

## «THAT THE WORD OF GOD

## CONTINUE TO SPREAD» (2 Thes 3:1)

(1/2)

THE WORLD OF GOD IN THE LIFE  
OF A CHRISTIAN BROTHER

My considerable experience as a catechist has brought me to some important conclusions concerning the passage of Scripture which opens these reflections. My numerous meetings with Brothers in our communities, faculties of our schools and Lasallian groups have served to confirm them. As a result, I hear within myself the insistent echo of the questions posed by Pope Paul VI to the entire Church in the document "Evangelii Nuntiandi".

- Is the power of the Gospel really stirring the consciences of men today?
- How can the power of the Gospel truly transform mankind today?
- What methods can we use to teach the Gospel so that its power can be effective?

## THE WORD SPREADS...

All of these experiences have also thrown new light on the life and the teaching of our Founder. It seems to me that we must now read some of his teachings from a different perspective, and apply his teachings to the situation that exists today in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the Lasallian Family.

In the Rule of 1718 he wrote:

«In order to acquire this spirit and to live by it, the Brothers of this Society shall have a great respect for Holy Scripture. Therefore they shall always carry the New Testament with them and shall pass no day without reading some of its passages, through a sentiment of faith, respect and veneration for the Divine word contained therein, looking on it as their first and principal Rule».

In Meditation 159 for the feast of St. Bartholomew De La Salle says: «How happy you are to be able to carry the Gospel with you always... Be faithful to this practice... Fill your souls each day with the holy maxims of this Sacred Book and become familiar with them by meditating on them frequently».

Fortunately, today there are many Brothers and Lay persons who follow the advice of the Founder: «Attentively read the Word of God each day» (M 178, 3). In this way they are coming to realize the power of the Divine Word in the world today. Although the words of De La Salle were written for the Brothers, many groups of lay persons are also hearing them and following his recommendations. The result is that they are experiencing what St. Paul says «The Word of God is a power in those who believe» (1 Thes 2:13).

With the encouragement of Vatican II, many Christians are spreading the power of the Word. «Through the Sacred Scriptures, the Father comes to His children to speak with them, because He loves them. Such is His omnipotence and the power of His Word that it becomes the foundation of the Church, the firmness of the faith of its members, food for the soul and the clear and ever flowing fountain of spiritual life» (D. V. N° 21).

## TO PERSONS AND INSTITUTIONS...

Truly the Word of God displays its power because the Lasallian world receives it openly, puts it into practice and allows it to effect our conversion to God.

- In school A... several groups of Lasallian teachers meet weekly, either before or after class hours, to read, share, pray and apply the Word of God to their responsibility as teachers.
- Parents B... do not leave the house in the morning before having read the Word of God and prayed. Whenever possible, the children join in...
- In school C... youth groups begin their meeting with a reading from the Word of God, followed by a discussion, sharing and prayer. The Gospel of the Sunday is the usual text.
- In school D... the Mothers' Club organizes social activities and teaches catechism. Their meetings begin with a reading, discussion and prayer, also using the Sunday Gospel.
- In school E... all meetings of the Board of Directors begin with a reading from Scripture followed by a commentary and a prayer. Thus the members inspire themselves in their own personal lives and guide themselves in the search for adequate school policies and programs.

The same can be said for Parents' Clubs, janitorial and grounds crews and the secretaries. Through them the Word of God is ever present in our schools.

I am personally convinced that the Word of God is a positive force in personal, community and institutional living when it is "free" to exert all its power and creativity. Using it we will acquire the "sentiments of faith" which are characteristic of our Institute. Two passages of the "Declaration" express this idea very clearly:

«The exercise of our authentic apostolate is the source of our spiritual growth... By listening to the needs of men we can better hear the words of God» (N° 25-2).

«The Word of God reveals the ultimate meaning and the infinite value of human existence. In turn, the mystery of man is really solved thanks to the mystery of the Incarnate Word» (N° 42-1).

These quotations were written in 1967, but are still relevant to the life of the Institute.

## DE LA SALLE: A MAN OF SCRIPTURE...

His entire life as «a man of faith» is based on Scripture. The Word of God is "living and effective" (Heb 4:12-13) because it is read daily, meditated daily and accepted with joy and hope. De La Salle listened to the Word and it became his teacher and guide.

He taught it with confidence because it taught him. By meditating on it he learned its mysteries and these he then taught to his disciples. That is why he could speak to the hearts of those who listened. As presented by De La Salle, Scripture was joy and peace for his Brothers. Together they shared the Word, meditated on it, prayed it and lived it. The Lasallian Family, like the early Church is a "community of the Word" (Acts 2:42).

The Word is salvation because it is first of all conversion. Between 1679 and 1684 the first Brothers experienced the same thing which was expressed 300 years later in the Declaration: «The Word of God does not come down from on High in an abstract form to anonymous individuals, but it always comes to complete, reveal, clarify human experience» (N° 40-5).

Since De La Salle is converted to Scriptures and is converted by them, he can use the language of faith with his first Brothers as he speaks about: trust in Providence... true poverty... community life... the new approach to the school... Christian...

Following the line of thought of the Declaration we can say that the first Brothers and teachers "found the God who called them by name, not in books or in words but rather in His teaching... John Baptist de La Salle... man of Scripture... (cf. N° 40-5).

#### **IN A CHURCH MORE SACRAMENT THAN WORD...**

It was not clear for John Baptist de La Salle what «being a man of Scripture» might mean, in the light of his epoch. In his day, the Church, like the Church of Trent and Vatican I was more sacrament than Word. But within this setting, La Salle understands that the Word must be at the basis of Christian education if it is to be solid and lasting. He had the experience of his "spiritual directors" in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice and the French School of spirituality. His love for the Word was well founded in a broad experience. He understands that Christian life must be sustained and supported by the Word – a Word which is taught, heard, shared, prayed and lived – and that the Christian teacher must first be a "man of Scripture". Thus the life of the Christian teacher formed by De La Salle gradually assumed the character of a ministry. For La Salle this is the very logic of the Church which is born of the Word and exists to teach the Word. He learns this from experience and the Epistles of St. Paul which are solidly based on Scripture: «How will they believe if they have not heard? And how will they hear if no one teaches? And who will teach if no one sends them?» (Rom 10:13-15).

De La Salle well understands discipleship and wants his Brothers to imitate him as "men of Scripture" because in their turn they are to be catechists "ministers of the Word" in the Christian schools and for the students who attend them. For De La Salle the model of the Church is "the faithful people" of the "disciples of Jesus Christ". He was foreseeing Vatican II.

#### **IN A PERIOD OF CLERICALISM...**

De La Salle distances himself from the vocation of the ministerial priesthood to form "ministers of the Word" so

that this ministry could be exercised there where the Word would find a privileged place, where it could be taught, heard, meditated on, prayed and lived... in the Christian School...

For De La Salle there is no "Christian school" unless there is explicit teaching of the Word, without challenging our life with the Word...

Besides, in this age of clericalism, the Word was not always available to the faithful believers. They were not always free to read the Word, to be educated by it and to be formed by it. De La Salle saw that the "Christian School" was the ideal place to bring the Word to children because they understand it easier, because they better understand the mystery of the kingdom. (Cf. Lk 10:21).

De La Salle understands that within the Christian school the Word finds an ideal situation in which to form the heart and attitudes of ordinary people. In the Christian school the Word can be heard in the language of the people... It is the right atmosphere to meditate on it and to share it. In fact, the Christian School is a privileged place where "the Church of the Word" can grow.

Such is De La Salle's understanding, and this is what he explains to his disciples. The Word is at the very center of every school day.

Everything starts with the "Reflection" when the whole of existence takes on new meaning by the light and power of the Word.

Then come the "maxims of the Gospel" which are prayed and meditated in order that they may later be memorized and then lived. The Christian brings the "living memory" of the Gospel into actual daily living.

Then follows the catechism on the principal mysteries which gives Christological dimension and meaning to systematic catechesis. This brings a better understanding of the presence of the mystery of Christ in daily life.

#### **THE WORD AND THE HISTORY OF SALVATION**

De La Salle is a return to the early days of the Church in which the Word had priority and taught the faithful. These were times when the Word dominated the ecclesiastical structures as well as the liturgy, preaching and catechetics...

De La Salle reads the history of the Church from the perspective of the "Ministers of the Word" – the Apostles, evangelists, Fathers and Doctors of the Church... And he does not hesitate to say to the Brothers these words which many lay teachers are applying to themselves: «You have the happiness of sharing the ministry of the apostles by daily teaching catechism to your children... instructing them in the maxims of the Gospel» (M. 159.2).

In this way, De La Salle associated the Brothers and all Christian teachers with some of the greatest teachers in the Church like Barnabas (M. 134), Augustine (M. 161), Cyprian (M. 166), Gregory (M. 109), Jerome (M. 170), John Chrysostom (M. 100).

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