



Seminario Pastoral Dehoniano

MISSIO CORDIS

*Um coração que escuta, aprende e anuncia*  
*Un corazón que escucha, aprende y anuncia*

## Opening of the Seminário Pastoral Dehoniano *Missio Cordis*

*John van den Hengel scj*

My sincere greetings to all the participants of the Seminário Pastoral Dehoniano *Missio Cordis*. It gives me great pleasure to be in your midst, representing Fr. Ornelas and the other members of the General Council. I have been in your beautiful country once before as a participant in the ongoing formation session, held in Taubaté in 1986. At the time, I had just completed six years as Provincial Superior of English-speaking Canada. I feel honoured to be able to participate in this, the second theological conference on the theological, biblical and pastoral foundations of our spirituality.

I come here not only as a representative of the General Administration and as the person in charge of the Spirituality Sector – and thereby, the coordinator of the Theological Commission of the Congregation – but also as a fellow theologian much interested in how our spirituality is articulated.<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that, because of my linguistic limitations, I will not be able, to the extent that I would like, to participate in the theological back-and-forth of a Seminário.

In my opening remarks I would like to touch on three topics. (1) the role of the theological seminars for the life of the Congregation; (2) a summary of the issues brought forward by the first seminar held in Alfragide from March 8 – 14, 2008; (3) the new impulses brought on by the Latin American context.

### **(1) The role of the theological seminars**

It is, of course, already a blessing that we have been able to gather this group of theologians to reflect on what lies at the core of our life together as a Congregation. But it is also good to remind ourselves of the role these seminars play in the life of the Congregation. Allow me to mention a few.

#### *a. Between fidelity and renewal.*

In his opening remarks for the first seminar in Alfragide, Fr. Ornelas, the superior general, spoke of the importance of these seminars for the early formation of our members. These reflections on the bible and our tradition will, to use his words, “constitute an abundant source of fidelity and renewal of our Institute and its actions in the Church.”<sup>2</sup> Such a to-and-fro between fidelity to a past and a new orientation towards the future describes the essential task of a theologian. What

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1965 and 2005 – outside of an interval of five years for doctoral studies at the University of Nijmegen – I have taught systematic theology at Saint Paul University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Three areas became my fields of research. My main area of research was in the field of hermeneutics, particularly the practical hermeneutics of the French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur; my main area of teaching, outside of hermeneutics, became Christology and in the final six years also the Triune God; one of my avocations became religious education. For 30 years I have worked with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to write the Canadian catechetical series, *Born in the Spirit*. I was the main theological contributor of 15 texts used by some 700.000 students in English-speaking Canada. In 2005 I became emeritus.

<sup>2</sup> “Allocuzione del Superiore Generale” in *“Theologia Cordis” Seminario Teologico: Prospettive di una “Theologia Cordis” oggi* (Lisbona/Alfragide – Portogallo, 9 – 14 Marzo, 2008. (Roma: Studia Dehoniana: Centro Generale Studi SCJ, 2009) p. 7.



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is so interesting, as is pointed out by Kosselleck in his book *Future's Past*<sup>3</sup>, such a back and forth between past and future is actually a mode of being or living in the present. We all know, already since Augustine, that the past as past does not exist and fidelity to the past cannot be a recreation of the past. The past of Fr. Dehon no longer exists, except in some of the linguistic and institutional traces. Kosselleck called the past a "space of experience." Augustine called it memory. And that is what we are calling forth here: a memory of our past. The past becomes meaningful only when it is set in a dialectical relationship with what Kosselleck calls an "horizon of expectation." The past, in our case our Dehonian past, becomes meaningful if cast in relationship to our hopes and dreams. We have shaped our lives by committing ourselves to a life within the horizon of expectations shaped by Dehon. Exactly on the vector where his life and person intersect with our commitment to follow his charism sits what Kosselleck calls our present. And what is important for us here is this present not as static but as movement. The present is an initiative, a possible way of life to which we can commit or have committed ourselves. As such the present is not an objective moment but a project.

So what we are about here as theologians is to help us to articulate this project shaped by the interaction with our past. We are at the intersection of what we have been as a Congregation and what we might be. As such, the Congregation is a project, something to be done. We are not some static objective thing: we exist only as a form of life, as a project to be done. What we are about in this Seminar is this project. You have defined this project as a "mission", a pastoral mission.

#### b. *Knowledge of our Dehonian tradition.*

A second contribution of these seminars – connected with the first – is the increased study of our past in the sources, the writings of Dehon himself but also in the tradition of interpretation of these writings (such as in our Constitutions). When I was first introduced last Fall to the wall full of folders and exercise books of the writings of Leo Dehon in the Centro Studi in Rome, I was incredulous. There is so much – and so much is handwritten in Dehon's at times illegible script with numerous abbreviations and sigla. With me will remain the image of Fr. Aimone Gelardi in Fr. Raphael Gonçalves da Costa's office, shortly after my arrival in Rome, with a number of squiggles on a computer screen that were Dehon's writing. They were trying to decipher them. Through their work and that of others we have now available many of the writings of Leo Dehon as source materials. But there is much yet to be done: among them the thousands of letters of Dehon. The writings are somewhat like the raw materials. They must be weighed against the current reception of the writings and personality of Dehon. That is an enormous exercise. As a Congregation we have been in existence for 132 years. As yet, we have not yet arrived at some type of unanimity regarding the core of our spirituality. In my mind it is not yet clear what ought to be the major objective of our theological research. Is it the theology of the heart? Is it, as the title of this seminar suggests, the mission of the heart, a pastoral theology? Is it a theology of Trinitarian love of which the heart of Jesus is the symbol? Is it Dehon and his spiritual vision? And what is the discipline within which our work falls: dogmatic theology or practical theology or is it, what I think it is, a spiritual theology? And for whom is it intended? Who are its intended readers or hearers? Other theologians, formators, our theology students, or the lay Dehonians or the Famiglia dehoniana?

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<sup>3</sup> (Cambridge U Press)



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#### *Our expectations: an exploration of our possibilities*

The third aspect is perhaps the most challenging. Where do we want to take this theological reflection? Or, even more so, what do we take to be the theological task today? What does our theology do? Where does our theological reflection take the community and how do we communicate it? Is it enough that we publish it in *Studia Dehoniana*? As someone schooled in the type of theology that I would call practical theology, I suggest that what we are to be about are the practical possibilities that our reflections open up. What becomes possible for us as individuals, as community, as Church, if we reflect on the spirituality of the heart? After all, spirituality is about living our faith and our love. For Paul Ricoeur, a practical hermeneutics – in our case, a practical theology – is a search for what he calls *l'homme capable*. In a practical theology one looks for what sort of self can emerge from our work, from our theology, in our time. Who is this self of faith, of hope, and especially a self formed by Love? What am I capable of today through this spirituality? So, it is not so much *what* can I think or what I *may* think, but what does this spirituality make me capable of doing and being? In the context of the Congregation, what does it make the Congregation capable of? A practical theology, therefore, looks for possible initiatives. It searches out to what I – or the Congregation – can commit itself, what the Congregation can promise to its members and to its candidates.<sup>4</sup>

As the Seminars continue to inform our lives as Dehonians, we trust that they will also point to a new way of being together as a community. Our reflection on the charism of the Congregation is, therefore, important for the development of a new Congregational self – or Congregational “we.”

#### **2. The Alfragide Seminar of 2008**

Since this seminar is the second of what we hope will be a series of seminars, I thought it useful to say something about the first seminar held in 2008 in Alfragide, Portugal.

##### a. The original mandate

The original mandate given to the Theological Commission was to deepen and appropriate the Dehonian spirituality.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Famerée informs us that in the search for a central theme of our spirituality, the Commission decided that the “spirituality of the Heart of Christ was the most encompassing and central theme for the Priests of the Sacred Heart.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the first seminar developed a reflection on the “Heart of Christ” from an anthropological, historical and biblical perspective. This was clearly a choice of the Commission: to interpret the Dehonian spirituality as a spirituality of the heart. This is an interesting choice, but it is not the only available one. The interesting brief note of Yvon Mathieu of Madagascar on the notion of the heart or its equivalent in his culture in the first Seminar is a helpful note of warning how the cultural differences in our Congregation can critique but also enrich our perceptions.<sup>7</sup>

##### b. Delimiting the project of the spirituality of the heart

Joseph Famerée also informed the first seminar that it was the intuition of the Theological Commission that the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus needed to be radically re-thought and re-

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<sup>4</sup> For Ricoeur, the self – the institutional self – who emerges out of this reflection cannot be the Cartesian self who wants to be the origin and source of meaning, as the one around whom everything has to turn. This self is much more aware that meaning comes from the other, in the manner of Emmanuel Levinas. This has a much broader appeal to us than the solipsistic ego that has dominated Western consciousness. I believe our spirituality has a powerful antidote to the secular, individualized self of Western culture.

<sup>5</sup> *Theologia Cordis*, p. 17

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Famerée, “Theologia cordis - Pour une réinterprétation” in *Theologia Cordis*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> “Théologie du Cœur du Christ et inculturation : le cas de Madagascar,” *Theologia Cordis*, p. 247-253.



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positioned.<sup>8</sup> In his programmatic essay he presented what he thought were the challenges the theologians faced who would engage the spirituality of the Heart of Jesus. Here are a few:

- It has to dissociate itself from the pietistic sentimentalism of the traditional devotion to the Sacred Heart. It means, for example, to refuse the attempts to work out or justify a theology of consolation and reparation.
- It has to dissociate itself also from the resentment politics (anti-republican royalist, anti-revolutionary struggle against human rights, anti-modern) that emerged from the historical Paray-le-Monial. It must not partake in a reactionary parody of Christianity.
- A spirituality of the heart must be able to incorporate a Christology of Jesus of Nazareth, that is, of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In other words, the "Sacred Heart" is not to be dissociated from Jesus of Nazareth of the Gospels and of our tradition. For the same reason it must incorporate the much expanded Trinitarian approach to God of current theology.
- It must be willing to engage the current cultural, visceral reaction to anything that presents itself as representative of the sacred. In order to proclaim a love that transcendently encompasses the human and gives it its deepest self and steers it in its desire for the good, we must be able to speak reasonably about a revealed truth that is not contrary to human authenticity.
- Finally, there is a need to rethink the semantic grid that has accumulated around the Heart of Christ, such as oblation, sacrifice, abandonment, and particularly the static notion of presence in Eucharistic adoration. We need to take seriously the critique of Heidegger of a "hic et nunc" or substantive notion of the present, particularly as it applies to Eucharistic "presence."

#### c. The contributions of Alfragide

What emerged from this first attempt to radically re-think this spirituality? The seminar took the linguistic, biblical, anthropological and Christological outline proposed by Joseph Famerée and produced four articles of a more historical, frequently linguistic, nature<sup>9</sup>, one article which was biblical<sup>10</sup>, and four practico-theological articles<sup>11</sup>. Of the nine writers, all but one received their theological training in Europe. Two are working in Latin America. There were no African or Asian contributors. It means that the first seminar had a distinctly European flavor.

#### d. Theological perspectives

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<sup>8</sup> "Theologia cordis", p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Natalino Valentini, "La nascosta bellezza del cuore: Dalla Philokalia al pensiero russo", p. 45 – 66; André Perroux, "Tradition et actualité de la mystique médiévale: Sainte Gertrude d'Hefta", p. 83 – 120; Joao Carlos Almeida, "O Coração de Jesus na sua mente e na sua mística," p. 121 – 172, and Paul J. McGuire, "The Dehonian Way to Christ," p. 173 – 198.

<sup>10</sup> Carlos Luis Suárez Codorniú, "Un acercamiento bíblico a la Theologia Cordis," p. 67 – 82.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Famerée, "Theologia cordis," p. 17 – 30; Elmar Salmann, "L'esistenza patica e pratica: Il cuore tra anima e spirito," p. 31 – 44; Adérito Gomes Barbosa, "A pedagogia do coração: mistagogia consequências pastorais no plano humano e cristão a partir de uma teologia do coração," p. 199 – 220; and Marcello Neri, "L'idea" di Dio nell'orizzonte della devozione al Sacro Cuore," p. 221 – 234.



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With such a diversity of writers and approaches it is probably perilous to try to say where we are, after this first stage, upon which you can build or which we can deconstruct during this seminar.

- The linguistics of the heart. The word “heart” played a central role. The referent of heart was not first of all the “Sacred Heart.” In most of the articles heart is not capitalized. While the ultimate referent was the heart of Jesus, most of the articles were intent on discovering the semantic meaning of “heart.” It falls within, what the programmatic essay called, the anthropological. This is a felicitous turn.
- The anthropological turn remains unfortunately somewhat static and theoretical. Famerée, to go back to the programmatic essay, designates heart as a symbol, in the manner that Paul Ricoeur developed the notion of symbol in *La symbolique du mal*.<sup>12</sup> As a symbol, heart is presented as a double-meaning word, a word that has reserves of meaning not accessible to a literal understanding.<sup>13</sup> Heart is a word that first of all stands for love. Not an abstract love but an incarnated love. A love that is enfleshed desire, embodied, sexual, masculine and feminine. The semantics of the heart, in other words, refers to the whole person as generous, courageous. It stands for the human as totally self-giving, at his/her deepest core. To say it differently – and here I may be interpreting it in my own words – the heart stands for the human self in a certain orientation, tendency, instinct or character.<sup>14</sup> The articles do not make sufficiently clear that, once established that the heart stands for the human self, what our spirituality is calling us to do.
- In his perceptive presentation on Dehon’s use of the word heart, Joao Almeida recognizes that Dehon’s exploration of the heart of Jesus was not so much a theoretical or theological study of the heart of Jesus but a very sensitive attempt to deepen an understanding of the “life of love.” Dehon’s life-long search into the Heart of Christ seems almost totally centered on the “interior life.”<sup>15</sup> If the heart “stands for” the love of God, as manifested in Jesus, for Dehon it stands revealed in the interior life<sup>16</sup>, that is, in the movement of his own life of love. It would clarify why Dehon chose the different patron saints of the Congregation.<sup>17</sup> They are all explorers of the life of love. They all instituted a type of fruitful dialogue between the love of God and our human

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<sup>12</sup> *Philosophie de la volonté. Finitude et Culpabilité. II La Symbolique du Mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960)

<sup>13</sup> It is perhaps good to recall that at this stage of his philosophical work, Ricoeur has not yet recognized to the fullest the radically linguistic nature of a symbol. That becomes much more apparent in his *La metaphor vive* (Paris: Seuil, 1975). The literal – figurative tension of the symbol in *La metaphor vive* becomes the much more forceful clash of meanings that forces the birth of a new meaning in a metaphor. In other words, In that sense, heart is not a symbol, in the same way as, for instance, the story of the fall in the Book of Genesis is a symbol of evil. Heart would come closer to a metonymy (one word stands for another) or a synecdoche.

<sup>14</sup> See the article of Carlos Luis Suarez Codorniú, “Un acercamiento bíblico” *Theologia Cordis*” p. 72-73. Also in the article of Natalino Valentini on the Russian *philokalia* the heart refers to an interior movement, an occurrence in the self.

<sup>15</sup> See Almeida, “O Coração de Jesus” *Theologia Cordis*, p.152.

<sup>16</sup> See Almeida, p. 151.

<sup>17</sup> Along these lines, see the contribution of André Perroux, “Tradition et actualité de la mystique médiévale: Sainte Gertrude d’Helfta”, p. 83 – 120. Dehon sought to place before the Congregation Christian saints who had delved into the mystery of love in their writings and in their personal lives. These are the exemplary “prophets of love.”





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participation in this love. Here Dehon was utterly realistic inasmuch as this love, as did Paul, is connected with the cross. It is a love beyond sentiment. Here the Alfragide Seminar comes closest to what I described as practical theology: what does love enable me to do?

- Is it possible to give a first outcome of the work of the first seminar? It is clear that the first seminar by way of a study of the notion of “heart” has steered the reflection on the Heart of Christ toward a spiritual theology. In this it fulfilled the mandate given it by the Superior General. It is a very good, even exciting, dialogue on what lies at the heart of our Dehonian life: a spirituality of the movements of the self as implicated by the love of God. This may at first sight look like a rather solipsistic approach. But the self, the heart, spoken of as a movement is movement not solely within, as an “interior life” isolated from the other, but a life of “justice, love, mercy, piety towards the little ones, the humble and the suffering”<sup>18</sup> However, not much space was given to this suffering other.

### **3. Perspectives for Seminar II : in the light of Aparecida**

Where do we go from here? With the directions given to the participants of the Seminar it is clear that you intend to enrich the theological reflection on the spirituality of the Heart of Christ by placing it within a Latin American context. For you it is, if I understand correctly, best articulated by the CELAM meeting of Aparecida in 2007. Aparecida sought to respond to the alarming disaffection of so many Latin American Christians. It called for a new effort to evangelize. This context will give a particular colour to the Seminar. Allow me to make a few points – albeit as a North American theologian:

a. In your announcement of the Seminario Pastoral Dehoniano, the use of the term *Missio Cordis* expresses the orientation you wish to give to the dialogue of the Seminar. How will we do this mission of evangelization as Dehonians? What does the spirituality of the heart of Jesus Christ bring to this new effort of evangelization in Latin America? Aparecida has outlined the focus: it concerns:

- the preferential option for the poor
- a Christology with a specific emphasis on the life of Jesus of Nazareth
- an ecclesiology of comunidades-de-base
- a particular methodology of See-Judge-Act.

b. The subtitle of “Missio Cordis” reads “For a heart that listens, learns, and proclaims.” It shows that you have taken over the *Leitmotiv* of the first Seminar with its anthropological twist. Its focus is of what the heart, the Heart of Jesus Christ and our heart, makes us capable. Heart, the first Seminar showed, has to do with the inclinations, powers to act, with human existing or Be-ing. This Seminar promises to develop the spirituality of the heart to discover what it is possible for humans to become.

c. The Christological vector of the Missio Cordis seems - more than the European model – oriented towards the message and praxis of Jesus of Nazareth. While it may be that the

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<sup>18</sup> Léo Dehon, “Le retraite du Sacré-Coeur, OSP I, p. 30 – 236 as quoted in Almeida, “O Coração de Jesus” p. 153.



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Christologies of Latin America have had greater difficulty in linking up with the more ontological approaches to Jesus Christ of the Greek Catholic tradition of the first centuries, one of the words that you have latched on to was Pope Benedict XVI's acceptance of the option for the poor is part of Christology. It was seen as a vindication of Latin American Christology. This interpretation would be very fruitful for the development of our spirituality. It also means that images of the heart of Christ must always be tested in the images of the Jesus of the Gospels.

In conclusion, I can only express the wish that our dialogue be rich not only for those who participate in the Seminar but also for the Congregation as a whole.