

**TWENTY YEARS OF
"SHARED MISSION"
IN THE LETTERS OF
BROTHER SUPERIORS 1976-1996
(2/3)**

Brother Edwin Arteaga Tobón

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1990:

There is no mention of shared mission.

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1991:

While dealing with the theme of *Identity, the Central Issue and Our Concrete Experience*, Brother Superior tells us: "It seems to me that the most substantial difference between the Rule of 1967 and that of 1987 is the introduction of article 17. I quote here from 17a and 17c:

"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. The Brothers make known to the rest of the educational community the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition. The Brothers offer to those who desire it, a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific apostolic commitment".

It is my impression that Brothers in most (but not all) areas of the Institute accept these new orientations, with attitudes, however, ranging from enthusiasm to begrudging resignation. There are Brothers who interpret the evolution from Brothers' schools to Lasallian schools as a sign that the Institute has failed. Others wonder whether Brothers still have a worthwhile role to play in Lasallian education. Still other suspect that the Institute itself and its leaders have lost faith in the Brothers' vocation and are actually contributing to its decline by strongly encouraging and promoting the participation of the laity in Lasallian mission and spirituality.

There is no doubt that this new understanding and exercise of the role of the laity is effectively forcing us to reflect seriously and profoundly on the meaning and significance of our vocation and of our own particular role in Lasallian education today and tomorrow. While I believe that a purification and strengthening of religious motivation will be the eventual fruit of this questioning, the current negative impact on morale and on the pastoral ministry of vocations is substantial" (pp. 19 ff).

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1992:

"While the Founder and early Brothers spoke of 'associating themselves' and of keeping schools 'together and by association', it is extremely important to observe that the meaning they intended to express by the word 'association' was fundamentally different from the meaning sociology gives to that term today. De La Salle and the early Brothers used the word 'association' to communicate to themselves and to others that they were living what sociology calls today intentional or total community. Sociology, on the other hand, uses the word 'association' to describe groups which make comparatively few demands on their members" (pp. 14-15).

Later on, the Brother Superior adds: "Even a cursory reading of the new *Rule* reveals that the Institute understands itself officially as an "intentional community" (pp. 15-16). "But the 'associational model' is perfectly appropriate to express the variety of relationships and groupings our lay colleagues can have among themselves and with us.

Our invitation to lay colleagues to share our spirituality and educational mission is not, at least ordinarily, an invitation to the kind of 'total community' which is proper to the Brothers. It is rather an invitation to invest a certain amount of themselves and of their time and energy, but without prejudice to their personal autonomy and/or family obligations" (p. 21).

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1993:

The theme of this pastoral letter was the transformation of the Institute.

In one paragraph the Brother Superior tells us: "During the past several decades, we Brothers have had to discern and express who we believe God wants us to be today, what we believe he wants us to do, and how we believe he wants us to do it" (p. 21).

"The orientations of the *Message* of the last General Chapter challenge districts to take seriously the orientations of article 40a, as well as 19a (of the Rule), which propose transferring some of our activities or even entire works to our lay colleagues, in order to respond to those peoples whose needs are neglected, both at home and abroad" (pp. 33-34).

Shared Mission: "Increasingly we realize that if we want our schools to be truly Christian and Lasallian, we must have the informed and enthusiastic participation of our lay colleagues. It is encouraging to note that everywhere today appropriate programs of formation in Lasallian spirituality and pedagogy are being organized for both Brothers and lay men and women. At the same time, we are gradually becoming more aware of the possibilities inherent in "shared mission" for the education and evangelization of youth...What is of fundamental importance is that we accept our lay colleagues as full collaborators. Most of us have moved beyond the stage of considering lay men and women as 'necessary evils.' But I am not sure that most of us have moved beyond the stage of considering them as 'inferiors' who require our direction. I think we must avoid at all costs the creation of dependency relationships which are nothing less than a new version of 'clerical-lay' relationships" (pp. 38-39).

Circular 435 of June 24, 1993:

Official texts of the 1993 42nd General Chapter.

"From its origins, the Brothers made the vow of association to keep together and by association schools for the educational service of the poor and they continue to do so. It is essential to the Institute. What has changed is the ever-in-

creasing role played by the laity in the mission of the Institute, hence the expression 'shared mission'. In the face of the difficulties of today's world in the schools and other educational enterprises, it is no longer conceivable that the Brothers can guarantee by themselves the continuation and the vitality of the Lasallian mission. The spirit of the Institute, which is the spirit of faith, invites us to see in these circumstances something more than the decrease in numbers of the Brothers. Rather we should see it as a call from God to maintain our place as consecrated lay persons in the religious life, alongside our colleagues in a common mission that is shared. As the Rule affirms, 'The spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. John Baptist de La Salle extend beyond the confines of the Institute that he founded' (Rule 146). It is the Spirit that has led some of the laity to participate for many years now in the mission of the Institute. The Brothers acknowledge the action of the Spirit in the promotion of the laity and find its significance in a renewed reflection on their vow of association... Guided by the Spirit, the Church has entered 'the age of the laity' and of a new evangelization. In this new perspective, **we see our shared mission as a sign of the times. Far from being a regrettable situation, it constitutes an integral part of our vocation as religious lay persons.** The Spirit invites us to a deeper and richer understanding of who we are and what we are called to do. The mission which the Church confides to the Institute and that is accomplished by Brothers and other Christians derives from their baptism and confirmation.

Those who are not Brothers are committed as 'Christifideles laici seculares'; the Brothers, as 'Christifideles laici consecrati', while making apparent in the lay vocation the radicalness of the Gospel and the transcendent dimension of the Kingdom.

In association for the shared mission, the Brothers are the heart, the memory, the guarantors of the Lasallian charism and 'the ferment of an adult Christianity'". (pp. 41-44).

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1994:

"In the report entitled 'Theology of Shared Mission' - a report accepted globally but not voted section by section - the Chapter recognizes shared mission as a manifestation of the work of the Spirit and declares that 'it constitutes an integral part of our vocation as religious lay persons'. That is a very significant statement. It means that we now consider 'shared mission' as a constitutive dimension of our vocation. *Christifideles laici*, because it is so named, provides the setting for our mission which is seen as a whole and compared to 'a great commitment and magnificent undertaking confided to the Church: the new evangelization which the world today sorely has need of' (p. 44). The associative character of the laity in favor of the mission of the Church is mentioned several times in this document" (p. 29).

Letter of January 1, 1995:

Devoted to "Our Charism in the Light of the Synod" and reflecting on its *Lineamenta*, Brother Superior tells us: "The

realization that religious constitute only 0.12% of the members of the Catholic Church and that of this percentage 82.2% are lay - 72.5% are sisters and 9.7% are brothers - and that 17.8% are priests obliges us to view the Church and religious life in a manner that is, at least for many of us, different and certainly more enlightened (p. 30).

Finally, Brother Superior looks at statistics concerning the Institute itself: "I think that it is important that I say explicitly that in addressing the Brothers I am addressing 7% of those actively engaged today in the Lasallian mission. According to the statistics compiled by the office of our Secretary General, of the 55,747 persons engaged in Lasallian education today, 50,496 (91%) are lay men and women; 4,033 (7%) are Brothers; and 1,218 (2%) are priests or members of other religious institutes. These statistics help us to understand and appreciate those General Chapter statements to which I called attention last year: that shared mission constitutes an integral part of our vocation, that looking upon ourselves as the *authorized agents* of our mission is obsolete, that our key role is to be the 'primary witnesses' of the spirit and charism of the Founder, that we Brothers must 'make visible the call to live the Gospel in depth' and that we must be 'readily available' for the educational service of the poor" (pp. 62-63).

Pastoral Letter of January 1, 1996:

"Understanding ourselves today:

This understanding of ourselves as Brothers, so well expressed by the 39th General Chapter, has to be interpreted and lived in a Church and Institute that has changed remarkably in the past thirty years. Of the 60,000 persons living the Lasallian mission today, only 7% are Brothers of the Christian Schools. As the 42nd General Chapter stated very accurately: 'Guided by the Spirit, the Church has entered 'the age of the laity' and of a 'new evangelization'. In this new perspective we see our shared mission as a sign of the times. Far from being a regrettable situation, **it constitutes an integral part of our vocation as religious lay persons.** The Spirit invites us to a deeper and richer understanding of who we are and what we are called to do" (Circular 435, p. 43). "We must overcome the attitude of considering ourselves as the authorized agents of the mission of the Institute" (p. 8). John Paul II has remarked that the participation of the laity is in the process of changing ecclesial life (Redemptoris Missio, 2).

It has certainly changed our Institute. The most striking difference between the experimental Rule of 1967 and its final version in 1986 is the introduction of a section entitled 'shared mission' (p. 15).

There are, however, no functions reserved to us. Lay men and women can do everything that we can do. Our effectiveness in a particular ministry depends on general competence and not on membership in the Institute" (p. 17).

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