

WITNESSING TO THE WORD 3

THE BROTHERS' MINISTRY

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Foreword

The theme of this paper is one of the goals and priorities set up by the 1977 general chapter. It doesn't need a long introduction. The emphasis is placed on the practical side of the brothers' vocation and ministry. It will be seen that at its deepest level the brother question is one which concerns their place in our religious society as a part of the salvific community of Christ.

1. The Evangelical Counsel

As a religious community we have no other task than that of the Church itself: "Reform your lives and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This is our evangelical counsel. We have no other gospel, no other perfection, no other goal. The constant conversion to faith works itself out for us in the evangelical counsels, in living up to the gospel in a definite community, propped up by a regular way of life.

In this respect our religious rule is an attempt to stress one angle of the gospel in the living out of our lives. No priest or brother through his own ministry, and no religious congregation, can live out every aspect of the gospel. "The whole gospel is given to every Christian. It is only within a common calling that religious communities find their place. Yet each of them is identified by its own particular charismatic gift which challenges it to carry out its own radical embodiment of the gospel" (1).

2. Each Person has his Gifts

Every Christian has his particular charism such as ministering to others, teaching, zealous leadership. These give their own coloring to the basic principle of love. In bestowing such gifts God has expressed his trust in us; what ever charism is ours is an indication of God's will. What did God want then when he gave me the call to be a priest or brother in our society?

We don't have to answer this question in a vacuum - we are surrounded by people, we live in certain circumstances. Man, moreover, is shaped by what he does, and it is only when he begins to work as a priest or brother that he can clarify, refine and improve his abilities for ministry and love. Life itself, the ordinary daily life we lead together, is the best examination of conscience.

Since there are different gifts, it is more than likely there will be a clash of ideas - and this is not just an unavoidable occupational hazard. Various impulses issue from God and are felt within the Church and the world. If every thing proceeded from only one point we would have totalitarianism. There is no one style in the Church, and no one point of view has ever proved entirely right.

Every charism is linked with suffering. When it is a question of the cross, the treasure from which God draws is inexhaustible. It is only when we all make a mutual gift of ourselves that we become happy with our own lot; no need then to be preoccupied with oneself or be seeking to please just this group or that. "There are different gifts but the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:4).

3. The Brother Vocation as it developed

a) in the Church

A look at the history of the brother in religious orders where priests and brothers live together can broaden our minds and make us more conciliatory. It even has its funny side when we realize the shortcomings of earthbound men in their dealings with God.

For centuries, monks (ordained and unordained) had used lay workers for the heavy outdoor work as well as for some of the household tasks. In a gradual development these "famuli" (servants) become linked more closely to the monastic community. In the transition period between the 7th and 11th centuries, they form a "cloistral border group" between cloister and outside world. Their approach to the monastery in the stricter sense proceeds by numerous steps. Quite gradually a group from this household community takes shape which little by little assumes the elements of monastic life: a schedule, a lay breviary, a religious habit, and finally profession. The cloister's lay assistants had gradually transformed themselves into lay religious. Choir service and the active and passive vote remained denied them.

It was thus in the history of Western religious orders that a new group of religious alongside the priest-monks and lay-monks entered the scene in the 11th century. The lay brotherhood experienced its first flowering in the 12th century among the Cistercians. Their *Exordium parvum* (1151?) says their origin derives from a decision made long before: "At that time it was decided - with permission of the local bishop - to accept bearded lay brothers who, during their lifetime and when they came to die, were treated in the very same way as ourselves though they weren't monks" (2). The brothers' life was devoted to prayer and work. Since they could neither read nor write, they had a lay office, composed of a number of Our Fathers and Glory be to the Fathers,

They worked either in the cloister or on farms which might be as much as a day's journey away. It was also their concern to transact business, purchases and sales in the name of the monastery. A priest was charged with their religious care. On Sundays he gave them a conference after which the chapter of faults took place.

The number of Cistercian brothers in the 12th century rose to great heights; often it was two or three times that of the monks. There were monasteries with from 200 to 300 brothers. Rievaulx in England even seems to have reached the figure of 500 brothers in the year 1165 at a time when 140 monks were living there. The order owes its economic boom in the 12th century to the industry of the lay brothers. They had a strong influence, too, by word and example on the people living near the monasteries.

As the lay brotherhood flourished, it showed forms in marked contrast to the prevailing feudal milieu with its rather rigid division into social classes - serfs, freemen, nobles.

The monks did not want to live off the serfs' labor. To those who joined them as lay brothers they granted freedom and a share in their privileges. There was in fact a fusion of classes since many nobles were to be found in the brothers' ranks together with simple peasants, and the whole monastic community, monks and lay brothers, worked for the common cause.

Some bitter experiences had also to be endured, one of them by the order of Grandmont in France. Their founder, St. Stephen of Muret (+1124), had accorded his lay brothers a rather high status with a nearly complete control of the monastery's property. Finally, the brothers demanded equality with the monks including access to the priesthood. In 1185 they plotted an open revolt, expelled the prior with about 200 monks and installed an intruder. Successive popes failed in their efforts to restore peace. In 1219, another revolt took place. Finally the constitutions were changed, but by this time Grandmont had long passed its peak.

The Cistercians, too, had their difficulties. The division of labor increasingly hardened into social classes. The general chapter of 1188 even forbade the acceptance of the educated classes as "conversi" (lay brothers) - for them it had to be monks or nothing.

Although feudalism had not given birth to the lay brother hood, it now demanded its tribute. Class divisions ultimately belonged to the social order, and their acceptance even partly explains the brothers' success. Yet history had moved on. The mendicant orders were offering a new form of religious ideal, and the fast-growing cities granted those who came to them freedom from serfdom. In the 13th century, the lay brothers in many places became few or died out completely. Quite a few monasteries had to rely again on nonreligious. At Rievaulx, for example, the number of brothers had dropped from 500 to 3.

At this time the two mendicant orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic were founded almost simultaneously. The two saints agreed not only in the goal to be attained, the Church's well-being, but also in the means to achieve it, poverty and the active life. Their points of departure, however, were different. Dominic (+1221), who was a priest, strove from the start for a clerical order. Francis (+1226), on the other hand, hardly even thought of his order in clerical and lay terms, but rather in the sense of a brotherhood as demanded by the gospel. He was not a priest himself.

Although strong currents of clericalism in mentality and legislation were increasingly associating the religious life with the clerical state, St. Francis' great vision of equality proved enduring.

All during the late Middle Ages there were lay brothers who were local guardians, and occasionally - despite the law - provincials. When the Council of Trent demanded major orders for all offices in collegial churches of religious, all the friars minor protested in the name of tradition, the rule, and the order's humility. It was only gradually that lay brothers were declared ineligible for all offices: the Recollects in 1625, the Conventuals in 1628, the Capuchins in 1740, and the Franciscans not until 1897.

The experience of the Franciscan family is of considerable importance because it became an example for later communities of clerks regular. In spite of a common rule, a sharp distinction developed between priests and lay brothers according to their functions: apostolic and supportive-domestic. This development must be seen against the background of the general clericalization of the Church, which had not developed a theology of the lay person's place and role.

During the early Middle Ages, the clergy had by degrees assumed the form of a separate social group which they did not possess in the early Church. Various factors contributed to this: Christian

Roman rulers granted the clergy privileges; when the empire collapsed, the functions of the secular ruler fell on the clergy; since the 5th century clerics wore a distinctive garb and played an important role in the construction of a new Christian society. In the division of functions in medieval society, activities which demanded an education were assigned to clerics and monks and expected of them. Thus it finally came about that "clericus" could simply mean "educated". In the ecclesiastical set-up there was hardly a task at all for the lay person. He was assumed to lack not only the monk's sanctity, but also the cleric's power and rights. In his "Decretum" (1140), which became for centuries the basis of Church law, Gratian distinguished two kinds of Christians, "duo genera Christianorum"; "clerici" and "conversi" (brothers) on the one hand, and "laici" on the other. The lay brothers, therefore, were counted with the clerics. They also enjoyed clerical privileges. But it was made clear to them that they had no authority over clerics. Thus Pope Innocent III in the early 13th century: "Lay persons, even though they be religious, should have no authority over churches or ecclesiastics; they are bound by obedience and have no authority to issue orders".

Down the centuries the priesthood had also taken over many other ministries including those that didn't require ordination. The Catholic reform of the 16th century opened a new chapter in the history of religious life. Most new orders of men were 'clerks regular' without choir duty. They were geared for activity, and aimed at renewing the priestly ministry. They became religious in order to be better priests. Smaller groups like the Theatines, Barnabites and Camillians, also admitted lay brothers to solemn vows. Ignatius created a concentric form: a core group of priests who pronounced four vows; a group of 'spiritual coadjutors', priests who bound themselves by three simple vows; finally a group of 'lay coadjutors' in simple vows.

The clerical congregations with simple vows, which were founded in the following centuries, usually accepted lay brothers too, and this was to be the shape of things to come: the brothers lived according to the same rule under the same roof as the clerics. But their different tasks stamped them as a special class; usually they had less education and a transition to the clerical state was not possible.

Several inroads into the normally clerical character of religious life resulted from the new needs of the apostolate, which called for a new type of lay religious. Education was traditionally a preserve of the religious orders, but they cared usually for only the upper classes. When concern for educating the ordinary people became ever more urgent, John Baptist de la Salle, a Canon at Rheims, founded the congregation of Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1684 from a group of dedicated teachers. It became a model for many similar congregations.

b) in the early SVD

To commemorate the centenary of the Society, Fr. Johann Kraus wrote a detailed account of the history of Steyl's brother community, which is inseparably linked with the building up and development of the press. He writes: 'Arnold Janssen, the founder of the SVD, was not thinking in terms of a religious order before he started the work in Steyl. The idea of having brothers was far from his mind. His cherished image was that of a society of secular priests for the service of the pagan missions' (3).

After some trial and error, the canonical reception of brother postulants was begun not long after the opening of the mission house. Fr. Henry Kroes sums up the beginning thus: "In 1878 the founder accepted the first postulants and so laid the foundation for the brotherhood in the SVD. In 1879 he composed a rule which provided for a year's postulancy, two years' novitiate and nine years' temporary vows before final profession.

They were to follow the rule of the Dominican tertiaries. In 1882 the first couple of brothers took the three vows” (4).

The first general chapter 1884-1886, decided upon the name 'Societas Verbi Divini' and the general rule that the Society should comprise 'fratres clerici' and 'fratres laici'. In compiling the rule, our blessed founder kept a close eye on the constitutions of the Vincentians and the Jesuits. Fr. Fritz Bornemann adds: 'The embodying of the vows in the constitutions took place at the 1884 general chapter with the introduction of the three vows for all, brothers and clerics' (5). The SVD concept of brothers was, without doubt, one of the most modern in Europe at the turn of the century. Fr. Bornemann points this out: 'The print shop, the composing rooms, the photo-etching section, bindery and shipping room all made an impression on visitors and retreatants. They remembered the brothers who showed how modern techniques could be used by religious. Thus the press contributed to the healthy increase in the number of applicants for the brotherhood. Then too, the janitor, cook and sacristan were all proud of the press. Carpenters, locksmiths, tailors and shoemakers caught the spirit and wanted to employ the latest technical inventions in their workshops. In the course of the years they made it their aim to become master craftsmen in their respective trades and skills, while following the vocation of brother in a missionary society' (6).

In many religious congregations besides our own the brother hood experienced a surprising growth in the 19th and in the first decades of the 20th century. But it is suffering a sharp decline again in recent years as it did in the 13th century. Today there are just over 1000 brothers in the Society.

Are the lay brothers then dying out?

A glance back into history should have warned us not to answer such a question too hastily. What is surely dying out is one or the other style of living this vocation.

The vocation of the lay person to the religious life will remain. It will remain as a vocation to the religious sisterhood, the religious brotherhood and to the state of the lay monk. Our constant 'becoming' takes place in history. This is true of us as individuals, of our religious community and of the Church.

To let oneself be persuaded and changed, to give up some times what has become familiar and cherished, is God's gift. Let us have the courage to make the change which God is indicating.

4. Recent General Chapters

What have we, then, as a community done to create a brother image which will not be consequently set aside by history? It is difficult, if not impossible, for us as a society to hurry to introduce new modes of thought into a juridical system that is considered logically compact and containing a norm for every concrete circumstance.

The best way of coping with the various aspects of the theme is probably by having a look at the whole situation as it developed after earlier general chapters and presented it self to the preparatory commission and capitulars of the eleventh.

In the first issue of “Witnessing to the Word” (January 1978), I entitled one section “Chapter of the Brothers”. It is surely true that the generalate and the provincial administrations worked towards having the brothers' questions taken up, and that during the whole chapter one could feel a great open-mindedness towards these questions.

For the first time, an international brothers' commission took part in the preparation of the chapter. On the basis of a questionnaire sent to all the provinces it compiled comments on the coming chapter, general proposals and special suggestions for changing the constitutions. The commission's final document went to all capitulars. In the 'Arnoldus Nota' of September 1977 it was pointed out that those who were interested could borrow a capitular's or commission member's copy.

It is worthwhile to note that in other religious societies similar commissions were convoked. Particularly well known is the Jesuit brothers' convention at Grottaferrata, 1970, which 56 brothers attended out of some 4,500 who comprise about 15% of the Society of Jesus. Father Arrupe S.J. stated that the real aim of the convention was to discuss the resolutions of the 31st general chapter, but that it went far beyond this and finally brought the whole complex of brothers' questions into discussion.

The 'Convegno Mondiale' of the Salesians that took place at Rome in 1975 also springs to mind. The Salesians number about 18,000 members of whom 3,000 are brothers. The out come of that meeting was a report of 700 pages.

The SVD brothers' commission saw itself as a preparation for a general chapter. Therefore it was conscious of the fact that it ought to contribute to the necessary ongoing renewal of the whole Society - it had to be concerned not so much with the question of the brothers' awareness of their own position within the Society as with the self-awareness of all the Society's members as brothers.

The key concept of the commission was: SVD unity as brotherliness lived from within. The Society refers to this in its constitutions when it speaks of itself as "an apostolic fraternal community".

The commission's work, therefore, was not primarily a narrow circling around the so-called brother problem. It wished rather to point out the opportunities that present themselves when we seek to bring about those things to which we have already committed and bound ourselves in the constitutions of our religious community. It wished just as earnestly to call attention to the consequences that follow from not paying attention this aspect of the constitutions. Thus the work of the brothers' commission became a summons to the whole chapter to emphasize more clearly our common vocation to a missionary religious community, which is the true interior reason for our being together.

The brother's presence in the Society cannot be understood from a mere pragmatic viewpoint either by himself or by his confreres who are priests. Nor can it be explained by the contention that he is absolutely necessary for the work. Looked at only from this limited point of view, the services rendered by the brothers in a religious community like the SVD could be performed by lay helpers and employers. It is not true to say that a brother in every case works better, more cheaply and more energetically.

The fact that we have brothers in the Society is due to the free gift of a vocation to the religious life, with no strings attached as to the kind of work that needs doing. For each brother, the main thing in his life is the call from being a lay man to being a lay religious.

This question about the brother's very existence calls the attention of the whole Society, as an apostolic fraternal community and missionary religious congregation to its essential structure:

RELIGIOUS - MISSIONARY - PRIEST
RELIGIOUS - MISSIONARY - BROTHER.

This indicates the orientation of the commission towards the whole Society and shifts the stress of the entire problem.

Does the brothers' problem cause so much disquiet because upon closer scrutiny perhaps a fathers' problem is also unearthed? I would like to quote a few thoughts submitted to the commission on this point:

“Are all members conscious of having, as SVD's, a common vocation to a missionary religious society, and do all members also live in tune with that vocation? Or is it a fact that it is chiefly the brothers who represent the religious life in the Society while many of the priests are aware of themselves almost exclusively as priests and live accordingly”?

“Is the priest's affiliation to the Society of a different nature from that of the brother, the priest's being chiefly by priestly ordination, the brother's mainly by the vows? Are the vows in this way valued less as a pattern for living and used more as a practical instrument for the priestly ministry”?

Perhaps an up-to-date review of the priest's role, of his priestly and, above all, his non-priestly activities, would produce important insights, which, together with a similar review of the brother's role, could yield a new understanding and awareness of our vocation to the SVD and its lifestyle.

5. Uncertainty of the Brother's Position

No matter how one views these particular correlations, it is clear that the Society displays disturbing symptoms of illness, even if one is superficial and uses purely and simply the rapidly falling number of brothers as a thermometer. I would like to reduce these symptoms to a common denominator and diagnose the illness as the brother's uncertainty of his position. It shows up in the canonical, social and missionary areas.

a) Canonical Status

At present our Society is classified in Church law as an 'exempt clerical institute of pontifical right'. The pertinent canons in the draft of the new law for religious read:

Canon 5, 1: An Institute is called 'clerical' which, because of the purpose or goal intended by its Founder, or by legitimate tradition, exercises the sacred ministry, and is recognized to be such by Church Authority.

Canon 117, 1: Clerical Institutes should fulfill their ministry by exercising their sacerdotal powers; other apostolic works, unless they are proper to the Institute, should be entrusted to others, including laymen, who are qualified.

Canon 117, 2: By reason of their profession, lay members in these Institutes exercise by a special title that priesthood common to the faithful by their cooperation with members who are clerics; they should undertake preferably those tasks that promote such collaboration.

Translated into everyday language, this means that from the legal standpoint the Society of the Divine Word is a community of priests with an appendage of brothers.

Apart from the question of positions in the Society, a series of consequences results from this which today can hardly be carried over into the whole context of our community life if we understand

unity as brotherliness lived from within.

Under these conditions can we really, in all intellectual and spiritual honesty, speak intelligibly of an apostolic fraternal community as the introduction to our constitutions does?

How far our Society feels at ease in its clerical costume is hard to say. In the course of years a gradual levelling-off between clerics and brothers has taken place within the Society, due partly to the pressure of social changes in the world around us. This led to the catchword often quoted in the 1967-1968 general chapter: "Integration of all SVD members". The constitutions revised by the sixth general chapter (1932) say: "Although clerics and lay brothers contribute to the common welfare in entirely different ways, and are engaged in distinct occupations, all shall ever and sincerely show themselves to be brethren, and treat each other with respect, yet let each one be mindful of his condition" (con. 190, Techny 1941 edition).

The 1967-1968 chapter lessened the inner tension contained in this statement. In the introduction to the draft of the newly revised constitutions the idea of an "apostolic fraternal community" appears as a spiritual value which supersedes each one's mindfulness of his condition. Voting rights were changed. The chapter introduced the director of brother formation (1968 dir. 513.5). Fourteen brothers were invited to participate in the chapter.

On October 20, 1970, the general assembly of provincials at Nemi treated the brothers' role and formation in detail. At this assembly's recommendation the general council on April 7, 1971, appointed a brother assistant for matters pertaining to the brothers; he took up his work alongside the general consultor entrusted with these matters and continued there until the following general chapter.

Under date of April 14, 1972, a general inquiry concerning brothers was conducted as a remote preparation for the tenth general chapter. For the first time in SVD history seven elected brother delegates took part in this chapter. In line with the ninth, it took the integration of all SVD members as its main theme. It declared that this goal can be reached only if "we are convinced of the value and meaningfulness of our community and feel that we are interiorly obligated to exemplify in our lives the evangelical ideal of that fraternal community which we preach to others" (7).

Directory 612.1 was changed to read: "In so far as it is possible according to church law, offices in the Society are open to all confreres in perpetual vows". After this mandate had been given it, the general council took up the matter in official petitions and in personal interviews with Roman authorities.

The general chapter elected a brother to the general council, who in the nature of things was also to represent the brothers' interests in the council. In cooperation with the provinces, additional directors of brother formation were appointed.

These more mature deliberations were a welcome change from the previous rather petty thinking in which we had shown ourselves children of our time. Thus the sixth general chapter had still been concerned "that all who sit down to meals in their religious habit be granted the use of a napkin" (Nuntius SVD, 82, p. 629). In the nineteen-fifties the introduction of the brothers' right to wear the white clerical collar was likewise considered a move to be taken seriously; in order to forestall a detrimental erosion of boundaries; the brothers were instructed to close the collar not in the back but in the front.

How did the transition from the preparatory brothers' commission to the practical assembly work proceed in the 1977 general chapter?

What was the general mood? I use "mood" to emphasize the personal element in the opinions expressed. To put it briefly, I felt that the general atmosphere regarding the brother-question was better at the beginning of the chapter than at the end.

This stemmed partly from the fact that during the last few days issues were discussed that in themselves offered more material for misunderstanding. Besides that, questions about voting methods and the binding character of chapter procedure helped cloud the issue.

Misleading generalizations kept on coming up as well and made objective discussion difficult: for instance, that all the brothers should, or want to, 1) have an academic education, 2) get into the direct apostolate, 3) become superiors.

For the rest, it was relatively easy to bring most of the suggestions for changing the constitutions into the chapter and to transform the commission's general proposals into binding "goals and priorities" (cf. *Witnessing to the Word* 1/78).

In the present context I would like especially to indicate two brief passages that invite the brothers to reflection. The first is constitution 514 which reads: "The brothers are called to fulfill in the world the missionary task of the Church, entrusted to every Christian in his baptism and confirmation, in the decisive way called for by the religious life. Through their varied services and their witness to the gospel, the brothers share in the mission of Christ to renew the whole world order. The better trained they are for their professional, social and pastoral activities, the more effectively can they fulfill their vocation".

It must be conceded that the phrase "by their witness to the gospel" contains a whole life's program. I would like to underline just one aspect of it here. There is a danger of brothers from industrialized countries being carried away by their very technical skill into a sort of one-sided thinking that stresses only performance and efficiency. One result of this is that they become almost incapable of passing on their specialized knowledge to young men whose standard of life has not been so exclusively shaped by the pressure to achieve and by organized perfectionism. The situation becomes worse if human shortcomings, like impatience and irascibility are added.

There is also a sort of proficiency that makes a community dependent and tyrannizes over it in an authoritarian way.

The second passage is directory 514.2: "Brothers should be offered a suitable basic theological education together with their professional training, so that they can enter more deeply into their own vocation, and work in catechetical and pastoral fields".

The motivation "so that they can enter more deeply into their own vocation" indicates that the theological education should first of all become effective in ourselves in a mature and convinced acceptance of our own vocation. It should not be seen merely as a means of instructing others. This thought is particularly important in brother formation. A priest's work constantly compels him to study and read. If he himself does not see this as a requirement of his vocation, the needs of the modern apostolate will very soon show up his limitations. The demands made on a brother in this respect are not so urgent. It is all the more necessary then for him to stand on his own feet, to read, listen, observe, investigate, in order that he may remain a well-balanced man, reasonable, intelligent and religious.

The reference to catechetical and pastoral work in directory 514.2, however, does not refer exclusively to the direct apostolate. In many places where he works, his relations with co-workers and employees offer the brother an opportunity for spiritual guidance and support and may even oblige him to it. The brothers should take time for this and, if needs be, reduce their work-time to prepare for it.

b) Social Status

The brother's uncertainty of his position, occasioned by Church law, makes itself felt in community life and in social life in general. In a certain sense it is stronger than death. Separate sections for priests and brothers in community cemeteries and differently sized tombstones give evidence of this; though there is no need to take such venerable practices very seriously. More worrying is the fact that in modern vocation propaganda brothers are often overlooked. For example, the magazine, "Kontraste-impuls" dedicated its issue 3/1978 to "Mission". It was put together with the help of the missionary societies in Germany, which here for the first time displayed their wares on the same table. But one must honestly say that the way the "clerical societies" described themselves in it left a big question mark as to whether one would be welcome also as a brother in any of them (8).

There is no doubt that community life within the Society has improved much in recent years especially in the area of work relations. The solution of some individual problems, for example, formation programs, proves more difficult.

The minimum education required before entering the clerical novitiate does not differ much in Africa, America, Asia, Australia or Europe. This basic minimum makes community building easier.

But, if it is a question of brothers, there are fundamental differences of opinion among our own men responsible for formation in various countries. Only by degrees are comprehensive programs for brother formation in each country being worked out and put in writing, programs that clearly determine the minimum requirements on the levels of education and training for entering the novitiate.

If we cannot deny that there is a certain sociological uncertainty within the Society itself, what impression will we make on outsiders as a united religious community?

People the world over seem to have much the same image of the Catholic priest. A Philippine, South American or European mother has a definite picture in mind when she imagines her son a priest. The picture even fits more or less into the same frame. One could say the same of the woman-religious. But a standardized picture of the brother doesn't exist; it is either the image of the brother in a clerical society or in a brothers' institute comprising brothers only, usually teachers. The laity, sisters and clergy usually have a less favorable view of the former.

The formation of the brother's image, moreover, depends on social and historical factors, on Christian and non-Christian religious tradition and on the education and experience of people in each country. The elements that have gone to form the image are as many and as variegated as life itself. Among them are: the class thinking of medieval Europe; the effects of well meant dogmatic exaggerations e.g. the stress on the dignity of the priesthood which led people to underestimate the laity; the change of mind occasioned in those who come to live in cities from rural areas.

Faced with this situation, the eleventh general chapter took up the proposal of the preparatory commission to seek a norm, a coordinating point that could reduce the diverging and often contradictory elements to a common, practical, applicable denominator.

And so directory 511.8 was agreed on: “In principle, the novitiate for brothers and clerics in our Society is made in common. Where it lasts for two years, the canonical year at least is made in common. Should there be difficulties, however, in having a common novitiate, the decision is made at territorial level whether separate novitiates for brothers and clerics are feasible or not”.

The novitiate, intended by the Church as the first introduction to the religious life and the beginning of formation, could be the proper place for an initial, radical and thorough adjustment to those realities with which we have later to live together.

Our novitiates, too, may have become over academic – places for developing only intellectual maturity. Should this be so, the idea of a common novitiate could also lead to making the necessary changes to remedy the situation. (The second part of directory 511.8 was included because of the various circumstances obtaining in different countries).

On the other hand, the basic idea of being united in a community of religious-missionaries need not prevent brothers from being trained - especially in the earlier stages – in groups with their own instructors (houses of brother formation). In fact, their being together in the same group can bring about mutual encouragement, help in clarifying their own vocation to the brotherhood and lead them to embrace it more freely. If this basic attitude is won, it will enable a brother - without any trace of prejudice or inferiority complex - to slot his own particular charism into the whole united SVD effort as his special contribution.

There should be no need for the brother to aspire to come a step nearer to the priesthood. He can stand with dignity on his own feet.

c) Missionary Status

The text of canon 5, paragraph 1, taken from the draft of the new law for religious, forces one to a further fundamental consideration. It reads: “A clerical institute is one which assumes the activity belonging to sacred orders according to its goal and purpose in the intention of its founder”.

The documentation of the eleventh general chapter for November 21, 1977, contains a resolution which the general council forwarded to the Papal Commission for the Revision of Canon Law and to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. The document explains that the chapter did not find the Society's idea of itself adequately reflected in the draft of the new law (cf. *Witnessing to the Word* 1/1978). In a working paper for the preparation of the resolution Fr. Karl Mueller, mission secretary, declares:

<< From the intention of our founder and through its entire tradition, our religious community, the Society of the Divine word, is a missionary society to which clerics and laymen binding themselves by the same vows, belong.

According to *Ad Gentes* and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* there is no doubt that the mission cause is not a matter for the clergy only, but for the whole Church including religious and laity. If EN says that the laity “work with their pastors” (73) it states the same of priests and deacons (68). The very fact of following Christ carries with it the duty, of witnessing to him. Priests, religious and laity retain their own due functions and their own responsibilities (cf. AG 21 & 23).

In serving the mission cause one does not exercise a “clerical” function. If it is said that the whole Church is missionary, this does not mean that the Church as such is clerical.

What is true of the Church also holds for a missionary society. The fact that we are missionaries by vocation does indeed make us a missionary society, but still not a clerical missionary society.

The fact that we are bound to Christ and to the missions in a radical way by religious vows makes us indeed a missionary religious community, but still not a clerical religious community. Indeed, for some time in our Society, those who were not priests outnumbered those who were. If the laity have their special tasks and their own responsibility in the Church's mission work (as AG 21 & 23 affirms), then also in our missionary religious family. Thus it is topsy-turvy to describe the SVD as a "clerical religious- missionary society".

The deeper understanding of Mission has overhauled the traditional slotting-in of our Society among the clerical religious orders. Such a classification is also outdated because of today's emphasis on total salvation for the whole man, stressing as it does the special task of the layman in a missionary-religious society.

What conclusions is one to draw from this with regard to the structure of a missionary society and its community life? There is food for thought here >>.

The brothers react logically to the situation as a whole when they feel that special treatment is out of place. It would be a superficial approach and would merely divert attention from the fundamental problems. At present the brothers constitute 20% of the whole Society. Their numerical representation at the eleventh general chapter was around 8%. Yet most brothers do not want special measures taken to raise the percentage of representation.

The call to find a sort of final solution by ordaining the brothers deacons is also felt to be inept. The brother vocation cannot be considered a first step to the diaconate.

An observation in a press dispatch of June 1977 from the assembly of German religious superiors is worth quoting; it concerns the diaconate: "It was declared that religious could possibly render a good service as deacons at home and in the missions. A general provision of the diaconate for religious communities cannot be laid down. In any case the independence and intrinsic value of the brother's vocation or of lay monasticism must be ensured. The introduction of the diaconate into a religious community must not aim merely at boosting the value of the brother's vocation or lead, in fact, to its devaluation".

On the whole our constitutions and directory embody the brother commission's recommendations and the supplementary reflections of the chapter members. In the goals and priorities agreed upon for the generalate and the Society, it is recommended that the secretary of studies take note of his responsibility for brother formation.

Important as the theoretical formulations may be, it cannot be expected that they will do away with the aforementioned uncertainty of the brothers' position overnight. Rather they are another sign of hope that developments within the Church may lead to a better understanding of the brothers' role.

The Vatican II decree on the apostolate of the laity and a series of other Council documents have led to lively discussion of the lay person's place and role in the church: in addition to the ministerial priesthood, we are becoming more aware of how real the general priesthood of the faithful is; the various ministries, as elements for building Christian communities, are being thought out anew; the theology of the religious life is being taken seriously; the gifts of grace are being experienced in deeper reality.

In this connection Father Leclercq's observation is interesting. He writes: <<The clear-cut distinction between these two states, the clerical and the lay, is on the point of being overhauled by a more complex and subtle notion of the diversification of ministries and the discovery of their complementarity. The terminology "clerical-lay", "priesthood-laity", although ancient, appears to some to correspond neither to the data of Holy Scripture and ancient tradition nor to the present demands of the Church's active presence in the world; the term "hierarchy" is not to be found in the bible. This does not deny in any way the necessity and specific character of a ministry proper to priests>> (9).

A "mixed" religious society could help very well to offset a too great attachment to the distinction "clerical-lay".

"The gospel, if lived, always leads to community. For this reason, religious societies rightly regard themselves as communities of disciples in a special sense; this corresponds indeed to a long, uninterrupted historical tradition. They not only have their place in the Church but they are Church, and should manifest the Church so that one can believe that the Lord is in its midst" (1 Cor. 14:25) (10).

Example is important within the Church. Over and above this, the sign of a "community building itself up out of relationships is important as a course correction for the massing of unconnected human units, the palpable unrelatedness of modern man" (Martin Buber, "Ich und Du").

Sound integration is a gradual human process which requires time, patience and perseverance. It is not an external operation, but a fermentation clarifying the SVD's idea of itself as an apostolic fraternal community and a missionary religious society. We do not all bring to this process the same ability and the same gifts. This explains, too, why the tempo of progressive rethinking can differ so much from community to community, from country to country. We must be convinced of the importance of this process, not regarding it as a "class triumph", but welcoming it for the sake of our community as a living part of the Church.

6. Some Practical Conclusions

1) A basic concern is the creation of an up-to-date image of the brother in our own thinking, speaking, acting and publications.

Father Arnold Janssen introduced brothers to entirely new tasks. "Your resolution to entrust lay brothers with more important tasks seems praiseworthy" (Pope Paul VI) (11). Whoever continues to propagate the picture of the "good", necessarily naive, brother in families, schools, sisters' convents and among the secular clergy does the Church and the Society a bad turn.

2) The formation program for the brothers is an indication of the amount of interest taken in them in each province. Its planning, supervision and improvement push the brother-question into the practical context that cannot be avoided in everyday life.

It is essential to lay down the minimum academic requirements for entering the novitiate, especially for late vocations.

A set standard should be aimed at for all, and those with different skills should be ensured a corresponding level of attainment. The formation programs of the provinces should be filed with the secretary of studies at the generalate, even when the provinces do not yet consider them complete.

3) Suitable brothers should be prepared for vocation recruiting and other forms of youth work and community building, for the office of director of brother formation, and for novitiate activities. These tasks must take priority over other important duties.

Projects for vocation recruiting should be carried out together by a team of priests and brothers. The choice of priests for the work of training and directing brothers is an unerring gauge of how seriously a province takes its pastoral responsibility for them; education and inclination, together with spiritual and human experience should influence the selection.

4) Experience has taught us that the ban on candidates over 30 years old, apart from exceptional cases, is well founded.

A professionally conducted psychological test can be a useful help in clarifying vocation problems.

5) Directories 521.3, 619.9.j and 628.3 establish the office of director of brother formation. This term is really not sufficiently comprehensive. In 521.3 he is said to be responsible for the recruitment, education and formation in a province or several provinces. Although the task of providing a formation program, of constantly adapting and supervising it, and of carrying it out is and remains one of his principal functions, it does not exhaust them. On the contrary, the very task of recruiting and formation calls for a thorough study of the whole situation, namely:

“the idea the brothers have of themselves in the sociological and historical context of each country; questions concerning the novitiate; cooperation with the prefect of brothers in temporary vows; taking part in territorial chapters and conferences concerning matters of formation; establishing contact with clerical and lay religious communities for sharing information and mutual assistance”(12).

6) All possibilities for service in the Society's direct and indirect missionary work, which do not call for priestly ordination, are open to the brothers. There is a continued interest in brothers in manual, technical, administrative technical, pastoral, medical and academic fields subject to adequate planning and training in each case. This is due to the wide scope of our missionary work and to the desire for the financial independence of each area of work.

What is decisive is each one's selfless service as planned with the community in the Society and in the Church. This is the basic attitude on which personal education must be built. Objectively it is dependent on the talents received and the gifts of grace for whose use we are responsible.

7) We must strive sincerely and wholeheartedly to apply the principle mentioned in the last paragraph. In practice, however, it has proved better in brother formation to limit the education to a few specially important subjects. This holds good chiefly in place where a group of brothers is just being built up. It is the only way in most cases to avoid a dissipation of energies which would cut down the possibility of mutual help in the group and render planned guidance more difficult. Too wide a scope also creates snags both in boarding the men and providing enough possibilities for training in schools and workshops.

8) The situation is different again if a fully trained man applies to join the Society as a brother. Without referring to past practices, it happens even today that such men are “reserved for the priesthood”. Either the brother's vocation is not explained clearly to them, or they are simply talked into studying to become priests.

Would it not be better to allow such men to use as brothers the talents they already have and to follow the particular gift of grace God has given them?

9) A special grace of the brother's vocation lies in his nearness to the world with its resultant possibilities for the promotion of human development, for being a sign for the laity in working with them (the worker priest idea) and a reminder of the value of manual work in an area where one sided and prejudiced views to the contrary seem to prevail.

10) The brothers' chance of survival does not depend on imposing numbers, but on a clear, responsible acceptance of their vocation as lay religious. Numbers, comparisons and statistics have their own place and value which should not be overlooked. They should not, however, put us into a closing-time mood. For our community, for the Church and for the candidate himself it is preferable to admit one too few than one too many.

Our vocation to the missionary religious life as brothers or priests demands a personal decision motivated by faith. To experience and accept a vocation effected in the depths of our being leads to inner freedom and joy. The desire that others may come to share this joy clearly justifies our continued prayer for more laborers in the vineyard.

This prayer should always include the petition that the Lord of the harvest may form our communities in such a way that those called can recognize us as a prophetic sign.

Fraternally in the Divine Word,

Henry Heekeren, S.V.D.
Superior General

NOTES

Witnessing to the Word 3/1979 is the work of a team which built on a basic text composed by Brother Max Staudinger SVD.

The account of the historical development of the brotherhood is based chiefly on two sources:

Father Martin Benyerath, CSSR, "Das Bild des Bruders in der Geschichte" (Study week on "The Brother's Image Today", Schoenbrunn, Switzerland, 1966).

Father Manfred Mueller, SVD: "Lay Religious in Clerical Institutes - an historical outline" (composed at the request of the SVD generalate in preparation for the 1977 general chapter).

(1) Resolutions of the Bishops' Synod of the Federal Republic of Germany: the Religious Orders, 2.1.4.

(2) cf. J. Damme: Documenta pro cisterciensis Ordinis historiae ac juris studio, Westmalle 1959, p. 13.

(3) Fr. J. Kraus SVD: "Die Steyler Bruedergemeinschaft und ihr Wirken" in Nova et Vetera Sept./Dec. 1975, p. 235.

(4) Fr. H. Kroes SVD: Article on Arnold Janssen in "Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione" Rome 1978, vol. 5, col. 300.

- (5) Fr. F. Bornemann SVD: “The Concept of the Missionary and the Religious at the Beginning of Arnold Janssen's Foundation”, *Verbum Supplementum* 9/3.
- (6) Fr. F. Bornemann SVD: “Father Arnold Janssen, Founder of Three Missionary Congregations, 1837-1909, a biography”, pp. 161-162.
- (7) 'Tenth General Chapter, 1972', V. p. 21.
- (8) *Kontraste-impuls' (Mission)*, 3/1978, p. 46.
- (9) Fr. Jean Leclercq OSB: Article on Clericalizzazione della Vita Religiosa in “Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione”, Rome 1975, vol. 2, col. 1188.
- (10) Resolutions of the Bishops' Synod of the Federal Republic of Germany: the Religious Orders, 2.1.7.
- (11) Pope Paul VI: Discourse to the general chapter members of the Franciscan Conventuals, May 29, 1978.
- (12) cf. Fr. J. Musinsky SVD: Circular letter of December 15, 1975, to all provincials.