

CHAPTER II

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

8 1 - As members of the Church, the Brothers live in this world and ought to be sensitive to the problems which arise in every period of human history. They share the hopes and anxieties that everyone experiences. The signs of the times alert the Brothers once more to the importance of their mission in today's world, as well as to how urgent it is that they renew their religious life, their apostolic ministry, and their presence among people.

2 - To achieve the adaptation and renewal asked for by the Council, it seems important that the Brothers be ready to heed and to discern the challenges that the Holy Spirit addresses to them through the mediation of their fellow humans. Since they have chosen to work for the salvation that comes from Christ, they should let themselves be led by the Spirit of God. Sometimes the Spirit stirs up in the Brothers the desire for renewal; sometimes the Spirit inspires the contemporary Church to insist on certain aspects of their teaching ministry; sometimes the Spirit communicates in a mysterious fashion through the events that take place in the world and through the aspirations of the world's peoples.

Challenges from the Brothers

9 1 - Whenever the Brothers manifest their apostolic and religious yearnings in a profound union of hearts, the action of the Holy Spirit is involved in the process. This happens particularly on the occasion of a General Chapter when certain challenges make themselves felt with greater urgency through the notes sent to the Chapter. When these notes and these challenges converge, they constitute in reality a collective discernment which militates against too individualistic an interpretation. The Institute has an obligation to sift these observations, to appreciate their value, and to make use of them.

2 - The notes that have come to the thirty-ninth General Chapter have helped the capitulants to perceive that the Brothers want to participate more actively in the life of the world and the Church, and to adapt more effectively to the geographical, social, cultural, political, and religious milieu in which each Brother finds himself. Quite a number of these suggestions manifest the desire for a more authentic religious life while insisting on the need for a more precise understanding of the apostolic mission of the Institute and its missionary character. As a result, there is a need for works that reflect this apostolic and missionary purpose and also a need to provide the Brothers with a formation that will prepare them for the work that awaits them.

3 - There can be culled also from these notes the desire for a greater flexibility in assigning personnel to our institutions so that it will be realistic for us to be available for the most urgent needs in the field of education. In particular, there is widespread insistence that the service of the poor become once again one of the principal characteristics of the Institute.

Challenges from the Church

10 1 - The post-Conciliar Church has also made its voice to be heard appealing to

all the workers in the Lord's vineyard to renew their spiritual life and to organize an apostolate that will truly bear fruit for salvation in today's world. The Church stresses the importance of concerted action, of collective pastoral effort, for she achieves her mission only through the diversity and complementarity of her ministries and charisms.

2 - The Church stresses her character as a community when she presents herself as the People of God. By this title, she proclaims that she is the sacrament of the presence of God in the midst of God's people and so teaches the primacy of witness in the apostolate. The Church for that reason defines herself as missionary, gives priority to those who are far from her, and insists that ardent concern for the salvation of the world is a demand of our baptism. In any case, the invitation to all her members to expand their horizons is a way of recognizing, with respect for the diversity of charisms, that the Holy Spirit dwells in each person.

3 - The Church encourages this apostolate of the faithful, but she wants it to be clarified; she affirms and marvels at the action of the Holy Spirit beyond her visible boundaries, among the separated brethren as well as among those who are not Christians. The Church calls her members to acquire an ecumenical spirit and to collaborate with all persons of good will. On the one hand, she knows that the truth cannot be imposed by force, and she declares that every human person has a right to religious freedom. On the other hand, she regards everything outside herself that is good and true as a preparation for receiving the Gospel and as a gift from the Christ who enlightens every human being.

4 - In this spirit the Church proclaims the value of the things of this world, affirms their lawful autonomy, and teaches that faith and hope engage the Christian to labor more ardently for the well-being of the earthly city. Wishing to be the servant of the people, she declares "that all things on earth should be related to the human as their center and crown" (GS 12). The Church is concerned for the total person and wants people to develop harmoniously in all their potentialities. The Church's mission of evangelization consists in demonstrating to human beings the ultimate meaning of their existence and in clarifying for them the mystery of what it means to be human.

Challenges from the World

11 1 - If the Spirit of God issues challenges through these teachings of the Church, the Spirit is heard also in the hopes and sorrows of the people of today, in the possibilities and the sufferings of our changing world, as recalled to us, for example, in *Gaudium et spes*, *Gravissimum educationis*, *Populorum progressio*.

2 - It is a world marked by human greatness and by scientific, technological, and economic progress; a world more and more desacralized and secularized; a world of social awareness, a more unified humanity, and the development of the means of communication; a world which aspires to make the benefits of an education accessible to all; a world experiencing a population explosion and aware of the ever-increasing importance of youth.

3 - But it is also a world in which life, liberty, and human dignity are more and more threatened; a world of loneliness and despair for many who are crushed by

selfishness, greed, indifference, or the will to power; a world of social injustice and an increasing disproportion between the rich and poor nations; a world of illiteracy and ignorance in which the young are neglected; a world of rivalry and wars; a world where God is missing or rejected and where persons, because they close themselves off from what they cannot see, are threatened by the thought of personal extinction.

4 - The world has more need than ever, even at the very center of human and temporal existence, for the witness given by those who are consecrated and who know and love God as a living reality. More than ever, this is the world in which an international Institute ought to live in order to serve and to educate all its many peoples.