

# Letter from Brazil

Some time last year I wrote an article in Spectrum advocating that the present system of "Prefecting" in the Irish Province should be replaced by a more flexible and varied period of formation on the missions. Now that I am on the missions and able to view the situation from another angle. I thought it might be worth while sending on my findings, especially since this will most likely be one of the topics discussed at the coming provincial chapter.

Recently, the six of us who are studying here at the centre in Petropolis, had a meeting to draw up a paper to present to our chapter delegate Fr. Dave Regan. The following is a quotation from it: "Scholastics who are destined for Brazil, instead of doing Prefecting in the traditional way, should be sent to Brazil, to do a course in the language and culture in a centre such as Petropolis. Afterwards they could do youth work, Catechetics etc, in carefully selected parishes. At the end of two years they could remain to do Theology or else return to do so in Kimmage. If they return to Kimmage they should be supplied with pertinent literature, news etc, from time to time."

The centre here in Petropolis offers a four month intensiva course in Portuguese, Pastoral Theology. Socio-cultural Anthropology, Social Science, Brazilian history, literature and music. Naturally, I don't know much about the possibilities available in Africa, but it should not be too difficult to organise a good course in conjunction with some of the well known Catechetical centres, especially on the East Coast. Co-operation with other missionary Orders for this purpose should be possible.

Having visited all our parishes here I don't see any reason why a Kimmage student wouldn't find plenty of suitable work here. The Holy Rosary Sisters are already involved in Social Science, Catechetics, Group Work etc. The same student would also get a real taste for his study of theology afterwards. One of the things which surprised me here was the amount of reading in Theology being done by our Irish P.P's. One c.s.sp. claims to do two hours study each morning (no -its not Dave Regan). Missionary motivation should also be strengthened. When we met the French cssp students in Paris last year, Paddy Peters found this to be one of

the things that stood out. Those who had been on the missions already, as part of their military service; were enthusiastically preparing for the time they would return. Recently I asked a German Franciscan seminarian, who is doing his Theology course here, how necessary he found this period on the missions before ordination. He felt that "even with a four month preparation in the mission country, the violent change of mentality required in so short a time is not good. A much longer period is necessary in which the person has few responsibilities and can allow the culture, attitudes and mentality of the people to slowly grow on him. The alternative is to go into a parish shortly after arriving in the country, be swamped with duties, and work with Irish priests who will have fixed ideas on many things. The Franciscan experiment of bringing foreign seminarians to Brazil before ordination has proved very successful". The Canadian Jesuits use the same system in conjunction with their Uruguian Province and have got very good results.

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An exam. question read: "State the number of tons of coal exported by Britain in any one year."  
 And one successful candidate wrote: "55 B.C.—None."

MOTHER, tucking child into bed: "Now, darling, if you need anything during the night, just call Mother, and Daddy will come."

If students return to Kimmage and finish their studies, I think "Theology" should be divided into, groups on the basis of destinations, rather than on a basis of belonging to a particular year (to borrow an idea first suggested by Fr. Paddy Lewis). These groups could keep in contact with the mission by receiving periodicals etc, and also keep the language fresh by speaking it among themselves.

However, the problem of whether or not theological studies should also be done on the missions has to be faced. A Brazilian seminarian I spoke to last week felt strongly in favour of the idea. "This is the only way you can learn Theology adapted to the problems, mentality, and social structure of the country" he claims. Fr. Secundo S.J. one of the foremost South American theologians, who lectured to us recently, felt that it is important for foreign seminarians to spend some time on the missions. However, whether or not they returned to their own country to continue their studies, he believes is indifferent "as far as theology goes, because it is the same theology which will be taught in both countries, the theology of Vatican II". Mgr. Cambron, a French-Canadian, who is at present engaged in writing a book on the role of foreign clergy in South America, inclined to the view that studies are best completed in the home country. The reason he gave me is rather interesting. "As an Irish person, you can only take on a new culture in the nature of a graft. You start by accepting the fact that you can never become a Brazilian without being born into the culture. The root, your Irish culture, remains and the new culture is determined by the vitality of the root. It is only by appreciating your own culture that you can appreciate other cultures. If you kill the root you kill the life itself and you are unable to assimilate the culture of another. The more you know your own culture profoundly the less likely you are to project Irish categories of thought onto the new culture. I feel foreign missionaries should return to their own countries to complete their studies if they are to have this profound grasp of their own culture, a grasp which will enable them to harmonise with the new one".

There is no clear cut solution. Perhaps the best solution is to go on the mission for two years and then decide. This is what Sr. Anne Coleman, a Holy Rosary Sister, who is studying with us here in Petropolis, is doing. She intends working in a parish for a few years and then she will decide whether to do a degree in Sociology in Brazil or elsewhere.