



Tuesday ended with a lighthearted musical show put on by Fr. Olav Hamelijnk and fellow staff and community members from Handrup.

Be sure to check the General Website (www.dehon.it) for further documentation. There are also links there to the reports and photos. Photos can also be accessed at www.generalate.smugmug.com. An album has been started there of participant photos; we hope to have it complete by the end of the week.

General Conference Report, Tuesday, July 17, 2012

Identifying Dehonian values, examining the role of media

The second full day of the General Conference began with a presentation on Dehonian values from Fr. John van den Hengel.

The talk was developed from an earlier one that he gave in January 2010 to the teachers and staff at the SCJs' Gymnasium Leoninum in Handrup. Its focus was on Dehonian schools – what makes a school “Dehonian,” What Dehonian values are recognized in the school?

Taking that one step further Fr. John asked the questions, “What important values do we [Dehonians] want to pass on to the next generations? What do we stand for? What values identify us?”

What are values?

Before identifying these Dehonian values, Fr. John reflected on the idea of values themselves. “Objectively,” he said, “values don’t actually exist. It is only when they are held by people and institutions that they are real.” Yet it is when connecting values to institutions that we realize how different and sometimes difficult values can be.

He gave the example of the European Union. Even though the people of Europe have many communal values, these values are not the glue that holds Europe together.

European countries initially came together for economic reasons. But these shared concerns are not enough to create a European bond, a bond that supercedes ethnic bonds. More is needed for unity in diversity.

What is lacking? Fr. John suggested that it is a common story of being “European.” “They lack a myth of origin, a founding story” he said.

Trying to establish common values without a common story of origin “is like trying to build a house without a foundation,” said Fr. John.

Values do not work in a vacuum.

A founding story, an origin myth, makes sense of what an organization, a people, are doing and why they are doing it. Values must be linked to that founding story.

What is our SCJ story?

Moving from the example of the European Union, Fr. John talked about the founding story of the SCJs. “It comes from Fr. Dehon; from his life we can configure a founding myth,” he said.



Fr. John van den Hengel

Fr. John spoke of Fr. Dehon’s profound Christmas experience, when as a boy just barely entering his teens, he said that he heard the Lord speak to him and urge the young Dehon to give his life to him. “My conversion experience happened that day,” said Fr. Dehon.

The founder, said Fr. John, was transformed by a love that he didn’t know was possible. It was a faith in a God who loved him.

“Belief in God’s love is our founding story,” said Fr. John. Fr. Dehon came to believe that “love” is a primordial value. This personal discovery of God’s love is the story of our origin,” said Fr. John.

Dehonian values

Born out of this founding story, what are Dehonian values?

In previous education meetings in Salamanca, Spain, three values were identified: 1) Adveniat Regnum Tuum (May Your Kingdom Come), 2) Ecce Venio (Behold I Come), and 3) Sint Unum (Be One With Others).

What do these values offer the world, what can they give to the younger generations?

For Fr. Dehon, the idea of the Kingdom of God (Adveniat Regnum Tuum), had political overtones. But today, it is more than looking at the social structures of society. The kingdom, said Fr. John, is what happens “among us.” It is a surplus of love. Dehonians can help young people to see the surplus of love, the friendly universe.

Fr. Dehon was an optimist. He believed in a world capable of being transformed. This is something to impart to the younger generations.

Ecce Venio, or “Here I Come,” is the realization that life, for each of us, starts with a call. Response to that call is a discovery of one’s identity. It is an acceptance of the “other” in life. Dehonians often refer to this as “oblation,” an openness to say “Here I am, I come to do your will.”

Sint Unum, being one with others, is a recognition of the bond that unites us. Social issues are deeply religious issues. A search for Christ is a search for those most in need. Reparation is a way of making things “right” with God.

We — Dehonians — can be agents helping people to become capable of God’s love. In a world where cynicism often reigns, Dehonians can instead offer an unlimited capacity for love.

Values in action

How do these Dehonian values translate in the “Educare” or education of youth? What should a Dehonian school look like?

First, said Fr. John, there must be a sense of solidarity. A slogan used in the United States is “No Child Left Behind.” Although the implementation of the idea may have fallen short, the concept behind it is very Dehonian. No young person must be left behind.

The young must learn to be citizens of the world, where not only “no child” is left behind, but no person or society. With a growing internationality in the world, young people need to better learn how to live with and accept the “others” in their lives.

Following Fr. John’s presentation, participants met in linguistic groups to discuss central values. Reporting in plenary, just about every group echoed the three values identified in the Salamanca meetings, and then today by Fr. John: 1) Adveniat Regnum Tuum (May Your Kingdom Come), 2) Ecce Venio (Behold I Come), and 3) Sint Unum (Be One With Others).

There is agreement on what the Dehonian values are, now the challenge is to find a language with which to share them.

The impact of media

Fausto Colombo led the afternoon sessions, examining the relationship of youth and mass media. He is a professor of Media Communications Theories and Media and Politics at the Faculty of Political Sciences, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan. He is also director of Osservatorio sulla Comunicazione, a media and communication research center, based at the Università Cattolica.

Prof. Colombo spoke of the youth of today. The idea of what is “young” has expanded, stretching well beyond the teen years. Coupled with this is a societal desire to appear youthful, with people going to extreme measures to seek the look of youth.

This is a new phenomenon. “We didn’t always have youth,” said Prof. Colombo. For centuries, the young were simply those waiting to become adults. Now, the young are a group unto themselves with items marketed specifically for children and teens. They include books, television shows and movies marketed to satisfy their interests as youth. The concern is that the same emphasis isn’t put into developing items that help young people to grow.

It is almost as if youth are encouraged to stay where they are at, and not move forward to become adults.

Prof. Colombo traced some of the history of this phenomenon. Many parents want to give everything to their children, but if a child has everything, he will want everything.

As they get older, many youth feel that promises to them have been broken. Unemployment among young people is high. The welfare state that has been promised them in places like Spain is quickly changing.

Youth and media

Prof. Colombo noted that most young people today are “digital natives,” meaning that they have grown up with digital technology, and use it as an integral part of their lives. Those who are older often feel as though they are “digital immigrants.” They are not as adept, for the most part, as the young “digital natives.” Yet being digitally adept doesn’t necessarily mean that one is always correct. And the older “digital immigrants” are not without something to say to the young.



The use of the internet has changed the

Prof. Fausto Colombo

way information is both disseminated and received. Prof. Colombo gave the example of Wikipedia versus Encyclopedia Britannica. Britannica was created by specialists who decided what information should be included in their encyclopedia. But the web has changed the way people receive information. Wikipedia, in many ways, has become today's Britannica. Yet it operates on a premise opposite of Britannica. Wikipedia is generated by users. Users are the ones who decide what goes in it.

The lesson in this is that pre-established authority, such as that once found in the Church, does not have worth on the web. Authority now has to be earned. The people decide what is worth hearing, worth knowing. It is what he termed a "horizontal authority."

Prof. Colombo cited other challenges or characteristics of youth. They live in a gratuitous world on the internet where so much is available. Songs, videos, anything can be downloaded. Yet this misses the interaction of receiving a gift, which comes with a sense that something should be given in return.

Young people are very focused on themselves. Social media encourages the constant sharing of personal information, yet doesn't necessarily encourage the development of real relationships. But that is where genuine communication takes place. It is in real relationships that values can be shared. Social media is a good way to reach young people, but it can only be an introduction to a real relationship.

What is the response? Prof. Colombo cited the story in Luke of Zaccheus, the tax collector who heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho. Zaccheus climbed a tree to get a good look at Jesus. He just wanted to observe. But Jesus looked at him and told him to come down from the tree. Jesus said that he wanted to stay at his house.

To reach youth one must do the unexpected and reach out. Zaccheus expected to blend into the crowd. The tree was simply his window to Jesus. But Jesus reached out to him and established a relationship.

This is how to communicate to youth, by reaching out and building relationships.



The Polish SCJs have a group photo after Mass