

## Dehonian values in a time of fluidity

*Love and doubt have never been  
on speaking terms.*  
Kahlil Gibran

These reflections on Dehonian values began in January 2010 as a presentation to the teachers and staff of our Leoninum school in Handrup. I was asked to speak about what makes a school a Dehonian school. That quickly translated into: "What values would make Leoninum recognizable as a school in the Dehonian tradition?" When we began the preparations for the General Conference in 2011, I was asked to expand on what I presented in Handrup. It was thought it would be useful to ask ourselves what input, what values, might go into what we want to pass on to the next generation? What are the main impulses that as Dehonians we want to give to youth? What do we stand for? What values identify us? It is with this in mind that I address you today.

### Values

I thought that I might begin by making a problem of values. Objectively values do not exist. It is only when they are subjectively held by real persons can they be called values. Values are convictions or beliefs. They are connected with goodness and beauty: they are affective connections with people and with things. They assign worth or value to existence. By themselves values do not exist.

It is when we try to connect values with persons or institutions that we realize how difficult values can be. The European union has been engaged in these past years with the search for the values that could act as the sort of glue keeping the different members of the union together. Their research is a sort of warning to us that to search for our dehonian values is not as simple as it at first may seem. Europe has learned that even when there are communal values, they have not succeeded in creating united Europe.

Let us follow their search for what binds them, so that we might be instructed by their difficulties.

Europe is very much aware of the need of values. In documents about European values they are called the glue that is to keep the European community together. The problem in Europe is not

that there are no values. Research has shown that there are common values held by people across Europe. European Values Network<sup>1</sup>, European Ideas, a Pew Report on European values all present a pretty consistent list of commonly held values in Europe, such as, peace, freedom, equality among men and women, democracy, rule of law, tolerance, solidarity, individuality. Yet, they do not hold Europe together. They do not inspire the members to come to each others aid. Why do these values fail to operate as reasons for belonging to the European Union? Because values are not the glue. Countries must have these values to belong but they are not the reasons for belonging. This is something to consider when we speak about Dehonian values. Why is this? How do values function? For the moment, allow me to stay with Europe as an example. I want to make three points from which I hope to draw some preliminary conclusions.

(1) The origin of the European idea in the European Union was economic. Only later a political idea of Europe emerged. The treaties and conventions that underlie the European Union speak of common cultural principles. But these principles, while determined by research to exist, have not succeeded in creating a European bond or foundation. In Europe the ethnic bond, the belonging to a nation, is still stronger than the belonging to Europe. In other words, to build a stronger Europe, more is needed to build “unity in diversity”. It was thought that the unity would be constructed by way of commonly held values. That appears not to be the case. The values are not the sufficiently motivating bond for belonging to the European Union. So what is lacking? What do we want values to do?

(2) What is lacking, it seems, is that for most Europeans the union is purely instrumental. It is useful economically. It is a tool that is beneficial because it allows Europe a better chance to compete with the new economic players in the world. It is beneficial because together the European countries can do more than what each country can do by itself. Such an instrumental view means that the institutions of the European Union take care of the needs of the member states, but not all the needs are provided for. As long as the European Union provides for a prosperous Europe without war and with fair structures, Europe will survive. But in a time of crisis such as Europe is experiencing today - the instrumental view will not hold it together.<sup>2</sup> It will need a stronger cohesive than an instrumental one.

(3) Another option for Europe is to look at the historical or common cultural roots as the reason for their union. Are there historical reasons, historical values, which could bind Europe? On this score, the Vatican and a number of Episcopal Conferences in Europe have insisted that Europe should acknowledge its religious roots. Europe, they argued, could not be thought without the influence of Christianity. But, if there are any historical values to be enshrined in the Constitution, France proposed, they must be Laicist or secular values, not christianity. In other words, in the current mood of Europe, religion and Christianity are not seen as public values, at most, as

private values. Research has tended to support this. Even European Christians tend to identify themselves primarily by their nationality, not their religion.<sup>3</sup> In other words, religion and religious values are not the glue of Europe.

Before we get into the Dehonian values, we must therefore realize two things: values on their own, Dehonian values by themselves, are not enough to make a school or a parish or an organization Dehonian. Something more is required. What is this more? Why was it that no one stood up for the Greeks, when their economy collapsed? Why was there only contempt for the folly of Greece?<sup>4</sup> And what can we learn from it?

What is lacking in Europe - and this may give us pause as Dehonians - is a common story of Europe. Europe has no encompassing story of itself. It means that Europe lacks a myth of origin. In the words of Mauro Magati, a professor at Università cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, "Trying to establish common rules, without relying on a 'founding myth' upon which to create them, is like wanting to build a house without foundations."<sup>5</sup> In other words, values do not operate in a vacuum. They need a context or a foundation. A founding myth legitimates. It provides a context in which the actions and their reasons - their values - become meaningful. This founding story gives sense to what people are doing and why they are doing it. Europe seems unable to find itself in the founding story of a Christian Europe. But neither will Europe read its identity in the French Revolution and its declaration of human rights. If the European Union has no founding myth and for that reason has no clear identity, it should not expect that the values found in Europe will be the cohesive. Values must be grounded in a founding story.

With this as background, we may be ready to talk about Dehonian values. For them to be the sort of glue in our communities and in our work with youth they must be linked with a founding myth, a story of our origin, bound up in a narrative that all the participants can identify with. So let us start with the story of our origin? What story do we tell when we talk about our identity? What story will ground our values? Obviously, it has to be a story about Fr. Dehon. From his life we configure a founding myth. But what of Dehon constitutes this myth?

### **Interpreting Dehon today**

As Dehonians we have had difficulty identifying the story of our origin. It was not some unique experience that we can recount to others with the final line: "And this was Fr. Dehon." Our own Fr. André Perroux has tried to do this. At the end, he ended up with a question: "Fr. Dehon, who are you?" We tend to tell the story of our origin in retelling the story of the encounter of Dehon with the Soeurs Servantes du Coeur de Jésus. Although we get a certain pleasure retelling the story of the influence of the indomitable Chère Mère, Olivia Ulrich, who accompanied the writing of our first Constitutions in 1877, this is not the story of our origin. Nor is it the story of P.

André Prévot, whom P. Dehon pointed out as the real founder of the Congregation.

It is not easy to actually construct the story of our origin. As Fr. Yves Ledure pointed out in his recent article in *Dehoniana*, there are a number of issues to resolve before we can speak of a commonly-held story of Dehon and the origin, or, as we say in more spiritual language, the charism of our story.

One of the lessons I have learned from philosophical hermeneutics is that we cannot second guess what Fr. Dehon would have said to us if he were to come alive here. Nor can we recreate the flesh and blood Dehon. The flesh and blood Dehon has passed away, closed to us by time and his death. What we have of him are texts, writings, diaries, letters. It is a paper trail, traces, of the real Dehon. And over the last eighty or so years the followers of Dehon have taken these traces and out of them created an interpretation of Dehon. There now exists a growing library of books on Dehon, dissertations, and articles. As a religious Congregation we too are an interpretation of Dehon. Dehon has somehow also taken a new form in us. We are not always sure that our interpretation, our life, is an accurate memorial of Fr. Dehon.

So if I venture into such a story today, it is with the awareness and caution that this is perhaps still a story in the making. If what we call the Dehonian values is to have a real foundation, we must have a story into which these values are embedded.

It is therefore with the foundational myth that I will begin.

### **The foundational myth: Dehon's experience of Christ loving him**

As I have said, the foundational story does not go back to a specific event in Fr. Dehon's life. So I cannot start with, "One day Fr. Dehon had a specific spiritual experience." The closest we have to a transforming experience for Léon Dehon was on Christmas night when he was 12 or 13. Of the experience he says, "I received there one of the strongest impressions of my life. Our Lord urged me strongly to give myself to him. The impact of this grace was so marked that it stayed with me a long time that my conversion happened to me on that day." (NHV I, 26r). Certainly, it left its mark on Léon Dehon – he refers to it again in 1913 when he says that on that night he received his priestly vocation." However, the Congregation has not seen itself grounded in this early experience of Léon Dehon.

Our *Rule of Life* has summarized our founding story as a faith experience of Fr. Dehon. Paragraph 2 of the Constitutions goes so far as to say that his experience of Christ was similar to the experience of Jesus of which Paul speaks in his Letter to the Galatians.<sup>6</sup> Paul was overwhelmed by the crucified Jesus as the Son of God. He had not been able to accept a crucified Messiah.

Before the gates of Damascus he is thrown to the ground by the light, transformed by an experience of a love that he had not held for possible. It was an experience of - to say it in Paul's words - "The Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." This experience of faith was about love. We affirm a similar experience to be the foundational event in Léon Dehon's life: faith in a God who loved him. It is a powerful story. In the *Rule of Life* it reads as follows:

Our Institute is rooted [2]  
in Father Dehon's faith experience.

Saint Paul expressed the same experience, as follows:

"I still live my human life,  
but it is a life of faith in the Son of God,  
who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

The open side and the pierced heart of the Savior  
most wonderfully expressed for Father Dehon  
a love whose active presence  
he experienced in his own life.

Our grounding story, in which Dehonian values are rooted, is a belief in love: God's love. God's love in threefold excess. In his life, Fr. Dehon came to believe that this love is *the* primordial reality. It precedes us. The primordial story of Dehon is of an experience that at the heart of the universe and of our lives there is an outburst of love – a cloud of love, defining all. We did nothing to earn it. It is just there. Fr. Dehon believed himself to be living in this cloud. It was the determinative experience of his life.

For Dehonians this experience of the outburst of love, which Dehon discovered at a deeply personal level in the person of Christ, is their story of origin. This is the legacy that is most treasured. It is also the central story of their identity. God is an unknown and at times despised love who nevertheless grounds us at the heart of our identity. It is this discovery of love for him personally that is the story of our origin. It is not that we are most successful in living this legacy. For most of us it takes a lot of convincing that it is there, that it is real, that it is for us.

Dehonians use symbols to evoke this. The main one has been the image of the pierced Heart of Christ, of a heart inflamed by love, an image from the 17<sup>th</sup> century given us by St Margaret Mary. Beyond this image, there is the more scriptural image of the dead Jesus on the cross, his side pierced, out of which flows constantly life for others. There is also the imagery of the trinitarian God, Father, Son and Spirit, the one totally for and in the other. Before this love we are

left speechless. All of them are images of love as the original outpouring of life. As Dehonians, we scour the great tradition to allow us to enter into this mystery of love.<sup>7</sup>

As Dehonians we believe in the power of this love. The knowledge of God as friend, we believe, is to become a power in us. For Dehonians from this faith in the love of God flow all the other values. Without this one the others do not make sense. It is this love that makes us capable human beings, capable to face life, the source of our strength.

### **Three Dehonian Values**

So what flows from this rock of charity, from God's Spirit as love dwelling in us? How is it translated into Dehonian values? How does this founding story become values for a school, our work with youth, in our parishes? What are dehonian values?

This Conference is not the first time that Dehonians have tried to translate this legacy into livable values for education. There have been already two meetings on Dehonian education in Salamanca, Spain. There, the participants created a manifesto about education; it is borne by three mottos frequently used by Fr. Dehon and subsequently by his followers. They are *Adveniat Regnum Tuum* (Your kingdom come), *Ecce Venio* (behold I come or Here am I, I come) – to which could be added the *Ecce Ancilla* of Mary - and, finally, *Sint Unum* (Be one with others!).

You may note: All of these are scriptural mottos. They have their origin in Jesus. Fr. Dehon used them as summaries. They translate in a beautiful way the foundational myth of the founder into values for our work with young people. So let us take each of these mottos: *Adveniat Regnum tuum*, *Ecce Venio* and *Sint Unum* and see how they translate the grounding story of Dehon into livable values for the next generation? What sort of world view do these mottos promote? What sort of direction will they give to our youth, in our schools, in our parishes? What might a Dehonian school, a Dehonian education for the next generation, promote? As may be obvious, these reflections apply not only to schools. They apply as well to parishes or our social engagements.

The first motto is: **Adveniat Regnum Tuum** (Your kingdom come)<sup>8</sup>

The first motto is derived from the prayer of Jesus. It is part of the Lord's Prayer. Jesus prays not that "My kingdom come", but "Your kingdom come": the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Abba-Father.

As you will note, I interpret *Adveniat Regnum tuum* in a less politically charged way than

has usually been done. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the motto was connected with the Apostolate of Prayer in France. Dehon took this up into his notion of a social Catholicism: the reign of Christ in societies. For him the reign of God had political overtones. It was a dream of a more harmonious society – a contrast with the secularizing, anti-clerical, society in the making in late 19<sup>th</sup> century France. This was to be a society according to the Heart of Christ.

If we take a step back from this too politicized version of the reign of God – for Dehon’s perspective is too restorationist, too pervaded with the Catholic question in a post-revolutionary France – we may do what Dehon himself did throughout his life. We go back to the scriptures. His writings are filled with scriptural quotations, especially his meditations.<sup>9</sup> In this context, I propose to read the metaphor “kingdom of God” as it is read in today’s exegesis. I think that such an exegesis allows for another understanding of the Dehonian motto, *Adveniat regnum tuum*. In today’s exegesis the metaphor “kingdom of God” is a creation of Jesus: it was his way to talk about God – his God, Abba-God - in the communal life of Israel.

As such the motto, *Adveniat regnum tuum*, May your kingdom come, is particularly apt not only for the Palestine at the time of Jesus, for France at the time of Dehon, but especially for us in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the time of Jesus, the metaphor kingdom of God called for a new Naming of God in the tradition of Israel. In the context of France at the time of Dehon, this phrase called for a new naming of God in French society within the destructive secularizing forces of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in a way that is no longer acceptable to us. For our time, with all our diverse cultural and religious experiences, it is a call to name God anew. It is one of the great challenges in education and formation: how to name God today for young people, for the new generation.

Exegetically, the term “kingdom of God” in the mouth of Jesus was precisely to name God in the first century. Today more than ever, for our youth, we might imitate the language of Jesus when he talked about the kingdom or about God. The kingdom of God was a metaphor for Jesus. Jesus did not talk much about God directly. Only in prayer, does Jesus name God directly as Abba. In all other occasions, he did it almost always indirectly. He told parables. He used aphorisms. Parables are ways of speaking wisdom, ways of speaking about God by talking about what goes on in day-to-day life, what goes on in families and households, what goes on in the lives of young people.

Jesus’ language about God is about the surplus, the paradox, the hyperbole of everyday

life. It is about mustard seeds and plants, about yeast in flour, about sowing seeds. It is what happens among us as unnoticed as the germination of a seed and the growth of a seed of wheat into a head to become the bread that feeds us. What Jesus evoked in these stories is the surplus of life, its abundance, its surprises, its challenges. We hear here the language of a Fr. Prévot, who frequently said, “We must let the measure of love overflow.”<sup>10</sup>

The richness of expression in music and in poetry has always pointed – even in its bleakest expressions – metaphorically to what has not yet appeared in language. There is a surplus in life. Jesus drew on that surplus. It is a surplus we touch when we read, when we listen – also to each other – when we walk in the forest, when we look into the eyes of young people. Education must first be about this surplus: that is the kingdom. If we are capable of seeing, we will see around us the surprise of an infinite that wishes to invade our finitude. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur called this “*The eruption of the unheard in our discourse and in our experience.*”<sup>11</sup>

Education must put students in touch with this infinite that pops up in our most creative moments of life. It must allow our students to live in the awareness, despite all evidence to the contrary, that they live, as one of my countrymen Bernard Lonergan pointed out, in a “friendly” universe, not just a dangerous universe, or an evil one, but a friendly universe. We, Dehonians, identify this surplus as Original Love. We believe that creation’s principle, all reality, is pervaded by love. That love was at the origin of this world, that love sustains it. You must be able to see it awakened in young people when first they fall in love, in the energy that emerges when you bring out the best in them, when they make these exhilarating discoveries in learning new things. A Dehonian education believes in this surplus, this excess of energy, this friendliness of the universe in an at times overwhelming darkness. This is our first educational point: Love the excess of life! Translated into values we might call this generosity or big-heartedness or cordiality.

Where do we find this in Dehon? On a personal level – in the words of Perroux - “[Dehon] showed a surprising physical resistance, lots of imagination and humor, a real sense of initiative... and a constant interest in what he discovered.”<sup>12</sup> He had an immense interest in this world and a great sense of the small details of life. He was an optimist: always savoring the good and the surprising.

At the level of the world, Dehon was not an apocalypticist. He believed in a world that could be transformed. All his life he showed his optimism that history can be made – it is

not all “pre-made”. It bore the traces of God. That is why he could not accept what was happening to the workers, to education, and the hospitals, and ultimately to religious orders by the laicist movements of his time. It is good to remind ourselves that for Dehon the supernatural is built on the natural.

At one point, in 1900, at a Congress in Bourges with priests interested in social issues, Dehon asked them in a particular examen of conscience: “Have you loved today’s society enough so that you do not hold a sulking attitude towards it?” (OS IV, 577) For Dehon instead of turning an accusing eye at society, he demanded that the church allowed itself to be questioned by society. This, he said at a time when the clouds were gathering that led to the expulsion of religious from France in 1902 and the definitive separation of church and state: *la laïcité*, or 1905. (Cf Ledure, 2012, p. 101) Dehon, in his own way, rejoiced in the surplus of life.

The first value we want to honour as Dehonians is this belief in the surplus of life, in our “friendly universe”, the value of cordiality, great-heartedness.

**Ecce Venio** (“Behold, I come” but preferably “Here am I, I come!”)

In the scriptures, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, *Ecce venio* is the birth cry of Jesus. “Here I am” or more accurately “Here am I, I come.” In the scriptures, this birth cry of Jesus is actually the birth cry of every human being. When God called Abraham, Isaiah, Samuel and Mary, they all respond with: “Here am I!” The response is not a courtesy, an “obedience”, unless you mean by obedience a deep listening to one’s core; the response is a sudden discovery of a new identity. Or, as the Jewish philosopher Levinas would say: “The response is an election.” Paul Ricoeur, the French philosopher, called this birth call a vocation. At the origin of all life there is a call that is identified with my deepest self. Abraham, Isaiah, Samuel and Mary were who they were because they became what they were called: their vocation was their life, their identity. Their whole life was this vocation. The Mary we know is the Mary before God’s messenger, the Mary who accepted the Word said to her by saying, “This is who I am!” – Here am I: the servant (*Ecce Ancila*). She became what she was called to be.

In the Jewish and Christian tradition the response to the call is “Here am I.” Or, as Levinas translates it, “This is I, at your service.” This “I” of “Here am I” is not today’s egotistic or atomic I. It is not the Cartesian ego which began the Western journey of individual-

ism, not the ego as the starting point of our dominion over others and things. It is another "I" that listens to others, or, perhaps more accurately, has an other nestled right in his or her soul.

This vocation is not just for the extraordinary people: it is true for everyone. My life, my meaning, does not begin with me, with my decision; also I am called into existence. Benedict's Rule begins with the word "Hear!" He too tapped into something that is at the origin of human life, just as do the Jews in their Shema. Here too the first word is "HEAR": "Hear, Israel." Our identities are caught up with what we call a vocation, a calling. In the Christian tradition this has meant that there is this other in everyone's life, who calls. I do not make the call; a master does, a master who teaches me. A Master who dwells deeply within me, God's Spirit. That is why we are a community of disciples. Our time has a hard time to identify the other, the master within, difficulty with identifying self as a disciple, as one who is taught, as one who listens. We tend to identify this voice as our subconscious, or conscience, as the parental voice, only at times as God.

For Dehonians this vocation is known as oblation, as our "Here am I. I come to do your will", as an explicit identification of myself as a response. In our daily acts of oblation Dehonians recognize this master within; we acknowledge that other in me to whom I must listen, who is my master. The word "oblation" may be a difficult word today, but it is no more than the acknowledgement of the other in me. As Jesus says, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." (John 14.10) Like Dehon we hear the voice of this master also in the scriptures, which is for us the Book of Life. For him the *Ecce Venio* was the identity of Jesus: Jesus was this oblation to the Father (OSP 2, CAM p. 206)<sup>13</sup>

I have already referred to Dehon's first experience of *Ecce Venio*. How on Christmas eve of 1856 when the 13 year old Dehon was still in Haazebrouck, he received or you might say heard his vocation. It stayed with him throughout his life. As he writes in *L'année avec le Sacré Cœur*: « In the words (Ecce venio, Fiat!) one finds the whole vocation of souls dedicated to the Sacred Heart, their aim, their duties and their promises.»<sup>14</sup> In his *Directoire spirituel* he translates this *Ecce venio* as "Le don de soi": the gift of self.<sup>15</sup>

That is why the second Dehonian value is oblation or availability.

The most decisive injunction about our work with youth is to help them listen to the call that gives each his or her unique identity, their vocation – to listen to their identity. In

this we go back to Socrates, the wise, who said that the aim of life was to “Know yourself.” Know where you are from. Learn to listen to a voice that is not your own, to realize that I come from a place that is not my own but which, nevertheless, is my innermost identity.

The formation of youth comes from listening. Their “Here am I” is this gift of themselves to life, to justice, to reconciliation, to the creation of a world that is more livable, less damaged by pollution. Dehonians call oblation. They have learned this from listening to a Jesus, who identified himself as *Ecce Venio*: “I do as the Father has commanded me.” (John 14.31) His vocation is to do the will of the Father, the will of another. His I is totally for the other. Our cultural ideal is to be self-directed; but a self-directed person is one who has first listened.

This is our second Dehonian value: our vocation is oblation: an attentive listening to the other in life: I am a response “Here am I, I come.”

### **Sint Unum** (“Be one with all others”)

The third Dehonian motto for youth is *Sint Unum*: “May they be one”. This too is a word of Jesus, again a prayer, expressing his deep desire for a united community of disciples. For Jesus it was a prayer that God’s communion would pervade the human community and repair the damage of betrayal, rivalry, domination, and greed. *Sint Unum* is the recognition of the bond that unites us.

The Dehonian value underlying “Sint Unum” is perhaps best translated as solidarity. For Dehon the outpouring of God’s love could not remain a personal, spiritual gift; it must enter into all our social relations.

Anyone reading the life of Leo Dehon becomes impressed by his intense concern for the social well being of people. The greater part of Dehon’s life was taken up by the social questions of his time. From the beginning of his pastoral ministry in Saint Quentin, he realized that the social issues of his time were also deeply religious. The alienation of the working class because of the barbaric working and living conditions of the industrial revolution translated itself in the spiritual alienation of the workers. Throughout his life he connected the spiritual with the material, social and economic conditions of life. It was clear to him that in a relation to Christ one cannot isolate the personal from the social.

He believed in the unity of the relation to the heart of Christ in “souls” and in “society.” Fr. Dehon did not believe in the privatization, the isolation, of religion, cut off from public life.

Certainly, the issues of Dehon’s time – of the beginning of the industrial revolution and the first steps toward capitalism - are no longer the ones of our time. But the underlying quest of Dehon remains. He saw this quest for justice and reconciliation or reparation in society as involving our very relationship with Christ. For him – as indeed for the Gospel – our search for Christ today is a search for Christ in the ones who are the main target of his *Sint Unum*. These are the excluded of the earth, the excluded in our societies. A dehonian education without a social outreach, without a deep concern for the social issues of the day, without a teaching of the social doctrine of the Church would be lacking something essential.

Within the congregation, this thrust toward justice, peace, integrity of creation and reconciliation has received a specific focus. For Fr. Dehon the social outreach was seen as a way of repairing the social fabric. In his time, influenced by a particular strain of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, the word reparation was frequently used to speak of a way of making things right before God. In our time, we view this reparation more as a reconciliation, the healing of relations, or, to use the words of the *Rule of Life*, as the “welcome of the Spirit.” By this is meant the setting free of our capacity to love. That in the complex, intense and often violent web of relationships that is our world, we, humans, in the power of God, become agents of making people capable again to love. To welcome the Spirit is to pry loose what envy, greed, hatred, pride, fear has congealed and to create space for authentic life through the loosening power of love, fashioning a space of justice and reconciliation. In a world that threatens to become more and more cynical of the power of love, Dehonians continue to believe in the capacity of love. Maurice Zundel, the great Swiss spiritual writer, has called this project of reconciliation as a “taking care of God” in the space we call the world.

### **An ethos of solidarity in the school or the parish**

The ethos of a Dehonian school or parish ought, therefore, to be one of solidarity: the creation of a spirit of community that excludes no one. In the United States there exists an educational program called, “No child left behind” : a difficult motto for a school and for a parish.

In the traditional Catholic teaching on angels there existed an awareness of protector angels not only for individuals but also for institutions. Along these lines, all institutions were thought to have a protecting angel. It suggests that institutions are at heart a web of relationships. It views an institution, such as a school or a parish, as a living being. I like this idea since it would make what holds an institution together into something more tangible. For instance, a school has something to do with spirit – with being a living, breathing organism. Following this imagery further, we see why a school or a parish has a name, but also a character. Institutions are in fact the sum total of its relationships, past and present. The angel of the school or parish has a certain ethos, a spirit, a philosophy of life, a certain personality. In this context, we may well ask what such a Dehonian angel would look like? What image, character, personality describes our school or parish or social institution? How Dehonian does it feel? A Dehonian angel in a school or parish is an angel of solidarity.

The value of reparation and solidarity in this context mean to look at all the ways in which in our schools and our parishes we work to leave no young person behind.

### **A solidarity with the world**

A Dehonian institution must also be ecumenical or catholic in the full sense of catholic. Literally, catholic means “to be in all places.” At one time this may have meant that Catholics were meant to go everywhere as missionaries. Today, however, this everywhere is not in other countries; it is right here. The world has come to live with us. There has been an enormous movement of peoples in the last 60 years.

For young people to live in this world they need to be given the wherewithal to understand the complexity of this world. In that sense, a Dehonian school is to be a school of solidarity with the world. In order for young people to understand this, they must be given the tools. When Fr. Dehon went to speak with Pope Leo XIII, the pope of *Rerum novarum*, the first social encyclical, he was asked to preach the encyclicals. That has remained a primary task. For Dehonian schools to stand in this tradition is to give the students an opportunity to learn the Christian social doctrine. But that task also pertains to the parish. Young people should understand about social justice, about the possibility of overcoming social conflicts, about social reconciliation. They need to become citizens of the world and play a role in the “taking care of God.”

Many of the countries in which we work have become countries of immigrants. Schools and parishes today in many countries have become a community of nations. The Catholic High School opposite Saint Paul University in Ottawa, where I taught for forty years, has students from over sixty nations, most of the parents of the students are first generation immigrants. This internationality is now the new reality. For many countries such an influx of immigrants has stretched the capacity of accommodation and has created social tensions. This multiculturalism and internationality is perhaps one of the greatest challenges of many nations. For us, as a Congregation, 2012 has been named as the year of internationality. Solidarity has become for us a core value. It is the art of living together with the other across boundaries. In the Congregation this solidarity and internationality has become more and more tangible. We now have a good number of international communities. In Rome we lived this past year in a community with 20 nationalities. The new generation will be asked to do the same, to spearhead another Europe, another United States, another Canada, another South Africa or Brazil. The generation you are teaching will be asked to bring to bear on your countries what it means to be human, a Christian, living with Muslims, with Buddhists, Hindus, with secularists, with the world. I wish you the wisdom and the insight to accomplish your vocation. Actually, isn't this the deepest meaning of Church, the gathering of the nations?

When the Congregation finally received the approval of the constitutions in 1923, Bishop Binet of Soisson wrote to Fr. Dehon: "To young people you have been a leader and a father, an initiator and a creator of works." (Letter of March 7, 1923). May it be said of us as well.

And so in conclusion, I leave you three mottos: *Sint Unum*: "Be in solidarity with others", *Ecce venio*: "Know your vocation" I am a response to a call: the value of oblation, self gift for the other – the other whom Levinas called a beggar who can take us hostage, and *Adveniat Regnum tuum*: "Love the abundance of life", live in a friendly universe.

But, above all, be in love!

Thank you.

John van den Hengel scj

Roma, 23 Maggio, 2012

<sup>1</sup> The website for European Values Network describes its objective as follows: “European Values Network (EVN) is a platform open to all who believe that, in order to successfully address global challenges, the European Union should become a real political community consciously rooted in its values and cultural heritage. Inspired by the values of freedom, personal responsibility, and an active civil society.”  
[http://www.europeanvalues.net/docs/EVN\\_PP\\_web\\_2010.pdf](http://www.europeanvalues.net/docs/EVN_PP_web_2010.pdf) Accessed December 6, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> [http://tt.europeanideasnetwork.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2&Itemid=9](http://tt.europeanideasnetwork.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2&Itemid=9) Accessed December 8, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/11/17/the-american-western-european-values-gap/> Accessed December 7, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Lewis, *Boomerang: Travels in the New Third World* (New York: Norton, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> Mauro Magati, “Is Faith a Sign of Hope for Europe?” in *Consecrated Life in Europe Today: Situations and Implications* (75<sup>th</sup> Semestral Assembly USG, May 2010) Roma: Litos, 2010, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> John van den Hengel, “Dehon’s Faith Experience in Light of Galatians 2.19-20,” *Dehoniana 15* (2011) p. 87 – 105. See also, André Perroux, “Pour moi, vivre c’est Christ!” (Ph 1,21) Saint Paul et le Père Dehon. (Conférence prononcée à Clairefontaine lors d’une assemblée générale des Prêtres du Sacré-Coeur de la Province Europe-Francophone le 16 avril 2009), (Clairefontaine: Heimat und Mission Verlag, 2009) p. 9-67.

<sup>7</sup> Dehon was not the first to have experienced this. We know other mystics who have left us their poetry of love. With this experience Fr. Dehon’s story must be inserted into a rich and intense story configured by a long line of mystics – many of them women from the monastic tradition of Helfta – but also a Margaret Mary and Veronica Lioger who left us a rich legacy of images, poetry and symbols of this love. We hear it resounding in the poetry of a St. Gertrude:

You are the splendor of all the colors, the sweetness of all flavors,  
the fragrance of all fragrances, the charm of every melody,  
sweet tenderness of intimate embraces.  
In Thee is every delight, Thy abundant spring waters of life, you attract the sweetest charm,  
with you the mind is filled with holiest feelings (St Gertrude)

Or in the lament of St. Augustine,

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside... You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

<sup>8</sup> Il senso di *Adveniat Regnum tuum*: il motto dell’Apostolato della preghiera in Francia. A very powerful association of Catholics who were asked to daily consecrate themselves to the Heart of Jesus. For Dehon this would be part of his social Catholicism between 1889 and 1903. For Ramière this dedication also included the efforts of Catholics to make the Kingdom of God come in their hearts but also in their actions and justice (“to make them men of action”). For example, Léon Harmel, an industrialist and a friend of Dehon, tried to Christianize his factory in Val-des-Bois by way of the devotion to the Sacred Heart and the Apostolate of Prayer. But, in the final analysis, the spread of the devotion led to the unification of all the believers under the symbol which would assure the Church a new political

triumph. (Menzotti, p. 137) The aim was “la restauration du règne social de Jésus Christ.” In this view, “Cette religion est aussi une politique, la seule politique digne d’un chrétien [...] celle qui prie et qui travaille pour hâter l’avènement du règne de Dieu sur la terre comme au ciel. » See Menzotti p. 138.

<sup>9</sup> Y. Ledure, *Le Code du Royaume: Léon Dehon et la spiritualité du Coeur de Jésus* (Clairefontainer Studien, Band 4) (Clairefontaine : Heimat und Mission Verlag, 2001) p. 98. A. Perroux has begun to tally these quotations and has discovered more than 20,000 citations. Without being an exegete, Dehon had a surprisingly insightful reading of the scriptures.

<sup>10</sup> In the earliest reports on formation in the Congregation under the care of Fr. André Prévot, there was a constant stress on this love. Fr. Prévot spoke of a love without boundaries, a love without measure. In all his conferences he repeated: “One must let the measure of love overflow, as, according to John, Jesus loved us to the end.” G. Driedonckx scj, *De Dienaar Gods P. Andreas Prévot (1840 – 1913)*, Manuscript, Nijmegen, 2012, p. 31. For Fr. Prévot this love without measure was mostly the love the novices were expected to offer but it referred first of all to the love of God in Christ.

<sup>11</sup> “Biblical Hermeneutics” in *Semeia* 4 (1975) 127.

<sup>12</sup> See André Perroux, « Quelques réflexions sur sa personnalité » Manuscript : letter to John van den Hengel, p.12

<sup>13</sup> Yves Ledure insists that we must understand this oblation not first of all from the victimal spirituality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but directly from the scriptures: “Dans la contemplation de l’attitude oblatrice de Jésus, tel que l’Évangile nous la décrit, le dehonien bâtit sa propre personnalité spirituelle. De ce point de vue l’oblation crée la dynamique même de la spiritualité dehonienne. » *Le Code du Royaume*, p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> « Dans ces paroles (Ecce venio, Fiat!) se trouve toute la vocation des âmes vouées au Sacré Cœur, avec leur but, leurs devoirs, leurs promesses. »<sup>15</sup> (OSP 3, 329)

<sup>16</sup> OSP 7,15.