

OFFERING THE SCHOOL AS A SIGN OF THE KINGDOM

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In N° 3 of the Rule there is a sentence which captivates me. It is: "St. John Baptist de La Salle renewed the school in order to make it accesible to the poor and to offer it to everyone as a sign of the Kingdom and a means of salvation."

How can the school be a sign of the Kingdom? What does it have to accomplish in order to be considered as a sign of the Kingdom of God?

SIGN

Reflecting on the meaning of "sign," I think of two examples. The first was the result of my curiosity in Baguio, the Philippines, while attending a cursillo. Near the residence where I was staying was President Marcos's palace; from time to time, he used to come there. Whenever I passed by the palace I used to look for some signs that might indicate that the president was there. What I looked for were signs such as the presence of the police, additional cars around the palace, the number of people entering and leaving, the position of the national flag. If I could not see the president, I wanted to find out, indirectly, by "signs," if he was there or not.

My second experience was waiting for the smoke to escape during the election of the Pope. The entire world eagerly waited to see the color of the smoke coming from the chimney. White smoke or black smoke, signs, enabled us to arrive at our conclusions.

SIGNS FROM GOD

I have searched out some Biblical texts to see what the meaning of "sign" is in Sacred Scripture. A sign from God would indicate or manifest that God is present or that He has passed by during a particular moment in history. Just as I was not able to see President Marcos, man is not able to see God; His presence must be guessed at or manifested by very clear signs.

If the school is to be a sign of God's Kingdom, we must, by looking at the school, learn something about God. There must be indications or signs pointing out that God is truly present in the school. Such signs would be manifestations of the presence of God and that He is at work in the school.

SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM

Here are some indications or signs of the real presence of God presented by Scripture:

Matthew 11: 4-6:

- the blind can see
- the lame can walk
- lepers are cured
- the dead rise
- the Good News is announced to the poor
- demons are expelled (Mt. 12:28)
- the sick are healed (Lk 10:9)

Isaias:

- powerful nations are at peace (2:4)
- swords are changed into plowshares (2:4)
- wolves and sheep live together peacefully (11:6)
- leopards sleep with goats (11:6)
- calves and lions get along together and a little child watches over them (11:6)
- cows and bears eat together and their offspring sleep together
- the lion eats hay along with the steer
- a baby sticks his hand among poisonous snakes and is not harmed
- the earth is full of the things of God (11:9)

Acts 2:17:

- the Spirit of God is poured over us all
- the children of God's people announce His message
- the young have visions and the elderly have dreams

Summing up we can say that in the Bible a sign of God is something concrete and marvelous. Any person can deduce from it that something extraordinary is happening or has happened. Why? Because God is present or has been present. Signs take on the character of the one who causes them. If God is great, his signs will be great and awesome.

There are other manifestations or signs, no less powerful, of the Kingdom of God. In the hearts of the faithful we have seen these signs:

- selling one's riches and giving the proceeds to the poor and then following Jesus (Acts).
- selling what one has in order to invest the proceeds in the purchase of a field with hidden treasure.

In the *Magnificat* we also find concrete manifestations or signs of God's activity: "the poor are fed while the rich go away hungry..." In the First Book of Samuel, Anna describes God's action in terms similar to those found in the *Magnificat*.

In the Conciliar Constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, on Sacred Liturgy, we read: "The same visible signs used by Sacred Liturgy have been chosen by Christ or by the Church to signify invisible divine realities." (S.C. 33)

To signify invisible divine realities is what the school must do in order that it might be a sign of the Kingdom of God. How does our Rule believe it is possible for the school to be a sign of God's Kingdom?

THE KINGDOM AND THE SCHOOL

The school will be a sign of God's Kingdom if it manifests in its daily life those signs of the presence of God previously described. Above all, the presence of God will be manifested by the type of person produced by the school. The school will be a sign of the Kingdom if it can produce persons who:

- are poor in spirit (Mt. 5:1)
- are comforted in trials (Mt. 5:5)
- are intensely desirous to do what God requires (Mt. 5:6)
- are merciful to others (Mt. 5:7)
- are pure of heart (Mt. 5:8)
- work for peace (Mt. 5:9)
- are disposed to do what God asks even if it means being persecuted (Mt. 5:10)
- love their enemies and pray for them (Mt. 5:44)
- are not too proud to help the poor (Mt. 6:2)
- know how to pray to God in their homes (Mt. 6:6)
- wash when they fast (Mt. 6:17)
- are interested in storing up treasures in heaven (Mt. 6:20)
- are not preoccupied with eating and drinking (Mt. 6:20)
- are preoccupied with the Kingdom of God (Mt. 6:33)
- do not judge others (Mt. 7:1)
- do not throw pearls in front of swine (Mt. 7:6)
- treat others as they themselves would like to be treated (Mt. 7:12)
- give without charge what they have received without charge (Mt. 10:8)
- are not afraid of those who can kill only the body (Mt. 10:28)
- are always disposed to declare openly the things of Jesus (Mt. 10:32)
- are like children (Mt. 18:3)
- develop their talents according to their capabilities (Mt. 25:14-30)
- know who their neighbor is (Lk. 10:25-37)
- keep the commandments of God and teach others to keep them (Mt. 5:19)
- know that God has pardoned their sins (Lk 5:24)
- pardon others so as to be pardoned (Lk 6:37)
- are a light in the darkness (Lk 8:16)
- are the salt of the earth
- are capable of seeing the hand of God in action (Lk 11:20)
- sell their possessions and give the proceeds to the poor (Lk 12:33)
- are yeast in dough (Lk 12:20)
- become reconciled (cf. Lk 1:17; 15:12)

For anyone to obtain the results described above, he needs the graces and presence of God in his life. Likewise, if the school is to be a sign of the Kingdom of God, it has to be able to affirm that these signs of God's presence are found in it.

Among the signs given by Christ, signs of the arrival of the Kingdom, is that of announcing the Good News to the poor. Jesus puts that sign on the same level as performing miracles such as giving sight to the blind, making the lame walk, and so on.

RULE

If the Rule has meaning in the life of the Brother, it must help in bringing about the signs of the presence of God. The principal Rule of the Brothers is the Gospel. The Rule has as its mission to make the Gospel real and meaningful.

If our Institute is concerned with helping to educate the poor (R. 11), if it helps the poor to feel like human beings and sons and daughters of God, then the school can very well be a sign of the Kingdom.

The Brothers consider evangelization and catechesis as their principal functions (R. 15). It is in those activities that they contribute to the growth of the faith in those who are already baptized. By the same means they build up the

ecclesiastical community.

In countries where catechesis is very difficult or impossible, the school can still be a sign of the Kingdom of God provided the Brother knows how to be creative. He can contribute to the Kingdom of God by helping youngsters to learn about life, about their responsibilities, about how to be considerate of others and about how to love one another. He thus helps in the work of God. God's Kingdom is built upon the activity of the Church as well as on the work done in the world. (R. 15c)

To be able to work for the Kingdom requires faith. Faith tells the Brothers that, in their profession, they will find many who will help them unselfishly as their coworkers with Jesus Christ. Thus they can consecrate their entire being to the apostolate of the school.

The promotion of justice and peace (R. 7) is part of the work and mission of the Brothers. If a Brother teaches in a school where the students are well-to-do, he must help them be aware of the injustice in the world. He must help them become creators of justice and peace. Contributing to justice and peace is a way of establishing the Kingdom of God.

The Brother does not work alone but in community, as the Rule states "together and by association," (R. 20). Hence the Brothers are easily able to unite their efforts with those who work either directly or indirectly in extending the Kingdom. The Brothers are happy when the Kingdom of God is expanded no matter how or by whom.

In meditation the Brothers have an interior freedom which enables them to discern "the hand of God" in everything that refers to their ministry. Also in meditation they receive the graces they need to make their work for the Kingdom efficient and long lasting. (R. 69).

The vow of chastity helps the Brother in establishing the Kingdom of God because it liberates him for the service of the Kingdom and the service of others. (R. 27).

EARTHLY REALITIES

The realities of everyday living are part of the Christian's vocation in the "world." They help sanctify him.

St. John Baptist de La Salle insists that the Brothers make no distinction between their work (teaching) and their sanctification. The Brothers must always see the school as a way of contributing to the growth of the Kingdom of God.

The Rule presents the perfecting of social structures as a form of spreading the Gospel, a way of extending the Kingdom of God. To help make a world which reflects the Kingdom of God is what the Brothers want to do in the Christian school.

CONCLUSION

When the Rule says that it is necessary to make the school a sign of the Kingdom of God and an instrument of salvation, it is saying that the school has to be converted into a kind of "sacrament," since sacrament is both sign and instrument of the action of God. Vatican Council II presents the Church as sign and instrument (sacrament) of our intimate union with God (L.G. 1). This affirmation is the basis of what the Rule wants the Brothers to do with the school. In order to acquire it, the Brother has to work in a contemplative and sacramental attitude. ●