

Immigration in the Writings of Father Dehon

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Purpose

The years 2015 and 2016 knew a huge immigration movement and activity throughout Europe, the consequences of strong and dramatic upheavals in the Middle East. The General government of the SCJs wants us to give this subject more attention and raises the question that we will seek out in this work. How did Dehon understand the migration movement? We have carefully poured through the sources available in Dehonian documents (as of February 2016) wherein the Founder makes use of the terms, “immigrant” and “immigration.”

The Source of Information

The specific citations in the Dehondocs, which use these terms, appear in edited texts between 1889¹ and 1913. It is a theme that is with him throughout his adult life and it ends precisely at the time of the Great War, an event that marks the collapse of something profound in his character and reflection: his patriotism.

There are four kinds of literary material that he uses concerning this topic. For one, we have his *Diary*, with accounts of his travels that allow us to see into his real life experiences of migrant people. From the next source, we have some newspaper articles and short passages from his social writings that will permit a look into his understanding of the causes, the consequences, and the solutions pertaining to this matter. In this sense, it is interesting to note that in his personal *Diary*, Dehon uses the term, “immigrant,” to describe an individual, whereas when he is writing for the public, he uses the term to describe the concept.² Here is a brief count:

	Diary	Newspaper Articles	Social Works	Travel Notes
“immigrant”	21	9	1	5
“immigration”	8	13	4	7

¹ The first citation (THD 122) is found in his Doctoral thesis of 1864, but it is not an academic reference we consider very relevant.

² We should not forget that in some cases, his personal notes are transferred almost literally in the pages of NQT 20/61, and two years later, are copied in MLA 23; NQT 22/122 is the source of MLA 513, etc.

The references we are using have been with us for many years and generations.³

a. the term, “immigrant”

Year	Diary	Newspaper Articles	Social Works	Travel Notes
1889	NQT 4/388			
1890	NQT 5/71, 91, 92			
1891	NQT 5/112			
1898	NQT 13/98			
1899	NQT 15/3	EXT 8035097/3 CHR 1889/73 CHR 1899/159, 160 REV 8031060/4		
1900		CHR 1900/53	RSO 1/65	
1902		EXT 8035157/7 REV 8031111/4		
1903		CHR 1903/75		
1906	NQT 20/48, 61			
1908				MLA 7, 23, 229-230, 420, 709-713
1910	NQT 25/45, 80 NQT 26/22, 25 NQT 27/88, 91 NQT 27/122, 130 NQT 31/95, 96			
1911	NQT 34/5			
1913	NQT 35/71			

³ For the convenience of the reader we have gathered the abbreviations used:

ADP *Beyond the Pyrenes* (1900)

CHR “Chronicles” in *The Reign of the Sacred Heart in Souls and in Societies* (1889-1903)

CSC *Social Catechism* (1898)

EXT Various articles

MLA *A Thousand Leagues in South America* (1908)

NQT *Daily Notes* (1867-1870, 1886-1925)

REV Articles in various periodicals

RSO *Christian Social Renewal* (1900)

SAC *Sicily, North Africa, and Calabria* (1897)

THD *Doctoral Thesis* (1864)

b. the term, “immigration”

Year	Diary	Newspaper Articles	Social Works	Travel Notes
1864			THD 122	
1890		CHR 1890/34, 106, 153		
1891		REV 8031006/20		
1892		CHR 1892/89		
1893		CHR 1893/148		
1894	NQT 7/127	CHR 1894/125		
1896		EXT 8035085/11		
1897		CHR 1897/178		SAC 244
1898			CSC 225, 480	
1899		REV 5710/5		
1900		CHR 1900/53	RSO 1/5, 65	ADP 25
1903		CHR 1903/129, 182		
1906	NQT 22/122			
1908				MLA 229-230 MLA 324, 513 MLA 725, 736
1910	NQT 25/67 NQT 27/38, 39, 79 NQT 27/121, 123			

Dehon’s Understanding of Immigration

Let us begin with the concept of immigration that will permit us to get close to the specific events in order to understand Dehon’s way of thinking and placing himself in this phenomenon.

The first piece of information from the collection of texts is the difference Dehon seems to establish between a first immigration movement (in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and a second immigration movement (in the nineteenth century).

Some references appear to be negative regarding the conquests of the Spaniards, Portuguese, and Anglo-Saxons, who were the main characters of the “first immigration” that pushed and crushed the native population with “the rising waves of immigration.”⁴ Similarly, it referred to the immigration of Ireland, France, and Germany of the later centuries, but in this case, we learn that the motivation for the abandonment of their birthplace is religion.⁵ Many left Europe in order to live their faith (this does not refer to Catholics) and they traveled toward a New

⁴ NQT 27/79

⁵ Cf. NQT 27/121

World. Now this is a positive fact because the Catholic faith will also enjoy the progress⁶ of an extension;⁷ in fact it could introduce new or original gestures for these lands, like the reconciliation of the Indian tribes of Minnesota and the Sioux.⁸

But the analysis of the moment indicates a constant flood of European migration to Canada,⁹ the United States,¹⁰ Brazil,¹¹ Argentina,¹² and Australia.¹³ The main characters of this “second immigration” are described as, “farm workers or longshoremen. Most came in poverty, driven from home by the precarious state in which some provinces found themselves economically.”¹⁴ This is the description of Italian immigrants, but is perfectly applicable to other nationalities. However, there also exists a critical side. These “new immigrants bring with them modern radical principles and revolutionary ideas that constitute a great danger for the future of Catholicism.”¹⁵ That is to say, the old ideas or problems travel with these new immigrants to the New World. “Manners have declined as much as institutions.”¹⁶

A Eurocentric Vision

The consideration of the immigrants’ character is thought of in terms of “fertile roots.” The ethnocentrism or better yet the Eurocentrism of Dehon regarding this point of view is abundant. A sample text: “America, Asia, Oceania, and Africa—there is no longer any place in the world where the European races have not placed themselves, where they have not imposed

⁶ Cf. NQT 27/123

⁷ Cf. CHR 1890/106

⁸ Cf. CHR 1903/182. Perhaps here we can include the Jesuit reductions in confronting what was motivated by glory and riches. They placed themselves “in the struggle with all the other immigrants” (MLA 420), that is to say opposed to the immigration of conquest and domination, not religious immigration.

⁹ Cf. NQT 27/38

¹⁰ Cf. NQT 25/67

¹¹ Cf. NQT 725

¹² Cf. NQT 22/122

¹³ Cf. CHR 1890/34. His analysis also looks at other cases, such as the Asian. It is especially difficult with Chinese immigration: “They take over. Borneo, the Philippines, and all the peoples who do not resist are invincibly penetrated by the yellow infiltration, with the exception of India because of their dense population, and Australia or California by their strict legislation (EXT 8035105/1). The “yellow skinned people” are definitely carrying on in a way for purposes of conquest: “China...pushed its emigrants further, to invade Siberia, and by way of Turkestan, to advance to the Urals; but they were too peaceful and carefree” (NQT 31/95; cf. 31/96).

¹⁴ MLA 736

¹⁵ NQT 27/122 What he writes about the migrants settling in the United States is very interesting.

¹⁶ NQT 27/130

their languages, their ideas, their customs, and their institutions.”¹⁷ Inevitably, considering this, we also find for him discordant or problematic elements, or, in his own words, “less favorable.” He refers to the Jews. Describing the migratory phenomenon in Jersey City, New Jersey, he says, “The former stratum of the population consisted of the best races of Europe: English, Irish, German, and some French. The new immigration is less favorable. There are almost a million Jews. They do not assimilate among the people; they remain Jews always.”¹⁸

Going back to the positive elements of the migratory event, Dehon finds them in the scientific and political order although always through the European genre or frame of reference, which for Dehon is the most viable approach. Discoveries and the movement of peoples include “a greater sharing of food between people of different climates.”¹⁹ And without forgetting, let us repeat that, “the work of the missionaries and Catholic immigration will also benefit the new means of communication and will carry everywhere the name and the reign of Christ, despite all obstacles.”²⁰ However, there are negative elements. The one that represents “the greed of migrating companies...true feudal lords,” especially in the case of Brazil,²¹ is a specific historical event. Yet, its assessment is more profound.

Negative and painful experiences

Migration for Dehon is fundamentally negative and painful. His analysis of causes, consequences, and solutions has as its framework his own analysis of society, which he considers to be in crisis. This crisis appears in these four, specific areas: economics, labor, agriculture, and the middle class. It is where “migration decimates Europe.”²²

¹⁷ CHR 1903/129. The European mode of living and operating in a new land is reproduced in various sectors, from axiology (which is a study of values and ethics): “The sense of respect that formerly motivated Old Europe” (NQT 26/25); from the people living in city: “The shrine is located about two hours by train west of the major commercial town, which will reach a million inhabitants. Surrounded by a small town which will grow because of it, it rises up in the immense uniformity of the plain, as large as a third of Europe, a land of meat and wheat, over which is spreading immigrants from all regions of the Old World (EXT 8035157/7); or from the Church population: “The arrival of many Ruthenian immigrants in the United States requires the residence of a Ruthenian bishop who lives in Philadelphia” (NQT 25/80).

¹⁸ NQT 25/67; cf. CHR 1897/178 Dehon considers the Jewish immigrants “as involuntary immigrants; they are a violently dispersed nation and they remember it.” It is the basis for a previous line of argument, “We are not in favor of an outraged anti-Semitism. We ask neither expulsion nor plunder of the Jews. We are agreed, however, that there would be reservations in the rights they receive. We are not saying that from a religious motive, but from a patriotic one. We do not believe in the sincere naturalization of nine-tenths of the Jews.” (REV 8031111/4). He calls attention to his suspicion regarding the incapacity for assimilation on the part of the Jews with regard to cultural realities and religions that are foreign to them (such as French Christianity) while he praises the persistent identity, national and religious, of the masses of immigrants in America.

¹⁹ CHR 1903/129

²⁰ CHR 1890/34; cf. NQT 27/122

²¹ MLA 324

²² CHR 1893/148

A 1892 article,²³ regarding rural immigration, offers us its vision regarding the matter. The rural exodus demonstrates a struggle between the new values (luxuries, pleasures, and big salaries) and the great, traditional values, and places in question the moral stability of the very fiber of the nation.

For Dehon, there are three elements that make up a nation: religion, family, and property. Practically speaking, property is equal to landownership. This conception of the economic basis (i.e. medieval, traditional) finds in the Revolution (and the changes it has brought in the social and therefore economic environment) the culprit of its deterioration, namely, that the taxes on the land and buildings are tripled, or that the law of succession allows for the unlimited division of the land until it is made significantly unproductive or unprofitable and does not aid

- *the suffering and hungry*: “another clear sign of misery is the migration that is caused by hunger and suffering,”²⁴
- *depopulation*: “the suffocation of small property, the abandonment of land, and the painful migration to the cities,”²⁵
- *the return of social systems to semi-slavery*: “Naturally, migration is increasing. Multitudes of ragged poor clutter immigration ports. They go to the United States with work contracts that put them in an almost servile condition, or they expose themselves to hunger and death in South America.”²⁶

In the meantime, the analysis of the causes and its connection with the consequences permits him a clear formulation of his thoughts.

“Emigration, caused by poverty, has begun to weaken this people, who had formed a great power! Hundreds of thousands of young people and the more enterprising families left their ruined homeland in search for daily bread in France or in America. And now, we have a crushing defeat. We are in a general disarray.”²⁷

In the area of solutions, Fr. Dehon refers to the social teaching of Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*. He cites it at least twice.

- **CSC 25**: “stimulates the industrious activity of the people by the prospect of participation in ownership of the land...The work will be more intense and fruitful; the deplorable emigration will diminish;”

²³ CHR 1892/89; in RSO 1/65 Dehon indicates the technical cause of the European emigration as the mortgage debt of the land.

²⁴ REV 5710/5

²⁵ RSO 1/5

²⁶ CHR 1897/178

²⁷ EXT 8035085/11

- **REV 8031006/20:** “participation in the ownership of the land will fill, little by little, the chasm that divides society into two classes: omnipotence in opulence, and weakness in poverty. Besides, a more abundant production, the thought of working in the mines, renews the fervor of man, and in the end checks the emigration movement.”

Who is the person suitable to solve this process of destruction of the mother country? The State. The mother country is a concept of special relevance that captures the approach of Dehon to the immigrant. The mother country has been incapable of attending to the obligations of giving food, work, dignity, and security:

“of the hundreds of thousands of emigrants who each year abandon their homeland where they found neither bread nor work; the hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children who withdraw into unhealthy factories, and create among themselves a disastrous competition for work; and so many unoccupied hands, especially during winter; so many beggars who go door to door seeking their bread and starvation wages.”²⁸

She has become a bad mother. For Dehon, the reasons are the perversion of spirit, the renunciation of fundamental virtues, and the collapse of authentic patriotism.²⁹

The solution is a State based on authentic values. Another type of initiative is to be remembered and confirmed, such as the “apostle of the new agriculture,” Fr. Bonsignori of Brescia³⁰ or the Catholic University of Lille that funds the School of Agricultural Studies.³¹ Even the apostolic orientation of the SCJ Congregation will be determined by the migratory phenomenon. Not as refugees but as companions:

“We are pleased as well to have heard praise and encouragement for our Apostolic School in Clairefontaine, near Arlon, which prepares missionaries for the countries of immigration, notably for South America.”³²

Specific Responses

Dehon is not indifferent to the migration movement. However, at the operational level what is decisive for understanding his response is the direction of this movement. It is not a movement of welcoming refugees but of being companions. The Europe that Dehon lives in does not have the experience of refugees but migrants. The European migrant is not strong and suffers much

²⁸ REV 8031060/4

²⁹ Cf. NQT 27/88 to see a nationalistic interpretation of the migratory event.

³⁰ Cf. REV 8031060/4; CHR 1900/53 It is only through work in the fields that can we solve hunger problems, which motivates migration. The solution always is to create jobs.

³¹ CHR 1894/125

³² CHR 1890/153

hardship. There is difficulty in understanding the motives and objectives of immigrants, and difficulty clearly seeing what to do, and how to achieve it.

Is this a destiny of cultural welcome of refugees or do we see it as a growth of the land? The immigrants represent a city, a civilization, or a race (a concept of understanding, not only in the biological sense but also, to a greater extent, in their character). The colonial spirit seems to prevail. Certainly, this is so according to the destinations, but in the texts, it is not perceived that the immigrants are received as refugees (to be integrated into an independent and totally new reality for them). Rather they are welcomed (but continue living in the new land in the manner in which they lived where they were not able to eat “the bread that the mother country no longer gives them”³³).

That is why, for Dehon, the phenomenon acquires a pastoral characteristic in his early notes: “they lack priests to help them preserve their faith.”³⁴ It is about accompanying this portion of the Church’s flock in order to shepherd them to their new destiny. The exterior changes but the interior remains, wherein is found a new way to extend the Church through its example and welcoming new conversions to the Catholic faith.

Being in “solidarity with” the immigrant could express this apostolic interest of Dehon, as in 1913 when he wrote about the service “of a group of missionaries, who accompany migrants in their travels,”³⁵ or in earlier years (1889–1899) when he confronts the matter of working for migrants in Clairefontaine. Matteo Sanfilippo makes reference to this matter in this way:³⁶

A small number of international organizations aid Catholic Belgian immigrants in North America. These are religious associations, which originate in Belgium, but benefit from the support of the Holy See. By the 1800’s, some Belgian prelates think about imitating the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles, founded by Giovanni Battista

³³ CHR 1899/159

³⁴ CHR 1899/159

³⁵ NQT 35/71

³⁶ M. Sanfilippo (1999): “An Original Look at Belgians in North America, The Contribution of the Roman Ecclesiastical Sources (18th to Early 20th Centuries)” in S. Jaumain (dir.): Les Immigrants Préférés: Les Belges, Ottawa : Les Presses de l’Université d’Ottawa, 64-65.

Scalabrini³⁷ bishop of Piacenza, to help Italian immigrants. In 1887, Charles Cartuyvels,³⁸ vice-rector of Louvain University, writes to Scalabrini after being informed of his activities and those of the Salesians in South America. He offers to the Italian bishop the direction of a Belgian missionary work, which Cartuyvels wanted to found near the Abbey of Clairefontaine. Scalabrini authorized two priests of his Congregation, Henri Degrenne and Guisepepe Molinari, to travel to Belgium in 1888. Once there, they benefit from the assistance of the Nuncio, Domenico Ferrata.³⁹ Cartuyvels' program seems to be underway. The bishops of Namur and Luxembourg form a committee to purchase the Abbey of Clairefontaine and establish there the seat of the new work. The Roman archives testify, however, to doubts coming from several clerics on the feasibility of the project. Cartuyvels will decide finally to postpone the foundation of the work and Degrenne, whom he had sent to New York to prepare the ground, will become a parish priest in Mexico.

In 1889, Clairefontaine passed into the hands of the Priests of the Sacred Heart, of which the founder, Leo John Dehon, requests information from Scalabrini before opening the headquarters for the migrants in Antwerp, Buenos Aires, and Montreal.⁴⁰ Dehon's initiatives met with some success, but shortly after 1888, the Society of St. Raphael in Belgium creates its information network and makes various services available to immigrants in North America, and during three decades will protect its countrymen

³⁷ Giovanni Battista Scalabrini (1839-1905) was elected Bishop of Piacenza at the age of 36. A catechist, a founder of newspapers, and the initiator in 1881 of the *Work of the Congress*, pays special attention to the migration phenomenon, which he describes in this way: "In Milan, a number of years ago, I witnessed a spectacle that left my soul profoundly saddened. While traveling to the station, I saw a vast hall, its side doors and the nearby piazza invaded by three or four hundred people poorly clad and divided into several groups. On their faces, bronzed by the sun and furrowed by premature wrinkles stamped there by privation, there appeared a jumble of feelings that, at that moment, stirred their hearts. There were elderly men bowed with age and fatigue, men in the flower of their youth, women who walked behind or carried children on their shoulders, young boys and girls, all made comrades by a single thought, all focused on a single goal: they were emigrants."

[[www.francaavillaangitola.com/Beato Scalabrini.htm](http://www.francaavillaangitola.com/Beato_Scalabrini.htm)] Dehon echoes these ideas in two articles on his work for migrants. CHR 1899/159 and REV 8031061/3.

³⁸ Bishop Charles Cartuyvels (1835-1907) was a Belgian priest and the vice rector of Louvain for 25 years. In Lieja, the city of his birth, he presented a *Congress of Social Work* of 1887, a study of Belgian emigration to America. Dehon notes his participation in the *Eucharistic Congress of Reims* of 1894, qualifying it as one, "of apostles, writers, and speakers known to all" (CHR 1894/155; cf. NQT 10/108). In his diary, Dehon seems linked with the work of Anvers-Clairefontaine, in which he displays much interest (NQT 4/360).

³⁹ Dominic Ferrata (1847-1914), the Nuncio of Belgium in 1885, will later be in Paris with the task of carrying out the *raillement* (see footnote NQT 12/9 and NQT 20/12). Later in Rome, as a Cardinal, he is the prefect of various organizations until he will be named the Secretary of State by Benedict XV, although he died a few days after his appointment. He is a regular in the "Chronicles" of Dehon in the *Reign* (CHR 1897/14; 1899/321; 1901/174; 1903/39; 1903/45) and will be one of the prelates with whom Dehon consulted to carry out the approval of the Congregation (cf. NQT 20/24; 20/31; 20/36; 23/45), and also to evaluate (unfavorably) the biography which Dehon wrote of Sister Mary of Jesus (cf. NQT 35/18.20).

⁴⁰ The author's citation refers to Mario Francesconi, *Giovanni Battista Scalabrini. Vescovo di Piacenza e degli emigranti*, Roma, Città Nuova Editrice, 1985, p. 1045).

settling outside of Belgium. Its activity is slowed by the War, but in the early 1920s, the Congregation of the Josephites, from Grammont, reorganized the Society under the high patronage of Cardinal Mercier, of Bishop Seghers of Ghent, and Bishop Waffelaer of Bruges.

Actually, in 1889, Father Dehon acquires a building, which was until then inhabited by Dominicans in Clairefontaine near Antwerp, Belgium. This is how *The Reign* was founded:

A new center of publicity for the *Reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* comes to be based in Belgium. Our Lords, the Bishops of Namur and Luxembourg have kindly wished to entrust to the Priests of the Sacred Heart, who direct this Review, the house of Clairefontaine near Arlon. This monastery, so rich in pious tradition, and still fragrant with the memories of St. Bernard, is intended for the preparation of religious missionaries for South America and Scandinavia. It will recruit especially in Luxembourg, in Belgium, and in the Catholic provinces of Germany. Who does not sense among Catholics the urgent duty to provide for the religious needs of countless emigrants departing for South America? We know that in Belgium especially, the clergy is preoccupied with this thought. We are confident that this house will easily obtain their sympathies and support.⁴¹

In a get-together (12-15th of May 1889) with his old stenographer companion from Vatican I, Dominic Hengesch presented Dehon with a project at Notre Dame de Clairefontaine, “to recruit missionaries.”⁴² So from May 21-23, Dehon travels to Luxembourg to evaluate the foundation, to which is added a specification: “missionaries for South America and Scandinavia.”⁴³ And on June 12-13, he writes in his *Diary*, “Foundation of the house in Clairefontaine. Our Lord has led us here. Let us form there and provide for Our Lord youth who truly love and serve him with passion and simplicity!” (NQT 4/352)

“We are pleased as well to have heard praise and encouragement for our Apostolic School in Clairefontaine, near Arlon, which prepares missionaries for the countries of immigration, notably for South America,”⁴⁴ is the orientation and sense of the Apostolic School, but Dehon from the beginning understands the difficulties. He accepts that there are friends (for example Cartuyvels) who would want to establish a “procure for immigrants,”⁴⁵ but he adds, “This foundation will be difficult. It will meet powerful opposition from another Congregation and

⁴¹ CHR 1889/73 during the month of June.

⁴² NQT 4/328

⁴³ NQT 4/349

⁴⁴ CHR 1890/153

⁴⁵ NQT 5/71

from the Society of St. Raphael, which desire to keep a monopoly on the work of migrants. We wish only to do the will of Our Lord.”⁴⁶

Although Sanfilippo said that, “the initiatives of Dehon will meet with some success,” the Clairefontaine project needed to review the specific services it offers to migrants. But the impact remains. Perhaps what he refers to in his *Diary*⁴⁷ when he speaks of a meeting that Dehon has with a Canadian priest (Villeneuve) and Cardinal Simeoni, is the demonstration of the serious commitment to this apostolic work.

However, this is more clearly shown in a meeting held in Louvain in 1899 to coordinate the growing presence of the SCJ Congregation in Holland. There are two projects that are under consideration for the “breaking out” of the Dutch “to establish a Dutch school in Sittard or a house of assistance for migrants in Rotterdam.”⁴⁸

Dehon, Travel Companion

That Dehon was a dedicated and nearly tireless traveler is a known fact. *En route* to America in 1906, he certainly shared travel with some immigrants as well as with some missionaries including a Prefect Apostolic.⁴⁹ The ship by the name of “Chili” of a company named *Messageries Maritime* was the place where Dehon closely experienced the reality of the migrants’ circumstances: “a third of the ship is jam-packed with migrants.” He describes both the physical and mental reality.

“Everyone lives as they can, but quite poorly. They chase away sadness by singing and dancing. They give us a show of popular Spanish dances, the Gota and Fandango. The youth dance quite graciously. The dances are accompanied by the accordion, hand clapping, and spoons striking plates. The Gota is quite a curious dance! It can be interpreted as a gesture of honest love and a preparation for marriage. First, the male and female dancers face each other, getting ready to unite, then, finally form couples who swirl as in a waltz.”⁵⁰

For Dehon, the alarms go off upon his arrival. A deep concern and upsetting matter appears in his writings when he finds what is called the “payment of salaries.”⁵¹ Migration is likened to a new slavery, this time over salary, and surfacing hostile overtones in Dehon, who denounced

⁴⁶ NQT 5/71

⁴⁷ NQT 5/92, 112

⁴⁸ NQT 15/3 The Sittard project was achieved.

⁴⁹ Cf. NQT 20/48

⁵⁰ NQT 20/61; MLA 23, two years later, he literally copies this biographical note.

⁵¹ MLA 229 This “very much resembles the slave trade.”

what he saw without sugarcoating it: “white slave trade on a grand scale,” and “toned down slavery.”⁵²

He describes how the system named, “contracts for so much a head”⁵³ works in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Landowners, who need workers, have immigration agents (in Geneva and Naples, for example) and corresponding agents in Sao Paulo and Santos. These immigration agents charge 180 francs for each contracted worker. The cost of the travel by boat is 60 francs, leaving them with 120.

Such underhanded behavior has an additional negative consequence for real immigrants. The State does not intervene. France prohibits immigration to Brazil, which seems to want to recruit slaves.⁵⁴ There are Brazilian⁵⁵ attempts to moderate these practices⁵⁶ and to receive immigrants of a higher quality.⁵⁷ They see the necessity of increasing the population of various regions of Brazil.⁵⁸

Having made such a critical presentation, Dehon describes the various solutions that the immigrants bring to the local agriculture. Those employed by the immigration agency in Santos receive the immigrants and take them to a place for immigrants where they verify that they fulfill the legal requirements, specifically that they have the documents issued from their country of origin, which show they are workers or laborers.⁵⁹ From Santos, they are sent by train to the “Living Quarters for Immigrants” in Sao Paulo, which has a capacity of 3,000 people.⁶⁰ Once there, their belongings are disinfected while the immigrants are vaccinated.⁶¹ The agency for colonization and employment is not far from their living quarters.⁶² Both an immigration employee and the immigrant put together a work agreement, and the immigrant is given a handbook of federal work laws and pay scales. In the judgment of Father Dehon, we are in the presence of “a great organization that will melt away all the criticism regarding the exploitation of workers in Brazil.”⁶³

In 1910, Dehon would experience something different in the United States and in Canada. By way of an anecdote, from his own personal experience, he shared a room for the night with five

⁵² MLA 229

⁵³ MLA 230

⁵⁴ MLA 229

⁵⁵ MLA 709

⁵⁶ MLA 420

⁵⁷ “This immigration of an inferior quality also brings a serious decline in morals. The prisons and hospitals are filled with immigrants” (MLA 230).

⁵⁸ MLA 230

⁵⁹ MLA 709

⁶⁰ MLA 710

⁶¹ MLA 711

⁶² MLA 712

⁶³ MLA 713

or six immigrants, there being “no room in the inn.” It is better, he says, “to sleep in this dormitory than on the pavement of the streets.”⁶⁴ He reads into this a Biblical insight,⁶⁵ the same insight as can be found directing our attention to their voyage: an exodus in which a “superior race” is formed by joining the fundamentals of the other nations that build a new city in a new land. A land with rays of hope in a new free society.⁶⁶ This began with “no room in the inn” and an exodus.

The concern for the extension of the faith, a much greater consequence of these real life events, also forms a part of the North American experience. There Dehon will come to know the Catholic Church Extension Society, dedicated to build schools and churches for the Catholic immigrants in order to preserve their faith. The Society has its own train car, which serves as a chapel on wheels and it goes all throughout the country bringing missionaries to carry out their work. American railroad companies transport the car free of charge. New land, new relations, new concepts, and new creations: “I had the pleasure of traveling from Chicago to Detroit in this chapel car.”⁶⁷

Conclusion

Certainly, the experiences, analysis, and the consequences from Dehon’s reflections do not possibly serve us in a direct way regarding a series of immediate actions to be accomplished. The context in which he lived was a different reality. However, they can be used to help us join ourselves to the hearts of those undertaking today’s journeys. Physical and dangerous hardships will surely continue to be the same yesterday, today, and always. They will have their own nuances but the risk is always a risk.

Now we need to pay immediate attention to the benefits resulting from our own contacts, which surround us today. Consequently, the response is also contextualized. Indeed, we find a direct usefulness, we would say, in what Dehon brings us near to in our hearts, feelings, thoughts, convictions, and desires. In this moment, we make use of the word “hard.” The word describes the migrant. He suffers such hardship, aware that he is leaving his homeland. It is hard for him, filled with his own convictions about life. Can the migrants of today leave Europe or leave some place so culturally different, can they have different plans similar to what the Europeans had in the time of Dehon? Can they find their own place or can they integrate? Will they have restricted space or be part of generating a new society? It is now that we should decide.

⁶⁴ NQT 26/25

⁶⁵ NQT 26/25

⁶⁶ NQT 27/91

⁶⁷ NQT 26/22