

# Cesar 1968

By LeRoy Chatfield

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## Chapter I

November 12, 1965

My dear friends,

This is rather a difficult letter to write but one that I feel obligated to send because of your interest and kindness to me in the past.

Very simply put: I am withdrawing (voluntarily) from the Christian Brothers in order to work full time for the National Farm Workers Association - a grass roots movement begun in Delano, California by Cesar Chavez to organize farm worker families in California. (For my non-Catholic friends): my withdrawing from the Christian Brothers does not mean that I have to leave or that I intend to leave the Catholic Church. I will once again assume the position proper to that of a "layman", i.e., a member of the Church but without the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

My reasons for such a decision are really not very profound or complex. I just feel that I can no longer work on behalf of social justice at the level of abstraction that my life as a religious teaching Brother seems to indicate. Then too, my ever increasing involvement and identification with the poor only continues to widen the gap between my obedience to religious authority and my own understanding of what my life as a Christian must entail. Actually, the decision to make a decision was probably the most difficult part.

I must emphasize that it is not with an attitude of bitterness or hostility that I leave the Brothers. Quite the contrary! I will always be most grateful to them for the opportunities that I had to work with young men and women - that experience alone has been worth a lifetime to me. Then too, many of my closest friends are Brothers and will continue to remain so. In short, whatever "levels of consciousness" I have attained is due in large measure to my having been a Christian Brother.

As I have indicated, I will be working for the NFWA at a salary of \$20 a month. I will serve as the Director of Co-Op Development. Our idea is to build a complex of Co-Op's (clinic, pharmacy, credit union, garage, etc.) somewhere in the Valley - but this complex would be owned and controlled by farm workers themselves. Since almost all of these families make less than \$3,000 a year, this idea presents some unique difficulties that must be overcome. My job - as I see it - is to attempt to organize these Co-Op's by setting up their over-all economic and legal structures and to recruit professional men and women (doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, accountants, teachers, etc.) who will give us one or two

years of their lives to work for the poor through the Co-Op at prices that farm workers can honestly afford to pay. We look upon this as a prerequisite for serious grass roots organizing.

I estimate that it will take two years to organize such a Co-Op - granting of course that it can be done! Since at the age of thirty-one I begin from "scratch" without financial resources, I will have to live in a kind of voluntary poverty for the next two years at least. By voluntary poverty I mean that I will have to live on \$100 a month and buy (and support) a Volkswagen. Since the NFWA can only afford to salary me at \$20 a month at this time, I am going to have to be dependent upon friends who believe in me enough to pledge, let's say, \$5 a month for a year to support my efforts at organizing.

Honestly! This is not a letter of appeal. God knows you have received enough of them from me in the past. I don't want you to do anything for me or for the cause I believe in unless you really want to. I realize that what I propose to do will strike some of you as "crazy" or "naive" or "nuts" and maybe in two years time I will agree with you. But right now I am convinced that Cesar Chavez and the NFWA represents a true anti-poverty program that respects the dignity and integrity of the people involved.

For the first year (at least until June 1966) I expect to be operating mostly in San Francisco and Los Angeles. I have two "contact" offices:

San Francisco Area:

LeRoy Chatfield  
c/o Bonnie Burns  
700 Church St. Apt 205  
San Francisco, California  
(Phone: MA 6-2281 - Evenings)

Delano Office:

LeRoy Chatfield  
c/o National Farm Workers Association  
Box 894  
Delano, California  
(Phone: 8661)

For those of you who want to know what you can do, consider the following:

1. Keep me free to organize by contributing small amounts each month for my support.
2. Make a small contribution towards the purchase and support of a VW.
3. Let me know if I am welcome to stay with you for a day or two when I am in your area. Believe me, I won't overstay.

4. Put me in contact with professional persons or persons with specialized talents who might want to work in a CO-OP situation at the grass roots level. Warning: this work will entail a kind of voluntary poverty and the living conditions will be very basic.
5. Arrange for me to speak to potentially interested groups about the NFWA and our CO-OP movement.
6. Refer me to existing Co-op's that you are personally acquainted with so that I can visit and learn more about them.

Thank you, thank you, for all you have done for me in the past I hope that you will look with understanding on what I feel that I have to do to close one chapter in my life and begin another.

Love,

LeRoy Chatfield  
(Formerly: Brother Gilbert, FSC)

P.S. I suspect that my San Francisco address will be the fastest way to contact me - at least for the time being.

February 4, 1966

Article from St. Louis Review  
Dateline: Delano, California

"Brother Quits Order, Joins Delano Strike"  
"Leaves After Union, Christian Brothers Fail in Negotiations"

A Christian Brother who attempted to bring about negotiations between the Christian Brothers Winery in Central California and the National Farm Workers Association, quit the Brothers after negotiations failed and joined the association as a union organizer.

LeRoy Chatfield, 31, who joined the order in 1949 and took his robe and the name Brother Gilbert, F.S.C., in 1952 is now Mr. Chatfield again after receiving dispensation from his vows last November.

In October, Brother Gilbert arranged for a meeting between Cesar Chavez, head of the National Farm Workers Association and leader of the vineyard strike in Kern and Tulare Counties in California and Brother T. Jerome, F.S.C. provincial of the San Francisco province of the Christian Brothers.

Although the Christian Brothers vineyards are not being struck, for what one person close to the situation called "political reasons" the workers there receive the same pay as workers

in the struck vineyards. The strike is over pay increases and union representation. The growers now refuse to recognize a union for the workers.

Chatfield, as Brother Gilbert, had been interested in social work for some time and three years ago, while vice principal of a high school in Bakersfield, Calif., met Chavez, who was working in Delano, 30 miles north of Bakersfield, the center of the present strike.

According to Brother Jerome, Brother Gilbert's difficulties with the order began at this time when many of the brothers felt that as vice principal of the high school he was spending too little time at the school and too much in social action work in Delano.

Brother Jerome told the St. Louis Review that he had met with Cesar Chavez at the urging of Brother Gilbert but "nothing came of it because Chavez wanted exclusive permission to represent workers in our vineyards who are working in an area which by Chavez' own admission, he is not yet involved in."

Brother Jerome explained that the Christian Brothers vineyards are approximately 75 miles from Delano and the current strike area, at the closest point. The Christian Brothers take the position that since they are not involved in the strike area in any way, there is no decision for them to make yet on unionization. The Christian Brothers Winery is in the Napa Valley, 300 miles north of Delano, Brother Jerome said. It was the first winery in its area to be unionized, he said.

"The winery is our major operation in this field," he said. "Our vineyards are comparatively small. We buy most of our grapes from the growers."

Chatfield told the Review that since the Christian Brothers' Winery was one of the largest in California, he was "very concerned".

"They do not seem to be any more socially conscious than anyone else," he said, referring to the Christian Brothers. "Their pay is no better and no worse.

An irony of the situation, he said, is that the Christian Brothers Winery - which he said produces the largest selling brandy in the country - was started to support the Christian Brothers work with poor children.

"I left the order because I could no longer work at the abstract level of teaching social science on a campus," he said.

"When the National Farm Workers Association wrote the Christian Brothers asking for a meeting between the workers and the provincial to talk about union representation, the response we got was worse than the one from the growers. I had left the order between the time we sent our request and the time we got an answer." He said that the Christian Brothers would be treated as any other grower would.

February 21, 1967

Copy of Letter from Bishop Hugh A. Donohoe, Chairman of the California Bishops Committee for Social Justice to Brother T. Jerome West, F.S.C., Provincial of the Christian Brothers, California Province

Brother T. Jerome West, F.S.C., Provincial  
99 Devin Drive  
Rheem Valley, California 94570

Dear Brother Jerome:

After returning from the East last Thursday, I learned that negotiations had broken down between Mont La Salle Vineyards and the National Farm Workers Organizing Committee. It is my hope that the leaders of both groups will soon resume negotiations in good faith and avoid what could well become a national scandal.

At this time I wish to offer my services to you and the members of your staff to assist you and the NFWOC in returning to a peaceful and reasonable negotiations procedure. I would be happy to meet with you and the Mont La Salle Vineyards executives as well as with NFWOC leadership, in hopes of resuming negotiations in an orderly fashion. At such a meeting, Brother Jerome, I would consider it rather important that you be present together with the Brothers in charge of the Vineyards and their legal counsel.

We are all aware of the difficulties in conducting a fair election. We would not want you to sign an under-the-table contract, but lacking a National Labor Relations Act for agriculture, good faith is necessary on both sides to determine a fair election.

It is not necessary for me to emphasize that the Church is very much concerned in this matter. It is not sufficient to proclaim the principles of social justice. We must also, as opportunity presents itself, make clear that these principles can be applied. In this instance we are presented with an opportunity, and with God's help and a measure of good will on both sides, we should be able to find a solution that will be in accord with justice and possibly serve as a model for other growers, who may be seeking some leadership in this important matter.

Hoping to hear from you by return mail, since time is so important in this matter, I remain

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Hugh A. Donohoe, D.D.  
Bishop of Stockton

February 21, 1967

Copy of Night Letter from Board of Christian Social Concerns of the Southern California-Arizona Conference of the Methodist Church

Sent to:

Brother Bertrand Leo Kirby  
La Salle Provincialate  
330 Riverside Drive  
New York City, New York

Brother Jerome West  
99 Devin Drive  
Rheem Valley, California

Deplore latest activity of Christian Brothers against National Farm Workers Association at Napa and Reedley. Urge in Christian conscience you live up to your earlier agreements with NFWA and bargain in good faith now.

Ken Watson, Chairman

Frank M. Gray, Executive Secretary

Board of Christian Social Concerns  
Southern California-Arizona Conference  
The Methodist Church

February 27, 1967

Copy of Letter from Brother Jerome West, F.S.C., Provincial of the Christian Brothers, California Province to all Christian Brothers in California.

Dear Brothers:

This is an unusual letter from me to you, but these are, to say the least, unusual times. I want to write a few lines to you about the current "dispute" between Mont La Salle Vineyards and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).

Undoubtedly most of you have seen and read the article in the National Catholic Reporter (February 22, 1967) by A.V. Krebs Jr., on the dispute between MLSV and UFWOC. I know that this article must be disturbing to you even though you are confident that the Brothers who direct Mont La Salle Vineyards are men of integrity and deeply concerned about their workers.

I take this opportunity to assure you that all of us who are involved in this matter are dedicated to the principles of social justice so often and so clearly enunciated by the Church. We realize, further, that it is not sufficient to proclaim these principles but that they must be applied even at great sacrifice and even under great pressures from one side or another. I can assure you personally though my close contact with the problem over the past year or more that Mont La Salle Vineyards and its spokesmen have acted in complete good faith in dealing with Mr. Chavez and the UFWOC despite the insinuations, half-truths, quotations-out-of-context that appear in the article in the National Catholic Reporter and elsewhere.

The current problem stems from the fact that Mr. Chavez "pulled out" of a scheduled election approximately one hour before the voting was to begin. The election procedures as well as the election itself was under the supervision of the California State Conciliation Service. This abrupt decision on the part of Mr. Chavez occurred despite the fact that Brother Gregory had spoken to the UFWOC leader only the evening before and had been assured that the election would be held as scheduled.

The Brothers, very briefly, are being blamed for "intimidation and coercion" of employees. I am confident that Mr. Chavez himself does not believe this. I am sure that the UFWOC knows this is untrue. I think the article in the San Francisco Examiner of February 15, clearly states the problem:

"Farm labor contractors, facing extinction with the growth of unions in agriculture, have fouled up the AFL-CIO relations with the Christian Brothers' Mont La Salle Vineyards, union organizer Cesar Chavez said today. Chavez told The Examiner that AFL-CIO United Farm Workers decided to pull out of a scheduled union representation election because of 'the coercion and intimidation' exercised by farm labor contractors."

The farm labor contractor is not an employee of Mont La Salle Vineyards and Mr. Chavez knows this. The words of Mr. Chavez quoted in The Examiner are considerably different from the insinuations in the article by Mr. Krebs in the NCR one: "the intimidation of the Christian Brother workers continued at an accelerated pace by company foremen."

Bishop Hugh A. Donohoe of Stockton, Chairman of the California Bishops Committee for Social Justice, has written to me indicating that we should not "sign an under-the-table contract" with any union. This we also believe. On the other hand, Mr. Chavez wants Mont La Salle Vineyards to recognize his union without any election at all. We are most anxious to proceed to a fair election so that our workers may select representatives of their own choosing. This has been our objective in all our dealings with UFWOC. We are even now continuing negotiations so that an election may be held as soon as possible.

We all know that there are times when we must stand up in the face of opposition and manifest to all our integrity and the justice of our cause. Those of you who have seen the movie "Man For All Seasons" will realize very well what I mean. Possibly, this is one of those times. It is for this reason I write to you to assure you that the Brothers directing Mont La Salle Vineyards have acted prudently with courage and with a deep concern for the principles of social justice. If there has been any fault to find I think it has been with our failure to communicate to you and the public in general the integrity of our position in this difficult matter.

I do ask for your prayers for a swift and happy conclusion to this problem.

Cordially in Christ,

Brother Jerome West, F.S.C.  
Visitor

March 13, 1967

Report on Cross-Check Election  
State of California, Department of Industrial Relations  
Conciliation Service

Employer: Mont La Salle Vineyards (Christian Bros.), Napa and St. Helena

Union: United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO

The results of a Cross-Check Election conducted by the undersigned on March 13, 1967 at State Conciliation Service, 4073 State Bldg., Fresno, Calif. are as follows:

Number of Eligible Employees . . . . .35

Number of membership records or authorization cards submitted  
by the union .....29

Number of signatures verified with Employer's Eligibility Records .... 29

Number of signatures rejected ..... 0

I hereby find that the above named Union has been designated and selected as the exclusive representative of the employees in the unit designated in the Cross-Check Election Agreement executed on Tuesday, March 7, 1967.

Ralph Duncan  
Conciliator

April 3, 1967

Letter to LeRoy from Al Krebs

Dear LeRoy

Just thought you might like to see  
some of the crap I am having to put up with as fallout  
from the Christian Brother caper.

The letter I think is self-explanatory.  
Needless to say, my byline will not be on the article. I  
may send it down when published, especially if the "Jurisdictional  
Dispute" clause is added, and ask that Cesar write a letter  
to the editor. We'll see.

Got a great note from Tom Loomer the  
other day concerning this whole mess. He evidently also  
received a copy of Brother Jerome's letter to "Dear  
Brothers . . ." It's nice to have friends.

Also enclosed is a clipping I thought  
you people might be interested in.

Keep in touch.

Viva!

A.V. Krebs, Jr.  
San Francisco, California

April 3, 1967

Rev. Francis Maurovich, Editor  
The Catholic Voice  
2918 Lakeshore Avenue  
Oakland, California 94610

Dear Father Maurovich,

You will excuse me if I seem to belabor the point but I am still left with an uneasiness about this whole matter of my strike stories for The Catholic Voice. I realize that our phone conversation was not the best way to discuss this important matter and for that reason I am taking the liberty of writing this letter to you in an effort to make my point as clear as possible.

First, I realize that you have to answer to the editorial board concerning the paper's policies but I fail to understand where one person (with admittedly vested interests) on the board can exert so much pressure that future stories of mine are now also to be read by the paper's business manager.

I realize fully that you think I am reading into this episode far more than is there but I am afraid there is no other way it can be read.

An advertiser, whose representative sits on the editorial board, has complained that his firm, which advertises frequently in the paper, was handled "unfairly" in a story which appeared in the paper's news columns.

The Christian Brothers made their rebuttal in a letter to the paper, addressed not to the editor as is customary, but to the business manager which to me smacks of intimidation.

The Voice ran that letter in full and wisely consented to let me, as the journalist in question,

respond. It would seem to me that if the Order was still unsatisfied with the treatment they had received they could demand a retraction. To date, to the best of my knowledge, they have taken no such action.

What they have done in this matter I am afraid closely parallels one of the very things I reported in my article concerning their role in the union recognition elections and to which they objected.

I am speaking of Brother Gregory's "pep talks" to the workers about all the "glories" of working for the Christian Brothers as opposed to the "restrictions" which they would face as union members.

Say for the sake of argument, that Brother Gregory wasn't trying to be anti-union how else, as Bishop Donohoe reminded him in their Stockton meeting, were his remarks going to be interpreted by the workers?

Given this background how else am I to interpret Mr. John Broad's letter to Donald Woods, your business manager; the results of the charges made by the paper's Christian Brother editorial board member, and Mr. Wood's subsequent inspection of my copy?

The second point I want to make is to question the type of thinking which would allow Mr. Wood to even suggest that the A. Perelli-Minetti affair is a "jurisdictional dispute." I don't see how anyone could make such an assertion after reading my recent Assumption Abbey article with its carefully detailed chronology of the dispute unless they were prepared to take a decided pro-management position.

When could we get together in the near future to clarify the position of my professional integrity on the staff of The Catholic Voice?

In Christ,

A.V. Krebs, Jr.