
PASTORAL LETTER – JANUARY 1988

**THE DESTINY OF THE
INSTITUTE: OUR
RESPONSIBILITY**

"The life and development of the Institute depend primarily on the mystery of and the power of grace. By the gift of freedom, however, the Lord has willed to place the destiny of the institute into the hands of the Brothers who are committed to work together so that it will prosper and remain faithful to its mission. It is above all to Jesus Christ, to his gospel and to his Spirit that the Brothers are faithful."

- 1987 *Rule*, 142

1 January 1988
Feast of Mary, Mother of God
World Day of Peace

Dear Brothers,

“To you all, God’s beloved. . . called to be saints, may God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send grace and peace.” (Romans 1:7)

Once again I make my own a greeting of Paul to the early Christians. Although I am writing these words several days before we bid farewell to 1987 and welcome 1988; you are reading them some weeks into the new year. Late or not, I wish to communicate to each of you my hope and my prayer that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace throughout this new period of time given us by God to procure his glory as Brothers of the Christian Schools.

I. GRACE AND PEACE

This grace and peace I wish for every Brother is nothing less than the fruit of the Holy Spirit which comes from the Father through the glorified Christ:

“From his breast shall flow fountains of living water. He (Jesus) was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive.” (John 7:38)

In expressing my hope and prayer, Brothers, that you receive grace and peace, I am, at one and the same time, expressing my hope and prayer that **all of us** truly BELIEVE in Jesus Christ, from whose breast flow the fountains of living water.

To believe in Jesus Christ is to place our trust totally in him, it is to commit ourselves unreservedly to him. To believe in Jesus Christ is to "live with our arms outstretched"—that is to say, to live the YES that Mary spoke unceasingly to God; it is to say YES to what God requires of us in our daily life and YES to all those unexpected and sometimes painful events which invade "the tidy little world we like to construct for ourselves." (Robert Johann)

If we "live with our arms outstretched" as an act of worship of the Father, we thereby live "crucified" with Jesus Christ. When we live crucified with Jesus Christ, the Father raises us as he did his Son and fills us with the Spirit. We in turn, then, become fountains of living water for those confided to our care. (F .X. Durrwell)

This, therefore, is my New Year Wish for each of you: that you grow during this year as men of grace and peace—and, as such, as fountains of living water for all those whose lives touch your own.

Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace

In his beautiful **Message for the World Day of Peace, 1988**, Pope John Paul II insists that religious freedom is an indispensable condition for national and international peace. In uncompromising language he speaks of the "millions of people . . . still suffering for their religious convictions: they are victims of repressive and oppressive legislation, victims sometimes of open persecution, but more often of subtle forms of discrimination aimed at believers and communities."

As we call to mind these millions of victims, we remember our own Brothers living and working in countries where the Institute

has been officially suppressed and the Brothers strictly forbidden to live in community. We remember also those who are permitted a restricted District and community life but are forbidden to exercise our ordinary apostolate and are isolated from the rest of the congregation. Our Brothers are persecuted because they believe in Jesus Christ, have made public profession as religious of their faith, and have committed themselves to the human and Christian education of youth, particularly poor youth.

We do not forget either our Brother imprisoned two months ago (as I write these words) for political, ethnic, and religious reasons. His faith has led him to work constructively as an official representative of the local Church and in close collaboration with the Archbishop for a more just society. Nevertheless, he has been jailed—but not formally charged—for allegedly contributing to ethnic and religious tension.

We remember these Brothers, as well as their families and friends, their former students, and those to whom they minister in one way or another. They should never be far from our thoughts, our hearts, or our prayers. Their example of fidelity and courage is an inspiration to us all.

1987: An Extraordinary Year

During these final days of 1987, I find myself reflecting often on the ordinary and extraordinary events of the year, events which have affected the Institute and, in a particular way, those of us involved in central government. By ordinary I mean the normal pastoral activity of those of us striving to serve the Institute at the Generalate. Ordinary or normal, yes; perfunctory or routine, no. When I think of the contacts we have had with the Brothers—through visits, meetings, or publications—I am filled with gratitude, together with renewed conviction that God is truly with us as we strive to become more and more the men he wants us to be, in order to fulfill the precious mission he has confided to us.

But 1987—the year of the beginning of the Marian Year and year of the Synod on the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church—has not been for the Brothers of the Christian Schools an "ordinary" year. Quite the contrary. It has been an historic year: the year during which we received the approbation of our new Rule and officially adopted it; the year during which Brother Arnould, exemplary model of the life of consecration, mission, and community, was proclaimed blessed. We praise God and thank him for these extraordinary graces.

It has been a year in which death touched our generalate community in an extraordinary way. The totally unexpected loss of Brother Eugene Bodel, General Councillor, left us in a state of profound shock, disbelief, and grief. His death was followed several days later by that of Brother Maurice Hermans, Director of Lasallian Studies and former Procurator General. His contribution to a more comprehensive and profound understanding of the charism of St. De La Salle and of its significance for the Brothers in the contemporary world is incalculable. We look forward to Brother Michel Sauvage's biographies of both Brothers.

But if we were saddened by the loss of Brothers Eugene and Maurice, we were heartened by the appointment of highly-qualified successors: Brother Pierre Josse, new General Councillor, and Brother Michel Sauvage, new Director of Lasallian Studies.

1988: Time for Internalization and Commitment

There are no indications at the time of this writing that 1988 will be as extraordinary for the International Institute as 1987. But, of course, we never know what the Lord in his Providence has in store for us. If, however, the year is more "ordinary" than "extraordinary," I shall be pleased. Pleased because I think we need **time** at this moment to study our new Rule and thereby deepen our understanding of who it is God calls us to be, what service he wants us to render, and how he wants us to live.

But as important as deepening our understanding is, more is required. We have to make the Rule **our own**, that is to say, we have to internalize it. Still more is required: we have to stand before the Lord with our arms outstretched, proclaiming to him our YES to its content, knowing full well that commitment is going to involve CHANGE in our life. Finally, we have to make the decisions that are called for in our personal life, in that of our community, in that of our District, Sub-District, or Delegation, in that of our region, in that of the Institute.

II. OUR DESTINY . . . OUR RESPONSIBILITY

I have entitled this pastoral letter **The Destiny .of the Institute: Our Responsibility**. There are several reasons why some of you may have difficulties with this title: 1) It is not easy to define with precision the word "destiny"; 2) the claim in the title may appear to some as Pelagian; 3) our Founder used a similar expression but attributed the responsibility to Directors.

Despite some personal reservations, I employ the word "destiny" because the Rule uses it, and because I believe its meaning is sufficiently clear to all. If the title read out of context appears to some to veer towards Pelagianism, a reading of the entire article of the Rule is sufficient to allay that concern. Finally, the position of the Institute, as expressed in Chapter 10, "The Vitality of the Institute" is indeed that the destiny of the Institute is in the hands of the Brothers.

At the same time, the text reminds us that "the life and development of the Institute depend primarily on the mystery of and the power of grace." (142) In like manner fidelity of the Brothers to their vocation is in reality a response to God's fidelity in their regard (42). "It is above all to Jesus Christ, to his gospel and to his Spirit that the Brothers are faithful" (142). Because we are convinced that "the need for this Institute is, very great" (St. DLS), we believe that God does not abandon "his work" but that "it pleases him to make it bear fruit day by day" (141).

"By the gift of freedom, however, the Lord has willed to place the destiny of the Institute into the hands of the Brothers who are committed to work together so that it will prosper and remain faithful to its mission" (142).

The message of this important article is clear. God's grace is available in abundance. Nevertheless, the future of the Institute is our responsibility—as individual Brothers, as communities, as Districts, Sub-Districts, or Delegations, as regions, as Institute. We have to live our religious consecration wholeheartedly, entering into intimate communion with the crucified but risen and glorified Christ from whose breast we shall receive the Spirit and become "fountains of living water" for those confided to our care.

St. De La Salle captures this thought magnificently in the following passage, a passage which expresses succinctly the heart of the apostolic spirituality he wanted his Brothers to live:

"Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ himself . . . The Spirit acts in you and by you through the power of Jesus Christ . . . In order to fulfill our responsibility with as much perfection and care as God requires of you, frequently give yourself to the Spirit of our Lord to act only under his influence and not through any self-seeking. This Holy Spirit, then, will fill your students with Himself, and they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit." (*Meditations for the Time of Retreat* 3.2)

The destiny of the Institute: our responsibility

The first step, Brothers, in the exercise of this responsibility is to offer ourselves totally to God, committing ourselves to "will one thing"(Søren Kierkegaard), that is to say, God's will in our regard.

This consecration is not, of course, something we make only once or even several times in our lifetime. It must be renewed every day of our lives and in a special way at particular periods of our spiritual journey: The Brothers "are ready to respond to the successive calls of God in the various stages of their lives" (42a).

Brothers, you and I are privileged to live a "moment" that can legitimately be called "historic." I know very well that that expression is overused and for that reason has a hollow ring. Nevertheless, when a moment is truly historic, it is appropriate and helpful to declare it to be such. For the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the moment we are living **is** historic. It is essential that we grasp the significance of this moment and accept the consequences. Nothing less than our future as an Institute is at stake.

"I set before you life or death, blessing or curse; choose life then" (Dt. 30:19). God is calling us, Brothers, to **CHOOSE LIFE**. He is calling us to take **responsibility** for the **revitalization** of the Institute and to **work together** so that it will prosper and remain faithful to its mission.

III. AN HISTORIC MOMENT

The "moment" we are living is historic because it marks the end of some forty years of prayerful search for a new expression of our identity, mission, and manner of living, an expression that is at one and the same time faithful to the Founder and faithful to the times in which we live.

My choice of "forty years" will surprise some. But I think the choice can be justified. The approbation of the Rule on 26 January 1987 was the conclusion of a process that began after the publication and approval of the text of the General Chapter of 1946. As Brother Michel Sauvage explained in his homily for the funeral Mass of Brother Maurice Hermans (and will surely develop at length in his biography), it was Brother Maurice, as sub-director of the Second Novitiate and lecturer on the Rule, who introduced a strikingly new approach to understanding our normative text. If the General Chapter of 1956 commissioned a new revision of the Rule, it was to a large extent because of Brother Maurice.

But Vatican II and the specific directives which followed it brought a broader perspective to this work of revision. The result was a new kind of Rule, a Rule faithful to St. De La Salle and inspired by Vatican II, a Rule we attempted to live, with some adjustments at the Chapter of 1976, through the past twenty years.

Prior to the General Chapter of 1986, every Brother in the Institute was invited to send to Rome his evaluation of our normative texts and to make recommendations for improving them. Numerous Districts, communities, and individual Brothers responded to that invitation. Those notes gave direction to the work of the International Commission on the Rule, which, in collaboration with the Superior and General Council, prepared a draft and sent it to the Institute for reaction. Again many Brothers responded.

In 1986, after two months of intense work, the capitulants agreed on a definitive text, which, with some adjustments, mostly of a juridical and technical nature, was approved by the Congregation for Religious on 26 January 1987.

Common Meaning and Values

This “moment” is historic because after years of prayerful and sometimes painful discernment, we have arrived at a common understanding and common expression of who we believe God wants us to be, what we believe he wants us to do, and how we believe he wants us to live.

My use of “we” in the preceding sentence is quite deliberate. Our new Rule is not something that was handed down from above—by a Superior or General Council, by a commission, or even by a General Chapter. While successive General Chapters exercised their responsibility in voting specific texts, their capitulants strove to represent the Brothers of the Institute, drawing upon their lived experience, the orientations of Districts and regions, and the notes of numerous Brothers. Every effort was made by past

Superiors and Councils to involve all the Brothers of the Institute in the revision of our Rule. That a significant number of Brothers responded positively to those invitations is a source of encouragement.

But to say that many have participated in the process of drafting the new Rule is not the same as saying that everyone is perfectly content with every article. My impression is that the Brothers generally are very proud of the new Rule. But satisfaction with every article is another matter. There are some articles I do not consider adequate. It is obviously impossible to write a Rule that is perfectly satisfying to everybody. What is important is that we have worked together and, by association to come to common decisions on the essentials of our life. We have made major decisions and articulated those decisions in the Rule. It is our responsibility now to accept what we have decided.

Brothers, how important it is for a group to have a common understanding of what it is about. Without a common understanding there can be no common vision, no common goals, no common objectives, no common expectations, no clearly directed programs; there can be no internal meaning or significance to the group.

There is no doubt that the problems we have experienced during the past two decades—notably the extraordinary number of withdrawals; the drop in vocations; the uncertainty, confusion, lack of confidence and peace many of us have experienced—manifest clearly what happens when there is confusion about identity, about mission, about style of life; in short when there is no clear common vision or understanding. The events of the past twenty years indicate, among many other things, that the "old Rule" was not as internalized as we once took for granted! They indicate also that too many of us failed to "make our own" the other excellent documents of the 39th General Chapter.

Internalization and Change

We return, therefore, to that major preoccupation of the capitulants: they knew that it was not enough to publish another document on identity, mission, and manner of living, even if that document is **The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools**. For this reason the capitulants called each of us to conversion, called each of us to change our lives, called each of us to accept our responsibility for the future of the Institute, called each of us to work together, with God's grace, to build that future.

Brothers, our new Rule is demanding, very demanding. It is demanding because making it our own and living it will inevitably involve change: change of ideas, change of attitudes, change of behavior. Change is, at least for most of us, difficult; for some of us, extremely difficult. But the Lord calls us to say YES to the directives and orientations of the Rule—which means, of course, saying NO to whatever is contrary to these directives and orientations. “Letting go” of established patterns and moving in new directions is never easy.

It is essential for all of us to give high priority to study of the Rule. An important number of Brothers have already devoted hours to its prayerful reflection and meditation. Many Districts have created systematic programs of study for each community. Some communities have established their own programs.

Five Specific Themes

In the pages that remain of this letter, I intend to offer some thoughts on the four specific themes I chose to reflect upon in my closing address to the General Chapter: 1) Association and Interdependence; 2) Evangelization, Catechesis, Pastoral Ministry of Youth; 3) Solidarity with the Poor; 4) A Shared Mission.

In that address I suggested that these themes would determine to a large extent our priorities, goals, objectives, and programs during the next seven years. They are, therefore, extremely relevant to our consideration of the destiny of the Institute and our responsibility for that destiny. This list of four themes is neither exhaustive nor definitive. For the purposes of this letter on our responsibility for the destiny of the Institute, I am adding a fifth theme, one of great importance: the pastoral ministry of vocations and initial formation.

IV. ASSOCIATION AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Institute

In that same address to the capitulants on the last day of the General Chapter, I made the following comment: "Brothers, we are one. We are an International Religious Institute at the service of the Church. While it is perfectly normal and necessary that we function as regions, Districts, sub-Districts, and Delegations, this Chapter has consistently reminded us that we are one, calling us to association and interdependence, calling us to fight against 'provincialism.' Brothers, we have to appreciate the power for good that we possess if we really live and work together and by association as an International Religious Family. This commitment will require us to know one another better and to be better disposed to share our personnel, our finances, and even to make ourselves available personally for service in areas with special needs."

It is a joy for me to be able to say that that paragraph describes not only the ideal towards which we strive, but, to a large extent, the reality that exists. I am happy to have this opportunity to express my personal appreciation of the genuine spirit of brotherhood that I perceive in the Institute today.

With respect to the sharing of personnel, we members of the Central Government of the Institute have contacted many regions or Districts during the past year with requests for

personnel, either in response to immediate needs or in response to long-range needs. A number of regions and Districts have responded immediately with Brothers, particularly for specific needs. Other regions or Districts have made long-term commitments and have already sent their first Brothers. Other regions and Districts are still studying our requests. I am confident that the responses of these sectors will be positive. I am keenly aware that agreeing to share personnel with other sectors represents a significant "sacrifice" for these regions and Districts. To all those who have manifested such outstanding fraternal collaboration, I say, "Thank you sincerely."

The same spirit of generosity has been manifested in a readiness to share financial resources. The Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations have nearly all been very faithful to contributing for operation of the Generalate and for service emanating from the Generalate. Furthermore, many sectors have contributed regularly and significantly to the Sharing Fund; to SECOLI, either by direct contributions or by the funding of mini-projects; or to needy areas directly through a variety of twinning arrangements. The response to our letter on the restructuring of the Sharing Fund, a restructuring demanded by the General Chapter, has been very encouraging.

Another manifestation of a growing sense of international brotherhood is the participation of representatives from neighboring regions as observers in regional assemblies. There is fidelity too to our international programs of continuing formation. Although the present CIL session is not at capacity, the first session after the Chapter had a waiting list and the 1988 International Session of Lasallian Studies has already closed registration.

It is clear, therefore, Brothers, that we are thinking more and more as INSTITUTE and of the potential for service in the Church that we possess. I join you in praising and thanking God for this special grace.

Regions

The eleven Regions of the Institute have generally made substantial progress since their formal creation following the 1976 General Chapter. Most are functioning regularly and creatively. The benefits to the Districts, Sub-Districts, and Delegations which constitute the regions are clearly perceptible.

A Region in our Institute is "conceived, not as a structure of government, but as a means of coordination and collaboration . . . a Region is established as an expression of the willingness of the units that compose it to cooperate with one another and so benefit by the added vitality that comes from acting together." (Art. 127)

This very elastic description is realistic, given the geographical, linguistic, and cultural differences that exist in the Institute. Regions enjoying geographical proximity and at least relative homogeneity of culture and language will inevitably function differently from Regions composed of sectors dispersed geographically and admitting of different cultures and languages. But **all** sectors can function in a **Region**, as Regions are described in our legislation.

Each region is required to have a permanent representative or coordinator (**Regional** is the word employed in the official French edition of the Rule). His responsibilities must include, but need not be limited to, those duties specified in articles 127d, 127e, and 127f. Personally I remain convinced that regions cannot realize their full potential for good without a permanent representative who functions as Chairman of the conference of Visitors and of Regional Assemblies and who, at least in the large regions, functions on a fulltime basis.

The reluctance to move in this direction seems to be motivated by the fear that the permanent representative or regional coordinator will somehow interfere in the internal affairs of Districts, sub-Districts, or Delegations. I see no reason why such interference should occur. Our Rule rigorously protects the

legitimate (if relative) autonomy of each District, Sub-District, and Delegation.

My judgment, therefore, is that while “regionalization” in the Institute has had positive results, much potential for good is not being realized. More could be done, for example, in strengthening our relationships with Conferences of Bishops and Major Superiors, as well as with other Church bodies and national and international educational associations; in improving communication among the Visitors, Auxiliary Visitors, and Presidents; in the coordination and stimulation of the missionary activity of the region (personnel and finances); in the creation of new cooperative works for the poor; in the continuing formation of the Brothers and of lay teachers; in initial formation; in pension and insurance services for Brothers and lay teachers (where necessary and feasible) . . .

District

My general impression is that there has been significant progress during the last five or six years in the fostering of a “sense of District.” Many Districts, after years of searching and experimenting with a variety of structures, are reorganizing along the lines of the new Rule. I personally believe that the present directives and orientations as outlined in the Rule are eminently wise. They are wise because they are the fruit of experience.

There is also progress in the integration of the apostolic activities of the Brothers and communities in an overall District plan. Articles 16 through 16d offer very positive guidelines for this integration, so necessary if we are to be faithful to our strong tradition of working together and by association.

Community

We live our association and interdependence most intensely on the level of community. The subject is vast. I am going to limit myself to one brief comment. It is the following:

"The distinctive character of the Brothers' community is to be a community of faith where the experience of God is shared" (48) (Unfortunately, the words "of faith" are inadvertently missing in the English language editions of the Rule).

That is strong language. We all have to ask ourselves if sharing the experience of God characterizes our communities. Are our communities communities of prayer? Do we really pray and share the Word of God together as well as our petitions and reflections (50 and 71a)?

Our opportunities to experience community life during our visits are very limited. Nevertheless, I want to say that I nearly always "sense" that our communities are progressing as faith communities, as apostolic communities, and as fraternal communities. At the same time my impression is that in too many of our communities, there is little if any **explicit** sharing of faith. We need to share our intentions, our reflections on the Word of God, and our prayer itself. Only then can we really say that the distinctive character of our community is to be "a community of faith where the experience of God is shared."

V. EVANGELIZATION, CATECHETICS, PASTORAL MINISTRY OF YOUTH

"It is your happiness to have been chosen by God to make known Jesus Christ and to announce his coming . . . It is for this end that God has called you to your present vocation. "
(*Meditation 87*)

Rich material for meditation! God has chosen us and called us to be Brothers. For what end? Our Founder says the end is to make known Jesus Christ and to announce his coming. To have been so chosen and called, he says, is our happiness.

Do we in fact perceive ourselves as De La Salle describes the Brother? Do we perceive ourselves as men chosen and called to make Jesus Christ known to young people? Are we happy to

have been chosen and called for this mission? How do we fulfill this mission?

Consecration and Apostolic Ministry of Education

Our Rule, Brothers, insists repeatedly that "commitment to the apostolate is an integral part" (7) of our consecration. The apostolic ministry of education is a "constitutive element of our vocation" (10). It follows, therefore, that the Brothers must be "penetrated with the spirit of zeal" (7).

What precisely is this apostolate to which we have been called?"

The purpose of this Institute is to give a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it. (Art. 3)

Brothers, let us carefully **avoid** dichotomizing our apostolate by speaking of education ("general" education) on the one hand and ministry (catechetics and pastoral services) on the other hand. That position is not consistent with our Rule or with our tradition. Our ministry is human and Christian education. The Rule goes so far as to say that "the Brothers consider their professional work as a Ministry" (13)

"The Brothers participate in the Church's mission by consecrating their lives to God in order to bring the Gospel to the educational world.

"In their educational activity the Brothers seek to integrate the effort for human advancement with the announcement of God's word. They are convinced that any education that respects the human person is a way to open people to God's grace and so dispose them to accept the faith."

The School: Privileged Instrument

In the exercise of our apostolic ministry of education, the school is our privileged instrument and preferred field. That reaffirmation by the capitulants of our traditional position was not made perfunctorily. On the contrary. The reaffirmation reflects a strong conviction that the Catholic school is, or at least can be, an excellent instrument for the human and Christian education of the young.

But we have to be extremely careful when we claim the school as our privileged means. We have to be careful because the school that the Founder intended to be the privileged means is not just "any" school. The Rule declares with no ambiguity that the privileged instrument of our apostolic ministry is the **Christian** school. But even that statement is not complete. The privileged instrument is the Christian school which is **accessible to the poor** (3).

If political, religious, or economic circumstances render the creation of Christian schools that are accessible to the poor difficult if not impossible to achieve, we have to accept reality and do what we can. But we cannot claim that any other kind of school is the **privileged Instrument** mentioned in the Rule.

I make these reflections, Brothers, because I am convinced that too often we have been satisfied and perhaps are too easily satisfied today when we have created excellent academic, professional, technical, or agricultural institutions, whether the level is primary, secondary, or tertiary. Even if our institutions are accessible to lower middle-class and poor youngsters, they cannot be said to be the **privileged instrument** of Lasallian apostolic ministry if they are not **Christian**.

By a Christian school I mean a school where the religious atmosphere, the sense of community, the symbols, the organization, the priorities all indicate clearly that the school is Christian. Prayer in the school, perhaps at the beginning and end of class, is considered normal. There is a program of religious

instruction well adapted to the particular youth of that school—youth at all age levels. This program enjoys priority in the curriculum, in the timetable, in the budget. The Christian school is a school in which there is a carefully organized program of pastoral ministry of the young: a program that provides opportunities for prayer, for the Eucharist and Sacrament of Reconciliation, for retreats, for counseling and spiritual direction, for participation in groups of prayer, community, and service, etc.

Evangelization

I entitled this section **Evangelization, Catechesis, Pastoral Ministry of Youth**. While I have not yet used the word “evangelization” explicitly, I have spoken of its reality throughout this entire section. I am well aware that not everybody defines evangelization, ministry, human and Christian education in the same way. We need more reflection on these concepts. But, for now, I am using the terms interchangeably. When I speak of evangelization, I mean our apostolic ministry of human and Christian education. I believe such a “definition” is faithful to the spirit of Paul VI’s **Evangelii Nuntiandi**.

Brothers, we are evangelizers when we participate wholeheartedly as individuals, as members of the Brothers' community, and as members of the total educative community in the creation of a well-organized school of high quality which is, to the extent possible, explicitly and authentically Christian and accessible to the poor.

Our Principal Function

But the Brother is called to do more. “The Brothers consider that their ‘principal function’ consists in the work of evangelization and catechesis.” (15) We need more precise data on the number of Brothers actively involved in the religious instruction of the young. My impression is that the number has increased in recent years, but it is still surprisingly low, particularly in some regions.

Some Brothers asked to be relieved of religious instruction because they thought their grasp of Vatican II theology was inadequate or because they felt insecure with the questioning of contemporary youth. These explanations clearly point to our need for ongoing theological formation, but they are not satisfactory justifications for the abandonment of religious education to a few specialists.

Our commitment to evangelization requires us, Brothers, to take a strong interest in the various programs of pastoral ministry of youth and even to participate actively as animators. There are many Brothers of all age brackets in the Institute today who find the time to work with youth groups, to help with retreats or school liturgies, etc. Are we doing as much as we can?

Every Brother Contributes

Brothers, in placing such a heavy accent on the Christian dimension of our schools, I have not forgotten those Brothers who work in apostolates other than schools (3, 16a, b); nor those Brothers working in countries that are non-Christian, "de-Christianized," or markedly pluralistic (15c) ; nor those living under conditions which prevent the Brothers from responding directly to the purpose of the Institute (16c); nor have I forgotten the aged and the sick: who can no longer carry on an active apostolate, but who contribute by their prayer, their suffering, their good example (16d).

It is important for all of us—in a special way those of us who, like me, have no direct apostolate with youth at this time of our life—to take heart in this beautiful passage of the Rule: "In fulfilling their ministry, whatever their individual assignment may be, they are contributing, as a community to the unique mission of the Institute within the Church" (16).

Evangelization, catechesis, pastoral ministry of youth: three indispensable characteristics of the mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

VI. SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

Since the moment when the 39th General Chapter called us to a return to the poor, successive Superiors, General Councils, and General Chapters have sought to explain the position of the Institute, resolve ambiguities, respond to objections, and exhort the Institute to move more decisively towards the direct service of the poor.

I think it is correct to say that much progress has been made over the past twenty years. There is greater sensitivity for service of the poor. There is greater openness for transforming present works, for turning over some of our present works to others, for creating new works, for providing Brothers for service of the poor at home and abroad. This openness has been translated into a significant number of concrete realizations. Furthermore, there is far less dissension and polarization over this issue than ten or fifteen years ago.

Nevertheless, many capitulants to the recent chapter were far from satisfied. They helped us structure articles in the Rule which are remarkably free from ambiguity. It is crystal clear that the Institute of tomorrow must be an Institute more oriented towards the the responsibility to help our communities, our Districts, Sub-Districts, or Delegations, our Regions, and our Institute “establish a plan for development of their apostolic works which will make the direct service of the poor more and more their effective priority. Such a plan includes ways to recruit or train replacements and so permit Brothers to be released for such service” (40a).

Furthermore “this concern . . . for the poor serves to motivate their activities when they deal with people in a more favorable social environment, urging these to become more sensitive to unjust situations of which the poor are so often the victims” (14).

We spoke earlier of the necessity of internalizing the directives and orientations of the new Rule, of making them our own, of acting upon those directives and orientations. For many of us,

these unambiguous calls to greater service of the poor are indeed "hard sayings." We find such statements as the following very threatening:

"Following the example of their Founder, the Brothers, as persons and in community, look upon their intellectual and spiritual development in terms of a progressive conversion to the poor." (Art. 40b)

I believe that direct service of the poor will become our effective priority only when we have become more committed men of faith and only when we have become ourselves more poor.

"The Brothers become poor in order to follow Christ who was poor and in order to serve better all persons . . . especially those most in need . . . if they were to fill their hearts with the goods of this earth, they would close themselves off from God and become as strangers to the poor . . . (they) cultivate within themselves the disposition of a poor person . . . God is their only wealth . . . they live simply as persons of ordinary means." (Art. 32, 29)

The Institute of the future—if it is to be an Institute faithful to its self-description—must be an Institute clearly identifiable as an international community of religious men committed to the poor—the poor of our own countries, the poor of other countries. The destiny of the Institute is in our hands. We have the responsibility to establish the plans which will make the direct service of the poor more and more our effective priority. (40a)

VII. A SHARED MISSION

Towards the end of 1988 the General Council and I will address our lay teachers and members of the Lasallian Family by means of a special Circular, expressing what we "envision for the present and future of our educational ministry" (Proposition 6 of the General Chapter). Extensive consultation prior to writing the definitive text has already begun and will continue throughout the first half of 1988. This consultation will include discussion with

the permanent representatives of the regions who will meet in Rome during the month of March.

For this reason, and because I commented at some length on this topic in my first pastoral letter last year, my remarks will be brief and centered on three important ideas:

1. The Brothers and the Educative Community

"The Brothers gladly associate lay persons with them in their educational mission . . . 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 . . . They foster a spirit of collaboration and mutual enrichment among all the members of the educational community . . . They make known the essential elements of the Lasallian tradition." (Articles 17, 17a, b, c)

The space given in the Rule to relationships between the Brothers and the laity associated with us is remarkable. Not only are there two full pages in Chapter 2, there are a number of pertinent passages in other chapters. To situate this emphasis and dramatic change in the Institute in the context of the evolving role of the laity in the Church today, I am including this excerpt from a talk Pope John Paul gave last September to religious educators in the United States:

"In the beginning and for a long time afterwards, women and men religious bore the chief organizational and teaching responsibilities in this country. As pioneers they met that challenge splendidly and they continue to meet it today . . . The importance of the presence of committed religious . . . has not diminished . . . In recent years thousands of lay people have come forward as administrators and teachers in the Church's schools and educational programs. By accepting and developing the legacy of Catholic thought and educational experience which they have inherited, they take their place as full partners in the Church's mission of educating." (*Oss. Romano* 12–9–87)

They take their place as "full partners"—and we Brothers gladly associate them with us in our mission. 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 be instead "Lasallian Schools," schools animated by Lasallian educative communities of faith "within which the apostolic activity of the Brothers' community takes place" (17a).

What this dramatic shift means is that there is a new role for the Brothers, and a new role for those associated with us. I am truly heartened by the rapid and even enthusiastic evolution that is very evident in many parts of the Institute in living this notion of "shared mission."

2. Lasallian Groups

We provide for "those educators who want their professional work to be a form of gospel ministry" and who wish to live that ministry in the spirit of De La Salle, "the means to learn about the Founder and to live according to his spirit" (17). We offer to those members of the educative community who desire it—students, parents, teachers, priests, sisters, former students, friends, etc.—"a more intensified sharing of Lasallian spirituality, encouraging such persons to make a more specific apostolic commitment," and collaborating with them in the organization of faith communities. (17c)

We welcome with enthusiasm those "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." . . . We are convinced that "the spiritual gifts which the Church has received in St. De La Salle go far beyond the confines of the Institute" (146). We see in these movements a special grace of God. On the one hand we help them achieve their proper autonomy; on the other, we create ties with them and evaluate the authenticity of their Lasallian character (146).

The Rule invites us therefore to do all we can to promote the growth of faith communities or groups among our teachers, parents, former students, young people, and others associated with us. What is described in that paragraph is not only an ideal. It is already a reality in many parts of the Institute. Fostering the formation of these groups and helping to animate them (without falling into the pitfall of paternalism or "clericalism") is clearly an essential dimension of our service in the Church now and in the future.

3. Our Identity as Consecrated Religious

My third point is one of great importance. As we explore and reflect upon the changing roles of the Brothers and of those associated with us, and as we search for the language most apt to express the relationships that exist among us, we must—at all costs—guard against any careless confusing of "identities." We must be careful that we not reduce the Lasallian charism to faith, zeal, and community, and thus blur the distinction between the Brothers and those associated with us.

We are consecrated religious men. We express that religious consecration by vows of chastity, poverty, obedience, association for the service of the poor through education, and stability in the Institute. We live our consecrated life in community. Our manner of living our baptismal consecration is **different** and highly significant—both for ourselves and for others: We are "public Christians." By our very life style, if we live it authentically, we "say" to all who observe us, "We believe." That is a powerful message. I am convinced it is communicated more clearly and more frequently than most of us realize. Our Rule captures this thought in article 24: ". . . the first apostolate of the Brothers consists in the witness of their consecrated life."

Let us, then, Brothers, give ourselves generously and energetically to the building of strong Lasallian educative communities and to the formation and animation of Lasallian groups of teachers, parents, former students, and young people.

Let us commit ourselves to this mission with a clear and unambiguous understanding and appreciation of our own identity as consecrated religious.

VIII. VOCATIONS AND INITIAL FORMATION

It is obvious that no discussion of the future of the Institute would be complete without some reflections on the subject of the pastoral ministry of vocations and initial formation.

In my letter of 1 January 1987, I suggested that among the major explanations for the decline in the number of vocations is our own lack of confidence. Too often we communicate, directly or indirectly, a certain confusion concerning our common meaning and common values. Such confusion is readily perceived by the young. Perhaps that is one reason why too few are attracted to our vocation.

It is my strong hope and earnest prayer that" the new expression of our corporate understanding of the Brothers' vocation—our Rule—will serve as a valuable instrument in the ongoing process of rebuilding that confidence which we urgently need.

But, of course, we must also strengthen our programs of the pastoral ministry of vocations and of initial formation. Brothers, it is my judgment that the **overall situation** of the pastoral ministry of vocations and initial formation in the Institute is **not** healthy.

There are many regions and Districts which have a good vocational program, or good aspirancy and postulancy program, or good novitiate, or good post-novitiate program. But, frankly, there are very **FEW** sectors of the Institute with strong programs from beginning to end: that is to say, from the early stages of the pastoral work of vocations through aspirancy, postulancy, novitiate, post-novitiate, accompaniment of young Brothers in community, and perpetual profession.

Brothers, as an essential exercise of that responsibility which is ours for the future of the Institute, we must "together and by

association" take a critical, detached, and rigorously objective look at our formation programs. We need a common understanding of the elements which must constitute initiation into the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Out of that understanding must come, at every level, clear goals, precise objectives in pursuit of those goals, and programs that are efficacious in the realization of those objectives.

In compliance with the General Chapter directive requiring the General Council to prepare a "Directory" we have initiated our work on the section of the Directory that will treat of formation. We have asked Brothers Joseph Hendron, General Councillor for Formation, Malachy Broderick and Bernardo Villar, Co-Secretaries for Formation, to prepare during this coming year a detailed schema, drawing upon the rich documentary material available in the Book of Government of 1976, Circular 418, the new Rule, and, of course, non-FSC sources.

After tentative approval by the General Council, this schema will be sent, no later than 1 December 1988 to Brothers involved in formation throughout the Institute. Between February and May, 1989, the responses of these formators will be analyzed and evaluated and a draft of the Directory on Formation prepared. In September, 1989, this draft will be studied by a special commission organized for this purpose. A third draft will be presented for reaction to the Cilists of the special session on initial formation beginning in October, 1989. The definitive text will be published in early 1990.

But, of course, I am not suggesting that we suspend our present efforts while we wait for this Directory! On the contrary. We must work to construct sound and comprehensive programs and to collaborate more efficaciously with other Districts or our region. Preparing well-qualified formation personnel must enjoy high priority. Every member of the General Council and our two Co-Secretaries for Formation are ready to do all in their power to assist you.

IX. FINAL REMARKS: VISION, FAITH, AND COURAGE

We have been reflecting on **The Destiny of the Institute: Our Responsibility**. My objective in offering reflections on what I have called "an historic moment" and on selected themes has been to stimulate thought and to encourage all of us to accept the responsibility which our Rule says clearly is ours: "The Lord has willed to place the destiny of the Institute into the hands of the Brothers who are committed to work together so that it will prosper and remain faithful to its mission." (142)

Our Founder was led by God to found a community of men who, enlightened by that same God: "associated together" to respond to the needs of poor youth. "Even today, each of the Brothers' communities finds in this historical event a fundamental source of inspiration" (47).

On 24 February 1688, three hundred years ago, De La Salle made the major decision of breaking definitively with Rheims and moving to Paris. He arrived in Paris with two Brothers, after declining the guarantees of security offered him by the Archbishop of Rheims. Those guarantees were conditioned on the Society's remaining within the confines of the Rheims archdiocese.

De La Salle's vision was far wider. His profound faith in Providence gave him all the "security" he needed. He moved to Paris, a bold and courageous decision which gave his young society a completely new orientation and changed the way they understood themselves.

Brothers, let us find in this important historical event a fundamental source of inspiration for ourselves today. We need similar vision, faith, and courage to "let go" of whatever is holding us back and move off in the direction indicated to us by our new Rule. Despite the difficulties we shall inevitably encounter, let us commit ourselves to working together for the future of the

Institute, convinced, as was our Founder, that "the need for this Institute is very great."

Yes, Brothers, the young, the poor, the world, and the Church still need us and our ministry (141).

Fraternally in St. De La Salle,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Brother John Johnston". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'B'.

Brother John Johnston, FSC

Superior General