

MINUTES OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE VII INTERNATIONAL DEHONIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINAR

Date: August 1, 2026

Place: Auditorium of the Faculdade Dehoniana / Convento Sagrado Coração de Jesus (Conventinho), Taubaté-SP, Brazil

Session theme: Léon Dehon in *Couronnes d'amour*: Father Dehon in his spiritual texts

Opening of Session 3

On the first day of August in the year two thousand twenty-six, in the Auditorium of the Faculdade Dehoniana, in Taubaté-SP, within the framework of the VII International Dehonian Theological Seminar, the Third Session of the proceedings began. The moderator of the third session, Fr. Emerson Marcelo Ruiz, a member of the organizing committee, opened the day's work at 8:30 a.m., welcoming the participants. Before beginning the program planned for the session, Fr. Emerson made five announcements:

1. Greetings to confreres Fr. Stefano Zamboni and Fr. Mario Marcelo Coelho on the day of the "moralists," on the liturgical memorial of Saint Alphonsus Maria de Liguori;
2. Greetings to Fr. Yudistiro Adifitriyassanto on the occasion of his 25th anniversary of religious profession (a photograph of his first religious profession was projected on the screen);
3. Welcome to confreres Fr. Alain Martial Nguetsop and Fr. Joseph Kuate, members of the African Commission (CTDAF), who finally managed to arrive in Brazil the previous evening;
4. Communication concerning the death of a collaborator of the Conventinho, Mrs. Maria de Lourdes, on the previous day, with a request for prayers for her eternal rest;
5. Instructions regarding the departure at the end of the day for Mass and dinner in the Dehonian parishes and communities, with the organization of participants in the vehicles and their drivers (the list was sent in the WhatsApp group).

After these announcements, Fr. Emerson invited the secretariat of the Theological Seminar to present the summary of the previous session. Fr. Victor de Oliveira Barbosa, on behalf of the secretariat, read the summary of the work on Father Dehon's *Social Catechism* (the text was sent in the communications group).

Once the secretariat's presentation was concluded, Fr. Emerson introduced the theme of the third session, centered on Father Dehon in his spiritual writings. The pre-seminar work had been carried out by the North American Commission (CTDNA), which chose to work especially with the work *Couronnes d'amour*. The European Commission (CTDEU) prepared the response to the work done by the CTDNA. Fr. Emerson then presented the program of the third session: (1) presentation of the CTDNA study; (2) presentation of the CTDEU response; (3) group work and plenary discussion on the theme of the session.

After these initial considerations, Fr. Emerson invited Fr. John van den Hengel to take the floor and present the study carried out by the CTDNA.

1. Presentation of the CTDNA

Fr. John situated the study in the final period of Father Dehon's life, marked by his forced departure from Saint-Quentin and by exile in Brussels. In that time, the Founder's life shifted from social engagement toward a spiritual life and a revision of devotion to the Sacred Heart. Between 1896 and 1922, Dehon wrote nine works on the Heart of Jesus and the interior life. The CTDNA does not dwell on the historical biography, but on the implied author and the mock reader that emerge from the texts, taking *Couronnes d'amour* (1905) as the privileged lens.

1.1. Corpus of the spiritual texts and choice of *Couronnes d'amour*

The CTDNA presented the set of Father Dehon's spiritual texts in the period 1896–1918/1922:

- 1896: *La retraite du Sacré-Cœur*
- 1899: *Le mois du Sacré-Cœur*
- 1900: *De la vie d'amour envers le Sacré-Cœur*
- 1904: *Couronnes d'amour*
- 1906: *Le Cœur sacerdotal de Jésus*
- 1918: *L'Année avec le Sacré-Cœur*
- 1918: *La Vie intérieure*
- 1918: *La vie intérieure: Ses principes, ses voies diverses et sa pratique*
- 1922: *Études sur le Sacré-Cœur de Jésus*

The choice of *Couronnes d'amour* as the axis of the research is due to the fact that it is the clearest example of the Dehonian intention: a retreat structured on the basis of the *Triplex Corona* prayer of the *Thesaurus precum*, with three crowns – Incarnation, Passion, and Eucharist – each with five mysteries explored in six meditations, totaling ninety meditations.

1.2. Common internal structure of the Sacred Heart texts

Fr. John showed that the Dehonian spiritual writings on the Heart of Jesus share a common internal structure:

- they appropriate traditional devotional practices of devotion to the Sacred Heart (Litany, Crown, month of the Heart of Jesus, oblation, liturgical year), while at the same time challenging the traditional interpretation of those practices;
- they take the form of a spiritual retreat configured as a series of meditations (in the set of retreats, about 625 meditations);
- they are practical and contemplative texts, and not primarily analytical or doctrinal;
- the principal action is contemplation;
- the mock reader is conceived as someone who places himself in an attitude of retreat, meditation, and contemplation, first of all the member of the Congregation called to make the retreat, in the context of post-revolutionary France;
- they have as their goal union with the Sacred Heart, by way of passage through the mysteries of Christ, with a biblical and eucharistic reading inspired by the French School of Spirituality, especially Pierre de Bérulle;
- they culminate in what Father Dehon calls pure love, the mystical immersion of the meditator in the Heart of Christ.

1.3. Devotion to the Sacred Heart as performance

Fr. John insisted on the practical and performative character of these texts. The Sacred Heart is not presented as a doctrine merely to be known, but as a world configured by meditation. The genre of the retreat through a sequence of meditations is central: it is a methodical spiritual itinerary, a “deliberately choreographed spiritual experience,” destined to refigure the disciple.

The aim of the retreat is not to arrive at a decision (as in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Saint Ignatius), but at an experience of union with Christ, of pure love, or of the Sacred Heart within the self. The Sacred Heart does not remain an objective reality exterior to the meditation: it is what is configured in the life of the retreatant by the inner dynamic of the meditative cycle.

The meditation follows the Sulpician form: (1) a declarative text about a divine reality, generally a Gospel passage; (2) explanation and affective communion with the feelings and attitudes of Jesus; (3) application to life, with affections, resolutions, and a spiritual bouquet. The mock reader becomes an active participant, filling in the gaps of the text with personal devotion and spiritual engagement.

1.4. Union with the Sacred Heart: Bérulle and the French School

The meditant's passage through the mysteries of Christ until union with Him is modeled on the Christology of Pierre de Bérulle. Although Bérulle's name is not cited in *Couronnes d'amour*, the method is Bérullian: to appropriate the mysteries of Jesus, the origin of the Son in the Father, the Incarnation, the hidden life, the ministry, the death, and the Eucharist, until the meditant is progressively reconfigured in Christ.

Three aspects of Bérullian spirituality reappear in *Couronnes d'amour*:

- the exemplarity of Jesus for human life;
- the necessity of the annihilation of the self (*néant*) in order to make way for Christ;
- the endpoint of contemplation: union with Christ.

In the Bérullian anthropology assumed by the implied author, the human nature of Jesus does not subsist in itself, but in the person of the Word. Human perfection passes through the assumption of the human by the divine. In *Couronnes d'amour*, Dehon writes: "Our Lord's humanity did not have its own subsistence and lived only by virtue of its union with the person of the Word. How this reality made him feel the nothingness of his human nature!" (CAM 1/134). The language of victim, immolation, and oblation is articulated within this grammar: the "I" must yield place to Christ, according to Gal 2:20, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me," which Father Dehon freely translates as "His Heart lives in me" (CAM 1/19).

1.5. Christology of the Sacred Heart and mysticism of pure love

The CTDNA presented the Dehonian Christology of the Sacred Heart in four movements:

- the Incarnation as Christ's oblation to the Father;
- the human way: from self-love to pure love;
- a life of contemplation of the Sacred Heart: retreats of meditations that appropriate the mystery of love in the life of Jesus (mystical union / pure love);
- at the summit of contemplation, intellect and will are overtaken and transformed by the divine: "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20); through contemplation of Christ's love, the meditant finds "a permanent dwelling in this Heart" (CAM 1/10).

The Sacred Heart is an icon of Christ's life of self-gift, of the oblation of the human in favor of the divine, and a figure of the infinite, generative, and creative love of God made physical presence on earth. Pure love is at once passive and active: a gift of the Sacred Heart that encompasses us and an energy of agape that becomes a force in us. The Heart of Christ is what God had in view in creation; it is the "thinking and loving heart of God" made flesh (CAM 1/30). To dwell in this Heart, or to let this Heart dwell in us, is the term of mystical union and the source of reparation: not primarily an isolated moral effort, but participation in the reparative love of Christ himself.

Fr. John situated this mysticism within the horizon of modern mysticism, especially that of Saint Francis de Sales: not a merely ontological union in the depths of the soul (as in the Rhineland mystics), but a union through the faculties, intellect and will, at their highest level, in mental prayer and contemplation. The summit of the soul Father Dehon names heart, in its abyss: the space of that which exceeds us, the Heart of Jesus, "our home, our refuge, the place of our retreat" (CAM 1/16).

1.6. The Eucharist as the apex of the way (third crown)

According to Fr. John, the third crown, the Eucharist, completes the itinerary. In it, union with Christ as self-gift is realized. The Heart of Jesus is very much alive in the Eucharist: "To continue always and without interruption the *ecce venio* and the act of love that the Incarnation was — such is the unique activity of the Sacred Heart" (CAM 3/80).

Father Dehon speaks of a "substitution" that the Sacred Heart enacts in us, almost of a "transubstantiation" of our imperfect dispositions into the wine of love (CAM 3/123). Thanksgiving, reparation, adoration, and immolation become acts of the Heart of Jesus offered to the Father in our name. The spiritual cycle closes in eucharistic annihilation and in the life of

oblation: the *Ecce venio* becomes the permanent form of Christian and Dehonian existence. The life of sacrifice is the core of the Eucharist and the core of Christian life (CAM 3/220).

1.7. Meaning for today's reader and for the Congregation

Fr. John concluded that the implied author of *Couronnes d'amour* does not offer only doctrine about the Sacred Heart, but a spiritual performance: a methodical itinerary destined to refigure the disciple. The mock reader is the SCJ religious called to become contemplative in the Heart of Christ, uniting interiority and mission.

The North American Commission formulated, in conclusion, four affirmations and one challenge:

- Father Dehon presents a new way of interpreting the traditional practices of devotion to the Sacred Heart (retreats, meditation, and contemplation);
- Father Dehon's spiritual writings remain largely unknown;
- these writings seem, at first sight, to be in tension with other preoccupations of Father Dehon reflected in his other texts (social, institutional);
- for the disciples of Father Dehon in the twenty-first century, the question arises: what does such a mystical entry mean in relation to today's social challenges and needs, in particular social justice?

Finally, Fr. John affirmed that, for the Congregation today, the study of Father Dehon in *Couronnes d'amour* leaves decisive questions:

- how to reread the language of *néant*, victim, and immolation without betraying its substance, translating it into categories of availability, reconciliation, solidarity, and the reparation of relationships;
- how to maintain the primacy of mystical union with the Heart of Jesus as the source of the apostolate, avoiding both disembodied spiritualism and activism without contemplation;
- how to let the Eucharist and adoration continue to be the place where the charism is renewed and becomes mission;
- how to form "new meditants" capable of reading their own life and history in the light of the mysteries of Christ, in creative fidelity;
- how to articulate the mysticism of *Couronnes d'amour* with the social engagement witnessed in the *Social Catechism* and in the *Notes Quotidiennes*, so that contemplation and the transformation of realities of injustice remain inseparable.

When Fr. John's exposition was concluded, at 9:40 a.m., the moderator, Fr. Emerson, thanked him for the presentation and invited the participants to a break until 10:15 a.m., when the work of the session would resume.

2. Response of the CTDEU to the CTDNA

Returning from the break at 10:15 a.m., after the exposition of the North American Dehonian Theological Commission (CTDNA) on Father Dehon in *Couronnes d'amour*, the assembly heard the response of the European Dehonian Theological Commission (CTDEU).

The moderator, Fr. Emerson, situated the moment, recalling that the third session had opened the field of the Founder's spiritual writings, with the North American reading of *Couronnes d'amour* (1905) as the privileged lens for identifying the implied author and the mock reader in Father Dehon's text, as well as its contemporary relevance from the perspective of the spirituality of the Sacred Heart. It then fell to the CTDEU to welcome, value, and tension this contribution from the sensibilities and questions of the European continent, in creative fidelity to the charism and in the exercise of critical charity. The moderator invited Fr. Stefano Zamboni, coordinator of the CTDEU, to take the floor and present the European response to the CTDNA essay.

Fr. Stefano situated the North American essay in the final period of Father Dehon's life, marked by exile in Brussels from 1903 onward. It is a phase of intense interiorization, in which the Founder's spiritual life underwent a change of direction, moving away from more immediate involvement with the social scene and dedicating itself almost exclusively to a revision of devotion to the Sacred

Heart. The CTDEU welcomed with great interest the effort to apply to this material an innovative reading methodology inspired by contemporary literary criticism. The intention of limiting oneself to Father Dehon as implied author and to the mock reader, as they emerge in *Couronnes d'amour*, was recognized as a valuable and necessary attempt to free Dehonian literature from purely hagiographical or naively biographical readings.

Fr. Stefano affirmed that the European response is organized in four moments: positive aspects and merits of the text; criticisms and methodological limitations; relevance for Dehonians today; and questions addressed to the CTDNA.

2.1. Positive aspects and merits of the text

Fr. Stefano recognized, on behalf of the CTDEU, several points of excellence and insights of great scientific value in the CTDNA essay.

First, the reevaluation of Dehon's late period. The essay timely sheds light on a chronological period and a production often dismissed as "minor" or excessively devotional when compared with the earlier social works, with specific focus on the nine books that Father Dehon wrote between 1896 and 1922 on the Heart of Jesus and the interior life.

Second, the rigorous reconstruction of sources and theological coordinates. The essay offers a notable contribution to the mapping of Father Dehon's theological coordinates, highlighting his deep debt to the French School of Spirituality, particularly Pierre de Bérulle and Saint Francis de Sales, and showing how the Founder arrives at the mysticism of pure love. This notion plays an essential role: it allows the believer to participate directly in the infinite energy of God's agape. Moreover, the text clarifies Father Dehon's spiritual lineage, showing that he does not align himself with the ontological mysticism of the Rhineland, centered on essence; rather, he embraces a psychological mysticism of the interior life, inaugurated by Francis de Sales, which involves the faculties of the soul at their highest level of activity.

Third, the reconstruction of pedagogical and performative dynamics. The analysis captures the inner logic of the Dehonian meditations, inspired by the Sulpician method, and correctly underlines their practical and performative nature. The ultimate goal of these texts is not theoretical, but union with Christ — a process that leads to the gradual reconfiguration of the meditant's self into the self of Jesus. The mock reader is constructed as a meditant and contemplative, called to pass through the mysteries of the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Eucharist until immersion in pure love.

Fourth, the transcendence of biographical reductionism. The methodological choice of approaching the text from within, safeguarding its literary autonomy from the Founder's historical vicissitudes, was considered a correct and praiseworthy operation, in keeping with the North American essay's own declared intention of limiting itself to Father Dehon as implied author.

2.2. Criticisms and methodological limitations

Alongside these merits, the CTDEU observed a structural discrepancy between the declared methodological premises and the actual development of the essay.

The first point concerns the short-circuit between narratology and the history of ideas. In the introduction, the text declares the intention of using Wayne C. Booth's categories (implied author and mock reader) to study the *persona*, sensibility, or worldview that the reader infers about the author from the text itself. Yet the analysis quickly shifts into a traditional study of the history of ideas (spirituality, theological anthropology, and mystical psychology). Instead of analyzing how rhetorical choices and textual structure shape the implied author, the essay seems to limit itself to explaining what Father Dehon thinks, dispersing the analysis across various doctrines, such as those of Bérulle or Francis de Sales. The narratological promise remains, for the most part, in the background, serving almost as an artificial methodological framework.

The second point refers to the inconsistent use of personal biographical sources. Despite the explicit promise not to refer to Father Dehon's biographical reality, the essay frequently turns to the *Notes Quotidiennes* in order to explain and decipher *Couronnes d'amour*. From a strict methodological point of view, this creates a contradiction: the personal diaries belong to the real author, Father

Dehon in his psychological historicity, whereas the implied author must be reconstructed exclusively from the published pages of *Couronnes d'amour*.

The third point concerns the excessive simplification of the mock reader. The identity of the ideal reader envisioned by Father Dehon is dismissed too hastily by identifying him, *tout court*, with the members of the Congregation. Beyond the fact that the original public of *Couronnes d'amour* was potentially broader – women religious, diocesan priests, laypeople – crucial textual questions remain unanswered: how is this hypothetical reader configured in the text? What are his interests, his horizon of reference, and his presupposed spiritual attitudes?

2.3. *Relevance for Dehonians today*

Presenting the third point of the CTDEU response, Fr. Stefano affirmed that the essay, despite its methodological limitations, deeply challenges contemporary Dehonian identity.

First, the integration of the mystical and the social is required. The study forces us to examine how to connect the Dehon of the later years, the “mystical” Dehon, focused on pure love, with the “social” Dehon of the earlier works. It shows that devotion to the Sacred Heart is not an intimist refuge from historical disappointments, but the very source from which reparative action springs. This intuition finds an echo in Pope Francis’s recent encyclical on the Heart of Jesus Christ, *Dilexit nos*, especially in chapters 4 and 5.

Second, the challenge of pure love today. In a pragmatic and utilitarian society, recovering the dimension of disinterested and gratuitous love restores to Dehonians the specificity of their mission: to bear witness to the absolute gratuity of God’s love in a world dominated by profit. Pure love, oblation, immolation, and mystical union with the Heart of Jesus do not dispense with commitment to justice; on the contrary, they ground reparation as participation in the reparative love of Christ himself.

2.4. *Questions addressed to the North American Theological Commission*

In order to promote a fruitful dialogue, the CTDEU presented two central questions to its North American colleagues.

The first question: in the essay, it is explained with great effectiveness that these meditations do not intend to teach a systematic doctrine, but present themselves as an eminently practical guide, the Sacred Heart as performance, which requires the active and affective involvement of the reader in order to be realized. If this is true, is this not precisely the key for defining Father Dehon as implied author? In *Couronnes d'amour*, Father Dehon does not adopt the posture of an authoritarian master; on the contrary, he deliberately withdraws and almost disappears, renouncing his authorial presence in order to leave the whole space to the reader’s immediate spiritual experience. What does the CTDNA think about this?

The second question concerns the practical use of a text such as *Couronnes d'amour*. Since it is, as affirmed, a work of performative and not purely speculative character, how can this book be used concretely today in pastoral ministry, in the spiritual formation of religious, or in the accompaniment of persons? How can this practical guide shape the spiritual experience of a twenty-first-century reader, thus answering the very appeal that the text awaits the witness of those followers who have dedicated their lives and ministry to putting Dehon’s legacy into practice?

Fr. Stefano concluded by affirming that some interesting contributions of Fr. Jakub Bieszczad, a confrere of the POL Province, to the text are available in the CTDEU text published on the Seminar website.

At the end of the presentation, the moderator, Fr. Emerson, thanked Fr. Stefano Zamboni and the CTDEU for the theological density and critical clarity of the response.

3. **Group discussion and dialogue on the theme of the session**

Fr. Emerson then gave the instructions for the group work: the groups were to concentrate on only three points of the theme discussed in the session; the secretaries were to present the groups’

contributions in the plenary in no more than three minutes; the group secretaries were to send their responses to the secretariat of the Theological Seminar. The groups were to answer the question: “On the basis of what we have heard, what are the significant and important aspects for our understanding of Father Dehon in his texts today?”

The moderator, Fr. Emerson Marcelo Ruiz, conducted the third moment of the session, inviting the group secretaries to present the elements of the discussion. He asked each secretary to identify himself and to indicate the language in which he would make the presentation.

This was an exercise of collegial discernment, in continuity with the method of the Seminar: to read Father Dehon in his texts, with critical charity and creative fidelity, in order to illuminate the life and mission of the Congregation today. The stage was situated in the immediate sequence of the North American study of *Couronnes d’amour* (1905) as the privileged lens for the implied author and the mock reader in the spiritual writings of the Sacred Heart, and of the European reaction, which valued the contribution and tensioned it with methodological and theological observations. The group work did not have as its purpose merely to echo the CTDNA presentation and the CTDEU response: the scope was to formulate formative, spiritual, and missionary questions, within the horizon of mystical union, pure love, oblation, and reparation, themes that had emerged from the presentations. The contributions are recorded below in the order in which they were received:

3.1. Portuguese-language Group 1 – Fr. Elizeu Resende Silva

The group observed that Father Dehon seems to require renunciation of the self as self-love, which in certain passages approaches an exaggeration: the annihilation of the human being so that God may act. It is necessary, however, to consider the Founder’s spiritual experience, the limits of language, and the historical context. *Couronnes d’amour* may cause a certain repulsion because of its language, but it has a context: rationalist France, in which the human excludes the sacred and the divine. The context helps us to understand, even if the underlying anthropology appears, in part, deficient.

In agreement with the European Commission, the group recorded that the text of the North American Commission did not fully obey the methodological rule of distinction among real author, implied author, and mock reader. This constituted a limitation of the presentation, although the thematic exposition was rich.

Finally, a provocation was formulated: in Father Dehon’s writings there seems to be a dichotomy between the social (the canonist, the lawyer, the public man) and the spiritual (an anthropology in which the human being seems to lack autonomy before God), a piety that is insufficiently critical. How are we to deepen and overcome this apparent dichotomy?

3.2. Portuguese-language Group 2 – Fr. João Carlos Almeida

The group organized its reflection in three times. Yesterday: emphasis was placed on Father Dehon’s conscious use of the French School of Spirituality, which allows the resignification of concepts such as union of love, annihilation, holocaust, and victim — not very palatable for religious of today, but perhaps very palatable for the religious of tomorrow, since many young people today adhere to this kind of spirituality.

Today: it was perceived that *Couronnes d’amour* continues to be a good aid for the formation of young Dehonians in the spirituality received from the Founder.

Tomorrow: seminars such as this one can contribute to an organic and updated reading of Father Dehon’s texts, so that they may remain usable and eloquent for new generations.

3.3. French-language group – Fr. Alain Martial Nguetsop

The group appreciated the mysticism referred to by the CTDNA, which combines contemplation and action for the sake of mission. It was asked, however, how the Commission arrived at the conclusion that this mysticism would mean a rupture between the mystical orientation and social engagement. The need was recognized to value *Couronnes d’amour* as a spiritual method, and it

was asked whether it might not be possible to transform it into a spiritual exercise: a Dehonian path toward union with God. The great capacity for synthesis of Father Dehon in the work was also highlighted, which confers importance upon it and calls for greater reception in the Congregation.

3.4. *English-language Group 1 – Prof. Dr. Jeremy Blackwood*

The group valued the space that the text leaves for the reader to go deeper: *Couronnes d'amour* is an invitation to meditation, and not an imposition of what the reader must discover in the experience; it appeals to more than the intellect.

The question of divine and human *kenosis* was raised: what does it mean to “disappear” and “give place to God”? It was observed that the Dehonian approach is open to the risk of an excess of self-immolation. A theology of creation is needed to sustain this language. Care is required with the categories of “victimhood” and “abandonment,” and the Dehonian Family must be able to include critique of Father Dehon in its perceptions and in congregational life.

As in the social field, it is not a matter of copying Father Dehon, but of creatively following the principles and deepest meanings in a way appropriate to the present time. He felt that the task was commitment to love; yet the question remains: what is the pure love of which he spoke, and is it truly possible today? What of people who come from broken homes and wounded backgrounds? For seminarians, this may require greater attention to human formation and psychological healing. Theologically, it will be necessary to clarify levels or types of love, the meaning of the “purification of love,” and the difference between self-offering and loss of self. From there opens the path toward compassion for the other, including addressing the ways in which poverty and other social wounds can hinder spiritual experience.

3.5. *English-language Group 2 – Fr. Emmanuel Nanduri*

The group affirmed that *Couronnes d'amour* is not primarily about knowledge nor about an abstract discourse on love, but about experience: the personal and spiritual experience of Father Dehon, which manifests his spirituality. A profound parallelism and complementarity between *Couronnes d'amour* and the SCJ Rule of Life was highlighted: both texts illuminate each other and offer a denser understanding of one another.

The notion of pure love was considered relevant for the present time, finding its perfection in union with Christ. Although it sounds Christocentric, its purpose is to purify the soul and conform it to Christ. Purification of the self is a fruit of interior life and of union with the Lord. Interior life is not reduced to sacramental or liturgical life: it is the integration of the totality of the person and underlines the presence of each individual in liturgical and spiritual practices.

The group insisted on the integration of mystical life and social life. The articulation of two Christological approaches broadens the understanding of the origins of the charism and emphasizes anthropology: Christ as the new human person, whom Father Dehon seeks to realize in his social works through the centrality of human dignity. The reflection invites us to ask who we are before God, in the person of Jesus Christ.

3.6. *Spanish-language group – Fr. Renato de Vieira Lima*

The group underlined that Father Dehon has many faces: he is an author who uses diverse literary genres. There is a relation between contemplative love and social commitment, even without direct mentions in every passage: being a servant, the Kingdom, mission.

The implied reader, to a certain extent, withdraws so that the real reader may have a personal experience with Jesus. More than a speculative book, the text is, in part, a compilation of Father Dehon's retreats. The path proposed is to draw near to the person of Christ through the mysteries of his life. Pure love appears as the summit of the spiritual life. Christological questions remained open: annihilation of the self or a perspective of elevation?

3.7. Free interventions and dialogue with the presenters

Once the presentations of the secretaries of the linguistic groups were concluded, the moderator, Fr. Emerson, invited the presenters of the session, Fr. John van den Hengel and Fr. Stefano Zamboni, to join the discussion table and opened the floor to those who wished to make free interventions.

Fr. Joseph Famerée drew attention to the ambiguity of the expression “pure love,” which can assume distinct meanings according to the anthropology that sustains it. It may indicate an experience of self-gift and freedom, but it may also run the risk of being interpreted as the annulment of the person. Without entering directly into that anthropological question, he suggested that the language of pure love can be updated by the expression “unconditional love,” understood as the free love of God, revealed in Christ and symbolized in the Heart of Jesus. He then asked whether the expression “pure love” is recurrent in Father Dehon’s spiritual writings and whether there is in them a proper development of this notion.

Fr. John van den Hengel replied that the expression appears about two hundred to two hundred fifty times in Father Dehon’s writings, which demonstrates its relevance. According to him, the language clearly refers to the French spiritual tradition, particularly to Fénelon, even when the latter is not explicitly cited. Fénelon’s influence can also be perceived when Dehon mentions authors and important figures of French spirituality. The proposal of the research is therefore to analyze first the notion of pure love in Fénelon and then to verify how it is appropriated by Father Dehon. He further observed that the question remains current not only in the theological field, but also in psychology and in other areas of reflection, where the risk of an excessive self-surrender, capable of leading to the loss of one’s own identity, is critically discussed. The updating of the notion therefore requires discerning between a loving and free self-gift and an annulment of the self. Personally, he preferred the understanding of Thomas Aquinas as a good corrective for this language, including with regard to the congregational use of terms such as “abandonment.”

Fr. Josimar Baggio highlighted two concepts that he considers fundamental for understanding Dehonian spirituality: “pure love” and “interior life.” Without them, it would be difficult to establish the relation between Father Dehon’s mystical dimension and his social commitment. He observed, however, that to speak today of interior life also requires considering the capacity for presence. In a context marked by dispersion and by a deficit of attention, to be truly present, physically and interiorly, in the place and before persons has become a challenge. The same can be applied to pure love: it is a love that does not grow weary, that perseveres and goes to the end. The question for the Congregation is whether these two characteristics, interior life and persevering love, still find space and can constitute a properly Dehonian contribution to the contemporary world.

Fr. Gustave Lulendo N’dotony observed that the methodology planned for the session had not been fully followed in the presentation of the North American Commission, although he recognized that this option corresponded to a conscious methodological choice of the group. He clarified that the Commission had more extensive texts on the implied author and the mock reader, and that the oral synthesis privileged a selection because of the time available. He invited the assembly to read the recent volume of the Center of Studies in which Fr. John van den Hengel treats pure love in accessible language, as well as Father Dehon’s own texts.

Fr. Victor de Oliveira Barbosa recalled that a large part of *Couronnes d’amour* goes back to texts of Father Dehon dated to the 1880s, originally used in the retreats of the first Dehonians, even before the *Consummation est*. These texts present few differences in relation to the version published about twenty years later and are already available among the unpublished writings. He asked whether the CTDNA had considered these earlier sources in its analysis, for they can help to deepen the evolution of the Founder’s thought. More than transforming these texts into a retreat outline, it may be necessary to recognize that they were already born as retreat material, before being reworked and incorporated into the published work. This observation offers an important key for understanding both Father Dehon’s original intention and the transformations that his thought underwent over time.

Responding to Fr. Victor and to related observations, Fr. John van den Hengel affirmed that the Congregation needs to dedicate itself much more to reflection on love and to devotion to the Sacred Heart in the contemporary situation. He recalled attempts to elaborate series of meditations on the basis of the Dehonian texts and considered it desirable that the Dehonian Family recover the formative and pastoral use of these sources. On the notion of the self in today's culture, he insisted that the language of loss of self and of self-annihilation requires care: the challenge is to incorporate the mysticism of the Heart without leading to an annulment of the person, but to a subjectivity open to the other and inhabited by the love of Christ.

Fr. Stefano Zamboni took up again the ambiguity present in the expression "pure love," considering that this aspect deserves to be deepened. He even suggested that a future Seminar might dedicate itself specifically to this theme, placing the spirituality of pure love in dialogue with the conditions of contemporary society. Starting from the reflection on attention, he observed that the capacity to be truly attentive is also linked to openness to the other and, therefore, to love. Attention would not be only a psychological question, but a relational attitude: to be present means to welcome the other and to allow oneself to be affected by him or her.

Fr. João Carlos Almeida observed that, although Fr. John had affirmed that he would not make a biographical presentation, his exposition ended up offering important elements for a historical understanding of Father Dehon. He questioned the interpretation of a supposed rupture between the social Dehon and the spiritual Dehon, as if, in a given period, he had set spirituality aside in order to dedicate himself to the social question and, later, returned to the interior life. He highlighted the need to study better works such as *The Plan of Freemasonry*, still little explored, which can help to understand the continuity of his concerns. He recalled the change of context from 1903 and 1904, when the Congregation is expelled from France, Dehon finds himself in Brussels, and the separation between Church and State deepens. He asked how to understand the language of *Couronnes d'amour* and of pure love within this new historical and existential context, avoiding simplifying readings that project two irreconcilable Father Dehons.

Fr. Zbigniew Morawiec appreciated the presentations and proposed deepening two questions related to the notion of identity. The first concerns the very concept of the self in contemporary culture and the way it is manifested in writing and in the tradition that Father Dehon inherits. It is a notion subject to different interpretations and, for that reason, capable of generating ambiguities. He suggested rethinking first of all the notion of creation and then that of relation: the relation between creature and Creator and also among creatures themselves. The expression "annihilation" or "total self-donation" can become problematic if understood as the disappearance of the subject. As a possibility for deepening, he proposed turning to Trinitarian theology, especially the notion of *perichoresis*, which allows us to think the relation among the Persons of the Trinity without isolation or loss of identity. This perspective could help to overcome an understanding of pure love as the annulment of the subject and lead to reflection on a relational subjectivity, capable of preserving its own identity precisely in openness to relation and to life.

Fr. Michel Temgo affirmed that the session provoked a reflection on how little *Couronnes d'amour* is used for preaching retreats in communities and provinces. He expressed surprise on hearing that the texts are, in origin, retreat material. Just as Fr. Stefano Zamboni proposed that a later seminar reflect on pure love, he suggested that the theological commissions might work on an updated version of *Couronnes d'amour* usable today not only by religious but also by laypeople: a path of Dehonian spiritual exercises, in the manner of what the Jesuits do with the Exercises of Saint Ignatius, at the service of union with God and of the mission of the Congregation.

The moderator thanked the speakers and the presenters for the richness of the dialogue and, at 12:10 p.m., declared the third session of the Theological Seminar closed.

Fr. Eduardo Nunes Pugliesi
Fr. Nilson Helmann
Fr. Victor de Oliveira Barbosa