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I/D 30

THE GENERALATE TEAM

January 1982

“Strengthen your brothers”

(Luke 22:32)

“Mission for the future” is a much discussed theme nowadays in most religious institutes. It was the theme of the SEDOS research seminar in March 1981 with 105 delegates from all parts of the world (cf. *Spiritual News No. 36*), and in November representatives of the various Generalates in Rome met to discuss the same subject. Our last General Chapter also devoted a good deal of attention to it.

As we prepare to share our reflection on this theme with you, the words of Scripture come spontaneously to mind: “*Strengthen your brothers*”. Such is indeed our duty. “*Strengthen your brothers*”, because new perspectives are opening up, revealing the beginning of a new age for Mission. “*Strengthen your brothers*” who “labour in the cause of the Gospel”, for the service of a changing Mission is demanding, requires conversion and entails much uncertainty.

We take these words of Christ seriously, for they sum up the task you have asked us to do, to each one being given “the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7).

At the service of “the Church of God which is at . . .”

(1 Cor. 1:2)

The 1980 General Chapter asked for “a continuing commitment to our missionary involvement in the local Churches” (SL, 57-58). The growth of local Churches, which is so marked today, has been taking two main directions since Vatican II. One is towards UNITY – that of the Church of God gathered together in a single Body, by the same Spirit, with “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph. 4:4-6). The other is towards LOCALIZATION, for it is a question of “the Church of God which is at . . .”, in a particular human group with its own cultural, social, economic and po-

litical context. Missionary service too must take these two directions (cf. *Lum. Gent.*, 23; *Evang. Nunt.*, 61-62).

The issue is an important one: you are playing your part, however modest, in the communion of Churches; you are contributing to the development of the Church, one and multiform, rich with the diversity of peoples and cultures, completing the mystery “of the Word made flesh”; you are participating in the growth of local Churches which together join in the

universal Mission. Missionary activity is gradually moving towards the new era of the Church and her Mission.

The "localization" of Churches

The "localization" of a Church, i.e. an original way of experiencing the mystery of Christ in a human group, extends to all spheres of the life and mission of this Church. Among its many aspects we may pick out the following:

- **Communion.** The Church of Christ becomes local, not only by the establishment of the hierarchy, but when the peoples of a certain cultural and geographical area base their solidarity and their already existing links on the foundation of the word of Christ and the presence of the Spirit (cf. the new relations in Matt. chaps. 5-7 and 18; and in Mark 9:30-10:45).

- **Ministries.** The early Christian communities showed a great variety of charisms and ministries, and the same Spirit who manifested His presence in so many different ways is at work in the Churches today. This conviction helps us to recognize the charisms present in people, to be open to new ministries and to develop coresponsibility at all levels (cf. 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7-11).

- **Inculturation and liberation.** Inculturation means the incarnation of the mystery of the Word in a particular culture, which it both assumes and purifies. It means a new discovery of the Gospel and a further step by the Church towards universality. Liberation, which is inseparable from inculturation and complements it, expresses the strength of the Gospel, which liberates from every oppressive structure, from every violation of fundamental human rights, to "restore all" in the justice and peace of Christ (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 44 and 57-62; *Evang. Nunt.*, 20 and 27-39).

- **Basic communities.** These communities, which are becoming more and more common in all Churches, are a particularly effective form of "localization". They offer a minimum of structure and a maximum of communion and communication. They favour the development of ministries, the exercise of coresponsibility, ongoing dialogue, and the struggle for liberation (cf. *Evang. Nunt.*, 58).

The Spiritan: a "religious-missionary"

You work for the growth of the Churches and their "localization" by collaborating with other apostolic workers and the whole Christian community in a spirit of diversity and complementarity. To be engaged "with others" in a common task, under the responsibility of the local Church, will be an important aspect of future missionary activity.

What are the particular traits of the religious-missionary Spiritan's service to a Church? The search for a service that is specific to us, for reserved areas or commitments, is doomed to failure. Missionary institutes must recognize that the local Church is responsible for all the apostolic work and is co-responsible, with other Churches, for the universal Mission. This responsibility, which can only grow greater as time goes on, will oblige the institutes to "re-situate" themselves. What is specific to each institute will be certain traits in its life and action that are recognized by its members as forming a common bond and spirit.

More concretely, we may single out some aspects of Spiritan presence in the Churches:

- Like the local Churches, the different Spiritan circumscriptions themselves experience a "localization" in accordance with the concrete circumstances of the country, people and Churches. **District Chapters**, which are held more and more in dialogue with the local Church, are essential. Spiritans will probably diversify still more in future, and this will be a good thing.

- Our global aim is to contribute to the development of Churches until they are self-sufficient. Gradually Churches arrive at a stage of maturity where they no longer need a massive missionary presence. We must be able to discern the criteria of maturity, taking into account the Church itself and our own finalities. **Mobility** in commitments will impose itself more and more on the Congregation.

- We strongly encourage mobility of commitments in the circumscriptions, going **from the centre towards frontier situations** - a movement that is becoming one of our major concerns. Districts like Kenya, Cameroon and Senegal have moved towards zones of first evangelization. Provinces like England, France and the United States are working for migrants and abandoned minorities. "A deepening commitment towards the poor" (SL, 59-60) was one of the great priorities of the 1980 General Chapter. This movement from the centre towards frontier situations is becoming a "leitmotiv" of our animation. The Congregation must revive its original ideal.

- We must **help the Churches to become more missionary**, as local Churches and still more as sharing in the universal Mission (SL, 58). A new missionary drive will thus be developed. Stress on basic communities and on our Spiritan Foundations can be of great assistance here.

- The Churches need the witness of religious life (SL, 61) and in particular of **community life**. While respecting the demands of the ministry and the personal needs of confreres, there should be a move from too great dispersion to real community life. At the Enlarged Council next May, a survey will be presented on community life, in our own Congregation and in others.

"The care of all the Churches" (2 Cor. 11:28)

At the service of communion between Churches

The development of local Churches, incarnating themselves in different cultures and situations, requires ever deeper communion between Churches to ensure both their growth and their unity. Missionary institutes, because of their internationality and their presence in so many Churches, can play a leading role in this. They can act as channels for communicating the original and complementary "words" that the Churches have to say to each other; they bear witness to the universality of the one Church of Christ and they too have the "care of all the Churches".

This role of exchange and communion, important for Mission today, will be still more so tomorrow. Churches in all continents will make their own specific contributions to Mission. Among the four main missionary activities picked out by the recent SEDOS meeting, the influence of Asia was stressed for dialogue, of Africa for inculturation, and of Latin America for liberation; proclamation is common to all. Missionary congregations have their part to play in all four.

The service of exchange and communion will thus take on more and more importance for the missionary, and his activity will have to develop in this direction. The presence of representatives of other Churches is desirable, even if the local Church is self-sufficient, as has often been pointed out. It is easy to guess the demands of this service: the missionary should be rich with the experience of his Church of origin and also with that of other Churches; and he should be open to the main currents of thought in the Church today. Refresher courses, ongoing formation and theological reading are necessary, and the "rotation" of personnel can help in the updating process.

The implications and possibilities of this service must be explored, but already exchange and communion between members of the Congregation and between Provinces, Districts and Foundations can be recommended. In our meetings, such as those of Major Superiors and Chapters, we should stress the inter-ecclesial dimension. We should pay special attention too to the North-South dialogue. We should make use of home leave, the mass media and meetings to tell of the "wonderful deeds" that God is working in the Churches.

At the service of coresponsible Churches

No Church should turn in on itself. Each local Church is also coresponsible, along with the others, for the universal mission. Religious Congregations

place themselves at the service of this coresponsibility. While sharing in a Church's local evangelization, the missionary should remain open to the universal Mission. Mobility and taking root locally are two expressions of one and the same fidelity to both the Congregation and the local Church.

The missionary solidarity of Churches expresses itself in their solidarity on the level of personnel. Some Churches are rich in personnel, others poor. Churches grow towards maturity at different speeds; fields of apostolate evolve; new missionary situations present themselves. Congregations can play an important role in this solidarity at the level of personnel, taking care to go rather towards poor and abandoned Churches and to respond to urgent missionary situations wherever they may be. Personnel will always be needed for frontier situations. To engage more easily in this service of coresponsibility, the Congregation must reassess its commitments and clarify its priorities. It would be good too if Congregations went about this reassessment in dialogue with each other and with local Churches.

One of the advantages of coresponsibility is that it will help both the younger and older Churches to become more missionary. Special attention should be paid here to the Southern Hemisphere, as Pope John Paul II did on Mission Sunday 1981: "*A phenomenon that gladdens us and for which we must thank the Lord is the birth of a missionary movement in the young Churches which, from being evangelized, are becoming evangelizers . . . The young Churches which, in their turn, have become missionary, are giving proof of maturity in the faith. They have realized that a local Church that is not missionary is not fully Catholic*" (18 Oct. 1981).

It is an important development: the young Churches throughout the world, together with the older ones, will collegially share the task of evangelization, both locally and in the universal Mission. Missionaries and their points of origin are multiplying and diversifying.

It is in this context that we must see our young Provinces and Foundations in the Southern Hemisphere and missionary animation in the Northern. Among the priorities drawn up by the 1980 Chapter were "promoting new Spiritan Foundations" and "promoting a missionary spirit in the local Churches" (SL, 58). We ask all confreres, then, to move in the direction that Mission is taking today: the young Provinces and Foundations are the business of each Spiritan and not merely of the Congregation in general (cf. SL, 104-138).

Another point to be noted is the growing diversification of the Congregation's membership. Africans form the largest group of young Spiritans at the moment. For us too there are new mission-sending circumscriptions. And it is fitting that, at least until they find their full identity, the young Provinces and Foundations should have their own mission areas. We are working on providing them with these.

"Go out to the whole world" (Mk 16:15)

These well-known words of Christ take on new urgency today, and some confreres may be a bit uneasy at the thought of the Congregation opening up to all continents. The 1980 Chapter recommended "greater openness to the call to universal Mission" (SL, 56), and, in line with this, the General Council has decided to promote "greater openness to the world - to the whole world".

Mission today is multidirectional: "from everywhere to everywhere". The distinction between 'sending' Churches and 'receiving' Churches is dying out, and the missionary movement developing in the Southern Hemisphere is opening up new paths for the future. The calls and challenges of today's world (cf. I/D No. 25) invite religious Congregations to "move out and encounter humanity in its struggles and diversity" (SEDOS Seminar).

A danger for missionary institutes is that they may remain fixed in an outdated notion of mission, grow old in their present commitments, refuse to face up to today's challenges, and be overtaken by events.

The General Council has adopted a policy of promoting movement from the centre towards frontier situations. It may express itself only in token foundations, but, taken together, they are a significant move.

The poor must always be a priority for us. Poverty is on the increase throughout the world, and the SEDOS Seminar pointed out "the widespread, even global character of oppression". Our care for the poor should go first of all towards those who are suffering from injustice and whose fundamental human rights have been trampled upon. We must become actively involved in work for Justice and Peace.

Each circumscription, if it has not already done so, should undertake this movement towards frontier situations: first evangelization, abandoned or op-

pressed minorities, marginalized urban groups, refugees (especially in Africa), migrants, dialogue with Islam, non-evangelized milieus, involvement in contemporary problems such as unemployment, racism and violence.

At the level of the Congregation as a whole, there will have to be greater mobility. Some of the 1980 Chapter decisions have not been too welcome to all the confreres. It is true that our numbers are going down, but we must also look to the future. The evolution of Mission and various calls on us require diversification and greater efforts to ensure the Congregation's vitality and its ability to adapt to the future. We are considering the needs of Asia, and of India in particular. It is clear that Asia is the greatest missionary challenge today, and new approaches are needed. We are also looking at requests from Latin American countries. The movement is towards greater 'universality' in the Congregation.

Our Brothers have an important part to play in the renewal of our missionary activity. As consecrated laymen, they can, in their professional work, "encounter humanity in its struggles and diversity". They can more easily enter non-evangelized milieus and be witnesses to the Gospel where priests may not be allowed to work. For the renewal of our Brothers we shall have to go further than the 1980 Chapter did. The unanimous approval, without discussion, of SL 97-100 was felt by several, both Fathers and Brothers, as lack of interest rather than the opposite.

It is through contact with the unevangelized that the importance of Mission is brought home to us. On the occasion of his meeting with the centurion, Jesus saw his good will and made it clear that Mission would have no bounds: "Many will come from east and west to take their places at the feast" (Mt 8:10-11).

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"In each diocese the bishop should strive to understand what the Spirit wants to manifest through his flock and especially through the religious present in the diocese. That is why it is necessary for him to cultivate sincere and familiar relations with superiors, in order the better to fulfil his ministry of Shepherd towards men and women religious. In fact, it is his specific office to defend consecrated life, to foster and animate the fidelity and authenticity of religious and to help them become part of the communion and of the evangelizing action of his Church, according to their distinctive nature . . .

Religious, on the other hand, should consider the bishop not only as Shepherd of the entire diocesan community, but also as the one who guarantees fidelity to their vocation as they carry out their service for the good of the local Church. Indeed they should comply promptly and faithfully with the requests or desires of the bishops when they are asked to undertake a greater share in the ministry of salvation, due consideration being given to the character of the particular institute and to its constitutions" (*Mutuae Relationes*, 1978, no. 52).