VOLUNTEERS: BOTH DISCIPLES AND CITIZENS.

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INTRODUCTION

The title Volunteers: Both Disciples and Citizens is an attempt to express the tension lived by every Christian man or woman in our society. To follow Jesus of Nazareth as part of the Christian community, and at the same time to collaborate as a citizen in the construction of society - these are the two tasks of every believer in the God of Jesus.

This tension can on occasion precipitate painful ruptures. It can also cause the over-stressing of one or the other of the two polarities. It is always difficult to accept any sort of existential tension. How much more so when what is at stake is something as essential to our being as our identity! If we look at the evidence, beginning with the New Testament and continuing with the documents recording doctrinal evolution in the Church, it is clear that the Christian community has always poured a great deal of effort into responding honestly and in depth to this two-fold duty: to be both disciples and citizens.

Thesis

It is our belief that social volunteerism allows a person, as very few activities do, to realize simultaneously his or her identity as citizen and as Christian.

This is not an analysis of volunteerism in Spain; nor is it a philosophical or sociological reflection on this social phenomenon. Anyone wanting information of this kind would do well to consult the writings of García Roca, Robert Wuthnow, and the publications of the Plataforma para la Promoción del Voluntariado (Foundation for the Promotion of Volunteerism). The references are to be found in the footnotes.

This booklet, with the help of the studies mentioned, seeks to encourage reflection in faith on the subject of volunteer work. We shall

. define, firstly, what kind of volunteer work we mean, and list its characteristics with regard to participation in social action;

. analyse, secondly, the kinds of volunteer work that arise from a Christian orientation, and see how such activities constitute faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus;

. and, finally, suggest what social volunteer work is when it arises out of faith; and how it contributes to the ideal of a society based on inclusion and participation, on justice and comradeship.

Our wish is to walk together with thousands of Christians who offer a part of their time and energy in service to the disadvantaged and marginalized.

I. THE VOLUNTEER AS CITIZEN.

The word "volunteerism" can mean very different things. It reflects the large range of possibilities for human sharing - but it risks privileging certain activities and certain group interests that have little to do with what we are calling "volunteerism" in this context. Let us look at three definitions, from three different sources, in order to appreciate this diversity of meaning.

- "The resolution adopted by the European Parliament in December 1983 confirms the four basic characteristics: volunteer work is not obligatory; it is helpful to society, normally unpaid, and done within a more or less organized context." (1)

- "A volunteer is one who acts disinterestedly and responsibly, without remuneration, carrying out a project for the benefit of the community, obeying a programme of action with the intention of being of service. A volunteer action shows social solidarity; the work of a volunteer is not his or her usual occupation. It proceeds from a responsible decision taken out of conscience and sympathy, and totally respects the individual or individuals for whom the work is done. A voluntary action can be carried out by an individual in isolation, although in general it is performed by a group." (2)

- "The aim of social volunteerism is the performance of gratuitous and disinterested service. It arises from the threefold ideals of citizenship, being an exercise of individual autonomy, of social participation, and of solidarity with those who are weakest." (3)

These three definitions progressively limit the scope of the term. The first tries to cover every kind of volunteer action. It could include professional colleges, interest groups, and so on. The last limits volunteerism to the purely social, with clear leanings towards socio-political obligation and towards inclusiveness. In this booklet we shall take this last definition to describe best the type of voluntary action that derives from Christian discipleship.

It is important to note that this conception of volunteerism says nothing about altruism, much less heroism. It merely makes voluntary action part of the practice of citizenship. To be a social volunteer, according to García Roca, is simply the consequence of taking the condition of citizenship seriously.

Obviously, this means that citizenship is regarded as entailing both responsibility and a devotion to justice. Unfortunately such a view of citizenship is hardly common in our society. It does not follow, however, that taking the option for the poor (or "solidarity with those who are weakest" as the last definition expresses it) is open only to those called to be disciples, followers of Jesus.

It must be made clear from the outset that when we consider Christian motivation, and volunteer action as its consequence, we are not defining a new type of volunteerism that would not be possible without Christian faith. As we shall see later, "Christian" qualifies the voluntary action, giving it a motivation, a call to radicalize, a context within a community. This makes it possible to aim reasonably for a just utopia, as the social volunteerism as we define it requires.

However, let us return to volunteerism as citizenship, in order to underline its characteristics. Later we shall look at it from the point of view of the believer. We can define it through three actions which characterize it.

1. DISCOVERING OUR DIVERSITY.

Leaving the circle of our friends and of our social class.

The construction of a democratic society, according to Robert Bellah, requires "taking care." This presupposes a growing sensitivity and increasing perceptiveness towards the idea of the common good; a feeling of obligation, both respectful and critical, towards social institutions. (4) This new perception of society, or "enlightened understanding," requires a great deal of information about and exposure to social realities; it is one of the basic prerequisites for the democratic process. (5)

To achieve it, we must necessarily be open to social realities other than those of our own social milieu. We must look beyond the restricted circle of our friends and acquaintances, beyond the confines of our social and cultural class. Being open, however, is not enough for this kind of social action: we must actually cross the frontiers that divide and separate us.

And having done so, the social volunteer must ensure that the rest of society discovers the existence of human lives that need and deserve to be taken into account. It is in direct contact with those who are excluded that the volunteer discovers the primary impulse of his or her action, which is compassion - not feelings of distress and commiseration, but an apprehension of reality that comes not from the head alone, but from the heart.

It is impossible to remain indifferent once one has seen and known the pain and rage that arise from the experience of exclusion. Therefore one of the main tasks of a social volunteer is to recount to the world the hidden stories, of suffering and struggle, of the destruction of dignity and of hope, that his or her work uncovers. In this way compassion has a chance to break into and colour the utilitarian and selfish language of our culture.

This actual involvement at a personal and local level with the victims of the system can actually leaven voluntary social action. Without disregarding the importance of justice and its consequences, we soon find out that mercy, generosity, and freedom in the giving really come only from human contact and human relationship.

And so the first question arises.

- Does our voluntary action entail the risk of taking leave of the known, of the restricted circle of our peers (or "quasi-peers")?

This kind of work implies a loss of security; it requires an openness, a readiness to learn, to understand, and to value different ways of living and relating; an ability to let ourselves be affected by the reality we meet (pain, resentment, internalization of rejection,

aggressivity, etc.). Never fear, however: this first characteristic does not demand heroism. Simple presence is enough - being poor with the poor.

2. REDEFINING THE COMMON GOOD.

Among those who have been rejected by society, the Common Good is conceived differently from the way the Establishment conceives it.

Volunteerism, understood as responsible and inclusory citizenship, requires a redefinition of society as a whole. The Common Good is to be considered the real objective of our living together, the ideal towards which we strive.

Yet there is no doubt that this ideal is understood differently by the different groups that make up society. It is also an ideal that is not only inaccessible to but experienced as alien by large portions of the population, whose right to participate in society is merely theoretical and not recognized in practice.

Most volunteers belong to social classes that have the power to exercise their civil rights and participate in defining their society's ideals. It is essential to generate dynamics of inclusion (6) and ways in which the rejected can recuperate their dignity, so that they too can participate in the redefinition of the ideal of the Common Good.

Volunteers must definitively leave behind ideas of "charity" and of paternalism.

Our aim is to establish a dialogue - not the monologue that has always characterised traditional charity. This is one of the hallmarks of the legitimacy of any volunteer work, by which its credibility may be judged.

Such undertakings as the rehabilitation of dependent people, assistance for groups in precarious economic situations, etc., must aim to "insert" or include such people within the mainstream of society. We have to work for the restoration to them of their rights to political, economic, and social participation; the restoration of their right not only to the resources of society but also to the obligations that society imposes: this participation belongs to them as a human right and by virtue of their human dignity.

To avoid the danger of becoming accomplices in injustice and rejection through merely papering over their consequences, social volunteers must manifest a key element in their objectives and their methodology: they must let the people they serve be the protagonists. There must be no attempt to substitute one´s own for the other´s presence or voice. Instead, the volunteer must mediate, with "a light touch that gives back to persons 'in need' their own role as agents." (7)

What might seem in theory to be obvious may not be so in practice. It is not easy to renounce our own interests (beginning with our role as "saviours"), or to abandon our individualism. (8) It is even harder to believe that certain marginal groups could really have something to say about their own situation (people with severe handicaps, children, foreigners, etc.), or that they are capable of saying "the" words they need to say, given their cultural,

physical, or psychological status. As Tony Catalá insists, "it is amazing to notice how people cannot stand to see the 'other' leave the periphery to which he or she has been consigned. What many 'social and political' activists do is simply make marginal conditions a little prettier so that everything can go on as before, so that everything and everybody can stay in place." (9)

Option for "the epistemological privilege of the poor."

The social volunteer, as defined here, chooses to believe that reality is actually better understood when seen "from below," "from outside" the social boundaries. This is difficult to get across to people who have not allowed themselves to be affected by those who are other, alien, different; to people who reduce their life experience to that of their peers; and to people who stand at the top of the social ladder. Nevertheless, every volunteer knows by experience that there is a way of seeing things, a point of view by means of which one can widen one´s vision of reality. Only the experience of such an expansion of vision can make one see that the rejected of society must be given a voice, be placed centre-stage. Indeed, without a truly alternative vision of life, why should they be given a voice? It would be far more practical to carry on deciding on their behalf what should be done to resolve their problems.

Those who have been excluded from society have a different conception of the Common Good from that of "established" society. Such matters as race, sex, and economic well-being have a different meaning and above all a different value. Only if we accept into our ranks those we have rejected can we cure our society of the "epistemological blindness" that afflicts us - a blindness to whatever view of reality does not correspond to our own culture and interests, which promotes the usurpation, intolerance, and fear inherent in the system.

The second question includes two crucial practical matters:

- What role is there in our voluntary organizations for the beneficiaries of our work? Do they participate in the decision-making process? Do they exercise any power with respect to objectives, methodologies, and the evaluation of results?

- Has our own vision of social reality changed because of volunteer work and our relationship with the victimized? What, specifically, has this vision contributed? How has my view of myself changed, both personally and in relationship to the reality that surrounds me?

Either negative or confused replies to these questions would merely make us followers of the model offered by the conquistadors, or by the followers of Franco in more recent times. For the former, the Indians were beings "in a childlike state," incapable of knowing what they wanted and needed. For the latter, the Spanish lower classes were immature and unable to make their own decisions. Not only does history repeat itself, but we are also capable of justifying old-style colonialist and paternalistic actions with ideological arguments taken from Marxist criticism or from postmodernism.

3. PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE.

Volunteerism means personal engagement not only with individuals but also with social structures and institutions.

Finally, the voluntary sector consists of a complex network of institutions and organizations. This is one of the principal contributions made to society by what is called the "third sector," to distinguish it from the public and state sector and the business and commercial sector.

Voluntary associations act as intermediaries between the State and the citizens.

This social network redistributes power in society in a way that reaffirms political pluralism and safeguards the liberties of the citizen. Voluntary associations act as intermediaries between the State and its citizens, and offer a channel for citizen participation. Both roles (redistribution of power, the promotion of participation) make of these associations one of the best examples of the "principle of subsidiarity" as it is postulated in Christian Social Thought. Robert Bellah retrieves the relevance of this principle for contemporary society when he asserts that the "principle of subsidiarity" favours social cooperation and the decentralization of power. It makes possible "a new experiment in participatory democracy" in the workplace and in politics. (10)

Nevertheless, not every voluntary action involves itself in the process of social change: integrity and gratuitous giving are not enough; the work needs to be evaluated so that it avoids merely legitimizing the system. Subsidiarity and complementarity with public institutions and social interventions does not mean uncritical assistance and support on the part of the volunteers. More importantly, new social policies must be proposed, and obligations upheld not only personally and towards individuals but also towards structures and institutions.

Social change energized by social volunteerism extends from the acceptance of the dispossessed into society and its decision-making organs on the one hand, to a new conception of justice, a "communitarian" justice on the other. This justice is contextual and historical; it respects differences, affirms the moral value of persons and groups, supports autonomy and self-respect, domesticates authority, and, finally, establishes a theoretical and practical framework for moral debate on political topics. (11) The inclusiveness of which we spoke in the last section is in line with this ideal of justice. As a matter of fact, voluntary action - in its work of inclusion - presupposes respect for the autonomy of the person as it presupposes the enabling which is necessary for the development of all the characteristics (rights and obligations) of citizenship. The struggle engaged in by voluntary associations for equal dignity and protection for all is based on the radical common identity shared by all men and women. Voluntary work fights against the moral stigma that classifies some people as being "intrinsically" worse than others.

The struggle to achieve a wider and more inclusive citizen body is not simply a practical matter. It entails an ideological and political debate, and at the same time a personal commitment and a taking of risks. The search for communitarian justice must involve not only the volunteer but also his or her organization. Social volunteers come into contact with diverse and ambiguous human realities, and this convinces them of the necessity for a continuous fight for justice. The network of volunteer associations has an inescapable duty to

reflect these concrete experiences, to tell the rest of the citizen body about them, and to ask for the social and legal means to respond to the needs of the most disadvantaged. Voluntary action, if it is to be ethical, must not only accompany the victims in their travail, but must also be motivated by a will to change the circumstances, in their favour. In our society, a commitment to social justice is the touchsone of credibility, not only of volunteers but also of their institutions.

The third question is the direct consequence of the previous one.

- What objectives for social change are being pursued by myself and my association? Are we able to formulate alternatives? What room is there in my work for adherence to an association?

In the classic dilemma of justice versus mercy (remember the famous words of Dostoyevsky: "You know no tenderness. All you know is justice, and so you are unjust"), this question prevents us from being recruited into the ranks of the "charitable," and so into the role of "useful fools" within the system. Such a fate leads to death and exclusion, even as it revels in the heroic gestures of those who seek merely to alleviate the consequences of structural evil without attacking the causes.

The commitment to achieve justice and social change requires a radical motivation. These are not easy times for ethics, for radical involvement. There are two great pillars that support altruism and voluntary action. They are: relationship with the other, and the experience of the transcendent, the divinity, the Other. Both together provide a solid basis for radical commitment, even during periods of disenchantment. In this section we have limited ourselves to volunteerism as an expression of the citizen´s identity, as action born out of human identity itself, which, to be such, must open itself to relationship with the "other."

Without denying the force of a motivation springing from citizenship alone, daily experience shows us that it is difficult to assume the risks of crossing social frontiers, of involving oneself in life-stories and relationships weighed down with pain and confusion, of accepting the changes in one´s own life that all these things imply, of losing the security of a space that is stable and protected by rights inherited from birth ... of living "on the edge," as J.L. Sampedro puts it.

What is needed is a story, yes, a story, an existential narrative that provides the reasons for a choice that is so irrational in the eyes of the people around us and of our culture in general. What is needed is a "community of memory," a community that offers a tradition, a way of seeing reality that makes sense of the sacrifice - not of the "heroism" but of the daily and apparently useless acts of compassion and of struggle to achieve justice. Here lies our responsibility as believers, as people who have received the "gift of faith": that of being ambassadors of trust, in a world sour with suspicion.

II. THE VOLUNTEER AS DISCIPLE.

The Christian faith claims a new identity for those "born of water and the spirit" (John 3.5). What relationship has this new identity with the civic identity that characterizes us as members of a secular society? What relationship is there between this Christian "new identity" and the volunteerism we have been discussing? My reply is two-fold: on the one hand, social volunteerism is a way (not the only way, but certainly one of the most privileged ways) of living a Christian identity in the world; on the other hand, Christian discipleship radicalizes social volunteerism, and with it our citizenship, by giving it a narrative of radical devotion to the other. It is a response to the unconditional love of the Father; in other words it is the existential narrative of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

1. DISCIPLES WHO RESPOND TO "THE ONE WHO LOVED US FIRST"

For the Christian community, the motivation to "charity" (fraternal love that issues in justice and mercy, as we have known it through our God), comes from our having been loved first by Christ. It is this love, and no other thing - neither Law nor Tradition nor security nor anything else - that constitutes our moral standard. All our actions of altruism, of solidarity, of compassion arise out of gratitude to God for having first loved us, with a love that is undeserved and impossible to repay.

We have heard this so often that it might seem pointless to repeat it. Yet it is the key to everything we are about to analyse. The radical stance we have described thus far can only be lived out of a grateful response to a love that has been poured into us until it overflows. As P. Jaramillo writes,

"Volunteerism, then, is a practical expression of the understanding that one´s own existence is a gift. Whoever lives out of a self-understanding born of such a radical belief, necessarily expresses his or her recognition by living life as as an offering. We are God´s gift, in order that we might be gift for others." (13)

The Christian ethic is not a compendium of standards and obligations, but a grateful response. Now we cannot forget that Jesus formulated a single commandment, a commandment to love. And we cannot separate this teaching from the story, the life history, of Jesus, which exemplifies this love and ordains it as a requirement for all of us: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13: 34-35). The Washing of the Feet, the Cross - these show us how to understand, contemplate, and live this commandment.

The word "Christian," in its strictest sense, means "follower of Christ." When the Gospels speak of following Jesus, only two words are used: mathetes (disciple, learner) and akoloutheo (I follow in the footsteps of ...) We do not find the noun "discipleship," as a concept. This reflects the practical idea the early Christian communities had of discipleship, as a "way," a process, a practice - not a status or a theoretical concept. Rather, they perceived it is a dynamic movement, a process of belonging more and more closely to Jesus the Christ, of participating in his life.

One last consideration. Only one in ten instances of the word "disciple," in the Gospels, refers to the Apostles. The term applies, then, to whoever follows Jesus. There are no castes in the Christian Church - or at least, there ought not to be.

Characteristics of this discipleship.

(a) A total break with the past. It entails abandoning one´s family and one´s own self-interest (Mark 1: 16-20; 2: 14; Luke 14: 26), denying oneself (Luke 14. 27), losing economic autonomy and breaking with reigning values (cf. Mark 10: 41-45). The call of Jesus asks for and makes possible a break with the past. At the same time it offers the disciple a new future.

(b) An entry into a lifelong relationship with Jesus. The text of Mark 3: 14, "that they may be with him" gives us the meaning of discipleship. It includes sharing in the uncertain life of Jesus, in his suffering and death (cf. Mark 10: 39; 8: 34). It is not a matter of imitating the Master by repeating his doctrines, nor of belonging to him in an intimate manner. The disciple collaborates with Jesus, day by day, to bring about the coming of the Kingdom.

(c) A call to mission. The crucial element is taking part in the ministry of Jesus. The disciple is no sooner called than sent. Both events coincide, from the start.

The Church is "the community of the disciples of Jesus." She must therefore, as Schillebeeckx puts it, write "the fifth Gospel," adding to her own history the stories of so many lives rejected by society - and by the Christian community.

2. DISCIPLES AS CITIZENS.

We have seen how our Christian identity is a gift of which we are made conscious through Jesus. Therefore we can only understand this identity we have received through the actualization of the "story" of Jesus and of the believing community, in our own individual lives. This story of ours must be analysed as a function of our relationship with God, with our neighbour, with the world, and with ourselves. For this analysis we rely on three great criteria: faith, hope, and love.

Profile of discipleship.

These three virtues are the basic foundation in which are rooted other more specific virtues that give us the "profile" of Christian discipleship:

- Openness and readiness to hear and respond to the call of God.

- Gratitude as characteristic of our relationship with God. This gratitude should affect the rest of our relationships (with ourselves, with others, and with the environment), and it should give rise to praise.

- Compassion, pardon, and justice as the fundamental virtues in our relationship with our neighbour. The mercy and faithfulness of God, his justice with its "partiality" for the orphan and the widow, are paradigmatic for the Christian way of relating to others. The interrelationship of the Persons of the Trinity also teaches us to base our relationships upon reciprocity, not upon necessity or upon domination. Finally, the divine wish for salvation for everybody compels us to break down the sociological frontiers of the Church.

- Solidarity in the sharing of natural resources, which are given by God to all of humanity, all who live today and all who will live in the future.

- A creative use of personal resources, as a way of making oneself fully human. In this way the disciple lives to the full what it means to be human.

The formation of a person with these characteristics is the task and duty of the Christian community. It must be founded in the living memory of Jesus Christ, of his words and deeds of salvation. In that sense, the narrative of the life of Jesus is reenacted through the medium of the community, and in the process it shapes the Christian character.

The community of the disciples of Jesus has a double objective: to live with him, and to announce the Good News. To restrict our personal or communal conception of discipleship only to "living with him" (living only within the Church) leads to isolation from and a sectarian rejection of the world. To limit ourselves to a social mission leads to a devaluation of the power of the community to mediate.

3. DISCIPLES: CITIZENS AND OUTSIDERS.

When we investigate this theme, we cannot forget the eschatological background that informs all of the New Testament: the end of a dying age and the beginning of a new age, that of the Kingdom of God. From that perspective, the best that can be said of the power of the State and of citizenship in general is that although they are merely provisional, they may be considered to be an instrument for the service of the will of God. The critical distance that we observe in the New Testament texts arises out of this tension between the "already here" of the age of God, initiated in Christ, which completely relativizes the social structure, and the "not yet" of the time of waiting for the definitive triumph of Christ.

Social "structures" are never exalted, much less legitimated as reflecting the eternal order of God; the existing order is seen as needing to change direction. In this way, the "new sect" of the Christians, which had no cultural ethos of its own, was able to take what was best from the surrounding culture and subordinate to the "Lord."

According to the North American theologian Stanley Hauerwas, the Church need not worry about whether or not it is in the world: her only concern is how to be in the world, in what manner and with what aim. There are two extremes in the debate about "how" the Church should be in the world: the sectarian pole demands a great critical distance and a standing-apart from social structures; the other pole is total inculturation, which would reduce being a Christian to the private sphere (an attitude which is very prevalent in the secularized environment of Spanish "progressive" Catholicism).

Although a "confessional" Church, which radically questions the powers and structures of the system, seems to us very attractive, yet we cannot forget the redeeming role played by reason and culture in personal human (and also Christian) development. If we want to announce the Good News to the world, we cannot break our lines of communication with it. Further, we must recognize that God works everywhere, and not only within the Church community.

What is needed, then, is an attitude of humility. We must know how to recognize the contributions made by the culture and by secular society to Christian comprehension and practice.

Historically, the Church has defended her right and obligation to transform the world, and has opposed the secular abandonment of this objective. Hence her insistence on the liberty "to exercise her mission among human beings without obstacle, and to pronounce moral judgement, including judgement upon matters to do with the political order, whenever the fundamental rights of the human person must be upheld." (Gaudium et spes, 76)

The question of how the Church and the world must interrelate remains open; there is no simple and universal answer. The eschatological perspective obliges us to live in perpetual tension between separation and acculturation (i.e. the loss of identity in the process of inculturation). In fact, to silence the criticism that comes from prophetic movements could be to tie the Church too closely to the political power structure. On the other hand, to insist too much upon the separate identity of the Christian life would make it impossible to bring the Gospel to our culture and to the world. This tension obliges us to be citizens without losing the distance involved in being an outsider and knowing it (I Peter 2: 11).

III. SOCIAL VOLUTEERISM AS CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

As we have seen in the last chapter, it is clear that although there are many ways of being Christian in the world, as Christians we are called to live in our society, exercising our citizenship in an especially radical manner. This consists of our applying to our civic duties the same criteria we discussed when we spoke of discipleship.

I have claimed that social volunteerism is an excellent way of putting into practice this Christian manner of being a citizen. Because of the tension between citizenship and discipleship, social volunteerism allows one "to live on the frontier," to participate in both identities, with neither compromise nor confusion between them.

In this chapter we shall look at the foundations of a social volunteerism lived out of faith in Jesus, at what the disciple can bring to voluntary action, and see how we may characterize Christian citizenship.

1. SOCIAL VOLUNTEERISM AS A CHRISTIAN DUTY

There are two fundamental principles for understanding volunteerism as a Christian duty.

(a) Scripture's constant preoccupation with the poor. This concern shown in Scripture speaks to us of the very identity of God. Our God is a God who lives in relationship, and in him relationship is based on love, and not on domination or exclusion. Thus, ever since the Old Covenant of Yahweh with Israel in the Sinai, relationship with God is achieved through caring for the defenceless: the widow and the orphan (Ex 22:21). The "compassionate" God of the Old Testament (Ex 34:6) goes beyond the Law and beyond justice. The language of God does not speak of rights, but rather of mercy and compassion.

(b) The concept of discipleship, as we have described it. The mandate to love our neighbour, together with the explanation of what the word "neighbour" means in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37) and in the promises given in the Beatitudes, all make the care of others central to the life of every disciple. Love of God and love of neighbour are one; there can be no confession of faith where there is no proof of love and compassion for others (cf. Matt 25, the parable of the Last Judgement.)

It is in the sending on a mission that we meet the call to Christians to voluntary action. When Jesus sends his disciples to proclaim the Good News, he tells them: "Cure the sick, bring the dead back to life, purify the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you have received, now freely give." (Matt. 10,8) So there is no proclamation of the Word of God without "giving of ourselves freely," in imitation of our God and as a grateful response to this initiative. This is why Bishop Echarren is able to assert that "every Christian, by the very fact of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, must be a social volunteer." (16)

2. IS THERE SUCH A THING AS CHRISTIAN VOLUNTEERISM?

An examination of voluteerism reveals the following characteristics that relate it to Christianity put into practice:

(a) When we are pressed for a reason for our voluntary action, a religious motivation is frequently cited. This motivation is not isolated: ideals of a religious kind are found in conjunction with the desire for self-realization (e.g. the wish to cross social boundaries, meet new people, broaden our experience, etc.). Let us not deceive ourselves: religious motivation is not incompatible with self-interest. (17)

(b) Scripture provides us with a language of compassion and of openness to others, which is vital when it comes to making sense of the experience of helping others. This might seem to be of secondary importance, but in fact it is not, given our utilitarian culture. How are we to make sense of the impotence and inefficacy we experience when accompanying someone through a terminal illness? People certainly try to apply economic and utilitarian standards to voluntary action - but the attempt usually ends up looking ridiculous. The alternative is not to give the language of volunteerism a "commercial" or "governmental" twist, but rather to create openings through which gratuitous compassion can pass, breaches in the walls thrown up by our needy culture.

(c) Belonging to a community predisposes people to take part in voluntary action, more than does faith alone. Christian community is what prevents voluntary social action from becoming a justification and legitimization of individualism - even of individualism informed by religion. The community accompanies the Christian; it supplies a narrative - the story of Jesus - and the tradition of hope and struggle; it predisposes him or her to a radical style of service. It is Christian community that is able to help us to achieve critical insight, using the criteria of the Beatitudes, into whether or not our altruism springs from authentic compassion, solidarity, and justice.

A further point: the existence of community is absolutely necessary in a volunteerism that aims for the inclusion of those who have been marginalized. Only a group with its own identity and history, a group that is also connected to society, can endorse the "admission" of those excluded, and simultaneously provide a point of entry.

(d) A semantic battle rages in our culture between the connotations that arise from words like "justice" and "solidarity", and terms such as "compassion" and "gratuitous giving." Recent feminist theology has underlined the central role of love and caring (freely caring for others) when it comes to justice. Those who put justice first are afraid that talk of compassion and of free caring might sentimentalize and weaken the radical nature of the commitment to change the structures. Those who are anxious to promote mercy, tenderness and compassion in the fight for justice accuse the others of lack of personal involvement, of not listening with sensitivity, of not placing the victims of the system centre-stage, of being guilty of a quasi-bureaucratic rigidity when it comes to working with the excluded themselves ... In fact we need both points of view if we are to understand and give meaning to voluntary action. The Christian proposition is that we should strive for involvement and direct personal relationship. This is what will make our analysis radical and keep our idealism alive. And so in the words of J. Coleman, "if, in any strategy arising out of Christian theology, the fundamental option for the poor is considered central, we shall find ourselves moving beyond the categories of justice, and advancing towards those of solidarity, of community in suffering, of agape." (18)

Such an option entails an ethic both of solidarity and of difference; it points to a new vision of Church, as a community of inclusion and integration; and it presents us with a new understanding of justice - a justice that is both deeper and more human.

The Option for the Poor: What Discipleship adds to Citizenship

As we saw in the first chapter, it is as difficult to see the rationality of an "epistemological privilege of the poor," as it is actually to make a preferential option for the poor. This difficulty disappears (the difficulty in theory, that is, not the difficulty in practice) if we think of our lives as to be lived in the way Jesus of Nazareth lived his.

This option was first called for in the Documents of Medellin and Puebla, and later confirmed in various pontifical documents (cf. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 47). It has had a lengthy history in the social thought of the Church. It is not simply an ideological matter, or even a political one. What is called for is a way of life that demands

- personal involvement (in one´s life-style, work, and social milieu)
- socio-political analysis
- concrete commitments
- and, of course, conversion

All of this entails a radical change in our vision of reality, and that includes our idea of justice. We have to begin by taking account both of the historical consciousness that emerges from the voices of the oppressed, and of Scripture interpreted from the point of view of the rejected.

Furthermore, such an option cannot remain limited to the immediacy of personal contact. It demands attention to social structure as well, together with the use of social interventions, in order to achieve social change. This will bring with it conflict, tensions, denials and rejections. None of this is new. It has been the norm in our society and in the Church for the past few decades. What is new is the insistence on direct contact with the excluded, and on a personal conversion that espouses the culture and the world view of the lowest levels of society.

This is the contribution of discipleship to citizenship: the founding of the necessity for a fraternal and just society upon the existence of a common human identity. This sort of citizenship is new in that it is able to embrace both the dangerous memory of Jesus, and the memory - also dangerous - of the long history of human suffering. To ignore this primal connection is the greatest betrayal we can commit, as Christians, against the spreading of the Good News. Not every kind of volunteerism, and not every way of exercizing citizenship, is Christian. Therefore, to conclude our reflection we must single out what is essentially Christian in our voluntary action, in our work towards more justice and more solidarity - what it is that arises directly out of our faith in Jesus, who was murdered on the cross and who conquered death.

3. CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

The Christian way of working with and for the poor is inspired by the life of Jesus, by his words and his way of putting justice into practice. It asks of us that we remain critical of society, but involved in it. I have claimed that the option for the poor is the principal contribution of discipleship to citizenship. This contribution is two-fold. It assumes that we collaborate both with God´s will for justice and with God´s compassion. We must push for a community-based conception of society: for a radical understanding of the duties of a citizen, which breaks with our language of acquired rights, and proposes instead a language of compassion and justice.

In order for our citizenship - our participation and our work within the society in which we live - to be Christian, it must be critical, idealist, radical, and compassionate. The radical nature of our volunteer work, too, can be evaluated by the same criteria as those applicable to Christian citizenship.

3.1 Citizen-critics

The tension between discipleship and citizenship is what makes critics of us. We have already referred to the critical distance that we, as "members of the body of Christ," must maintain in the face of any social structure. However, this critical distance also involves commitment to those very structures, and the use of human intervention in order to improve them.

We cannot be sectarian. That was not Jesus´ way. The organized Christian community has to fight together with other social organizations, to collaborate with them or to oppose them, in order to live authentically its Christian identity. Given this relationship and its conflicts, we ought not to dismiss out of hand the legitimate autonomy of the ideal citizen. Respect for the pluralism of humanity and for the right of everyone to participate in the construction of human society, obliges us to seek collaboration and dialogue, and to accept the contributions that secular citizenship can make to our way of living. All this can be summed up as follows:

- Christian solidarity must extend its field of action beyond the sociological boundaries of the Church, in spite of the temptation to sectarianism and to "closed doors" ("our poor," "our marginalized," "those to whom we are committed" are expressions we hear often in Christian circles);

- We must impose upon ourselves a humbler attitude in our work, and refrain from falling back on the use of institutional power.

- We must be seen to stand for the Christian revindication of liberation in this world, through the action of the Grace of God.

If we do not wish this proclamation to be vain, it is essential that we present alternatives that bring dignity to the lives of the oppressed and the marginalized.

As far as volunteerism is concerned, this respect for our double identity implies, to use the terms of García Roca, a spirit of complementarity rather than a spirit of opposition or

colonization or mere juxtaposition. (19) One of the keys to the future of Christian voluntary action is the extent to which we prove to be capable of "critical" complementarity with other social organizations and with the administration of the State. If we leave social politics in the hands of others, if we consider ourselves to be better (more compassionate, more radical, etc.) and therefore despise the experience and management skills of the governmental sector - we shall once again have lost the possibility of generating a different society, and thereby we shall once again have betrayed those we claim to want to serve: the excluded.

3.2 Citizens of an ideal city

As Christians we belong to "two cities" (Gaudium et Spes 43). This requires us to be "bilingual," which means that we must be able to speak and to live the language of the Bible with the obligation it imposes to be compassionate and radical, with its ancient memory of suffering and hope - and also the language of our culture, with its critical and rationalist way of thinking. Of what use is our radical talk if it does not recognize cultural mediation - and therefore ends up being merely incomprehensible? Many of our arguments and our disquisitions upon the radical nature of Christianity fall upon the rational "deaf ears" of our contemporaries.

It is necessary to "translate" the language of our idealist social vision - but that cannot make us lose the radical nature of our hope. In fact, discipleship adds to what is political a utopian vision rooted in the Gospel as promise, judgement and vocation: promise of a new society of justice and solidarity which, although striven for by all of us, will come from the hand of God; judgement of a world that marginalizes its people and denies them the dignity and freedom owing to the children of God; vocation or call to the construction of a new order in which it is possible to proclaim the Good News to all of humanity.

The utopian society that Christianity proposes is communitarian in its nature. The principles enunciated in the Social Doctrine of the Church: "subsidiarity" and its complement, "socialization," together with the concepts of "justice as participation" and "option for the poor" offer the foundations for a critical analysis of society, and a guide for the Christian community as it searches for a social order rooted in justice and solidarity.

The growing complexity of "vital entities" and of the relationships among social agents obliges us to keep on analysing situations and intervening in the social fabric of society. It is here that social volunteerism plays a crucial role: it brings to everyone´s attention the facts about new forms of oppression and marginalization, and maintains a Utopian perspective thanks to a continuous process of social and political analysis.

3.3 Radical citizens

The nature of our radical stance is that of the surrender of himself by Jesus, for all of humanity. It is his assuming upon himself all the pain of humanity, and the Father´s acceptance of his action, that provides the key to why we Christians believe that we must stand with and among those sections of the population who continue to be "crucified." We must take care that this radical proximity to the victims does not make us "apologists for suffering." We do not value pain in itself; our closeness must not be blameworthy, but rather liberating, hope-inspiring, open to the discovery of human dignity where society has denied its

existence.

The invitation is to a far more committed citizenship than that offered by our formal democracy; something more down-to-earth than what we find in a certain type of humanism which is preoccupied solely with fraternity and not with the revolution we are asking for here (and which the pontifical documents also call for): a revolution that consists of the inclusion of everybody, and in which the whole of society lives and struggles to achieve the Common Good. There is little more to be said about this: we have dealt with it in the section on Christian volunteerism. If we take seriously the option for the poor, if our friendship and relationships "include" those previously excluded, if we truly count ourselves among those who are categorized as not belonging, if we accept their points of view and use these as tools for analysis ... If in fact we continue reading Matt. 25 until we reach the passage about "whatever you do to the least of these..." then we shall indeed be moved to the depths of our being. Our citizenshp will be truly radical and Christian, and there will be no turning back.

3.4 Citizens who are of service

All this is possible only if we follow the example of Jesus in the washing of feet (John 13: 1-17). Our God makes Himself our "servant." And it is a fact that, at the feet of the other, our lives take on a different meaning. When Jesus knelt at the feet of his disciples he knew that his end was near: "he had loved those who were living in the world and he loved them to the end" (John 13: 1). Jesus lived out of love, and this is the key to understanding the rest of that final encounter.

When we begin, as volunteers, to offer part of our time, we have no idea of the changes that are about to occur within ourselves. From compassion and close contact with one who suffers we move to rage and indignation at his or her unjust suffering. That obliges us to analyse and try to attack the causes of it. Our energies rise to meet our experience, they overflow, and our lives are never the same again. And even if we manage to alleviate the suffering, we shall have become conscious that evil continues to run rampant in our society.

Therefore we must allow ourselves to become steeped in the narrative of the life of Jesus, to become part of it, for it will give meaning to our free offering, it will support us in the various crises of disenchantment that are the inevitable lot of anyone who makes a radical commitment. We shall also find that the vision of life from the point of view of the poor and the fight for an inclusive society will give us a very different conception of the person and of society.

Finally, it is through this story of Jesus that we adhere to a tradition, to a community. From these we receive the impetus, the formation, the language, the values that enable us to approach injustice directly and to do battle with it, as Jesus did.

Once more: social vounteerism, reinforced by the language and tradition of the community of faith, offers a way to integrate justice with gratuitous effort, to reconcile personal commitment with the struggle for social justice and structural change. Direct service, yes - but we are also sent to proclaim and to defend our alternative vision of solidarity in the political arena. The double obligation of all Christian volunteerism (personal involvement and denunciation/proposal of alternatives) is carried out in this "confessional" mode, bearing

witness to a God who loves without conditions and without exceptions. Love - composed of service, free giving, compassion, denunciation, analysis, the offering of alternatives - is, then, the ultimate criterion of our voluntary action, of our Christian citizenship. This principle provokes conflict with society and with the Church itelf, but it is this that allows us to see social volunteerism as Christian discipleship, which means nothing other than acting with justice, loving with tenderness, and walking humbly with our God.

NOTES

1. BOLLAERTS, Liliane. El Voluntariado en Europa. Madrid: Cruz Roja Española, Departamento de Voluntariado, 1987. In: Conferencia Nacional sobre Voluntariado, Sevilla, 8-10 Mayo 1986, p.17.

2. CALO, José Ramón. ¿Qué es ser voluntario?. Madrid: Plataforma para la Promoción del Voluntariado, 1990. In Cuadernos de la Plataforma, 2, p.14.

3. GARCÍA ROCA, Joaquín. Solidaridad y Voluntariado. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1994. p.62.

4. BELLAH, Robert (et al.) The Good Society. New York: Vintage Books, 1992. p.254.

5. Cf. DAHL, Robert A. Democracy and its Critics. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. pp. 111-112.

6. For an analysis of the importance of "inclusion" for deepening and reforming our western democracy, see DAHL, Robert, op. cit., pp. 119-134.

7. GARCÍA ROCA, Joaquín. op. cit. p. 137.

8. Investigations into the motivations behind volunteerism reveal not only that individualism is not incompatible with service, but also that self-fulfilment is a very powerful motive when it comes to helping others.

9. CATALÁ, Toni. Salgamos a buscarlo. Notas para una teología y una espiritualidad desde el Cuarto Mundo. Sal Terrae: Santander, 1992. In Aquí y Ahora, 21. p. 17. The critique of Catalá is not directed only at "social politics;" it also shows how a "scientific" reading of the miracles of Jesus allows us to ignore the way in which Jesus, in the performance of those miracles, broke social boundaries and embraced the rejected.

10. BELLAH, Robert, op. cit., p. 282.

11. Such a notion of justice requires community to support it. For a discussion of the relationship between justice and community, and also of the revision that must be made of our legalistic conception of the "right" to justice, cf. SELZNICK, Philip. The Moral Commonwealth. Social Theory and the Promise of Community. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, chapter 15.

12. GARCÍA ROCA, Joaquín, op. cit., p. 52.

13. JARAMILLO RIVAS, Pedro. El Voluntariado Social: la mística de la gratuidad. Madrid: Cáritas Española, 1993. In Corintios XIII, 65, p. 176.

14. HAUERWAS, Stanley and WILLIMON, William H. Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony. Nashville: Abington Press, 1994, p. 48. Hauerwas is a U.S. theologian "of community." His writings show some sectarian bias, but his propositions and questions are unfailingly stimulating, especially in his revindication of Christian community and identity.

15. CATALÁ, Toni, op. cit., p. 15.

16. ECHARREN, Ramón. El voluntariado social: aviso para creyentes. Santander: Sal Terrae, 1989. In Sal Terrae, 1991, p. 464.

17. Cf. WUTHNOW, Robert. Acts of Compassion. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. esp. pp. 121-190. Wuthnow offers a penetrating analysis of the role of faith in voluntary action.

18. COLEMAN, John A. An American Strategic Theology. New York: Paulist Press, 1982, p. 207.

19. GARCÍA ROCA, Joaquín. Público y privado en la Acción Social. Del Estado del Bienestar al Estado Social. Madrid: Popular, 1992 (Trabajo Social, 18), p. 62.

APPENDIX I: A CHALLENGE FOR VOLUNTEERISM.

Its contribution towards a different model for society.

Exerpted from: Victor Renes. Panorama de voluntariado: elementos para una radiografía. Revista de estudios de Juventud (Ministerio de Asuntos sociales), diciembre 1989.

"The commitment to change is a sine qua non for volunteerism. A conservative volunteer is a contradiction in terms. A vocation to be a volunteer is born when someone sees that the system is dysfunctional, that necessities are not being provided, when there is obvious physical and moral suffering and that person decides to intervene in order to change the malfunction. The question is: What is it that the volunteer intends to change? To what extent is he or she prepared to disrupt the system?" (G. Pasini)

We must try to discover how it is that a volunteer can develop a critical consciousness, and use it to bring about change. Let us look at the set of values that can sustain a voluntary intervention.

- Movement away from the culture that is selectively elitist, and where relations based on force prevail
  ... to a communitarian culture in which the interests of the weakest are granted priority.

- Movement away from individualism with its tendency to ignore the needs of the weak, as being "not our problem"
  ... to an acceptance of co-responsibility for all that concerns both each individual person and society as a whole.

- Movement away from the habit of anonymity
  ... to a deliberate search for personal relationship.

- Movement away from hedonism
  ... to sacrifice. Because working for the poor is not by its nature pleasurable.

- Movement away from consumerism and "having"
  ... to "being," as referring to the quality of life that austerity in and of itself can confer, as very many communities of volunteers attest.

- Movement away from the emotive and the provisional
  ... to faithfulness and continuity in one´s personal relationships and in one´s service to others.

These values wll be a force for change to the extent that they are permanently adopted by the person, and are reflected in their consequences, in everyday life, in politcal commitment, etc.

The change can also come about from human contact between volunteers and the poor and marginalized. A human relationship, conducted properly, can shake up passivity and fatalism, awaken and mobilize energy, and thereby facilitate progress towards autonomy and liberation in the persons being assisted.

Another contribution can grow out of contact with service professionals: the volunteers´ hands-on experience can induce professionals to check the validity of their subventions and the

humanity of their dealings with the disadvantaged.

These contributions pose various questions. It goes without saying that volunteers should themselves be "changed" by the people they are helping: made to reconsider what the values they embody are based upon. Otherwise there would be no truly helping relationship. A simple humanitarian relationship can of itself attentuate suffering, but it does not necessarily cause real change, or ensure the rights of people who do not now enjoy them.

A real change in a volunteer´s vision will make the following question unavoidable: "What ought to be changed in our society, in our institutions, in social services, in order for conditions of poverty and marginalization to be improved in the direction of liberation? We must raise the subject of the place of volunteerism both socially and politically.

Profound change demands the support of all forces, whether cultural, social, or political - not forgetting the forces to which people have entrusted promotion of the common good. Among these forces, volunteerism, through its social sensitivity and through its daily contact with the weak of society, has a possibly unique contribution to make to the potential for change.

As far as the hands-on presence of volunteerism is concerned, its primary objective is to induce people to see poverty and marginalization as evils springing from society itelf, and needing to be treated as such. And that includes the problem of changing the attitude of the dominant culture, its resignation to considering such evils to be almost physiological components of social development.

As for the "political" arena, it is possible to sum up relations with public administration by describing them as moving along complementary lines:

- That of moving and shaking, and of denouncing failures to deliver, failures to function, and general deficiencies on the part of legislative bodies.

- That of active collaboration, promoting the pilot initiatives of service organizations, and developing real, adequate, and concrete collaboration, while maintaining an often difficult equilibrium between facing the powers-that-be with a true liberty of spirit, and also demonstrating a sincere wish to collaborate.

APPENDIX 2: THE IDENTITY OF THE VOLUNTEER

Ten principles for conducting a search.

Excerpted from Joaquín García Roca, Solidaridad y voluntariado, ed. Sal Terrae, 1994, a book which we heartily recommend, and which recommends itself through its remarkable popular and critical success. García Roca offers first of all a "guided tour" of the terrain of voluntary action, and from that point of view the book is of undeniable sociological interest. It situates volunteerism in a new world with new horizons, opens windows, and provides the elements needed for entering that world, which is so often unfamiliar and ignored. The resulting book is both guide and companion; it offers inspiration and it gives models for reflection and action. We take the liberty of quoting the ten principles with which the book concludes:

1. The volunteer must discover the full complexity of social processes; a simple idea is a simplistic idea. Social problems are a web of factors, tighty woven together. Today´s volunteer must know how to live in a complex society, and also have access to excellent sources of information.

2. Volunteerism makes sense only if the volunteer does not lose sight of the horizon of emancipation. Sympathy with a person dying of a terminal illness or with a person struggling with an addiction is essential, but such sympathy must always constitute one more step towards the removal of the causes of marginalization and of unnecessary suffering.

3. Voluntary action is ethical only when it is a person´s free choice, and springs from a threefold aspiration: to self esteem, to solidarity with others, and to social justice.

4. Volunteerism is not an alibi for the dismantling of the obligations of the State - rather it demands the fulfilment of those obligations. If its presence ever becomes a pretext for the Government to withdraw from or to reduce its involvement, then volunteerism has entered a danger-zone.

5. Voluntary action can be compared to an orchestra. The important thing is the orchestra´s sound. It matters little whether the flute is wood or metal, whether it belongs to this person or that. We demand from an orchestra coordination, coherence, and the concentration of its forces. The volunteer is always a team member; fragmentation serves no purpose. In an orchestra each player plays his or her own part, while collaborating with the other players as the score dictates.

6. Voluntary action must include competence on the humane level as well as quality in the technical sphere. Love is not enough; if, through ignorance or incompetence, we cause suffering to a fragile human being, even with the best of intentions, we have only added to his or her powerlessness and marginalized the person further.

7. Volunteerism must make inroads into the working classes. It cannot be an institution that interests only the middle classes, or those with plenty of spare time. It corresponds much better to a citizenship that renders everybody responsible for matters that affect everybody.

8. The volunteer holds professional social workers in esteem, and will always seek to complement their work. But at the same time there is no question of volunteerism becoming a mere auxiliary service or liaison. The volunteer defends the freedom of operation that is essential to his or her vocation.

9. Voluntary action today requires discipline. Great initiatives are being lost through an

inability to submit them to the strictures of programming, clear objectives, a tested method, a definite time-table, to serious dedication, to evaluation. Good intentions make for great progress - provided there is discipline. Without discipline what you get is confusion and failure. The volunteer must not be taken in by idle talk, but must opt for effectual action. It is important to speak and write with precision and accuracy.

10. Reciprocity is essential in voluntary action. The volunteer does not simply direct his or her efforts towards the assistance of others; the aim is growth for both the helper and the aided, even if their contributions are different. Respect for the other does not merely require the other´s acceptance; it is also given in the hope that the other will respond in kind.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP WORK

1. If you are giving time to volunteer work: Why are you doing so?

- Enquire into your motives.
- Make a list of them and then assess them. Are your motives the same now as they were when you started?
- What made you read this booklet?

2. It often happens that work and other obligations leave us no time to engage in voluntary action.

- How can one integrate discipleship (or following Jesus) and being a citizen in various spheres of life (work, family ...)?

3. Try to answer the questions proposed by the author.

- See Sections I.1, I.2, I.3

4. What is the author´s answer - and what is your own - to the following question:

- What does Christian motivation add to voluntary social action?

5. In order for social action to be not merely an excursion into the "country" of the poor, but a genuine force for change in the volunteer´s life:

- What personal characteristics are indispensible to the volunteer?

6. Think of the difficulties and the crises that arise for everyone in the normal course of engaging in voluntary action.

- What are they?
- How can they be overcome?