



XXIII CAPITULUM GENERALE

Misericordes, in comunitate, cum pauperibus

Merciful, in community, with the poor

Final Message of the XXIII General Chapter

1 United at the XXIII General Chapter, we believe we are called together with all you members of our congregation to live mercifully, in community, with the poor.

Our **Founder** reminds us that “there is no other divine attribute that Sacred Scripture lauds more greatly than God’s mercy (RSC 72). Thus it is necessary “that the ministries of the Savior be arrayed with his charity in going to the people and engaging in all the activities that would alleviate their sufferings and re-establish their place” (ESC II, OSP 5:639). As we look at the world and at the church, we believe this is the way today to respond to our vocation as servants and preachers of “the love that makes God present even among the cold shadows of life” (NHV 12/159).

2 The **Son** of God, having left the bosom of the **Father**, walked along the streets of our history because it was a history of liberation. The **Spirit** is continually urging us to walk along with Jesus in this **exodus** toward God’s **Kingdom**.

In Jesus, God is given a human heart. To see and contemplate the Heart of Christ (Cf. Cst. 21) is to be introduced into the mystery of the love of God, who takes the initiative and welcomes us unconditionally.

Receiving the **Spirit** from the opened side of Christ, we see ourselves and all humanity with the eyes of God. We see his glance fall with particular benevolence on those the world does not see or does not wish to see, those who are deprived of bread and hope, of work and dignity, of someone to love and to be loved by.

3 We, the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, have known and believed in the love of a **merciful** God who desires to live **in communion with his poor**. We want to remain in the Heart of God so as to be near those who are miserable (*miseri – cor*) and together with them to seek the Kingdom of God before all else.

Called to enter the movement of redeeming love, we are united in **fraternal community** where we mutually commit ourselves to each other (Cf. Cst. 21), learning to give ourselves to our brothers in order to come to know the mercy of God.

4 To be merciful, in community, with the poor is an invitation to walk in an **Exodus**: leaving ourselves behind in order to meet with the other; leaving behind our search for security and comfort and opening ourselves to being welcoming; planning prudently while maintaining an attitude of expecting the unexpected; walking with the poor toward a land where “*mercy and truth shall meet, justice and peace will embrace*” (Ps. 85 (84):11)).

Mercy is also the name of a community on **mission**, for which “our place is at the periphery, in troublesome environments, at the boundaries of civilization, where love is lacking” (*Bressanelli*, 304).

5 Our weakness invokes the mercy of God and therefore foretells the arrival of something new that we look forward to attentively. With this hope we seek for models that suit our day, which allow us to be merciful, in community, with the poor.

To this end, in the XXIII General Chapter, we have singled out several ways along this pathway that we wish to walk together:

1. confirming our *identity* and growing in the creative freedom to obey what God is calling us to be today;
2. maintaining *openness in welcoming communities*;
3. persevering in an ongoing sense of needing *formation*, as persons and as communities;
4. developing our abilities for an intelligent practice of *charity* on behalf of the *needy* and of our readiness to live among them;
5. nourishing a *missionary* attitude by means of which we continually feel the urge “to put out into the deep” (Luke 5:4).

1. Spirituality and identity

Personal and community Experience of the Love of God and its Realization in Mission

We are called to serve the Church in the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Our response to this call presupposes a spiritual life: a common approach to the mystery of Christ, under the guidance of the Spirit (Cst 16).

6 As disciples of Fr. Dehon, we find the principle and center of our life in a **union with Christ** in his love for the Father and in his mercy toward men. “I no longer live but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

In the merciful love of God we find the fulcrum of our religious identity and the magnetic pull, in our day, of the spiritual and apostolic legacy left us by Fr. Dehon which, together with our lived “Dehonian culture”, constitutes its matrix.

7 The **personal and community experience** of the active mercy of God is the source of our witness to the Gospel, the shape of our mission, and the basic disposition for our pastoral ministry. At times we believe ourselves to be its object and at other times its sharers, as we are called to “have in us the same sentiments as Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

We make ourselves amenable to the grace of this renewing experience by “keeping faithful to hearing the **word** and in the breaking of the Bread” (Cst. 17).

Our deepening and interiorization of the **Founder’s charism**, along with the updated reading of it found in our **Rule of Life**, confer upon it a special resonance with the gospel which has been given to us so that God may have joy in us and that his joy be complete (Cf. John 15:11).

Its compassionate and solicitous attention paid to **history**, for “the hopes and the joys, the griefs and anxieties of the men in our age, of those who are poor in particular” (*GS*, 1), confirm the genuineness of our spiritual life.

8 The experience of the merciful love of God is promoted and expressed in the **sacramental life**. This means participation in the sacraments, particularly Eucharist and Reconciliation, yet also in our readiness to make our daily life a sacramental sign of mercy.

For this reason, **hearing the word of God**, having **solicitude for those in need**, personal and community prayer, personal sharing and witness, and serious and diligent work will not be absent from our daily lives.

The word, mercy [*miser cordia* in Latin] , plays on the word “heart” (miseri-cor). Whether in our prayer or in our community and apostolic service, we live these moments as a personal encounter, thus rescuing them from the tepidity of *routine* and the aridity of *job*.

The presence of diverse age groups and cultures in our communities as well as in our territories make an attitude of openness necessary and useful.

Actions

9 The invitation to live mercifully, in community, with the poor is the criterion that directs our apostolic service (which is not exhausted through the ministry of ordained priesthood) in our planning for our personal and community life.

- a) Every Community should have a plan for its life and its apostolate.
 1. to guard and nourish a genuine spiritual life, taking form and models from our charism;
 2. to give shape to sharing our life with the needy and welcoming them.
- b) Forms that express our Dehonian prayer traditions should be updated.
- c) Days of recollection and retreats should be planned at the community level, and ongoing formation programs dealing with knowledge about the Founder and SCJ spirituality should be planned at the entity, continental, or congregational levels.
- d) The *Centro Studi* at Rome should be bolstered and Study Centers at the continental level should be established to benefit formation.
- e) Sharing our spirituality with the entire Dehonian Family should be fostered.

2. Fraternal Life in Community

Mercy Within and Without

We let ourselves be permeated with the love of Christ and we hear His prayer Sint unum: we do our utmost to make our communities authentic centers of Gospel life, particularly by openness, sharing and hospitality, while respecting those places reserved for the community (CST 63).

10 “I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 1:23). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).

Fr. Dehon proposed and found in the **Sint Unum** a translation of the commandment to love, both God and neighbor. It is possible for us to obey this command because God himself desires that we be one with him and one among ourselves and it is for this that Christ never stops praying.

We are thus called, as disciples of Jesus, to live in community and so dwell with him and, by persevering in fraternal communion, we give witness to the world of his love (Cf. Acts 2:42-46). This is the primary form our mission takes (cf. Cst. 60).

11 Obedience to the *Sint Unum* takes on the face of mercy when we are **concerned one for the other** so that none be lost; when we provide support to one who is wounded in body or spirit (cf. *IL* II:14); when we share what we have, what we do, who we are, and what we would like to be (cf Cst. 25).

The **hearing of the word of God** which creates the community goes together with **hearing our brother**, fraternal correction with appreciating the various gifts each one has received for mutual

edification, and co-responsibility for the apostolic project with participation in moments of community life.

At this time in the world and in the church, the call to fraternal life, in addition to being an appeal for continual conversion from individualism, asks us to enlarge our welcome across age-groups and various cultures.

Interculturality is the form that fraternal life appears in today. Before all else, it is a *mental attitude*, and interior disposition to personal openness to the other because in our religious and territorial communities today we come from different backgrounds and formation and eras.

12 The **service of authority of a religious superior**, at all levels, is a personal support and a community support, as well as a support to the projects that communities and entities set in motion. The office of the **treasurer**, too, is a **ministry** that serves the community in its more concrete aspects. The treasurer helps preserve and teach the community's lifestyle and is the administrator of its most precious commodity – charity.

Certain human and spiritual qualities are prerequisite when one is seeking members for these services:

- a) identification with *the values of our spirituality* in the interior life and in apostolic service, so that a specialized service which avoids clericalism and generalities can be rendered to the church.
- b) capacity for *working with others*, specifically to bring his own “vision” and at the same time looking to the contributions and competencies of others, with a readiness to allow decisions to mature through listening and dialog.
- c) a profound *humanity* in which respect, empathy, compassion, benevolence, and a spirit of service seem to belong;
- d) *transparency* which allows participation and co-responsibility; and *flexibility* which leads to adaptivity and creativity; both of these can be expressed in the responsibility of prudent future planning.

Actions

13 Mercy as lived in community and as community leads toward an awareness that we need each other. Hence we believe is necessary that:

- a) In providing itself with a project governing its living, a community sets forth the times for its life in common, in the course of which it shall allow time for reading sacred scripture (*lectio*), and for the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist, prayer in common, to community meetings for discernment (family councils), and to sheer conviviality.
- b) In the organization of fraternal life, one shall be aware, at all levels, to the solicitude that is owed to the weaker and elderly members.
- c) A member should never be required to live alone.
- d) The forms of financial transparency and co-responsibility defined in the NAG, particularly the common burse, constitute the minimum irrevocable for fraternal sharing. Here virtuous comportment should be required at all levels.
- e) The proposals put forth in the *Report of the General Treasurer* (5.7) which the chapter supports should be adopted:
 1. the adoption of an external *audit* of the balance sheets of works and entities (5, 3);
 2. the establishment of development offices (5, 4);
 3. financial planning to reduce dependency (5, 5);
 4. the study of financial measures for maintenance of the Casa Generalizia (3, and 4.2.1).

The chapter equally adopts the proposal formulated in the *Report of the Experts* (n. 5) for the “establishment of a support team” to assist entities.

14 Connected with this topic, the chapter approved the following motion:

MOTION 4

Let an examination be made of the possibility of creating new organizational structures of the entities, keeping in mind the smaller ones – particularly those in a developmental phase or in a phase of decline due to aging. Organization, of a federal type, should respect the singularity of the entities set into a system of common coordination (cf. GD n. 124, 5).

3. Formation

Linking a theological-spiritual formation with a social one:

All the members of the community, in loyal collaboration and with respect for each one's role, shall strive to create a communion of life in an atmosphere of prayer, of work and of apostolic service. Each religious must consider himself involved in the work of formation (Cst. 91).

The quality of our religious life and the effectiveness of our apostolate depend, in large part, on our constant effort at adaptation and renewal (Cst. 104).

15 We learn from Christ, meek and humble of heart (see Mt 11:29), the docility to the Spirit who also consecrates us to go wherever humans are found to proclaim the good news and a time of grace (Luke 4:18-19). We enter into the school of the mercy of **Jesus the teacher**, who gives the Word and Bread, proclaims and heals, forgives and sets free. The more we know him and his mercy, the more we feel moved to share life with those in need.

The life and thought of **Fr. Dehon** reaffirm the double step through which he interprets the following of Jesus: a deep inner life and a genuine concern for those who suffer the injustices of a civilization that rejects the love of God (see Cst. 94).

"We endeavor to establish a vital relationship with the history of Father Dehon and of the congregation through study, with the founding charism through our lifestyle, with the needs of the local Church through a real insertion into its ecclesial, social, cultural and political context, especially with the poor, the excluded and the marginalized "(RFG 26.d).

16 The distance between the ideal Dehonian style and concrete experience makes formation a time and a place for permanent **maturation**, at the human, religious and apostolic level, in accordance with our own charism (see RFG 63-148). It offers the ideals of values, the pathways of real life, the need and ways of checking on consistency in our life.

In tune with the RFG, initial training deserves to be both existential and experiential, to grow towards, *"a closer look at the insignificant, the poor, the needy, among whom we find older people in the congregation and in society"* (RFG 144). These are privileged pastoral experiences of the "periphery".

The quality of community life keeps us in an attitude of conversion. *"To progress in the spiritual life and to respond to the ever new problems of our times, we all have to provide ourselves with an environment of **continuing education**"* (Cst. 104).

Continuing on a path of formation is a way to be merciful towards ourselves and towards our brothers, knowing and accepting our limitations and our gifts, helping to convert what is sin, in the "active hope for what others can become with the help of our fraternal support "(Cst. 64; cf. ET 39).

Actions

17 The importance of formation/training, acknowledged at all levels of the congregation, was repeatedly noted at the chapter and is expressed in several proposals:

- a) The entities will be disposed, through formal agreements as well, to receive and send religious for initial training.
- b) The learning of a second language should be a lifelong pursuit.
- c) To have access to our sources, the study of French is encouraged.
- d) We also foster the study of social sciences and the social teaching of the Church by way of study grants.
- e) The general administration will convene the Entities, at the continental level, to examine the possibility of putting in place shared structures of formation: initial and on-going formation.
- f) Training in chastity should receive careful attention, particularly to prevent every kind of abuse.
- g) The general administration will offer training opportunities for those who are called to administer our goods: a course for treasurers within the next three years; and a meeting of all the bursars of the entities.
- h) A special meeting dedicated to the Social Teaching of the Church will be organized: (Suggested topic: Mercy in the social teaching of the church.)

18 Connected with this topic, the chapter approved the following motion:

MOTION 3

To promote an international orientation for initial formation, let the organization of a student exchange be studied and established that allows every scholasticate to have places destined for young religious from other entities. The GG should exercise a coordinating role in such exchanges, in dialog with the entities involved.

4. Preferential Choice for the Poor

Relationship between Mercy and Apostolate

In sharing our joys and our sorrows, Christ is identified with the lowly and the poor, to whom He announced the Good News (CST 28).

If we take our commitment to poverty seriously, we shall be ready to share among ourselves and to turn toward the poor and the needy (CST 51).

19 The Incarnation of Christ moves us as the great act of mercy in history. The words, the works, the entire life of Jesus manifest the love of God for the poor. We are his followers if we abandon what we have and walk in the footsteps of the one who emptied himself and became a slave, poor with the poor (cf. Phil 2:6-8; 2Cor 8:9). “Blessed are the poor” and “blessed are the merciful” are words woven into our very lives and apostolates (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Mt 25:34-46).

The life and teaching of Fr. Dehon witness to the solicitude he had for the needy in his time. He studied the “social question” (Cf. CSC, MSO, RSO) and worked toward realizing that the dignity of the very weakest of society be respected.

He was acknowledged as the “apostle of *Rerum Novarum* and of the church’s social teaching which was being developed as a magisterium.

Today, this teaching of the church that helps us discern the many faces of poverty is vast and profound. The teaching of Pope Francis affirms: ...”without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor” (*EG* 48).

In the magisterium of the church we hear a repetition of Fr. Dehon’s words: “Go to the people” and we interpret them as an invitation to go out to the present day peripheries (Cst.50) “*Characterizing mission as service and proximity to the poor, the least, and those at the peripheries is in perfect with the Dehonian project for reconciliation and reparation of the wounds afflicting humanity. To prepare ourselves and make ourselves available for this mission is what gives*

meaning to personal consecration and the existence of the congregation” (Report of the Superior General 5.2.3).

20 Poverty chosen with religious profession is a renunciation of possession, but more importantly, it is a gift of the self. It is a relationship more than a virtue (Cf. Cst. 46). Mercy toward the poor is genuine if lived with them and like them. In this fashion we abandon paternalism for solidarity, privilege for service, and secure situations “to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG 20).

To allow ourselves to become neighbor to people with personal and social problems we must make an effort to study their causes and become organized so that mercy comes to mean respect not superficiality, and effectiveness not piety, and allows us to change the situation by destabilizing the structures of sin.

In mercy we are solicitous to receive appeals that issue from those situations where we find ourselves and where we find new forms of poverty.

Actions

21 The preferential choice for the poor demands a change in mind and in the way we do things so that mercy affects reality and transforms it according to the Heart of Christ.

- a) Promotion of a culture for social concern
 1. In initial and ongoing training and formation;
 2. In spreading magisterial documentation;
 3. In organizing study gatherings at the international level;
 4. In a reactivation of the Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation Commission;
 5. In the establishment of a Dehonian social network;
 6. By increasing our collaboration with other religious institutes;
- b) Agree among communities and entities to make initiatives to care for the weaker members;
- c) Activate or participate in initiatives of solidarity economics.
- d) Collaborate with laity, particularly youth, in initiatives of social volunteerism.
- e) Encourage community solidarity initiatives with the poor and make plans for solidarity communities with the poor.

22 Connected with this topic, the chapter approved the following motion:

MOTION 1

We, the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, assembled at our XXIII and representing 40 different nations, stand and affirm our complete solidarity with persecuted Christians.

We invite all government leaders to mobilize to secure the respect and the rights of Christians.

We ask the media to combat the general indifference and silence over the situation.

To our Christian brothers and sisters who are being persecuted, we re-affirm our solidarity and assure you of our prayers.

5. *Mission*

“Going forth” at the Personal and Community Level

Following the Founder, according to the signs of the times and in communion with the life of the Church, we want to contribute to establishing the reign of justice and Christian charity in the world (Cst. 32).

Far from making us strangers to people, our profession of the evangelical counsels puts us into greater solidarity with their life (Cst. 38).

Our community life is at the service of an apostolic mission in accord with our proper vocation. It is strengthened in the accomplishment of this service. The community allows itself to be questioned by the people among whom it lives. It comes forward to join and to support their efforts at reconciliation and fraternity (Cst. 61).

23 The Father, in his mercy, sent his Son to us in the Spirit and in power and he went about blessing and healing those under the power of evil (Cf. Acts 10:38). “As the Father has sent me so I send you” (John 20:21). “**Go...**to the ends of the earth...preach...heal...” as disciples of Jesus we are sent to the farthest limits to announce the joy of the gospel and to live the mercy that heals.

By his *Ecce venio* Fr. Dehon lived in obedience to Jesus for being sent, so that the Father’s will could be done and his Kingdom might come. We were born of his “yes” to being sent on this mission. Mary, with her *Ecce Ancilla*, “inspires us to availability in faith: she is the perfect image of our religious life” (Cst. 85). We make her *fiat* ours thanks to which the mercy of God “reaches from generation to generation.”

Jesus called his disciples so that they could “be with him and to be sent out to preach and to have authority over demons” (Mark 3:14-15). The charism given from Fr. Dehon to the congregation is enlivened by this **double call**: to dwell in the Heart of Christ (cf. Cst. 17) and to “go to the people” to preach and free people from evil, i.e, an intense spiritual life and an apostolic service filled with mercy.

24 The **Congregation is mission**. This is expressed in fraternal life (Cf. Cst. 60), in community and with the poor. Moved by mercy, we are continuously urged to **go out** from the confines of our “sacristies” and take the risk of placing ourselves in situations that are extremely needy with great courage.

This is the *mission ad gentes*, where the gospel has not yet been preached, but more frequently this is a mutual assistance among churches (Cf. Cst. 34) and, among us, between entities. Many of these, having given most generously to going outside their boundaries in the past, are today in need of assistance in the new evangelization.

The mission needs a profound **awareness of the situation** in which one serves, even when it appears familiar; a capacity for dialog with cultures and religions; the interest and desire to collaborate with local churches, with other religious families, with civil institutions and with the laity. All these realities need study and training for us to be inserted into a situation and **transform it**.

Not being directed toward “a specific work” (Cst. 30), the congregation creatively looks for methods suitable to proclamation and to models that aren’t even presently tested to live out mercy, in community, with the poor.

Actions

25 Merciful, in community, with the poor is a mission that requires living together in solidarity and in collaboration:

- a) Mutual assistance in the mission among the entities like the model of exchange among churches.
- b) Collaboration with local churches requires the formulation of agreements.
- c) Projects of formation for the mission for which entities can ready themselves to invite and welcome their brothers.
- d) Special support for community projects where there is collaboration with the laity.
- e) Personal projects should be evaluated for their harmony with community projects.

- f) Organizational structures and support for the mission (commissions, development offices, networks of secretariats, etc...)
- g) promotion at the congregational level of a Dehonian youth mission.
- h) continuously closer collaboration with other subjects of the Dehonian Family.
- i) Appeal to the congregation to assist entities that are suffering.
- j) Mission activity always needs more competent use of the means of social communication.

26 Connected with this topic, the chapter approved the following motion:

MOTION 2

That every religious, on the occasion of his perpetual vows or priestly ordination receive a concrete proposal to make a declaration of his availability for the missions, to be addressed to his own Major Superior and to the Superior General. All coordination of mission requirements and the availability of personnel will take place in dialog between the entities and the GG.

Conclusion

27 In the fraternity, prayer, and discernment of these days we have sensed our belonging to a vibrant and spirited congregation which desires to live the joy of the gospel.

We have felt our members present at every moment; we have felt so many sons and daughters of God present for which the joy of the gospel seems a hope too far because of the burden of their situations or the wounds from their history.

We let ourselves search the word of God, the deposit of the faith of the church and the treasures of our spiritual legacy, but, equally, the reality we seek to live: merciful, in community, with the poor.

We were introduced to chapter work by the words of Fr. José Ornelas Carvalho, its president, : “As a congregation we feel ourselves limited. [...] God, however, has given us so many gifts of fraternity, understanding, free and freeing service, labor, missionary generosity...[...] We offer everything we have and we offer it in its entirety with joy and humility, knowing that from his hands that which is lacking due to our poverty, understanding, and efforts, will be made up. His blessing will multiply our tiny gifts to feed those who hunger for bread, justice, hope, and life” (Homily).

29 When the chapter was about to end, Pope Francis received us in audience. From his words we received a confirmation of the place of mercy as the center of our vocation. “Mercy is the word that sums up the Gospel; we can say it is the ‘face of Christ’”. He invited us to always seek his face in our Eucharistic adoration and to be open “to the actual needs with promptness and to attentively be present in the new forums for evangelization, paying particular attention (even if it requires great sacrifice) to those situations of extreme need that seem so symptomatic of modern society.” “The world is sick and needs the caresses of God” he said, speaking “off the cuff.” “At the end what counts is to be found by Jesus, healed by Jesus, pardoned by Jesus.” At the end of this chapter, this is all the counts.

30 Our saints, Venerable Leo Dehon – “whose beatification we continue to wish for in active hope” (Saluto) – and Blessed Juan Maria de la Cruz, with Mary our Mother, be models and sources of protection for all, accompanying and sustaining us in our efforts to be merciful, in community, with the poor so that we may proclaim the Kingdom of his Son, to every brother and sister who looks for salvation and true joy.

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Abbreviations and Citations: (*Original sources*)

Bressanelli – V. Bressanelli, «Sulle frontiere dell'amore» [14.4.1996]: *Lettere circolari VIII*, 1996.

CSC – L. Dehon, *Catéchisme Social* (1898)

CST – Costituzioni dei Sacerdoti del Sacro Cuore di Gesù (2009)

DG – Direttorio Generale dei Sacerdoti del Sacro Cuore di Gesù (2009)

EG – Francesco, Esortazione apostolica *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013)

ESC – L. Dehon, *Études sur le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus* (I: 1922; II: 1923)

ET – Paolo VI, Esortazione apostolica *Evangelica Testificatio* (1971)

GG – Governo Generale SCJ

IL – *Instrumentum laboris* del XXIII Capitolo Generale (2015)

MSO – L. Dehon, *Manuel Social Chrétien* (1894)

NHV – L. Dehon, *Notes sur l'Histoire de ma Vie* (1975)

Omelia - J. Ornelas Carvalho, *Omelia del Superiore Generale all'inizio del XXIII Capitolo Generale* (2015)

OSP – L. Dehon, *Œuvres Spirituelles* (1985)

Relazione Economo – A. Mielgo Domínguez, *Relazione dell'Economo Generale al XXIII Capitolo Generale* (2015)

Relazione Esperti – Comitato degli Esperti, *Relazione del Comitato di Esperti al XXIII Capitolo Generale* (2015)

Relazione Generale – J. Ornelas Carvalho, *Relazione del Superiore Generale al XXIII Capitolo Generale* (2015)

RFG – *Ratio Formationis Generalis* SCJ (2014)

RSC – L. Dehon, *La Rénovation Sociale Chrétienne* (1900)

Saluto – H. Wilmer, *Parole di saluto al Santo Padre nell'Udienza al XXIII Capitolo Generale* (2015)

SCJ – Sacerdoti del Sacro Cuore di Gesù (Dehoniani)