

16
JUL
2021

Our Spiritual Life (V)

A Prophetic Witness

DEHONIAN STUDIES



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

by **Fr. Albert Bourgeois, scj**

1. Our prophetic charism

258 Some may find the expression surprising and even a little pretentious. However, it is not by mere chance that the word prophetic is used. It already appears in art. 7 which states: "Fr Dehon expects his religious to be prophets of love". And art. 39 also makes reference to "a prophetic witness". Prophets of love, a prophetic charism, a prophetic witness provide a sort of thread passing through the text.

259 To understand and justify the use of these terms we must reread and meditate art. 12 of *Lumen Gentium* on the sense of faith and the charisms of the people of God. Our prophetic charism, which is in the

order of the sharing by the people of God in Christ's prophetic office, places us at the service of the saving mission of the people of God in the world of today (n. 7), by making us prophets of love or at least calling us to be so. Here we are referred to the biblical notion of prophesy and the biblical figure of prophet and especially to the prophetic office of Christ himself (cf. DTB, "Prophète", 1046-1057; *Encyclopédie de la foi: "Prophète"*, III, pp. 496-519).

260 "The prophet is not the holder of the truth. He is not invested with any power in the society. He speaks less by his tongue than by the commitment of his life; and this discourse of life does not come from him; he receives it and shares it. He constantly verifies its authenticity by measuring it against his vocation and submitting it to the discernment of the church" (J. Cl. Guy, *La vie religieuse dans l'église*, in "Etudes", fév. 1982, pp. 247-248).

261 For us Jesus is Christ the Lord in whom the Father has made known his love, in whom we have come to know and believe the love, which God has for us (n. 9).

262 Christ's being, his life, death and resurrection are prophesy. Our prophetic charism gives us a share in this task of manifesting, not so much by what we say and do, but by what we are and how we live, because of and in proportion to our union with Christ in his love and oblation.

263 Art. 26-27 are particularly meaningful. "In his footsteps and by a special grace of God, we are called in the church to seek out and to live as the one thing necessary a life of union with Christ's own oblation. This consecration already possesses in itself real apostolic fecundity".

264 It is in and through this consecration – life of union with Christ's oblation – that we define our prophetic charism at the service of the saving mission of the people of God in the world of today. The consecration itself is charismatic. The spiritual life of union with Christ's oblation is of itself apostolic and prophetic, not first of all and only through an effective service of the church (cf. n. 16); but it is in

itself necessarily a service to the church and to the mission of the people of God.

265 As that of Jesus, our spiritual life too must be prophetic, the revelation and manifestation of God's love. In and through his love for us Christ reveals his love for the Father and the Father's love for us. Jesus has commanded us to love as he has loved and as he loves. His commandment gives "us the assurance that his will is to love in us whoever he commands us to love" (Teresa of Lisieux, MsC 12v). Through this, our life of love, our union with his oblation can be and really is prophetic.

266 Our union with Christ's oblation is not restricted to loving with him and after his example; in some way it gives him the possibility of loving in us, of giving himself to our brethren, of being recognized and heard by them. For our part, we must be the way of his love, as he is the way of the Father's love for us and our love for the Father. We shall be prophets of love by living Christ's love for the Father and for our brethren and by letting it live in us. This life is the first and fundamental reason of the apostolic fecundity of our consecration (n. 27). Through this consecration, our spiritual life is necessarily and essentially apostolic, not only because of the initiatives and achievements, but by its very nature, in virtue of devotion to the Heart of Christ, of the life of love and union with Christ's oblation, which devotion to the Heart of Jesus implies and which is the source of all our works.

267 All this has practical consequences regarding the motivation and inspiration of our works themselves, so that they may be revelation and prophesy of that love which we are called to witness and manifest, a love that must show through legibly in our being and our action, as in Jesus who, "in his communion with man... revealed God's love and proclaimed the Kingdom" (n. 10).

268 These are very happy expressions: prophets of love, a prophetic charism, prophetic witness. Without doubt, the spiritual perspective, defined in terms of prophesy, would have gladdened Fr Dehon's heart as a genuine expression of his thought and will.

2. Our reparatory vocation

2.1. The purpose of the congregation

269 Art. 23 speaks of “our vocation of reparation”, recalling art. 6 which states that the purpose of the congregation, according to Fr Dehon’s intention, is to make it possible for members to “unite their religious and apostolic life explicitly with Christ’s reparatory oblation to the Father for the sake of man”.

270 Our prophetic charism, through which we are prophets of love, finds expression in a reparatory perspective. There can be no doubt about Fr Dehon’s intention in this regard; for him and in the history and life of the congregation, the spirit of reparation, according to the traditional formula, is essential. This spirit, and therefore the sense, theology and apostolate of reparation, is undoubtedly the most sensitive, important and significant point regarding the dynamic fidelity of our new Constitutions.

271 Leaving to others an exposition of Fr Dehon’s teaching as well as a general treatment of reparation, I shall confine myself to the text of the Constitutions.

272 Fr Dehon’s reparatory experience and life are recalled in n. 4: “Overwhelmed by this neglected love, he would respond to it...”

273 Art. 7 points out that reparation comes within the congregation’s scope; indeed, it belongs to the institute’s particular character “to undo sin and the neglect of love... (and) render that worship of love and reparation which his Heart desires”.

274 Art. 23-25 specify the content and modes of this reparation according to our reparatory vocation and in a religious life.

275 These two articles appear as the heart or summit of the whole section 9-39. They form a point of arrival which lights up all that has

gone before. After n. 25, the treatment is directed to our mission, commitments and the apostolic style of the institute (nn. 26-39). Our reparatory oblation, union with the reparatory oblation of Christ our Reparation is lived by participation in the mission of the church (nn. 26-34) in the world today; it is our mission at the service of the church and in the church.

2.2. Reparation

276 Art. 23, which explains our understanding of reparation, is a sort of compact and synthetic definition summarizing the elements already mentioned in nn. 5 and 7.

277 Our understanding of reparation is based on four general traits: welcome to the Spirit, response to Christ's love for us, communion in his love for the Father, cooperation in his redeeming work in the midst of the world.

2.2.1. Welcome to the Spirit

278 This is the most surprising and newest expression, and possibly the most meaningful.

279 Art. 23 refers us to 1Thes 4,8, where Paul calls on his readers not to disregard God "who gives his Holy Spirit to you"; and this so that they might please God by living in holiness (cf. V 1 and 7). Our reparation is first of all this holiness (or sanctification) to which we are called as Christians (cf. n. 13) and through which, as religious, "we profess to strive after perfect charity" (n. 14).

280 In line with the idea of a spiritual life being a welcome and a response rather than an exercise, our holiness is characterized in n. 23 by "a welcome to the Spirit", the Spirit of holiness. This welcome has the value of reparation, even before there is any question of sin to be repaired. It is pleasing to God, it is "to the delight and glory of God" (n. 25).

281 Above all, the welcome to the Spirit is the realization in us of that

“union with Christ’s own oblation” (n. 26), the filial oblation, according to all its dimensions of love of the Father and of men. It is a reparatory love in a reparatory oblation. Finally, if sin is the rejection of love, reparation cannot be other than a welcome to love, to the Spirit of love, to the Spirit of love, given with water and blood in the mystery of the opened side. We SCJs are called to be the witnesses, the prophets of this contemplation. Would not an indifferent neglect of this mystery, which is the gift of the Spirit of love, be a kind of sin against the Spirit for us?

282 An understanding of this first element of reparation is the theological and mystical basis of the other three.

2.2.2. “A response to Christ’s love for us”

283 The phrase echoes nn. 4 and 7 concerning Fr Dehon’s experience and the congregation’s purpose; it is a question of responding to the “neglected love” (n. 4) and of undoing “the neglect of love” (n. 7).

284 Reparation is effected not only by union in love, but by a requital of love, a reparatory and consoling requital.

285 This anticipates the objection that could be brought against the new text, that of changing the traditional perspective of SCJ reparation: reparation to the Heart of Jesus rather than reparation with the Heart of Jesus; a reparation that places the accent on consolation.

286 In fact Fr Dehon’s exposition of reparation had nothing exclusive about it. He stated explicitly that our reparation is not just consolation, but that it is reparation to Christ and reparation with him.

287 In respect of consolation current theology recognizes its scriptural foundation, stressing that the God of the bible and the gospel is not the immovable mover of Aristotle and the philosophers, in whom immutability and transcendence signify impassibility. Our God (and the glorified Christ) is love, a love that became vulnerable (cf. NRT janvier 1982: *Le Dieu trinitaire et la Passion*, also Moltmann, Rahner, Balthasar, etc.).

288 Our reparation, participation in the work of reconciliation, is for the glory of God, but also for his delight. This gives rise to an important question: when we speak of God's joy or consolation because of the acceptance of his love and of his suffering caused by the rejection of that love, are we in the realm of pure anthropomorphisms?

2.2.3. "A communion in his love for the Father and a cooperation in his redeeming work in the midst of the world" (n. 23)

289 The last two themes (glory and delight of God) can and undoubtedly must be considered together as an expression of one and the same movement. Christ accomplishes "his service for the multitude" (n. 10) in obedience to the Father and as a proof of his love for the Father.

290 Through communion with the love of Christ for his Father, in the welcome given to the Spirit, we emphasize the Trinitarian aspect of reparation. This was not absent in devotion to the Sacred Heart nor even in the reparation proposed by Paray-le-Monial, but was often blurred in certain presentations more emotional than theological.

291 The presentation of our devotion and especially of our oblation as a union with Christ's filial oblation removes this risk. In this perspective, the expression "reparation of love" finds all its theological value in the movement of Christ's love.

292 Jesus lives and expresses our communion with his love of the Father in cooperation with his redeeming work in the midst of the world, as "servants of reconciliation" (n. 7).

3. "Servants of reconciliation"

3.1. A ministry

293 This expression characterizes our reparation. The latter is defined in n. 25 as “our sharing in the work of reconciliation”, which is the form of our “cooperation in the redeeming work in the midst of the world” (n. 23).

294 Our oblation is defined as an association with the movement of redeeming love (n. 21), which allows us to partake of redeeming grace (n. 22). Far from being a sort of devotional excrescence, our reparation derives a Christian specific from the very core of Christian revelation.

295 This is why a serious theology of the redemption is of interest and importance to us. It is a complex treatise, having developed in different periods, and is expressed in terms of satisfaction, expiation, compensation, ransom, reconciliation, recapitulation, solidarity. These terms have accumulated and are all to be retained and considered. Exclusiveness gives rise to deviation and narrowness, which in spiritual matters “extinguishes” the Holy Spirit. There are many different graces and charisms in the church.

296 I would only note that the text speaks of undoing “sin and the neglect of love” (n. 7); it does not pay much attention to the aspect of expiation/satisfaction, except implicitly in regard to reconciliation and purification (nn. 7, 25, 29), while it gives a special place to the words and ideas of regeneration (n. 20), creating anew (n. 21), liberation (nn. 23, 26), restoration (n. 23), transformation (n. 29). Our prophetic witness, that of reparation, is bound to “the coming of the new humanity (reconciled, renewed, created a new, liberated, restored, recapitulated) in Jesus Christ” (n. 39).

297 The 1973 *Rule* stated that SCJs should be “architects of reconciliation”. “The word servant in the new text avoids the suggestion of sufficiency and furthermore evokes the idea of service and the figure of the Servant. The charism is a gift for service and also a sort of ministry (non-liturgical). In 2Cor 5, 8 referred to here, Paul speaks of the ministry of reconciliation.

3.2. "Caught up in sin" (n. 22)

298 We must analyze the theme of sin in the new Constitutions, for we cannot speak of reparation without speaking of sin. Further, a theology of the redemption supposes a theology of sin.

299 In the text reference to sin with which we are caught up introduces us to the theme of reparation: "That is how we see reparation". This is similar to the procedure earlier where Fr Dehon's reparation is treated together with his sensitivity to sin (nn. 4, 5).

300 In a wider sense stress is given to the need of awareness of "what in the world of today stands as an obstacle to the love of the Lord" (that is sin seen as the rejection of love). Thus all our human effort "must be continually purified and transformed by the cross and resurrection of Christ" (n. 29).

301 An allusion to sin is also found in n. 7 as a call to reparation, in n. 12 as an obstacle to the triumph of the redemption and in n. 23 as an expression of slavery.

302 Apparently it is little enough and certainly, we must deepen our awareness of sin itself to give meaning and force to our reparation.

303 SCJ reparation derives essentially from theological sensitivity to sin. This is awakened by contact with "sickness in society" and "human misery" (n. 4). Nevertheless, its source and *raison d'être* are found in the Heart of Christ at Gethsemane and on Calvary.

304 Fr Dehon received his sense of sin from his contemplation and experience of Christ's "neglected love". He accepted it in his psychological sensitivity and in any case in his theological and spiritual sensitivity.

305 This sense of sin determined his idea and practice of reparation. Our reparation also is and must be prophetic witness of love, of the reality and sense of sin, with and as Christ during his whole life and in the mysteries of his death and pierced Heart.

306 This is the specific message of Paray-le-Monial. H. Brémond points out that of all the forms of devotion to the Sacred Heart that of Paray-le-Monial, because of the emphasis placed on reparation, has oriented the devotion to the exterior, to the apostolate, in contrast particularly with the orientation given the devotion by Bérulle – contemplative, doctrinal and mystical. Maybe this is simplifying history; but it is not without a basis of truth and certainly in a more profound and essential way than that which Brémond thought and stated (cf. *Histoire littéraire du sentiment religieux en France*, III, pp. 329-334).

307 In any case the new Constitutions follow a line of dynamic fidelity in their presentation of reparation as we see it. The contemplation of the Heart of Christ in the mystery of the opened side is the inspiring source of a reparation that is part of the “movement of redeeming love”, of an apostolate that is reparation and a reparation that is prophetic and apostolic.

308 In this sense it may seem somewhat weak and inadequate to speak of “our vocation to reparation, the stimulus for our apostolate” (n. 23). In fact reparation is not only the soul of our apostolate, it is itself an apostolate through the witness it gives. Indeed, it is because of its end and the prophetic witness of reparation that our institute should be recognized and should live as an apostolic religious institute.

309 Art. 23-24 give the features of this reparation.

310 It is first of all the proclamation of the gospel, participation in the work of reconciliation, participation in the church’s mission in the world of today. (This theme is developed in nn. 26-39).

311 It is also suffering offered as an exalted, mysterious communion with the sufferings and death of Christ for the redemption of the world (n. 24). This has its mysterious and mystical efficacy, but is also an apostolate and an apostolic witness, not only because of the merits it earns but also because it is a revelation of the active presence of Christ’s love.

312 The theme of reparatory suffering is important in spiritual tradition, especially in that of devotion to the Heart of Christ and in that of the congregation. The themes of immolation and the spirit of victimhood find a special application there.

313 The passage from Colossians (1,24) cited in n. 24 refers not to Christ's expiatory sufferings, but to the trials "linked with the preaching of the gospel" (cf. TOB/III, note a, p. 626). The interpretation of Augustine "extending to all Christians the vocation of suffering in communion with the Lord for the good of the ecclesial community" (ibid. p. 626) is important, if communion with Christ in suffering is the proclamation of the gospel, witness of operating charity, to overcome and eliminate the reality of sin.

314 Reparation through suffering is in itself eminent cooperation with the redemption in the midst of the world, sharing in the mission of the church.