



A Year with Venerable Father Leo John Dehon

Preparing for the centenary of the founder's death in 2025

The seventh in a series of monthly biographical sketches as we prepare to commemorate the centenary of his death on August 12, 2025

Fr. Leo John Dehon: The Pope's Preacher

In 1878, Pope Leo XIII issued a Decree of Praise for the Priests of the Sacred Heart, recognizing the invaluable ministries being done by the religious order Fr. Dehon founded. Fr. Dehon travelled to Rome to thank the Pope personally for this affirmation. At that meeting, Pope Leo XIII asked Fr. Dehon to "Preach my encyclicals." The Pope had been writing on contemporary issues of employment, the economy, and the need to protect the rights of workers. One of the Pope's major writings was *Rerum Novarum: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Capital and Labor*, published May 15, 1891. Fr. Dehon's education, experience and passion for the Church to be part of the solution made him an excellent choice to speak on these topics.



Pope Leo XIII

In *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo urged the clergy of his day to "secure the good of the people; and above all must earnestly cherish in themselves, and try to arouse in others, charity, the mistress and the queen of virtues." (63) Fr. Dehon often wrote about charity



Fr. Dehon at his desk

(love), which he also connected to the devotion to the Sacred Heart: "The devotion to the Sacred Heart acts like the sun in the natural world. It warms and revives the spirits of those who understand it. For us, faith in the love of God will bring us back to life, and with it, hope and charity will be reawakened." ("Lenten Sermon" 1855) To address the social problems of their day, both men knew charity was an essential virtue to be developed.

For the next fifteen years Fr. Dehon was a tireless interpreter of Leo XIII's social teachings. He promoted Christian social values mainly through his publications, such as the periodical "The Reign of the Heart of Jesus in Souls and Societies", his *Christian Social Manual*, and many other writings. He also participated in numerous

Congresses of Social Studies throughout the region. Dehon particularly addressed the clergy, writing, "Social activity is not opposed to priestly work; it is by means of it that we prepare the social reign of Christ." His writings are still influencing seminary education today.

Fr. Dehon was working towards "Adveniat Regnum Tuum", meaning "Your kingdom come." This refers to the idea that we are working towards unity in the Heart of Christ, so that Christ's love reigns in individuals and society.

Next month, will learn about Fr. Dehon, "The Missionary Priest."



Cardinal Turkson celebrating Mass at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology in 2022; Cardinal Turkson also provided a lecture on Fr. Dehon's social writings.

Quote:

"One of the purposes of society is precisely to assist members of the human family, through good social organization, to escape from the grip of misery. The earth is rich enough to sustain us all and even to allow us to live in modest comfort. No sensible person can believe that the poverty of the majority is a law of nature."

- Fr. Leo John Dehon, *Christian Social Manual*, Chapter 2

Reflection Question:

What are three small ways you could live more simply,
so that you can share more with others?

**Learn more about the
Priests of the Sacred Heart
(Dehonians/SCJ) at:
www.dehoniansusa.org**

