

## THE DEHONIANS' CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY

**Achu fidelis nkematabong**

The congregation of The Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus also known as the Dehonians is an apostolic religious institution (Constitution 1) formed in Saint-Quentin by Father Leo John Dehon in the year 1878. Who was at first a diocesan priest. After his priestly ordination at St. John Lateran in Rome, he was appointed as the seventh and the last vicar of the Basilica Parish at Saint Quentin.

This period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterised by the industrialisation and because of this even children below 12 years were to work for at least 12 hours a day. The working conditions, the salary and the hours of work were deplorable; since the rich did not give attention to the poor. All they were interested on was their money even at the detriment of the poor. Vis-a-vis to such an economic mess and the injustice of the rich, the church at Saint-Quentin were very indifferent. That is, the men and women of the church were not in touch with the situation the people were living.

Moreover, in the midst of such a situation, Fr. Dehon a man of great personality, a man who had a great vision as to what concern the priesthood and the church could not be left indifferent to such. Therefore, in the face of such a mess, he foresee that the only remedy to this was the reign of Christ in the soul of people and in the society. To this was born the charism and the spirituality of the congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The charism and the spirituality are the distinctive mark of every religious institution in a Christian religious cycle. That is, it distinguished one religious congregation from another in their way of following Christ and imitating him. But to what is the Dehonians charism and spirituality different from the others?

### **Dehonians' charism**

The word charism is from a latin word charisma which signifies a gift in religious perspective. Charism or charisma could also be define as *a personal quality or gift that enables an individual to impress and influence others...* the word charism in a Christian religion sphere or connotation is a free gift of God to his beloved children through the person of the Holy Spirit for the building and advancement of the other(s) 1 Corinthians 12:11.

For in the beginning, the congregation was not created for any particular activity (apostolate) or to solve any activity. But open to any activity or apostolate as time reveal. In the beginning, Fr Dehon and his co-brothers were involved in various apostolic activities like: press edition, missionary activities, social works... For our charism is rooted in the apostolic work of Fr Leo John Dehon and his co-brothers. Who were animated by a very high apostolic zeal especially for the poor and the most humble... that was their point of interest and could be verify in his daily notes of 1<sup>st</sup> February 1916. Where he said *in all these apostolate I was only seeing the raising of the small and humble according to the spirit of the gospel*. The congregation has many diverse ministries around the world, but so do other religious communities. What is it that makes a Dehonian ministry distinct from that of a Jesuit, Benedictine, Dominican, or diocesan ministry? How are the social works of our congregation different from the social efforts of secular organisations which also seek to be in solidarity with the poor and disenfranchised? For us to make a clear and precise distinction in this domain, it will be necessary to understand who a Dehonian or member of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is.

First and foremost we are all priest from the order of our religious profession. Not priests as in line of the holy order but by our way of life. Where we become a sacrifice and constantly offering our life for others through our daily yes to the will of the Father. That is “an oblate”. He who no longer lives for his own self but for the sake of others. This is sum up in this statement <Ecce venio> here I am O Lord to do your will Hebrews 10:9 and Ecce ancilla I am the handmaid of the Lord be it done unto me according to your word Luke 1:38. This is the major characteristic that distinguish us “Dehonians” or “Priest of the Sacred Heart of Jesus” from the others. This is the spirit that animate our charism and to this father Dehon calls his followers to be *pastors of souls than ministers of mass celebration*. That is, all our apostolic activities are carried out in the spirit of oblation and this will be further develop when we will be talking on the spirituality.

Although we can say the congregation was not created for any particular activity but open to any apostolate as time reveal. Our Congregation focuses on education, social work, missions, spirituality and media to announce the kingdom of God.

We live in community, are inspired by daily Eucharistic Adoration, and in a fragmented world we believe unity to be possible...

Our objective is the reign of the Sacred Heart in souls and the society.

### **Spirituality**

We the Dehonians, our spirituality is that of reparation. Since the fundamental idea behind the head of Fr Dehon was to form a congregation of les oblats réparateur. The spirituality of our congregation is express in this word Love, Oblation and Reparation. Which formed the three pillars of our spirituality.

Love: as a free, active and coherent engagement which guide us in all things, all circumstances and our ration. It is the soul of our person and all our acts.

Oblation which is the fundamental attitude of the free gift of one's self and constant disposition of one's self toward the Father and his Spirit, the community, the brothers and the people of God.

Reparation as an engagement to collaborate to the redemption work at the heart of the world and as the fruit to receive in us the Holy Spirit and his strength (cf. Cst 23).

The constitution which characterise the Oblats of the Heart of Jesus are many. For example the constitutions of 1891 expresses and precise the general aim of the institution which are:- The spirit of love and reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Here, it is about offering ourselves and others especially the consecrated to the lord.

Sacerdotal reparation which is done by the priests in favour of the consecrated souls.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart with its corresponding practices especially of the Eucharistic reparation.

Our personal sanctification and that of our brethren.

It is about living and causing others to live our spirituality through our way of life. Fr Dehon sees in this the sincerity of relation that exist among brothers in community as a confirm sign of sincerity toward the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This sincerity of relationship among brother is manifested in external signs like: asking of forgiveness and community understanding.

### **Fundamental terms of the spirituality of Sacred Heart of Jesus**

As we have easier said, it is Fr Dehon experience that is at the base of our understanding of the spirituality of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Since it wasn't a new spirituality in the church.

But a proper way of Fr Dehon to understand and live the gospel. He did it through a total disposition of his being in the hands of the Divine Providence.

The centre of this spirituality is the Heart of Jesus according to the biblical richness and human symbols. In effect the Heart of Jesus is as a key to Fr Dehon that is the corner through which he sees, understand and learned the person of Jesus in his totality. This heart of Jesus on the cross for Fr Dehon is the summit of God's love for all. It is from this heart that the new humanity "the church" which is the new people of God. All these indicate the centre place in the Dehonians' spirituality.

### **The sources of the spirituality of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus**

The Dehonians spirituality has two sources. The Holy Scriptures and Private Revelation.

#### **The Holy Scriptures.**

In his ways of living his relationship or union with God, he meditated on more on Scriptures especially the New Testament. In his meditation of the Scriptures, the evangelist John and apostle Paul were his best authors. It is also in this perspective of the heart of Jesus (the love of God for man) that he meditated most of the text. The fundamental attitude of his spirituality are <Ecce venio> here I am O Lord to do your will Hebrews 10:9 and Ecce ancilla I am the handmaid of the Lord be it done unto me according to your word Luke 1:38. Which are biblically base. For Fr Dehon. For Fr Dehon the heart has a symbolic significant. Meaning the totality of the person.

#### **Private Revelation**

This is drawn from the private revelation Jesus gave St. Marguerite Marie Alacoque concerning the look warmness of the concentrated soul... It is of great important to note that this is one of the most influential school of spirituality that greatly influence Fr Dehon. Since he inherited it from his mother.

Although this was a current of spirituality in the time; involve in the reparation of Love that is not love, he understood and living it in a difference angle. What distinguished this current of spirituality with the Dehonian spirituality is the spirit of oblation.

Fr. Dehon himself invites us to this when in the Spiritual Directory he affirms that the religious

Vows "are common to all Institutes; but they differ from one another by their practical application in relation to the special end" of each Institute. The Priest of the Sacred Heart will observe the religious vows "with the spirit of love and of immolation proper to their vocation" (P. III, chap. 1, n.78).

### **Some books I consulted**

Spiritual directory of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Petite vie de Leon Dehon Yves Ledure

The constitutions of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Laisser le Christ se former en vous

Postulant note book