

12-O-22

## BROTHER ARNOLD “IN THE SHADOW OF THE SPIRIT”

### “By the movement of the Spirit of God”

If there is one recommendation of Saint De La Salle which our protagonist followed to the letter, it was that of Chapter two of the Rule of 1705 inviting all the Brothers of the Christian Schools to do all their actions “by the guidance of God, *by the movement of his Spirit* and with the intention of pleasing Him”.

It can be said of Brother Arnold what is sung in a recent liturgical hymn about the Blessed Virgin Mary, that is, that he lived “in the shadow of the Spirit”. Do we not hear him express the meaning of this verse when he writes:

It is the Spirit of God who brought about in Mary the divine work of the Incarnation by the creation of the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ.

It is again He who returns to accomplish in us the precious fruit of the holy life brought by Jesus Christ to the world”.

For Brother Arnold, the third Person of the Holy Trinity was not, as He had been for so long in our Church and as He was called in 1921 by one of our well known confreres, “the Divine Unknown”.

It is interesting to discover the progression with which his story unfolds, how from Landroff to Courlancy the Spirit of God, received in baptism, made his imprint increasingly more demanding and at the same time more tender on this generous soul.

The frightful austerities with which the servant of God wove his nights and days were not blind masochism but the “wisdom of God” such as that defined by Saint Paul (1 Co. 1, 22, 23)). Penetrated with the so-called theology “of compensation” so much valued in the nineteenth century, Brother Arnold, as he exhorted his disciples, offers

“with steadfastness to the Heart of Jesus the sorrowful compensation exacted by sin”.

### “An enlightened charity”

However, this “Lasallian ascetic”, as he is called, has too much common sense and evangelical sense not to place fraternal charity above mortification. Sketching the portrait of a mortified man, he speaks about an “enlightened charity” as a lamp before one’s steps or of a proof of truth.

His confreres, students, later his brothers and sisters, his companions in schools and those who worked with him are all unanimous in underlining the place held in the life of Jules Reche by the “fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, benevolence, mildness, and self-mastery” (Ga 5, 22, 23). And these manifestations of an “enlightened charity” help them acknowledge the other panel of the diptych: “Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires”. (id. 5, 24). They recognize the bonds which unite “Austerus” and “Agape” in the same man whom they admire: “If we live in the Spirit let us also walk under the impulse of the Spirit”, concludes St. Paul in the same letter (5, 25).

Living by the Spirit, Brother Arnold seemed to all who shared his existence or those who met him occasionally, as a charming man, pleasant and full of good humor, delicate in accepting others, and attentive to all, especially to the timid and those most deprived.

His relations with his family were such that he wrote to them often, paid them visits, and shared their joys and sorrows. He suffered deeply over the partitioning of Lorraine in 1872 which made the village where he was born German territory.

Going back to his students and confreres of the Rue de Venise, and to the novices and retreatants of Thillois and Courlancy, they all pay homage to his “indefatigable devotedness”. It was a devotedness which really overlooked nothing, especially to the sick to whom he consecrated himself, even during the night if needed, so that his Brothers would not be fatigued or be irritated because of missing their sleep.

Still, what struck his students the most was the patience of this educator. He had patience to the point that his students believed that he had absorbed this difficult virtue “with his mother’s milk,” as the pious hagiographers were wont to say. Nothing is further from the truth! Many attest that this seemingly jovial fellow was quite violent by nature. Then suddenly, it seems, he becomes mild with his very tender infancy from “the Holy

Spirit who was been given to us". Brother Arnold received from Him the request of the liturgy of Pentecost: "Come, Holy Spirit... make supple what is rigid, warm what in us in frozen...".

**"... seeking together with Him to whom we pray"**

"We can be sure that it is never alone that we pray so well. Someone is living within us... It is He who creates the words within our heart ... He makes us ourselves say the psalms, the hymns, and spiritual canticles... It is the Spirit within whom we pray all the time, through every prayer and supplication...".

It is with regret that I cut this quotation short for it is a beautiful text written by Brother Arnold. It is a text with a Pauline resonance which brings us to the keystone of his spiritual life: the HOLY SPIRIT. He revealed to him Jesus given by Mary; He guided him to the wisdom of following the Crucified; He taught him the unique love of God and men. It is again with the Holy Spirit that our protagonist rejoins his Savior in prayer.

We do not in the least doubt that the Spirit was already guiding him as a child, as an adolescent in Landroff, as a young worker in Charlesville. "Led into the desert" of the religious life by the same Spirit, Jules Reche in a favorable climate brought to fruition this gift long known by his family and comrades, and later by his students, his confreres, and his novices. All of them equally speak of the long hours consecrated to prayer by the young pupil, the farmhand, the wagon driver, and the religious apostle.

At what source did he supply this insatiable thirst for praying? The same source that Catholics for the past fifty years have found to their

taste: the Bible and the Liturgy. We do not hesitate to say that in this domain, Brother Arnold was a precursor and merits our attentive recognition.

His knowledge of the Bible and in particular the New Testament was that of one possessing a prodigious intelligence and memory; furthermore, he had a heart which beat to the rhythm of the word of God, not morally meditated upon, but contemplated, lived in the slightest detail of an existence totally dedicated to His service. He held a preference for the psalms which expressed his praise, his contrition, his supplications.

A compatriot and contemporary of Dom Gueranger, restorer of the Roman liturgy, Brother Arnold exhorts his novices to "pray with the Church", as we would say today":

"I beseech you, he writes to one of them", use the prayers of the Church; they are so beautiful and so well adapted to the needs of our soul, for it is the Holy Spirit Himself who teaches us the way to pray with His Church".

We are thus led to the Holy Spirit! Cardinal Marty perceived this primordial action in the existence of Brother Arnold. He explains it at the conclusion of the preface which he so kindly agreed to write for my book;

"The Holy Spirit ever breathes among the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Pentecost happened yesterday in Judea; Pentecost is presence and action of the Holy Spirit at every stage in the life of the Church. The testimony of Brother Arnold is a luminous arrow on the spiritual and apostolic highway for all Christians".

No further comment...

**Brother Charles LAPIERRE**