



**THE BROTHER OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IN THE WORLD TODAY.** by Delegates to the Thirty-Ninth General Chapter; Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1967; reprinted in Manila.

The image of La Salle schools on Taft Avenue, in Green Hills, and in Bacolod is familiar to many Filipinos who have in one way or another come into contact with the work of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in this country. And yet these men remain an enigma to a large number of even their closest contacts. The Brother is the religious who wears the polo barong; he is the celibate who does not say Mass; he is the layman who is consecrated by vows and lives in community.

To answer puzzled minds, not only here but the world over, the General Chapter of the Brothers, meeting as a representative body in Rome, formulated a Declaration entitled "Brothers of the Christian Schools in the World Today." It was formally promulgated in Rome on December 6, 1967 and has since been re-published by the Brothers locally in a 55-page booklet and made available for general sale in several city bookstores and in Brothers' schools.

Describing the Declaration, Brother Leo Kirby, regional superior for the United States, the Philippines, and parts of Africa, says:

This Declaration is the answer to the question all of us have been asking, and which many have asked of us: "Brothers of the Christian Schools, what are you?" The Brothers, young and old, their parents, alumni, students and friends even the whole world will find in this Declaration the specifics of what it is to be a Brother.

The Declaration is well thought out and carefully worded, containing material that happily finds relevance, not only in the Brothers' lives, but also in the lives of all religious, and often of all Christians.

An introductory section lays the ground-work, "faithful to the spirit of Vatican II which invites religious families to undertake the work of renewal and adaptation (= 1)," as the Declaration itself says. It directly faces the challenge of the twofold task: renewal, "which demands a return to the sources found in the Gospel and in the origins of the Institute (= 2)"; and adaptation, by which the Brother is "sensitive to the problems which arise in each successive period of human history (= 8)" and studies the signs of the times "so that he will be much more effective in bringing the gift of salvation to the world of today. (= 10)." The task is the paradoxical one of

taking a step backward and a step forward simultaneously, a going into both past and future for the sake of the present. But the paradox is only seeming. The Superior General, Brother Charles Henry, states:

If we were to look back only to our foundations, we would be engaging in a sort of spiritual-apostolic archeology. If we were but to project ourselves only into a possible future, we would be engaging in dreams. Were we to observe only the present, we would be in a position only to change and to change with each changing present.

The following section contains the essence of the Declaration, a succinct expression of the six key constitutive elements of the Brother's specific vocation. The remainder of the Declaration further clarifies and expands ideas latent in these six.

The first key principle touches upon the mystery of the Brother's definitive call from God to a particular manner of living his baptismal consecration to the fullest. It speaks also of the imperceptible but very active role of the Holy Spirit, and the nobility of a life under the Spirit's guidance.

The importance and centrality of the second constitutive element makes it worth quoting there:

The Brother gives full and explicit expression to his baptismal consecration by making a public profession of vows which are received by the Church, in an exclusively lay Institute. (# 13).

In the further elaboration, the Declaration makes clear the nature of the Brother as fully a religious, for which reason he takes the vows (poverty, celibacy, obedience, fidelity, and service to the poor) and lives in community; and just as fully a layman, for which reason his apostolate, his spirituality, his activities, and even his garb (in the Philippines, the polo barong) are that of a layman. The Brother is not a *mestizo*, half religious and half layman, but is fully both: a layman (not a cleric) by function in the worshipping community, and a religious (not a secular) by state of life. As the Declaration puts it, "the religious state of life is not an intermediate one between the clerical and lay states. Rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both. (# 16)."

Thirdly, the Brother is one who lives in a community of similarly consecrated laymen in order to pool resources with them for the greatest good: "When the Brothers associate themselves together and live in community, they stimulate and help one another to procure the glory of God through the salvation of men. (# 22)."

The fourth principle affirms that the Brother is one who furthers the kingdom of God by "an educational mission in community which the Institute carries out with special reference to the poor (# 13)." His life is essentially apostolic, and the form of apostolate he takes is one of education, a task which, in our day more than ever, is second to none. A re-emphasis of

the Chapter on service of the poor is not only timely in the light of today's atmosphere of world solidarity, it is also relevant to the local situation, where economic and social stratification is often alarmingly patent. In an excellent section on defining who the poor are, the Declaration cautions against two extremes: a too rigid interpretation defining the poor from a purely economic point of view which may belittle institutions which serve the poor indirectly but very considerably, and a too loose interpretation defining poor too broadly, which may lead to indifferent complacency with the *status quo*. It thus implicitly acknowledges the services of such local institutions as De La Salle schools in Manila, Green Hills, and Bacolod, where the imparting of social justice and sensitivity to the poor is a main concern, where financial support to aid poorer provincial schools is earned, and where the existence of many poor students cannot be overlooked, those with poverty of intelligence, poverty of affection, poverty of faith, and poverty of economics, these last being provided for by numerous scholarships. The Declaration also encourages the work of the Brothers in schools in Batangas, Mindanao, and Negros and their efforts in supervising and assisting in thirteen other schools in provincial areas through out the country. This aspect of the Brothers' work, in the Philippines, though perhaps less known, has to be properly considered if one is to have an accurate picture of these men and their apostolate.

The last two constitutive elements are a further elaboration of the Brother's life. The fifth points out the intrinsic value of providing students with a full, human, balanced education. The principle echoes a postulate formulated for the Brothers by St. John Baptist de la Salle himself, "Do not distinguish between the work of your apostolate from that of your sanctification." Finally, the role of the school as the preferred but not the only means of the apostolate is defined. In the Philippines, though the school is the primary means, it is not the only one; Brothers carry out an extensive catechetical program in Muntinglupa and head such professional organizations as the Philippine Association for Technological Education.

These, then, are the main ideas of the Declaration. In the expansion of these ideas, gems of thought very often turn up which happily can be treasured by the cleric or the secular, as well as by the Brother, such gems as "The achievement of a personal vocation through fidelity to the continual guidance of the Holy Spirit is the life-long task of every individual. (# 15)." Others abound, especially those on the true notion of catechesis and its importance, the integration of deep personalism and a community of charity, and the necessity of renewing basic foundations for meaningful flexibility.

The little pamphlet cannot be too highly recommended, not only for Brothers and religious, but for other laymen and for clerics as well. A reading of it will reward priests, teachers, parents, and thinking Christians, not only with relevant ideas worth further thought, but also with a better understanding of the man they address as "Brother."