

02  
JUL  
2021

# **Our Spiritual Life (III)**

*Initiated into the Good News of  
Jesus Christ*

DEHONIAN STUDIES



A series of presentations of the "Reading Guide" to the Constitutions, written by Fr. Albert Bourgeois.

by *Fr. Albert Bourgeois, scj*

***"... Initiated into the Good News of  
Jesus Christ...  
we are invited to an ever deeper  
discovery  
of the person of Christ and the  
mystery of his Heart"  
(nn. 9.17)***

***1. Our faith experience***

140 In parallel with the procedure followed regarding Fr Dehon's grace and mission (nn. 1-8), we too are to make our own faith experience the starting point of our journey to find the characteristic traits of the SCJ spiritual life and make out its principal lines. In this sense, the second chapter of the Constitutions taken as a whole (nn. 9-85) introduces and in a certain way requires the subtitle of art. 9: "Our own vision of faith". A global analysis has been given in 1.3.1. and more specially for art. 1-39 (SCJ religious life) in 1.3.2. It is from our own vision of faith (*fides*) that our fidelity (*fidelitas*) derives its content and dynamic.

141 As already mentioned, literary analysis can assist a reading and reflection but, as with every analysis, ends by betraying the reality and the text itself.

142 The reality, because a literary analysis would seem to make a logical, and therefore chronological and essential, distinction between Christian experience in general on one hand ("with all our fellow Christians", nn. 9, 16) and the SCJ experience on the other (nn. 16ff), as if the second were not in germ in the Christian experience, but a sort of excrescence. And again, there seems to be a dichotomy between spiritual life (nn. 16-25) and apostolic mission (nn. 26-39); a suggestion of this is to be seen in art. 16: "Called to serve the church... our response will imply a spiritual vision".

143 But the analysis also betrays the text where at first sight we recognize how from beginning to end what is described is not a spiritual life at the service of a mission, but an apostolic spiritual life, in a consecration that "already possesses in itself real apostolic fecundity" (n. 27). The word consecrated, besides its charismatic implication, also signifies the consummation and fulfilment of the spiritual experience. Our SCJ experience, in germ in our Christian experience, achieves fulfilment in the service of its mission.

144 Art. 9 is worthy of special attention, for it has a special richness:

– with the two quotations which situate it and whose inclusion is not by chance (1Jn 4,16; 1Cor 12,3);

– with the short central development culminating in the phrase “to follow Christ”; here we note: mention of the three theological virtues in their interdependence; expression of evangelical radicalism which will appear again in art. 13-14 on our religious vocation; reference to “the challenges presented by the world” which will be recalled in art. 35-39 regarding “the pleas of the world”.

145 I have already drawn attention to the three references, here as in 16 and 26, to the mystery of Christ, that of the church and the action of the Spirit (cf. 1.3.2.2.).

146 We should also note the movement of the text characterized by the indicating of three stages in the faith experience: “Initiated...we have come to know and believe... we proclaim”. There is also the brief but meaningful allusion to the necessity of consolidating and affirming the faith we have received (cf. Rom 10,8-10). This faith experience is well conceived and presented in the perspective of an apostolic religious life.

147 Finally, beside this reference to our baptismal and ecclesial initiation there is explicitly placed our religious vocation, “rooted in our baptism and confirmation” (n. 13) as “a special gift meant for the glory of God and as a testimony to the primacy of the Kingdom” (ibid.), so as to attain, through perfect charity, that holiness which is the universal vocation of all the baptized. The phrase “with all our fellow Christians” (n. 13) clearly stresses this. Here we find one of the evangelical and theological principles of the religious life mentioned by the Council (LG 44, PC 5), which “*Ecclesiae Sanctae*” asked to be emphasized in the revision of constitutions: “*Principia evangelica et theologica de vita religiosa eiusque unione cum ecclesia*”.

## **2. The basic features of our spiritual life**

148 The description of the SCJ experience and life evolves throughout the text along the lines of the three principal features

found in each of the subdivisions. I have already outlined (cf. 1.3.2.3.):

- in the discovery and approach to the person of Christ, his mystery and his mission, especially through the mystery of the open side and the pierced Heart (nn. 2-3/10-12/19-21);
- a life of attachment and union, particularly the experience of the active presence of Christ, lived in union with his reparatory oblation, as the principle and center of our life (nn. 4-5/13-14/17-18/22-24);
- a prophetic witness for the establishment of his Kingdom in the world today (nn. 6-7/67/26-29).

## **2.1. A common approach to the mystery of Christ**

149 “Initiated into the Good News of Jesus Christ...” (n. 9).

150 By the “Good News of Jesus Christ” we understand the gospel which is Jesus Christ. Thus, we are initiated not only into his teaching but also into his person. This gospel is the ultimate norm of the Christian life and in a special way of the religious life (cf. PC 2). We have learned Christ (cf. Eph 4,20) and are his disciples (manthanein/mathetês). This initiation is not simply by information, but by “in-formation” through the very form of Jesus Christ.

### **2.1.1. Christ's names**

151 Through the entire text the person and presence of Christ form a special pole of reference:

- at the beginning and end as a sort of great frame: “Initiated into the Good News of Jesus Christ” (n. 9) – “committing ourselves unreservedly to the coming of the new humanity in Jesus Christ” (n. 39).
- In the whole text the name of Christ, in different forms, appears 40 times in 30 articles. Starting from these names of Christ an outline of Christology emerges (cf. the famous work of Luis de Léon (1583), *Les noms du Christ*, which contains meditations on 14 names of Christ).

152 In practice, reference to Christ, or better his presence, is at the beginning, the center, the end, and always in the background of every paragraph, of many of the phrases, and is “the principle and center of our lives” (n. 17); “his way is our way” (n. 12), to give us “together with Christ and in Christ’s own way” (n. 21), and in his footsteps live in solidarity with all men (cf. n. 22), “to the coming of the new humanity in Jesus Christ” (n. 39). “He is the first and the last and the living one”; he is “the one thing necessary” (n. 26).

153 In this sense the 1979 text is more meaningful and unified than that of 1973. The alteration to the plan effected by the changed positions of the articles on the pleas of the world emphasizes the unique relation between our vocation and life and the person and mission of Christ. In virtue of this relationship, our gaze on the world and our attention to its pleas and aspirations assume more clearly their sense, their light and their content. Even more than in awareness of the world’s needs, it is in the Heart of Christ that our religious vocation has its origin and our oblation takes on all its apostolic and reparatory force.

154 All this is in harmony with Fr Dehon’s experience and intentions, in harmony with the very nature of a vocation and of the religious life.

### ***2.1.2. Two texts: nn. 10-12 “New Adam”; nn. 19-21 “Heart of human life and of the world”***

155 Two important text briefly describe our “common approach to the mystery of Christ” (n. 16) and to his person in a progressive discovery. “We are invited to an ever deeper discovery of the person of Christ and the mystery of his Heart” (n. 17):

- a first approach is made in that faith experience had “with all our fellow Christians” (n. 13; cf. nn. 10-13);
- and then with a “particular conscience” (n. 16) of what corresponds to Fr Dehon’s experience, in which reference to the open side of the Crucified One determines how he views the mystery of Christ (cf. nn. 19-21).

156 Two successive texts then, each well adapted to its immediate context and to the logical development of the Constitutions. They are not two different parallel approaches, but a deepening of the one contemplation.

157 The gospels were written as testimonies. They give witness to the approach and reflection of those Christian communities to the life and death of Jesus, in the light of the resurrection and under the influence of the Spirit. In a certain way, we are also invited to take a similar pedagogical step. A way of common approach is indicated: the fact and mystery of the open side. The evangelist points it out, recalling the prophesy of Zechariah: *Videbunt in quem transfixerunt*. The contemplation of the open side as a way of approaching the mystery of Christ is thus suggested to us, as it was to Fr Dehon, as the pre-eminent and favorite way towards a progressive discovery of and approach to the person of Christ, for a spiritual life as a Priest of the Sacred Heart.

158 These two texts are worthy of a detailed analysis and an attentive meditation:

- of their parallel movement from beginning to end;
- of the presentation made of Christ's mission, his presence and action, of what he is for us and for our life.

### 159 **A. "New Adam" (n. 10)**

160 Three phrases in art. 10-12 have particular significance for our SCJ spiritual life:

- in obedience to the Father
- in the service of the Kingdom
- in his communion with man.

161 *In obedience to the Father*

162 This is the key to understanding the mysteries of Christ's life, each of his acts, his mission. In this obedience, according to John, the person of the Word reveals himself "with God" (1,1). In it, the Son reveals himself as the Servant to the point of that great cry of supreme abandonment on the cross (cf. Mk 15,24). The gospel of John is full of these references to the Father's will, of which the famous hymn of Phil 2,6-11 is a moving expression.

### *163 In the service of the Kingdom*

164 "His service for the multitudes" (n. 10). The idea and reality of the Kingdom dominates the synoptic (and apocalyptic) perspective of the mystery of Jesus. It is a reference and guideline to follow throughout the whole of the Constitutions regarding various themes (cf. 13, 29, 37, 38, 41, 43, 48, 54, 60).

165 The text multiplies the expressions: a new world, that of the freedom of the sons of God, of the new man in the justice and holiness of truth. These words – liberty, justice, holiness, truth – make up the content of the redemption and each one of them is full of meaning in scripture as well as in theological and spiritual tradition. They will be found again in art. 33-39 regarding the "pleas of the world" and the "aspirations of our contemporaries... to the coming of the Kingdom promised by God and realized in his Son" (n. 37). The chronology of this Kingdom should also be noted; announced, already in germ, Christ already at work and present amongst us, the redemption already present... and yet still waited for and possible and offered. This chronology is the very place of our spiritual and apostolic life in the perspectives opened by the two quotations (Rm 8, 22-23; 1Cor 15,28).

### *166 In his communion with man*

167 This communion is the law of the incarnation and the whole of a life in the footsteps of Christ.

168 The word communion (solidarity) is used frequently throughout the text (e.g. nn. 10, 29 for Christ's and nn. 22, 29 for our own).

169 Here in art 10 it is particularly meaningful. "In his communion with man as the new Adam, he revealed God's love". Thus, according to 1Jn 4,7-16, by loving each other we give witness that God loves us and that God is love. We shall return to this text regarding the meaning of our oblation in the theology of the agape from which it flows. If our oblation is a union with Christ's oblation (cf. nn. 6, 17), Christ's solidarity with men is very important to it.

170 In this first important text of our Constitutions for our approach to the mystery of Christ, the figure of Christ as servant is given prominence (cf. n. 10): Christ living his love of the Father in his love of men, revealing the Father's love by living in us. In Christ, the Father manifests his love.

171 Contemplation of Christ's mysteries and uniting ourselves to him in these mysteries (cf. n. 77) thus take on their full meaning, not only as imitation, but as union with the mystery and effective sharing in Christ's mission. "His way is our way" (n. 12). This is an exercise that, in different forms, regards the foundation and structure of the Christian spiritual life and therefore of our SCJ spiritual life.

172 We already have this approach in art. 2 in respect of Fr Dehon's faith experience, "by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2,20). Our confession of faith directs us along the same lines: "Through the Holy Spirit we proclaim Christ as Lord, in whom the Father has made known his love and who remains present in our world to bring it to salvation" (n. 9). For us as for Fr Dehon, the most eloquent expression of this love of the Father, revealed and operating in Christ's love, is the open side.

### **173 B. "The Heart of human life and of the world" (n .19)**

174 Taken as a whole, this second christological text (nn. 19-21) runs parallel to the first (nn. 10-12):



- the mission of Christ (nn. 10, 19)
- his presence and present action (nn. 11, 20)
- what he is for us and for our life (nn. 12, 21).

175 The two texts offer a sort of panorama of the plan of redemption – the economy of salvation, as the Fathers would say – which is at least outlined, with shades and differences of accent; the second is not merely a repetition of the first.

176 In art. 10-12 Christ is the subject of every sentence; he is the obedient actor. In art. 19-21 the Father becomes the subject in the life and mission of Christ (and the verbs in art. 19 are all in the past tense). On the contrary Christ's action, in art. 20-21, is in the present. The presentation is more synoptic in 10.12 and more Johannine in 19-21 where, to use the terminology of our theologians, there is the twofold complementary perspective of a Christology from below and a christology. Especially the second text, centered on the actual active presence of Christ, "the Heart of human life and of the world", develops what is said in art. 11: "Christ... is already at work through his presence in our midst". The symbol of the heart characterizes his presence: this Kingdom, whose heart is Christ, is a kingdom of love, whose law of salvation is love that regenerates, e reunites anew, reunites, and recapitulates, according to the Father's plan of love (cf. nn. 19-20).

177 The word "love" appears six times in 19-21, while only once in 10-12. The two texts are of course concerned with the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ (cf. n. 10), but especially in the second it is given particular attention. This approach finds expression in the contemplation of the pierced Heart, for a devotion to the Heart of Christ fully integrated in the mystery of Christ, in "that movement of redeeming love" (n. 21).

178 The figure "Heart of human life and of the world" is akin to the Pauline image of Head and members, which it does oppose but rather clarifies. The figure of the heart is here strictly bound to the resurrection and lordship of Christ: a Kingdom of love for the

amorisation of the world, “source of the full development of individuals and communities, which finds its full manifestation and recapitulation in Christ” (Teilhard de Chardin: *Le Point Oméga*).

179 Whatever may be the references or allusions, if devotion to the Heart of Christ is not directly intended here, this provides at least a good introduction and an ample perspective in which the revelation of the Heart itself finds its place and meaning.

## **2.2. “As we contemplate the Heart of Christ...” (n. 21)**

180 Contemplation of the Heart of Christ is an essential part of our SCJ experience. We must consolidate our Christian faith “as we live it out in charity” (n. 9). “As we contemplate the Heart of Christ, the most eloquent symbol of that love, we are confirmed in our vocation” (n. 21). For us this is not a sort of devotional extra; it is our particular way of approaching the mystery of Christ. However, the new Constitutions replace the Paray-le-Monial image and message with the mystery of the opened side, according to the gospel of John (19,31-37) and this could present a little problem of SCJ fidelity.

181 The old Constitutions (1885, 1906-1956) opened on the Paray image and message, those words of the Lord to Margaret Mary which Fr Dehon said impressed him so much (NHV XII, 167). The image and message also inspire the *Spiritual Directory* and Fr Dehon’s other writings. Throughout his life, he remained faithful to them in his spiritual life and apostolate for the establishment of the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart. The Directory begins: “We respond to the appeal of our Lord at Paray-le-Monial”.

182 It is something important for us, which concerns the consolidation of our vocation (cf. n. 21) and also the spiritual vision that determines our participation in the church’s mission in the world of today (cf. nn. 2, 27).

183 The change from the Sacred Heart of Paray-le-Monial to the Crucified One with a pierced Heart is more than a mere substitution of one image for another for aesthetic reasons or for cultural and

pastoral adaptation. This renewal and adaptation has taken place at the request of the church. Doctrinally and spiritually, it is a sort of conversion, by returning to the sources of devotion to the Sacred Heart, to the way of conceiving and practicing it:

- in communion with the thought and life of the church, along the lines of the encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* and the important theological, spiritual and pastoral development which went before and after it and which our old Constitutions did not take into account;
- in deep fidelity to the Paray-le-Monial devotion, if not in presentation and form, at least in essence. Of all forms of devotion to the Heart of Jesus, that of Paray refers most directly and constantly to the reality and mystery of the pierced side as recorded in John's gospel, and to its reparatory aspect;
- through SCJ fidelity, if we are to follow Fr Dehon in his contemplation and teaching, in the evolution of his basic and practical personal attitude regarding meditation on the mystery of the opened side.

184 The 1885 Constitutions saw in this mystery the figure of our profession of immolation. "The profession of immolation, which characterizes the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, can be compared to the centurion's lance which opened the Savior's side and consummated his sacrifice" (V, n. 113).

185 "Through love the spirit of immolation gives the Society its particular character" (V, n. 152).

186 Fr Dehon himself has some beautiful pages on this mystery in *Etudes sur le Sacré-Coeur* (I, 114-127), in *Couronnes d'amour* (II, 5) and in the *Spiritual Directory*, especially in the meditation on the passion (II, 1, 4), Mary's experience on Calvary (II, II, 3) and that of John (II, IV, 3).

187 Without ignoring doctrinal, patristic and mystical tradition, Fr Dehon particularly develops the spiritual and devotional meaning of the transfixion for an exhortation to total giving as requital of love in a

spirit of reparation. The mystery of Calvary is contemplated as a wonderful illustration, a teaching about our vocation, rather than as the source of our vocation. Our fidelity consists in mastering his profound thought. He said it himself. For him “the opening of the Heart of Jesus is the mystery of mysteries, the foundation of all the others, the mystery of love that former ages have had a glimpse of, but which has been fully revealed to us” (*Couronnes d’amour*, II, 5, 1).

188 In this spirit of dynamic fidelity the new Constitutions invite us to contemplate with John the opened side.

189 First of all the mystery itself attracts our attention: the opening of the side, the gushing forth of water and blood, the mystery of the slain lamb, the paschal mystery of the blood that was shed, the Pentecostal mystery of the gift of the Spirit, the birth of the church and of the man with a new heart .

190 The line of the spiritual and mystical tradition of devotion to the Sacred Heart: entering into the Heart of Jesus, very familiar to Fr Dehon, is ever present and supposed in our new Constitutions. The text speaks of “an intimate union with the Heart of Christ” (n. 4), of “companionship with Christ which began in the intimacy of the heart” (n. 5), of “intimacy with Christ in his love for the Father and for men” (n. 17), of “communion with Christ” (n. 22), of “intimacy with the Lord” (n. 28). This is how Fr Dehon understood and meditated John’s phrase: *Videbunt in quem transfixerunt* (19, 37), “They will gaze into him whom they have pierced” (cf. *Année avec le Sacré-Coeur* I, p. 363). In *Vie d’amour* Fr Dehon places these words on the Savior’s lips: “In the mystery of my passion, I am truly a book written interiorly and exteriorly; and what is thus written is my love... Do not be satisfied with reading and admiring the exterior of this divine writing, but go right into my Heart and you will see” (p. 72).

191 Contemplating the pierced Heart of Christ in this way, we shall see:

- the ultimate and supreme manifestation of God’s love, *usque ad finem*, in the total gift of the Son; the obedience and oblation of

Christ, ut adimpleretur scriptura;

- the mystery of sin in the slain lamb, in quem transfixerunt,
- the appeal to witness, "... ut et vos credatis".

192 These three lines of contemplation of the opened side corroborate what has been said of Fr Dehon's faith experience.

193 For him it is the mystery of mysteries, not only the greatest and most beautiful of the mysteries (as might be said of the "Canticum of Canticles" or "Vanity of Vanities") but the foundation of all the others, the point that corroborates them and reveals their meaning, it is the mystery through which and starting from which we are invited to contemplate all the others, it is our way of approaching the person and mystery of Christ.

194 SCJ fidelity demands all this in order to gain the maximum profit from a real and profound devotion to the Heart of Jesus and for a genuine SCJ life: a life of love and reparation conceived and lived as a life of charity, a realization of that agape which must animate our life, so that we may be "prophets of love and servants of reconciliation for mankind and the world in Christ" (n. 7), "committing ourselves unreservedly to the coming of the new humanity in Jesus Christ" (n. 39), so that "from the Heart of Jesus opened on the cross" there may be brought forth "that man with the new heart, animated by the Spirit and united to his brothers in that community of charity which is the church" (n. 3). A spiritual life, nourished by contemplation of the cross of Christ, cannot be authentic if it is not prophetic.