
Leo Dehon and Current Historiography

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I. AS OTHERS SEE HIM

1 How is Fr. Dehon perceived in the historiography of non-Dehonians, in this case by historians? In what context is he spoken of? Certain publications have been chosen from within the field of Church history (in French, from within the field of *histoire religieuse*). The choice was made, from those works published outside the Congregation after 1991, based on what the author was writing about and on what type of publication they were writing for. This use of periodicals was advantageous for various reasons: the last great biography of Fr. Dehon, edited by Fr. Manzoni, was in 1989, and a good part of the preceding literature relative to Dehon can be traced back to it¹. However, the 1991 Paris Conference on Dehon, and the subsequent publication, made that year an important stage in the historical research of Fr. Dehon².

2 Much of what follows will confirm Dehonian written history, though it may not always be in harmony with it, and some gaps in our perception of the founder will become evident. I would like to immediately make it clear that I do not attribute an absolute value to historiography, though it is to be

¹ In any case it would be very interesting to analyze the writings prior to 1989 concerning Dehon. But that would go well beyond the limits of this article.

² *Rerum Novarum en France. Le Père Dehon et l'engagement social de l'Église*. Sous la direction de Yves Ledure (Rerum Novarum in France. Father Dehon and the Social Commitment of the Church. Under the direction of Yves Ledure), Éditions Universitaires, Paris 1991. An Italian translation was published with the title *Leone Dehon e la Rerum Novarum*. A Cura di Yves Ledure (Leo Dehon and the Rerum Novarum. Edited by Yves Ledure), EDB, Bologna 1991. The various contributions, in which historians explicitly deal with Dehon, in spite of their different levels of quality, constitute a milestone in the study of the work and social thought of Fr. Dehon. A comment on the Conference was published in the *Dehoniana*: A. Bourgeois S.C.J., 'The Conference on 'Dehon and the Rerum Novarum'', *Dehoniana* 1992, pp. 19-44 (Italian Edition).

considered in all cases. It is obvious that written history can be guilty of neglecting certain important aspects and of following the interests which are felt to have priority, interests which change with the dominant ideologies. All the same, the results of the research within the Congregation must always be compared with the results of the professional and scientific research outside the Congregation.

3 The quotations will be presented in full to make the material accessible to those readers who have no direct access to the individual volumes.

4 A first glance at the collective publications clearly shows the following: Fr. Dehon is considered above all as an *abbé démocrate*. Attention is especially focused on the period from the *Rerum Novarum*, 1891, to the *Graves de Communi*, 1901. The context of the presentation is almost always that of French social Catholicism, in particular regarding the history of the second *Démocratie Chrétienne* (DC). Almost nothing is said of his spiritual writings; at most the foundation of the Institute and Dehon's activity before *Rerum Novarum* are either mentioned marginally or only in relation to the above mentioned thematic and historic context.

5 One aspect of his commitment, often underlined and familiar also to us, is the presentation of Dehon as a man who placed himself in the service of the diffusion of the papal social doctrine. In this process, in French Catholicism, Dehon successfully carried out the task of its propagation.

6 In his essay "*Rerum Novarum - Mito ed Avvenimento*" ("Rerum Novarum - Myth and Event"), Andrea Riccardi (of the Third University of Rome) writes on the reserved reception of the encyclical of Leo XIII: "*For the social doctrine of Leo XIII, the effect was swift: the Christian Social Manual of Fr. Dehon, published in 1894 and translated into Italian the following year as a result of the intervention of Toniolo, to provide an illustrious example, familiarized seminarians and militant laity with the thought of Leo XIII and with an enthusiasm for social sensitivity*"³.

7 Marco Agostini, of the University of Bordeaux, also presents Dehon in the context of the transmission of the papal social doctrine: "*But this document (Rerum Novarum), in the spirit of the Pope and of those who call themselves generically social Catholics, must bring about transformations, find applications to insure that it will be understood by a large number of people. While the general comments on the encyclical become rare, famous*

³ Andrea Riccardi, *Rerum Novarum: il mito e l'avvenimento* (Rerum Novarum: The Myth and the Event). In *Rerum Novarum. Écriture, Contenu et Réception d'une encyclique. Actes du colloque international organisé par l'École française de Rome et le Greco* (Rerum Novarum. Writing, Content and Reception of an Encyclical. Acts of the International Conference Organized by the French School of Rome and the Gregorianum). Nr. 2 of CNRS. Rome 18-20 April 1991. The French School of Rome 1997, pp. 11-27.

works, like the Father Dehon's *Christian Social Manual*, continue the work and endeavor to make its principal aims and its potential understood"⁴.

8 Jean-Dominique Durand (of the University of Lyons) emphasizes the fact that Dehon did not limit himself to making the papal message popular but also sought to study it in depth and to amplify it: "*By liberating energies, acknowledging that the State must have more than a negligible role, leaving the way open to trade associations, the Rerum Novarum encyclical has strongly encouraged democratic Christians to act through concrete initiatives for which Leo XIII does not hide his sympathy, and to develop, study in depth, amplify, extend and make known the pontifical discourse. Examples of these initiatives are provided by Fr. Leo Dehon and by the Abbé Antoine Pottier*"⁵

9 Subsequently Durand presents Dehon as a prototype of the *abbés démocrates*, setting commitment to the papal social teaching in relation to the abandoning of monarchical positions, and clarifies the difficult position of the DC between conservative Catholics and anticlerical republicans: "*If Albert de Mun's attempt to found a party in 1885 failed, the years since 1890 have been marked instead by the first true attempt to organize a Democratic - Christian movement. The people who were the basis of it were the abbés démocrates: Trochu, Calippe, Lemire, Naudet, Pastoret, Gayraud, Garnier, Dehon, Six. Coming from an intransigent, social legitimism, ultramontane, many of them had taken part in the Work of the Catholic Workers' Club; these young priests, all born after 1850, progressively detached themselves from the cause of monarchy... Many writings reveal their thought: Father Leo Dehon, founder of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, chaplain of the works done in the factory of Val-des-Bois, which was directed by Léon Harmel, in 1894 published the Christian Social Manual and in 1898 a Social Catechism, and in this way divulged the Rerum Novarum... These (publications) met with violent opposition, in particular on the part of Monarchist Catholics, by whom they were considered to be reds or indeed communards, while the republicans saw them only as being clergy*"⁶.

10 In his essay on the way *Rerum Novarum* was received in various regions of France, Yves-Marie Hilaire (of the University of Lille) mentioned Fr. Dehon as one of those *abbés démocrates*, for whom the *Rerum Novarum* had

⁴ Marco Agostini. *Catéchèse de l'encyclique Rerum Novarum - pédagogie française d'un document fondateur*. In *Rerum Novarum. Écriture, Contenu et Réception d'une encyclique* (Catechesis of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum - the French Pedagogy of a Founding Document. In *Rerum Novarum. Writing, Content and Reception of an Encyclical*), pp. 319-329, this quote from p. 319.

⁵ Jean-Dominique Durand. *L'Europe de la Démocratie Chrétienne* (The Europe of the *Démocratie Chrétienne*). Edition Complexe, Brussels 1995, p. 45.

⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 67ff.

been a stimulus which activated their commitment: “*The Encyclical provoked a genuine shock in one part of the clergy, in particular among the young clergy. The famous text of Georges Bernanos, in the Journal of a Country Curate, refers to the region of the North, where the phenomenon of the abbés démocrates was more strongly felt, with Lemire, Six, Vanneufville, Bataille, Raux, Joncquel, Dehon*”⁷.

11 Towards the end of his article, Hilaire shows that Dehon belonged to those personalities of the DC which supported the papal definition of the DC in Graves de Communi 1901: “*Rome, therefore, (after the failure of the Catholics in the 1898 elections and the revival of the anticlerical policy under Waldeck-Rousseau and Combes) invited the Catholics to change their attitude. The encyclical Graves de Communi, well received by the priests Six and Vanneufville and by Father Dehon, invited the Democratic Christians to limit themselves to charitable social action. The laity then took the lead, passing into the front-line. This was the moment in which Max Turmann and Georges Goyau made widespread the expression ‘Social Catholicism’, according to the observations of J. M. Mayeur*”⁸.

12 In the new reference book on the History of the Church, Jean-Marie Mayeur (of the IV University of Paris - the Sorbonne) proposed a completely different perspective. In the chapter on the new pastoral patterns of Father Dehon’s time, he puts the accent on his commitment of life to have an up-to-date understanding of the priest and of the ministry. Mayeur begins with a description of the inadequacies of the ministry of that time, “*founded on the country parish which, even if it gave no sign that it had nothing left to say, showed signs of inadequacy with regard to the new forms of life’s social situation...*”, and offered as an alternative the quest “*for a new priesthood, reducing the lack of trust towards the aspirations of their contemporaries, being less worried about politics than about social action among the less favored... The itinerary... of another young priest, Leo Dehon, the son of a rich cattle raiser in Thiérarche, is also significant. Ordained in 1868 in the Rome of the Council, which he followed closely, in November 1871 his destination was the Basilica of Saint Quentin, as one of the seven priests who took care of thirty-five thousand inhabitants. The creation of a Youth Club, to which was added a secondary school, was the expression of his ambition to give a global Christian formation to young people. Through a diocesan inquiry, and after having participated in a Congress of Workers’ Associations, there began a collaboration with Léon Harmel, one which was*

⁷ Yves-Marie Hilaire, *Rerum Novarum en France: Réception et audience dans les régions*. In *Rerum Novarum. Écriture, Contenu et Réception (Rerum Novarum in France; Reception and Audience in the Regions)*. In *Rerum Novarum. Writing, Content and Reception*, pp. 503-514, this quote on p. 505.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 508.

subsequently to grow more intense. Soon, however, he felt the need to deepen his spiritual life in community with his brethren. This desire led him to found the Institute of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, which Rome was to approve in 1884. Without renouncing the perspective of the 'mystic victim' which oriented the beginnings of the Congregation, its founder stamped it with a 'change of accent' which again gave priority to action among young people and to social commitment"⁹.

13 Leo Dehon's anti-Semitism is a theme the writings within the Congregation have barely touched upon when doing research on the founder. Pierre Pierrard (Catholic Institute, Paris) categorizes him up more than once as being among the *Démocratie Chrétienne* personalities whom, contrary to few exceptions such as Lemire and later Naudet, were not free of anti-Semitism: "*The Catholics, which at the end of the XIX century formed the most advanced battalions in democratic and social commitment, were not devoid of dislike, indeed hatred, for the Jew; considered by them to be a character who had been given undo berth in the changing Christian society. To collaborators from Lyons (from the anti-Semitic review 'la France libre?') ('France Free?'), were added journalists from Libre Parole (Free Speech) and some big names from the Démocratie Chrétienne: the priests Gayraud, Dehon, Garnier, Lemire, Cetty, Naudet'*"¹⁰.

14 In another book, Pierre Pierrard allowed an entire paragraph to the anti-Semitism of Dehon. After having presented him as one of the "*leaders of the Démocratie Chrétienne... in the front-line of the social action of French Catholics*"¹¹, he illustrates his anti-Semitism with precise quotations from the Social Catechism: he especially opposed the Jew's activities against the Church and their economic activities. After most European nations abandoned the anti-Semitic legislation of the preceding generations, Dehon, in these quotations, reveals an over-exaggerated reaction in favor of a legislation which would limit the freedom of Jews.

15 Jean-Marie Mayeur too, in one of his articles, observes that Dehon remained in the anti-Semitic current of the DC: "*Setting some to the side, such as Naudet and Lemire, who had moved away and evolved towards the*

⁹ Histoire du Christianisme. Tome XI: Libéralisme, Industrialisation, Expansion Européenne (The History of Christianity. Volume XI: Liberalism, Industrialization, European Expansion) (1830-1914), under the responsibility of Jacques Gadille, Jean-Marie Mayeur, published by Desclée, Paris 1995, pp. 517ff.

¹⁰ Pierre Pierrard, *Les Chrétiens et l'affaire Dreyfus* (Christians and the Dreyfus Affair), Les Éditions de l'Atelier, Paris 1998, pp. 31-36, also mentioned in: Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe*, New York 1991, pp. 234-236.

¹¹ Pierre Pierrard, *Juifs et catholiques français. D'Édouard Drumont à Jacob Kaplan 1886-1994* (Jews and French Catholics from Édouard Drumont to Jacob Kaplan 1886-1994), Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, second enlarged edition 1997, pp. 126ff.

left, the movement of the Abbés Démocrates, with personalities such as Dehon, Gayraud, (and) with 'The Cross' of the Assumptionists... participated in the 'anti-Dreyfusism' and nationalism of the end of the century"¹²

16 A short quotation regarding Dehon's activity as a contributor to some publications is to be found in the essay by Yves-Marie Hilaire in Abbé Six's paper "La Démocratie Chrétienne": "Among the occasional contributors to 'The Démocratie Chrétienne' are to be noted the names of most of the Democratic priests of the region, Lemire and Calippe, whose contributions are important, Noel, Decrouille, Louis Glorieux, Bataille, Leleu, Cachera, Dehon..."¹³. In presenting the description of the magazine he continues: "In the spiritual field the Dehonian influence is present with 'The Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus', often quoted, but above all it is the congresses and the activities of the Third Order of the Franciscans which occupy a great deal of space"¹⁴.

17 In one of his books Paul Misner (of Marquette University - USA) gives a great deal of space to Leo Dehon: within the DC he presents Dehon as one of the most eminent publicists and organizers, as a guarantee of the orthodoxy of the DC and as a defender of the orientation of the Third Order of the Franciscans towards being anticapitalist and committed in the social field.

18 "The sensational predominance of the Abbés Démocrates in the arousal caused by the *Rerum Novarum* was shown in two types of activity: as elected members of the Chamber of Deputies and as publicists and organizers... The principal publishers and organizers were the priests Paul Naudet, Théodore, Leo Dehon, Pierre Dabry and Paul Six... They formed a colorful group of personalities, too colorful and individualistic to constitute a unified movement, much less to be the clerical component of a Catholic political party. What united them was their readiness to obey Leo XIII when he intimated to the priests that they should leave their sacristies and go out to the people.

...
19 "Leo Dehon, for his part, collaborated with Léon Harmel in the social formation of priests and seminarians at Val-des-Bois, from 1892, during summer weekly seminars. To host two-hundred priests at the same time, in

¹² Jean-Marie Mayeur, Les 'abbés démocrates'. in: Cent ans de catholicisme social dans la région du Nord, Revue du Nord (One Hundred Years of Social Catholicism in the Region of the North), Revue du Nord (Review of the North), No. 290 and 291, Lille 1991, p. 244.

¹³ Yves-Marie Hilaire, Les abbés Six et Vanneufville et la revue La Démocratie Crétienne (Abbés Six and Vanneufville and the Démocratie Crétienne Magazine), (1894-1908), in: Cent ans de catholicisme social dans la région du Nord (One Hundred Years of Social Catholicism in the Region of the North), op. cit., p. 254.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 255.

1895 he took them into his own city, to Saint Quentin. While he was chaplain of OCCO (*Oeuvre des Cercles Catholiquers Ouvriers - The Work of the Catholic Workers' Club*), he accompanied Harmel in the *Démocratie Chrétienne*. At first a secular priest (*abbé*, in its differing meaning from father), then canonical, he founded the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, which were expelled from France in 1901. At the same time he served as guarantor of the orthodoxy of Christian Democracy - his reputation was confirmed by his being appointed to the post of consultant of the Congregation of the Index! No wonder that his *Christian Social Manual*, published by Bonne Presse in 1894, had the function of an exposition and an authoritative defense of the *Démocratie Chrétienne*.

20 ...
“In 1900, during an international convention (of the Regular Third Order of Saint Francis) in Rome, Dehon repeated the condemnation of capitalism in good faith; but the Irish brother, David Fleming, who occupied more than one important position in papal Rome, called the Third Order of Saint Francis to come back to its primary religious role... so that it should not become a ‘school of sociology or an organization created to promote a political economy’ when it should be a school of Christian perfection”¹⁵.

21 The importance of the social orientation of the Third Order of Saint Francis between 1893 and 1901, barely mentioned by Dehon, is amply dealt with by Jean-Marie Burnod¹⁶. He quotes Dehon more than twenty times.

22 “Canon Dehon, born in March 1843, founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, had a close relationship with the leaders of the Work of the Clubs at its beginning. As a democrat his influence on the clergy was to be considerable. In 1884 he published the *Christian Social Manual*, drafted by the Social Studies Commission in Soissons, of which he was president. He was to be one of the most notable figures of Franciscan congresses”¹⁷.

23 In 1893, under the leadership of Harmel, a new social orientation of the Third Order began; it had been crystallized at the meeting of a study group in Val-des-Bois. In addition to the Franciscans, the Capuchins and Harmel they were “joined by some members of the secular clergy and some laymen, because of their social competence and their attachment to the Third Order. We find the names of Abbé Garnier - journalist and democrat - , of Canon

¹⁵ Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe*, New York 1991, pp. 232-238.

¹⁶ Jean-Marie Burnod. *Le mouvement social franciscain en France à la suite de Rerum Novarum (1893-1901)* (The Franciscan Social Movement in France Following Rerum Novarum (1893-1901)), Les Éditions Franciscaines, Paris 1991. This study was edited in 1974, but published only in 1991 on the occasion of the Jubilee of Rerum Novarum.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Dehon - Superior General of Priests of the Sacred Heart of Saint Quentin..."¹⁸

24 In spite of his tendency always to seek a balanced position, Dehon remained committed to the social renewal of the Third Order - even in 1900, when numerous signs indicated the failure of these efforts. This appears clearly for the last time during the aforementioned International Congress of the Third Order in Rome, in September 1900. In his writings, Burnod introduces Dehon's speech with these significant words: "...*Dehon gave the most resonant and most committed speech of the whole congress*"¹⁹. Subsequently, Burnod wrote two pages of comments on the content of Dehon's speech concerning the "*True Mission of the Third Order*", and characterized the rejection of Fr. Dehon's ideas, on the part of Fr. Fleming who, after him, defined the congress as an expression of the "*strength of the conservative, not to say reactionary wing of the Church... a failure also of the Pope*"²⁰.

25 In a book which, by means of its views of diverse personalities, demonstrates the contribution of the Christians towards the attitudinal position that existed at the end of the XIX century, Pierre Pierrard and Nicolas Pigasse give a notable summary of Fr. Dehon's work:

26 "*Among the "abbé démocrates" who, between the two centuries (XIX and XX), made an effort to find an accord between the Gospel and social justice, two above all had a major role. The First would be Leo Dehon (1843-1925), founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Saint Quentin. This man from the North, who rooted his priestly activity in the industrial city of Saint Quentin, perceived with singular perspicuity, the changes in French society - in particular the rise of the working class - and also the rejection and impotence of the ministry of the Church when faced with the social and the cultural reality of the epoch.*

27 "*His law studies in Paris - he became a lawyer at the age of 21 - and his philosophical and theological education in Rome gave Leo Dehon a great openness of spirit and a strong sense of contemplation of the pierced side of Christ on the cross. Fascinated by *Rerum Novarum*, he referred to it continually in order to elaborate a genuine social thought, a ministerial practice and a Christian plan concerning both man and society. The title of the work, which he completed in 1900, 'Christian Social Renewal', reveals this dynamic. His contemporaries were not mistaken in considering his *Christian Social Manual* as the authorized commentary on *Rerum Novarum*"²¹.*

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 125.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 128ff.

²¹ Pierre Perrard, Nicolas Pigasse. *Ces croyants qui ont fait le siècle* (The Believers Who

28 On the basis of these contributions, it is necessary that we make certain observations:

29 One thing to be noted, even if it does not come as a surprise, is the way in which Dehon is discussed in written history as of 1991: in a larger group of contributors Dehon appears as one of the many, one among the many who confirm the description of the various phenomena within the DC. On the other hand, however, there are historians who illustrate and establish, in the way that Dehon does, specific aspects in the history of social Catholicism: the search for pastoral and priestly models appropriate to the epoch; activity in the field of formation of the clergy and of young men; the essential element of fidelity to papal authority and commitment to the papal social doctrine; and the beginning of a link, or at least a gradual closing of the gap, between spirituality and the ministry, and respectively of a link between spirituality and social commitment.

30 What is striking is the fact that meanwhile, in almost no essay on French social Catholicism of the late 19th century - and as we have seen also in some historical works of wider range - is there a lack of reference to Dehon. On the other hand, the way in which Dehon is mentioned shows his secondary importance for the writers of history.

31 These observations suggest that one should take a glance at the way of writing history. In many cases after 1991 it is easy to verify most of what has been written about Dehon: a great part of the authors already quoted were rapporteurs at the 1991 meeting at the Catholic Institute of Paris, on the theme "*Rerum Novarum in France - Father Dehon and the Social Commitment of the Church*". This is true of Mayer, Hilaire, Durand, Agostino. All of them refer, in their contributions or in the books quoted, to their own reports or to those of other participants in this meeting. The Paris meeting, in which they were explicitly dealing with Dehon and where they had primary sources available, continues to produce effects in historiography and perform a dynamic function for the presence of Dehon in that history²².

32 While the source of their presentation of Dehon does not appear in Pierre Pierrard and Nicolas Pigasse's book, Paul Misner on the other hand refers, in addition to the standard encyclopedias, directly to the Social Works of Leo Dehon.

33 If our Congregation is interested that Leo Dehon should remain or become a theme for historians who also write outside the Congregation, then it is necessary to continue to seek for other ways to: a) stimulate historians and confront them with Dehon; b) insure that Dehonian sources are of easy

Made the Century), Bayard Éditions, Paris 1999, p. 132.

²² One should add that the people who were already engaged in the study of Dehon in the past, were above all Mayeur and Hilaire.

access and adequately prepared, for consultation and to have them popularized.

II. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RESEARCH ON THE DÉMOCRATIE CHRÉTIENNE

34 In recent decades there have been developments in the research on French social Catholicism and, more precisely, on the DC. These developments confirm many results of our research on the founder and, at the same time, stimulate it in a fertile way.

35 In 1975, Émile Poulat published an article entitled “*For a New Understanding of the Démocratie Chrétienne*”²³. This contribution marks the breaking away of a historiography which, for a long time, had been bringing the Démocratie Chrétienne of the end of the XIX century close to liberal Catholicism. Poulat, on the contrary, insisted that the DC neither springs from liberalism (in the sense of liberal Catholicism) nor has a tendency towards it, even if both are concerned with the same problem: “*How can one be a Christian of one’s time and in one’s time?*”²⁴ The liberal Catholics, however, had a conformist attitude towards society. They demanded that, in a spirit of reciprocal acceptance, the Church should legitimize the new society and the new society should recognize the rights of religion. The champions of the DC, however, were by principle non-conformists with regard to society. “*The Démocratie Chrétienne, on the contrary, accepted the new society only in order to conform it to their model: purge it of its original flaw and bring it to a superior state, manage its treatment and education, pick it up and raise it up*”²⁵. This reveals **reformism** as a characteristic of the DC.

36 Another characteristic, according to Poulat, is **popularism**, incarnated in the expression which became the catchphrase of the entire movement: “Go to the people”. However, this attention directed towards the people is structured in a very specific way: “*The Démocratie Chrétienne is none other than the alliance, the conjunction, of two oppressed forces: the Church and the people*”. The internal logic is clear: in looking at the medieval unity between Church and people, in which the Church defended the interests of the people and was recognized by them, the DC ascertains an alienation of the people from the Church (or vice versa). In order for the Church to resolve the existing problem of the radical reform of modern society in its spirit, it is necessary that the ancient alliance between people and Church be recovered. Drawing closer to, or reconciliation with, modern society is not even

²³ Émile Poulat, Pour une nouvelle compréhension de la Démocratie chrétienne. Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique, LXX 1975, pp. 5-38.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 7.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

mentioned: *“Thus the Church would find itself again as it has always been, without conceding anything to its adversaries: this is how uncompromising its position appeared”*²⁶.

37 Émile Poulat’s article marked a clean break with the past historiography of the *Démocratie Chrétienne*, by clearly inserting the DC in the tradition of intransigent Catholicism.

38 Since then written history has moved forward. To the theme of the intransigent structure of the DC, has been added an aspect - in my opinion even more interesting for us, although contested in scientific discussion - which had already emerged in the work of Poulat, and was subsequently developed by Jean-Louis Jadoulle in his book on the Abbé Pottier.

39 *“Historiography, in effect, has shown how the Démocratie Chrétienne did not let itself be reduced to a program of social and economic reform, nor even to a global conception of man and of his life in society. The Démocratie Chrétienne, therefore, is also the bearer of a typical view of the faith and of a more or less conscious and explicit plan for the insertion of this faith, and of the Church which is its vector, in the contemporary world, marked as it is by the social situation”*²⁷.

40 In simpler words: historical research, according to Jadoulle, has increasingly revealed that, for the DC at the end of the XIX century, the social situation was above all a religious problem, because the protagonists of this movement intended above all to be men of religion. It is for this reason that Jadoulle directs his research on Abbé Pottier (who met Fr. Dehon several times) along the following premise: *“Economist without doubt, moralist certainly, theologian above all, priest even more so: this is to be our working hypothesis”*²⁸.

41 To prevent the suspicion that the Church’s attention to the people is merely a strategic reflex, he observes: *“Beyond the reasons of tactical opportunism, certainly in work, there is a deeper, and in a certain sense more positive, motivation. Recent historiography designates it with the term integralism... The apostles of social Catholicism proclaim the principles and develop the consequences of integral Christianity; they do not expect God to surrender on His part, but, on the contrary, to restore His Kingdom to Him; they do not present concessions in His name, but demands...”*²⁹

²⁶ Ibid. p. 8.

²⁷ Jean-Louis Jadoulle. *La Pensée de l’Abbé Pottier, 1849-1923 - Contribution à L’Histoire de la Démocratie Chrétienne en Belgique* (The Thought of Abbé Pottier, 1849-1923 - A Contribution to the History of the Démocratie Chrétienne in Belgium), Louvain-La-Neuve 1991, part VI.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 101.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 58.

42 Probably the terms ‘integral Catholicism’ and ‘integralism’ should be used less categorically, which Jadoulle and Poulat do not do. Integralism, which appeared at the threshold of the XX century in the context of the confrontation with society, remains a way, contrary to the Gospel, in order to combat, denounce and suppress, within the Church, positions, people and groups which seem to threaten Catholicism. This is demonstrated by the example of Umberto Benigni with the publication of ‘Sapinière’.

43 The ‘integral Catholicism’ which Jadoulle describes in the preceding quotations should, in my opinion, be distinguished from the above mentioned integralism.

44 The progress made by written history should be interesting for us, since it increasingly takes into consideration the religious motivation of the social Catholics of the XIX/XX century in order to understand their commitment. More precisely, what is made evident is the relationship between the integral view of Catholicism and sensitivity, as well as activity, with regard to society.

45 In applying these considerations to Dehon, it seems to me that many results of the research carried out on him in the Congregation will be confirmed and deepened; especially this lived unity, which we currently call the unity between mysticism and politics.

46 In addition, by viewing Dehon as an ‘integral Catholic’ we are presented with an even clearer and correct picture of the scale, the possibilities and the limits of his so-called ‘social activity’ (e.g. his competence and importance in the field of the social and economic sciences).

47 I speak provokingly of his ‘so-called’ social activity because presenting Dehon as an integral Catholic will probably permit us to tackle, in a more adequate way, the question: What did ‘social commitment’ mean to Dehon?

48 *“The word social (in the work of Dehon) has... a very broad application; it is the equivalent of everything that concerns society: social power, meaning political; social morality, meaning collective customs, norms and bases; the social Kingdom of Christ; social danger, which is the opposite of the preceding expression and which the social action of the Church can remedy. The ‘social and political situation’ - called simply ‘the social situation’ - is that of a global restoration... Thus the adjective ‘social’ is too generously used together with other words, or is insinuated in too many passages of the Dehonian writings, not to rapidly complicate the meaning which should be given to the expression ‘the social action of Father Dehon’. It soon appears that the decisive objective is not where one wishes to place it: in the improvement of the conditions of life of the popular classes. It is to be found instead in a global plan for society. The solution to the workers’ situation*

*can legitimately be considered, in the thought of Dehon, as the potential consequence of the fulfillment of this plan*³⁰.

49 The indubitably broad definition of the social concept in Dehon - to be accurately distinguished from our current understanding of this term - can be more easily understood when we keep in mind that his integral vision of Catholicism very quickly brought him to consider the whole of society as an object of interest and commitment.

50 So was Dehon more committed and interested in the social situation, or in society, or in politics?

51 Once more, as always, we need to make a precise distinction between the definitions of that time and those of today (for example the term 'social'), and we need to study the historical research on social Catholicism with a view to a better understanding of Dehon, in order to know what the reference point of our dynamic fidelity is.

³⁰ Yves Poncelet (ICP), Léon Dehon entre 1849 et 1891. Formation et action sociale sacerdotale dans le seconde moitié du XIXe siècle, in: RN en France... (Leo Dehon between 1849 and 1891. Formation and Priestly Social Action in the Second Half of the XIX Century; in: Rerum Novarum in France...), pp. 35-63, this quote from p. 62.