



The Charism of Fr. Dehon in the Church



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Introduction

There is much to admire about the spiritual gift which Fr. Dehon gave to the Church. And it is only perhaps in the aftermath of the Vatican Council, when religious communities were mandated to return to the charism of their founders that we Dehonians began to appreciate the gift.

From this mandate we have derived our new constitutions and a new awareness of the gift of the Spirit through Fr. Dehon. In our Rule of Life we have dared to compare his insight into the love of Christ with that of Paul's insight into the love of the Father through the cross of Christ. We have done what the Church has done when it raised the devotion to the Sacred Heart to a liturgical feast of the Sacred Heart – in the process changing and overturning the traditional devotion thoroughly. Our reference to the spirituality of the Heart of Christ is no longer St. Margaret Mary but the immensely rich biblical tradition of God as love, of a God who is at heart a desire for people. It is no longer only St. Margaret Mary to whom we refer but to the Gospel of John and the great number of female spiritual guides, especially from the Rhineland tradition and other great men and women who turned to the pierced side of Christ for their inspiration.

We believe Fr. Dehon to be one of those mystics who throughout his life delved into the scriptures to understand what, in the depths of his soul, he had experienced of God. Fr. Perroux was so struck by the frequency with which Fr. Dehon explored the scriptures that he began to add them up and to delve into the mystery that Fr. Dehon in some way intuited and wished to pass on to his followers. Fr. Dehon called it "union with Christ", borrowing a phrase dear to French spirituality.

Fr. Dehon did not leave us a theological tract on how he understood the spirituality of the Heart of Christ. He may actually have left us confused by what he meant. His first guides seemed to be hyper-mystical, excessively self-sacrificing Soeurs Servantes with their penchant for revelatory experiences. They gave the first orientation to his spirituality of the Heart of Christ. His first constitutions interpreted his relation with Christ through the revelations of Margaret Mary, but through the prism of these sisters. Later, he allowed himself to be convinced that it was best expressed in the spiritual vision of Fr. Prévot, who himself had been moved by the Soeurs Victimes

of Véronique Lioger. And so he left the development and training of his members to Fr. Prévot, while he concerned himself with the practical running of the Congregation and his involvement with the social issues of the working class.

From what we know now of Fr. Dehon, while Fr. Prévot shaped the spirituality of the first generation of Dehonians, Fr. Dehon went *his own* spiritual way and continued his own spiritual search. As a Congregation we have not allowed ourselves to listen sufficiently to this later Dehon. We have hardly turned to this spiritually more mature Dehon to arrive at our charism. And we have not always taken seriously the divergence between him and Fr. Prévot.

For my reflection today I will take this divergence from Fr. Prévot, what I call Dehon's social charism, as my point of departure. I think it expresses best his spiritual gift to the Church.

The social charism of Fr. Dehon

When the studious Fr. Dehon with all his doctorates ends up being the seventh curé of the Cathedral parish in Saint-Quentin at age 29, he broke with most of the approaches to parish ministry. He developed a strategy which seemed from the outside to be totally focused on the marginalized. He sought contact with the new industrial world, with Cercles d'Études on social issues, with uneducated youth. In an almost unsustainable rush of energy, his pastoral ministry turned social. It is clear that traditional pastoral ministry does not suit him – sacramental ministry, catechism, visiting the sick. It is too limiting for him. It allows contacts, as he says, but only with some "selected families." For Fr. Dehon the world was bigger and the energy of society was going in a totally different direction. Because of this, his parish work became like a chain around his neck. As he said, "I have only the greatest repugnance for this type of ministry, but I did nothing about it." (NHV XII, 152) What he did do, however, was found a congregation shortly after he made the remark.

It certainly got him out of the sacristy. He became totally committed to the social movements of his time. We need only to look at the books that he began to write in the 1880s and 90s that stand alongside his more spiritual oeuvres:

<p>L'année avec le Sacré Cœur Mois de Marie Couronnes d'amour Études sur le Sacré Cœur (2 vol) Vie intérieur. Ses Principes La retraite du Sacré Cœur Le Cœur sacerdotal de Jésus</p>	<p>1877 : L'Éducation / L'Enseignement selon l'idéal chrétien 1889 : Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus dans les âmes et dans les sociétés 1893 : Manuel social chrétien 1895 : Usure au temps présent 1889 - 1895 : Œuvres sociales : Chronique du Règne 1897 : Nos Congrès 1897 : Les Directions Pontificales : politiques et sociales 1898 : Catéchisme social 1897 – 1900 : La Rénovation Sociale 1908 : Le Plan des Franc-Maçonnerie en Italie et France (Le clef de l'histoire)</p>
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How did starting the congregation help him to escape the sacristy? It seems at first sight to be a flight from diocesan priesthood. In one of his statements he acknowledged that “I did not feel at home” in the diocesan priesthood¹ Here is a quote recalled by Pope Albino Luciani (Pope John Paul I) who had a deep appreciation of Fr. Leo Dehon:

The organization of our large parishes, he said, does not permit our clergy to carry out the apostolate. When our good priests have assisted at funerals, taken part in the offices, kept the registers up to date, their time and their activities are almost exhausted. One could live many centuries this way without rebuilding a Christian society. Everything has been organized on this level, and then one is amazed that people have ended by saying that religion is made for women and children. This pusillanimous generation has changed Christ for us. He is no longer the Christ of the workers, the Christ who practiced his apostolate among sinners, the publicans and the men of the world. The Lion of Judah ... has become a timid sheep. Our Christ ... has changed into a weak man, who only speaks to children and the sick. Priests cannot remain enclosed in the sacristies and presbyteries (...). They have seen the apostasy of the whole of the people and all they have created are associations for girls.²

What did Fr. Dehon find so difficult in the diocesan priesthood? He desired to be a priest. He had all his life. He went contrary to the strong wishes and ruses of his father to become a priest. So what idea did he have of priesthood? Why was being a “religious” priest so important to Fr. Dehon? And how did this vision lead to a different practice as a priest?

A prêtre religieux de Dieu

During his time of study in Rome in the 1860s, Dehon took on the notion of priesthood from French Spirituality from his spiritual director, Fr. Freyd. For Bérulle, one of the originators of the French School, a priest was to be an alter Christus. Jean Eudes described a priest as follows: “A priest is a Jesus Christ, living and walking upon earth.”³ In French Spirituality this meant that a person must take on Christ by meditatively passing through all the phases of the life of Jesus and thus becoming like him. This is the original meaning of what became known as “union with Christ.”⁴ It is reflected in something Fr. Dehon wrote in 1870: “The priest must reproduce the life of our Lord! He represents him; he is nourished by him.” (NQT II/1870, 57) It is in this context that Dehon sought a priesthood that called for a special

¹ A statement at the end of his “Notes sur l’histoire de ma vie”. He made this remark in 1886 when he needed to justify his choices with regard to the beginnings of the Congregation.

² The text Albino Luciani quotes from is found in the Christian Social Manual. See “Léon Dehon, Priest, Apostle, Founder” Manuscript, p. 130.

³ R. Deville, *L’Ecole française de spiritualité* (Paris : Desclée, 1987) p. 93. See Y. Ledure, *Le code* p. 89.

⁴ This phrase also appears in the Rule of Life (#5, 17,18, 22, 26). However, the meaning of “union with Christ” is no longer derived from French Spirituality but has a greater consonance with the Pauline entry into the death and resurrection of Christ.

holiness: to be a prêtre religieux de Dieu, a personal witness of the gospel: doing what Jesus did – following his example – and so being an alter Christus. For him it meant not to be a sacramental priest. Let me make three remarks:

1. What did he mean by “prêtre religieux de Dieu”? This notion of priest as an « alter Christus » means that the priest is ontologically different from other Christians. He is a « sacralized » figure. In French spirituality a priest is personally a mediator between God and people. For us this has become an unacceptable way of understanding the priesthood. For us only Christ is the mediator. However, this notion of the priest as an alter Christus was current in Dehon’s time. What Fr. Dehon sought was a priest who would be personally what Christ was, personally a representative of Christ. Today we distinguish between sacerdotal and ministerial. We understand the role of the priest to be ministerial. But for Fr. Dehon, a priest is a sacral figure, ontologically distinct from other believers, a personal mediator between God and people.⁵
2. This personalizing, sacralizing, ontologizing trend of French Spirituality allowed Fr. Dehon to shift the role of the priest away from the sacramental tasks to a mission toward society. The priest stood as another Christ in society, doing what Jesus did in his time. For Fr. Dehon this role in society was educative: the education of youth, the formation of priests, the formation of free and informed Christians, the work towards justice for workers, and the transformation of the political and social structures of society. Not the Church, but the priest personally was the mediator between People and God, just like Jesus. For Fr. Dehon there was no dichotomy between religious life as a priest and pastoral social work – the role of the priest was educative. Fr. Dehon found the traditional priesthood in the parish constraining. Fr. Dehon’s own life shows that he understood himself to be a priest not in the sense of classical sacerdotal ministry but as a priest-religious, whose task it was to preach the Gospel in the different contexts of social life. In this sense, Fr. Dehon is truly modern even though his theology is not.
3. This social (or societal) activity⁶ was for Fr. Dehon a spiritual activity. In 1889 he began a periodical entitled « Le Règne du Cœur de Jésus dans les âmes et dans les sociétés ». This title is significant because it signifies that for Fr. Dehon this societal ministry of priests was somehow linked with the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Fr. Prévot could never have imagined such a link! From this effort it is clear that for Fr. Dehon the societal activities come forth not only out of his idea of the priest as priest-religious but also from his spiritual intuition about the “Heart” of Christ. Here Fr. Dehon is unique.

To understand this shift in the understanding of the priestly ministry, we need to put Fr. Dehon’s societal activity in a larger context of the major shift of perspective that was making its way through the different European societies in his time. Fr. Dehon was one of the first to have recognized that the Church needed to be involved in a different manner in this new society.

⁵ Joseph Famerée, “Commentaire critique” of Yves Ledure’s book *Le Code du Royaume: Léon Dehon et la spiritualité du Cœur de Jésus* (Clairefontainer Studien, Band 4) (Clairefontaine : Heimat und Mission, 2001) manuscript.

⁶ Yves Ledure suggests that the word “social” does not adequately cover Dehon’s framework. He uses the word “societal”. “Sociétal” is broader and covers better the level at which Dehon worked. Yves Ledure, *Le Code du Royaume*, p. 87, note 9.



Religion in the crunch of globalization

The era that was emerging in Fr. Dehon's time we have learned to call modernity. From the 15th century onward in Europe there was a gradual cultural transformation. Today we call this period, modern times. And this time is marked by globalization. Something new manifested itself beginning towards the end of the 15th century. It appears in the journeys of discovery, the work of Galileo, the thinking of Descartes, the religious search of the Reformation.

Prior to the 15th century the social structure of Europe was dominated by the sphere of religion. Politics, economics, knowledge, morality, law and society received their validity and their fruitfulness through their connection with religion, which, at the time, was Roman Catholicism. Everything turned around the religious sphere. In the 15th century this began to change.

Religion became divided between Catholic and Protestant. Knowledge shifted away from religion when it began to question all truth based on tradition or authority. Scriptures as revelation became suspect as a source of knowledge. In the 17th century this became a search for an empirical epistemology: a knowledge based on experience and measurement, not on revelation. Also, politics moved away from the religious sphere. Because of the Protestant Reformation, the rule of *cuius regio cuius religio* became established. Progressively Church and politics drifted apart. In the economic sphere we see the first indications of a ruthless accumulation of capital and amoral trade practices. What had previously formed a unity of all these areas of life, despite tensions, now began to drift apart. It meant that politics, economics, sciences and morality, began to operate more and more independently, with their own goals and objectives, no longer set by the sphere of religion. The shift to different faculties in universities, as undertaken by the reorganization of universities by von Humboldt, is a good example of this globalization. A new ideology based on reason replaces religion as an organizational key of society.

Modern people no longer started with the religious outlook. Politics began to develop its own theory and practice, so did economics, so did the sciences, and, actually, so did religion. Today we more or less accept that these different fields, these different milieux, operate separately. For religion that was – and still is – difficult to accept. We tend to call it the process of secularization: the process of becoming independent from religion.

In the 19th century this process was not understood. Also Fr. Dehon interpreted these changes negatively. The Catholic Church, which held the hegemony in Europe in the field of religion, began to feel attacked. She experienced these changes as a loss of influence over the lives of people. She found it very difficult to allow the order of things, which she felt had been in her hands, to go their own ways. This is not as God would have wanted it, it was felt. And so it was interpreted as a grand decline, a big apostasy.

What we are experiencing in the West, in other words, is a significant re-orientation of religion in the public sphere. Religion is no longer the dominant voice in the different

spheres of life.⁷ It will have to find its voice in a different manner. This is modernity – or post-modernity – whether we like it or not.

Fr. Dehon and modernity

If we find it difficult today to respond to these movements, it was even more difficult in Fr. Dehon's time. Yet, he did. In the 1880s he became totally involved in the societal issues of his time. What drew his attention most were changes in the political and economic fields. This was after all, as we see it today, the time of the industrial revolution and the gathering storm of capitalism. Hence Fr. Dehon's interest in education and in the plight of workers. From these Fr. Dehon formed an initial idea of the different movements of his time. It is with these that he interacted, hoping to change their direction.

For Fr. Dehon this loss of the influence of religion, that is, the Church, was most evident in the lives of the workers in northern France. They may have been alienated from the Church, but Fr. Dehon saw them as victims of a new societal order.⁸ It is interesting in this light to read his Christmas homily – actually a sermon of 28 pages – in the first year that Fr. Dehon was in the Cathedral parish in Saint Quentin. This new societal order – at least in the viewpoint of Fr. Dehon – had come about through the disaster of the French Revolution with its reign of reason and the proclamation of the rights of man. For Dehon, the results were disastrous. For him and for many others, the secularization of the 19th century required a re-implantation of the Church after the destructive, revolutionary forces of 1789.

19th century restoration

The feeling of social malaise in France led to a massive growth of male and female religious: from 70,000 – 80,000 in 1830 to 215,000 in 1878. Most of the energy of these religious men and women was expended on restoration, to undo the ravages of the French Revolution. Raymond Hostie, in his book *Vie et mort des ordres religieux*⁹ is devastating in his critique of the new religious of the 19th century. He says, « The 19th century did not see arise any form of religious life that had not been known at least a hundred years... On the ecclesial level,

⁷ Niklas Luhmann, *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie. Was leistet die Systemforschung?* (with Jürgen Habermas), (Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp 1974); Peter Beyer, *Globalization, Religion and Culture*, Edited with Lori Beaman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), *Religions in Global Society* (London: Routledge, 2006)

⁸ "Sermon for Christmas Day: Father Leo Dehon 1871." Translated and Introduction by P.J. McGuire scj (Franklin, WI, Dehon Study Center, 1995). Here is P. Dehon at his prophetic best: "Now let us consider the desire of the eyes, that is, the greedy and impassioned attachment to the goods of this world. This is indeed the queen of our society. It reaches its height at the Money Exchange where one man's fortune is at the mercy of the stroke of the pen or the throw of the dice disguised under a game that was formerly forbidden but is now honored. [Dehon here refers to usury.] It holds sway in industry where irreligious capitalists exploit the worker and destroy his body, his soul and his eternity by imposing work on Sunday. ... It prevails among the workers who are unable to achieve the possession of capital by means of careful savings and a well-disciplined life, so they make feverish attempts to get it through social revolution and expropriation." p. 17-19

⁹ (Paris: DDB, 1972)



the 19th century is one of restoration.”¹⁰ Our Congregation in France fit this mold. It did not look ahead but backwards.

However, not totally! And here, I think, Hostie did not see sufficiently the innovative elements of 19th century religious communities. Its novelty applies particularly to Fr. Dehon. The innovative emerged through his engagement of the social, political and economic.

It is not enough for us to see Fr. Dehon’s charism only in the area of a spirituality of the interior. Fr. Dehon had this great intuition of inserting the social within the spiritual. Our letter on the occasion of the Feast of the Sacred Heart in 2011 was about this intuition. Having moved out of the sacristy, he threw himself into the world of workers. In order to improve the situation of workers, Fr. Dehon began to study the causes of the plight of the workers and to look for solutions, particularly through his association with Léon Harmel at his factories in Val des Bois. We must understand his involvement therefore as a grappling with the social order of his time. In a recent book on the Sacred Heart devotion, Fr. Dehon is singled out as a prime example of someone who recognized the importance of the social dimension of the devotion.¹¹ As Ledure writes: “In the 19th century, Fr. Dehon is the only founder of a congregation with a spirituality of the Sacred Heart who has developed, together with those whom history has called the Abbés Démocrates, a whole series of activities that opened the Church to the realities of the modern world: the taking up of societal questions, particularly regarding social justice and democracy.”¹²

According to Ledure, this social engagement must be seen as the opening of Fr. Dehon to modern times. He wanted the Church, despite its restorative tendencies, to become engaged with all the economic, political, and social changes of the time. The reign of the Sacred Heart meant for him to struggle also for social justice and for the recognition of the living conditions of the working class, to reconstruct society. In other words, “Through his societal pre-occupations, Fr. Dehon sought to reposition the Church in a society that had broken with Christianity. »¹³

From our perspective, Fr. Dehon’s inclusion of the social dimension may still seem too strongly inclined to a Christian restoration of society, that is, to a return of a situation where

¹⁰ R. Hostie, p. 241. (See Ledure, p. 89).

¹¹ Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore: Un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione cristiana della società*, (Roma: Viella, 2001) p. 107 – 225. See also Stefan Tertünte, *Léon Dehon und die Christliche Demokratie : Ein katholischer Versuch gesellschaftlicher Erneuerung in Frankreich am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* Freiburger theologische Studien (Freiburg: Herder, 2007); Albert Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon et « Le règne du Cœur de Jésus » 1889-1892*, (Roma : Studia Dehoniana 25.1) 1990; Yves Ledure, *Le règne social de Sacré-Cœur chez père Dehon (1843-1925). Essai d’interprétation d’une dynamique historique*, in *La dévotion au Cœur du Christ. Histoire et symbole*. 1987, p. 41-60; Yves Ledure, « *Pensée sociale et projet fondateur chez Léon Dehon* », *Revue des sciences religieuses* 84 no.3 (2010) p. 325-340; Yves Ledure, *Le Code du Royaume : Léon Dehon et la spiritualité du Cœur de Jésus* (Clairefontainer Studien, Band 4) (Clairefontaine : Heimat und Mission Verlag, 2001); Yves Ledure, « *Léon Dehon entre mythe et histoire. L’oubli du sociétal?* », *Dehoniana X*, 2012, p. 81-112; Andrea Tessarolo, « *Le règne social du Cœur de Jésus dans les écrits de Léon Dehon* », in Y. Ledure, (ed.), *Rerum Novarum en France*. (Paris : Éditions Universitaires, 1991) p. 117 – 132.

¹² Yves Ledure, « *Léon Dehon entre mythe et histoire* » p. 109.

¹³ *L’héritage du Père Dehon?* » (assemblée provinciale, Clairefontaine du 2 au 7 septembre, 2007) Manuscript.

Christianity was the primary ordering force. Yet, as he evolved in his understanding, Fr. Dehon began to move away from a reactionary restoration. For instance, he did not seek the return of the monarchy. Even though he had great difficulties with the French Revolution and its declaration of human rights, he was prepared to live with the changes. Fr. Dehon accepted the new political order, that is, republicanism, particularly, after the intervention of Leo XIII in 1892 in his encyclical *Innumeras sollicitudines*.¹⁴

The intent of Fr. Dehon's charism becomes clear from the opposition he received from the members of his new Congregation. He may not have seen how his involvement with the social question led to a crisis within the congregation regarding its charism. It burst into the open during the General Chapters of 1893 and 1896.

During the two chapters, Fr. Blancal, who lived in the same house as Fr. Dehon in Saint Quentin, La Maison du Sacré-Coeur, and hence was very much aware of the work of Fr. Dehon, challenged his re-election as superior general. Why? In part because of Fr. Dehon's social involvement; Fr. Blancal called Dehon's social involvement "politics."¹⁵ In a letter written to Fr. Dehon on July 6, 1897 – hence, after the Chapter – Fr. Blancal accused Fr. Dehon of being interested in all the great questions of the time. But, he says, this has nothing to do with the aim of the Congregation which, he continues, is "a special cult of love and consolation towards the Heart of Jesus as a means of a quick and powerful sanctification." As a result, Fr. Blancal says, "We are separated by an abyss; our ways of seeing things are radically different."¹⁶ The social engagement, he felt, was not part of the Congregation. For Fr. Dehon it obviously was.

For Fr. Dehon, his *contemplatio Dei*, his thriving in the love of God, was not exhausted in a spirituality of the soul. For Fr. Dehon his experience of the intense love of God for him had a second outlet, the social, which he could not divorce from the first.¹⁷ For him, his social engagement is an integral part of his life and of his charism.

Charisms and their impact of social life

¹⁴ The Ralliement refers to the attitude of one part of French Catholics who followed the advice of Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical *Innumeras sollicitudines* (*Au milieu des sollicitudes*). After February 20, 1892 they expressed their adherence to the French Republic. This did not mean that they accepted legislation hostile to Catholicism, but simply an acceptance of the republican system of government.

¹⁵ See Dorrestijn, *Vita e Personalità di P. Dehon*, Notes of G. Manzoni, p.692.

¹⁶ Dorrestijn, p. 699. This letter was written a year after the General Chapter in which this same group tried unsuccessfully (15 to 6) to replace him as Superior General. Three of the seven signatories to the letter were incardinated into a diocese a few years later. The mother house of the Congregation (Sacré Coeur in S. Quentin) was a hothouse of opposition to Dehon. One of the members who opposed Dehon, Fr. Delgoffe, in 1920 humbly asked Dehon to forgive him for his critical attitude and his letters to the Bishop.

¹⁷ As does Ledure, who thinks that Dehon's spiritual vision is not original and smells too much of the restoration of 19th century. For him Dehon did not perceive how this social stance could be integrated within a spirituality of catholic restoration. However, it does not take away his intuition. That remains valid. Dehon's time was not quite prepared to accomplish this. Hence, his efforts failed – not for want of trying. His "reign of the Sacred Heart" is built on a false attempt to apply Augustine's *Civitas Dei* to the 19th century. According to Dehon, the human citadel of his time was based on liberalism and the power of money (capital) which in his eyes was creating havoc in the lives of workers. He connected this with the Freemasons and particularly with the Jews. He wanted to restore it within a social reign of the Heart of Christ: a restorationist model where the Church would continue to play a key role in politics and the other social realms. Yet, in his appeal to the encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII he broke with the restorationist model.



If such is the case, it is worth our while to further explore this interaction of the spiritual and the material. I will do it through – what I can only call – an innovative way of looking at charisms and their impact on social, economic and political life. I am referring to the positions of two Italian social and political economists: Luigi Bruno and Sr. Alessandra Smerille. If not exactly Paul's position, this notion of charism is nevertheless helpful.

On April 28, 2012, Sr. Alessandra Smerille, a political economist at Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione "Auxilium" in Rome, gave a conference to our international meeting of treasurers. In the presentation she talked about the power of charisms on the economy. She drew examples from the charisms of a number of founders and their impact on social life. She looked at St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi and St Vincent de Paul. Her concern, because of the audience, was the power of charisms on the economy.¹⁸ St. Benedict's charism, she said, had an enormous impact on the perception of work. We know Benedict's famous motto of "Ora et labora." "Pray and work." In Greco-Roman culture work was despised. To work was not to be free. Only slaves worked. To be free meant not to be indebted to work. Benedict's charism was to give value to work. In his monasteries, he divided the day equally between prayer and work. (the other eight hours were for sleep.) With his motto "Ora et labora" Benedict instilled the value of work alongside that of prayer. With it he transformed Europe with its thousands of monasteries that proclaimed the spiritual value, but also the immense economic value, of work. As a result, the monasteries became the great economic powerhouses of Europe.¹⁹

Similar arguments can be made about the re-evaluation of poverty by St. Francis. He gave dignity to the poor when he talked about Lady or Sister Poverty, when he kissed the leper and when he honored the widows. Francis did not see the poor as a problem but as a gift. With this charism, the Franciscans actually became the first proponents of an economic school from which emerged the modern market economy. The first tracts on values and prices and money are found in works by Franciscans in the 13th century.²⁰ I was reminded of this in the article in Dehoniana of 2012 in which our own Francesco vanderHoff honored the need of humans to live within the means of the earth, and talked of the "decent poverty" lived by the indigenous in Oaxaca. Also the modern welfare state was established through the charisms of apostolic religious communities which established hospitals, schools, orphanages, poor houses, immigrant centers, food kitchens, and all sort of social work. The charisms of all these founders had a direct impact on the political landscape of Europe, as

¹⁸ Sr. Alessandra Smerilli works together with Luigi Bruno. Together they wrote *Benedetto Economia*, (Roma: Città nuova, 2008).

¹⁹ Smerilli, *Benedetto Economia*, p. 47-69. Pezzimenti in his book *Ora et Labora* (2006) says *Ora et Labora* is not just a motto or an ideal. It is life itself. They are not alternatives but two inseparable aspects which give value and the real meaning to each other. (p. 73) It is good to remember that work included many activities: *Opus Dei* (prayer in common), labor (manual labour), artes (the arts), opus (study), *lectio divina* (sacred scripture), bonum (good works), *conversation morum* (interior work: return to God). Bruno, p. 56.

²⁰ Luigi Bruno e Alessandra Smerilli, *Benedetto Economia*, p. 71. The Franciscan thinkers are William of Ockham, Pietro Olivi and Duns Scotus. See Giacomo Todeschini, *Ricchezza francescana*, 2004. See the beautiful phrase of Jacopone da Todi, "Povertate è nulla avere, e nulla cosa poi volere; et omne cosa possedere en spirito de libertate." (Bruno, p. 71)

they do now in Asia and Africa. With the adoption of many of these areas by the state, the apostolic communities have lost their attraction and may have to re-invent themselves; however, we should not forget what was at the foundation of the political welfare state.

What is a charism along these lines? According to Smerille, a charism is a gift that allows one to see things that others do not see. Charisms are like new eyes on the world. They are the eyes that see the world differently. For her, it is linked with seeing the world in its intrinsic value as gratuitousness – it is a religious view of the world, but integrating the social, economic and the political. For her the view on the world is founded on *agapé*, on absolutely gracious love. Someone with a charism is someone who is in love – in love with the world. Only one who is passionately in love can attract and fascinate others to follow him or her. As Mother Teresa reminded us, only a charismatic can see poverty not as a problem but as a gift. The charismatic innovates, sees unsatisfied needs, identifies new forms of poverty, and opens new ways of fraternity and reciprocity in the world. A charismatic pushes forward the frontier of humanity and civilization.²¹ A charism touches all aspects of human life, especially in areas of moral and civil liberation.

It is with this in mind that we might look at Fr. Dehon's charism to be the capacity to see with new eyes the radical openness of the spiritual, in his case, the Heart of God in the Heart of Christ, to the social, economic, political and scientific aspects of human living. From the beginning of Fr. Dehon's ministry this charism is discernible. Unfortunately, he did not put it into the first Constitutions of the Congregation. In fact, he never integrated it within his view of the spirituality of the Congregation. But it was found in *the practices* of the Congregation. In 1890 when there were 33 members, fully one third were engaged in the social sphere. We have seen this sensitivity in almost every place where the Congregation has ministries. The history of the Congregation is filled with stories of social initiatives undertaken by Dehonians. Whether it was in the world of the workers, unions or education, the underlying thrust was the reign of the Sacred Heart, that is, the living out of love. What was lacking was the capacity to coherently think this social charism.

Fr. Dehon's social charism

Fr. Dehon made a number of bad moves in implementing his social charism. Let me mention at least two before returning to the positive side of his social charism.

1. There is a lot of ambiguity around the precise location of Fr. Dehon's social reign of the Heart of Christ. The social reign at times seems nostalgic to a time prior to the French Revolution, or it resembles the dream to re-establish the presumed supremacy of the Pope in medieval Europe, where the Church was the core institution around which everything else revolved. At times it is anti-modern. Dehon was realistic enough to want to live with Republicanism, once he was urged in that direction by Pope Leo XIII. His vision of a new social order for workers did not advocate worker organizations or unions, but worked hierarchically from the perspective of owners or patrons. Fr. Dehon was not a visionary, nor did he succeed in articulating well his social charism as a charism of the Congregation. It led in the history of the Congregation to a great number of social engagements but not to a coherent vision of a social charism.

²¹ Luigi Bruno e Alessandra Smerilli, *Benedetto Economia*, (Roma: Città nuova, 2008) p. 22 – 37.



2. The second negative move has had more serious repercussions with which we are still dealing today. In his social analysis, Fr. Dehon believed that the unjust plight of the workers in his time and the difficulties experienced by religious in France was due to the political and economic influence of Freemasons and Jews. In his denunciations of the Freemasons and the Jews, Fr. Dehon went too far. Although what Fr. Dehon said against the Jews was misinterpreted as a harbinger of the anti-Semitism of the 20th century, his social and economic Judeophobia crossed the line of the acceptable. Here he should have listened to Pope Leo XIII who cautioned the Abbés Démocrates to stay clear from incendiary charges. His language has become an almost insurmountable barrier to his beatification.²²

3. And on the positive side...?

One of the most fruitful legacies that has come from these first interactions of the Church (or religion) with the modern economic and political spheres has been the gradual development of the social doctrine of the Church. I think that was the genius of Leo XIII and it was also the good sense and intuition of Fr. Dehon to realize the enormous potential of the social message of the Gospel. And that remains part of the legacy of the Congregation. If for Fr. Dehon this legacy was inextricably an outflow of his spirituality of the love of God, it must also be so for us (even if he did not directly do so himself). It is not as if the social outreach is a second aim of the Congregation; it is intrinsically part of the one charism of Fr. Dehon.

It is said of Fr. Dehon that each morning he went out to buy a newspaper. When he was asked why did so, he said, "So that the confreres will have something else to talk about than each other." Fr. Dehon was hugely interested in the world around him. But that interest was inextricably connected with his insatiable thirst for understanding of the love of God for him. With that same love he sought to understand the world around him. This is, I think, the heart of his charism. It is our task to develop this further.

Fr. Dehon's social charism today

In order to grasp this intuition of Fr. Dehon better and to see where it is bearing fruit in our time, I turn to two important examples. Unfortunately, I have time only to develop one of these examples.

The first example is found in the ecclesial event of Vatican II. I see in the underlying thrust of Vatican II a fulfillment of Fr. Dehon's demand to us to "leave the sacristy." We have much to learn from the current re-interpretation of Vatican II as a novel language – a new style of being – in the Church. I will say a bit more in my conclusion.

The second example comes from Pope Benedict's encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (2009).

²² See the manuscript of U. Chiarello: "Il canonico Leone Dehon e la questione ebraica," Vitorchiano, ottobre 2004, 74p ; *Antisemitismo cristiano?: Il caso di Leone Dehon*, Ed. by Yves Ledure, (Bologna: Edizioni Dehonianne Bologna, 2009)

The encyclical “Caritas in veritate”

As you know Pope Benedict XVI first wrote an encyclical on Caritas, or agape (*Deus caritas est* 2005). He followed this up with a social encyclical entitled *Caritas in veritate*, “Charity in truth,” or, you might say, agape in action. Benedict introduced two new concepts into the Church’s social doctrine on the economy, namely, fraternity and gratuity. What is novel in this encyclical is the primal conception of economics as a discipline based on relationships. In accordance with this understanding, Pope Benedict speaks of fraternity and gratuity in economic relations. The concept of economics as a discipline of relationships comes from Professor Stefano Zamagni (a professor of economics at the Johns Hopkins University affiliate in Bologna). It has interesting repercussions, especially for us who, like Pope Benedict, want to start our reflection on justice and economics from the position of charity or agape. A theology and spirituality of the heart wants to start with agape, God’s agape, and understand how this absolutely gratuitous agape can urge a free response in love.²³ In other words, is there a human ethics that flows from God’s agape? Or: is there an economics of agape? How does love – God’s love – enter into justice or economic relations?

In *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict seeks to do exactly that. He brings economics back to its original context of the *nomos* of the household relations. At their roots, in politics and economics we are dealing with human relations at the level of the household, which we might then apply to the national and international communities. The issue is: how do we interact in economic and political relationships? What Benedict does in the encyclical is to insert the relation of love. But the love he speaks of is not the love we have for one another but the divine agape. Only in relation to divine agape does human love make sense. So how does the encyclical do this?

In social, economic or political relations, there are three stages, three levels, of relationships:

- a) The first level is the level of just relations. In economics and social relations one must always give what each is due. The first rule is always justice. Theories of justice today, as for instance proposed Michael Sandal or John Rawls, have created great interest among political economists. Justice operates on the level of equality of all. We know how difficult this is at the level of distributive justice. It is almost impossible to have an exact measure of justice. We have all struggled with the issue of just remuneration of late: What is a just wage or honorarium for a hedge fund manager? What is a just minimum wage? Although justice remains primary, it cannot resolve issues adequately. That is why there is a tendency today not to talk of justice, but of fairness. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur insists, however, that justice can only function if it is placed in dialectical relationship with love, as it is done in the Gospel of Jesus.

²³ This reflection on agape is enhanced by the back-and-forth relations established by gift-giving. For further reflection on this, see Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, tr. by Ian Cunnison (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967). Mark Rogin Ansprach articulates the double bind of gift-giving: “In recognizing a present by giving one in return, does one not destroy the original gift as gift? (A charge de revanche: Figures de l’aggression éthique (Paris: Seuil, 2002) p. 53-54.) See also the interesting development of these thoughts in P. Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, tr. By David Pellauer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) p. 225-246.



Jesus inserted a new dynamic into the daily relations of people: the dynamic of the kingdom, or the dynamic of love. Justice without love will break down at the level of equal relations. On the other hand, love without the rule of justice breaks down in arbitrariness. The encyclical does not go down this path. It wants to reach beyond justice. And in this, the encyclical clearly follows the Gospel of Jesus.

- b) The second level of the relationship of economics and the social sphere is that of “fraternity.” With fraternity one passes beyond the more neutral relationship of justice to a second level where relationships take on the intimacy of the relationship with brother and sister. How, it asks, would one act in cases of justice or in social circumstances, in economics, if the other were a brother or sister? Such a consideration would take economic relationships beyond that of a neutral business relationship by introducing “respect” in economic relations. In other words, when charity or agape enters into the picture, a stronger relational intensity is introduced into justice. The other is my brother or my sister. The same is true of the third level, that of gratuity.
- c) The third level of relationships in economics he calls gratuity. Here I do not give to the other just what is his or her due, but I introduce generosity into the picture. When Christians talk about God in the context of everyday life, they introduce an element of “plus” into language – an element of excess or surplus or superabundance. When the great theologians wanted to speak of God, they introduced ordinary human experiences, such as goodness or beauty, and insisted that, applied to God, one would have to introduce the question of “more” into the picture. God is the greater, the more, than which can be thought, said St. Anselm. So also caritas is the more than what can be thought, the more than which I experience, the more than which I can give. What happens then when this infinite – when God – is brought into our language and relationships, also economic relationships?

In justice or in economic relations the introduction of agape would mean going beyond what is contractually necessary. It would mean in economic relations not to let oneself be ruled by the law of equivalency, of giving each his due. Equivalency rules with “I give that you may give;” that is, with contractual reciprocity. Nor does gratuity remain only at the level of the relation of brother or sister. A gratuitous relation is a relation without obligation. Gratuity is for naught. It gives without a guaranteed prospect of return.²⁴ This is the sort of giving that also delineates the face of God in the Sermon on the Mount. Give without measure, said Jesus. It is the giving of the widow, who gave all that she had. (Mark 13.41-44) A justice, an economy, of gratuity is a type of relating to people that knows how to find goodness and beauty in the other from whom we expect nothing in return and to whom we wish nothing but that they be

²⁴ See the Margaret Beaufort Lectures of 2012 at Cambridge. The second lecture was given by Prof. Stefano Zamagni, “The Crisis of Capitalism and the Common Good.” See also Johan Verstraeten, “Economics with a human face,” *The Tablet*, February 25, 2012, p. 12 – 14.

well. If there is a gift in return, it is a free gift that comes from gratitude. It is the sort of gift exemplified in the Eucharist.

Caritas in veritate gives us a new understanding being prophets of love and servants of reconciliation. It also gives us a new way of understanding how our spirituality reaches into our social and pastoral relations. When this enters into the area of social justice, our social justice is not so much coloured by what we do but by the generosity with which we enter into these relationships. It is not so much the “what” that enters into the exchanges, but much more the level “who”. In the Letter to the Ephesians Paul speaks of the “fullness” of God. We believe that this fullness of love has entered into our world. It means that our actions must reflect that fullness. Also our relations to others – also in economics and politics – must reflect this surplus, this more, this fullness.²⁵

Conclusion

I believe that Vatican II had a similar thrust. I have become more and more convinced that Vatican II lies within the expanse of the intuition of Fr. Dehon’s turn to the societal. The most interesting way of interpreting the event that was Vatican II is through what Pope John XXIII said was his intent in calling the council. He did not want a council to look inwardly at the Church and try to correct all its mistakes. If for us Fr. Dehon wanted to get out of the sacristy, Vatican II did just that. Blessed Pope John wanted it to be a pastoral council, open to our brothers and sisters in the faith, open to Jews and to Muslims and other religions, open to the world in all its hopes and sorrows, open to a different ethic, open, especially, to the Gospel. Pope John XXIII’s *aggiornamento* was his opening of the doors and windows of the sacristy and face the modern, secular world.

When John XXIII opened the council, he said that what he wanted was to look at the “whole” teaching of the Church, but from a new perspective, that is, “according to the forms and proportions of a magisterium that was thoroughly pastoral.”²⁶ And what was to be its style? He wanted the council to take on the style of the Gospel.²⁷ One of the more exciting ways in which today’s theologians are interpreting Vatican II has been to look at its style. By this they mean the style of its language. It was not a council that used the traditional “canons” with their condemnatory language but a rhetorical style which can best be called epideictic, that is, a language that expresses that “what is going on is ... simply ... the promoting of values that are shared in the community ...”²⁸. In the past few years much has been written about Vatican II as a

²⁵ See also E. Levinas, *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* ed. by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 170. It is important to note that for both Levinas and Ricoeur the surplus from the encounter with God is practical. The experience, mediated by the scriptural text for Ricoeur, but confronted immediately in the face of the other for Levinas --is a summons, a call. It is not a neutral revelation. For Levinas it is a word that obligates me as the one responsible for the other (*Idem*, p. 170). For Ricoeur it is a summons to discipleship. (See P. Ricoeur “Le sujet convoqué. A l’école des récits des vocation » in *Revue de l’Institut Catholique de Paris* 28 (1988) 83-99.

²⁶ Christoph Theobald “Le style pastoral du Vatican II et sa réception postconciliaire, » in *Vatican II comme style* Ed. Joseph Famerée, (Paris :Cerf, 2012p. 276

²⁷ Theobald, “Le style pastoral du Vatican II et sa réception postconciliaire, » in *Vatican II comme style* Ed. Joseph Famerée, (Paris :Cerf, 2012, p. 269

²⁸ Chaïm Perelman, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) p. 52

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style. Fr. Dehon would feel at home in this style because he would welcome its openness to the real issues of the Church in this time.

In one of the texts on the style of the Vatican Council, I also found a reference to the style of being bishop in accordance with the Council. Perhaps there is also a peculiarly Dehonian style of being a bishop. As the Canadian theologian Gilles Routhier expressed it, a bishop, he said, ought to be a “doctor of the Church who searches.” Our dehonian style would be one of “listening, dialogue, simplicity, humility and poverty.”²⁹

²⁹ Benoît Bourguin, “Observations conclusives. De style à herméneutique, et retour.” In Vatican II, p. 290