

«THAT THE WORD OF GOD

CONTINUE TO SPREAD» (2 Thes 3:1)

(2/2)

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Today, we never tire of speaking of the "new evangelization". Neither should we, today, tire in daily seeking effective instruments for that new evangelization. We must base ourselves on the Word. The Congress of Puebla (1979) said it for the Church of Latin America: «Scripture must be the soul of evangelization» (N° 374).

Before Puebla, it was Medellín (1968) that affirmed: «Our pastoral mission must first of all be based on the Word of God» (14-14). For this purpose it made some catechetical specifications: «A continuous effort is necessary in order to demonstrate that the message of salvation is today a Word of life» (8-15). Then it goes on to ask for a better preparation for native catechists and deacons as «ministers of the Word» (8-14).

For Christian teachers, the words of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (19, 5) are still valid:

- To evangelize means that the Church must bring the Good News to all parts of the world so that its power can transform them from within and thus renew the whole of humanity... (N° 18).
- It is important to evangelize cultures... (N° 29).
- Since «the gap between the Gospel and culture is the great problem of our time... cultures must be converted by being introduced to the Gospel... But this meeting cannot take place if the Gospel is not made known» (29).

Therefore, there will be no New Evangelization without the Word, without Dialogue, without MEETING... The Rule clearly states: «Lasallian institutions are characterized by the determination to make the means of salvation available to young people through a quality education and by an explicit proclamation of Jesus Christ.» (13).

This proclamation of Christ holds priority among the Christian Brothers, a priority which extends to other activities besides those in which we are "ministers of the Word".

The Declaration says: «In no way do we neglect to proclaim Jesus Christ. We believe that the youth of today needs to hear the Gospel and is ready to listen to it» (39-4).

John Paul II has given us a general idea of the New Evangelization: «It is new in its zeal, new in its methods, new in its expression».

What does this mean for our lives, and for our schools?

NEW IN ZEAL: This means that we base our faith in the newness of God the Father. Then we will be able to show our love and our fidelity even amidst all the idols which surround us...

NEW IN METHODS: Everywhere and always present, the Word is GOOD NEWS, hope, salvation. We make it a Word which attracts, supports, corrects because it is always with us; a Word which never condemns because it always hopes; a Word to which we grow accustomed...

NEW IN ITS EXPRESSION: a dynamic Word, close to us... which enters into the lives of persons and groups, of Educational Communities... so that many can see the novelty of the impact of the Word on our lives and our institutions.

It is evident that we will not be effective agents of this "New Evangelization" until we become "men and women of the Word", "Communities of the Word"...

«MEANWHILE THE WORD SPREAD...» (Act 6:7)

This is another result which the Church sees each time it frees the Word, each time it puts the Word within reach of the faithful, each time the Word is placed in the hearts of the People of God.

It was the observation of St. La Salle. It is what the Rule means when it says: «Together they listen and meditate on the Word of God» (50). «Daily they read and meditate on the Word of God» (67).

As we familiarize ourselves with the Word, we will live what the Rule says in N° 48... (and to which we are not always able to measure up). «The distinctive character of the Brother's community is to be a community where the experience of God is shared».

As long as we are not open to the Word of God and we refuse to let ourselves be taught by it, it will be more difficult to share our faith with each other. We will continue to be shallow men and women...

Sometimes I ask myself why we seem to be afraid of the Word when our spirituality and our mission urge us to absorb it; when we are the spiritual sons of "a man of the Word"... Why do we not let it free us?

And meanwhile, our spiritual lives seem to languish as if they lacked sustenance... What should we do?

AS DISCIPLES...

We have already mentioned that "discipleship" is a given in the teaching and practice of De La Salle. «Jesus Christ has chosen us to be his co-workers in the salvation of souls. When reading the Gospel, you should study the manner and the means he used in order to bring his disciples to the practice of the truths of the Gospel» (M 196, 2).

The Gospel contains many images of the "disciple" which complement each other.

– The disciple seated at the feet of Jesus in order to hear his word (LK 10:39).

– The disciple who has an intimate experience of the Lord and therefore who can see and hear what others would or could not... (LK 10:23-24).

– The disciple who shares the interior experience of the Master (Jn 15:15). In this way the disciple becomes a friend of the Master because through his intimate experience of His person he knows the secrets of His life, that which sustains Him, that which gives Him strength, joy and hope. «Those who hear My voice are My mother and My brothers and sisters...» (Lk 8:19-20 and 11:27-28).

We should not be surprised that this should be so, but rather rejoice in it. Often in our ministry we may have noticed that "Faith comes by the Word" (Rm 10:17).

FREE THE WORD...

«The word of the Lord cannot be chained» (2 Tm 2:9) says St. Paul, basing himself on his own experience. It is not always thus. We Brothers must promote, respect and insist that the Word of God remain available to all, especially in our own lives and schools. It might cost us something to have Paul's experience. We are always tempted in various way to "chain the Word" in Community and School...

– When the Religion period gets the least desirable spot in the schedule because it is not a priority.

– When we fail to help catechists prepare themselves and when we fail to support them...

– When we do not provide a good place or atmosphere for listening, meditating, praying the Word...

– When we teach the Word theoretically without showing how it truly works through living experiences.

– When we teach the Word professionally, as a subject for study and analysis rather than as the mystery of God in Christ and the Church...

– When we proclaim the Word timidly, hurriedly or without enthusiasm...

– When we get lost in technical points instead of opening hearts to the Word,... be they the hearts of persons, of communities or schools.

– When we try to "control" the Word instead of letting its influence flow powerfully and freely...

"To free the Word" according to the language and the practice of De La Salle is to hand it on, to present it simply as the reality of God; to give it wide berth so that it is not constricted by schedules, structures... or by "the letter..." and then let it move hearts to conversion. (Acts 2:37).

"To free the Word" as far as teaching Christian Brothers are concerned is to listen to it, accept it, yield to it so that it becomes our guide and our teacher...

In certain ways we are living in times in which it is not easy to proclaim the Word. The demands of the New Evangelization will make us enter more and more into the approach given by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Phillipians:

«...be innocent and genuine, perfect children of God among a deceitful and underhanded brood, and you will shine in the world like bright stars because you are offering it the word of life» (Phil 2:15-17).

For this purpose you must acquire the mentality of "the man of the Word", daily perusing the Scriptures (Acts 17:11).

IN THE POWER OF THE WORD

The Church which is Mater et Magistra teaches us discipleship. I like to point out the liturgical practice which is very realistic in its teaching. Frequently the Alleluia or the Gospel Song which introduces to Gospel reading during the Mass indicates either the attitude best suited to that reading or the power and creativity of the Word itself. Thus:

– "The Lord opened his heart to receive the Gospel" (Acts 16:14)... is a practice of the early Christian Church.

– We are always in danger of "hardening our heart" (Ps. 94, 8).

– The Lord gives us "a noble, generous and patient heart" (Lk 8:15)... in order to receive the Word.

– In us lies "the incorruptible seed of the Word" (I Pet 1:22-23).

– We are disciples like "sheep attentive to the Word" (Jn 10, 27).

– We must not allow "the Word to degenerate" (Jas. 1:18).

– Thus we can enter into the intimacy of our God (Rv 3:20).

CONCLUSION

"That the Word continue to spread" (2 Thes 3:1).

For this to happen let us enter on the road to conversion thanks to the Word. It will be good for us. We will be closer to our Lasallian origins. What must we do?

● Continue to increase "experiences of the Word" in our communities, schools, Lasallian groups...

Give more time to community meditation on the Word. Enrich our community prayer times with the experience which the Church offers us in the "Lectio Continua". Renew our community and group prayers and celebrations so that the Word of God may be more evident as the Word proclaimed, received, interiorized, shared, heard...

● Likewise, we must be promoters and animators of "Groups for the Word". Here I have in mind what is done in several Regions of the Institute with reference to efforts being made to provide biblical formation for adults (Parents, teachers, friends, neighbors...):

– Introduction to the Bible concentrating on the Sunday Gospel.

– Systematic biblical catechesis.

– Courses on the Bible stressing study and prayer.

– Groups using biblical prayers.

– Basic ecclesial communities.

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In this way our communities and school will grow as "the people of the Word", "relishing the Word" (Hb 6:5), making "the Word active within them" (I Thes 2:13), because "the Word of God remains among us in all its richness" (Col 3:16).

Then, following the logic of the Acts of the Apostles each time the Word is announced and spread, the Church grows proportionally (cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20).

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