

FAITH & SOCIAL COMMITMENT

FR. LEON DEHON

&

**A NEW SOCIAL CATECHISM FOR THE
21ST CENTURY**

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The preoccupation with the social development of humankind is a theme which the Church took up and made her principal concern from her birth.

A reflection of the meaning of authentic human life in history and culture found expression already in Scriptures and in the writings of the Church Fathers, Church social movements and are now taught by the Church's Magisterium as the Church's Social Teachings. For, we human beings and our wellbeing have been God's main concern from the beginning: « For God so loved the world that He sent his Son....» & «Caritas Christi urget nos!»



“The joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the women and men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way oppressed, these are the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1)

FAITH & CHURCH'S SOCIAL COMMITMENT *in history.*

- ▶ The Spirit of Christian Charity and devoted self-sacrifice which had once impressed the pagan world was by no means dead. Rather, the needs of the times called forth new efforts in the service of Christian charity.
- ▶ History records innumerable examples of practical works of mercy. The Church was a social power in the declining culture of those days. The bishops were obliged to substitute for a corrupt and decrepit officialdom: to assume the duties of public welfare servants; to supply the needy and suffering with food, clothing and shelter; and in many instances, even to organize the defence of cities...
- ▶ The relief of the poor, the care of slaves, of prisoners and of travellers became their concern. A part of the Church's income was set aside to aid the poor. In large cities such as Constantinople and Antioch, the Church's work among the poor was to a great extent highly organized. There arose many institutions for the relief of every human need: hospitals, poor houses, orphanages, foundling homes, shelters for travellers, etc., which had been entirely unknown in pre-Christian times (Karl Billmeyer, *Church History*, 1, 1968).

..needs of the times:

FR. DEHON (1843-1920) & 19TH CENTURY FRANCE

- ▶ The French Revolution..... 1789-1799
- ▶ The Industrial Revolution..... 1760-1840 (Britain –Europe)
- ▶ *The Phenomena:* ...all that the revolution brought about in society, especially, in the area of the mechanization of work and the life of workers, asymmetrical power relationship in the workplace, ownership of property, rights & freedom of workers, the use of capital, profit-making, usury etc.
- ▶ With the rise in impoverishment and usury, people turned away from the church who they saw as inept in handling the economic, political, and sociological crisis of the poor and lower-class citizens in society. The Church no longer had influence over government or its people.

The Seedbed of Fr. Dehon's Social Ministry

- ▶ The influence of these new developments on the social and religious life in France was manifest and palpable; and so was it also in the other nations/countries of Europe: The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy.
- ▶ Within the Church, this new development engendered a current of thought and action about living the faith in those changed times which would give birth to the *social movements*.
- ▶ They were to be found in France, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy and Spain: as *social movements which* engendered political parties, mostly under the name “*Christian Democrats*” and which endeavoured to maintain the voice/teaching of the Church in the increasingly polarizing tension and separation between Church and State, and disregard for the poor/workers.

The “Social Concern” Legacy of Fr. Dehon

SPIRITUALITY

- ▶ In the general religious and socio-political setting of the 19th century France, Fr. Dehon cultivated a *spirituality which gave meaning to concrete life. He enunciated the primacy of the spiritual, not in the disincarnate form of some ascetical schools of the past, but within the problems of the present*, such as those of the working class. His spirituality was based on the pierced heart of Christ crucified, contemplated and adored in the Eucharist, as the basis of a life of communion, with the heart of Jesus and with others/world.
- ▶ His was a spirituality of self-sacrificing love, *of the “Mystic Victim”*; and it was this spirituality that drove Fr. Dehon to go *to the peripheries of his day: the factories with their workers and schools of young students, and to give social formation to young priests and seminarians (with Léon Harmel at Vals.des Bois)*. Cf. Mons. Alfredo Battista, “Fr. Dehon, the SCJ and Vatican II”, *Dehoniana* 1980/2, 119-122
- ▶ Accordingly, Fr. Dehon would encourage priests to leave their sacristies and go out to the people. Recently, on the feast of St. Don Bosco, Pope Francis praised Don Bosco for having known how to go out to the youth. Pope John Paul II, at the mass of canonization of Kolpings, would also say that “*Christianity is not meant to be lived in the sacristies, but in the workplace*”

The “Social Concern” Legacy of Fr. Dehon

Social Catechism/Catechism of Social Action

- ▶ This new idea called ‘Social Catholicism’ in France was born out of the mistreatment of workers in the Industrial Revolution in order to create solutions to the working-class abuses.
- ▶ In his “*Souvenirs*“ (03/1912): Recalling his many social works - his numerous works at St. Quentin France, the congresses in which he participated, and his social writings and lectures – Fr. Dehon wrote: “I wanted to contribute to the uplifting of the lower classes, with the advent of justice and Christian charity.” He concludes: “in this area, too, the work must continue. The masses are not yet convinced that the Church alone possesses the true and practical answers to all social questions.”
- ▶ The rich and the employers must not treat the worker as a slave, but must respect in him the dignity of man and that of the Christian. Work, far from being shameful, brings honor to a person. What is shameful is to use a person like a cheap instrument. The State must particularly make itself the protector of the weak and the poor.”

The “Social Concern” Legacy of Fr. Dehon

PASTORAL ACTION

- ▶ The Reign of the Sacred Heart in Souls and Society: “It is necessary that the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was begun in the mystical life of souls, come down and enter into the social life of the world's peoples. *It will bring the sovereign remedy to the cruel ills of our moral world.*”
- ▶ Mission: To evangelize a society with a relevant catechism of social action and works that reaches across religion and politics? Ie. to help our people see that God and church have a major role in solving the ethical, moral, physical, emotional, and psychological ills of society.
- ▶ Mission tool: Have Heart of Christ reign in the individual soul and in society:
 - a) Spread of devotion by Catholic ‘Associations’ or organizations and formal collaborative action by the Bishops, priests and laity.
 - b) Sensitize parish priests and seminarians about social problems so that they would leave their sacristies and go to the people. Need of God’s Reign to be in the hearts of souls and society to remedy the evils of the world.

Contemporaries of Fr. Dehon 1

To deal with these new developments & impact on persons and society, there was not only Church and faith teaching. There exponents of thought & ideas: philosophical, economic, sociological, techno-scientific and even masonic:

Fr. LEON DEHON (1843-1925)

(In St. Quentin, Fr. Dehon saw rise of working class & impotence of ministry of Church, faced with social & cultural reality of epoch).

- ▶ Karl Marx (1818-1883)
- ▶ Nietzsche (1844-1900)
- ▶ Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)
- ▶ Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)
- ▶ Max Weber (1864-1920)
- ▶ Etc.

Contemporaries of Fr. Dehon 2

New developments engendered a current of living the faith in those changed and changing times which gave rise to social movements (semaines sociales, Christian Democrats etc.)

▶ Fr. Leon Dehon

- ▶ Giuseppe Toniolo (1845-1918)
- ▶ Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954)
- ▶ Jean Monet (1888-1979)
- ▶ Robert Schuman (1886-1963)
- ▶ Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967)
- ▶ Jacques Maritain (1882-1973)

3-Fold Nature of Church Responses

- 1) Spiritual
- 2) Pastoral
- 3) Political

Between Pastoral & Political Action, Pope Benedict XVI:

It is ideological to merely make proposals without moving on to action: Accordingly, in dealing with social question, "The task of Bishops is to transform theology into pastoral care, namely into a very concrete pastoral ministry in which the great perspectives found in sacred Scripture and Tradition find application in the activity of Bishops and priests in specific times and places." In doing this, however, it is very important that one does not confuse "*pastorals*" with "*politics*"; and it is clarity about one's identity: being a Church with a specific and an irreplaceable identity. (Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Roman Curia....., 21 Dec. 2009).

Contemporary of Fr. Dehon 3: Pope Leo XIII & *Rerum Novarum* (1891)

- ▶ Audience with Pope Leo XIII: Fr. Leon encouraged in outreach towards workers & to teach encyclical in *Adveniat regnum tuum*, *Christian social manual* & *social catechism*.
- ▶ *Rerum Novarum* energized political thinking and action of members of Christian social movements into forming political parties to uphold the dignity and freedom of workers in face of emerging economic and capitalist structures .
- ▶ *Le Chronique social de la France* of Lyon spread message of *Rerum Novarum*.
- ▶ *RN* Marks a gradual shift in emphasis from a simply *Social Question* to an *Anthropological Question*.
- ▶ A shift which will become prominent, under the influence of Jacques Maritain's teaching of "*transcendental humanism*" (revived Aquinas for modern times and influenced the development & drafting of "*Universal declaration of Human Rights*").

Social Question: an Integral Human Question

- ▶ Subsequent Encyclicals increasingly qualify the “*Social Question*” as “*Integral*”, affecting all dimensions of the human person.
- ▶ Dimensions of human existence and growth are not separable and *independent: there are no independent variables in integral humanism*
- ▶ Everything is inter-connected and inter-dependent.
- ▶ *Integral Ecology: natural ecology, human ecology, social ecology, ecology of peace (Benedict XVI), ecology of economics (Francis) etc.*

Towards a new *SOCIAL CATECHISM* *for Integral Ecology:*



In Social Encyclical

- ▶ 1. *Rerum Novarum* (1891) Leo XIII
- ▶ 2. *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) 40 yrs. after RN.. Pius XI
- ▶ 3. *Mater et Magistra* 1961 Pius XII
- ▶ 4. *Pacem in terris*, 1963 John XXIII
- ▶ 5. *Gaudium et spes* (Vatican II) 1965 Paul VI
- ▶ 6. *Populorum Progressio* 1967 Paul VI

Concerns/Issue addressed

- ▶ Conditions of working classes, right & duties, of capital and labor.
- ▶ 40 yrs. After *Rerum Novarum*: *Challenges of Industrial revolution is not challenge of Depression of 30's.*
- ▶ *Christians & Social Progress*: In changed world, economically & politically 70yrs after RN, justice & common good is basis of conduct.
- ▶ Rights & obligations of individuals & of State: rooted in natural law (religious freedom etc.
- ▶ World to be embraced in dialogue & mission.
- ▶ Poverty & Development (of people) as peace!

7. Octogesima Adveniens (80yrs of RN) 1971, Paul VI

8. Laborem Exercens 1981 John Paul II

9. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 1987 JP II

10. Centesimus Annus, 1991 (100yrs of RN), JP II.

11. Evangelium Vitae 1995, JP II.

12. Fides et Ratio 1998, JP II

- ▶ 80th anniv. of RN. Situations of injustice & inequality. Integral dev. of persons.
- ▶ Dignity of human work, physical & spiritual.
- ▶ 20th anniv. Of Pop. Progressio. Authentic dev. is integral: promotes all dimensions.
- ▶ 100yrs. of RN. Person at centre of social order. Participation, Freemarket & democracy.
- ▶ Value & inviolability of human life: Protection.
- ▶ Faith & reason. Humanity's transcendental nature & search for truth. The place of Jesus.



13. *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004.

14. *Deus Caritas est* 2005, Benedict XVI

15. *Caritas in veritate* 2009, Benedict XVI

16. *Laudato si* 2015, Francis

17. *Fratelli tutti* 2020, Francis.

- ▶ CSD Principles
- ▶ Humanity and God's love, and invited to live God's love.
- ▶ Takes up Po.progression: human development and moral action in a globalized world (brought close, but not made brothers).
- ▶ Integral ecology
- ▶ As ethic of human relations.

A new *SOCIAL CATECHISM* *for Integral Ecology*

- ▶ Contexts and occasion of Social Encyclicals focus on the *transcendental and integral development* of the person. The wholistic growth and development of human person & conditions (*ecologies* that promote it).
- ▶ In integral ecology/growth, there is no *independent variable!*
- ▶ A “*social*” Catechism for an *Integral Ecology* has two primary sources / building blocks: *faith* and the *CSD*.

BUILDING BLOCK OF *FAITH*

1. God's self-revelation as basis of faith & commitment to common good.
2. Fidelity to God's covenant thru. Christ
3. Participating in love & wonder of Trinity

- ▶ God, creator of all
- ▶ In revelation of God's saving love for humanity, God confirms dignity of the person.
- ▶ In their dignity every person is *relational & Individual*.
- Jesus enters human history as true God & true man.
- Jesus' incarnation is ultimate contradiction which breaches assumed divides between divine & human, human & human, death & life.
- God's love to be real in all relationships: neighbour, the least & last, enfolds enemies.
- ❖ Christian belief in God of trinitarian communion means Trinity has left its mark on all creation
- ❖ In imprint of Trinity, faith recognizes a creative potential for unity within diversity.
- ❖ In the imprint of Trinity, the human person, society & natural world inhere in one another

In the imprint of Trinity, human persons are summoned to *integrity & integrality*: to personal wholeness that is simultaneously relational and responsible

- ▶ 4. In the embrace of Grace.

- ▶ 5. Shaped by God's Word

- ▶ 6. With the Spirit, we abide in God's love

- Christian faith reveals: all human activity finds fulness in the mercy and love of God, whose image human beings are.
- When people open themselves to relationship with Christ, grace received has impact that abounds in society & creation.
- In Jesus' incarnation, no human sphere or project is beyond God's grace. Every gesture is latent with God's grace.
- ✓ Gospels is tool fo *putting on mind of Christ & imitating in the concrete reality of one's time & place.*
- ✓ God's kingdom is unfolding still: here & now and not-yet, on earth as it is in heaven.
- ✓ Discipleship with Jesus is living relationship by which every baptized person participates with Jesus in daily project of building kingdom
- Faith illumines our vision of God's plan & how to appropriate it in daily life.
- Holy Spirit arouses in people's heart the irresistible requirements of dignity.

Principles/Key Themes of CSD/CST in Application

CST Principles	Implications for Social Action	Questions for Discernment
The Human Person and Human Dignity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An exercise in freedom, entailing duties as well as rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is human freedom enhanced or degraded? Are human rights fully respected? Are opportunities fair and equally accessible? Are externalities borne by the beneficiaries?
The Common Good	The shared milieu without which initiatives cannot be taken nor benefits received	<p>Are social values uplifted or neglected? How specifically does the community benefit? Is others' participation included or excluded? Are persons' capabilities allowed to thrive?</p>
Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The essential personal interdependence - in society and nature - in which the progress/dev. is also embedded 	<p>Are other persons respected or commodified? Is the social impact unifying or divisive? How is nature's bounty valued and preserved? Will this investment grow or fray trust?</p>
Social Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A biblical and historical recognition that even the best human systems degrade and become oppressive over time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How will inequality be ameliorated? Are stakeholders/workers/poor heeded? Have the excluded or marginalized been heard? Are expected outcomes ethically inspiring?
Subsidiarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Retaining human scale, exercising responsibility at the level of community relationship 	<p>Does this empower community-level decisions? Is personal agency strengthened at all levels? Does accountability engender widespread trust? Have those most impacted had their say?</p>
Care for Our Common Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inheriting the gifts and opportunities from creation, and ensuring these are bequeathed to future generations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is authentic sustainability being realized? Are nature's beauty and vulnerabilities valued and appreciated? How precisely is stewardship being fulfilled? Are kinship and kindness foremost or depreciating?



Thanks for your kind
attention

Card. P. Kodwo Turkson