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The Generalate Team

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“Take Courage”

The Enlarged General Council that was held at Carcavelos in May this year was a good reflection of the “Spiritan reality” as described by the 1980 General Chapter in the section on ‘Mission Today’: “*Our Congregation today shows signs of suffering and signs of hope*” (SL, 26-46). At the Enlarged Councils of 1976 and 1978 it was the signs of hope that prevailed; at the 1982 Council it was rather the signs of suffering.

However, this Council seems just as important to us as the preceding ones, not so much because of new decisions taken as because of the questions raised. These questions must be faced and answered if our renewal is to be realistic and our hope in the future well founded.

“Signs of suffering”

“*Present changes bring about difficulties and tensions*” (SL, 27 ff.), and these did in fact emerge at the Carcavelos Enlarged Council:

- In the field of priorities, tension was felt between the priorities of circumscriptions and those of the Congregation as a whole. Did we not often hear the questions: “*Why take on new commitments when our present ones are already suffering from lack of personnel? And what are the criteria on which these new commitments are based?*”
- Internationality is still a problem in formation and in the setting up of international teams. What do we mean by internationality and why should we stress it? Are we paying enough attention to the need for solid grounding in one’s own culture and for the presence of a substantial group of young students in the home Province?
- On the plan for the new Constitutions, discussion centred on the relationship between the apostolate and religious consecration. Different ways of looking at this relationship mean different approaches to the order in which they should be treated in the Constitu-

tions: should apostolate come first, or consecration? The tension at the heart of the description of the Spiritan as a ‘religious-missionary’ was thus clearly felt.

- As at the 1978 Enlarged Council and the 1980 General Chapter, community renewal was seen as a difficult question: cultural differences, long-standing habits and ‘de facto’ situations seem to stand in the way of renewal.
- The report on New Forms of Collaboration presented interesting experiments, but did not enable the meeting to give directives for further progress in this field. Difficulties in the way of true membership in the Congregation were raised because of its clerical status, material problems and mentalities that were not open to change.
- On the question of the general government of the Congregation, and the way it will be defined in the Constitutions, fears of too much centralization were expressed. Stress was laid rather on decentralization and on the responsibility of the circumscriptions and the regional conferences of Major Superiors.

“Signs of hope”

Though there were signs of suffering, there were also signs of hope that were clearly evident at the Enlarged Council: in the exceptional hospitality of our Portuguese confreres, the fraternal spirit of the participants, the quality of the liturgy, the informal meetings in which many questions were settled and many diverging viewpoints brought closer together. . .

The short reports on Angola, Paraguay, Pakistan, Nigeria-East and the various Foundations were stimulating, and they brought out the real vitality of the Congregation.

No important decisions were taken by the meeting, but we are sure that the following reflections and suggestions based on it will be also, in their own way, seeds of hope

“Bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6 : 2)

“It is wonderful to belong to a Congregation; you can count on others, you are not alone,” said one of the young confreres in Pakistan when, together, we were working out on the spot the future of Spiritan presence in that country.

Urgent situations

The Enlarged Council was first of all an experience: that of belonging to a large group of brothers who, together, are engaged in a common adventure. The most needy, in personnel or in finances, can appeal for help to the others. Thus a few urgent situations revealed themselves at Carcavelos:

- In the Prefecture Apostolic of **Tambacounda**, Senegal, there are tribes that are now showing openness to the Gospel, but workers are needed. “It is an opportunity not to be missed”, said the Principal Superior. A team of three would be necessary.
- In **Guinea-Bissau**, where there is a particularly difficult situation of first evangelization, it would be necessary to have at least two teams. Two or three confreres would be welcome immediately.
- In **Zaire**, the District of **Kongolo**, which has been so severely tried, is in need of personnel. Lack of personnel has not stopped the District from drawing up the ‘Kabongo project’ for a region that has been neglected till now but that should see considerable development.
- In **Mauritius**, our confreres have mentioned three priorities: the parish of Fr. Laval, the Indian Ocean Foundation, and the Rose Hill catechetical and youth centre. For the last named work, run by the Principal Superior himself, one or two confreres would be needed, because of its importance to the local Church in its youth programs and also because of its importance to the Foundation.
- Begun in 1971 by the Province of U.S.A. West, the mission of **Mexico** has eight confreres in six parishes, each of which has several Indian communities. The Mexican Indian has been called “the poorest of the poor”. Our confreres live in a precarious situation here and their ministry is difficult. Their main priority — the training of local leaders, catechists and priests — faces problems inherent in the situation of the Indians, and they have appealed for help. The confreres, who now come from several Provinces, are asking to be recognized as an International Group.
- There are more than 25 million **refugees** in the world, 6.3 million of whom are in Africa. “The fact that millions of men, women and children live precariously in overcrowded refugee camps is a human tragedy of enormous proportions. It is also a human-rights tragedy” (Joan Baez). As the Congregation has made Justice and Peace one of its priorities, it must try to do something for refugees.

The three 1976 priorities

Six years ago, the 1976 Enlarged General Council recognized three priorities: Angola, Paraguay and Pakistan; and we must still recognize these as priorities of the Congregation as a whole. We will give more complete information on them later on, but already we can refer you back to I/D No. 7 (*‘Enlarged Council — Solidarity’*), I/D No. 11 (*‘New Paths for the Congregation?’*) and I/D No. 18 (*‘Spiritan Life and Spiritan Mission — the 1978 EGC’*). You will find in them the context and the reasoning behind these priorities.

ANGOLA: Here we have a Church and a Spiritan group that are suffering from political events and from a serious diminution of personnel. “It would be necessary to have lived through a similar experience in order to grasp the intensity of the appeal coming from it,” remarked a General Assistant. A Congregation that specializes in ‘difficult situations’ should help its members in their time of trial.

PARAGUAY: The alternative in 1976 was either to give up this mission or to commit ourselves seriously to it, and the Enlarged Council that year decided on commitment, out of solidarity with the poor, fidelity to the local Church, the importance of Latin America, and the need to diversify and renew the Congregation. Here too we should have three or four teams, and for this we must add three or four confreres to the present international team.

PAKISTAN: As a result of repeated appeals from the Bishops of Pakistan and the S.C. for Evangelization, the 1976 EGC decided to commit itself here. The ‘tribals’ meet all the demands of our criteria: first evangelization, the ‘poor and abandoned’, the marginalized and oppressed. In addition there is dialogue with Islam and other religions, the importance of Asia, “where the future of Mission is being decided”, and new developments in the apostolate which require diversity of commitment on the part of the Congregation (cf. I/D No. 25, *‘The Things to Come’*, and I/D No. 30, *‘Strengthen your Brothers’*). The project drawn up in dialogue between the Bishops, our confreres and the Generalate Team should be realized by 1985-86: six more confreres are required, to make up four teams of three.

Financial solidarity

Like the collection that St. Paul organized in Asia Minor, the sign that we belong to a single community is the willingness to share material goods. This willingness exists in the Congregation, and we hope that it will continue to grow: many confreres experience real need, especially those who live and work among the poor. The remarkable growth of our Province of Nigeria-East, the development of the new Foundations and the needs of our Province of Poland require special attention.

All these appeals should be studied at the meetings of Major Superiors, especially the question of aid to the young Provinces and Foundations.

Towards the future

One could object: "Why listen to so many new appeals? We are already short of personnel in our own circumscriptions. We have so many important and interesting works of our own." These remarks are obviously valid. And yet, if we are to enter fully into the new missionary era, we cannot afford not to listen to these appeals.

Global orientation

The 1980 General Chapter set its face firmly towards the future, and, after the Chapter, the Generalate Team took the same direction, both from conviction and from fidelity to the Chapter's mandate. Our global orientation could be summed up as follows:

"Taking into account: the will of the Chapter, which resolutely faced the future with hope and realism, and the new challenges of the world, the Church, the Congregation and Mission, which are all caught up in a period of transition to a 'new era', the Generalate Team: recognizes as the basis of its animation the tasks and priorities given by the 1980 Chapter and expressed above all in the 'Orientations and Priorities' of 'Mission Today', SL, 55-61; carries out its animation in the present concrete circumstances, while coordinating tasks and priorities in such a way as to ensure a definite movement towards the future; gives particular attention, in this context, to Justice and Peace, the new Foundations, formation and community renewal; and engages in Planning and in the assessment of our commitments as indispensable conditions for the realization of this Common Project."

We believe that the new appeals contribute to this global movement — "a movement towards the periphery, towards frontier situations".

The objectives

In this general framework of the Chapter's 'Orientations and Priorities', some very precise motivations guide us in our choices. With the passage of time, all institutes grow old in their commitments and fall away from their ideal. There is constant need for the Congregation to rejuvenate itself, especially in these times of falling numbers. Our first criteria are our tra-

ditional ones: "the poor and abandoned", "difficult situations", "works for which it is difficult to find personnel".

The "movement towards the periphery" results from the growth of the Churches in which we work. One by one they are reaching maturity and, unless we want "to end with the end of the missions", we must turn ourselves towards the more abandoned, in our own circumscription or in other Churches. And for this, an assessment of our present commitments is imperative.

A missionary Congregation has to respond to the missionary challenges of the day if it is to maintain its credibility. The commitments of the past must be confronted with the calls of the present: from the poor who suffer injustice and have their human rights spurned, from neglected minorities, from the victims of racism, from the refugees and migrants. . .

The Congregation must be attentive to the new directions of Mission: mission towards all the continents, mission from everywhere to everywhere, mission from the Third World, mission as exchange and sharing between Churches, the participation of the laity, new Provinces and Foundations, new forms of membership (cf. I/D No. 25, 'The Things to Come').

Let us go elsewhere. . ." (Mk 1 : 38, Lk 4 : 42-44)

When "the crowds wanted to prevent Jesus from leaving them" (Lk 4 : 42), he said: "Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring towns, so that I may preach there too, for that is why I have come" (Mk 1 : 38). The crowds that want to keep us are many, and there are such good reasons for staying. They bar the way to our renewal and our acceptance of new challenges, in the name of fidelity to the local Church, a work to be maintained, lack of personnel, inculturation, difficulties in changing etc. And little by little we realize that an institute can die in all good faith, and become incapable of facing up to the needs of the present. "Elsewhere," said our Superior General at the Enlarged General Council, "there may be more urgent situations than those in the circumscription or the work in which we are involved, and these should be heeded." Pakistan, which is practically the only new commitment "elsewhere" in the last few years, is little compared to what other institutes are doing. We strongly encourage those circumscriptions that feel themselves drawn to 'frontier situations'.

"New wineskins for new wine"

If we cannot rise above the old perspectives of "a Province and its Districts", distribution of personnel according to language and culture, the horizon of our own circumscription, the desire to remain faithful to the local community in a mission that is drawing to a close, then there is no hope for "the poorest of the poor" in Mexico and Pakistan, the abandoned people in the Kabongo region and Guinea Bissau, the tribes in

Tambacounda that are ready to welcome the Gospel, our confreres who are so severely tried in Angola, and the three priorities mentioned above in Mauritius.

Internationality, coresponsibility, planning, new forms of collaboration and community renewal must all be considered as requirements of the present time.

Crossing frontiers: internationality

As it seems to be still not very well understood, internationality will be discussed in a coming number of I/D. The confreres who presented their appeals at the EGC certainly believe in it; for them the important thing is that we should respond to urgent missionary situations. Traditional structures and the real values to be found in groups of a single culture are of secondary importance.

Present-day developments would seem to indicate that it will be normal in future to live and work in some sort of inter-cultural situation. National Spiritan blocs are dissolving and will continue to dissolve; the young Churches are continuing to grow and to diversify their apostolic workers; intercultural Spiritan groups are on the increase; the young Provinces and Foundations, which are already cutting across many Districts, will take their place, and rightly so, and this cannot be done without new forms of internationality. No doubt, the majority of confreres will hardly be affected by internationality, but for those in formation it is a way towards the future. Valuable suggestions were made at the EGC for promoting internationality while at the same time safeguarding the values of cultural identity.

“At the service of each other” (1 Pet. 4 : 10): coresponsibility

To be able to respond to appeals and to face the future with confidence, coresponsibility must be strengthened at all levels: community, circumscription, conferences of Major Superiors, and between the Generalate Team and the Major Superiors.

Sharing, solidarity, mutual service and coresponsibility should replace the problem of centralization or decentralization (a real problem ten years ago) and that of the distribution of power. A more evangelical approach to authority is being seen in religious institutes, with all members bearing their share of responsibility. The EGC encouraged confreres in this direction.

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12 : 7): Planning

One of our confreres who is a specialist in Planning said: *“What we want to do, with modern techniques, is basically what St. Paul spoke about when he described the role of the different members in the body.”* ‘Research and Planning’ means making better use of our resources in money and personnel, and

facing up to the many challenges mentioned in these pages. Planning must be done at all levels, and the Generalate Team will provide information and coordination, and plan for the Congregation as a whole.

New forms of collaboration

The laity will certainly play an increasingly important missionary role in future, and we must learn to work with them and give them their rightful place. Several of them have expressed a desire to be more closely associated with the life and work of the Congregation.

The report presented to the EGC mentioned various experiments taking place, though these are mostly still at the stage of a loose form of association. True membership comes up against the clerical status of the Congregation, financial problems, and mentalities that are not open enough to change. However, the experiments should be continued and we should aim at ever greater cooperation with the laity, in the hope of finding the best road to new forms of membership.

Community renewal

Community renewal is the stumbling block in our Spiritan meetings, and yet it is the cornerstone for all renewal, as many Congregations have experienced.

The difficulties of certain ‘de facto’ situations should not prevent us from accepting the broad lines of community renewal and facing up to our duty to put into practice this priority of the General Chapter. The EGC suggested that it should be approached at various levels and asked the conferences of Major Superiors to give it their serious consideration.

The new Constitutions: the program for our apostolic life

Your replies to the questionnaire showed the importance you attach to the preparation of the Constitutions. We thank you for this response, which enabled the EGC to give some orientations for the first draft of the Constitutions, which will be sent to you eventually for your comments (cf. *Decisions of the EGC*). You could already give some attention to the difficulty that came up at the EGC concerning the relationship between apostolate and consecration. Meditation on Christ, on Libermann and on documents like *Evangelii Nuntiandi* could help resolve this difficulty. Of great importance too is the experience of so many confreres who have successfully integrated their apostolate and religious life.

Conclusion: Hope in the midst of poverty

It is in the writings of Libermann that we have found the best interpretation of this EGC, which was marked by the “signs of suffering”:

“We are just a bunch of poor folk brought together by the will of the Master, who alone is our

hope. If we had powerful means at our disposal, we would achieve nothing worthwhile; but, as we have nothing and desire nothing, we can form great projects, for our hopes are founded not on ourselves but on Him who is all-powerful” (N.D. IV, p. 303).

THE GENERALATE TEAM