



René BOURGET
1920-2007

However dirty, soiled, bruised
The sinner's feet maybe
When Jesus washes and dries them
The water in the basin in its green transparency
Reflects the hidden face of the Servant
In an intimate agreement and perfect face to face
With the Eucharistic table.

Meditation by René Bourget
on a painting

René Bourget was born on August 2nd, in Chaudron en Mauges, in Anjou which is a land of vocations. He was from a poor family; his father died when René was 4. His mother looks after a small farm; she would say: "The dignity of the poor is to always keep clean" and René has always been careful to have a perfect appearance.

He was young when he entered the Sons of Charity. In his request to make his religious profession he writes: "Father, accept me through Charity."

In 1945, almost immediately after his ordination he is appointed to l'Union des Oeuvres. among others he joins there Gaston Courtois. Ten years later he becomes the director. On that same year, 1955, he is appointed General Secretary of the Institute.

In 1959, he leaves L'union des Oeuvres to become pastor at Bon Pasteur parish in Paris, but in 1962, still as General Secretary he is full time with the General Superior.

Nine years later, in 1971, he joins the team at St-Jean Baptiste de Belleville where he will remain for 25 years. He goes to St-Joseph retirement home in the fall of 1996, where he goes on receiving many friends, while taking some responsibilities in the community, dealing with each one with his usual warmth.

The last article that René wrote for Chantiers was in issue number 135 of October 2002. It is a very nice and strong meditation on a painting by Sieger Köder representing the washing of the feet. He wrote it and gave it its finishing touch just at the beginning of the summer. Just after that he fell into an incomprehensible psychic illness: how could he, within a month, go from his full

human, intellectual, spiritual capacity to that state of a seriously ill man? It might be that this was triggered by the fact that for the first time that summer, he could not get to Noirmoutier, and it seems that he had completely lost his eyesight, which he dreaded since long ago. His end was long and sad, in spite of all the cares lavished on him with love. Some times, some one could bring him back among us and have a very short conversation with him. But it had become rare.

All those who have known René will talk of a man of relations. He had a strong and faithful friendship with many. He knew how to welcome people and listen to them; one could rely on his discretion. He was a deeply joyful and human man, interested in everything, in cooking as well as in sports and music. He knew how to choose good wines; he knew the names of the football players. There was much keenness and humor in his way of talking of the books and novels he had read, for he was convinced that it is in the novels, more than in the psychological features that one discovers the human soul.

The women and men who have known René in Belleville appreciated his availability, his way of accompanying one or the other. He would receive many persons for confession. He visited the persons who lived alone, not forgetting to buy a flower on his way. He also attended to the small community in Bas-Belleville. He took part in the changing project when they moved further down. He wanted to be very present there when the neighborhood was beginning to change and especially when it began to welcome immigrants from Asia. He liked very much that part of Belleville, its cosmopolitan mixture, its history of workers made of all the migrations of the twentieth century and that he knew much about.

The Institute owes a lot to René. First of all he was a member of the General Council for sixteen years, as secretary or assistant. Then he took part in the birth and publishing of many writings, especially about Father Anizan. The spiritual writings (the red book) published in 1968 were at the origin of all the research work and publishing of the following years.

René is also the father of *Chantiers*. With Michel Cartron, he imagined the magazine in 1969. He was its editor from 1969 to 1983. That magazine directed to the families and friends of the Sons with its contents of news and witnesses, René has always wanted it with a look for “the general public”, with a nice presentation, photos, humor and enthusiasm.

Today we thank the Lord to have finally welcomed René in his light.

Regional Council of France

Translated by *Lorenzo Lortie fc*