

Fr. Albert Bourgeois

The Superior General of Renewal



Vigil on Dehonian Memorial Day

26.11.2021

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INTRODUCTION

Dehonian Memorial Day is an invitation to “draw up a biographical memorial of those more outstanding figures among our brothers and sisters who can serve as models and encouragement for us in living out more sincerely the vocation and mission which is ours in the Church and world of our day” (Letter on 18.12.2000, Fr. Virginio Bressanelli).

We are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Fr. Albert Bourgeois (1921-1992), sixth Superior General (from 1967 to 1979), the 40th anniversary of the approval of the new Constitutions (1982) and the 50 years of activity of the Dehonian Studies Centre.

About Fr. Bourgeois our Superior General, Fr. Carlos Luis Suárez Codorniú, wrote: “His intimacy with the Lord, his capacity for listening and discernment, his knowledge of our spiritual heritage, his determination to face challenges along with the indispensable collaboration of many other SCJs, made it possible for the Congregation to enter into the path of renewal requested by the Church” (Letter on 3.2.2021).

We bless the Lord who does all things well and leads his Church and our Congregation in sharing the faith experience of Fr. Dehon.

Song

THE FIGURE

In a first step of our vigil, we take a look at the figure of Fr. Albert Bourgeois. We will listen to brief notes on his life and work, and a testimony from Fr. Virginio Bressanelli. We will also meditate on one of Fr. Bourgeois' favorite biblical texts when he spoke about Dehonian spirituality.

Biographical notes

Fr. Albert Bourgeois was born on January 30, 1921 in Jandelaincourt, near Nancy (France). He was seven years old when his father died of tuberculosis, and only three years later he also lost his mother. As a child, at a very early age he knew the suffering and difficulties of a poor working-class family. He made his first profession in the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1938. In 1967, just after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, he was elected Superior General, a position he held for two six-year terms until 1979. He led the Congregation in a time of multiple transformations both within and outside the Church. The most visible result of the renewal of the Congregation were the new Constitutions. A first draft *ad experimentum* was prepared at the General Chapter of 1973, then approved, with various modifications, at the General Chapter of 1979. Throughout these years Fr. Bourgeois was able to maintain the unity of a Congregation full of tensions about its future direction. On several occasions he had to invest all his authority as Superior General and he was the guarantor and representative of the “dynamic fidelity” that characterizes our renewal.

From 1979 until his death in 1992, he dedicated himself to deepening our knowledge of Fr. Dehon's faith experience and to the study and communication of our Constitutions.

Testimony of the Superior General, Fr. Virginio Bressanelli at St. Quentin on the day of Fr. Bourgeois' burial

More than anyone else in the Congregation, after our Founder, our confrere deserves the beautiful name of Father: for his courage, his fidelity, and his wisdom in animating the Congregation in a delicate and decisive period of its history.

Like a good shepherd, he knew how to lead it back to its vital origins. He knew, in the words of Paul VI, that the “sap” comes from the “roots”. With his example, his governmental action, and his numerous writings, he wanted to lead the Congregation to meditate on the original intuition of Fr. Dehon.

For this reason, it is good that he rests here, in St. Quentin, close to the Founder. Here we have our roots. I would like the burial in this place to testify our esteem, our gratitude for his person and his service.

I would also like this burial to signify our commitment to dynamically maintaining the legacy that Fr. Dehon left us, and how St. Quentin remains for all of us a center of Dehonian spirituality, the point of communion with our sources.

Resting in this maternal land, Fr. Bourgeois is forever united to the foundations of our Congregation, so that he may continue to enrich our lives. We all know the richness of his spiritual life and thought, his attachment to the Congregation and its Founder, his discretion and humility. His life was truly that of a priest of the Sacred Heart.

He told us that in these last two months the Heart of Jesus had taken seriously everything he had written about our spirituality. What he wrote, he lived. May it remain an example for us and remind us that our vocation is above all a matter of life.

Biblical text: 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit. Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God. We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God* whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Prayer: Act of oblation

We thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth,
because in your Son Jesus
you have revealed the mystery of your love.
Transform us in Christ, servant of humanity,
and give us a heart similar to his;
let us be offered and available
to announce your mercy.
You call us to share the saving love of Christ
in a life of oblation,
grant that we might participate in his redemption
with the offering of our life.
Together with us you welcome
the sufferings and expectations of the world.
Welcome the efforts and hopes of the Church,
the joys and sorrows of all humanity.
Make us prophets of love
and humble servants of reconciliation,
on the way to the Easter of your kingdom. Amen.

EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

It may seem surprising that our Constitutions mention Eucharistic adoration as the first element among the apostolic orientations. From the very beginning of his service as Superior General, Fr. Bourgeois was a great defender, even in the face of resistance, of what today seems to be a characteristic element of Dehonian life throughout the world.

In 1989, at the International College in Rome, Fr. Bourgeois gave a series of lectures on “Our Adoration: History, Theology, Politics.”

(On this) Father Dehon goes on and on in recommendations for preparation, celebration, thanksgiving, organization of adoration, greetings, etc. Little things and minutiae, one might say, rituals and customs that have been made more flexible by the last Council and in the movement of a more liberated and airy spirituality and devotion. In these details, rather than a concern for cold ritual exactitude, we must undoubtedly see a real and authentic fervor, to be placed within the framework of a great project of love, of a heart that loves in spirit and in truth, such as the small gestures of care in the expression of human love, in the family, between young lovers or elderly spouses, and, more generally, of true charity towards God and towards one's neighbor.

But we need to go further, to the very meaning, to the intuition that, for an Institute whose “reparatory purpose” is its distinctive character and mission in the Church, sees in Eucharistic adoration an authentic, essential and substantial act of reparation.

Mary at the feet of Jesus (Lk 10:39) is the symbol and type of “time” given only to the one thing necessary, time “lost”, humanly speaking, because it is all for God. Mary's time coincides with that of Jesus, without anything being taken away or distracted. Jesus invites Martha to realize, in her own action and service, the same connection through attention to the one thing necessary, that is, to truly live what we must understand through contemplation in action. The true effectiveness of our action of redemption and reparation comes from this connection and not so much from the perfect adaptation of the means, even if the search for this perfect adaptation is a requirement of an action that wants to be wholly and purely for God.

This brings us back to the very meaning of our adoration, as pure and free time for the only necessary thing. Necessary, not primarily as an “exercise” of personal sanctification and as a stimulus to the apostolate – “the soul of the apostolate”, according to the title of a famous book. Not even as an exercise of freed and privileged time to offer reparation and satisfaction to the Lord for the ingratitude, indifference or sacrileges of which the Heart of Jesus complained of being the victim. But as pure and free time, consecrated time, humanly speaking, time lost and apparently empty of all efficacy. But time in which, in us, through Christ and in Jesus Christ, the world opens up and offers itself to God who restores and reconciles, time open to God's action in the world. And it is in this sense that we can and must speak of reparative worship.

From our Constitutions

Cst 31

This mission, for Father Dehon in a spirit of love and oblation, entailed Eucharistic adoration, as an authentic service of the Church (cf. Notes Quotidiennes, 1.3.1893), and *ministry to the lowly and the humble, the workers and the poor* (cf. Souvenirs XV), to proclaim to them the unfathomable riches of Christ (cf. Ephesians 3:8).

Cst 83

In very close relation with the Eucharistic celebration, we meditate on the riches of this *mystery of our faith* in adoration, so that the body and blood of Christ, food of eternal life, may transform our beings more deeply.

Thus we respond to a requirement of our reparatory vocation. In Eucharistic adoration we want to deepen our union with the sacrifice of Christ for the reconciliation of all with God.

Silence/Personal Meditation - Psalm 139:1-14

LORD, you have probed me, you know me:
you know when I sit and stand;
you understand my thoughts from afar.
You sift through my travels and my rest;
with all my ways you are familiar.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
LORD, you know it all.
Behind and before you encircle me
and rest your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
far too lofty for me to reach.
Where can I go from your spirit?
From your presence, where can I flee?
If I ascend to the heavens, you are there;
if I lie down in Sheol, there you are.

If I take the wings of dawn
and dwell beyond the sea,
Even there your hand guides me,
your right hand holds me fast.
If I say, "Surely darkness shall hide me,
and night shall be my light"
Darkness is not dark for you,
and night shines as the day.
Darkness and light are but one.
You formed my inmost being;
you knit me in my mother's womb.
I praise you,
because I am wonderfully made;
wonderful are your works!
My very self you know.

Prayer together:

Lord Jesus,
we are gathered here before you.
You are the Son of God made human,
crucified by us and raised by the Father.
You, the living One, truly present among us.
You, the way, the truth and the life:
You, who alone have the words of eternal life.
You, the only foundation of our salvation,

and the only name to invoke in order to have hope.
You, the image of the Father and the giver of the Spirit;
You, the Love: the unloved Love.
Lord Jesus, we believe in you,
we adore you, we love you with all our hearts,
and we proclaim your name above every other name.
Lord Jesus make us vigilant as we await your coming.
(Saint John Paul II)

Song

REPARATION

Reparation - a word and a concept that to this day provokes discussion. When, in 1973, the General Chapter decided, by 33 votes in favor and 32 votes against, to insert "reparation" into our Constitutions, according to Fr. Bourgeois that decisive vote was that of Fr. Dehon.

In 1990, at the Scholasticate in Freiburg, Germany, Fr. Bourgeois led a meeting on reparation. He commented in particular on St. John 19:31-37.

From our point of view and for our purpose, the last word, the quotation from Zechariah 12:10, is most important thing to remember. For it is the prophetic proclamation of this assiduous contemplation of Christ from the open side that has led the saints and the Church not only to devotion to the Heart of Jesus, but more precisely to the sense of reparation, which the message of Paray-le-Monial made explicit and popular. As has often been pointed out, the thought and experience of possible and necessary reparation was born at the foot of the cross from the image of Christ with the pierced Heart.

First of all, because it is the sign of the love with which we are loved, "the love of Christ the Lord in whom the Father made His love known to us" say our Constitutions (n. 9), throughout his life and "to the end, to the last", says St. John (Jn 13:1).

And then, because it is precisely there, at the foot of the cross, that we grasp the true meaning of sin, that we become "sensitive" to it, according to the words of our Constitutions on Fr. Dehon (n. 4). Not only in its human and social consequences, but in its theological reality that, in the strict sense of the word, requires what we mean by reparation.

This, like love itself, is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be entered into, not with readings, investigations, surveys, but with contemplation, which is love and union. It is not an escape from the real tasks of repairing our world. Fr. Dehon is a witness to that which is hard to deny. I think we would do well to return not only to his action, but to his contemplation. "The wound of the Heart of Jesus is an eloquent school of love. In contemplating it, one is irresistibly conquered by love and wants to love with that beautiful love of compassion, which first melts the Heart into infinite piety and then raises it up strengthened for all devotions." (ESC 1/278)

From our Constitutions

Cst 7

Father Dehon expected his religious to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation of people and the world in Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:18).

Thus involved with Him to remedy sin and the lack of love in the Church and in the world, they shall render *the worship of love and of reparation that His Heart desires* through their whole life, their prayers, works, suffering and joys (cf. Notes Quotidiennes XXV, 5).

Cst 23

This is how we understand reparation: as a welcome to the Spirit (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:8), as a response to Christ's love for us, as a communion in His love for the Father and as a collaboration in His work of redemption in the midst of the world.

For here, in our time, He frees people from sin and restores humanity in unity. Here, too, He calls us to live out our reparative vocation, as the incentive for our apostolate (cf. GS 38).

Silence/Personal Meditation - Isaiah 58,1.5-12

Cry out full-throated and unsparingly,
lift up your voice like a trumpet blast;
Proclaim to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
Is this the manner of fasting I would choose,
a day to afflict oneself?
To bow one's head like a reed,
and lie upon sackcloth and ashes?
Is this what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the LORD?
Authentic Fasting That Leads to Blessing
Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose:
releasing those bound unjustly,
untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
breaking off every yoke?
Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry,
bringing the afflicted and the homeless
into your house;
Clothing the naked when you see them,
and not turning your back on your own flesh?
Then your light shall break forth
like the dawn,

and your wound shall quickly be healed;
Your vindication shall go before you,
and the glory of the LORD
shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer,
you shall cry for help, and he will say:
"Here I am!"
If you remove the yoke from among you,
the accusing finger, and malicious speech;
If you lavish your food on the hungry
and satisfy the afflicted;
Then your light shall rise in the darkness,
and your gloom shall become like midday;
Then the LORD will guide you always
and satisfy your thirst in parched places,
will give strength to your bones
And you shall be like a watered garden,
like a flowing spring whose waters never fail.
Your people shall rebuild the ancient ruins;
the foundations from ages past
you shall raise up;
"Repairer of the breach," they shall call you,
"Restorer of ruined dwellings."

Prayer:

Blessed are you, gracious God,
for drawing near to us through Jesus Christ,
the perfect image of your love.
By giving himself for us
and offering himself to you,
he healed a world broken by sin and death.
He has set us free from everything that enslaves us.
He has reconciled us to one another and to you.
He has revealed the mystery of your eternal life.

And so, merciful God,
we ask you to continue the work
you have begun in us.
May we become what we receive,
the body of Christ given for others.

May your Spirit so fill us
that we reveal in our lives
the reconciliation Christ has won for us.
May we show the world
the love your Son has made possible
and the life you have willed for us all
since the beginning of time. Amen.

Song

THE INNER REVOLUTION

Unlike the 1956 Constitutions, the new Constitutions no longer indicate a specific time dedicated to meditation. Therefore, for Fr. Bourgeois, it becomes even more important to ask ourselves about the quality of our prayer and meditation.

Fr. Bourgeois, Meditation for a Provincial Conference, on St. John 15:1-17, and especially 15:3: "You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you", with reference to the 1973 Rule of Life.

Even more than tireless study and discussion, we need the attention of prayer. Not just the attention in our prayers... but the attention of prayer, as a movement of the soul carried by faith and love... I judge the importance and meaning I give to prayer not by the beautiful ideas I have about prayer, my ability to talk about it, but by the taste I have for it, the place it occupies in my concerns, my predilection for it, the time I devote to it, regardless of my occupations or even because of my occupations. And the busier I am, the more I am "in the world" - the more I need to be in Jesus, living in Him and of Him. I don't just need theoretical convictions, or just the science of prayer. I need the wisdom of prayer, the wisdom that prays.

Personally, concretely and sincerely, I need to ask myself, we need to ask ourselves: what real prayer time is left in my life since the daily half hour is no longer in the Constitutions? Is real prayer still a structure of life for me? Or is it reduced to the 5 or 10 minutes, scheduled here and there, after the readings, those brief times of silence set aside in our offices, times of silence often so empty of true prayer, because it takes time for silence to settle into our noisy, dissipated, busy lives. It takes time for the heart to be purified and for the Lord to be felt as present....

Sufficient, prolonged, persevering, regular prayer, even beyond the taste or distaste we have for it, is a requirement of life, of welcoming Jesus, to live and remain in Him, to produce fruit. Without this, one is not a "disciple" and cannot be in religious life, in a religious community.

But I promise you that true prayer and the life of prayer and the effort for prayer, through the necessary purifications, sacrifices of time and efforts of poverty and purity of heart, this prayer is a great sweetness, a great peace: "I have told you this", Jesus concludes, "so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."

From our Constitutions

Cst 76

We recognize that the faithfulness of each member and of our communities, and the fruitfulness of our apostolate, depend on our dedication to prayer.

To this Christ invites His disciples, above all His friends; we want to respond to this invitation. *Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart (Luke 18:1). Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial... (Matthew 26:41).*

Cst 147

By making our lives conform to these Constitutions as our profession requires, we shall be confirmed in fidelity to our vocation and our mission as Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our religious life shares in the evolution, the trials and the searching of the world and of the Church.

And so our life is constantly called into question. We are bound to re-think and to find new expression for its mission, its forms of presence and of witness.

Assured of God's unfailing faithfulness, rooted in the love of Christ, we know that the choice of religious life, to stay vital, re-quires faithful encounter with the Lord in prayer, continuing conversion to the Gospel, availability of heart and attitude to welcome This **Day of God**.

Silence/Personal Meditation - Psalm 62,6-13

My soul, be at rest in God alone,
from whom comes my hope.
God alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not fall.
My deliverance and honor are with God,
my strong rock; my refuge is with God.
Trust God at all times, my people!
Pour out your hearts to God our refuge!
Mortals are a mere breath,
the sons of man but an illusion;
On a balance they rise;

together they weigh nothing.
Do not trust in extortion;
in plunder put no empty hope.
On wealth that increases,
do not set your heart.
One thing God has said;
two things I have heard:
Strength belongs to God;
so too, my Lord, does mercy,
For you repay each man
according to his deeds.

Prayer for the Congregation and its superiors

Jesus, Good Shepherd,
we ask you to guide our Congregation.
Help us, who are dedicated to your heart,
to live as brothers united in chastity,
poverty, and obedience.
Bless our communities.
May all that we are and do
draw strength from the love
made visible in your pierced side.
Be with our brothers
who are given the service of authority.
May they work with courage and love
to build up our common life and ministry.
May we collaborate with them,
faithfully searching for God's will.
In this way,
may the whole Congregation participate
in your offering of love to the Father. Amen.

Song

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Brothers and sisters, on the Memorial Day of those who have preceded us and sanctified themselves by following the spiritual path indicated by Fr. Dehon, inspired by Fr. Bourgeois, the Superior General of the renewal, we ask for the grace to continue, in dynamic fidelity, to be prophets of love and servants of reconciliation in the world, on the way to the Kingdom.

Let us pray:

R. Renew us, O Father, in your Holy Spirit.

1. Grant that the Spirit of love may make all Christians one people in a world torn by conflict and discord so the Church may shine as a sign of unity and peace. Let us pray:
2. Renew the wonders of Pentecost for the Pope, bishops, presbyters, and deacons: make their service to humanity joyful and fruitful. Let us pray:
3. Enkindle in our entire Congregation the fire of the Spirit, so that we announce with our lives the love of Christ, meek and humble of heart, and commit ourselves ever more to the service of the little ones and the poor. Let us pray:
4. Help us to understand that the faithfulness of each one of us and of our communities, and the fruitfulness of our apostolate depend on our assiduous prayer, on the practice of Eucharistic adoration and on a life of reparatory oblation. Let us pray:
5. Send the necessary vocations to the Dehonian Family: may they become prophets of love and servants of the reconciliation of people and the world in Christ, to the glory of your name. Let us pray:
6. Increase the communion that unites us together. Help us to remain united to our deceased brothers and sisters in prayer and hope. Let us pray:

Our Father

Father, source of all renewal in love, grant that, with the collaboration of the Dehonian Family, in every language, people and culture, the joyful proclamation of the Gospel of Love may resound and that your Holy Spirit may regenerate us in the Easter of your Son. Who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen

Song