insistent call...from the Lasallian Family...one of the most important developments in the Institute today, one that demands our closest attention...this traditional model of FSC-lay collaboration has virtually collapsed everywhere...as the percentage of lay teachers has increased, many of us have experienced frustration, demoralization even, that Brothers’ schools, as we once knew them, are things of the past. But many lay teachers have also experienced similar frustration because they have not experienced themselves as full partners in the creation of Lasallian schools...This movement...is a gift of the Holy Spirit...Our role is to live our religious consecration authentically and in the process bear witness...We must exercise a role of animation, sharing the fruits of our formation with our lay colleagues...At all costs we must avoid a spirit of paternalism, condescension, and control (however subtle)...We can turn over certain works and certain activities to our lay colleagues and undertake creative responses to needs that are unmet...” (pages 29-32).

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1988:

Shared mission is cited as the fourth specific theme that Brother Superior chose to close the 1986 General Chapter. Then it is developed as the seventh of the nine points in that letter. To illustrate the progress of the concept and of the practicality of shared mission we would like to point out the following occurrences:

“Dramatic change in the Institute...

We accept that from now on our schools will not be “Brothers’ schools”, animated by the Brothers’ community with secondary collaboration of lay teachers, parents, students. They will instead be “Lasallian schools”, animated by Lasallian educative communities of faith ‘within which the apostolic activity of the Brothers’ community takes place’...I am truly heartened by the rapid and even enthusiastic evolution...” (pp. 31-32).

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1989:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Letter to the Lasallian family of February 2, 1989:

“Educators, teachers, catechists, people in posts of responsibility, all members of educational communities. All these share directly with the Brothers the apostolate of the Institute to educate and evangelize. We are very much aware of the extent to which their work with us is competent, energetic, creative, and of their willingness to help. **We are pleased** to see an increasing number of them willing to occupy positions of responsibility for the sake of continuity and the good of the school. Their presence in the school and their work are a constant source of enrichment for us. The Institute, in its turn, is conscious of its responsibility towards them in the matter of training and guidance...” (5.2).

.../...