

The Surplus of Charity:

The North American Response

When in November 2016 the newly-established North American Dehonian Theological Commission received the responses to the Centro Studi questionnaire (46 responses of a possible 113), it decided on a twofold response to the study of *Charism and Devotions*. Its first response was to read the responses in the socio-cultural context of North America. Is there a specific North American reading of devotions? Do North Americans understand and live devotions in a manner that is different from its closest cultural neighbour, Europe? A second response was to try to ascertain whether and how a deep reading of Fr. Dehon's legacy can still provide food for thought and life in the 21st century.

A. The spiritual landscape of devotion in North America

The North American responses to the questionnaire were read through the social analysis of religion in North America by Charles Taylor, Robert Bellah, Wade Clark Roof and others. We did this in order to differentiate the North American findings from other cultural areas in the Congregation. The paper makes six points to delineate a North American framework for devotional life.

1. A general characteristic of devotions is that they are personal, even though they may be communally celebrated. That was the presumption even of the questionnaire. Devotions display a person's interiority, his or her personal connection with God. In the North American culture, one is expected to respect this interior devotion of one's fellow religious and not to question the other about his personal practices.
2. Establishing communal devotions, a second dimension of the questionnaire, is a difficult enterprise. In the current cultural context, a community is restricted in its ability to introduce new devotions. A good example of this is the introduction of *Lectio divina* as a practice in the Congregation. Despite the efforts of the last General Chapters to promote it, *Lectio divina* has not been widely accepted. To become communal, devotions must at the same time be personal.
3. The only exception to this rule are the devotional practices that have become identity markers for the community. Dehonians have a number of these identity markers which the majority of the community do not question because they create their bond with the others. From the responses to the questionnaire it is clear that North America identifies the prayer of oblation and adoration as such identity markers. In the earliest period, the Congregation had some other practices such as the corona, the private vow of immolation, the Holy Hour on the Thursday before the first Friday of the month, the novena before the Feast of the Sacred Heart, etc., but these gradually were dropped as practices.

4. Since the time of the Enlightenment with its gradual secularization of areas previously pertaining to the religious sphere and through the influence of the subsequent era of Romanticism, devotions today no longer pertain to religion but to spirituality. In this bifurcation of religion and spirituality, spirituality is religion in the sphere of freedom, and religion pertains to the authoritative. In this context, devotions are considered under the banner of spirituality. This is clearly a Western phenomenon.
5. It is of interest that this bifurcation of religion and spirituality is felt differently in North America and Europe. Charles Taylor demonstrates this difference, using the analysis of European religious history by Durkheim.¹ For many parts of Western Europe, the break occasioned by the Enlightenment created a momentous struggle between the old order and the new. This was particularly true for France where the old order, known as the *ancien regime*, was stripped away more violently than in other quarters.² Because of the resistance of Catholics, in particular, to accept the new order, represented in France by the imposition of *laïcité*, the enlightenment was perceived as a violent removal from public life of all remnants of religion. In these cultural areas, religion is seen or experienced as anti-modern. This is less an issue in North America, where, except for Québec, there is no cultural or historical antagonism toward religion.³ Hence, there is a greater tolerance for religion and spirituality – and hence also for devotions.
6. Furthermore, there is a different interplay, particularly in the United States, between family, religion and the state, which still functions for the older members of the community: “the family was the matrix in which the young were brought up to be good citizens and believing worshippers; religion was the source of the values that animated both family and society; and the state was the realization and the bulwark of the values central to both family and churches.”⁴ This triangle has broken down for younger members, but not as clearly for the older members.

B. Fr. Dehon and the devotional

The above analysis of the North American situation of religion and devotion in a post-modern society may lead one to ask how the North American Dehonian devotional

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) p. 484.

² This struggle of Catholicism against *laïcité* in 19th century France was central to the concerns of Fr. Dehon particularly in the period between 1889 and 1903, the time of *Le règne du Sacré-Coeur dans les âmes et les sociétés*. The understanding of devotion in Fr. Dehon’s time needs to take into account the specific relation between religion and society of his time. See John van den Hengel, “Crisis with Modernity: Léon Dehon and the Social Reign of the Sacred Heart” in *Zeitschrift für Religion- und kirchliche Gesellschaft*, SZRKG, 110 (2016), In this context, it is interesting to note the highly critical reception of the thesis of Charles Taylor in France. The identification of secularization with the French Republican *laïcité* makes a number of French authors highly critical of a secularization thesis which does not exclude religion. See Sylie Taussig (ed), *Charles Taylor, Religion et secularisation*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2014.

³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 193

⁴ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 506.

practices are still consonant with the original charism of Fr. Dehon? The 21st century has changed the scope within which members live this 19th century legacy. How are Dehonians to interpret this charism today? An authentic interpretation of a legacy is always controversial. This applies to the 19th and early 20th century writings of Fr. Dehon as it does to any important historical person, event or document. Must a correct interpretation seek to uncover the original intention of Fr. Dehon? Contemporary hermeneutics is deeply aware that to recover Fr. Dehon's intention remains a conjecture and is indeed a hazardous undertaking.⁵ It has for this reason opted to take seriously the role of the current reader in the interpretation of historical texts. Hermeneutics asks how an historical text can refigure my present self-understanding or my capability. That applies to Fr. Dehon's writings as well. Can Fr. Dehon be read within the confines of today's self-understanding? May we use contemporary categories to make him understandable? Can a reconfiguration of his original text make Fr. Dehon durable for our time? The Congregation and certainly the North American SCJs have done so by relying on the creative, refigured interpretation of the original Dehonian intuition, found in the Rule of Life created in the 1973/79 chapters. The *Rule of Life* has become today's text through which Dehonians read Fr. Dehon.

However, this style of hermeneutics demands a thorough and critical reading of the original texts,⁶ to ensure that the current understanding and practice of "devotions" of our North American confreres faithfully reflect the Dehonian charism.

a. The configuration of the Sacred Heart devotion in Fr. Dehon's writings

The creative fidelity to Fr. Dehon needs to show a continuity with the role the Sacred Heart devotion, the primary component of Dehonian devotional life, played in Fr. Dehon's life. The earliest influence upon Léon Dehon's devotion to the Sacred Heart was his mother. Fr. Dehon called her a "true disciple of the Sacred Heart" (NQT5/12).⁷ With her he shared a devotion to the Sacred Heart in the form that was

⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

⁶ That has become even more clear after the suspended beatification of Fr. Dehon in 2005. There is a genuine sorrow in the Congregation that in the crisis of his time, Fr. Dehon felt compelled to read his time in "Jewish terms". As so many in Christian history have done, Fr. Dehon in the 1890s found in the freemasons and Jews the key to the social and religious malaise in France. There is a firm belief in the Congregation that these texts do not reflect the personality of Fr. Dehon and are limited to his social writings. As Marcello Neri points out, the event has led to an increase in the Congregation of serious, academic study of the spirituality of Fr. Dehon. "Uno stilo per la Spirito; Temi antropologici negli scritti spirituali di L.Fr. Dehon" in *Anthropologia cordis*, Roma: Centro StudiFr. Dehoniani, 2016, p. 293-4.

⁷ His mother gave him the "Manuel du Sacré-Coeur" of which he says that it became "his true ascetical guide" which stayed with him the rest of his life. NHV 1/49.

common in France, influenced by John Eudes (1601-1680) and Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647 -1690). By the time of Fr. Dehon , however, the devotion had already changed from the original anti-Jansenistic context of the 17th century to the highly-charged polemic between Catholics and laïcist Republicans in 19th century France. In the constant political skirmishes between the Catholic traditionalists and the Republican promoters of the Enlightenment, the Sacred Heart had become the visible icon of the Catholic opposition. The Sacred Heart represented a restorationist desire of Catholics to return to the social and political construct of the pre-revolutionary *ancien regime*. Throughout the century Catholics attempted to undo the political efforts of the Republicans to relegate religion to the private sphere. As a Frenchman, Fr. Dehon was very much affected by the French Revolution and its aftermath. He remained very much attached to the medieval social construct as an ideal, in which the French king served as the divine guarantor and the Church, under the guidance of the Pope, as the ultimate arbiter. In the cultural divide of France, Fr. Dehon was on the restorationist side. He could not reconcile himself to the Republican worldview until Pope Leo XIII, recognizing the intractable division in France, intervened to urge the acceptance of the Republican form of government. In other words, Fr. Dehon in the 19th century was confronted with a different reading of the Sacred Heart devotion in the new cultural and political context of 19th century France.⁸ It is obvious that, for the Congregation, the Sacred Heart today no longer serves as an icon for a restorationist social and political vision. The political, social and religious context within which the devotion functioned has changed. also for North America. This has repercussions. Because of the ideological change, the devotion to the Heart of Christ has lost its social and cultural context. For it to regain adherence in the 21st century, the Sacred Heart devotion will require a new social or religious context.

However, is Fr. Dehon’s articulation of the devotion open to such a re-reading? The first indications of a more articulated reflection on the devotion took place probably in 1873 through his chaplaincy of the Soeurs Servantes du Sacré-Coeur. The sisters’ devotion to the Sacred Heart was highly reparatory and immolational in tone. The practice of love, the core tenet of the devotion, called for a generous measure of reparation (consolation) to the Sacred Heart for the neglect and lack of gratitude of

⁸ Raymond Anthony Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; Idem, “Sacred Mysteries and Holy Memories: Counter-revolutionary France and the Sacré-Coeur” *Canadian Journal of History* 32 (1997) p. 347-359; Idem, Restoring a Sacred Center: Pilgrimage, Politics and the Sacré Coeur, in: *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques*, 20 (1994); Gérard Choley, *La Religion en France de la fin de XVIIIe à nos jours*, Paris, 1991; Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany*, Princeton 1993; E Poulat, *Catholicisme, Démocratie, Socialisme*, Tournai: Casterman, 1977; Frederic Brown, *For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010.

France⁹ and also for the negligent love of those supposedly closest to the Heart of Christ, priests and religious.¹⁰ Fr. Dehon acknowledged that he was much influenced by the form the devotion had taken in Mère Ulrich and Soeur Ignace, two members of the Soeurs Servantes, “especially in the months of April and May, 1877”, the year of the founding of the Congregation and the writing of the first constitutions (See NHV 12/152; NHV 12/139 and NHV 12/152).¹¹

In the Constitutions of 1885 – since we lack the first Constitutions which Fr. Dehon wrote between July 14 and July 31, 1877 - Fr. Dehon gave as the goal of the Congregation “to profess ... a special devotion to the most Sacred Heart of Jesus, by responding to the love of the most Sacred Heart and by compensating with a just reparation for the injuries which he complained to have suffered.” For this reason, the following “acts of homage”, all of which find their origin with St. Margaret Mary, are made mandatory for the members of the new Institute: masses and communions of reparation, the sanctification of the first Friday of each month, the practice of Holy Hour every Thursday, adoration of the Sacred Heart in the Eucharist. (Const. #2)¹² To these he added the daily exposition of the Blessed Sacrament (#4), the annual celebration in June with “exercises of piety” to prepare for the celebration of the Feast of the Sacred Heart (#5), the imitation of the virtues and perfections of the Sacred Heart (#6) and the efforts toward “winning souls to the Lord Jesus and to sustain in them a greater love and greatest devotion towards the Heart of Jesus.” (#7) In general, these practices of the devotion to the Sacred Heart remained in force in most Dehonian communities until the 1970s. At this

⁹ For Fr. Dehon France was a privileged place in the Heart of Christ. See, for example, part of his discourse in *De la vie d'amour envers le Sacré Cœur de Jésus* (1887): “Notre Seigneur a aimé la France d'un amour de prédilection. Nous pouvons le dire sans orgueil. L'Église n'appelle-t-elle pas cette nation privilégiée sa fille aînée? Nous avons mérité, il est vrai, par notre ingratitude de perdre cette faveur, mais la miséricorde du Cœur de Jésus nous sauvera... Nul au monde ne nous conteste ce témoignage de l'amour du Sauveur, c'est la France qui a reçu ce don. C'est elle qui a la première pratiqué et répandu cette dévotion.” VAM 8-9.

¹⁰ Even though Fr. Dehon makes frequent references to Blessed Margaret Mary in his writings, especially in his *Mois du Sacré-Coeur* (1900), and retained her practices of the devotion to the Sacred Heart, the social and cultural context for the devotion had changed. In his letter to Pope Leo XIII in 1882 he states that the motive for founding a Congregation came from Margaret Mary. But it was already a different devotion: “In revealing his Heart, our Lord asked for love and reparation, adding that it was particularly for consecrated souls that he awaited this affective compassion which would console him for the ingratitude of so many, and for expressing the sensitivity of his heart for the indifference of such privileged souls.” Fr. Dehon is here clearly pointing to the role of priests and their power in the public domain.

¹¹ In a letter written to Fr. Dehon on April 21, 1877, Mère Ulrich writes: “Si je ne me trompe il faudrait aussi des âmes sacerdotals pour cette réparation, mais Notre Seigneur fera accomplir sa volonté à cet effet à son temps.” (NHV 12/152) See also A. Perroux, *Le Père Fr. Dehon et Mère Marie du Cœur de Jésus: Les Prêtres du Sacré-Coeur et les Soeurs Servantes du Cœur de Jésus* (Recueil de documents sur les relations entre les deux Congrégations), *Studia Fr. Dehoniana* 46.2, Roma: Centro Generale Studi, 2003, 2 vol.

¹² Margaret Mary Alacoque was beatified by Pius IX in 1864, the year Léon Dehon began his theological studies in Rome.

point, as also the encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* noted, the devotion to the Sacred Heart was in decline in the West.¹³

At the urging of the post-Vatican church at this point a new hermeneutical interpretation of the founder was made. The hermeneutic of the devotion that became the *Rule of Life* of the Congregation (1979, 1985) has received a high level of acceptance in the Congregation. How valid is this hermeneutic? It is perhaps important to note that the *Rule of Life* makes no reference to St. Margaret Mary and the recognized devotional practices of the devotion of the 17th century¹⁴, nor to practices of the Soeurs Servantes of Saint Quentin of Fr. Dehon's time. The *Rule of Life* incorporated a Sacred Heart devotion that clearly took into account the general efforts of reinterpretation of the devotion since Fr. Dehon's time. Most ecclesial documents on the Sacred Heart had begun to insert the devotion into the patristic, scriptural and liturgical mainstream of the Catholic Church. This is evident in the texts of the liturgy of the feast of the Sacred Heart and in the establishment of the Sunday of Divine Mercy as the summation of the Easter event. In these texts, we perceive a new weighting and understanding of John 19.37, the piercing of the side of Jesus, in the life of the Church, but also the referencing of the Fathers of the Church and the influence of the Rhineland mystics.

This *aggiornamento* of the devotion is fully present in the *Rule*. The question for the Congregation today is whether the *Rule of Life* presents an authentic re-reading of Fr. Dehon that is able to feed the life of the Congregation in North America in the 21st century? Perhaps, it is important to note in this context that the *Rule* was the response mainly of the European members at the General Chapters of 1973 and 1979 and shows a European mode of reading the devotion.¹⁵ The current attraction to the notion of divine mercy is perhaps one indicator of a popular direction the devotion might take, but despite Pope Francis' efforts there is no a clear indication what devotional practices could evolve for today.¹⁶

¹³ In order to show that the devotion to the Sacred Heart has its roots in the longer tradition of the Church and was therefore not dependent on the apparitions to St. Margaret Mary, the encyclical makes no mention of Margaret Mary. The encyclical *Haurietis Aquas* sought to bring the celebration of the Heart of Christ into the mainspring of Catholic faith.

¹⁴ It is good to note that in the earliest version of the *Rule of Life*, (1985), contained in its introductory pages the first two chapters of the 1956 Constitutions. The General Chapter of 1973 insisted the historical memory of the practices promoted by Fr. Dehon be retained as part of the new *Rule of Life*. In the latest version of the *Rule of Life* (2011) the first two chapters are omitted.

¹⁵ Indigenous members of mission territories were not yet present at the chapters. See Stefan Tertünte, "Une règle pour la vie – une règle a vivre. Plus qu'une page d'histoire: Le témoignage du p. Perroux sur l'élaboration de notre Règle de Vie," *Dehonianadocs 2014/13*

¹⁶ Until recently the presence of the notion of mercy in Fr. Dehon's writings was not recognized in the Congregation. The topic of the Twenty-third Chapter has changed that. See the issue of *Dehoniana* (Anno XIII, 2015) which was dedicated to "Il dono del XXIII Capitolo Generale."

b. The theological foundation of the Sacred Heart devotion in Fr. Dehon's writings

Before we leave the area of the practices associated by Fr. Dehon with the Sacred Heart, it is important to search in his other writings to determine whether he had other, more developed, notions on the Heart of Christ. We will need, for this point, to go beyond the practices. We presume from his writings that Fr. Dehon, as superior general of the Congregation, put into practice what the first Constitutions put forward as the devotional life of the congregation.¹⁷ But did he go beyond these practices? It is interesting to note a clear distinction in the writings of Fr. Dehon. On the one hand, we find the somewhat narrow context of the devotion to the Heart of Christ of the Soeurs Servantes, which he borrowed for the official writings of the Congregation as found in the Constitutions of 1885 and the *Directoire spirituel*. Here there is little development from the traditional language and practices of the devotion. On the other hand, Fr. Dehon over time developed a deep spiritual understanding of the Heart of Christ which opens up another perspective to the devotion, much more in line with our contemporary understanding.

This second interpretation that we wish to explore further gives us new avenues for our contemporary following of Fr. Dehon. This secondary avenue is based on an elaborate spiritual theology of love. It is possible to uncover this in two developments in his life: (1) his post-*consummatum-est* spiritual trajectory which broadened his own mystical life. We find this reflected in his seven books of meditations on the Heart of Christ¹⁸ and (2) in his understanding of his pastoral activities as exemplified in his early ministry at the Basilica parish in Saint Quentin and subsequently in his 15-year-involvement with the publication of *Le règne du Sacré-Coeur dans les âmes et les sociétés*.

What is so new in his books and articles about his understanding of the heart of Christ? In his books of meditations on the Sacred Heart, in particular, Fr. Dehon gives a much more theological approach than in his more constitutional texts, which followed mainly the devotional practices of St. Margaret Mary and the Soeurs Servantes. In every case, these meditations begin with the ineffable love of God/Father. In other words, somewhat surprisingly, his point of departure in all these mediations is the eternal mystery of love, God's love. So, for instance, the first

¹⁷ Throughout his life Fr. Dehon remained faithful to the practices that are described in the Constitutions. This is also clear from the list of practices that Fr. Dehon noted in his *Directoire spirituel*. See below for the list.

¹⁸ *La devotion au Sacré-Coeur de Jésus* (1887); *La retraite du Sacré-Coeur* (1896); *Mois du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus* (1900); *De la vie d'amour* (1901); *Couronnes d'amour* (1905); *Le Cœur sacerdotal de Jésus* (1907); *L'année avec le Sacré-Coeur* (1919); *Vie intérieur. Ses Principes* (1919); *Directoire spirituel* (1919); *Études sur le Sacré-Coeur* (2 vol) (1922). It is important to note that these books were written later in his life, after his more social texts. Most of these texts are meditations for retreats for the members of the Congregation.

five meditations of *Le Coeur sacerdotal de Jésus* of 1907, dedicated as they are to the priesthood of Christ, begin with the priesthood of Christ originating in the womb of the Father and in Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit. The point of departure for Fr. Dehon is here clearly a trinitarian. Unlike in the popular devotion with its distinctive practices, Fr. Dehon here delves underneath the devotion and presents the devotion in a trinitarian mode, using an outline provided by the French spiritual tradition of Pierre de Berulle. The meditations on the Sacred Heart present the Sacred Heart by going through the mysteries of Christ in Incarnation, the hidden life, the public life and the passion and death of Jesus. In other words, for Fr. Dehon the primary origin of the Heart of Christ lies in the bosom of the Father. These meditations indicate how for Fr. Dehon the devotion is primarily Trinitarian. Thus, for instance, in *La Retraite du Sacré-Coeur* (1896) the first meditation is entitled "God is charity." For Fr. Dehon everything starts there. He critiqued the exercises of St. Ignatius because they begin with the miserable condition of creatures and not with God's love.¹⁹ All spiritual life must start with God's love – God's inner-trinitarian love. Also, the devotion to the Heart of Christ.

In the theological tradition of Fr. Dehon, this love is named oblation, God's self-offering, or self-sacrifice, for our sake, or as the Creed says, "for our salvation." This love, in other words, takes on a redemptive coloration. It is for this reason that also the incarnation of the Son of God is presented as receiving its fulfilment in the "sacrifice of the cross." It reflects the overwhelming staurocentric understanding of the incarnation in the 19th century.²⁰ God's self-gift in love is understood not as a self-gift to the Other – which is the Son – that is, as an exemplar of the agency of love. Love is translated as a sacrifice of self, not as a gift of the self as part of an identity where the self is relationally in an other. The self-gift is not allowed to stand on its own as the identity of God, Father, Son and Spirit: God's selfhood as self-gift in the other. The Son's self-gift as the identity of God/Father is transformed into the gift of the Son to humanity in the mystery of the incarnation and especially in the passion. Fr. Dehon's theology, in the context of his time does not consider both the eternal generation of the Son and creation as the first expression of this overflow of God's self-gift and circle of love that is the Trinity. He turns immediately to the incarnation and passion. The revelation of God as self-gift is not a making-visible of God's triune love, but a self-gift for humanity's salvation from sin. A theology which incorporates better the event of the resurrection, which Fr. Dehon does not, is

¹⁹ See the doctoral dissertation of Gabriel Pisarek, *L'influsso degli esercizi spirituali di Sant'Ignazio in P.Fr. Dehon*, (Roma: StudiaFr. Dehoniana, 2016, # 61)

²⁰ Although it must be added that Fr. Dehon is aware of the Scotist tradition in which redemption is not the primary motive of the Incarnation. See *De la charité qui dépasse toute science*, Louvain, vol. I, p. 27-28

capable of a more generous approach to God's love and to a devotion to the Heart of Christ.²¹

In Fr. Dehon's writings, the revelation of God's love is found in three specific moments: the inner trinitarian life with a focus of the incarnation of the Son, the hidden and public life of Jesus with at its apex the passion of Jesus, and the Eucharist. The three moments reflect the original self-gift of Christ to the Father. In the spiritual and theological language of Fr. Dehon, all this is captured in the notion of oblation. In current English usage, oblation carries a sacrificial connotation. The Webster dictionary defines oblation as an offering made in worship or a grateful gift in return. It no longer covers sufficiently the original self-gift of Jesus to the Father and to us "for our salvation". For Fr. Dehon, the love of Jesus is a love of oblation. It overcomes the brokenness of humanity through a sacrificial act of suffering. It is a sacrificial love that conquers sin. What emerges is a Christology of love and immolation/oblation, where the emphasis lies on the sacrificial death on the cross. The language centers on the sacrificial dimension of love, love as an immolation of the self, which, perhaps for our time, is too negative an understanding of love as a denial of self rather than as a love for the other. What is obviously lacking for us in this context is an understanding of the resurrection.

In the oblation which Fr. Dehon made a trademark of his followers, priests were to be united to the oblation mission of Christ to return humanity to God, by becoming one with Christ. In the Berullian French spirituality this meant that they must unite themselves to all the actions of Jesus, making his life their own. It called for a union with Christ in the mystery of his infancy, public ministry and passion. Here Fr. Dehon follows the conviction of French spirituality that one must take on the virtues exemplified in the life of Jesus.²² In Fr. Dehon's meditations on the heart of Jesus, there emerges a pattern of the virtues of Christian life held high in the 19th century (humility, purity, detachment, poverty, obedience).²³

²¹ See "The gift of the forgiving victim" in Brian D. Robinette, *Grammars of Resurrection: A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence*, (New York, Herder & Herder, Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009) p. 291 - 318

²² This explains the structure of Fr. Dehon's *Couronnes d'amour* (1905) in which the mysteries of the Sacred Heart of the first crown take up the infancy of Jesus, his hidden life in Nazareth, and his apostolic life. The same pattern is followed in *Coeur sacerdotal de Jésus* (1907). Below, I will return to discuss the virtues of Jesus Christ.

²³ See *La retraite du Sacred Coeur*. After the initial six meditations on the love of God, the meditations enter into the mystery of sin, and the need to return God's love which explores the stories of conversion in the Gospel (Zachaeus, Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene, Peter). The model that Fr. Dehon puts before the retreatants is that of the Sacred Heart in his humility, purity, detachment, and obedience. The retreat itself ends with a reflection on the apostolic vocation: generosity of love, imitation of the Sacred Heart, sacrifice as "le comble de l'amour", union as the endpoint of love, and the Eucharist. It is a cycle from love to love. The *Couronnes d'amour* (1905) follows the same pattern. The three crowns are the incarnation, the passion and the Eucharist.

In this context, it is important to make one further clarification of Fr. Dehon’s theology of the Heart of Christ. For Fr. Dehon this heart is not a symbolic heart. It is the physical heart. Fr. Dehon is utterly realistic in his assertion that the *agape* of God has taken flesh. It has found its residence in the physical heart, as intimate affection, as super-generous fire for humanity: “this heart is of flesh, but it is alive; human love makes it beat and fills it because of its hypostatic union with the Word of God. In this heart, we meet mercy and truth; there justice and peace embrace.”²⁴ As he says in the introduction to the *Mois du Sacré-Coeur* (1900): “The adoration, rendered to the humanity of Christ, is not given to this humanity, as *separated*, but to his humanity as *united* to the Word, in the person of Christ. It is similar to the cult given to the parts of this humanity. The incarnate Word is proposed especially to our adoration in his Heart, because it is one of the most noble organs of his humanity, an organ most intimately at stake in the affections of Christ, an organ which symbolizes perfectly his love for us. Such are the motives for a cult to the Sacred Heart.” (RSC 1)²⁵

c. A life patterned on the oblation of the Sacred Heart

Fr. Dehon saw the life of his followers as patterned on the logic of oblation: love and reparation. It is a simple structure; in its simplicity, it was very attractive. Dehonian life is a following of Jesus because he exemplified a life of oblation to the Father and for us. Followers of Jesus practice his virtues. In his *Directoire spirituelle*, Fr. Dehon enumerates these virtues and then mentions the practices of this spirituality.

Exercise of piety

Prayer

Meditation

Holy Office

Eucharist

Virtues of our vocation

Living faith

Confiance

Pure love of God

Thanksgiving

²⁴ L. Dehon, *De la charité*, p. 39. See also RSC 3,4.

²⁵ “L’adoration qui est rendue à l’humanité du Christ n’est pas rendue à cette humanité *séparée*, mais à l’humanité *unie* au Verbe dans la personne du Christ. Il en est de même du culte rendu aux parties de cette humanité. Le Verbe incarné est proposé spécialement à notre adoration dans son Cœur parce que c’est un des organes les plus nobles de son humanité, un organe dont le jeu est intimement uni aux affections du Christ, un organe qui symbolise parfaitement son amour pour nous. Tels sont les motifs du culte rendu au Sacré Cœur. »

« Adorer le Cœur de Jésus, ce n’est donc pas autre chose qu’adorer le Verbe incarné en tant qu’il est revêtu de ces «entrailles de miséricorde, dans lesquelles il nous a visités» (Saint Luc, chapitre premier).” (RSC 1) See also RSC 3-4: “Le Cœur de Jésus symbolise à la fois l’amour infini et créé qui a inspiré au Verbe sa venue vers nous sur la terre, et l’amour humain et créé qui l’a conduit jusqu’à la croix. Mais, parce que le Verbe de Dieu s’est incarné, pour nous sauver et pour nous donner l’exemple de la sainteté, son Cœur n’est pas seulement adorable, il est aussi infiniment aimable, et nous avons en lui le modèle de toutes les vertus. “

Eucharist and communion of reparation	Love of neighbour
Eucharistic reparation	Humility
First Friday of the month	Simplicity
Sacred Scripture and pious reading	Fidelity
Sacrament of penance	Vigilance
Examen of conscience	Order in little things
Three sacred Hearts	regularity
Union with the mysteries of the Lord	Pure intention
Rosary and devotion to Mary	Good example
Month of devotions and novena (June)	Perseverance
retreat	Abnegation / detachment / renunciation
	Welcoming
	Fidelity to grace and zeal for one's sanctification
	Mortification
	Abandonment
	Joy in trial and love of the cross
	Union with our Lord and interior life
	Devotion to the Eucharist
	Zeal
	Love of the Church

d. Dehon's societal spirituality

A final point to be made about Fr. Dehon's theology of the Sacred Heart touches on what we might call his social spirituality. For Fr. Dehon the impact of God's love revealed in the Heart of Christ went beyond a personal spiritual life. It also intended a societal, civilizational impact. Fr. Dehon hung on to an image of Christianity as a distinct *civitas*. The spiritual driving force for this new political and social civilization, he felt, was to be the love of God – amour pur – symbolized in the Heart of Christ.

Although this societal intent of Fr. Dehon's devotion to the Sacred Heart was not overt in his earliest writings, it was, however, latent in his apostolate. From the beginning of his ministry in the Basilica parish in Saint-Quentin, his energies were given not to formal parish ministry but to the social arena of the parish, particularly in education and workers' issues. In 1887 he acknowledged for the first time that this activity "out of the sacristy" which he called "the reign of the Sacred Heart", was the second aim of his Institute, the first being priestly reparation.²⁶ With the founding of the periodical *Le règne du Sacré Coeur dans les âmes et dans les sociétés* this expansion of the devotion to the social became more explicit.²⁷ Having been awakened to a more social understanding through, what Albert Bourgeois suggests, was an inherent social and political dimension of the original message of Paray-le-Monial,²⁸ Fr. Dehon began to gradually connect the more interiorized, intimist version of the devotion (a reparative priesthood) to a social and institutional reparation.²⁹ How he envisaged this became clear gradually in *Le règne*.

He began to see the acts of reparation, the prayers, the acts of immolation and oblation of the devotion as a way to overcome and heal the ills of the revolution. As became clear in 1893, he began to see the private acts of the devotion as a way to effect social change and transformation. In the notes for the retreat of that year – a very intense experience of the Ignatian exercises – it became clear that what he sought to insert into the social was what, in the Ignatian exercises, is called "pure love".³⁰ Pure love, as an image of God's love symbolized in the Heart of Jesus, is a love that asks for no return. It is purely gratuitous. It was this sort of pure love that Fr. Dehon sought to insert into the social. The focus was not on the social action itself but on the force of love that was to permeate the action. What Fr. Dehon sought was a social mysticism. That is why he considered his social work to be fundamentally

²⁶ AD, B 24/8b, inventaire 506.06. The term is found in the correspondence of Fr. Dehon with Fr. Matovelle who indicated to Fr. Dehon that what was primary for him was the reign of the Sacred Heart in souls and in societies. At the time – in 1887 – Fr. Dehon sought to amalgamate Matovelle's *Oblats de l'Amour divin* with his Institute.

²⁷ Albert Bourgeois points to 1889–1892 as «une sorte d'ouverture progressive à la dimension sociale et aussi politique que comporte nécessairement tout engagement pour le «règne»». *Le père Fr. Dehon* (see note 61)

²⁸ Albert Bourgeois, « Le père Fr. Dehon et «le règne du Coeur de Jesus. 1893–1903», in: *Studia Fr. Dehoniana SCJ*, 25/2 (1994), 40. In 1690, in a letter shortly before her death, Marguerite-Marie Alacoque urged Louis XIV to dedicate the kingdom of France to the Sacred Heart and to have the emblem of the Sacred Heart inscribed on the arms and standards of the French army. It is the first indication of the politicization of the Sacred Heart.

²⁹ Daniele Menozzi (*Sacro Cuore: un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione cristiana della società*, Roma 2001) points to Fr. Dehon as a classical example of this social turn. This shift occurred not only in France but also in Belgium, Austria and Italy. Fr. Dehon was not the innovator here. Others had moved in this direction. During this time of a dynamic spiritual movement in France after 1889, he became an important voice of those who refused to accept the isolation of Catholic life from the social and economic engagement

³⁰ The retreat notes are found interspersed in «*Le règne*» between 1898 and 1901 and in the *Oeuvres spirituelles 2*, 9–172. The role of pure love in Fr. Dehon was a frequent topic during these important years as the main propellant of his vision. A more detailed description of «pure love» is found in Fr. Dehon's «*Les Couronnes d'amour*» published in 1905. Pure love, Fr. Dehon writes, comes from the «grace to ask with each meditation to permit us to rejoice in the resurrection and the triumph of our Lord, for love of him, and forgetting ourselves.»

operative at the moral and social level and not at the political level. The shift of perspective did not affect the devotion as such but only its aim, which he felt was destroyed by the Revolution – “the immediate enemy of the reign of the Heart of Jesus”.

Dehon was convinced that the social anemia would be destroyed not by social programs, by a greater emphasis on justice, but by love, the love that he had found in and was represented by the Sacred Heart. “It is necessary”, he writes in the first article of *Le Règne*, “that the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, begun in the mystical life of souls, descends and penetrates in the social life of peoples.”³¹ Albert Bourgeois insists that Fr. Dehon was writing here not as a sociologist but as a priest.³² Fr. Dehon’s concern here and elsewhere was moral and pastoral.³³ In other words, Léon Dehon wrote his social tracts in order to protect Christians who lived in what he considered the poisoned social environment of his time from the harmful effects of the French Revolution and its laïcist social program. The remedy was love.

What Fr. Dehon was interested in was not the “institutionalization of political Catholicism”³⁴. He wanted “to depoliticize Catholic organizations and transform them to voluntary semi-religious associations.”³⁵ For Fr. Dehon one did not first of all belong to a political order but to a spiritual order. According to Fr. Dehon, one does not define one’s position in function of the state but in relation to the Church.³⁶ In the understanding of the time, the Church was a perfect society. This gave him an uncompromising key to judge society, particularly the secular model of France. In this, Fr. Dehon worked with the tools that his image of Church provided.

The cult of the Sacred Heart was for him not only the starting point but also its end point. It was a belief, and Fr. Dehon wanted to make this belief operative in the whirl of the socio-political and economic history of France in the 19th century. Although he was convinced that this was primarily a religious or social postulate – not a political one – it had institutional repercussions inasmuch as he believed in corporatism, decentralization, and the restoration of intermediate corporative or syndical social

³¹ Léon Dehon, Les opportunités du règne du Sacré-Cœur, in: *Œuvres Sociales: Les articles 1889–1922*, Roma 1978, 3.

³² Albert Bourgeois, Le père Fr. Dehon et «le règne du Coeur de Jesus. 1893–1903», in: *Studia Fr. Dehoniana SCJ*, 25/2 (1994), 69

³³ Fr. Dehon sums up his social engagement in 1897 as follows: «un engagement pastoral pour une action religieuse qui va au-delà de la dévotion et de la charité.» (RCJ 1897, 41)

³⁴ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*, Ithaca/London 1996, 80

³⁵ Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy* 87. With the fear of Catholics to form political parties in the latter part of the 19th century, Kalvas points to «the absence of a Catholic political identity»

³⁶ Yves Ledure, « Doctrine sociale et projet de société chez Fr. Dehon », in: *Rerum Novarum en France – Le P. Fr. Dehon et l’engagement social de l’Église* (Colloque de Paris, mars 1991), Paris, 1991, 140.

bodies, and in the final analysis, a conception of society in its totality.³⁷ For Fr. Dehon, these intermediate, corporative bodies were not political entities. For us they are. And so, for us, a social vision inspired by justice and charity of the Gospel must in the end promote institutional preferences. Because of his point of departure, his social teachings led Fr. Dehon into uncharted territory once he was forced to identify the historical agents of “pur amour” and the opponents of the Sacred Heart.

In the context of our devotional life, this expansion of the Sacred Heart into the Reign of the Sacred Heart in societies, thrusts the devotion to the Sacred Heart also in the direction of social engagement. It induced Fr. Dehon to become involved in the world of education and workers. Although he engaged a number of his early companions into the social activities of Léon Harmel at Val des Bois, it is not surprising, seeing Fr. Dehon’s spiritual approach to society, that he never stipulated for his followers where this pure love was to lead them in their work. The *Rule of Life* reiterates this: “Although our Institute was not founded for a specific work, it gets from the Founder some apostolic orientations, which characterize its mission in the Church” (#30).³⁸

C. Towards an aesthetic and practical theology of the spirituality of the Heart of Christ.

Where do we turn from here? What sort of refiguration of the devotion to the Sacred Heart can be suggested for the 21st century? In one of his last writings, Karl Rahner asked why the Sacred Heart devotion had undergone such a downward spiral. He cannot imagine a Church without the devotion. In a time of such religious diversity, such universal hopes and so many disillusioned people, the Church needs “sources of new life and witnesses of God’s grace in the world.”³⁹ The world needs the word “heart”, God’s heart in whatever way imagined, to have a place “where in the midst of multiple realities, everything is still one”: “Therefore, according to Rahner, when we say “Sacred Heart,” we evoke the innermost center of Jesus Christ and say that this innermost center of Jesus is filled with the mystery of God, where in the deadly frightening contradiction to all our experiences of emptiness, nothingness, and death we find in this heart the infinite love with which God gives himself.”⁴⁰ We can stand in the world only when we give ourselves totally to the love of God, when we know this world as loved by God. For Rahner, this is what is said and believed when we invoke the Heart of Christ.

³⁷ See the interesting work of René Rémond on the basis of the ecclesiastical Congress of Reims of 1896, *Les deux congrès ecclésiastiques de Reims et de Bourges 1896–1900*, Paris 1964, 75.

³⁸ The *Rule of Life* does mention the great importance which Fr. Dehon gave to the formation of priests and religious and to missionary activity. (#31)

³⁹ Karl Rahner, “Herz-Jesu-Verehrung heute,” in *Geistliche Schriften*, Band 29 of *Sämtliche Werke*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, Herder, 2007, p. 233.

⁴⁰ Karl Rahner, “Herz-Jesu-Verehrung heute” p. 240.

This is the challenge to which the Congregation is called, if it does not wish to lose sight of this faith in the innermost reality of Love pervading all. It is the underlying message and faith of Fr. Dehon. However, it is clear from his writings, it is not the externals of the devotion and its practices that engage Fr. Dehon. It is God's love and mercy of which the Heart of Christ was the symbol. It remains so for us.

In what follows, we propose some orientations for future reflections and some methodological considerations.

1. Results of *Anthropologia Cordis*:

For the Congregation's future reflection on our spirituality from the North American perspective we propose to start with the conclusions of *Anthropologia Cordis*, the 2014 theological seminar in Taubat . From the seminar, we would like to draw attention to some of its conclusions.⁴¹

- a. Within the general critique of contemporary society at the Taubat  symposium – cf. Gianni Colzani's presentation of our society "without a home," "without a face," and "without a heart"⁴² – it became clear that a new anthropology needs to take root in the West. In the North Atlantic region, this anthropology must be an antidote to the excessive concentration on the ego which emerged out of the Cartesian *dubito* of the 17th century and which endures into the present. The analysis of the responses of the North American members indicated some of the repercussions of this excessive search for authenticity and an overly strong reaction to any authoritative, community-based action. Colzani in his presentation at the seminar pointed to Levinas' notion of alterity as a contemporary ethical counter vision of Western attempts to control reality and to reduce difference. In John van den Hengel's pre-seminar paper, *The Self as Witness: An Anthropology of the Heart*, he presented another model of such an anthropology in the work of Paul Ricoeur.⁴³ In Ricoeur's practical philosophy, the anthropological self is a project or a capacity determined not by an interiority or self-assertion but by an other.⁴⁴ He called for a practical hermeneutics, which is open to give testimony to the call of God and to discipleship.⁴⁵ It interprets the divine interaction with the human as a call or a vocation in which the self is convoked by the Other or the neighbour. It asks how divine *agape* translates into

⁴¹ Maurizio Rossi, "Seminario Anthropologia cordis Taubat , 2-7 febbraio 2014, *Anthropologia cordis*, Roma: Centro StudiFr. Dehoniani, 2016, esp. p. 411-413.

⁴² Gianni Colzani, "Anthropologia Cordis" in *Anthropologia cordis*, p. 225 - 271

⁴³ *Anthropologia Cordis*, Roma: Centro StudiFr. Dehoniani, 2016, p. 107 -132.

⁴⁴ See his *Soi-m me comme un autre*, Paris: Seuil, 1990.

⁴⁵ John van den Hengel, "The Self as Witness: An Anthropology of the Heart," in *Anthropologia cordis*, 2016, p. 107 – 131.

human action which gives witness to the surplus of love evidenced in the ministry and words of Jesus. It emphasized the modern Western societies' lack of an authentic relationship to the transcendent. It has led to the shrinking of the self to the ego.

- b. The Seminar of Taubate also reflected on a style of theology that could help in the recuperation of a more authentic self. It came from a reaction of the African participants of the Seminar. They argued that the Colzani paper was culturally determined. They did not identify with his characterization of society "without a home, without a face, without a heart." Modernity in its Western face has not penetrated into all parts of the world. It showed the first fruitfulness of the decision by the organizers to opt for an approach for the seminar to the cultural presences in the Congregation. It was the first time, for instance, that the European presence was contested by the African voice.⁴⁶ The seminar had clearly opted for this enculturated approach and this approach will be continued in the seminar of Yogyakarta in 2017. These other voices will hopefully mitigate the incessant narcissism of the Western voice.
- c. A third impulse came from the presentation of Marcello Neri.⁴⁷ He sought to gauge the viability of Fr. Dehon's understanding of the spiritual for our time. He asked, "Is it possible to take Fr. Dehon's faith experience in all its singularity and live it in the current, very different European civilization and the Church?"⁴⁸ His presentation was a call for a refiguration of Fr. Dehon's spiritual vision in an aesthetic theology. Only an aesthetic approach, he maintained, can provide the minimal grammar for a style of being in the world which seeks to live the becoming flesh of the divine *agape*. His contribution was a tour de force through the works of Fr. Dehon, calling for a much more differentiated, affective approach to Fr. Dehon's writings. This paper will gratefully make use of his article for its approach.

From Fr. Dehon's works, it is clear, we should not expect a more speculative or intellectual appropriation of the theology of the Heart of Christ. Fr. Dehon did not present himself as a systematic theologian. This is clear from the genre of writing he uses to have his followers appropriate this *agape* as a way of life: the meditation. The genre meditation leads not to a search for speculative truth. Its

⁴⁶ "I lavori in gruppo e I dibattiti in aula: Africa" *Anthropologia cordis*, 2016, p. 345-350.

⁴⁷ "Uno stile per la Spirito: Temi antropologici negli scritti spirituali di L. Dehon," in *Anthropologia cordis*, 2016, p. 293 – 344. However much we appreciated the innovative approach to Fr. Dehon by Marcello Neri, there is insufficient distinction made between the aesthetic and the practical. Each has its own operations, leading to distinct judgments. The distinction of practical and aesthetic operations will form the basis of our response.

⁴⁸ "Uno stile per la Spirito" p. 295.

operation, in Lonergan's language, is not intellectual but practical and aesthetic.⁴⁹ If we wish to examine the Dehonian style of approach to the Heart of Christ, we will have to turn to the aesthetic and practical operations in his writings. In the rest of the paper, I will examine this theological style of Fr. Dehon's writings in order to find the language and the practices that correspond best to his approach to the love of the Heart of Christ. They may give us a key to a contemporary interpretation.

2. The aesthetic moment: *amour pur* of the Heart of Christ

If Fr. Dehon uses mainly the genre of meditation to write about the Heart of Christ, what are the repercussions of such an aesthetic approach? To understand an aesthetic approach to theology, I turn to Lonergan's *Method in Theology* where he introduces the cognitive operations of theology. Lonergan distinguishes four cognitional operations in theology: the intellectual, practical, aesthetic and decision. He maintains that while the cognitional operations of each are distinct, the underlying structure of these cognitional operations remains the same.⁵⁰ In each cognitional operation, Lonergan identifies a recurrent, invariant pattern, consisting of experience, understanding and judgment. For example, in an intense liturgical experience the believer interacts differently with the *mysterium tremendum*, has a different pattern of experience than he or she does when confronted with a moral dilemma. Yet in both the aesthetic and the practical operations, one starts with experience, that is, with the way that something affects the subject, passes on to understanding to end up with a judgment. Applying this invariant structure to the study of the devotion to the Heart of Christ, we ask what style of theology is appropriate to it and will then expose its recurrent pattern. With Marcello Neri we acknowledge that the primary style of Fr. Dehon's theology is aesthetic. So, we begin there. Our first move will be to explore the recurrent pattern of experience, understanding and judgment of Fr. Dehon's aesthetic approach to the devotion to the Heart of Christ.⁵¹

a. Aesthetic experience: the presence of the beautiful⁵²

⁴⁹ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 5th Ed., rev. and augm., *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 3, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 633 and 647.

⁵⁰ Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*.

⁵¹ James Pambrun, "Conflict in Current Roman Catholic Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 76 (2015) p. 439.

⁵² I draw here upon the classic text of Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, Tr. by Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Domingo and Leon Jacobson. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973. Mikel Dufrenne names the invariant structure of the aesthetic: presence, representation and reflection, paralleling Lonergan's experience, understanding and judgment. See the helpful article of James R. Pambrun, "Interiority, Cognitional Operations, and Aesthetic Judgment: In Dialogue with John Dadosky and Mikel Dufrenne," in *Philosophy and Theology*, 26, number 2, 2014, p. 307-341.

The aesthetic experience of a work of art, liturgy or the mystical is a deep bodily experience. It is deeply-felt relation or attentiveness of the body to the world. The world is *felt* as sensuous or attractive. The aesthetic feeling is an act of recognition by the body of something (a painting, scenery) as beautiful. This is not a conscious act; it is prior to consciousness. In philosophical language, it is a pre-understanding, an act of the body sensing itself as belonging, participating, in a world. It is the world to me in its pre-figured sense, a sort of pre-conscious knowing that can be developed, but is a knowing nevertheless that can become the incentive to my curiosity. In the words of Jim Pambrun, “The world calls for my attention; it awakens my body.”⁵³ At the preconscious level it is an unarticulated sensation of my body in its relation to the world.

Dehon’s devotion to the Heart of Christ began as such an aesthetic experience. This aesthetic pre-understanding of the Heart of Christ at the intimist level may have come from Fr. Dehon’s apperception of his mother’s devotion to the Sacred Heart from whom young Leo received *le petit manuel du Sacré-Coeur*. From his youth he had an appreciation and devotion to the Sacred Heart which he shared with many in France. For the primordial perception of Fr. Dehon’s devotion to the Heart of Christ at the social level, we can best begin with his expressed aversion to the pastoral parish ministry of “selected families” in order to become a “prêtre religieux de Dieu” open to a ministry at the periphery among workers, youth and child workers. (NHV 12/152) In both cases these apperceptions evolved.

b. The representational moment in aesthetics: a world awakened to the Heart of Christ

The second operation of the aesthetic emerges when the perception aroused in my body by a unique tree in the forest, a painting, the liturgical enactment, incites me to understand it. My curiosity is aroused. To understand what provoked my aesthetic experience I need to take a step away from what I have perceived or experienced. I am driven by what I have perceived to seek to understand it. I become more aware of my own excitement, my attraction, to what I have seen, heard, or experienced. “What attracts me in what at first appears unusual gives every indication of something to be understood... What appears at the level of presence needs to be assembled, unified in an order.”⁵⁴ What I assemble in the understanding is my own-most world, my cosmos, my being-in-the-world. It is an enhancement of my participation in the world; the world shows its surplus.

⁵³ James Pambrun, “Interiority, Cognitional Operations, and Aesthetic Judgment,” p. 321.

⁵⁴ M. Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, p. 352.

The movement to give form to Fr. Dehon's originary experience of the Heart of Christ seems to have taken place during his chaplaincy at the Soeurs Servantes in Saint-Quentin starting in 1873, leading to the establishment of Collège Saint-Jean and the founding of the Congregation in 1877. Here his earliest apperceptions of a world coloured by the Heart of Christ began to evolve into practices. The more determined search to understand what he had sensed in his first attraction to the Heart of Christ came later when in 1887 he begins to write his meditations on the Heart of Christ in a series of books and when in 1889 he begins the publication of *Le règne*.

c. The reflective moment in aesthetics: the aesthetic judgment

The third operation of the aesthetic is judgment: the affirmation of my experience.⁵⁵ If the initial image affected me and in the representational moment was sought to be understood, what does the aesthetic judgment effect? Dufrenne locates the aesthetic judgment in feeling. This is not sentiment, sentimentality. Feeling is the human self at its most inward. Ricoeur calls it the realm of the "heart", the human being at its most fragile.⁵⁶ This is the human at the devotional level. It is the point of return from the initial attractiveness of something to becoming conscious of my attraction (understanding) to the manifestation of the way that I am affected by a thing, a person, an event: my love, hate, joy, sadness, fear, hope, despair. Feeling reveals the inwardness of the self. It reveals the love-ableness or revulsion that is felt about a thing, person or event. It expresses my attachment to the world. Feeling says that I belong, participate, in this world. Feelings show how I am affected by things, how they touch me. For this reason, "feeling manifests what life aims at... it reveals the orientation of tendencies which direct our lives toward the world."⁵⁷ Mikel Dufrenne reminds us that "Authentic feeling must be earned" in as much as also aesthetic judgment can intensified, trained and refined by becoming more attentive to the world but also to my awareness of my attentiveness to the world.⁵⁸ As such, aesthetic judgment invites us to turn inward, to an intensification of the awareness of my sensuous self, to a deepening of my own relation to the world.

⁵⁵ B. Lonergan, *Insight*, Chapter 9: "The Notion of Judgment", p. 296-303.

⁵⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man: Philosophy of the Will*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1960, p. 124. Ricoeur asks whether a philosophy of the "heart" is possible without it becoming distorted into pathos. For Ricoeur it meant that feeling must be imbued with reason. It means that feeling has a language which Ricoeur identifies at this stage as myth and rhetoric.

⁵⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, p. 137.

⁵⁸ James Pambrun, "Interiority, Cognitional operations..." p. 328.

To determine Fr. Dehon's aesthetic judgment of the Heart of Christ we can turn only to his writings as a testimony to his feelings. About these writings there are two notable aspects.

- A unique literary genre governs Fr. Dehon's approach to the Heart of Christ. It is the genre of meditation. All his writings on the Sacred Heart use the genre of meditation to encourage the Congregation to appropriate the Heart of Christ. Now a literary genre is a generative device in the production of a specific type of discourse.⁵⁹ In other words, Fr. Dehon deliberately used the genre of meditation to generate an aesthetic approach to Christ. Fr. Dehon's favorite style of meditation is known as Sulpician. The goal of the Sulpician method is to lead its practitioners towards an affective union with Christ. It does so by entering with the imagination into the mysteries of Christ's life by what the French spiritual tradition calls the prayer of affection.⁶⁰ All of his meditations end with a part called "Affections and resolutions", leaving the one meditating with a "spiritual bouquet" of scripture quotes to reinforce the affection. Fr. Dehon never tired of repeating that his whole reason for these meditations was to grow in intimate union with Christ. The meditation was his favorite, almost unique, tool.
- If meditation was the method of Fr. Dehon's aesthetic approach, the stated intent was a mystical presence to the *agapé* outpouring of God, of which the incarnated physical heart of Jesus was the symbol or the image. Around this mystery of love circle all the meditations of Léon Dehon. At the absolute origin of this *agapé*, as we have suggested above, Fr. Dehon places the eternal self-gift of the Father, an outpouring of love that is revealed in the incarnation and in the life and passion of Jesus and in the Eucharist. As Fr. Dehon says, Jesus should be our "sole model ... whatever virtue you study, view it as exemplified in the life of Jesus. By these means you will arrive, without effort, at the point of spending your life in his Heart, for he will be the sole object of your thoughts, your preoccupations, your memory, your affections." (VAM 314) This is the mystery that attracted Fr. Dehon which he sought to understand and make his own. It coloured his world view. The point of these meditations is to evoke in the person feelings of gratitude, sadness, eagerness to receive the gift of love, a sense of *confiance*, that is, what the Germans say with *Geborgenheit*, the warm feeling of being safe and secure in the presence of God.⁶¹ In the words of Fr. Dehon, "Yes, it is

⁵⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory, Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: The Texas Christian University, 1976) p. 33.

⁶⁰ Pierre de Bérulle, *Bref exercice pour parvenir à la vertu, 1604*. William Thompson, *Bérulle and the French School* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Anne Ferarri, *Figure de la contemplation* (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

⁶¹ See for instance Fr. Dehon's meditation 11 of *De la Vie de l'Amour envers le Sacré-Coeur de Jésus*, which speaks of "sur l'amour de confiance et de l'union" or the final meditation of *Couronnes d'Amour*, vol. I, where *confiance* is

confiance which saves us. It is *confiance* which leads us to interior life, to contemplation. It is *confiance* which makes us perfect in forgetting self, for those who do not have or have little *confiance* in the Sacred Heart have an excess of *confiance* in themselves.” (CAM 1/268). Or, as he says elsewhere, “The life of love is a life of faith in the conduct of the one who loves us.” (VAM 345) That is why a return of God’s self-gift, God’s oblation, is grounded in this fundamental faith and *confiance* in God’s love. Somewhat ambiguously, as we shall see below, Fr. Dehon also calls this “amour pur”, or disinterested love, a love he equally applies to God and to humans. It is because of the centrality of this love that Fr. Dehon is deeply conscious of what blocks this love. He defines “sin” most frequently as the refusal to acknowledge this love especially by consecrated souls. Conversion for Fr. Dehon is a return to the love of God, a basking in God’s mercy.⁶²

- d. Conclusion: Even a cursory reading of his many meditations will demonstrate that Fr. Dehon seeks to construct an aesthetic approach to union with Christ. He leads his followers into a warm sense of security and safety with Christ because of the awesome self-gift of God as revealed in the pierced side of the crucified and dead Christ. He wants his followers to dwell in the hyper-generous and abundant world of God’s love, making it their spiritual world. As he says in one of his meditations, in a prayer of affection, “the soul is quickly responsive to a movement of affection which turns it toward the Lord. This movement comes from grace and ... is a movement of joy or sadness which results from meditating on the mysteries. It is always a movement of love.” (VAM 276-7) This is the kind of world Fr. Dehon seeks to configure with his meditations. Fr. Dehon wants his followers to operate mainly on the aesthetic level. It is to an aesthetic world that his meditations lead. It is for this reason that meditation, *Lectio divina*, contemplation and Eucharistic adoration play such an important role in his advice to his followers.

3. The praxis of the heart

The aesthetic, however, does not encompass the full picture of Fr. Dehon’s devotion to the Heart of Christ. Above we have alluded to his social spirituality. His devotion

described as the condition which impels the Heart of Jesus to exercise mercy. The felicitous suggestion to translate *confiance* with *Geborgenheit* comes from Marcello Neri in “Uno stile per la Spirito” p. 334. In the words of Levinas, “To love is to love the love which the Beloved bears toward me.” *Totalité et infini, Essai sur l’extériorité* (Dordrecht/ Boston / London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988) p. 244.

⁶² See, for instance, in *La Retraite du Sacré-Coeur* meditations 18 (abuse of grace as a misunderstanding of love), mediation 19 (Mercy of our Lord invites us to return to his love), meditation 20 (Conversion or return to the love of God). The following meditations advert to the conversions of Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene and Peter. In each case these conversions are a turning toward the Heart of Jesus: reflections of the power of love.

has a practical outlet as well as an interior one. That is also evident from the *Rule of Life*. The *Rule of Life* identifies the community as apostolic and religious (#1). It is clear that for Fr. Dehon, the aesthetic appropriation of God's *agape* has practical outlets and gives a specific orientation to a person's moral life. As Fr. Dehon has Jesus say: "The sign by which one recognizes the value of true sentiment is the good works which it inspires ... I ask for an affection which inspires action, an action sustained by affection. Such should be the character of the faithful and of the religious consecrated to my heart." (VAM 492) In light of this affirmation, let us look at the practical operations.

a. The practical experience: an experience of contrast

The practical cognitional operation also begins with an experience, which, like the aesthetic operation, is at first not conscious. Human praxis begins with a pre-conscious awareness of my capacity to effect change in the world. It is a pre-ethical experience mostly discovered in a negation or a lack.⁶³ It often begins as an experience of anguish, failure or fault that leads one to an experience of contrast: this is not how reality ought to be! Fr. Dehon had a highly developed practical sense, and he had his failures and his anguish about his failures. For Fr. Dehon's life we can point to a number of occasions that were such experiences of contrast. For example, we can point to the refusal of his father to recognize Léon's desire to become a priest, his experience of distaste for the ordinary parish ministry, the shock of the *consummatum est* with its non-recognition of the Congregation in its original form, the opposition of Fr. Blancal, the harsh reaction of his Bishop Duval, etc. All of these events led to subsequent movements of understanding, movements which affirmed Fr. Dehon's passion to exist despite all the negations. They did not lead to despair but in looking for ways to overcome these failures.

b. Dehon's practical understanding

It is beyond the scope of this paper to follow all the subsequent developments of Fr. Dehon's practical understanding. David Neuhold's exploration of the practical breaks in Fr. Dehon's life shows the complexity of Fr. Dehon's progressive practical understanding.⁶⁴ Fr. Dehon had a highly developed sense of his capacity to transform the world. It showed in the erection of the Patronat Saint-Joseph, the publication of a newspaper, the building of Collège Saint-Jean, the establishment of the Congregation, his involvement with the Workers' Circles, his many books, and his 15-year run of *Le règne*. Here Fr. Dehon delineated his

⁶³ Paul Ricoeur, *L'homme faible*, (Philosophie de l'esprit) (Paris: Aubier, 1960) p. 151.

⁶⁴ The General Administration in 2014 hired David Neuhold, a post-doctoral student at the Université de Fribourg, to write a biography of Léon Dehon. The framework of his research were the breaking points – the negations – in the life of Fr. Dehon.

practical understanding of the Heart of Christ. Beyond the aesthetics, the Heart of Christ also called for a practical response.

c. Dehon's practical judgment

This is perhaps the most complex part of Fr. Dehon's practical devotion. The paper's title "the surplus of charity" touches on this. Fr. Dehon understood this surplus. It becomes clear in his meditations, where Fr. Dehon stitched together the aesthetic and the practical. The point of departure of all his meditations on the Heart of Christ was God's *agapé*. At the aesthetic level, as we saw, the primacy of God's *agapé* led to a surplus which at the human level calls for reparation, immolation, oblation to make up for the shortfall of the human response. However, in the surplus of charity we are also enjoined to break into the ethical. When we sought to understand better Fr. Dehon's use of *amour pur*, we checked meditation 13 of *De la Vie de l'Amour envers le Sacré-Coeur de Jésus*, which was entitled "Sur l'amour pur et désintéressé", thinking to find there a meditation on God's *amour pur*. Instead we found there an exhortation of a human *amour pur*. (VAM 217f.) It led us to ask whether such an *amour pur* exists at a human ethical level. Isn't it a conflating of the divine and human? Is there such a thing as a practical *amour pur*? Is *amour pur* a doable? Marcello Neri finds such a conflation an "aporia invincibile".⁶⁵ This sort of charity or *amour pur* pertains first of all to God. Not to humans. How then to translate *amour pur* into practical or ethical life? It does not help to leave it at the level of hyperbole, as Neri does, unless one understands it as an eschatological act. Only as anticipatory acts or as testimonies do such sublime actions become part of human agency. It is in this way that we can make our own the theological virtue of charity. For this reason, we want to look briefly at the notion of testimony as found in Levinas and Ricoeur. Both in their own way ask how humans can give testimony to the divine.

d. Dehon's *amour pur* as a practical judgment

The Jewish philosopher Immanuel Levinas has a unique way of speaking of a testimony of the divine or the infinite.⁶⁶ A testimony of God, as also the Christian tradition acknowledges, goes beyond what can be said or named or done. To apply something to God means that whatever is said must first be "unsaid", because what seeks to be said is beyond saying. There is always a temptation to let the said or the act congeal into a "something". The infinite of the divine,

⁶⁵ Marcello Neri in "Uno stile per la Spirito" p. 331. Neri resolves the aporia by insisting that Fr. Dehon is speaking hyperbolically. However, it appears that here we have a clear case of confusing two discourses by Fr. Dehon.

⁶⁶ See his "Vérité de dévoilement et vérité du témoignage" in *Le témoignage* (Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre international d'Études Humanistes et par l'Institut d'Études Philosophiques de Rome) Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1972, p. 101-110.

however, must always remain beyond naming or beyond our capacity to do. In that sense, testimony is always “higher” than anything said, or “lower” than our capacity to say or do. This “beyond” of Levinas is like the Platonic Good. It is a transcendental. For Levinas, and here he helps us to understand Fr. Dehon, *amour pur* or *agapé* as names of God must retain the quality of being “unsaid” before we return to “saying”. It cannot be translated immediately into a doable, without at the same time undoing the doable. This applies also to what Fr. Dehon has identified as “amour pur”. Fr. Dehon’s “amour pur” is clearly an aspect of the Infinite. From Levinas’ perspective, however, he has drawn it too quickly into the sphere of the doable, and hence divested it of its quality of “beyond.”⁶⁷ The question it raises is how then does one safeguard the “beyond being of the good,” that is, a good, infinite in its goodness, which cannot become identified with a particular good or action? It means that, if there is a doing, the doing will always remain ambiguous, a doing which never achieves its full intentionality, a doing that is generous, but never so generous that its giving will not appear to be parsimonious. It is a doing that is a testimony of the more beyond our finitude.

But it remains a doing. To explain this, I must turn to Ricoeur’s notion of testimony. He recognizes, as does Levinas, that the divine naming takes place “by an accumulation of excessive, hyperbolic expressions destined to shake up ordinary thinking.”⁶⁸ It means that the naming of God becomes translated into excessive, hyperbolic expressions which do not reach into the realm of the Name of God, but instead, effaces the naming by withdrawing into a naming of the human in his or her responsibility for the needy other.⁶⁹ He points to the bible and its naming of God as a care for the widow and the orphan. The Name of God shows itself in the care for the other. The goodness beyond being, divine *agapé*, is nevertheless named in the human, generous goodness and responsibility towards my neighbour. God is named by the humanly impossible level of superabundant goodness not as an ethical commandment but as a revelation of the ineffable God. In this way, the goodness beyond being is like Fr. Dehon’s *amour pur*, totally dis-interested love. It is first of all a revelation of the ineffable goodness and love of God. But as a doable, in all its excess, our human doing is an eschatological deed, an act in tension with our human fulfilment in Christ. For Ricoeur it is not ethical but hyper-ethical. It calls for a poetics, a hymn of praise, before considering it a moral response.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l’autre homme. (Essais)*, Montpellierç Fata Morgana, 1972, p. 78.

⁶⁸ “Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony,” *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Tr. By David Pellauer, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, p. 121.

⁶⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, “The Name of God according to a Few Talmudic Texts,” p. 123-124.

⁷⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit / Amour et Justice*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990, p. 20.

In the profound imagery of a relation, emptied of all my self-centered desires, as a complete responsibility for the other, can I, in my experience, begin to name God? Here my action becomes a testimony of God. Such a testimony is never on the basis of an ethical command but only as a free gesture of response. It retains its ambiguity. It means that a response in its ambiguity serves first of all as a revelation of God's surplus of charity rather than as a moral imperative. It is first of all a testimony. It never reaches the fulfilment, the eschaton. As a moral imperative, it is clearly excessive. This is how Jesus uses eschatological language in the presentation of the Father in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon is first of all a revelation of "the Father" and only indirectly of a human ethics or morality in accordance with that name. Through these hyperbolic, hyper-ethical sayings we are revealed in ethical terms the superabundant goodness of the Father. The language is first of all a revelation of God which becomes accessible to our understanding through the imagery of the care for one another, for the poor, at its most dis-interested level. It is in that sense a hyper-ethics, a new ethics, a narrative of revelation of the perfection of the Father.

Along these lines, Ricoeur points to the hyperbolic, paradoxical and metaphorical of the Gospel aphorisms and parables of Jesus and Jesus' use of the qualifier "kingdom of God". The parables are, to use a rabbinic expression, the handle which allows us to grasp, however tentatively, the symbol of God's kingly rule of the First Testament.⁷¹ Because the symbol of the kingdom of God exceeds the possibility of direct referencing, Jesus used the strategy of metonymy and metaphor to configure the kingdom of God in language. The parable plot is given as a metaphor of the kingdom. But the plots are bizarre. They force a resemblance between the tiny mustard seed, the decaying yeast, the conniving actions of the steward who swindled his master and the kingdom of God. Through these shocking creations of resemblances, the parables dislodge any conventional discourse about God. In the use of paradox and hyperbole and in the network of contrasting, contradicting, disturbing, surprising and excessive subversion of the established myth of Israel, the parables open the space for a new economy, a new self. This is the economy of the gift. Here God is named, not directly, but indirectly. The parables, by giving us a handle, make the gift of the kingdom pass beyond the sayable. The tension of the metaphors of the kingdom is almost unbearable and yet the parables say the Name, not directly but indirectly.⁷² Language about God is transferred into a language about a whole range of aspects of human life. But in the very saying of the unsayable, it

⁷¹ Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989, p. 53.

⁷² Ricoeur calls them "inverted references."

opens the possibility for a doing which aspires in all freedom to become a said or a done. These are the intentional end-points of all our commitments and promises that we seek to express with religious life, with vows, with our devotions, with our works for the other.

So what does this mean for our understanding of Fr. Dehon's circling around the mystery of God's love? As I said above, sometimes Fr. Dehon does not leave sufficient space between God's *agapé* and the charge of human love and loses sight of its function as testimony. It too easily becomes an ethical or moral charge. Levinas and Ricoeur insist that our ethical language must retain the tension of the infinite. From the New Testament perspective, it must remain eschatological. We sense the infinite distance of the infinite by our limited capacity in caring for the widow and orphan. This limited, doable ethics defined for him our capacity to name the infinite. Although we appreciate Fr. Dehon's desire to live a life of love for our time, it requires a much more calibrated language. A much more sensitive care must be given to the naming of God's love. There is not an immediate exchange between the two in the manner that Fr. Dehon often does.

Amour pur is first of all the ineffable gift of God. We humans can give only an indirect and imperfect testimony to this. *Agapé* is of an infinitely more elevated order than any action we can produce.⁷³ That is why it is theological: first of all pertaining to God, only secondarily a human reflex. If the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount are first of all attempts to say the perfection of God, then, along the lines of Levinas, the imperative "You shall love the Lord your God" must translate into "... and you shall love your neighbour as yourself." However, this "commandment" cannot ever be translated into an obligation. For how can one take the plea: "Love me" into a moral command? Here love recommends itself. If it remains an axiom for action, it must be interpreted as an action, a gift, infused with superabundant love. What rules here is generosity, not the commandment. Here the aesthetic and the practical converge. The surplus of meaning of the aesthetic becomes a motive for hyper-ethical activity in accordance with the "new law" of Christ.

What that means for our practical devotion, Fr. Dehon's devotion to God's love revealed in the Heart of Christ, his devotion to *amour pur* and oblation, may well find its expression, as it did for Fr. Dehon after 1889, in a passion for a right social and political order. Fr. Dehon surmised that this passion was not first of all an energetic passion for social and political action, but a living out of *amour pur*. Here *amour pur* takes on a human face. As he did, we can reference it only

⁷³ Paul Ricoeur, *Liebe und Gerechtigkeit / Amour et Justice*, p. 8.

indirectly. It can also lead to a more intensive study and putting into practice of the message of God's *agapé*. The Constitutions urge Dehonians to be "prophets of love," to proclaim his love that surpasses all understanding." (#17) That too can be our devotion as Dehonians: to study more deeply, with greater attention, the love of God as revealed in Christ. One could do no better than allow himself to delve into the mystery of God's love and seek to understand it for our time.

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