



***THE WORD,  
WHO WILL PROCLAIM IT?***

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BROTHERS OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION



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The cover page represents an icon of Saint Paul. The title: "The Word, who will proclaim it?" refers to the Letter to the Romans (10, 14-17) and to the ardor of the apostle for the proclamation of the Gospel to the nations.



## INTRODUCTION

A few months away from the General Chapter 2012, we have already entered into the dynamic of the preparation for that event, whose main objective is to reanimate among us the flame of our Charism. Every six years, we are invited to such a task of communal discernment, in order to realize fully the Will of God for us.

We have just concluded the year dedicated to the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the death of Jean-Marie de la Mennais. During these months we have tried to encourage one another to “sow generously” and to open ourselves to the invitations of God for new commitments in the mission. These two reasons have prompted me to write the following pages. That will be my own way to actualize the chosen theme “sow generously” as we were all invited to do this year. This text will try to make the passage from “Sowing generously” to the theme chosen for the coming Chapter and reflect together on the concrete ways and means of educating and evangelizing today.

I think that, deep within us, we all have the desire to make the Charism of the Congregation fruitful. The best way to show the strong spirit of belonging which animated our Founders, notably Fr.

De la Mennais, may be indeed our desire to sow in the hearts of children and youth the seed of Life that is the Word made flesh, Jesus, the Friend of men and the Beloved Son of the Father.

I would like to encourage each of you to prepare his heart and his mind to listen to the Voice of God. *“Around us, nothing is stable, said our venerable Father to the Daughters of Providence, and we also change like the rest; thus [...] let us rely on God Alone; let us bind ourselves to God Alone; let us desire only to accomplish his Will, a Will that is always holy, just and merciful.”*<sup>1</sup>

This is what we want to do: to accomplish what is pleasing to God and for that, to listen to what the Holy Spirit tells us through our sharing with the Brothers gathered together in prayer, fraternal love and in an authentic desire of accomplishing the works God wants us to realize in the Church and in the world, through the life of our Institute.

The various chapters of this Circular will have their particular interlocutors, but at the same time, they will be addressed to all of you. Thus I invite you to read it with the intention of gleaning out what can nourish your own life.

After considering, in the first part, how consecrated life is by nature evangelizing, I will in the second part, reflect upon some aspects of what we can call “new evangelization”. In the third part, I intend to address a few lines to the Brothers still involved in schools and other educational activities, then to the Brothers who, because of age, sickness or other missions received, they are not engaged in school work; then to the young people in formation and to the youth who have decided to join our Congregation, and finally to the Mennaisian Laity without whom, today, we could not answer the call of the Spirit.

My preoccupation in fact will be to give to everyone the assurance that they are really in the way the Lord wants for each of

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon VII, 2165

them. I would like to tell them that together we must prepare for a new stronger commitment to the evangelization of the youth. That is the only “raison d’être” of our Congregation and of our Mennaisian family. We are not together just for the pleasure of being together. We are called, Brothers and Laity, by the Lord – the One in whom we put all our hope – to announce the Good News on which our whole life is based. If it were not the case, then our Congregation would be just an association like many others, with the only objective of being more efficient in the field of education. But this is not what we have been called to.

Our main objective is « to make Jesus Christ known and loved » through our schools and educational centres – certainly not anyhow, but in the way Fr. De la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes wanted it, that is, in line with our Charism - that gift of the Spirit, a gift that is not something definitely stuck, but rather a powerful breath that only awaits our enthusiasm to strengthen itself, grow and bear much fruit.

When we evaluate our actions, we are sometimes disappointed at the poor results of our efforts. We would expect much more brilliant results. We may even doubt of the relevance of this mission of education and evangelization. We indeed experience fatigue when facing the difficulties of this task and realizing the apparent sterility of our work.

This is why “*to check our aptitude for evangelization is useful... to improve our methods*” but also “*to question ourselves today on the quality of our faith, on the way we see ourselves and our way of being Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ sent to announce him to the world, to be witnesses filled with the Holy Spirit, disciples who are called to make other disciples in all nations.*”<sup>2</sup>

To evaluate our ways of evangelizing today, as the Lineamenta Synod’s 2012 document on new evangelization invites

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<sup>2</sup> Synod's Lineamenta on the New Evangelization.

us to do, is a process which, before even considering the addressees, asks us to look at ourselves and question ourselves on our “being evangelizers.” This questioning is destined for the entire Church. It is also destined for us, for our Congregation of Brothers as well as the Mennaisian Family. That will be the task of our General Chapter.

The Church is a missionary Church. Our Institute of Brothers is a missionary Institute. The Mennaisian Family too is a missionary Family. All its members are missionaries, not individually but together as a living and fruitful body. Hope must dwell within us, as we start this reflection. We turn towards those who are waiting for a Word that will bring life, not our own words but the Word of the God of Jesus Christ. Indeed we hear this invitation: “*Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly; lengthen your ropes and make firm your stakes. For you shall spread abroad to the right and to the left; your descendants shall dispossess the nations and shall people the desolate cities*” (Is 54:2-3). We also share that conviction of St Paul: “*But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring (the) good news!" ... Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ*” (Rm 10: 14-17).

For sure, sincere and honest men are saved by God, even if they do not know the Gospel. But a truly Christian heart, which belongs to God and has heard His Word, cannot but proclaim “*what he has seen and heard*”, as Peter and John asserted in front of the Sanhedrin (Act 4: 20).

Is it not also what Jesus himself was experiencing in the depth of his heart when he cried out: “*The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals; and greet no one along the way... Whatever town you enter and they*

*welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you'" (Lk 10: 2-4, 9-10).*

This Word, who will go and proclaim it? Before we answer this question, it seems important to read again the words Pope Benedict XVI said on Easter Sunday, April 24. They make us turn back to the foundations of our Christian faith. When reading them, may we find new strength to go and announce the Living One to the world: *"The readings of Easter morning relate the old and yet always new proclamation: Christ is risen! ... Until this day – even in our times of ultra-technological communications, the faith of all Christians is based on this proclamation, on the witnessing of these brothers and sisters who found first the stone moved aside, and the tomb empty, then the mysterious messengers who announced to them that Jesus the Crucified had risen from the dead... The resurrection of Christ is not the fruit of a speculation, of a mystical experience; it is rather an event that goes beyond history, but still occurred at a specific moment of history, and leaves in it an indelible imprint."*

## FIRST PART

<b>BEING BROTHERS: BEING “SIGNS” OF THE GOSPEL</b>
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### 1. A CALL TO BECOME PROPHETS.

*"In the history of the Church, besides other Christians, there were always men and women consecrated to God, who by a special gift of the Spirit, held an authentic prophetic ministry..."* It is in these words that Pope John-Paul II spoke in 1996, in line with the words of the Synod's Fathers on Consecrated Life. But what does that prophecy mean? Here is the answer: *"The function of 'sign' that Vatican II acknowledges in consecrated life, is expressed in prophetic witness to the primacy which God and the truths of the Gospel have in the Christian life."* The text goes on: *"Because of this pre-eminence nothing can come before personal love of Christ and of the poor in whom he lives."* (VC 84)

The program of one's life is clear: to follow Christ in an absolutely authentic love for God and for the poor.

This is why consecrated life is Gospel in action. We who made religious profession, we also took the vow to become “prophets.” We cannot pretend to be so by our own strength. We know that we are called to be prophets through the grace of God. Vita Consecrata specifies it: “*True prophecy is born of God, from friendship with him, from attentive listening to his Word.*” (VC 84)

Thus we cannot be truly Brothers except through the power of God’s Spirit. In Baptism we are born anew in water and in the Spirit. In the dynamics of this baptismal grace, we heard the call to become Brothers, to live our belonging to God in a radical way. Through the breath of the Spirit that we received in the sacrament of Confirmation, we have answered that call.

Interiorly, we knew that such a life was all centred on God. We foresaw that in his hands we would belong to nobody else but to Him and Him alone. Our existence then had no meaning except through Him. All that was contained in seed at baptism, we decided to make it a “sign,” a “witnessing” in front of the world, so that the world may see the infinite Love of the God of the Covenant.

Little by little, we have discovered that this vocation, which unites closely the love of God alone and the service to the “little ones” we meet by the roadside – for us, in education – has transformed our lives into an “existence for the Other,” and an “existence for the others.” We did not become Brothers to benefit by the advantages we can derive from it. On the contrary, such a choice would rapidly turn out to be an impasse: our lives are for others, totally, radically.

When an identity crisis comes up – and it always ends up coming up – this question becomes important to us : “Is your life really for others, or did you, after the enthusiasm of youth, take it back to think only about yourself, to serve yourself in priority while forgetting the reason why you became a Brother ?”

## 2. *LOOKING CLOSELY AT OUR LIFE BY THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.*

Happy the Brother who knows how to take time to reread regularly his life! Happy the one who, every day, finds time to see how God makes Himself present to him and how he himself is present to God and to his brothers, especially to the “little ones” among them. It is important indeed to “*look into oneself regularly, in the light of the Word of God*”, wrote Pope John-Paul. (VC 85)

Without insisting too much on this spiritual exercise, it is convenient to look into our practice of it: have we truly taken that decision to do some life examination, 'Lectio Vitae', every day? Such a practice is conducive to a better discernment of the Spirit's work in our life. It helps us see better what we have to do to become true disciples. It helps us grow in truth, thus avoid illusion and free ourselves from impressions that lead to discouragement.

We cannot hope for a personal conversion without a lucid look on oneself. Only the person able to stop and contemplate the Spirit at work in his life can get to conversion. Then our life will be wholly evangelized, because we have decided to do what God wants us to do. One morning of 1942, Etty Hillesum wrote: “*I am going to help you my God not to fade within me, but I cannot guarantee it!*”

We are facing a very important task, a task that demands an authentic love for the only Truth, Truth who can open up our hearts to divine joy. The call to be Gospel in action, to be images of Jesus, binds our good will. St Paul gave us an example of that: “*Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead*” (Phil 3:13). And what is the goal ahead? It is to run, “*to continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:14). These words express well our life project, don't they? Because we will be “prophets”, “signs” of that radical choice, we will be able to awaken in others who will meet us that same inner dynamism. Only then shall we be true evangelizers.

Let us take this call seriously. Let us accept to examine our life by the light of God's Word each day. In that way, the vivid light of the Risen Lord will dispel the darkness that veils our eyes, and wake up our sleeping hearts and minds. Let us also remind ourselves that we always find "an important assistance in the humble and confident resort to spiritual direction, through which a person is helped to respond generously to the motions of the Spirit of the Lord and is able to walk with more determination on the way to holiness" (VC 96). Spiritual accompaniment and daily rereading of life go well together and are both essential means for growth in our vocation to holiness.

### 3. *WHAT I HAVE, I GIVE TO YOU.*

If we keep in ourselves the preoccupation of giving a true life witnessing, we will grow in holiness, and then we will feel the task of proclaiming the Gospel as a necessity. We will do it as one brings good news that leads to freedom. For that, we have an excellent model in the person of the apostle Peter, who said with confidence to the lame man sitting at the Beautiful-Gate, "*I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have, I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!*" (Act 3: 6). The person, who carries within himself that Good News like a treasure, is moved by the same feelings that were in Christ Jesus. Through him, that person can accomplish "miracles of the spiritual order," that Jean-Marie was promising to his Brothers in favour of their students. It is through our witnessing that the Gospel can achieve miracles!

Consecrated life is called to "*offer a spiritual therapy to mankind,*" as Vita Consecrata says (VC 87). What Peter did for the lame man at the Temple of Jerusalem, we can also do it for the young people and adults to whom the Lord is sending us. Each one of us in his own particular way, according to the gift of the Spirit he has received, is called to propose a way to healing. This is why, following Jean-Marie de la Mennais, we like to say that our schools

are temples as well as hospitals. By the power of the Spirit of Jesus who lives in these temples that are our classrooms and sport fields, the hearts, minds and bodies of the young people are visited by the light of that life-giving power of God.

We do not want to hide that light under the bushel, nor let the salt become insipid: we would sin out of negligence and fear! We would have received a gift to pass on to the poor from the Great Master who called us, and we would have kept it for ourselves, through levity or too much timidity!

Brothers, let us chase any thought of fear from within us. Let us rather be aware of the richness of this Truth who is living within us, who will reveal Himself to us insofar as we accept to give Him to others. Let us get rid of all false “good reasons”, which prevent that Light becoming visible to the greatest number, that it may enlighten “*those who are in the house*”, meaning “*those who have eyes to see*”. Let us be signs, not by our ideas or those of our friends, but by those of the Lord Jesus and only Him. Let us be signs of God Alone. Only then will we be effective agents of that new evangelization that the Spirit desires for his Church.

Let us also entrust ourselves to Mary: that through the grace of her presence and of her motherhood, she may help us be nourished “*from the wellspring of a sound and deep spirituality.*” (VC 93)

## SECOND PART

### **PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL: A NECESSITY.**

In several of our countries, it seems that the Gospel does not have much impact on the youth. That is at least what is felt. Maybe this is due to the societies in which they are brought up. Some educators were talking to me recently about the young persons they meet in their educational institutions. Many of them, they said, are disoriented, without bearings. They approach an adult with a great need for recognition and acceptance as they are. They have high expectations from him, hoping to find in him a solid rock which will anchor them, capable of confronting them clearly if necessary, and able to give them landmarks that will help them grow to adulthood.

These young people – who either let themselves be accompanied easily or harbour an armour of irony or of violence that hide their inner confusion – hope to find in the adults before them persons more prone to encouragement than blame, persons capable of saying “no,” never under the influence of fatigue but with the concern for education. *“Yesterday I got a letter from a child whom I*

*had scolded the previous day... It was a letter of thanks,”* confided to me a priest who is working with street children in Manila<sup>3</sup>. True educators know well that what is important and decisive is to love the youth and look at them with eyes of faith and of hope.

### *1. A CHURCH THAT EVANGELIZES.*

To the oldest among us, it was suggested in the past, to keep alive the Christian practices they had inherited, practices which transmitted the faith received from the Church. Today we have before our eyes new scenery: young people who very often, as a sociologist said, are “*heirs without inheritance.*” They are generally children of indifferent or non-believing families, or even members of other religions.

In many of our countries, we notice also that the family, the parish or the school is no longer a place for “socialization” of Christian education. The young who live Christian experiences are found mostly among their friends or in movements or currents that give stronger social identity and allow them to express their faith more easily.

Faced with these realities, we ask ourselves what we can still do, as religious educators, committed to education: how can we initiate, together with the other pastoral agents of our parishes and dioceses, a new evangelization? What is now the place for our own charism that seeks to offer a style of education based on the Gospel to all young people and to their whole persons?

We believe that the school is and will remain a privileged place where all the dimensions of the person can be developed allowing the youth to prepare for their adult life on the solid bases founded on Christ. We cannot admit that the school scene where youths receive their needed instruction and education be estranged

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<sup>3</sup> *Matthieu Dauchez, Mendicants d'amour, à l'école des enfants de Manille, Ed Ariège, 2011. P. 29*

from what makes up the heart of our existence as man and woman: their being children of the Creating and Saving God, brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, called to life and to love without end.

But for that, new paths have to be taken. The family, the parish, the school and all other life networks of young Christians must work together to build the Church of tomorrow, that Church that we cannot yet define.

Already in many of our Provinces or Vice-provinces, new initiatives are taken to give adolescents, children and youth, the occasion to have a strong and deep Christian experience. Many of our Brothers and the Laity, who are at the origin of these “prodigies”, could tell us all about these “rebirths” they have witnessed. The Christ they meet makes them stand up.

## 2. *THE YOUTH, AGENTS OF THEIR OWN EVANGELIZATION*

As the Church just celebrated with splendour the beatification of John-Paul II, we have to recall the great movement of evangelization of the youth he launched through the World Youth Days. The one to be held in Madrid this year will confirm that, not only do the youth have a right to the Gospel, but that they are in the Church agents of their own evangelization.

This may be what we Brothers and Mennaisian associates have to rediscover: to evangelize youth is to elicit the impulse to become their own educators and evangelizers. They are not only the Church of tomorrow but also the Church of today. However, they will become so only if they see their elders evangelize by their lives and words. If we their elders are ashamed of the Gospel, where will they find the courage to be also witnesses of Christ?

### 3. COMMITTED TO THE WORLD OF YOUTH

*"At the very moment we are united to Christ by baptism, we are sent, according to the very logic of Christ himself, the One sent. Thus the Church is a reality not for herself but as sent to the world. That is how she takes on the following of Christ sent."*<sup>4</sup> We are called to be sent to the world, particularly to youth, in imitation of Christ. In us, it should be said, it is Christ given to them that youth must discover. Thus do we truly live our baptism and our religious consecration. We shall enter this dynamic of the new evangelization by being Christ given. If we do not withdraw within ourselves out of fear, that can lead us to martyrdom.

We shall take care, in the gift of ourselves, to go out to the poorest. The evangelization of the poor is one of the signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God in our world. Hence we open wide the doors of our schools to the poor. That is a matter of authenticity in the proclamation of the word of Jesus. Jean-Marie de la Mennais loved them above all. With like determination we must do all we can to assure them prime places among us.

Mennaisians, Brothers and the Laity in the Church, let us live with the young, listen to the cry of their hearts, perceive their thirst for infinite love, and let rise in us the calls of the Spirit, who sends us to proclaim to the world the Good News of Jesus.

Let us unite. Let us share these cries and calls we hear. Let us share the choices and initiatives we take in our various places of mission. Let us join our strengths and love these children and youth in the manner of Jesus, as Jean-Marie invites us to do today.

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<sup>4</sup> Mgr Albert Rouet, *I would like to tell you*, Bayard, p. 279

## THIRD PART

### - I -

<p><b>TO THE BROTHERS AND LAITY INVOLVED IN THE MISSION OF EDUCATION</b></p>
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I want to speak here to the Brothers of all ages, from the youngest to the oldest, to all those who have the grace of living their mission among the youth and children daily. I would like to encourage in their mission those who are listening to children and youth on the school ground or in any other place of school, those who every day teach them with love and patience, those who are in offices at the service of others, those who are assuming the various functions in school administration, finally those who in one way or another, are at the service of the mission in education. It is not the place here to

enter into too many details of school life: I would have to write a book for that, and many are already available and you can easily refer to them. I would simply like to remind you here a few basic dimensions of the beauty of your vocation of apostles to the youth.

### 1. *BEING A BROTHER SENT OUT ON A MISSION.*

We know well what our Rule of Life says: "*Between the religious status of the Brother and his mission of education, there is a fundamental unity and reciprocity of influence*" (D 107). Let us remember that the school is a temple where our vocation is expressed, where daily we can hear the call of the Lord and can answer that call: we are called for others, called to the service of children and youth.

And the way to live out your vocation is to live it as "*someone sent – a messenger*". You are continually called and sent, throughout the days, to the youth to be at their service: you are messengers of Christ by the testimony of your life.

### 2. *PRIESTS, PROPHETS AND KINGS.*

God has grasped and sent you: each of you is a "prophet" showing to the youth the way to life. They can thus rely on you to build up a future illuminated by hope.

You also have a "priesthood", a "ministry", which makes of your school, a place where the fruits of the Spirit can grow, where the atmosphere of the Gospel of God's mercy for his people can spread, a temple where the Eucharist is lived out as a prayer of thanksgiving and an offering of self out of love, a place where the Word that saves and in which God became man can be heard.

Each Brother is a builder of the Kingdom of God, sent by the One who has seen the misery of his people, to bring to the world of youth some peace and freedom. You are kings: kings who through

the grace of the Spirit exert your authority as a service. Humbly, you will “*touch with the hands of love those wounds which otherwise would be invitations to despair.*”<sup>5</sup>

### 3. *TOGETHER WITH THE YOUTH, OPEN NEW PATHS OF HOPE.*

For the youth, you are sentries of peace. You live the evangelical charity, like Christ, not in circumstances of fame or prestige, but rather in the humble daily encounters with youth and adults in your schools or education centres. Often, you do not live in penury, yet you live with young people who feel a great need to enter into a relationship of trust, on their path of life. Loving them can be done in the manner of St Paul: “*Love is patient, love renders service... love believes all, hopes all, bears all*” (I Cor 13: 4-7).

The vocation to the brotherhood means ‘to be given to the youth’, as I have mentioned. You are given in the manner of Jesus himself who encourages you through the mystery of his Eucharist. You are there among the young people only for them. We Brothers have no wife, no children. The children and youth of our schools are ours! They have been entrusted to us by God. Our view of them must always be one of love and trust. When we look at them and listen to them, it is like saying: ‘You are loved! Be confident, get up and walk’.

No young person should end up his encounter with you unchallenged to go beyond himself. Never should he feel judged by you. Every young person should discover that he or she is important in your eyes. Even when you have to punish, it is always with the intention of helping him or her, and that he or she must realize that. Your relationships with them should always be based on mutual trust: the young will have trust in you insofar as they discover that you yourself trust them.

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<sup>5</sup> Marguerite Léna, *Le passage de Témoin*, Parole et Silence, p. 239

#### 4. *BY FOLLOWING YOU, THEY FOLLOW CHRIST.*

Children and youth are observing you. In your schools, they learn by looking at how you live that mystery of being infinitely loved by Him. In the social context where “*many young people risk falling into a progressive spiritual decline because they are looking for superficial ideals and life perspectives which can only satisfy their material needs and requirements.*” (Benedict XVI), the view of the joy of living that you project is vital.

Children and young people listen to you. What is the weight of your words? I would like to say again that we are religious educators. However, I believe that we must also remember that we are also teaching Brothers. It is good for us to wear again that character. “*Teaching always means to give one’s attention, one’s whole attention, to a dual reality: to the signs we must give, and to the consciences we must awaken.*”<sup>6</sup> – “*It is through his teaching task as such that a teacher cooperates in the emergence of human freedom, and that from that most inviolable centre: the mind in its capacity to learn, discern, admire and choose.*”<sup>7</sup> The author goes on to say: “*It is through the task of teaching as such that a Christian teacher encounters the Word, can feel and adopt His action, facilitate His insertion in the world and touch hearts.*” This is indeed a very beautiful description of what the mission of teaching is, and it can only make us love that vocation, that “ministry”, as Fr. De la Mennais used to say: “*Sitting on your teaching chair, you speak in the name of Jesus Christ.*”<sup>8</sup>

The words of your mouth are “signs” of a renewed heart. Your schools will be temples only if you have in your own inner temple, the desire for the spiritual growth of your children and youth. While the young people who live more and more in a world which no longer speaks of God and lives as if He did not exist, we know in faith that the

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<sup>6</sup> Marguerite Léna, *Le passage de Témoin*, Parole et Silence, p. 52

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 53

<sup>8</sup> S VII 2326

Lord is still active in the secret of hearts. You must therefore watch out for in each young person like the sparks of life that are waiting to catch fire, the signs of the presence of the Incarnate Word.

5. *THE SCHOOL: A PLACE FOR A TRUE  
CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.*

The Rule of Life, which is the very expression of our charism, says: “*Education of the faith must be the major preoccupation of all the Brothers.*” (D 114) It adds that to reach that objective the witnessing of life and the setting of an evangelical climate of freedom and charity are necessary. It points out as a priority the explicit proclamation of the Incarnate Word. The Word of God indeed cannot be absent from the Mennaisian schools. In the environment where the development of the youth’s intelligence and affectivity takes place, where the stakes of their future are played, can we not propose also the One who identified Himself as “*the way, the truth and the life*”, the One who is the “*Light of the world?*”

In our institutions, it is good that young people will find places where they can experience prayer or interiority, and thus open themselves to true freedom. Our vocation of Brothers impels us to direct the youth towards these paths to freedom. In contact with us, they must learn how to prepare themselves to listen to the Spirit within. Our example must be eloquent in that field.

Here arises the question of schools in non-Christian environments. We know of situations in the Congregation where our schools receive more non-Christians than Christians. The Brothers and lay teachers who form in these schools true educational communities at the service of all the students, know how to respect their faith and convictions. They succeed in creating a Gospel climate which arouses the admiration of parents and children. They proclaim the Word of God, Word destined for all, primarily through the witnessing of their own lives more than through words. In these cases, with proper discernment and respect for all, they do not

hesitate to become more explicit in the integration of Christian values at the core of the education they offer. Sometimes even, their freely-given witness bears fruit through a freely made application for the catechuminate, while still in school or in later years.

In all these cases, the Brother must strive to be the image of the Incarnate Word. By the gift of his life and sometimes by his silence, he enables the Lord to enter the heart of children and reveal himself as he wants to. He is watchful for the signs which allow him at times to proclaim his Master and Lord in a more explicit way. He is convinced that “men today are more in need of witnesses than of masters, and when they follow masters, it is because their masters have become witnesses”, as wrote Paul VI.

#### 6. *ENTERING INTO THE "DIGITAL CULTURE".*

Without spending too much time on this matter which would deserve more development, I cannot avoid mentioning it when we speak of the proclamation of the Word. Already John-Paul II noticed some years ago that “*The new technologies were giving birth to a new culture.*” We know today that we have entered this digital culture, a culture that influences our way of living and relating to others. This represents a great challenge for the Church, notably in the field of education. We who are close to children must engage in it with confidence and discover all its potentialities.

On 4<sup>th</sup> May 2011, Mgr Celli, president of the Pontifical Council on Social Communications, made the following comment: “*We must ask ourselves in what measure we exercise pastoral work adapted to the digital world, with the reality of all these young people. Are we able to communicate and announce the Gospel in a digital culture?*”

The point here is to integrate the Gospel message by entering into dialog with this media world, and thus to touch the souls in search for God in this new culture. Our mission of educators and

teachers requires that we be able to face this challenge so as to use the language that can reach out to those who live in that new culture, essentially the youth of today.

7. *YOU YOURSELF, IMITATE THESE CHILDREN.*

Children and youth are your educators on your way to Christ, “*these children whom you must resemble, so that the Kingdom of heaven may belong to you*”<sup>9</sup>. For he who teaches must let himself be taught. He who announces the Word lets himself be touched by it. The one who educates is educated too. He learns to listen, love and serve unselfishly. He gives of himself without expecting any return.

Happy are the Brothers who are close to children and know how to discern the actions of the Lord within them. Happy are the Brothers who live with teenagers, attentive to their expectations and insecurities, humble and close at the same time, watching the growing plant that takes off with so many questions and a desire to live. Happy those Brothers who accompany the youth on their road of life, helping some, encouraging others, remaining always models of an adult life that is emerging little by little, witnesses of projects that see the day, of calls that open new horizons.

Happy those Brothers who have the opportunity to listen to a young person willing to share his desire to be a priest, a Brother servant of other youths and other disciples of Christ, or again a committed lay person living the Mennaisian charism. Happy are they to discover in youth that seed of a life given at the service of others. Such life experiences bring to those who have them a new response to their own vocation, they are like children who let themselves be guided humbly, every day.

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<sup>9</sup> S VII 2334

8. *A COMMUNITY AT THE SERVICE OF THE MISSION OF EDUCATION.*

We receive the grace of community life as one that must bear fruit, a gift to beautify and offer to the youth, in the name of God. This is why we must also speak of a community at the service of the school, an educational community. Before even setting it up, it is given to us. It is convoked by God. This is equally true of the community that is the Congregation, as of the local community inserted in a school and forming with the lay members sharing the same mission an “educational community”.

Each Brother receives his mission and lives it so that it bears fruit, like a talent: not alone but in the Church. Brothers, you have the opportunity to signify that communion in the mission through the congregation that is sending you together. You also have the opportunity to live that mission with lay members who wish to share with you the dynamics of their baptism, as a new power in the task of education. *“The Church needs living members who bear witness and keep the essentials, as the Acts said: the breaking of the bread, prayer, teaching, charity... This is a vital experience, which is translated in the reality of life in an intelligent way, allowing them to communicate to others beauty, truth and the abundance of Christian life.”*<sup>10</sup>

Brothers, make it a priority to work for the unity of that community dedicated to education, a community in which the young people themselves will be invited to join. If they realize that both Brothers and lay associates are united at their service, they will not remain passive spectators. Among them, many will want to follow in the footsteps of their educators and teachers.

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<sup>10</sup> Cardinal Angelo Scola, Patriarch of Venice, in "La Croix", may 6th, 2011

### 9. *THE NEED FOR AN "INNER LIBERATION" (cf D 98)*

Even if you do not have the time, if many activities absorb us, you must always be ready to go to the desert, like Jesus at night. All the saints did the same thing. Jean-Marie de la Mennais and Gabriel Deshayes also knew the importance of that desert experience, so as to let the light of the Spirit penetrate them.

Those we admire and try to imitate most are precisely those who look beyond themselves, who do not always consider things only for their own benefit, but rather are open to others. That demands a true "asceticism," as our Rule of Life says, "*Inasmuch as the Brother works for that freedom, he becomes more capable of entering into the Lord's intimacy and giving of himself to others*" (D 96). "*Personal discipline of life is the road to inner freedom*" (D 98). It means here that it is not enough to fall back once in a while – our whole life must have moments of pause and breathing when we restore ourselves.

Thus, over the years, if you remain vigilant over your hearts, you will become more and more capable of integrating a true apostolic spirituality. In the heat of action, remembering that "*all apostolic works find in God their fruitfulness*" (D 104), you will let the Spirit's fire dwell in you and free within you new energies. You will not succumb to pessimism or discouragement. Rather you will see hope blossoming in a seemingly dry and sterile land. You will see the dawning light of the Spirit where others only see darkness.

### 10. *THE IMPORTANCE OF ONGOING FORMATION*

Who is the serious teacher who does not evaluate himself every year by revising his class preparation, and regularly checking his teaching methods? Who cannot see that we cannot keep alive the flame in this service of youth without an ongoing effort for constant renewal? Nobody can maintain a strong desire to proclaim the living Word of God as a word destined to each person individually, if one is

not attentive to hear it every day in a new way. A Brother who lets himself be absorbed by his teaching duties must learn to find time to improve his mind, re-awaken his faith, and pray. Without that he will gradually lose the feeling of need of it.

From your first years as Brothers then, every day, alone or with confreres, you must find ways to nourish your heart and mind, in the light of the Spirit. Yes, read the Word of God attentively, study it, and assimilate books that can help you understand it better. Be faithful to the regular reception of the sacraments of Eucharist and Penance. Welcome a renewed presence of God in prayer and silence. Remember that the one who prays every day with his Brothers is a powerful witness to God before the young. These young people will acknowledge it and later on, will thank him for it. In prayer they will say, "Someone has helped me know you and love you, Lord. Please give him his reward".

- II -

<b>TO OUR AGED OR SICK BROTHERS.</b>
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I want to address here the Brothers who, because of their age or illness or a particular mission, are not able to assume the mission of effective presence to the youth. It is especially to them that I want to write these lines. It is not easy to speak of the mission of the Congregation or to hear about it when, for various reasons, we no longer have direct contact with the youth, but it has to be done.

It is by the grace of God that we have become Brothers, with the desire to teach and educate deeply anchored in our hearts. Many have lived out that mission with joy and enthusiasm. Then the time to leave that mission arrived, not necessarily because of government regulations forcing them to retire, but because age or health no longer allowed them to continue. Sometimes it is because another form of mission entrusted to some Brothers made it impossible to stay closer to the youth.

I would like to help these Brothers, if need be, to understand better the meaning of their participation in the mission of the Congregation to which they still belong.

*1. LOVING THE MISSION OF THE CONGREGATION,  
LOVING THE YOUTH*

Our gaze must reach higher and farther than our immediate daily life. At the level of the Congregation, in its present living reality and through the generations of Brothers who have lived since its foundation, we experience the communion of saints. Each Brother carries in him his Brothers and with them, the youth whose care the Congregation has entrusted to him.

The Spirit who called us in our younger years is still the same, calling us and sending us on a mission today. It is the same Spirit who has inspired the generous actions of so many Brothers, yesterday and today, in continuity with the founding spirit of our Institute. At every hour of our life, we have been invested with the mission of education and evangelization of youth and children.

I want to express here my prayer of thanksgiving, because I can certify that many Brothers I meet, presently aged or ill, are living their handicap while thinking of the Brothers, even of those they do not know. They love the Congregation, they want it to remain active, alive, missionary, committed to the service of the youth of our times. They love that new mission: they know that they can also contribute their own part, in perhaps a more hidden way, but no less fruitful.

I invite you, Brothers, to “sow generously” in your hearts the seeds of love for the youth of today, those you have the occasion to meet and those you may hear about. Love them with a fatherly heart, just as our Founders did. Picture how Fr. de la Mennais and Fr. Deshayes loved the children in their old age. Ask them in prayer for the grace to love these children of today with the same love as theirs, and the grace that these children may receive today the best possible

education. Pray that the Congregation may remain missionary and deeply committed to the cause of children and youth. You must believe that the younger Brothers working daily with children and youth do rely very much on your prayer and are in great need of your sustaining faith and fraternal love.

## 2. *LEARNING TO LET GO.*

One more step ahead has to be taken on the road of the Kingdom. In that sense, what I am writing now concerns all the Brothers. We all have to grow, with the right intention of doing all that the Lord wants, not what we would like to do. Often however, we learn through suffering and hardship that we can do nothing without God's help. We may have thought that we could achieve great things, even without God. It is quite a shock, in the first life crisis, and then later at the time of forced inactivity, to realize that we have not accomplished much! There comes a time of doubt and discouragement: Do we believe that God can realize great things in us? Do we believe that the Lord is simply inviting us to "let go," to leave everything to him, totally?

We are supposed to know these things, but when the time of trial comes, the feeling of uselessness overshadows our vision. We become blind; we no longer see the road on which we are walking.

Maybe as that priest involved with street children in Manila said previously, it is the awareness that "*our charity has become so full of ourselves and empty of God.*"<sup>11</sup> Have we forgotten that after all we are only "useless servants?" Do we want to impose on God how we wish to serve him? The Lord wants us to accept that He is the one taking charge of everything. "*God wants us to acknowledge our uselessness, to welcome it as in a hug, to embrace it, so that we leave some room for his grace. No doubt that notion of "useless*

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<sup>11</sup> Matthieu Dauchez, *Mendiants d'amour*, Artège, p. 102

*servant*” is one of the roots of the “night of faith” that the saints speak about.<sup>12</sup>

When I see elderly Brothers live their old age with joy, openness of heart, serenity and peace, I give thanks to God because I know that their life is fruitful. They radiate the joy of the Spirit living within them, they let the joy overflow. They offer humbly their limitations, without shouting from the rooftops, and their right hand not knowing what the left is doing. (cf. Mt 6: 3)

God does not ask efficiency, but rather faithfulness to him and love of him above all. He asks us also to love our brothers as He himself loves them. It is by love that we shall be judged. And to love our brothers in truth, we have to let go, to lose our fears and remain serenely in the hands of God. Only God can make our lives fruitful. May we let him to lead us when the night comes and the burden is too heavy. Let us love – quietly and strongly.

### 3. *TO HAVE THE SPIRIT OF A CHILD*

In a previous chapter I have mentioned that point, but it may be good to return to it here. These words of Jesus have inspired us all: "*Let the little children come to me. Do not prevent them, because the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like them*" (Mt 19:14). What does it mean, the “spirit of the child” that Fr de la Mennais wished us so much to acquire?

Let us consider children, their thirst for love, their capacity for admiration and enthusiasm, the joy they express so spontaneously, the forgetting of tears after being scolded, once they know they have been forgiven. Let us remember the joy of the Magi when they rediscovered the star, the joy of Zaccheus welcoming the Lord, that of Mary Magdalene when the Lord forgave her, that of the women at the resurrection, that of Jesus himself when seeing the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 102

work of the Father in the heart of the little ones. Is not our own joy similar?

*“Stay cheerful and arrange everything so as to assure that those who come to you experience that same joy which radiates from you, even when your heart is crushed by sufferings. Here is true holiness, more than all fasting or mortification”*, wrote Cardinal Van Thuan, former coadjutor Bishop of Saigon, imprisoned for thirty years. Hearing these words, we remember those of Jesus, *“Happy you who weep now, because you will find joy”* (Lk 6: 21).

A child knows also how to welcome sufferings and sickness. More than wishing them away, it awaits their transfiguration by God whose presence it is aware of more than we. A child, no doubt, can help us face the question of death, of ultimate trial, with the inner assurance that a Presence will transfigure it and give meaning to it. Let us read what a young person suffering from myopathy wrote: *“I believe that I have understood my sufferings now ..., it is my mission that the Lord Jesus has given me. And every day that comes, when I feel great pain, there is some good to be done, somewhere in the world. In fact, I must hold on, hold on till the end, like Him. That’s all.”*<sup>13</sup> Only a person with the heart of a child, a heart large like eternity, can hold such feelings. We understand why Jesus felt so great a joy in his heart: *“I thank you Lord, because you have hidden these things to the wise but revealed them to the little ones”* (Lk 10:21).

I would like here to invite all Brothers concerned in one way or another by these lines to discover that their own limitations make them true missionaries. Dare I say that the more useless they feel, the more fruitful they can be? It all depends on their capacity to become like children again, to admire the light of day and welcome daily life as an ever renewed gift from God.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 54

I would also like to ask you, Brothers, to pray for your confreres still engaged in missions. A simple exercise may facilitate it: you look at the list of personnel, and choose the name of a Brother you do not know, a Brother somewhere in another country, and then you pray for him. You sponsor him, somehow. Maybe you can even write to him and tell him, as Peter said to the lame man at the Temple, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you: my prayers and my fraternal friendship in Christ Jesus." That would be a beautiful way to live the mission, in communion with the whole Congregation.

The very best way would certainly be to ask for that grace through the intercession of our Mother in heaven:

*Holy Mary, Mother of God  
Keep in me the heart of a child  
Pure and clear as spring water.  
Give me a simple heart  
That does not enjoy sadness,  
A heart happy to give,  
Tender in compassion...  
Give me a humble and meek heart,  
A heart that no ingratitude will hurt,  
That no indifference will tire...*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> From a prayer of Léonce de Grandmaison, Jesuit, deceased in 1927

- III -

**TO YOUNG BROTHERS WITH TEMPORARY VOWS.**

I would like now to address this letter to you, Brothers with temporary vows. With you I would like to touch some points which all the brothers must pay attention to, particularly when they are living their first years in the mission.

These pages are for you, but I think that the other brothers too can benefit from them: we are never over with our formation. It is good, from time to time, to recall some aspects particularly worthy of our efforts to grow and improve. We know indeed that our path of growth is not straight or level. Sometimes we have setbacks, and we must resume our walking, after taking some time to know where we are on the map of life and what the objectives we have chosen are.

Brothers with temporary vows, you must learn how to evaluate your life and define clearly your growth objectives. Otherwise you run the high risk – many have failed it – to regress

and settle in an aimless life, and take bad habits that will make you lose sight of the desired objective.

In line with what the *Ratio Institutionis* says on this stage of formation, the following points are important reference marks to help you understand your own situation at this point. These pages also can be read on the occasion of a meeting or a session with an accompanying Brother. Frequent reading of these points will be quite beneficial to you and help you enter into a real growth dynamic. No doubt, these pages are limited in number and content, and cannot touch all the aspects of your ongoing formation; nevertheless they will hopefully help you.

### *1. MOVE OFF YOURSELF AS CENTRE*

I invite you, Brothers, during these first years of your religious life, to orient your will totally on what God wants for you. For that, you must learn to move off yourself as centre, avoiding always talking about yourself and your personal preferences. The reason is that to open oneself to God, one has to learn not to listen to oneself exclusively. This is the dynamic of going beyond oneself, a dynamic that can be acquired patiently, with renewed starts each time one has failed. It is a daily struggle, possible only if we truly know and esteem ourselves.

Learn to relativise your certitudes, avoid always defending your own point of view. That does not mean that you have to get rid of all your convictions on your commitment to religious life. Rather it means that you must learn little by little to confront what you have learned with the reality of what you live: knowing how to work with others, avoiding deciding by yourself alone, acknowledging that others may have different ideas or convictions and do not think like you, all that without losing or weakening your own faith and your determination to follow Jesus. This is the proper attitude to develop. Such an undertaking is demanding: you must become strong within yourself, relying on God's grace and personal prayer.

## 2. *BE FAITHFUL TO YOUR COMMITMENTS*

Some young Brothers shared with me recently their admiration for one of their young confreres. They particularly appreciated his great capacity to listen and the strength of his commitment in prayer as well as in the way of living his poverty, his availability to others and the clarity of his relationships. You must all start developing these attitudes: openness of mind, great capacity to forgive others and yourselves, firm resolve to remain faithful to your vows.

Another point also goes in the same way: the capacity to open yourself to God in life and in daily relationships; learning how to discover His presence and action, and use that to nourish your prayer. I notice how difficult it is, in many of our communities, to be present at prayer in the morning as well as in the evening. Brothers, do not let yourselves be influenced. Under no circumstance must you skip your half-hour meditation in the morning: if you do not do it at the onset of your religious life, your future fidelity will be in great danger. In the evening, you must find time to reread your day with the eyes of the Lord, see how God has been present to you throughout the day, how you yourself have been present to him, and what changes or conversions he is expecting from you. For that spiritual exercise, choose a specific time, during the time allotted to adoration or even better when you are alone, at your desk or in your room. It is up to each one to see what is more convenient.

I would like to emphasize the importance of the role of the local superior. He must make sure that his Brothers, all of them, honour the time allotted for communal prayer. Even though many communities respect it, too many others neglect the time for communal prayer. I invite each one to take on responsibility for this, and not hide behind reasons like 'lack of time'. If you really lack time, you must then alleviate your workload: God does not want you to break under too heavy a burden of daily work. He wants you to carry the burden he has entrusted to you, not the one you or others are imposing.

### *3. ACCEPT YOUR LIMITATIONS*

When you work with Brothers and lay colleagues, you have to learn how to own your mistakes, without rushing to conclusions on your supposed limitations. Know that you can always grow. Start with renewed confidence the training to develop a right relationship with youth. Do not get discouraged with the first failure, but accept your limitations and work serenely to overcome them. The Lord loves you as you are, and calls you to serve him with joy.

Many Brothers who were not so gifted for the work of education have yet achieved great success. They were loved and venerated for their availability, wisdom and patience. They were loving simply and humbly.

### *4. DISCOVER THAT NOTHING IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE LORD*

Being oneself entails accepting one's limitations, as I just said. In the experience of these first years, you will surely discover that you are not the person you dreamt of being. However be assured that you are loved by God as you are. He calls you by name, he knows you much better than you do yourself. He also knows your sins more than you do, and is always ready to stretch out his forgiving hands. Remember: it is not success that he expects from you but the gift of your person and total abandonment to his Providence.

You must admit that often you would rather free yourself from Providence, thinking that you are able to perform much without God. You are full of enthusiasm, but little by little you discover that the reality is quite different: the Brothers of your community are not what you thought they were; even the mission of education reveals aspects that are quite complex and disappointing. Then you are tempted to be dispirited, and you realize that you yourself are not performing as well as you thought you would. You fear to lose face.

This is the time, Brothers, when you have to rely on God more than on yourselves. God himself invites you to it. Do you hear him?

5. *KNOW WHAT TO DECIDE AND DO  
WHAT YOU HAVE DECIDED.*

Two attitudes must guide you: the first is confidence in God's Providence, in his ever-renewed call. The Lord never doubts about you, he always extends his trust; he wants you to achieve great things with you and through you. It is enough to accept and do what He wants: that desire must fill your prayer.

The second attitude is to do what you have decided. Always try to achieve what you have decided. Never make a declaration of intention without further follow-up, otherwise you will live in error, you will develop illusions about yourself and eventually lose confidence in yourself.

6. *SET UP A PERSONAL LIFE PROJECT*

The person who cannot discipline oneself is not able either to give of oneself. We cannot give what we do not have! If you live drifting along your moods, we will achieve nothing but illusion. This is not, and you know, what the Lord expects from you, nor will it help you give better service to the youth.

Each one must learn what good he can do and do it with a joyful heart. For that, you have to set up yourself a life project that will cover all the dimensions of your life: prayer, mission, various services, studies and readings, relaxation and rest, fraternal life etc. With simplicity show that project to your local Superior, your Provincial or Vice-Provincial or any other Brother in charge. That life project will help you avoid excessive activism. Rather you will strive to achieve success in what you have decided, without fear, anxiety or worry about the image you project.

### 7. *BE INTERESTED IN OTHERS*

Continue to develop the attitude of a true apostle: self-giving to Christ and presence with Him at the service of adults and youth.

You will know if you have an authentic spirit of service by the way you accept to lose time in the service of others, and first of all, of your own brothers, particularly those with whom you feel less sympathetic. If you only meet the confreres you feel more at ease with, “*Do not the pagans themselves do the same?*”(Mt 5: 47)

Get used to understanding others without judging them, to getting closer to them. Develop good communication channels with everyone: listen, respond, and dialog. Acknowledge the good others have done to you, show interest in what they do; ask questions instead of isolating yourself or talking always of your own business. Obviously use good judgment: wisdom lies in a just balance of life.

### 8. *BE AVAILABLE.*

Your first years of religious life must also form you to availability: be indifferent whether you are assigned to this community or to another, if the Superior asks you to move. Go joyfully where the Superior sends you. Do not show any regrets or sorrows. Avoid planning your own career, otherwise you will have many disappointments and be on the wrong track. The main quality to develop as a young Brother is availability: a Brother must not ask or claim things for himself, on the contrary, he must put his entire trust in the One to whom he has consecrated his life.

### 9. *BE CONCERNED FOR THE YOUTH*

Brothers, remain close to the young: it is they who will fill up your life; it is for them that you went for studies, that you now prepare your classes instead of wasting time watching TV or playing on the internet. Your preoccupation, your interest must always be to

discover the young people's legitimate expectations and how to respond to them. You are responsible for their formation before the Lord. Do not be content with giving only a few classes; rather spend more time with them, and with other lay teachers and youth; find ways to help them grow as humans and as Christians. Accompany them in various Church movements. Live the mission you have received with an ecclesial sense, in relation with other vocations in the Church.

#### *10. IN THE MENNAISIAN FAMILY*

The first persons with whom you will live in communion are the Brothers of your own community. After that come the lay colleagues working with you in education, evangelization and human formation of children and youth. It is your responsibility, together with other brothers of your community, to build up a strong and solid communion with them, in a spirit of common mission that we have received from the congregation. Be attentive to make yours the mission of the Institute, by developing attitudes that will help you in that sense. Make your priority the pastoral objectives the Province is proposing to you.

A young Brother today must not ignore the importance of building up an educational community in shared mission with the Laity. It is a calling from the Lord at this time, and we must respond to it in various ways, according to our different cultures and countries. However everywhere in the Church, we are in need of such communion, in need of mutual support of all vocations, in the respect of everyone's journey. A young Brother must be an ardent promoter of that spirit of shared mission.

Needless to say, the young Brother, helped by the example and support of his elders, must be attentive to the clarity of his relationships. No one should overestimate his strength. Relationships with the laity must on the contrary strengthen our determination and

joy of being a Brother. If they discourage us, then they are not properly lived in clarity and honesty.

*11. TAKE THE NECESSARY STEPS  
FOR YOUR ONGOING FORMATION*

*a. A community united and fraternal.*

The community is, for all the Brothers and in particular for the young ones, a place of growth and life. I give thanks to the Superiors of many local communities, who are careful to fill up that mission. The role of the local Superior is quite important, though it has also its limitations. The local Superior must fulfil his responsibility while relying on God's grace that will surely guide and accompany him.

It is desirable that the young Brother find in his community a place where all pray together, morning and evening, where the confreres gather regularly to share and see how they can better live their mission, where people are happy to be together, a place where they can relax together and find mutual support.

You may feel, day after day, the tension that will always exist between charism, structures and institutions. Structures are only means but they are important to sustain life and facilitate commitment at the service of youth. Brothers, take care to unite within yourselves and among the community, consecration with mission.

The community must be a help and support for apostolic commitment. Nothing helps a young Brother more than belonging to a community that lives fully its vocation and mission. I want to emphasize here the important role of each Brother in the community with regards to the young Brothers. God will bless the community if all its members unite and gather together to listen to Him.

*b. Personal spiritual accompaniment.*

This accompaniment is imperative. Young Brothers preparing for your perpetual vows, you cannot do without it. It would be a great mistake if you thought so. It is up to you, with the help of your Provincial or Vice-Provincial, to find a spiritual companion, a capable person with whom you may candidly share your life. Today we cannot be Brothers and blossom in our vocation without such help. I thank the major Superiors for their efforts to find appropriate solutions for young Brothers to have a wise person for their spiritual accompaniment.

*c. Sacramental life.*

I cannot conclude without adding a short word on the importance of the Eucharist. The desire to consecrate one's life to God by one's own strength is impossible. We all need Jesus power for that: only He was able to offer his own life for our salvation. He calls us to follow him in the same way. We can imitate him only by the power of his grace. It is by nourishing us with his Body that we can receive the needed inner strength to lead us up to martyrdom. I insist, Brothers, that together with the other members of your community, you seek solutions to facilitate your participation at the Lord's Table where He gives of himself as food.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation also is of first importance in the life of a Brother. It is said that Blessed John-Paul II confessed every week. This is beyond us, yet this sacrament helps us be what we really are: loved sinners, forgiven, redeemed. Without it, bit by bit, we would lose the sense of sin, and proceed into illusion. Open our eyes, and see the reality about you. Do not neglect going regularly to that sacrament of mercy.

To assist that, the re-reading of life that I mentioned above, is indispensable. Do not neglect it.

*d. Spiritual reading.*

From the very first months of your apostolic work, you must devote regular time to reading. If you do not find helpful books, talk about it to your Provincial or Vice-Provincial, who will help you find some. This reading must not be distracted but rather a slow rumination in which you should write the words that give sense to your life and can nourish your apostolic action.

These readings will help you ever to seek God, know Christ and his will for you, take stock of your faith in a world that ignores Him. About what spiritual reading should be, I share with you what a great theologian said: *“Each one will affirm that he can understand at first sight the meaning of such words as love, fidelity, patience, etc. However each must admit that the only one who can effectively understand these words is he who goes over his life experiences slowly and patiently while reading them, always turning the ear towards his own life.”*<sup>15</sup>

Develop also a better knowledge of the Mennaisian spirituality in order to live it better. You have many books at your disposal for that. Re-read them, study them, discover what the Spirit tells you deep down, and how to live your own life today, your own following of Jesus, in the manner of Jean-Marie de la Mennais.

This stage of formation is an important one and can also foster enthusiasm. It is necessary and should affirm one’s vocation and reveal how meaningful it is in the Church and the world of today. Every young Brother must do his best in it and not let himself be led down the gentle slope that could rob him of the meaning of his calling and commitment.

*e. Mary, an attentive Mother.*

Brothers, do not forget to pray Mary every day. Do not neglect the recitation of the rosary: it is the prayer of the humble of

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<sup>15</sup> Karl Rahner, *Loving Jesus*, coll. Jesus and Jesus Christ, Mame-Desclée, p. 11

heart, the prayer you can recite in all simplicity. Fr. de la Mennais used to recommend it to his Brothers. If you pray Mary, be assured that she will not let you down. Her motherly hand is so soft yet firm to guide you. Put all your trust in her.

- IV -

**TO THE YOUNG MEN IN FORMATION.**

I am happy now to address these lines to the youngest in our Institute, to those who, as Postulants, Novices or Scholastics, want to walk on their life journey together with other Brothers.

In the name of all the Brothers of the Institute, I would like to tell you that we welcome you with joy and thanksgiving. Your present commitment means that you have in your hearts the desire to become companions following Jesus. We are really in the same family. It is the same Spirit who animates us.

I do not intend to tell you what you must do during these years of formation; your Formators are close to you for that very purpose. I only want to underline some dimensions of your life, to encourage you in your desire to become Brothers as the Lord wants it for the youth of tomorrow.

*1. PRECIOUS YEARS.*

These years of initial formation are very precious, as you know. What you receive during these years, you will never find again in the same way later. Thus you must profit by all that is offered to you: it is like living water poured down abundantly. Take a good stock of it, for the periods of drought later on.

What you give now is also unique: it is your whole being that you are called to give. You are learning to give up everything that might impede your walk towards God. You are in a house of formation, together with other companions, for a single objective: to give everything to the Lord, to keep nothing for yourself. Henceforth do not refuse anything to the Lord. As soon as you discern, with the help of the Brother in-charge of you what the Lord expects from you, be it a specific aspect of your life that you still have to give up, do not hesitate: do it right away. Give all of yourself without return.

*2. LOOK AT JEAN-MARIE DE LA MENNAIS  
AND GABRIEL DESHAYES.*

Grow in your knowledge of our Founders, listen to the advice Jean-Marie gives you. You have many books for that. Maybe when reading the Founder's writings you are confused by the style of writing, which is of another time. But the content is always up-to-date. Nourish yourself of these texts: they will help you in your fidelity following Jesus in truth.

Pray to our Founders too, especially Fr. De la Mennais, who accompanied the young Brothers during his whole life and passed on to them his burning love for God and for youth. Speak to him as to a father, a friend. Near God he will intercede for you and bring you the precious help of his prayer. Stand before him as children. Love him and follow his guidance.

### *3. DEEPEN YOUR FAITH.*

In order to achieve the gift of yourself to God, you have to open your heart to his mystery. For that purpose the Lord offers you every day his Word of Life. Learn to listen to it with great attention, helped by the discrete words the Spirit murmurs in your hearts, words that can brighten your hearts and bring in you an abundance of his gifts.

The objective of the teachings you are receiving now is not for you to get a diploma. If a diploma is indeed given to you at the end of the Scholasticate, it is not so important: it will allow you to serve better. But it is not that diploma that will attest to your inner determination to always grow in a confident and loving faith. It is now that you have to base your life on faith, a faith that you have approached with your intelligence, and that you have truly understood in the depth of your heart. Form yourself: train your heart in the love of truth; shape your intelligence and open it to the lights of God through his divine Words and the teachings of your Brothers. It is truth that makes you free. And truth is in God. He alone can teach you what truth is: listen to him in his divine Word.

Learn also to keep integrity in your behaviour, not to hide yourself, not to lead a double life. Do not worry about what others may think of you; care only about what the Lord thinks of you. And we know that he has thoughts of peace: You are loved by the Lord just as you are. Throw yourselves into his merciful arms.

### *4. LEARN TO DISCERN THE WILL OF GOD FOR YOU.*

If you find yourself now in a house of formation, it is because of your positive answer to a call. With the help of a spiritual companion, learn to discern what this call is, and then, to respond with enthusiasm and peace of heart, walk on the path of life that the Lord proposes to you. True freedom you will find by doing what God wants you to do; it is in obedience to him that you will become free.

The happiest Brothers I know are those who, through obedience, accept to do all that the Lord invites them to do for him. By contrast, the Brothers who fear and do not wish to be led show a shut countenance, but it is mainly their heart that is shut to grace. During these years of initial formation, discover the beauty of simple, right, free and total obedience. Make that radical choice of life: you will then reach true happiness.

The Brother in charge of accompanying you will help you discern that call of God. Open your heart to him without fear, then light will pour in, and follow you, bringing within you a great peace and inner vigour that will radiate to others.

#### *5. LEARN TO LIVE WITH THE BROTHERS.*

One of the most basic dimensions of your vocation is precisely to 'be a Brother.' We are Brothers for Jesus, through his grace. We are also Brothers for our confreres. It is easy to say that we love others and that we are their servants. But the reality of community life will verify the authenticity of this affirmation, then you will know if it is true or not. The community of the house of formation to which you belong is a good school to train you for your future community life.

We will be judged by others on our capacity to love one another. It is through our love for one another that we will reveal to youth the true face of Jesus. I am convinced of that: it is our fraternal love that is the most authentic sign of the presence of Jesus in a community. It is through witnessing fraternal love that young people are challenged to imitate us and join us.

Do not neglect that basic dimension of your vocation. Learn how to rejoice at the joy of others, to be sad at their sorrows, to carry out common projects with them, to forgive the one who has offended you without delay, to avoid keeping a grudge or dreaming of revenge. You will be judged according to your love.

*6. BE ANIMATED BY AN APOSTOLIC SPIRITUALITY.*

God came to save his people. He looks down upon the poor to raise them up. We gaze on him, contemplate him in his works of mercy. An apostolic spirituality is precisely the joyful fervour of a heart open to the saving love of the Father for his children. A Christian heart is an apostolic heart, it is a heart transformed by love and ready to spread that love to the whole world, in particular to the little ones. Putting its faith in God's Providence, such a heart becomes also providence for others: an apostolic heart is a heart which loves in the same manner as Jesus did.

In an apostolic heart there burns a great desire to do good. As Fr. de la Mennais himself said, the Brothers are sent out to imitate Jesus in doing good: healing and teaching. You too will do the same; there lies the sense of your life. During these years of preparation, learn to serve and not to be served, try to do good and avoid evil. Help others to open up to love and goodness. Do not expect anything for yourself: all will be given on to you.

*7. PREPARE YOURSELVES TO BE EDUCATORS  
OF THE YOUTH.*

One reason why you have opted for the vocation of brotherhood is surely because you love children, you want to help them and prepare them for the future, and guide them to open their hearts to the Lord. Such feelings must indeed remain always in the hearts of all brothers.

Even now pray for the young that the Lord will later entrust to you, pray that through you they may discover the love of God for them. Dispose your heart to go out to them, with your Brothers: it is not your work alone but the work of the whole community. Foster in yourself the desire to proclaim the God of Jesus to the young people and children, so that they may discover through your free and generous words that they too may have faith in that saving Word.

8. *AND PRAY THE VIRGIN MARY.*

Mary is a mother for you, a mother who holds your hand and guides you on the way of an unconditional Yes to God. She is the person to whom you can entrust everything. She is also your model: she never hesitated to put her total trust in the Lord. Already in her heart the Spirit had put a clear and straight will totally given to God. Her life was one entirely led by the Lord. Sin never came to darken her heart. In her there was only one single Yes to the will of God, expressed in all the moments of her life.

Try to imitate her, Brothers, try to give yourselves to Jesus just as she did. Pray to her and ask for her help to pronounce the 'yes' of your first vows, and pray that yes may become the final 'yes' of a life total given to God. Like Mary, repeat that 'Yes' at every moment.

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<b>TO THE MENNAISIAN LAITY</b>
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I address these lines to you, dear members of the Mennaisian Family. I am well aware of the diversity of your journeys and of your commitment to the congregation and to the brothers. Still I am happy to say a few words to you within the frame of this circular, conscious of the close link that unites us all as members of the same Mennaisian Family.

The communion between us is so strong that we need each other now to keep on growing. We could not respond to the Lord's call today if we were to ignore one sector of the great Family we make up.

This is why, in our preparation for the coming 2012 General Chapter, we must be conscious of the steps we still have to take, each in his or her own vocation, and in communion of response to the Call of the Lord.

### 1. A CALL, AN APPEAL.

When I hear or read some of the texts you have written in the La Mennais Magazine, what I admire most is the importance you attach to the call you have received, a call coming very often from Christ. You express it clearly: "I want to live in the same manner as Christ and follow him."<sup>16</sup> It is for you a path that brings you to your baptism and shows you there the grace that transforms you, your configuration with Christ. In fact, at the heart of the Mennaisian Family, you live your membership to a greater community, which is the Church; people of God walking on the roads of men.

You have felt called by the Lord and you have come. "*I went to see, and I discovered the spirituality of Fr. de la Mennais, and it thrilled me.*"<sup>17</sup> You have received, and little by little, you discover also that you will have to give back. But you know that you will not do it alone: "*Alone, it is very difficult, but together as a group, we become a great force.*"<sup>18</sup>

### 2. A CHARISM, GIVEN BY GOD, LIVED WITH THE BROTHERS<sup>19</sup>

Our schools have a history. It all started with an inspiration, the gift of the Spirit given to our Founders. The first Brothers and those who follow them, helped even then by the Laity, imparted a specific colour by the grace of the Lord. At present, we welcome that heritage as it has been transmitted; we carry it with the same spiritual inspiration and the same pedagogical project.

Together, Brothers and Laity, we assume the Mennaisian charism. It is for us an original and unique way of contributing to the evangelization of youth through education. "*It is not so much a*

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<sup>16</sup> La Mennais Magazine, Special issue on the Mennaisian Family, p. 20

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 27

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 28

<sup>19</sup> Marguerite Léna, *The passage of a witness*, Parole et Silence, p. 227

*deposit to keep jealously as rather a grace to foster, with all that it entails in terms of adaptation to new circumstances and creation of new approaches. The inspiration is, like the soul in the body, a principle of guidance, of unity and of growth. As we have never finished breathing, except at the time of death, likewise we have never totally exhausted an inspiration”.*<sup>20</sup>

With you, Mennaisian Laity, we the Brothers must start working hard. Together, we shall live that inspiration by which our common soul wants to breathe.

### 3. NOT FOR MYSELF BUT FOR EVANGELIZATION

You live the experience of the Mennaisian charism – a gift of the Spirit to persons – to enable you to serve those the Lord wants to touch with his merciful hand. Through the grace of God, you have been called to be that hand of Christ that blesses the children; his eyes which see the inner light that shines within them; his word which consoles and provokes love, and his arms which support those in hardship. And little by little, a new power allows you to go further, to witness without any fear, to give to others all that you have and are, including your limitations; in all simplicity and trust. “*My relationship with others has helped me grow. May we let the Spirit grow in us.*”<sup>21</sup> And also, “*I got the confirmation of what I was looking for: a place where we can work together with youth, with the help of a community. ... It is a whole new understanding of what my mission is.*”

### 4. REVIVE YOUR BAPTISMAL CONSECRATION

Today, to be Christians, we need the sign of a living fraternal community, the sign of a Gospel vision that unifies and brings peace.

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<sup>20</sup> Marguerite Léna, *The passage of a witness*, Parole et Silence, p. 227

<sup>21</sup> La Mennais Magazine, Special issue on the Mennaisian Family, p. 30

This is what the text for the preparation of the Synod on new evangelization is telling us in other words: “*The new evangelization becomes a sort of encouragement that many of our tired-out communities are in great need of, to rediscover the joy of Christian experience.*”<sup>22</sup>. To be a disciple of Jesus is really totally relevant: the world needs this call to hope. Young people in particular expect adults that are among them elder brothers and sisters who, having found the pearl of great price, feel compelled to show it to every passer-by and share their great joy with them. God has come among us to share his best: his own life. Is this not a source of joy and hope? We are witnesses of it! « *There are people waiting: youth, families,* » you are saying. Yes they are waiting for us, and what we must tell them is that they are loved by God, and that if they wish, they can also build their future on that same faith of which we are the happy witnesses.

##### 5. ENTERING INTO PRAYER.

Each baptized Christian needs authentic prayer, otherwise faith will languish. Prayer enters us into a personal relationship with the Father, with Jesus, and with the Spirit. Jesus himself taught us how to pray. I remember the moments of organized prayer I had with young people, in a summer camp. Many of them were not quite used to prayer. The only prayer they could say was, “*Lord, teach me how to pray.*” Then a great silence fell on the group, because all of a sudden, the whole group felt united around that truth that concerns us all: we do not know how to pray.

I invite you to repeat that same prayer to the Lord, alone, with your family or in community: “*Lord, teach us how to pray.*” Then listen to his Word, attentively, with great inner trust in the Spirit speaking to you and teaching you who the Father is, who Jesus is, and who your brothers to be served are.

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<sup>22</sup> New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith, n° 6

## 6. *BEING MISSIONARIES.*

The challenges are not lacking for those who do not close their eyes and, together in community, want to participate in the reconstruction of a new world with the “little flower” of hope at heart.

You are called to find a new energy to bring out the question of God in your place of life and work, notably in schools, privileged places to live out our charism. That question probably concerns more the Western countries. You must work at making the Gospel reach out to all the youth in our educational institutions. The formation you want to bring in schools is an education and instruction inspired by Christ, teacher and educator. This is the main concern you must converse about: how can we, with the Brothers, open the hearts of our young people to the light of the Gospel as Good News that can completely change their view of themselves and of the world, their present and future life?

Engrave God in the core of your lives, in a dynamic of evangelization. Whatever your family, your place of work or your task in education may be, you must also ask yourself how the Gospel can inspire even more your life and behaviour. How can you be witnesses to that Jesus whose image you want to become? How can you let go of yourself and be led and transformed by his Spirit? You cannot answer these questions alone. Fortunately we have the grace of a family capable of helping us discern together and make the choices that are imperative. The sharing of the Word of God, reflection on the example and spiritual guidance of Jean-Marie de la Mennais, are elements which will progressively let the light of Christ penetrate deeply within us and make in us the changes He desires.

## CONCLUSION

Having written all these pages, I want to yield the floor to our Venerable Father. He alone can speak to us, his children, with words that really come from God and can reach our receptive hearts. May his words “awaken us from our sleep” and help us stand up as “humble brothers” willing to act as saviours of little children. I hope each of you will listen and live in conformity with that great ideal Jean-Marie is proposing to us.

*“Ah! Never forget that your vocation is beautiful, is holy... Your ministry is sublime, is divine... Your school is a temple where you perform the most sublime function of priesthood, that of teaching... Sitting on your chair (in the classroom), you are speaking in the name of Christ, we are there on his behalf.”*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jean-Marie de la Mennais, Sermon VII 2326

*"Sublime vocation! It is the vocation of Jesus Christ himself. He left the bosom of his Father in heaven only to do what you yourselves are about to do, at his example.... You also will make miracles in the spiritual order."*<sup>24</sup>

*"In these schools, we want to form the whole person, his heart as well as his mind."*<sup>25</sup>

We are about to close the *'Jean-Marie de la Mennais Year.'* We heard again his invitation to *sow generously.* We are on our way to the General Chapter, which, in the name of Jesus Christ, will challenge us in our commitment to a better service to youth. With united hearts, let us put all our strength and love at the service of so beautiful a mission. Perhaps then we will be able to answer that question we were asking ourselves at the beginning of this Circular: *"That Word, who will proclaim it?"* I dare hope that the response will be as generous today as when Fr. de la Mennais asked the Brothers for volunteers for the mission of evangelization in faraway countries.

*Father, you are sending us today to the heart of the world,  
Brothers and members of the Mennaisian Family,  
To proclaim to children and youth  
The Good News of your love.*

*Pour on us the light and power of your Spirit.  
May the compassion that shone in your eyes  
When you blessed the little ones  
Inspire in us today  
The desire to be like you.*

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Sermon VII 2237

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Sermon II 796

*Attentive to the pressing invitation of the Church  
For a new evangelization  
We want to listen attentively to your calls  
And commit ourselves boldly  
To make the Gospel proclaimed to the poor  
And that the bread of instruction be distributed  
To the children and youth.<sup>26</sup>*

Brother Yannick Houssay  
Superior General

June 12, 2011. On the Feast of Pentecost.

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<sup>26</sup> From the prayer for the 2012 General Chapter.

