



## SECOND LCF INTERNATIONAL MANUAL OF FORMATION

### BEING BORN FROM ABOVE

The members of the Lay Camillian Family are mature people. They have religious and social convictions which are particularly defined, firm and set.

But a Christian must always be open to change. Moreover christian life is a continuous daily conversion. Everyday, our life of faith must be born again, born again from above, from the Holy Spirit.

In saint John's gospel, there is a character who represents us, the members of the Lay Camillian Family. This character is Nicodemus. We can see him visiting Jesus at night to listen to Him in order to believe in Him and in His saving message. This is what chapter 3 of saint John's gospel tells us.

#### **Let us read it :**

"There was a Jewish leader named Nicodemus, who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. One night, he went to Jesus and said to him : « Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing unless God were with him. »

Jesus answered : " I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again."

" How can a grown man be born again ? " Nicodemus asked. He certainly cannot enter his mother's womb again and be born a second time !"

" I am telling you the truth," replied Jesus. "No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. A person is born physically of human parents, but he is born spiritually of the Spirit. Do not be surprised if I tell you that you must all be born again. The wind blows wherever it wishes: you hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

"How can this be ?" asked Nicodemus.

Jesus answered: "You are a great teacher in Israel, and you don't know this? "

#### **Let us reflect on this text :**

1.

Nicodemus goes to Jesus and calls him "Rabbi " and he does not begin by a question, but rather by an affirmation... " *we know that you are a teacher sent by God* " Does he mean to honour Jesus and then, maybe, ask him questions on how to enter the Kingdom of God ? Just like the rich young man who has applied all of the law, Nicodemus wishes to know if *there is anything more* to achieve. He has prepared his first question but Jesus, who seems to know him, interrupts him. Jesus' answer is sharp, categorical, direct, decided, nearly discourteous. With it, he rewords thus : "*The one who is not born again cannot see the Kingdom of God.* "

Jesus urges to answer this learned man that there is no other way of perceiving, approaching, and entering the Kingdom of God : *you must be born again.*

This way of being born does not imply going back - materially - to your mother's womb, as Nicodemus understands it, no.

The new man Jesus is referring to, although being old, is born, not by entering again his mother's womb, but through changing his view on the character of the Father, who is Spirit (Jn 4,24). One is born again when one knows for a certainty, - through experience - that one is loved as he is.

Only love can lead to the light of pure truth in order to know who I am, where I come from, where I



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am going.

The new man is born through the love of God and by the will of God (Jn 1,13). Love is recognised, not through the effort to love but through the acceptance of being gratuitously loved by God.

2.

Regarding the second question of the doctor of the Law, Jesus, still with his divine authority, forgetting Nicodemus' answer on being born again through his mother's womb, clarifies it by repeating that one cannot enter the Kingdom of God if one is not born through water and the Spirit.

In the same way as a mother and a father are necessary so that one can be born biologically like human beings, the gracious love of the Father (water and Spirit, according to the Fathers of Church, are God's seed), is essential to be begotten as children of God.

The generation Jesus is talking about is not from flesh, from earth, from below, but from above, from the Spirit.

What we implement : prayer, projects, apostolical activities... if they are not born through a sincere discernment in the Spirit, only deal with flesh, earth, matter.

The Spirit of God which, in the first creation hovered over waters (Gen 1,2), now hovers over us, sent by his Son, raised on the cross, in order to change us into a new creature, to give us a new life that, in turn, we can pass on.

3.

Do not be surprised if I tell you that "you must be born from above."

How can one not be filled with wonder at the greatest marvel that man, created from glébe, a material being, could become nothing less than the beloved son of God ?

Jesus knows that the legal man, the materialistic Nicodemus cannot believe in this type of life. The newness of the Spirit cannot enter his mind.

4.

How can this happen ?

Nicodemus wonders of something that he well had to know.

All the Old Testament which he knows well, is filled with promises which are to be fulfilled gradually and which aim at their total realization in the Messiah, in Jesus. One of them, the most repetitive and surprising, will be the presence of the Spirit in the state of Israel and in every Israelite : "... *Your sons and daughters will prophesy... I will put my Spirit within you... and you shall live.*" (Ez 37,14)

*"I will give them a new heart and a new mind : I will take away their stubborn heart of stone and will give them a heart of flesh, so that they will keep my laws, and faithfully obey all my commands."* (Ez 11,19) ... Heart of stone which will have to be changed into a human heart, humanized through God's grace.

This new spirit, promised by the prophets, represents a new birth, an elevation, through water and the Holy Spirit. Being born of flesh is, therefore, not sufficient.

"It is to be born again that we are born in this world."

Jesus opposed the two births. It is not the first one, the one of race, the one of flesh, the one which guarantees belonging to the Kingdom, but the second one, the one with water and the Spirit originating from Christ, elevated and **glorified** by the cross.

5.

It is difficult for the followers of Jesus to accept its prophetic dimension. We forget more than once something which has its importance. God did not become incarnate in a priest, dedicated to follow the religion of the Temple ; nor in a man of letters busy supervising the established order set up by law of the Temple. He was incarnated and revealed as a prophet sent by the Spirit to announce good



## SECOND LCF INTERNATIONAL MANUAL OF FORMATION

news to the poor and freedom to the oppressed.

We forget that the christian religion is not one more religion, born to provide the followers of Jesus with his Credo, his rites and his precepts, adjusted so as to live their relationship with God. It is a prophetic religion, began by the Prophet Jesus in order to promote a more human world, oriented towards a definite salvation in God.

As Christians, we have the risk of neglecting more than once the prophetic dimension, which must encourage those who follow Jesus. Even though the major prophetic demonstrations which occurred in christian history keep being true, which is asserted and recognised by the theologian H. von Balthasar : at the end of the second century « falls under the Spirit (prophecy) of Church a white frost (a white thick cloud ?) which could not be removed at all. »

Today, concerned again by restoring « what is religious » as opposed to modern secularization, we, christians, stand in danger of making our way to the future, deprived of prophetic spirit. If it is the case, we may experience what has happened to the neighbours of Nazareth : Jesus will try to be among us and will « walk away » to continue his route. Nothing will prevent him from pursuing his liberating task. The others, who have come from the outside, will recognise his prophetic strength and welcome his saving action.

6.

Nicodemus demonstrates that he himself was born from above, by believing in Jesus.  
He defended him and was on his side, faced with Israel leaders (Jn 7,50)

Following the shameful attitude of Jesus' disciples, Nicodemus came to the Calvary, asked Pilate for the body of the Crucified, removed the nails of the Cross and bought a hundred pounds of myrrh to anoint the corpse of the Redeemer (Jn 19,39). Together with Joseph of Arimathea, they gave him a burial place, until the morning of the Resurrection.

The christian tradition of several churches proclaimed him a saint and celebrate his day on August 31st.

V/ Saint Nicodemus, born of water and Spirit

R/ Pray for us and help us to be born from above.

AMEN