

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD – JOY

NORA BONILLA

In almost all drawings by children, the child's relationship with God can be perceived through the exchange of glances on the drawn faces, in the colors and shapes of the images, or in the words associated with the drawings. The joy the child has in relationship with the Good Shepherd is also represented in the smiles, flowers, hearts, balloons, and the harmony of the colors used.



This artwork of a young artist, age 5, is known to all of us as Sofia published it in *The Religious Potential of the Child*. It was drawn by a child in an atrium in Rome. In this drawing we see a big smiling Good Shepherd with many sheep on the left side, from top to bottom and under the Shepherd. The sheep are colored in the same yellow as the Shepherd. This color, says Goethe,¹ "is the closest to light [...] in its maximum purity it has a cheerful and merry condition that impresses."

The face of the Good Shepherd is of great joy and happiness; like the sheep he has in his arms. The mouth of the Good Shepherd is red and his eyes are blue, as is the phrase above his head, "The Good Shepherd." The cane is brown, the color for humility in iconography.

The Good Shepherd calls by name and the child has placed a name on each sheep "Biana," "Marilena," "Mary," "...", "..." etc. But there are also some without a name. The catechist asked if those sheep have a name and he or she answered, "Yes, they have a name but I got tired of writing."

¹ Goethe. W. Johann, Goethe. Johann Wolfgang von, "Esbozo de una teoría de los colores" en *Obras Completas, Tomo I: Miscelánea - Teoría de los Colores - Poesía - Novela*, traducción, estudio preliminar, prólogos y notas de Rafael Cansinos Sáenz, Madrid: Ediciones Aguilar, S.A. 4ª ed., 1963, N°s 765-766, p. 537

Under each name and under the sheep without a name, the child has placed a green and a black line. The legs of the Good Shepherd are also black.

In the eyes of an adult, this is a clear and obvious interpretation of how the Good Shepherd calls by name each sheep, to begin a relationship, the personal covenant with Him. It is in the same way God calls to the patriarch Abraham, the father of faith when he calls for him to leave his country for a new place and promises him many descendants (Gen. 12 ff).

What happened for this child in this drawing? We don't know; it is not for the adult to know. However, it is a drawing that speaks of great joy both in the Good Shepherd and in the sheep on his shoulders. Would the blue color² in the eyes and in the name of the Good Shepherd be something casual? Or would it be the graphic expression that states it is not a simple Shepherd but that he is the heavenly Shepherd?

The shape of the body of the Good Shepherd, plus his smile and the open arms, invite one to dance with joy and happiness on behalf of this kingdom of light.

Cavalletti writes considering the relationship: "I confess that it was a surprise to me when I realized that the best help we can give the little child in developing as a moral person is the parable of the Good Shepherd. Some will say, but in this parable there is no indication of what things to do and what not to do, there is no recommendation. Yet it is precisely because of this that the parable is so important to moral formation. It doesn't look to "do" things, but to "be" with the Good Shepherd, to enjoy his presence in our lives."

It is wonderful to see how these small creatures are able to open up to an active relationship, the result of receiving the gift. The level of response of the child is superior to any action and of

² Kandinsky. Wassiliy, Marc. Franz, dice que el azul claro es el color celeste, *Il problema delle forme*, Il cavaliere azzurro, Milano: Saggi e documenti del novecento, SE, 6, Milano: 1988, 1^a ed. Italiana, traduzione di Giuseppina Gozzini Calzecchi Onesti, p. 47

any effort of the will. The child's answer is of the same nature of the gift he or she has received: it is the love that surrounds the whole person to enjoy the Person of God that the relationship offers.

Each time we observe the children absorbed and engrossed in listening and in meditation, the adult should stop full of reverence, because the adult is given the privilege of capturing a special moment of God's covenant with his creature. Maybe respect should induce one to look away and not intrude on such a moment of great intimacy. The child is receiving the clarification of something that is within himself or herself.

The child encounters in this parable of the Good Shepherd the full satisfaction of a vital demand that is not intellectual. It is clear that in the small child relationship is a vital requirement, something like a hunger that goes in search of suitable food. The announcement discloses the name of the person who calls, who knows the child by name, who seeks the child and to whom the child can respond, can follow and with whom the child can enter into a relationship. It seems that for God there is no human creature who is too small to respond to his initiative. We can verify this in many of the drawings from children.