

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

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### 3. Summary

We see, then, how the life of the Church and its dynamism has led the Brothers to share the task with lay men and women educators. The Institute's attitude with respect to them has changed throughout history. We can read the acts of the General Chapter of 1946 as an example of a rebuff:

"Votes of the fifth commission. III. -A religious reorganization is needed in our schools:

- a) The urgent elimination of the feminine element, in certain areas their introduction was on account of the war;
- b) A progressive reduction of the civil element, not allowing any Superior to open any new school if it would mean an increase in this type of personnel in the District;
- c) A review of school schedules, in order to alleviate the work of the Brothers in all kinds of schools, especially boarding schools, to give them the possibility of satisfying the demands of their religious and professional life".

The tone was more realistic during the 1956 General Chapter in which the presence of the laity was seen as providential. In the fifth commission report we read: "The notes cannot omit the presence of lay teachers in our schools, especially the boarding schools. They are a 'necessary evil' according to some; a 'providential act' according to others".

"The General Chapter shares this second opinion, provided that we learn how to associate ourselves with lay teachers and make them collaborators in the work of Christian education, far from reducing them to a role of mercenaries who are interested above all in their material interests..." (The two quotations from the General Chapters of 1946 and 1956 can be found in the brochure: *Incarnating the Lasallian charism in Latin America* - the Sixth Assembly of RELAL - Guidelines for planning - Quito 1994, Numbers 95-96, p. 40).

The period from 1976-1996, the subject of this study, can be summarized as follows:

Of the 28 documents examined, 12 do not have any mention of shared mission; this is especially the case in 1978, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1989, 1990; two make mention of it very incidentally.

Schematically, the thinking on shared mission between 1976-1996 could be presented as follows:

* Two declarations of general opening principles for collaboration.	Circular 403 of 1976 and the letter of May 15, 1977.
* Uneasiness due to the negative impact on the catechetical program due to the significant presence of lay collaborators.	Letter of December 31, 1979.
* Shared mission: a contribution of significant importance for the Church. A new role that we should play. Sharing is urgent.	Circular 415 of 1981.
* The first blossoms of spiritual power. Instead of withdrawal, increase the sphere of action. An integration requiring a spiritual disposition and the soul of leaders.	Letter of December 8, 1985.
* Better schools and better service to the Church and society are now possible.	Circular 422 of 1986.
* Culmination of the process of realization: Our shared mission constitutes an integral part of our vocation as lay religious.	Rule of 1987, numbers 17, 17a, 17b, 17c.
* The traditional model of collaboration is obsolete! Shared mission as a gift of the Spirit. Our role: to live authentically, avoiding paternalism. Trust.	Letter of January 1, 1987.
* Dramatic change in the Institute. We accept: the passing of Brothers' schools to Lasallian schools...communities of faith.	Letter of January 1, 1988.
* The collaboration of the laity is rich in creativity...We rejoice in their taking on responsibilities. Their presence and their work is enriching. We are responsible for their formation and accompaniment.	Letter to the Lasallian Family of February 2, 1989.
* Acceptance ranging from enthusiasm to unwilling resignation. Suspicion of abandonment. Purification and intensification of religious motivation. There is a negative impact on spirit and vocations.	Letter of January 1, 1991.
* Two models of association: that of the total intentional community (of the Brothers) and the other of simple association (that of the laity).	Letter of January 1, 1992.
* We must depend on the knowledgeable and enthusiastic participation of lay men and women...as full collaborators...avoid the creation of dependent relationships.	Letter of January 1, 1993.
* Sign of the times - looking at Rule 17 again.	Circular 435, pp. 41-43.
* Shared mission as a constitutive element of our vocation, both seen as Christifideles Laici.	Letter of January 1, 1994.
* Percentages: 91% lay men and women, Brothers only 7%. The key: to be for the laity witnesses of the charism of the Founder.	Letter of January 1, 1995.
* Percentages are repeated as is Rule 17. We are not the authorized agents for the mission of the Institute. The Institute has truly changed.	Letter of January 1, 1996.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the light of these reflections we would like to draw some operative conclusions that we could formulate using this proposal as a basis:

Shared mission demands - reciprocally - on the part of the Brothers and the laity, an initiative, formation and accompaniment in order to share the Lasallian mission and spirituality so that a community of faith is formed. The key word here is "reciprocally". The Brothers need to initiate, form and accompany their lay colleagues in the exercise of their educational mission and the acquisition of the spirituality of the Founder. How will this be achieved? It will be achieved through initial as well as continuing formation.

The 1991 *Guide for Formation* concerns itself with shared mission in the formation process.

Speaking about the identity of the Brother to those in formation, the *Guide* states: "The Brother is a man of the Church. In his particular vocation, **he knows how to collaborate with other members of the Church at all levels**" (51). Further on, citing some aspects of mission, the *Guide* cites in the fourth area: "**all this** in a mission shared with lay people." (131).

Later on describing the first years in an active community, concerning apostolic ministry, it says: "The ability to share our mission with lay people is another area of apprenticeship into which the community initiates the young Brother who has just joined it" (251).

Finally, among the means and structures for continuing formation, the *Guide* points out, on the District and Regional levels: "The mission shared with the laity and the leadership role which young people and adults demand from the Brothers is a stimulus for them and an opportunity for renewal" (305). The *Guide* offers no more texts concerning shared mission but the small amount that is said includes the most important events in the initial and continuing formation of the Brother.

But, for their part, the openness of the laity is necessary so that they can be initiated and made participants in terms of their "creativity, availability, competence and vitality" to which the Letter to the Lasallian Family made reference (cf. Letter to the Lasallian Family 5.2).

There is no doubt that the "Brother Jaime Gutiérrez Training Center" (in Colombia), the study and the assimilation of courses and educational coresponsibility, are the best sources for facilitating the development of Lasallian creativity and competence among our Lasallian colleagues.

In the meantime, a theology of shared mission should be developed and should be based on the view of Church as seen from the standpoint of Vatican II, which proclaims the fundamental equality among the members of the People of God and communion in the diversity and complementarity of gifts (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 32, 37 and 40). In the same way, the practice of shared mission should be delineated so as to strengthen its theology and therefore strengthen its identity and the sense of belonging for our lay collaborators who should feel as "Lasallian" as a De La Salle Brother. This practice will serve to make more concrete the community living of the laity and the Brothers as they face the need to plan for fundamental tasks in order to respond to:

1. The needs of new generations.
2. The call of the new evangelization (cf. Rule 13 and 15).
3. The continuing call of the poor (cf. Rule 40, 40b, 40c).
4. The demands of renewing the Christian school.
5. The fostering of Christian educators.
6. The evangelization of culture (cf. Rule 18, 19).

#### 5. BIBLICAL ENLIGHTENMENT

It is very likely that our Superior Generals had the following text from Exodus in mind when they meditated on and wrote their reflections concerning shared mission to the Brothers. It is a marvellous description of the reality that has pursued the Brothers during these last twenty years and at the same time it is a call to take a position which is realistic and one that is full of faith in terms of shared mission.

"The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?' Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make known to them the statutes and instructions of God.' Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.' So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves. Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country." (Exodus 18:13-27).

The reference to "hard cases" and "minor cases" matters little...The encouraging and beautiful thing is the operative definition of shared mission that this biblical passage has given us: "So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you". As we fulfill the demand to "bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2), we work for the building up of the Kingdom. God, consequently, will make known his desires to us...We shall succeed in fulfilling our task...And we shall all arrive, together and by association, at the Promised Land. •