

**THE CHARISM OF BROTHER
IN THE WORLD TODAY**

**A Charism:
To Brother Our Sisters Today**

"There can be neither Jew nor Greek,
there can be neither slave nor freeman,
there can be neither male nor female
— for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 28).

An old rabbi once asked his pupils
how they could tell when the night
had ended and the day had begun.
"Could it be", asked one of the students,
"when you can see an animal
in the distance and tell
whether it is a sheep or a dog?"
"No," answered the rabbi.
Another asked, "Is it when you can look
at a tree in the distance
and tell whether it is a fig tree
or a peach tree?"
"No," answered the rabbi.
"Then when is it?" the pupils demanded.
"It is when you can look on the face
of any woman or man and see
that it is your sister or brother.
Because if you cannot see this,
it is still night."

Tales of Hasidim

In this last part of the 20th century, the words of Christ: "Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15) take on a new urgency, and conversion becomes an imminent challenge as we face the continued dawning of new insights and understanding. In an age glutted by a daily increase of information, as Brothers and as Christians, ours is the challenge of humanizing this global, electronic village.

Through news sources and the electronic media we share daily in the events and thoughts of our planet. And with this sharing, our packaged and honored understandings and language take on new richness or fall away as inadequate.

We, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, stand approximately two years away from the experience of our 41st General Chapter (1986). We hold in

our collective hands a newly approved and promulgated RULE which confirms our past 300 years of tradition, challenges our contemporary creativity and fidelity and beacons us into a yet uncharted future. We have received two messages from the Brothers capitulant: one calling us to personal and institutional conversion, the other, addressed to those who share our Lasallian world, promising that we have opened our blinders and will willingly share the rich tradition that is ours.

As Institute, the "Body of the Society" reminds us that we do not exist for ourselves. We were created three hundred years ago because of a need that existed in France. We continue because we recognize that same need, now global, today.

Like all General Chapters, the 41st General Chapter was both an end and a beginning. Its formulations contain the collective wisdom of past experience even as they thrust us forward to uncharted future experiences and formulations. We are part of a living tradition—a tradition which while finding a source of identity and basis in its past, must creatively hear the contemporary voice of need and discern therein the call of God into the future.

The early biographers of St. John Baptist de La Salle recount how he and the first school masters decided that they would be called "Brother". Blain (I, p. 241) indicates that the title was a proper one since it included "the definition of their state" and indicated "the mission proper to their vocation." The title was to indicate fraternity both among themselves and those they served.

Today, there is an echo and a development of that seminal insight in the RULE of 1986. "The members of this Institute are called by the name of Brother. By the fraternal character of their community life and their active and disinterested presence among those they serve, the Brothers witness to the possibility of creating true brotherhood among peoples and nations" (9). The collective experience of the capitulants speaks the need of this fraternal element of solidarity as both global and transcultural. Indeed, the entire RULE speaks an incarnational solidarity WITH and FOR. The three chapters on government, for example, clearly indicate this by beginning with a passage from the Gospel according to Luke (22:24-27) which rejects dominance as a characteristic of government when exercised by brothers. Collaboration and fraternity are the hallmarks of all relationships called for by the RULE of the Brothers.

But We Are Called to Recognize More than Brotherhood.

But while it is proper to call the men of the Institute to brotherhood, it is incorrect to say that we look for a world of “brotherhood”, for to say this is to create a generic noun of a word that is specific in gender. What of our sisters, the women of this world? In this age of awakening social justice, are they to be forgotten, or worse, subsumed in a label that fails to acknowledge their existence? Is not the call of Christ something that transcends gender as well as culture and national boundary?

As we come to the end of this 20th century, there is perhaps no minority so oppressed or forgotten as that of women. Collectively, they span every continent and every culture. Yet, the major languages of the world use the masculine words to indicate both male and female.

Even more unjust, many governments still reserve second class citizenship to women. Many nations pay lower wages to women for the same amount of high paid work done by a man.

Their “frailty” is by-word though they account for the bearing and rearing of all future generations. Even many religions ban them from sanctuaries by rule and reserve ordained leadership to men.

But, the voice of the poor cry out! (Ps. 69:33). Today we are beginning to hear the voices of women as they cry out with the power of the prophets of old. They who carry and nurture life speak out against impending nuclear holocaust with a strength that cannot be denied by those who devise weapons of destruction and strategies of war. They who dry the tears of babes speak in both silent and loud eloquence the ill-distribution of the world’s resources, especially that of food.

If ours is the charism to brother our world, may we forget our sisters?

The Nature of Charism.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul describes “charism” as a gift in which the Spirit manifests its presence “for the general good” (1 Cor. 12:7). We have long recognized our call to be “brother” as a charism of the Spirit.

Surely, our contemporary charism to “brother” the world must include a championing of the cause

of our sisters, the women of the world. Surely, in an age characterized by an almost apocalyptic “war-and-rumor-of-war” motif, we must recognize the charism of woman –the charism to nurture, the charism of lifegiving love, the charism of SISTERHOOD– and stand solidly with it in our role as brother.

The Lasallian Family: A Call to Conversion and Collaboration.

In his Pastoral Letter of 1 January, 1987, Brother John Johnston, Superior General, takes up the theme of conversion and collaboration in reminding us that we are called to a new challenge as we face the end of this century. There are no longer “secondary roles” for non-Brother collaborators in Lasallian works. The “secondary role” mentality and the structures which support it “neither can nor should continue to exist.” He goes on to say that “it is important... to understand this movement – and to accept it... because I am convinced that this extraordinary development, which is not limited to our Institute, is the work of the Holy Spirit, a gift of the Holy Spirit in our day.”

In championing the Lasallian Family notion, is not Brother Superior also speaking of something wider, more inclusive, when he says that this development is not limited to our Institute and is, in his observation, “the work of the Holy Spirit, a gift of the Holy Spirit in our day”? There can be no “second-class” citizens of the Kingdom.

If our call is to recognize that the charism of Christian education for poor youth which we have cherished for more than three hundred years is no longer the private province of the Institute –if our call is to recognize that “poor youth” is a generic term whose reality is both young women and young men– if we can understand this, then our mission takes on a new definition and a new urgency. It is no mere abstract principle, but the reality of the other person in need which challenges, summons, and makes demands on us now. This is a privileged time and place where it will be possible to identify again, a meaningful experience of the living God.

The call is clear; the gift is given; it remains for us to collaborate – to make God’s work, the equality of our sisters, our work.

Brother Jeffrey L. Calligan.