

Brother Victor Kazadi, CFX

An interview on the occasion of his Golden Jubilee with
Brother Vital Mwenge, CFX



Brother Victor, happy Golden Jubilee and
congratulations!

BR. VITAL: Brother, we are celebrating with you your 50 years of religious life. Can you tell us in a few words the feelings you have in your heart at this moment?

BR. VICTOR: *Dear Bro. Vital, in a circumstance like this, many things surface; a lot of feelings overwhelm me, so that the answer to your question is that my feelings are many and varied. It's a mixture of feelings. First of all, I feel joyous, with a happiness which I cannot express. And this happiness is due to a certain awareness of being the object of an immense love on the part of God; because I cannot envisage that this love could in any way be because of*

any merit on my part. No, not at all; because I have known some young ones who are no longer here today.

And so, it is this love of God and his mercy which have brought it about that today I am still here. That's why the idea which comes forth most strongly is the idea of gratitude, of thanksgiving to God who loves me in a special way. I also have a great deal of thankfulness for my parents: people who were simple, but who worked so that we could live with dignity.

I am also grateful to my Congregation, which showed its confidence



**Our Lady's Church
on the Mariastraat,
Bruges, Belgium**

This church, located a few doors down from the Brothers' House in Bruges, is where Brother Victor would make frequent visits for private prayer while visiting the Brothers at St. Francis Xavier Institute.

Brother Victor studied completed his studies in Belgium at the Catholic University of Louvain.

"I am also grateful to my Congregation, which showed its confidence in me in various ways, so that I would be able to show forth all the talents I had within me."

in me in various ways, so that I would be able to show forth all the talents I had within me. I can't forget all my confreres who, whether it was intentional or not, contributed to my growth; I am thinking of all the people who helped me in one way or another.

Along with these feelings of happiness and gratitude, we realize our limits, the finiteness of our being; the finiteness and consequent guilt, because we realize that we have not always measured up to this love of God and of others. There are things that have not been done as they should have been. Thus, we always place ourselves back in the mercy of God who loves us and leads us. I make a brief presentation here of the feelings which I have within me.

BR. VITAL: 50 years begin with one day, and the desire of consecrating oneself to God is born one day and grows progressively in the heart of a man. Since you were no exception to this reality, can you, Brother, tell us briefly the history of your vocation?

BR. VICTOR: *To speak of the history of my vocation, as you yourselves say, this call was certainly born in my heart one day, and it began to get more and more intense. But I must confess that it is truly difficult to describe exactly how this vocation has its birth in the heart of a child. At this age, it is very difficult to determine the path in life one is going to take. Like every child, I was in school, in the Luabo mission; we had Franciscan priests and the Flemish Sisters of "Petem". What struck us and filled us with admiration was their habit: for us it was so impressive. What impressed me the most at that time and which stayed with me,*



Brother Victor (center) at the beginning of his jubilee celebration in Likasi, DRC, with General Superior Brother Lawrence Harvey (left) and General Councillor for Africa Brother François Musongo.

“When you belong to a group which feels that it is genuinely an integral part in the life of all the people, that is something marvelous.”

especially around the Religious, was their devotion. The Sisters were in charge of a hospital, and their way of taking care of the sick was remarkable. They were really beautiful, but knowing that they didn't get married so that they could take care of others, that impressed me. As for the men, the Franciscans, I was a little disgusted to see their young ones in formation, going around with bare feet while wearing their religious habits. But there were also some priests who lived in a way that gave great gospel witness.

I then entered the Seminary of Kanzenze, but my formation program didn't permit me to continue. I didn't follow the normal schedule of primary studies. I got half way through the first stage; I didn't do the 6th, but there I was in the 7th. I spoke with the Rector of the minor seminary who told me of the arrival of the Xaverian Brothers who were going to have entrance exam sessions. I presented myself and succeeded brilliantly. Thus I found myself in the Formation Center of the SNCC, then KDL, in Likasi in 1956. Up until then I hadn't been thinking about committing myself to such a life. But when I got to know the Brothers, in particular Bro. Oscar who was my Teacher for practical living, I began to get interested in their way of life.

On Sept. 1, 1958, I went to Kasenga where I did the first three years of normal studies. June 30, 1960 was the day when the Congo became independent. We couldn't continue there, following the rebellions and all the troubles. On July 11, 1960, Katanga separated from the Congo, the Baluba lined up against Tshombe and others. And so, we moved the Juniorate to Likasi, and I enrolled in the College of Tutazamie.

On May 15, 1961, I was admitted to the Postulancy with Jean LOBO, at that time in GECAMINES. We went to Kasenga on August 15, 1961, and we took the religious habit. Almost immediately, in October or November, because of threats the novitiate was moved to Likasi; the cause of this was the Katangan secession and the ONU war against Katanga, up until 1962. Brother Jean de Ruel, our Novice Master had become sick over the war, and he did not tolerate the situation. He was replaced by Bro. Theodore Verstrat, who was named as the Novice Master (he died on July 2, 1972).

BR. VITAL: Bro. Victor, in this beautiful adventure of following Christ, there are many moments of joy and consolation. As long as you have been a Xaverian, what are your best memories, those that contributed to the strengthening of your vocation?

BR. VICTOR: *Dear Brother, the Congregation of the Xaverian Brothers is a Congregation dedicated to the formation of the young. And, for me, this apostolate is an apostolate that is truly exciting. And when I was a prefect in the college, I used to say often to*

the students that the best present they could give to the Brothers was their life. When the students leave us after their studies and after their university studies, what gives us joy is to learn that such and such a former student is an honest man, a worker who is responsible and a good family man. This is a great good, a real joy.

If our former students are happy people, and they become men for others, that really is a very great joy for us as educators and teachers. Being a Brother also has a lot of joy in it. When a life can't make one happy, it is not really a life. Happiness is something intimate, interior, according to each one's personality. It's not the same as exuberance. In this community where we have had Brothers who have been well formed, in a spirit of sharing which is sincere, we've taken a lot of initiatives, in community, together, and it's something which truly fills us with joy.

We feel like we're not alone, but part of a common project with the Brothers, and we bring to completion a lot of projects; it's a great joy. The Xaverians were a small group in the village of Likasi, but they were respected as Religious. One could say that we were served in some way; we've made something of our lives. When you belong to a group which feels that it is genuinely an integral part in the life of all the people, that is something marvelous. Bro. George contributed a lot to this feeling.

BR. VITAL: You have spoken of happy and encouraging moments. You have also known some dark moments, the negative experiences which have outraged you and have occasionally discouraged you. Can you tell us a little of this?

BR. VICTOR: *Yes, like everybody, we always experience highs and lows; happy moments and less happy moments which are discouraging, revolting. The hardest moment for me took place in 1970. But let's start at the beginning. I was in Belgium taking classes when in '67, I learned that 7 of the 12 professed Brothers whom I had left behind in the Congo, had left almost at the same moment. It was for me a most terrible blow.*

On my return to the country, I was placed with the five remaining Brothers to form a group of 6 Brothers. Then four of those who had remained left...then we were down to two, Placide and I. I think that that moment was surely a very dark moment of our lives. We were truly weakened. In '69, I had just taken my final vows, while Placide was still a Brother under temporary vows. There were some Brothers who even wanted Placide to leave, or even the two of us. But we held fast. And, on Sept. 1, 1973, when I became Prefect of the college (and that was stressful, it will be spoken of), we wondered if our congregation still had a future.

There were other dark moments which, I hope, we will talk about later. As for that famous year 1970, there was another event, sad to say, the arrival of the Belgian Provincial who closed the House of Formation of the Congo. There were two of us, and the house of Formation was closed; one can imagine what that meant in terms of creating a feeling of desolation.

BR. VITAL: What were your attitudes and strategies in dealing with events of this kind, because holding fast to this life for 50 years, you had to have solid defenses (weapons to deal with them). What were yours?

BR. VICTOR: *Brother, I think that you welcome whatever life brings you. We can't prepare for what may come our way. Can we speak of arms, of strategies for dealing with what will come along in our lives? I don't know. With regard to dark events in a man's life, I don't have any strategies like that. I say that it's no good for us to be fighting against dark moments other than to make us even sadder. For me, suffering is not something to prepare for, but when it comes one must welcome it; one must accept it, and when one has accepted it, one gives it over to God Himself.*



Brother Victor renewed his vows as a Xaverian Brother at his jubilee celebration. Here he renews his vows in the presence of the General Superior and surrounded by his Brothers from Congo, Belgium, Kenya and the US. As they gathered around him the Brothers sang a hymn of thanksgiving in Swahili.



The Brothers' Community House in Kasenga, DRC – near the Zambia border. It is in Kasenga where Brother Victor began his formation as a Brother. After leaving this mission in the 1970's, the Brothers returned to Kasenga in 2010.

Keeping in mind what Christ said: "Father, if you wish it, let this cup pass from me.." (Mk 14, 36), one must give oneself over to the will of God, who leads us, in such a way that through all these events we will always come to experience a great sense of peace

I find that God certainly answers us in one way or another. Are these strategies? I don't think so. It's rather the way things normally happen. We can't get peace of heart except in the Lord himself, when he sustains us, accompanies us. That makes us more peaceful. I think that I told you the other day, that the name that Bro. Placide, superior of this community, had given this house, "Our Lady of Faith", was revealing, when you consider the events that we had both lived through in this house.

The Virgin Mary was a Lady of faith. In religious life we can't do without faith; faith in the one who shapes our life. Are we talking about strategies? I really don't believe so. It's normal for us. We can rely on God, and it's in the middle of difficulties that we most need to go to him. Even when we don't know how to pray any more, it's best for us to throw ourselves at his feet so that he can take us in his hands.

BR. VITAL: Bro. Victor, fifty years of religious life, that's no small thing. What is your secret, and how have you remained faithful to your consecration ?

BR. VICTOR: *Once again, Bro. Vital, remaining faithful to my consecration, I don't think that is due to anything I've done. That is the work of the Creator himself...(Bro. Victor shed a tear here)..Our faithfulness to our vocation, one can say, is the very faithfulness of God. He's the*

one who has traveled with us. That's why we give him thanks. I thank him for his goodness, for his mercy, for his greatness. This God of goodness has welcomed me. He called me to follow him, such as I am, and he has not abandoned me.

I didn't enter religious life on a trial basis, as one would enter into a trial marriage. I entered with a firm will to put myself truly in his service without end. I think it is that which has allowed me to lead a consecrated life; thus, when I entered the Congregation, I have been able to stay for 50 years. I haven't even felt the passage of 50 years because it is He who has made it happen. He has leveled out certain difficulties. All this couldn't just be a human work. This is the mystery of a great God.

A religious vocation is not a human work; it is something which can be accomplished only by the will of God. Certainly we have to do our part in making ourselves available and having this intention to join our Congregation. It's also up to us not to call into question our Congregation, in spite of difficulties. For me, a religious vocation is always connected with what is happening today. It is not a life which belongs to the past.

It is not a life which doesn't make sense today. The religious life remains as a life that is deep and of great value. Perhaps the man of today needs it much more than the man of the past. I think that there's a certain awareness of what's happening in one's life which helps to affirm it. I think that for me, these are the convictions which are basis of my faithfulness. And that's what has permitted me, always

sustained by this God himself, to continue to be a man of hope, able to think that the present moments will pass and that something great, noble, and beautiful, is ahead of us.

BR. VITAL: Brother, you have directed Tutazamie College as Headmaster for 3 decades. Can you share briefly your long experience as first Prefect of this college? What were your fears?

BR. VICTOR: *It's true, dear Bro. Vital, that my experience as first Prefect of the college wasn't easy. It was a difficult experience, sometimes painful. But at the same time it was an uplifting experience. Why was it difficult? It was 1973, that is to say when Mobuto came on the scene. The Church was battling with the policies of Mobuto through the actions and words of Cardinal Malula, who had to take exile in Rome. Zairinization happened in 1974, leading to the suppression of religion classes in all the schools. At Christmas the Bishops were going to write a pastoral letter entitled "Our faith in Jesus Christ" to express the primacy of Christ. When I became Prefect, we were already in turmoil with the Mobuto movement, and the destruction of many things had reached its height. And for the populace, a black person who was going to replace a white in a school like the college was a sign of destruction which was undeniable. You can get a sense of the role I was going to play. There was fear: we are only two black Brothers; the formation program had been stopped; it was white Brothers who had named me the head of a college which represented the hope of the people.*

So it was the fear of disappointing those who named me to be the head of this institution on the one hand, and the people on the other. To disappoint them would be the same as jeopardizing the future of the Congregation here in the Congo.

The second fear I had was that of managing the College badly and thus validating the opinion of those who maintained that to put the college under the direction of a black would lead to disaster. The third fear I had was that the Church, under Malula, had political problems. Being named to this position could therefore make me compromise my religious identity. And also I thought of what would happen if I resisted. You can imagine the fear that all these painful conflicts stirred up within me. I had to get through all this with a certain serenity, a certain competence, and, at the same time, a certain firmness. All this was not always easy. And especially when one takes into account that when I was named to the college, some of the professors had been my teachers in the same college. How could I carry out my responsibilities successfully in those circumstances?

BR. VITAL: What were your moments of joy?

BR. VICTOR: *It's a lot easier to talk about my moments of joy. With everything I have just described, I had really felt that the positions I took and the way in which I had worked was exactly what was expected of me. I felt a certain affirmation which was already giving me a lot of joy, especially on the part of the parents of the students. They were happy with the way the college was directed. I had succeeded in gaining the respect of the teachers, and the school was even respected by the authorities of the country: they easily made their presence felt in other schools at the registration time, but at the college they had to behave just like any other parent. That brought me a lot of joy, and I kept my religious identity, in spite of the excessive mandatory meetings with the educational agencies and the security agencies like the CNRI.*

With the teachers we began initiatives in the areas of nutrition, environment, and health, because I was convinced that it is only in this way that people were going to be respected in society. Unfortunately, I had not been understood, and the consequences are still visible today.

For me, education is not the 5th wheel on a chariot as Mobutu maintained. But today the teacher seems to prove Mobutu right. The Church has not respected its own understanding, and it is the parents who must pay the teachers right up until today. They have destroyed the Church, education and the youth. Today the Church is busy fighting against this system of alienation which it was able to manage in its day and whose annoyances it was able to avoid. How much time have we lost?

BR. VITAL: And your difficult experiences?

BR. VICTOR: *Perhaps I can speak a little about some difficult experiences when I was College Prefect. At the time when religion classes were suppressed, there was a laissez faire social climate, putting youth in immoral situations. The education and the formation of the young were not taken care of because it was necessary to please Mobutisme. It was necessary to struggle against the non-values that were being put into the system. The college seemed to be a revolution against Mobutu's system. It was not easy. The most difficult thing was that it was not always unanimous with all the Brothers. One year when I refused to take an oath to support the Mobutu ideology, I was summoned to appear before the CNRI and the office of the Mobutu Youth Agency. I was happy that Bro. Placide also refused to take this oath. I felt supported. It was hard to see that the group to which I belonged couldn't support me. But how to take into account the teachers who would be in difficult circumstances on the one hand, and the necessity of supporting the children on the other? It's hard to fight against corruption, to see to it that such a virus as this does not infect your institution.*

It's harder still to see that the Church is not very much in solidarity, and is divided and not living up to its own agreements: we're not united, even at the level of CENCO.

BR. VITAL: Brother, after 50 years of commitment to the consecrated life many things have changed, your approach to this vocation has certainly evolved. Taking this into account, how do you understand your call today? What meaning are you going to give to your life now?



The College Tutazamie where Brother Victor served as Headmaster (Prefect) and where he was taught by the Brothers.

BR. VICTOR: *The most important event in the history of the Church in which I have been able to participate, indirectly of course, was Vatican Council II. This Council changed a lot of things. At Louvain, one of my professors asked me on his exam: "What is the greatest transformation brought about by the Council?"*

I put as my answer; "For me, it's the question the Church asked herself: "Church, what do you say about yourself?"

It was only beginning at that moment, from the Word of God given to her in trust by God, that the Church wants to be light for the world, As shown in three of the Constitutions of the Council: "Dei Verbum", which shows that the Church has received the Word and that by it, she understands that she must be light for the nations; "Lumen Gentium", so that all people might have life, and have it most abundantly; and that there might be joy in the world; "Gaudium et Spes". I told myself that beginning with that, from the word of God which has been entrusted with us, we are able to become lights for the world in order to procure hope for the people of our own time. The consecrated life itself, for me, has not changed. This ideal of consecration remains the same. It's the adaptation to the circumstances, to the problems of today, of particular parts of the world, of our times...The ideal of consecrating oneself remains. It's the circumstances, the problems which we must attack, which change with time. For me, I think the Council, thanks to this Word entrusted to the Church, which is our Word for all of us, is supposed to make our lives into lights so that the world

might have a little more joy and hope. That's the very meaning of our consecration.

...

How am I going orient my life now? What plans am I going to have?

*I think right now, at my age, there aren't any more plans to make. Our plans are found in how we live our very lives. As far as being a Xaverian Brother is concerned, the direction of my life has been all set up by my Congregation. At times people tell me that I am a pensioner, retired. And I answer: "Religious life is not a job, it is a life. One is not retired from being a Brother. A married person is never retired from being married, no matter what his age". My orientation is still this: **"being a Brother"**. Even though I can't carry out certain projects like the young Brothers, I am still a Xaverian Brother. My orientation is to become more of a Xaverian Brother. I think that's what I have to do, if they still have need of my services. How to consolidate our identity here in Africa, in such a way that the things we have devoted our lives to might continue? How to give meaning to our lives? Yes, there are things which have changed and are continuing to change. The basis of the religious vocation has not changed; it's still the same consecration. But in practice, giving of oneself, devoting oneself to the well being of people is expressed in new ways; it is adapted to the situations of our time.*

BR. VITAL: Brother you are a pioneer who perhaps has not been understood. You are an elder who, in spite of difficulties along the way, has inspired many vocations. What advice can you give to these young people who are coming after you?

BR. VICTOR: *Dear Bro. Vital, I am very aware that I have not always been understood. And even more than that, I am aware that I upset people. And I upset them because in every situation my greatest concern has always been to try to find out where the truth lies. That means that I am not satisfied with easy answers; I am not satisfied with vague reports, with things that aren't very clear, not very transparent, and especially if they are not honest. For me, honesty is a virtue which must take precedence in every situation, in every relationship. Wherever there is a lack of honesty, I am uncompromising. And I think that relationships become easier when there is an atmosphere of honesty because the honest person is honest with himself, with God, with others; this is a person who is free. The difficulty that has been with me all my life, this lack of understanding you're talking about, it's because I have never said anything simply to please someone, to pretend. Doing things that way has not always made it easy to be understood. I think is also a calling for all of us, to know that the world in which we find ourselves is a world which needs truth. That's perhaps why religious are trying to adapt themselves to the world (in every situation), by changing their own identity, in such a way that they find themselves changed in a negative way. The religious, the consecrated one, has received the Word,*

and he loses his identity when he seeks to please. That's a hard burden to bear, and it can't attract many followers, disciples. One has to accept at times the risk of being isolated and rejected rather than to please. Then, in spite of that, in spite of this awareness that I have of myself, it happens that young people could not follow me, but follow Christ (perhaps by seeing me?), I give thanks to God. As our Founder says so well; "God does not have to give an account to anyone, even if he wants to use a sinner".

If a misunderstood person like me has been able to inspire some vocations, one can only give thanks to God. And it's true, there are many people who have entered the consecrated life: Xaverians, diocesans, men and women religious who have been able to follow Christ through my modest words and actions. It's God's grace.

What advice can I give the young people who are coming after me on how they can follow Christ? The first piece of advice is to see only Christ, as St. Paul says, "Jesus Christ crucified," counting only on him, with a deep faith. Just as he himself is united with his Father, let them also be strongly united with Jesus Christ. One doesn't become a religious just to please No! It is a calling which is demanding, in which one must be honest with oneself, with God, and with others. It is a calling which demands discipline. You can't follow Jesus Christ and remain mediocre. No!

Another counsel is that you have to be determined to follow him, without looking back, knowing exactly what you

are committed to by your consecration, without beginning to nibble away at what you have given. Never wish to live your religious life like a stranger to this life. Follow Christ radically: "Whoever wants to follow me ... let him carry his cross...". These words are to be taken seriously.

I will say, finally, that religious life is not something which belongs to the past. And for Africa, religious life is an opportunity for something good. Then, let us live in such a way that this Africa might be able to encounter consecrated people who are giving her this opportunity. In the multiplicity of her tribes and values, with her legendary hospitality, her possibilities, her peoples who are so very welcoming, Africa is a truly favorable field for the Gospel, to become light for the world. If Africa suffers today, it's because, in my opinion (I could be mistaken, perhaps?), it is a victim of its own qualities. Unfortunately today, African religious are running about in search of wealth for oneself and one's family, to the point of losing the very identity of our consecration.

BR. VITAL: Brother, how do you see the future of our Congregation in general, and of our two African regions, the Congo and Kenya, in particular? What are your fears and your hopes?

BR. VICTOR: *How do I see the Congregation? First, generally speaking, since the 24th General Chapter in 1995, all the chapters that followed pointed their finger at the real problems that the Congregation has experienced and which were beginning to destroy it. Today, these essential points have been narrowed down into the six directives of our 26th General Chapter. Formation for mission became important. Community was existing in name only. Today we are concentrating again on creating communities which show forth a witness of their consecrated life. Likewise, we have stressed the contemplative life, in such a way that we are becoming aware again that the mission which is ours is God's mission; that we must work with Him while contemplating the world which he has created. Stress has been placed on the poor and marginalized, who are our contemporaries. The internationality of our Congregation was stressed as a very important dimension of our Xaverian life and, finally, discernment about the future, working together at being Brothers. With all this, I think we will succeed in reconstructing our identity, especially with the recent research done on the charism of our Founder. Thus, our Congregation will get out of the mediocrity into which it was beginning to fall; we will have plans for the future. And so the Congo and Kenya have a chance to be fully alive in a fascinating period of our history which belongs to our past. Most of you entered after the 90's. The Congo has acknowledged that it can't develop without Kenya and vice versa. I, personally, have been very happy that there is a joint regional council meeting (Congo- Kenya). The Congo can't desire to come up with its development plans while neglecting Kenya. And today, there are many possibilities within our reach. Six or seven years ago there were only a few Congolese who spoke English. Today there are many who do. One can't fault the Kenyans for not mastering French. We are lucky to have an English program in our schools; it's a big advantage which our Kenyan Brothers don't have as far as French is concerned.*

Visits between our two regions are healthy. Life in the Congo for the Kenyans, and vice versa, is possible. Having our Brother Rene studying in Kenya is a promising thing. But one has to be serious about all this, especially with regard to formation. We can't be uselessly numerous. Each young person has to be counted on and has to assume all the responsibilities given to him by the Congregation. If only two young men present themselves in Kenya, then these two must be true witnesses to Christ. It's the same for the Congo.

If the Congolese can't work in the Kenyan schools, there are still other areas for collaboration. So, in my opinion anyway, it's here in the Congo and Kenya where there are still vocations for the Congregation, that a lot of work must be done so we can help the whole Congregation. The mission which awaits you, my dear friends, my dear Brothers, is immense, and it's for the present times. The biggest fear here in the Congo is our mediocre course of studies. I don't know what we must do, but we've got to have more extensive and serious classes, if we want our candidates to be reliable.

Another fear is that I don't know what commitment someone has when one tells himself that he wants to become a religious, because there are a lot of young people who commit themselves ambiguously. There is too much of a desire for material goods. The impact of material goods on the individual and on the group is too great, and this falsifies the meaning of consecration. We have to pay attention to this. I mustn't be jealous seeing that the folks I have to form might become richer than me.

Another problem is the problem of tribes. Perhaps the Congolese tolerate the Kenyans better than they tolerate other Congolese, and vice versa. Internationality also comes into play here. We should be up to the task of helping an aspirant who is not capable of this to become tolerant of other tribes. I think that these are not unbearable fears, but these are the things that have to be dealt with to become Xaverian. I think that I have been conscious of this situation from the beginning, especially when I was on the General Council. I think the situation is evolving, but we can't be happy with something which is beneath the excellence which consecrated life requires.

Generally, I have a good impression of the way in which things are evolving.

BR. VITAL: What do you plan to do for the rest of your life; what personal projects do you still have to carry out for the Lord? In other words, how do you want to direct the rest of your life as a Xaverian Brother?

BR. VICTOR: *We already touched on this question, but there is something new in this regard.*

When I was leaving the college, I thought I would be doing something else, but I didn't know exactly what. But when Bro. George died, and I was presented with the possibility of accompanying the "pioneers," who were in a state of confused disarray, and I told them about my handicap, I saw myself being called to this work. As I got into it, I discovered more and

more about this man George who was truly a man of God. I am happy now to do this work, for in spite of all these difficulties, financial and spiritual, I am happy that I am able to understand who George was. To do what he did, he had to be a saint. George's work opened up the Congregation to the world of the marginalized, to those of no account, to the world of those who aren't able to defend themselves, but who need to be defended. For 7 years I have been busy fighting to get back this building that George left to the pioneers, but which was confiscated by a Lebanese. We needed sincere lawyers and our own title to get back this building. I think I told you about this during your visit to Kapulwa last week, that this is a great opportunity for our children at the centers.

I am happy I'm discovering what life in the rural world is like - a world of people who are rolled over, cheated, mistreated.

I think that we can develop something for the children. And I hope that the Regional Council pays attention to this. It's not just George's thing or Victor's or the social committee's. It's the work of the Congregation, and we must get to work on it.

For the rest of my life, I don't know how much longer I can do this work, which I find fascinating and which I got into with my handicap. I don't know what the Congregation thinks of it. I continue my work, and I am very thankful for the car which the Congregation has put at my disposal; my work is so much easier with it.

I think that as long as you young people call on me for advice, my life will always be useful. As for the rest, I pray that

the Congregation will continue to develop, and I pray for my meeting with the Lord. I take each moment that is given to me. I would like for the Lord to make it possible for me, as much as possible, not to be bored. I would like to be useful to the Congregation and to my community.

BR. VITAL: One question that we didn't dare ask, but which we're going to ask anyway: did you ever regret not becoming a priest? Did you ever envy your ex-confreres who had become parents, with families?

BR. VICTOR: *Bro. Vital, when I could still see with my eyes, I used to look at flowers a lot. Flowers are formidable things. I used to find that each flower had its own splendour and brilliance. And, for me, flowers are incomparable. They are incomparable because each one is unique. It's the same thing with regard to a priestly vocation and that of a Brother. They are two different vocations. A Brother is not a miniature priest. It's a distinct vocation: to be Brother for the world and for one's Brothers. It's a mission which has its own meaning, which calls someone to be Brother to people of every tribe, language, people, and nation. And our Founder wanted to send his Brothers everywhere. For me, when I find myself among Indians, Mongols, Europeans, I am at home with my brothers. If these people thought of me as their brother, working with them and for them, that's a vocation to which one can devote oneself, and what's most important here is that it's about bringing Christ to them.*

As for the second question, if I have ever envied those who became parents, I

will give the example of Father Maximilian Kolbe, who was killed in a concentration camp during the war, in place of a man who was going to be sent to the gas chamber. Father Kolbe had asked the commandant if he could take the place of the father. And so he went to his death singing. I think that's the answer to this question. Those of us in religious life, we are not forced to do something; we do it freely. Something like what Christ said: "Nobody takes my life, but it is I who give it".

Our joy, when those we have formed become rich, is like that of Christ who took leave of his divinity and lowered himself. From his poverty he made us free people. It's the same thing; that's what our life is, our consecration. If we begin to envy our former students, our former confreres, that means that there's been a weakening somewhere. The choice we've made is free and clear, knowing well what we've given up and what we've committed ourselves to.

As for our confreres who have left, I think that they have discerned honestly that it's not where they were meant to be. The one who is honest with himself and with God in doing this is going to be a good parent who is happy. But the one who has left when he was really meant to be in the community, he is going to be unhappy.

I would add the following to all this: religious life is a life of liberty, it's a life in which one is following Christ to give people the true meaning of life, which gives people the real "raisons d'être", and like all these flowers, since we spoke about flowers, each one is planted where it is, and wherever it is planted, let it shine forth and give homage to its Creator. And each one of us is created for this. Each of us is created to be happy, to live in harmony with other creatures and with his God. And our life, whether we're married or consecrated, should be a good choice. Wherever we find ourselves, may we be happy because we're where we are supposed to be.

BR. VITAL: Thank you, Bro. Victor.



A plaque at St. Francis Xavier Institute, Bruges which commemorates the 150th Anniversary of the Foundation of the Congregation in 1989. The quote on the plaque is from Theodore Ryken's autobiographical sketch where he writes about his conversion experience through which he "fell in love with the service of God."