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# **Our Spiritual Life (VI)**

## *In the Service of the Church*

DEHONIAN STUDIES



A series of presentations of the "Reading Guide" to the Constitutions, written by Fr. Albert Bourgeois.

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## **1. Relationship to the church**

315 Relationship to the church or ecclesial character is, according to J. Mouroux, one of the constitutive and structuring elements of the Christian experience. This is an experience in faith, an experience in Christ and an experience in the church.

316 It is also one of the theological principles of the religious life that *Ecclesiae Sanctae* wanted stressed in the revision of constitutions: "Principia evangelica et theologica de vita religiosa eiusque unione cum Ecclesia" (II, 12a).

317 We have already noted the constant reference to the church in the new Constitutions:

- in the description of Fr Dehon's faith experience (nn. 3-5), of his intention as founder regarding the nature and scope of the congregation (nn. 1, 6, 7) and for its canonical status (n. 8);
- in the description of our own faith experience, the reference is explicit at the beginning of the three subdivisions:
  - + the church as the place where we have been initiated to faith and the love of God (n. 9), for our religious vocation (n. 13) and for the development of the religious life (n. 15);
  - + service of the church as a constitutive element of our vocation in the congregation and for our spiritual life (n. 16);
  - + the church as the guarantor of our spiritual purpose (n. 26), of our charism (n. 27), at the service of the church (n. 30) through the apostolate and Eucharistic adoration (n. 31) in communion with the life of the universal and local church (nn. 32, 34).

318 In addition to these explicit references there is all that is said in regard to our religious life and the kingdom of God, the Body of Christ and the People of God (cf. nn. 13, 25, 27, 29, 37, 38). Further, reference to mission and service pervades the whole text and its dynamic. Finally, the eschatological horizon summoned up constantly at the end of each development is an ecclesial reference (along the lines of LG 7).

319 The old Constitutions (n. 8) and the *Spiritual Directory* only touched this theme. Of course, we are aware of Fr Dehon's ecclesial sense in his enterprises and commitments, his recommendations and his example of complete fidelity to the church. The new Constitutions are almost completely structured and supported by ecclesial reference, more intimately and more effectively than the brief references in the older texts could have done. This is an example of true dynamic fidelity to Fr Dehon's faith experience and vision.

320 Hence we can see the importance of a serious theology of the church, its mystery and mission, for a good understanding and appreciation of our SCJ religious life.

321 The 1973 *Rule of Life* contained a short but important article on this theme (n. 13). “Baptized into the death and resurrection of the Lord, confirmed in the Spirit, we are members of the church, the community of believers, called to life as brothers, to serve the Lord’s mission in the world” (cf. Eph 4,1-2; Jn 13,35). It is a pity this was not incorporated in the new text.

322 A sign and means of union with God and the unity of all mankind (LG 1), the church reveals him in whom the hopes of men become Hope and liberation Freedom in the Spirit (2Cor 3,17).

323 In the midst of the People of God, in communion with their pastors, we profess our religious life.

324 This presents the idea of a church that is not just institutional and canonical, but a community of believers, a place of communion and sharing, in different ministries, for the service of the People of God and of all mankind.

325 To these general considerations regarding the ecclesial nature of the Christian and religious life, we must add that our religious and spiritual life is awakened and nourished in and by the contemplation of the mystery of the opened side and the Heart of Jesus, source of water and blood, that is of the Spirit, and according to the great patristic tradition mystery of the birth and growth of the church. “This inauguration and this growth are both symbolized by the blood and water that flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus” (LG 3). For the spiritual life of a Priest of the Sacred Heart, this is like a new and particular internal and ecclesial need.

## **2. Sharing in the church’s mission**

### **2.1. An apostolic religious institute**

326 The two sections headed “Sharing in the church’s mission” (nn. 26-34) and “Attentive to the pleas of the world” (nn. 35-39) treat the

congregation's mission in the church "at the service of the saving mission of the people of God in the world of today" (n. 27). These articles develop and specify the characteristics and norms of the ecclesial nature of the SCJ religious life, along the lines set down in *Perfectae Caritatis*: "All communities should participate in the life of the church. According to its individual character, each should make its own and foster in every possible way the enterprises and objectives of the church in such fields as these: the scriptural, liturgical, doctrinal, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social" (2c).

327 The ecclesial nature of the institute is first of all authenticated and assured by the church's recognition. Founded to enrich the church and given the task "of bringing (the founder's) charism to fruition having regard to the needs of the church" (n. 1), the institute received its canonical status from the church (cf. n. 8). Further, the church has recognized and authenticated the spiritual perspective of its religious profession, the "special grace" (n. 26), the "prophetic charism" (n. 27), which mark its sharing in the church's mission.

328 Thus "recognized" (n. 26), our religious life develops and lives in the church, by the church and through the church, with an existence characterized by its "ecclesial mission" (n. 34), the apostolic service that marks its sharing in the church's mission. All this makes ours "an apostolic religious institute" (n. 8).

329 The early Constitutions are explicit regarding the apostolic nature of the congregation and of our religious life.

330 **1873–83 Constitutions:** "By uniting the contemplative and active life, this order responds to a need for the good of souls who, while attracted by grace to a life of immolation and sacrifice hidden from the world, are at the same time burning with apostolic zeal".

331 **1885–86 Constitutions** (*Studia Dehoniana* n. 2):

– "Members of the Society will regard as one of their sacred duties that of glorifying and consoling the Heart of Jesus, by working to establish his kingdom in souls" (n. 19).

- “They will not be satisfied with praying, but will work zealously to win souls for God” (VIII, 9, 4).
- “So that their zeal may be truly reparatory, they must imitate the zeal of the Heart of Jesus in all its characteristics, active zeal seeking and using all means of making God known and loved” (VIII, 9, 6).

332 In these Constitutions the paragraph on zeal (VIII, 9) is much more developed than the corresponding paragraph in the *Spiritual Directory* (VI, 23).

333 It is true however that at the beginning the institute was marked by a preoccupation to assure a regular interior life. Fr Dehon himself felt this need, regarding the religious life as a counterbalance to other activities. This explains a certain reticence he sometimes showed in respect of activities and works, recalling that in spirit and scope the institute was largely contemplative (cf. CF V, 86; I, 74; II, 2; III, 25).

334 However we judge the formulas, Fr Dehon’s example and the history of the founding and development of the institute give the above quotations from the early Constitutions and the Directory the value of a confirmation, to justify defining the congregation as an apostolic religious institute.

335 In the new Constitutions the apostolic character is emphasized throughout the whole text.

- Fr Dehon’s personal response to the “neglected love” is made through “an intimate union with the Heart of Christ”, with the apostolate for “the establishment of his kingdom in human hearts and in society at large” (n. 4), characterized “by the greatest solicitude for people, particularly the most deprived, and by a concern to redress in a practical way the pastoral neglect in the church of his time” (n. 5).
- As founder his intention was that his religious should be “prophets of love and servants of reconciliation for mankind and the world in Christ” (n. 7).
- “In the midst of the challenges presented by the world” (n. 9), our SCJ religious life is characterized by availability and love towards all,

“particularly the humble and the suffering” (n. 18), by solidarity with “all of humanity and creation” (n. 22), by “the service of the gospel” to heal, reconcile and consecrate humanity (n. 25). Our reparation is “cooperation in his redeeming work in the midst of the world” (n. 23) and “sharing in the work of reconciliation” (n. 25).

336 Thus defined and marked as an apostolic institute, our congregation, in carrying out the task of renewal, followed those directives of *Perfectae Caritatis* applicable to communities in which “the very nature of the religious life requires apostolic action and services” (n. 8).

– “The entire religious life of the members of these communities should be penetrated by an apostolic spirit” in such a way that “their apostolic activity should result from an intimate union with Christ” (ibid.).

– “These communities, then, should skillfully harmonize their observances and practices with the needs of the apostolate to which they are dedicated. But inasmuch as the religious life which is committed to apostolic works takes on many forms, a necessary diversity will have to distinguish its path to a suitable renewal and members of various communities will have to be sustained in living for Christ’s service by means which are proper and fitting for themselves” (ibid.).

337 These general principles are applied in the new Constitutions: in the presentation and organization of the religious life, vows and common life (nn. 40-85), in formation (nn. 86-105) and in administration (nn. 106-143). But first of all, they enlighten and direct the reflection on the spirit, specific consecration and mission of the institute.

## **2.2. Art. 26-39**

338 From the cooperation and sharing that characterize our reparation, art. 26-29 move on to indicate the general orientations and describe the SCJ apostolic style as it flows from the SCJ spiritual

life and experience.

339 There are three parts:

- Art. 26-39: the general law of our prophetic charism in virtue of the “life of union with Christ’s own oblation” (n. 26); an apostolic life characterized by complete openness to the signs of his presence in the life of men (n. 28), by positive solidarity with mankind (n. 29) and by awareness of what stands as an obstacle to the love of the Lord (n. 29), that is sin as a rejection of Christ’s love (cf. n. 4).
- Art. 30-34: apostolic orientations (nn. 30-31), concrete commitments (nn. 32-33), ways of our ecclesial incorporation (n. 34).
- Art. 35-39: conditions for authenticity and effectiveness of our apostolic witness: attention to the pleas of the world (nn. 35-37); solidarity with men in the construction of the earthly city and the building up of the Body of Christ (n. 38).

340 Apart from nn. 36-37, taken from the 1973 *Rule of Life*, this section is all new. It is about half of the text dedicated to our SCJ experience and spiritual life. Compared with the old Constitutions (nn. 7-8), the new text devotes much more space to mission and apostolate. As far as the *Spiritual Directory* is concerned, it has only one brief paragraph on zeal. Here we have another example of dynamic fidelity in the reinterpretation and presentation of the institute’s spirit in the light of the Council.

341 A detailed commentary would bring out the stresses, shades and prudence of the text, especially in regard to the pleas of the world and the response expected of religious. *Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes* and the document on *Religious Life and Human Promotion* provide a doctrinal and pastoral basis for such a commentary.

342 Here I shall just make a few comments on the plan of the text.

343 Nn. 30-34 seem to constitute an interruption between nn. 26-29 and nn. 35-39. An organic commentary may place nn. 35-39 immediately after nn. 26-29. Attention to the signs of Christ’s presence in the life of men (n. 28) as well as solidarity with men and

judgement on human efforts (n. 29) are developed in nn. 35-38 on attention to the pleas of the world (nn. 35.37) and solidarity with the life of men in the construction of the earthly city (n. 38).

344 The 1973 *Rule of Life* placed nn. 35.36 (then 9-10) on attention to the expectations of the world as an introduction (pedagogical) to the presentation of the mystery of Christ (nn. 11-12), our religious life (nn. 14-16), our SCJ life (nn. 47-54). The change made in 1979, as I have already pointed out, emphasizes the unique relation between our SCJ religious life and the mystery of Christ.

### **3. A consecration inherently apostolic (n. 27)**

345 Our consecration of a religious and apostolic life explicitly united “with Christ’s reparatory oblation to the Father for the sake of men” (n. 6) “already possesses in itself real apostolic fecundity” (n. 27).

346 This statement is very important and must be understood in its full depth. “In itself”, and therefore not only in virtue of the exercises it implies or the works it inspires. We possess apostolic effectiveness because of what we are, and not merely because of what “we do or suffer” (n. 25). However important the activities and their results, the witness of our being religious, if authentic, is prophetic and possesses a real apostolic fecundity.

#### **3.1. By our religious life**

347 “What we are” is first of all our being as creatures and the witness we give by our faith, our adoration; witness of the image that, through grace, aims at resemblance.

348 It is also a witness of our filial being in Christ, of his Spirit who cries out in us, Abba, Father, and who goes towards the Father “in the footsteps of Christ” (n. 13).



349 It is to this first of all that our religious life gives witness, and must do so, through that special gift which is our vocation. Vatican II spoke eloquently of this intrinsic effectiveness of the witness of religious consecration, through the vows, as a true service performed for the church (LG 44-46; PC 1.25. *Evangelica Testificatio* of Paul VI). Our Constitutions allude to it in respect of the different elements of the religious life (nn. 13, 40).

350 More specifically, the explicit union of our religious and apostolic life with Christ's reparatory oblation is defined, according to the founder's original intention, as "the service it (the institute) is called to render to the church" (n. 6) according to its own particular character. And our religious life, with the unreserved commitment it involves especially through our reparatory oblation, is a prophetic witness we are called to give for "the coming of the new humanity in Jesus Christ" (n. 39).

351 The reflection on various general themes of the religious life (evangelical counsels and community life nn. 40-79) will necessarily include this dimension of reparatory oblation. From this viewpoint, the change in the schema between the 1973 *Rule of Life* and the 1979 Constitutions is important. In the *Rule of Life*, treatment of the religious life (community life and evangelical counsels nn. 14-46) came before the presentation of the congregation's spirit (nn. 47-55) and the allusions to this spirit regarding the practice of the counsels appeared as mere additions.

352 Without developing the themes, I will just note the points made in our Constitutions on the matter of religious life-oblation as the proper character of the institute and of our SCJ religious life.

- In n. 40 our profession of the evangelical counsels is related to the union of our whole life with the oblation of Christ.
- In n. 41 our chastity, lived in consecrated celibacy, is united with that of Christ, who gave himself totally to the Father and to men in love without reserve.
- In n. 52, our poverty signifies the offering of our entire lives to the

service of the gospel.

- In n. 58, our obedience is an act of oblation in which, with Christ, we live for the redemption of the world, the "Ecce Venio" that defines our fundamental approach to life.
- In n. 63 our community life, under the sign of "Sint Unum", must make our communities true homesteads of gospel living, especially through our welcome, our sharing and our hospitality.

353 They are only brief points but they can direct our reflection. In the name and by virtue of our oblation, our religious consecration, through the vows and community life, aims at realizing that prophetic witness which "places us at the service of the prophetic mission of the people of God in the world of today" (n. 27).

354 This is how Fr Dehon considered our religious consecration, marked by oblation, for example in the *Spiritual Directory*: "The vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which formally constitute the religious state, are common to all institutes; but they differ in their practical application, in respect of the special purpose which each institute has" (III, 1).

355 Priests of the Sacred Heart must seek personal perfection in the perfect observance of the prescriptions that determine for them the sense, scope and practice of their vows in conformity with the end of their vocation. Their vows must be taken and kept in the spirit of love and immolation that is proper to them" (III, 1).

356 Similarly and with more precision for poverty (III, II, 3), chastity (III, III, 1) and obedience (III, IV, 1). The Cahiers Falleur are also very precise and direct in this regard (cf. St. Deh. The following words in the index: profession, voeux, pauvreté, chasteté, obéissance).

357 In particular Fr Dehon emphasized the ascetical angle: "the sanctification of members through the observance of the three simple vows" (1956 Cst n. 2 par. 1). This sanctification is for the glory of God and the coming of the kingdom of Christ. With dynamic fidelity the new Constitutions express explicitly what was formerly implied.

Our entire religious life, in its structures and in its practice, is incorporated into the dynamic of our reparatory oblation, the center and principle of our apostolic and spiritual life, for a prophetic witness, for “the glory and delight of God” (n. 25) and for “the coming of the new humanity in Jesus Christ” (n. 39).

### **3.2 United to Christ’s oblation (n. 26)**

358 Through its union with Christ’s reparatory oblation, our SCJ religious consecration is and must be of “real apostolic fecundity” (n. 27), not only for the dispositions it generates and the works it inspires, but by its very nature, as a union with the filial and redeeming oblation of Christ, in his movement towards the Father and in his “service for the multitude” (n. 10).

359 The theological reflection of von Balthasar on “The Time of Christ” will help us acquire a deeper understanding.

360 The entire temporal life of Jesus, his experience of duration and time was measured by his reference to the Father in obedience and oblation. His oblation was and always will be the expression of his movement towards the Father, as an immediate datum of his awareness as incarnate Word. For Jesus, his life on earth and in glory, his life of oblation is to have time, all his time for the Father and this oblation possesses in itself a real redemptive efficacy. “The Son is the original place in which God has time in the world. In him there is time for all men... This opening of God’s, by means of time, is grace: access to God given by God himself” (Urs von Balthasar, *Théologie de l’histoire: I. Le temps du Christ*, p. 40).

361 This essential efficacy of the oblation-consecration of Christ is the foundation and primary reason of the efficacy of our oblation-consecration. In the union with Christ’s oblation, our oblation is the measure of our time and our duration is movement towards the Father. In this time and this duration lived for God, God has time for the world, in Christ who lives his oblation in us. This could well be the most profound expression of that real apostolic fecundity (and

redemptive or reparatory) which the text of our Constitutions recognizes in our consecration through “a life of union with Christ’s own oblation” (n. 26).

362 This line of reflection, rather difficult but very profound and thought provoking could well be followed for a true understanding of oblation and the life of oblation. I would only note how it closely links the movement of being, duration lived and the relation to time and space. If the life of oblation is having time, all one’s time for God, then the use of time is at stake. In the time of our life lived for God our oblation finds expression in attitudes or dispositions (availability and solidarity) and in concrete commitments, works, different tasks and in the name of the special grace of our oblation, which already possesses in itself “a real apostolic fecundity” that “ places us at the service of the saving mission of the people of God in the world of today” (n. 27).

## **4. Availability and solidarity**

### **4.1. The words**

363 Those two words in our Constitutions sum up the two attitudes or dispositions that govern the unfolding, in actual life, in time and space, of our religious life in its union with Christ’s oblation. In this regard, we could talk of a law or norm of availability and a norm or law of solidarity.

364 The term availability appears in n. 18 in strict relation to the “intimacy with Christ in his love for the Father and for men” (n. 17) according to the law of interior reciprocity, also formulated in n. 17. Through “listening to the Word and breaking the Bread”, (n. 17) availability is how we express “our love for all, particularly the humble and the suffering” (n. 18).

365 The term availability appears again in n. 53 regarding Christ’s obedience, model of our obedience; then in n. 55 as a condition of the

community life, in n. 85 in reference to Mary as the perfect model of our religious life and finally in n. 144 to express the law of our renewal and our permanent conversion.

366 The term solidarity appears in n. 10 to mark the relation of Christ with the world, according to the law of the incarnation, than in n. 22 regarding our communion with Christ, implying a twofold solidarity: with Christ and, in him present in the life of the world, with all humanity and all creation. This second solidarity appears in nn. 29 and 38: after Christ's example, "we have to live in positive solidarity with mankind" (n. 29); "our profession of the evangelical counsels gives us a greater closeness with the lives" of men (n. 38).

367 Availability and solidarity belong to the psycho-sociological vocabulary concerning human and social relations. They do not contain all the meaning of the traditional terms oblation and abandonment, but as expressions of oblation, take their meaning and theological import from oblation itself. They have the advantage of concretizing oblation. In fact, they avoid the danger of reducing oblation to a mere exercise of cult or to acts of oblation rightly demanded by the old Constitutions (nn. 10-11) or of turning oblation into a theme for considerations or devotion. We are reminded that oblation is lived "in deed and in truth" (n. 18).

## **4.2. Oblation in deed and truth**

368 In a certain way availability is the practice of our life of oblation in time; it is placing our being at others' disposal in our use of time: time of attention to others, of welcome, of service. These terms are found throughout the Constitutions, especially service, which appears in many contexts.

- In n. 10 the expression "obedience to the Father" is made explicit through Christ's "service for the multitude".
- In nn. 25 and 34 "the service of the gospel" is stressed, that is the duty to evangelize.

- In n. 27 “the service of the saving mission” and in n. 30 “the service of the church”.
- In n. 31 Eucharistic adoration is called “an official service in the name of the church”.
- In nn. 48, 50, 51, 54, 55, 56, 61, 62, 70 service is mentioned as well as in all the fourth part dealing with “the service of authority” (nn. 106-136).

369 All this stresses how much of our time and its use is regulated by availability in the name of oblation for “the service of our diverse works” (n. 22). “*Orationes, labores, doloresque suos Deo in unione cum Sacratissimo Corde Jesu offerant*” (Old Cts n. 10). The texture of our life is taken up and lived in reparatory oblation. Life in itself becomes an exchange of love in prayer, in service of the brethren, in service of the church and the gospel, a true liturgy, an authentic spiritual sacrifice (cf. Rm 12,1; Eph 5,2).

370 Solidarity in a way is our life of oblation in its spatial unfolding, in its relation with the world and with men. All this in union and through “union with Christ’s oblation” (n. 26) present in the life of men.

371 Solidarity signifies presence and attention, sharing, collaboration, participation, coresponsibility, communion. These words return again and again in the Constitutions, regarding Christ (nn. 9, 10, 11, 19, 22, 23, 28) our relation with the world (nn. 22, 23, 25, 29) and our community life (nn. 67, 75).

372 Our oblation, united to Christ’s, leads us to relive the incarnation, as an incorporation in “that movement of redeeming love” (n. 21) in solidarity with “Christ present in the life of the world” (n. 22); all this especially “through the sacrifice of suffering, borne in patience and surrender... for the redemption of the world” (n. 24); even solitary suffering is an expression of solidarity.

### **4.3. For the community and the apostolate**

373 Availability and solidarity are necessary for our apostolic

orientations our commitments and consequently for our sharing in the church's mission in the concrete forms in which it is carried out (nn. 30-34). They also concern the community as such and the style of our apostolate.

374 In the first place availability and solidarity go together. One cannot imagine solidarity without availability; further, availability supposes a real and profound awareness of solidarity.

375 This is so on the community plane as on the personal one in the exercise, common or personal, of the common charism. "Our community life is at the service of an apostolic mission and is enriched by fulfilling this service" (n. 61). In reference to obedience, (n. 55) availability and solidarity are tied. In the service of its apostolic mission and common charism or common project, the community must be united in availability and available to be united with "the men in whose midst they live". Besides the personal oblation of each of the members, there is a sort of community oblation, in availability and solidarity, which is thus evoked and not only in the daily community act of oblation. A community living its oblation in deed and truth because it is available and united is an apostolic and missionary community.

376 Availability and solidarity must characterize our relation with the world and the style of our apostolate, making us "attentive to the pleas of the world" (nn. 35-39). "The life of oblation... leads us to pursue... gives us a ready ear..." (n. 35).

377 Therefore we are not available and united through conformity to a new fashion of conciliar renewal or through a form of religious sociology, but because of a sort of interior need of the special grace and charism mentioned in n. 27.

378 Of course Fr Dehon's example is significant in this sense, even if in his case the attention in some way went before his vocation and mission, or at least his awareness of it. His attention to social evils and their causes soon influenced him to found the institute. Possibly this bond was less explicit at the beginning. There is an interesting study

to be continued on the ecclesial mission of the congregation in Fr Dehon's thought in the course of the years and in the historical evolution of the conscience of the congregation, as well as in the official texts. We know the great difficulties Fr Dehon had in this regard at the 1893 and 1896 chapters and how he always maintained the apostolic orientation of the congregation (cf. M. Denis, *Le projet du Pere Dehon*, pp. 161-182).

379 Without going into details regarding the expressions in nn. 35-39, which anyway are echoes of *Gaudium et Spes*, we can see a clear recognition of the bond between the spirit and life of oblation and attention to the pleas of the world, with all that it supposes and implies in the field of information, study, reflection, collaboration and effective participation. In some way, we are called, in virtue of our oblation, to take up again the great orientations of the Council and the 1971 synod on justice and peace, for the realization of human promotion as an integral part of evangelization.

380 Finally, this life of oblation, of availability in solidarity and of solidarity in availability is and must be for us an active stimulus for a vision of the world, of society and of human relations, all penetrated by the spirit of the Heart of Christ, in his total availability and solidarity both affective (cf. Mk 8,2; Mt 15,32) and effective (cf. Mk 8,6; Mt 5,7; 15,35-36; Jn 2,7).

381 Great coherence is thus established between teaching and life on the one foundation of oblation: the "Ecce Venio" in which "as Fr Dehon himself expressed it, our whole vocation, purpose, duty and commitment can be found" (n. 6).

382 Thus we specifically apply the fourth norm for renewal and adaptation given in *Perfectae Caritatis*: "Communities should promote among their members a suitable awareness of contemporary human conditions and of the needs of the church. For if, their members can combine the burning zeal of an apostle with wise judgements, made in the light of faith, concerning the circumstances of the modern world, they will be able to come to the aid of men more effectively" (2d).



## **5. Different tasks**

### **5.1. An historic problem**

383 In the development of par. 4 (nn. 26-34), nn. 30-34 form a subdivision marked by the following phrases: “pastoral works” (n. 30), “apostolic orientations” (n. 30), “concrete undertakings” (n. 32), “expressions of our participation in the church’s mission” (n. 34). In traditional terms, it is a question of works, as of the place of exercise of our availability and solidarity and, more generally, of the place of our oblation, united to the oblation of Christ. Thus, n. 22 says: “Through the service of our diverse works we hope to enter into communion with Christ” and n. 25: “All that we are, all that we do and suffer (is) in the service of the gospel”.

384 Regarding this theme n. 30 makes three points:

- “Our institute is an apostolic institute, so we place ourselves willingly at the service of the church in its varied pastoral works”.
- The institute was “not founded for any particular active work”.
- But “it does inherit from the founder some apostolic orientations which characterize its mission in the church”.

385 Two lines and two tendencies can be recognized here:

- Indetermination as a logical consequence of total availability and solidarity with the church and with all men in all their needs according to time and place.
- Determination, from the fact that our oblation aims at being union with the oblation of Christ, union with his divine Heart, as Fr Dehon used to say. According to the 1919 Directory, the orientations of our zeal are those that are “most dear to the Heart of Jesus”.

386 The question was discussed at the first general conference,

1969, at the 1973 chapter and more briefly at the second general conference, 1976 (cf. *Documenta VIII-XI* and the article by Fr Girardi in *Dehoniana* 1982).

387 It would be interesting to follow the evolution of the question in the history and documents of the congregation and in Fr Dehon's writings. From the very beginning of the institute, the problem arose for Fr Dehon in his relations with the bishop and for the diocesan commitments (parishes, missions, and other works).

388 The old Constitutions (1906-1924) stated: "They will consider themselves humble and dedicated helpers of the secular clergy".

389 From the beginning however, some orientations took shape and developed until the very explicit text of the "Souvenirs" to which n. 31 refers us.

390 We must appreciate the balance of formulation in nn. 30-31 to satisfy the twofold need of indetermination and determination, required by the spirit of oblation. Note the importance given to the "apostolic orientations" (nn. 30, 32) or options, which must lead to "concrete undertakings" (n. 32) or works, to be taken on in the universal church and in the local churches, in agreement with those who bear responsibility; with them we must discover "which expressions of our participation in the church's mission leave it possible for us to develop the riches of our vocation" (n. 34).

## **5.2. Our apostolic orientations**

391 To determine our apostolic orientations Fr Dehon wrote in the *Spiritual Directory*: "We respond to the appeals of our Lord at Paray-le-Monial, to the inspirations of grace and to the guidance of Providence". In other words, we respond to the wishes and appeals of the Heart of Jesus, to the Holy Spirit working in our souls, in the church and in the world.

392 The new Constitutions state these appeals of our Lord very clearly:

- Attention to the Heart of Jesus himself, to his love and his active presence in the world.
- Attention to “people, particularly the most deprived” (n.5) “particularly the humble and the suffering” (n. 1), “the poor and the lowly to whom he announced the Good News” with whom we, “after his example, have to live in positive solidarity” (n. 28). Attention to the appeals of the world is also necessary, which the Lord makes known to us through little and big events, in human expectations and realizations (nn. 36-37).
- Attention to the needs of the church, spouse and body of Christ, to redress pastoral neglect (n. 5), sin and the neglect of love (n. 7), placing ourselves at its service “in its varied pastoral works” (n. 30).

393 This threefold attention will determine and direct our availability. It must be total, according to the needs of men, of the world and of the church. It is not undifferentiated but is inspired, according to Fr Dehon’s mode of expressing himself, by preferences of the Heart of Christ, the text of the new Constitutions brings this out with the use of words such as “above all” (n. 4), “in particular” (n. 5), “especially” (n. 18) and, speaking of “apostolic orientations that characterize our mission in the church” (n. 30), our “service in the church” (n. 31) or better our participation “in the mission of the church” (cf. nn. 26-34).

394 In this regard the old Constitutions indicated some “apostolates” or “orientations” and the *Spiritual Directory* spoke of works we should prefer, since they are “more dear to the Heart of Jesus: service of the clergy, their formation, their sanctification, care of children, of workers, of the poor”, as a service done directly to our Lord himself. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25,40).

395 Nn. 30-34 of the new Constitutions correspond to nn. 7-8 of the old ones. The only distinction is that, while nn. 30-31 treat apostolic orientations (or options) as distinct from the works in themselves, nn. 32-34 deal with concrete undertakings, or works at the service of the universal church and of the local churches.

396 Four great apostolic orientations are indicated in nn. 30-31 in reference to Fr Dehon's counsels and example. It is easy to see here the threefold attention to the wishes and appeals of the Heart of Jesus, to his preferences and to the needs of the church and the world.

397 **1.** Eucharistic adoration: attention, union and presence with Christ in his sacrifice and in his sacramental presence. "Set in a spirit of love and oblation" it is "an official service in the name of the church" (n. 31). Fr Dehon repeatedly recommended Eucharistic adoration in a most clear and forceful way. "Without adoration our Work will not achieve its mission" (NQT VI, 24, 1.3.1893). "We must firmly adhere to it", he wrote in the *Souvenirs* (XV). And in his spiritual testament: "My last word is to recommend to you once more daily adoration, official reparatory adoration, in the name of holy church, to console our Lord and hasten the kingdom of the Sacred Heart in souls and nations" (DSP App. 11). In this passage, we note the typically apostolic perspective given to our Eucharistic adoration (cf. M. Denis, op. cit. p. 362, references to the word "adoration").

398 The theme of the Eucharist returns in nn. 80-84. "Our entire Christian and religious life has its source and culmination in the eucharist" (n. 80). Here the eucharist is treated in its relationship to community life, through the text of Acts 2,42, recalled in n. 76: "Devoted to prayer". Here we find the great orientations of our spiritual life and of Fr Dehon's, for whom the eucharistic sacrifice expresses and concentrates his entire life in "one unending mass" (n. 5). In n. 83 eucharistic adoration is described as "a demand of our reparatory vocation".

399 **2.** The ministry towards the lowly and humble, workers and the poor, with whom "Christ aligned himself" (n. 28) to proclaim to them the unfathomable riches of Christ. The intimate relation between this attention to the poor and the wishes of the Heart of Christ and the example of Jesus is stressed in Lk 4,18, while Mt 11,25-26 and Lk 10,21-22 speak of Christ's joy and consolation because the mysteries

of the kingdom of God have been revealed to the little ones. Regarding Fr Dehon's thought, recommendations and example in this field, see M. Denis, op. cit. The best-known and most explicit text is the one from "Souvenirs" XI: "I have also wished to contribute to the elevation of the popular masses through the reign of justice and Christian charity... In this field too, the work must be continuous" (LC n. 338).

400 **3.** The formation of priests and religious or more generally "the service of priests for their education and sanctification" (*Spiritual Directory*), because they are particularly loved by Christ and are called to love him in a special way and also because they are particularly called to the ministry, a ministry in which pastoral neglect or infidelity weaken the church (cf. nn. 4-5), a ministry that particularly concerns Fr Dehon's mission to "the lowly and humble" (n. 31).

401 **4.** Missionary activity, as a special form of apostolic service, which concerns the fidelity and vitality of the church, spouse and body of Christ, in the mission the Lord has entrusted to it and also as a great test of love towards our Lord, along the lines of a life of love and reparation, because it demands more than sacrifice (cf. LC n. 162, 326; *Souvenirs* XII, LC. 390).

402 N. 31 refers to "Souvenirs" XI which lists the works to be preferred and the spirit with which they should be carried out. Fr Dehon could sum up everything in one great apostolic act: "Lead priests and people to the Heart of Jesus" (LC. n. 386). It is an apostolate, he adds, that must be continuous, extended and intensified.

403 This theme of apostolic orientations is especially important for the identity and vitality of the institute as an apostolic institute, in a determined spiritual perspective, as has been recognized by the church and to respond to the vocation of the institute of bringing the founder's charism to fruition "having regard to the needs of the

church and of the world” (n. 1).

### **5.3. Our commitments and enterprises**

404 In this field the Constitutions, which constitute the fundamental code, refer us to the provincial directories for its determination and adaptation according to the demands of place and time (nn. 32-34).

405 There are three general directives or criteria:

- “Communion with the life of the church” and especially with “those who bear responsibility for the local churches” (nn. 32, 34).
- Attention to the signs of the times – “according to time and place” (n. 32).
- Correspondence with the apostolic orientations indicated (n. 32) with particular attention to the ministries of missionary evangelization (cf. n. 33).

406 These apostolic commitments and enterprises must be “expressions of our participation in the church’s mission (which) leave it possible for us to develop the riches of our vocation” (n. 34) and thus realize the unity of the religious life, according to the twofold complementary dimension: spiritual life and apostolic life.

407 The brief points made in the Constitutions correspond with the conciliar orientations. They can be completed and developed with the aid of documents that have appeared since the Council, especially *Mutuae Relationes* (14.5.1978).

## **6. For the delight and glory of God**

408 This phrase of n. 25, coming at the end of our consideration of our spiritual life (nn. 16-25) seems a beautiful conclusion for reflecting on our apostolic mission, on our participation in the church’s mission in the world of today (cf. nn. 26-39). And for a reflection on our

religious life as Priests of the Sacred Heart. It supplies, at the end of n. 39 on our “prophetic witness... to the coming of the new humanity in Jesus Christ”, its ultimate perspective and its deepest meaning.

409 Thus in Eph 1,3-14, where the phrase “to the praise of his glorious grace” appears three times (vv. 6, 12, 14) the development: all revealed mystery and the whole life of the Apostle and of the Christian are presented under the sign of pure praise and of pure love.

410 We could also regard this as a very beautiful way of expressing what could be considered the essential law of our life as Priests of the Sacred Heart, the law of pure love, particularly recommended and explained by Fr Dehon.

411 Regarding the expression itself, it would take a book to explain Fr Dehon’s use of it, his preference, his conviction, up to the formula already quoted, which is surprising at first sight but which contains a great truth: “Pure love, there is the salvation of the church and of the world; it will resolve all current social problems” (CF II, 45-47).

412 The new Constitutions do not use the expression “pure love”, but the law of pure love is present throughout the text in expressions that stress the radicalism and absolute need of this love, whose active presence we experience in our lives (cf. nn. 9, 14, 25). The vocabulary of the *Spiritual Directory* (pure, all, nothing, absolutely, extremely) and the developments on pure love and purity of intention are possibly more striking, but the new Constitutions are no less demanding when they speak of holiness, perfect charity, commitment without reserve for a true prophetic witness.

413 In this regard note the use of the formula “for the Father and for men” (nn. 3, 6, 10, 14, 17, 23, 25) both for the love of Christ and for love and oblation. Here also we must bear in mind the theology of charity, of the one agape and of the one love; no dualism, parallelism or dichotomy, but the unitarian dialectic of Christian love. The love of Christ for humanity has its beginning and end in the mutual knowledge and the mutual love of the Father and the Son (cf. Jn 10, 15). The love of Christ for men, his solidarity is the expression of his

pure love for the Father. The church, in its mission of serving mankind, lives and realizes its love as spouse of Christ. In this perspective, our mission and apostolic action can and must be an action and life of pure love, to realize the coming of the new humanity “for the delight and glory of God” (n. 25).

414 In this perspective the insistence of the new Constitutions on reference to the world, man, humanity, multitudes, etc. is very meaningful. This is quite different from the Directory, which is much more ascetical and introspective. Nevertheless, by centering everything on Christ and his oblation, the new Constitutions show deep SCJ fidelity, under the law of pure love.

415 Purity of love is the great law of our life, at least as an ideal proposed, the ideal of “perfect charity” after which “we profess to strive” (n. 14). This striving is a new law of love; it is the continuous striving in possession itself, of which Paul speaks: “I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own” (Phil 3,12).

416 The text of the new Constitutions testifies to this in its own way, multiplying terms such as appeal, searching, etc. and inviting us “to an ever deeper discovery” (n. 17), for a union asserts and renews itself without ceasing. It is the law of “committing ourselves unreservedly” (n. 39) as a condition and expression of our “prophetic witness... for the coming of the new humanity” (n. 39) “for the delight and glory of God” (n. 25).