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Settlement of new Orders and Congregations in Brazil

At present Brazil is attracking the special attention of Catholics all over the world, with the happy result that the stream of Orders and Congregations settling in this country increases perceptibly. Experience, however, has taught us, that the settlement of a religious institute in a country on the other side of the world is often quite a risky undertaking attended with all sorts of difficulties.

To meet these difficulties the Federation of Religious Orders in Brazil (Conferência dos Religiosos do Brasil; C.R.B.) has created a special service for orders and congregations settling in this country, and has drawn up a plan by which these difficulties will be reduced to a minimum.

Before submitting this plan to Orders and Congregations we think it a good idea first to give an exposition of the reasons why Brazil deserves their special attention and then to give an outline of the organisation and activities of the Federation.

I. The position of Latin America and particularly Brazil in the Catholic world to-day

Latin America, which comprises South and Central America as well as Mexico, holds an exceptional position in the Catholic world to-day.

Colonised from the sixteenth century onwards and evangelised by the catholic „Great Powers" of the time, Spain and Portugal, Latin America has grown into the largest homogeneous catholic world-block, which at present makes up one third of all the Catholics of the world and will soon - especially owing to its very high birth-rate - form more than one half of it.

Neither Spain nor Portugal, however, have proved capable of christianizing this vast continent and of establishing a normally vital Church here. When in the last century the population of Latin America began to grow alarmingly, the Church failed to increase the number of missionaries necessary to keep up with this growth. This caused the shortage of priests and religious which has become proverbial. This is the main cause of the fact that the Church is still unable to make her presence sufficiently felt in our time, with the result that the deepening of faith and religious practice in this vast country show alarming gaps. That is why Latin America is the largest territory within the Church in need of spiritual help: it follows that Brazil, which geographically and in population comprises a third of this territory, suffers from the same disease and hence causes the same anxiety.

As a territory in need of spiritual help Latin America depends on the Catholic world for personnel: priests, brothers, sisters. If the Catholics elsewhere in the world do not succeed in rendering this help on a large scale and quickly, it is to be feared that this largest homogeneous catholic block will be lost to the Church. If, however, they do succeed, it is to be expected that within a comparatively short time Catholicism

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in Latin America will be vitalised to such an extent that it will be on a level with world-catholicism.

There is, however, more to it. Latin America, more than any mission among heathens, deserves the interest of the catholic world. For we think it theologically indisputable, that it is our first duty not to win over to the Church territories still pagan, but to preserve for her territories already catholic.
The latter, as a rule will be more easily accomplished than the former. This seems at least to hold good for Latin America, because in spite of all the gaps and shortcomings, catholicism is deeply rooted in this people, and because its proverbial religious sense, which is as strong as a primitive instinct, is so naturally inclined towards Catholicism, that a protestant missionary of Latin America declared at an interconfessional conference recently held at Geneva, that if the Catholic Church succeeds in making her presence felt in this territory, no other religious sect will be able to hold its own there. Of the Latin-American soul it may be said: „Anima naturaliter catholica".

Considering all this, Brazil has a right to claim a special place in the interest of the catholic world, not only because both geographically and in population it forms a third of Latin America, but also because of the special possibilities of vitalizing the Church in Brazil offers.
If we succeed in doing this for the Church in Brazil, then by this very fact the conditions for the vitalisation of the whole Latin-American Church will be there. Saving Brazil means creating the real possibility of saving all Latin America, which in my opinion cannot with the same certainty be said of any other Latin-American country.

Moreover, the vitalisation of the Church in Latin America would lead to entirely new possibilities of christianizing the heathen world.
After two thousand years of Christianity only one fifth of the world has been won over to Catholicism. In spite of the enormous proportions of the work the missions assumed in the last century, particularly in European countries like France, Italy, Spain, and partly also Germany - to which for the last few decades also Canada and the United States may be added - but most remarkably in smaller countries like Ireland, Belgium and Holland, the rhythm of the conversion of the heathen world is on the whole still too slow; probably with the exception of particular countries, especially in Africa. But recent events on the African continent justify our asking whether Christianity has already sufficiently taken root to be able to overcome the great social and political upheavels.

It would seem to us that old Europe, which so far has provided the greatest number of missionaries, has reached, if not surpassed the peak of its missionary activity, and that in the near future at least no considerable increase of mission-personnel is to be expected from here. How then is a new phase of missionary activity among heathens with a quicker rhythm of conversion to be ushered in, by which the vast continent of Asia and particularly China - when conditions will have improved - may be won over to the Church. Without Latin America taking part - and this on a large scale - the realisation of this world-plan will be out of the question. To secure this participation it will be necessary to succeed

in the vitalisation of the Church in Latin America, which will automatically bring about the increase in mission-persoonel, and this will represent more than half the catholic world-population. Then one may also reasonably expect that the number of missionaries who are going to work among the heathens will be more than doubled.

In this perspective of present spiritual need and possibilities of evangelisation in the future, Latin America and particularly Brazil, more than any other area in the world, deserve the devoted help of the whole catholic world, especially of missionary Orders and Congregations. This help is indeed already growing tangibly and at a surprising speed. Spain, rich in vocations, took the initiative by founding the episcopal work of the Hispano-American cooperation of priests (OCSHA), which has already grown into a powerful body. Belgium followed with the Latin-American College opened at Louvain. Then came the great impetus from Rome by the establishment of the Papal Committee for Latin American with the Cardinal-Prefect of the Congregation of the Council as its President and the Secretaries of the other Roman Congregations as its members.
At the beginning of 1960 the Holy Father convoked the General Superiors, residing in Rome, of Orders and Congregations, both men and women, in a kind of study-week to see what could be done to provide more rapid and abundant help for the Church in Latin America, especially by means of mission-personnel. Canada and the United States too set to work and both founded special episcopal committees for Latin America.

Catholic world-conscience is evidently awakening everywhere and concentrating on Latin America in particularly. A large scale action for speeding up the numbers of priests, sisters and brothers is growing, by which the salvation of Latin America is rung in and at the same time a speeding up of the evangelisation of the heathen world is being prepared for the future.

II. The Federation of religious Orders in Brazil (Conferência dos Religiosos do Brasil; C.R.B.): its organisation and activities

The Federation, which in spite of its being in existence such a short time - only seven years - has developped into one of the most powerful Brazilian catholic organs, is capable of rendering valuable help to orders and congregations coming over to settle in this country. We consider it useful to give an explanation of the nature of its organisation and the extent of its activities.

The Federation comprises all the Orders and Congregations, both men and women. Representatives of each of the three branches: priests, brothers, and sisters, sit on the General Committee.
On account of the size of the country the Federation is organised thus: the national Federation with its headquarters in Rio de Janeiro has its offices in each of the 21 states, with seats in the respective capitals, and these offices have their sub-offices again in more important centres. The organisation last mentioned is growing, especially in the southern states.
The general aim of the Federation is to promote the common interests of the religious orders, temporal as well as spiritual, on the threefold level of nation, state and district.

A. The Administration of the National CRB comprises four organs:

1. The General Assembly, the members of which are all the Superiors of Orders and Congregations: 151 priests, 13 brothers and 310 sisters, has its annual meeting in the third week of July, in Rio de Janeiro, and every third year it elects the Administrative Council and the General Committee.

2. The Administrative Council, consisting of five Provincials of clerical institutes has the task of checking the bookkeeping of the national CRB, if necessary via an accountant; to report on the result of it to the General Assembly and to suggest directives for the financial policy of the CRB.

3. The General Committee consists of nine members: the President, Secretary General and Treasurer, and as ordinary members three priests and three sisters. All of them must be Superiors except the Secretary General and the Treasurer, as they have a full-time job at the headquarters of the CRB. The General Committee holds its meetings on the third Saturday of each month, and it appoints the Executive Committee.

4. The Executive Committee, which is under the immediate direction of the Secretary General, at the moment consists of five priests and one brother: a Capuchin, a Franciscan, a Jesuit, a Divine Word father, a Redemptorist and a Marist brother, who all work full time at the national headquarters. This Executive Committee draws up plans for the national CRB, submits them to the General Committee and when they are approved, carries them out. So it forms the nerves of the Federation.

The Conferência carries out its activities through the Executive Committee for general affairs,
through the departments for matters of training - religious, clerical, apostolical and professional -, and
through the services in cases of assistance, especially in the legal and temporal field.

B. The departments of the national CRB:

1. Department of Statistics, committed to the charge of the Institute of the Missionaries of Crucified Jesus, is the basis-department of the CRB, on which the whole administration of the CRB, particularly the extensive correspondence of the headquarters rests. For this purpose it keeps a complex card-index for addressing bishops, provincials, schools for nurses and midwives, hospitals, colleges etc., apart from the card-index of all the religious houses in Brazil and of the subscribers to the periodical of the Conferência. This enables the Executive Committee, the various departments and services to correspond without undue delay with all the religious houses in Brazil. This department consisting of a community of eleven sisters, seven of whom do statistic work only, is the means by which the CRB makes its inquiries for the use of the general administration, other departments and services. The Department also works regularly for the Apostolic Nunciature and the bishops of Brazil.

2. Educational department, entrusted to the Jesuit fathers, is associated to the AEC (Associaçao dos Educadores Católicos)

of Brazil, and its task is to inform the educational institutes run by religious orders in matters legal and pedagogical.

3. Catechetic Department, entrusted to the Ursuline Sisters, gives information about catechetic training and activity.
4. Department for sanitation, committed to the care of the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, informs, particularly through the schools for nurses and midwives, the members about the apostolic and technical aspects of sanitation.
5. Department for social work, entrusted to the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Mary, gives information, chiefly through schools for social work, about legal, apostolic and technical matters.
6. Department for pastoral work, in the hands of the Redemptorists, founded the Institute for pastoral work of the CRB, which organises the yearly pastoral course (made obligatory for the members of clerical institutes by „Sedes Sapientia") for the young priests of the various communities.
7. Press Department (radio film and television), entrusted to the Franciscans, intends to bring about a better coordination of the press-organs, in view of greater apostolic efficiency, to which end courses of journalism are organised from time to time.
8. Department for vocations and religious training, entrusted to the Jesuit fathers, gives advice appertaining to recruiting and selection of vocations and religious training.

C. The Services of the national CRB:

1. Service for Secular and Canon Law, under the responsibility of the Secretary General, renders assistance in drafting civil statutes of provinces, religious houses, and works and institutions dependent on them, in drawing up contracts in accepting parishes, hospitals, social institutions etc., and it sees to the solution of civil and canonistic cases.
2. Service for the settlement of new orders and congregations, which mediates according to a comprehensive scheme of financial and legal aid in particular.
3. Service for new foundations, which mediates between those asking for foundations and the various orders and congregations.
4. Service for the transfer of stipends, which mediates between those who have a surplus of missae manuales and those who want them.
5. Service for travelling, which guarantees special price-reductions through contracts with national and international airways corporations and shipping companies. This service has some two hundred branches all over the country.
6. Service for procuration, which acts as sollicitor for the orders and congregations with the Federal Government offices, especially to obtain the Federal subsidies annually allotted by law to educational and social institutions run by the orders and congregations. This service deals with 3000-4000 cases a year.
7. Service for the purchase of branded goods, which guarantees special reductions through contracts with the various manufacturers.
8. Service for financing, which finances the purchase of goods by hire-purchase, including motorcars and trucks, on terms from 6- 36 months.

9. Service of Investment, which receives deposits of orders and congregations, at the rate of 12 per cent, to enlarge the service for financing.
10. Service for Publication, which edits the monthly periodical (Revista dos Religiosos do Brasil) and the year-book of the orders and congregations in Brazil.
11. Service for Publicity, which provides paid advertisements for the Revista and the year-book. Plans are in preparation to extend this service to all the periodicals of orders and congregations in Brazil.

D. Personnel of the national CRB

The personnel of the national CRB working full-time at the headquarters (Avenida Rio Branco 131, 9 andar, Rio de Janeiro) consists of a team of religious and lay people. The religious at present number eight: five priests, one brother and two sisters, the two last of whom are in charge of chapel, kitchen and refectory. The team of laymen consists of 51 functionaries, who all work at a salary. Their immediate head is the Director of Services, a layman himself, and under the general supervision of the Secretary General. Besides these people some twenty religious and laypeople work at the five departments in religious houses in Rio de Janeiro.

E. The national CRB financially self-supporting

The national CRB is financially self-supporting and does not receive any subscriptions from provinces or religious houses. Because its services for travelling (5), for procuration (6) and for purchase (7) act by commission, its revenues are sufficient to pay the lay-functionaries their fixed salaries, to bear the maintenance cost of the religious who work full-time at the headquarters or in their own houses, to cover the expenses of the other services and all the departments, which render their help free of charge, and to pay the cost of the gradual enlargement of office and personnel.

III. The Service for the settlement of new Orders and Congregation in Brazil

This Federation has instituted a separate service for the settlement of new religious institutions in Brazil, in order to reduce the numerous difficulties which generally attend the foundation of religious institutes in a country unknown and far away, to a minimum: financial difficulties of journey and temporary accommodation, legal difficulties both civil and canonical; difficulties of choice of district, town, and sort of work; difficulties in learning the language etc. etc.

This service starts from the point of view that the preparation of the settlement of a religious institute in Brazil cannot be made by means of correspondence only. Experience has taught us that the institute will only get to know the work and its surroundings from seeing them for themselves. For this reason the CRB submits the following plan to Orders and Congregations which want to settle in Brazil and have the personnel for it:

the generalate or provincialate sends the person who is regarded as the future superior of the new foundation, with a companion to Brazil. If the travelexpenses should be a difficulty, the CRB advances the money.

The future „founders" come to Rio de Janeiro, where the CRB provides free accommodation, while at the headquarters they study the numerous applications for religious in our archives. These applications come from bishops, parish-priests, secular and regular clergy, lay-institutions; for all sorts of apostolic work: parishes, hospitals, educational institutions, social work; from all parts of Brazil: from town and country, from areas with tropical, subtropical and mild climates, from the coast and from inland.

Advised and assisted by the Executive Committee the „founders" make a tentative choice and accompanied by an expert they visit and study the place of their future work on the spot, the CRB covering the travelexpenses again. If the work should not be the kind required, a second and if necessary a third place is visited, on the same conditions, till a final choice is made.

The CRB gives its advice and assistance in all the stages of the preparation of the foundation concerning negotiations with ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and drafting the contract between the applicant for the foundation and the religious institute.
First of all special attention is paid to the possibilities of further development of the religious institute and therefore, in view of vocations, to the district and town of the first settlement; and to the contract: spiritual help for brothers and sisters, full payment of their work, and as for contracts for hospitals and such like: observance of catholic ethics, especially in the surgical section.

Once the final choice has been made, the other members of the institute, who are to form the first community, can come over, on the same conditions.

The CRB gives information about luggage which can be brought to Brazil custom-free; helps with disembarkment and customs, in legalizing the immigration-papers, provides free temporary accommodation, finds the opportunity to study the language thoroughly, and sees to the journey to the ultimate place of destination.

The CRB can offer this financial help owing to two circumstances in particular: first of all through the fact that many who ask for institutions promise to reimburse the travel-expenses, so that the CRB after the definite beginning of the foundation presents to them the bill of the advanced expenses;
and secondly through the fact that in many cases a work is offered which in a short time will begin to pay sufficiently, so that the CRB concludes a contract with the Order or Congregation about the repayment of the expenses, in small installments.

In this way the RCB accompanies the whole process of the settlement of a new order or congregation, from the first contact with the provincialate or generalate in Europe to the ultimate settlement of the first community in Brazil.
In all its stages it gives expert advice, which reduces the difficulties of a first settlement in Brazil, especially financial and legal difficulties, to a minimum.

Latin America in its spiritual need cries for religious. The Holy See asks the General Superiors to pay special attention to this part of

the world. Vast Brazil with its 65 million Catholics has flung its doors wide. The Conferência dos Religiosos do Brasil offers a helping hand to ease the path of those who would enter.

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