



**Les Fils de la Charité
Région France**

**Jules DUCHÊNE¹
1910-1994**

He was born and baptized in Langrolay on September 15, 1910.

He was the son of Jean-Baptiste DUCHÊNE, aged 43, sailor, and of Adèle Haugomard, aged 37.

He became a Son of Charity on May 12, 1941.

He was ordained a priest in Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris on April 20, 1946.

He was vicar at Colombes

Master of novices

Pastor at Colombes, then Antony in the outskirts of Paris. He retired at St. Joseph House in Issy-les-Moulineaux.

He died on March 25, 1994, feast of the Annonciation.

Here is something he wrote on November 6, 1961:

“Everything talks about God: the beauty of nature, the progress of a militant, the very simple charity of the little people who surround us, the generosity and the faith of our team brothers. And nevertheless, all that we can contemplate here on earth is nothing compared to the God’s splendor, it is but a sparkle flying out of this center of Love. All the creatures should make greater our thirst to see God...”

In a letter to Marcel on June 10, 1969.

“It is Christ who has made me an apostle...”

“I love the Church profoundly; I can even say that I love it tenderly. Try to imagine just for a minute all the questions that a man of my generation is up against. There certainly are great riches in all that is going on, but who will separate the wheat from the weeds?”

“They would say about my grandfather: old man Duchêne never worries about anything. And the old man would reply “No worries, but worries nonetheless.” All that is above the many meetings and financial problems. But why bother the others with our worries. They cannot bear more. God knows that I keep them poorly in my heart and he is the only one who can alleviate them. We are always alone in front of God. That is life. We suffer one beside the others, sometimes one

¹ This is not an obituary like the others. When he died the obituaries we now have had not begun to be published. But Fr. Duchêne left his mark in the Institute. He was vicar and then pastor of one of the most famous parishes ministered by the Sons of Charity. He was master of novices for many years as well as a member of the General Council.

These notes are made up of the news of his death and of some of his writings. I also add the homily given at his funeral by Fr. André Rebré.

because of the others. You wanted to have a look on my life: there it is. More poverty than anything else. Yes an impression of poverty, of solitude before God, the impression that all that is human disappears...

But I want to leave you with a word of hope, to tell you what I want to believe, what I believe. "When a woman is about to give birth she is with anxiety, but when the child is born she is filled with joy!" Here on earth, we are like that woman. Soon we will see God. We will then see today with the eyes of God and we will see that this today was nice because God was there.

"God looks at our lives, God looks at our world.... God, our Father"

What follows was written in 1971

"...nonetheless it is Christ's call that I have heard. And it is for love of him that I left my job, my pals, in short a place I liked very much, without mentioning my projects for the future. I did not forget that work place. I did not deny it, I owe it much. My heart is still a bit there. Does one abandon his first love? However the call came from Christ and that He has given me, day after day, the strength to answer in difficult circumstances. I had to wait 10 years to become a priest and one must remember what the conditions were like in those days in a belated vocations seminary."

"It is Christ who talked to me, who has molded me, who has made me an apostle, insofar as I have answered. It is Him, it is the Church that have put their trust in me, and after so many years I still remain overwhelmed. My priesthood is His. It is a gift from Christ and the Church. He is the One and the only One who consecrated me. If there is someone who owns my live it is Jesus Christ. Perhaps my past had something to do with my entering the Sons of Charity, but I came to answer a call from Christ..."

"It is very clear that in order to serve the working world, and even more so in order to give it Jesus Christ, one must be as close to it as possible. Cardjin was right when he said: 'The apostles of the young workers will be young workers.' All that goes along the line of being closer 'may' be an approach to the mission that is entrusted to us. All that goes along the line of 'sharing the life', is perhaps a proof of the tenderness of God and of the Church for the poorest. I said 'perhaps' because there is nothing automatic in that matter. It is not enough to be near to the people, one must also have one's heart full of God and that the sign made by the church through us be perceived by those for whom it is meant..."

Homily at the funeral of Fr. Jules Duchêne on March 29, 1994 by Fr. André Rebré

I chose that text of St. John's Gospel (Jn 17, 24-26) because Fr. Duchêne liked it and one day he had commented it, at least the first sentence: "Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me." The comment he had made to me about that reveals that he had the heart of an apostle, all enflamed with love for the one he called "Christ"

"Where is Jesus that we should be with Him? He is in the heart of the poor that is where we should first find him." That Jesus in the heart of the poor, Jules looked for him with passion.

In 1947, when he arrives at Colombes, on du Four Street, he had spotted a group of youths who were used to sit on the steps of the church, near the door that gave on du Four Street. "I wanted to relate to them but I didn't know how to go about it. One day someone came to the rectory and brought a nice pair of shoes. I took them and I went to see these young guys. They were poor, poorly dressed, and remaining in Colombes while the summer was calling to everyone to go on vacations. I asked them to try on the shoes and they fitted one of them very well. I told him: "You can keep them." – "Is that true, Father?" – "Sure, they were given to me, you can keep them." And then that big guy jumps and hugs me strongly. Then he told me: "You know, son, none of them ever came to the Y.C.W., but every time I would pass by, they said hello and I would talk for a while with them. They had discovered that someone could be interested in them."

At the time, he was preparing an engaged couple for marriage. They were poor and had no family, no witnesses, no place to eat after he wedding and the outlook of returning to their small slum after the celebration at the church. "I was trying to see whom I could ask to be their witnesses. I didn't ask a rich family, but a popular one. They accepted and came with a bouquet of flowers and with their kids so that there would be more people. They had prepared a meal so that the newly weds would be with a family on that day." He told me: "You see, only the poor can understand the poor. It's because he made himself a poor that Jesus understood the poor and was loved by them."

Father Duchêne sought to reach Jesus Christ in the heart of the poor, whether they be his first young apprentices from the Y.C.W., one whose father drank, one who had abandoned the mother who had to work hard to make a living, one who hangs in the streets, the little unloved one; whether it be after May 1968, these postal workers that he had been himself, whom he went to see, incognito, in a small café near Saint Lazare station, to talk shop with them, to talk about exams that he prompted them to pass in order to get promotions according to their qualifications, to help them and sometimes to receive confidences. Among themselves they called him friendlily "the old man"; whether it be in Antony, with the Indians who had to move into high-rise towers. Fr. Duchêne dared to go and see the mayor and tell him: "You moved them, now you have to give the father a job either as gardener or municipal agent." For Fr. Duchêne the poor were always the poor that Jesus loved and that he called us to love if we wanted to reach Christ present in their heart.

But Father Duchêne went on with his comment: “Where else is Christ? He is on the cross.” He said to me: “Do you understand that the hardest for the Son of God was not to become man and to work when he was young -being a man is great- but it has been to live among the sinners that we are. Even the apostles that he had chosen were uncouth, ungrateful men unable to enter into God’s views. He came to love with the greatest love and was not understood, even by his most intimate friends.”

One day when he was in Antony he added: “At my funeral I don’t want people to celebrate the praises of the poor sinner that I am, but that they pray that God show me mercy.” Was it fear, anxiety before God’s judgment? Thinking about that, I rather believe that according to him, one can only measure the love of Christ for us on the cross in so much as we perceive the gap that he came to fill between God and the poor sinners that we are. Jules took God’s judgment seriously: “If we can stand up it is by grace of God, no one can presume what his judgment will be.”

“Finally, where again is Christ that we may reach him?” he would ask. “He is in the glory of the Father. But he is still there to make heard the voice of the poor; these poor who in his glory never cease to be the closest to his heart. He is there to bring men’s suffering, the burden that crushes them, and the despair that awaits them, the misery and the sin into which they give in sometimes.”

Jules likes this phrase of the Book of Revelations: “God will wipe all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away.” (Rev 21, 4) That is how Jules saw the glory of Christ. One of his novices told me that he liked to recall this also: “Then the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready wearing a bright clean garment.” (Rev 19,7)

Father Duchêne, I believe that God has put new garments on you, when you were with the young apprentices that have gone to Him before you: Dédé Deschaud and his wife Mireille and their son Francis, Jeannot Rousvoald, Robert Cailleaux and so many others that I forget. Christ has dressed you with his glory, as he has promised to the poor; and not to precede God in his judgment, I add that he did so because of his grace and his mercy of which you have been the channel for many, for all of us gathered here and for the Sons of Charity, your family.

For Regional Council of France, *André Rebré fc*

Translated by *Lorenzo Lortie fc*