

Quito Jubilee Meeting
March 11, 2026.

Father Dehon's Social Catechism and his concept of family

Fr. Emerson M. Ruiz (BSP)

Introduction

The work *Social Catechism* (CSC) was published in February 1898, with the aim of providing formation in social morality – a theme already addressed in other works, such as the *Christian Social Manual* – but here presented in a new format and aimed at a different audience.

Most of the work is, in fact, a catechism with questions and answers—a unique genre in Father Dehon's literary production—highlighting his commitment to reaching new audiences.

1. About the work *Social Catechism*

Social Catechism is organized into four parts:

Preface [1-13]

I - The principles of social and political life (14-92).

II - Principles of economic life [93-241]

III - Social duties [242-296]

IV - Apologetics: Social history of the Church [297]

In the first two chapters, Father Dehon uses the style of traditional catechisms, presenting short questions followed by direct and clear answers. The book is conceptual, composed of statements well grounded in the authority of the Church.

In the first part, we find answers to basic questions such as: What is the purpose of man? (CSC 14) or What is the role of the family in social life? In the second part, which is the most extensive (*Principles of Economic Life*), we find answers to questions such as: What is the economic system preferred by the Church? (CSC 116); What are the bases for setting wages? (CSC 125); What is meant by capitalism? (CSC 147); What are the advantages and disadvantages of credit? (CSC 164-173)

The third part, which is the shortest (*Social Duties*), begins by discussing the role of the priest: "What are the duties of the priest in relation to social life?" (CSC 241). This part

presents the duties of various actors in society, such as Christians in general (CSC 248), electoral obligations (CSC 251), the responsibilities of heads of families (CSC 258), employers (CSC 259), workers (CSC 263), among others.

The fourth part (*Apologetics: Social History of the Church*) addresses universal history, highlighting the role of the Church in human progress, especially in the defense of the family, freedom, social organization, and the fight against slavery. The chapter concludes with the themes of Christian Democracy (CSC 514) and the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (CSC 519).

The content, it can be said, is the social doctrine of the Church as preached by the popes throughout history and, in particular, by Leo XIII. According to A. Perroux, this book was "*conceived as an indispensable complement to the chapters on private social morality that are already widely taught*"¹. Thus, Father Dehon presents himself as a kind of "catechist" who seeks to echo the pontifical teachings, particularly those of Leo XIII.

The work belongs to the genre of "question and answer catechism," being a summary focused on Christian formation in accordance with the changes of the time, especially in the first three parts. The fourth part, on the other hand, adopts a historical-apologetic approach, characterizing a subgenre within the catechetical genre.

Father Dehon positions himself as a moral guide, presenting arguments structured in the context of religious and social debate. The stated purpose is to serve as a reminder that social morality should be preached in parallel with private morality, a field that the author considers a duty to explore in order to understand the depth of modern events (CSC 13).

In the fourth part, the historical argument aims to show that the Church has always promoted progress and freedom, combating errors such as Caesarism and liberalism. The author argues that, since the 18th century, civil society has been weakened by the spread of misguided political and economic ideas.

Father Dehon uses direct and succinct language that is easy to understand, which encourages the practical application of concepts. Amid the diversity of ideas characteristic of the late 19th century, his clarity contributes to consolidating the convictions of Catholics.

1.1 Context of the Work

¹ Cf. PERROUX, A. *Le témoignage d'une vie: le Père Jean-Léon Dehon*, STD 59, Rome, 2014, p. 490.

An analysis of the historical context in which the work is set is essential. The *Social Catechism* is part of the so-called "social years" period (1893-1903), a term used by the Founder himself in 1925, when he made a certain analysis of his history, seeking to characterize his intense social activity². This cycle began in August 1893 with the painful removal of Father Dehon from the direction of St. John's College, a significant event in his career (NQT 6/213), and ended in 1903, marked by the death of Pope Leo XIII – the pope of the first *aggiornamento* and of strong social action – and by the expulsion of the Congregation from France, as a result of the anticlerical measures promoted by Émile Combes³. The accumulation of administrative functions led Father Dehon to reduce his apostolic activities in the social sphere. During this famous period of social years, his goal was to apply the principles of *Rerum Novarum*, directing his educational and formative vocation toward an apostolate focused on social formation and the promotion of Christian democracy.

During this period, Father Dehon produced most of his books on social issues, publishing seven works, including the *Social Catechism*. Of the founder's social works, the exception, not published during this period, is "The Plan of Freemasonry" from 1908. His texts defended workers' associations and legislative actions to overcome liberal individualism and promote Christian values. Thus, Father Dehon expanded and broadened his role as an educator beyond schools, seeking to build the "Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus in souls and societies" through a more popular and social apostolate.

The *Social Catechism* was probably written in 1897, a year in which the Founder carried out various activities: he preached conferences in Rome published in *Christian Social Renewal*, participated in the Social Studies Commission of the Diocese of Soissons, became a consultant to the Index, organized a meeting of seminarians for social formation in Val des Bois, and attended important congresses such as that of the Third Franciscan Order and that of Christian Democracy, where he was elected to the Central Council. Certainly, this environment of intense involvement with ecclesial groups and congresses influenced the issues addressed by *the Social Catechism*.

Although the *Social Catechism* was published in 1898, the idea of creating an "easily understandable social work" arose in 1895. According to G. Manzoni, after launching the *Christian Social Manual*, Dehon received requests to produce simpler and more accessible material.

² NQT 44/152

³ NQT 18/46

Father Dehon makes it clear that his purpose with the book was not only to defend principles, but to make Leo XIII's social teaching known to the people. On February 6, 1908, he writes in his diary: "*May this little book become a classic and popularize the teachings of Leo XIII*"⁴. Thus, the *Social Catechism* should be understood as the result of a phase in which Dehon, already recognized as a writer and lecturer, took on a pastoral role of mediation: his focus was on transforming social doctrine into an educational tool for new strata and segments of society, providing objective arguments and indicating practical paths for social action.

It is interesting to note that each section ends with a comprehensive bibliography which, on the one hand, highlights the breadth of the field of research covered and, on the other, emphasizes the role of *the Social Catechism* as a link not only to the social teaching of Leo XIII, but also as a bridge for the reader to access various fundamental works of incipient Christian sociology.

1.2 Organization of the text

The architecture of the text reveals the link between its four parts. The first two present the doctrinal foundations, while the third addresses the duties to be observed. Finally, the fourth part describes, after a detailed historical analysis, the resulting expectations—that is, what to expect: Christian Democracy and the Social Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus.

Like this work, Father Dehon presents himself as an educator who brings the Catholic teaching of Leo XIII to social groups that, until then, did not seem to receive adequate social literature from the "good press": workers, families, young people, etc. Father Dehon acts as an interpreter of theology, capable of making Leo XIII's strong magisterium understandable to a wide audience. The *Social Catechism*, in a way, can be seen as an approach to social morality aimed at "going to the people." The author stands out as a "popular educator" or "adult catechist," bringing to light questions faced by workers, parents, and many lay people on the streets and in factories, such as: should we participate in the elections of the Third Republic? What is the Church's position on strikes? How can we protect the family in the face of a centralizing state?

When comparing *Social Catechism* with other social works by the same author, it can be seen that its thematic scope goes beyond the concerns addressed in the texts written between 1893 and 1903. The aim of this work is to offer answers to a wide range of social issues of the

⁴ NQT 12/110; cf. NQT 12/127.

time, responding to all the questions raised. The contrast with other books of the period, such as *the Christian Social Manual* and *Pontifical Guidelines*, highlights this characteristic: although *the Social Catechism* provides more succinct and less detailed answers, they are also more "Catholic," that is, they have a more "universal" meaning and are not restricted to issues of French social and political reality. The interest in translating the book into different languages shows that the author achieved his goal.

It is an apologetic genre that was not unknown, but the boldness of the work lay in its theme: social morality. In this sense, in addition to being a catechist and apologist, the author presented himself as a moralist, someone capable of debating the major social, economic, political, and religious issues of the time. The first three parts are written in a "question and answer" style to provide readers with arguments to answer the questions that arose in the religious debate of the time.

The author of the work seeks to offer answers that people (apparently) sought. He does not shy away from difficult questions and intertwines a theological reflection considered advanced with a very traditional model of exposition, which was the catechism. He recognizes the innovation of his work, stating that a "new treatise on theology" is needed, a treatise on social morality, "on the 4th commandment of the Decalogue," as will be seen below⁵.

An apologetic work

The fourth chapter, the longest in the work, reveals the apologetic nature of the text by providing arguments for the defense of the faith, the Church, and the so-called "rights of God." In this context, the author assumes the role of defender of the legitimacy of the Church and its role in late 19th-century secular society. The goal is not only to guarantee divine rights, but also to ensure the institutional participation of the Church in social processes. The fourth chapter highlights the relevance of Catholic engagement in society, defending the historical role of the Church as a central element in social development. In addition to supporting workers, it emphasizes the importance of Catholic workers promoting the defense of the Church, consolidating its conciliatory role and its temporal influence with the State.

An open reflection?

⁵ Cf. CSC 12.

Father Dehon proposes a flexible and adaptable reflection, adjusting as situations require. In CSC 46, for example, he recognizes that when the ideal outlined above—the centrality of the Church in a Catholic society—is not realized, the Church must learn to adapt to new realities. He notes cases such as the United States and England, where, despite the breakdown of Catholic religious unity, the Church maintained freedom of action amid religious diversity, even though this posed risks. Regarding concordats, Dehon comments in *the Social Catechism*: "it certainly does not constitute the ideal..." (CSC 49). In other words, there is an ideal and a possible reality, and Dehon demonstrates skill in moving between the two, preserving dogmatic continuity on the one hand and recognizing the need for adaptation on the other.

The role of the priest

A central strategy of his narrative is the insistence on serious and methodical study as a prerequisite for the social apostolate to be carried out by the priest. Dehon argues that one must study in order to know and one must study in order to teach. It is necessary to study especially those social issues that are new and that should always have been studied in the Church (cf. CSC 291), arguing that the priest should not act without rigorous intellectual preparation. This commitment to the study of the magisterium and the surrounding reality serves to persuade the reader that his proposals are the result of "patient study" and a keen critical sense.

See – Judge – Act Method?

According to Fr. Perroux in his *Social Catechism*, Father Dehon implicitly uses a dynamic similar to the "see, judge, act" method, always starting from concrete reality in order to analyze it and guide pastoral action. For P. Perroux, Father Dehon is an "excellent observer" who considers reality broadly, gathering detailed information about a particular social problem (see). He then examines the situation in light of the Church's magisterium, especially the teachings of Leo XIII (judge). Finally, he makes a practical commitment to transform that reality (act)⁶.

For whom does Father Dehon write?

⁶ Cf. PERROUX, A. *Le témoignage d'une vie: le Père Jean-Léon Dehon*, STD 59, Rome, 2014, p. 67 ff.

Due to its unique structure, *Social Catechism* is intended for Catholics who questioned the Church's teachings during the second industrial revolution (1850-1945). The target audience includes heads of families and educators, affirming the priority of the family over the state, as well as workers, employers, and social leaders, emphasizing the importance of professional corporations and justice in labor relations. By using the term "popularize"⁷, Father Dehon addresses this book to all Christians interested in understanding the new social context from the perspective of faith. It is a reader who trusts the Church as the final authority to assess the modern crisis. Father Dehon does not debate modernity through sociological arguments, but rather through theological moral legitimacy, aimed at those who seek an organic view of the social order based on faith.

In directing his social catechism to social agents in the popular milieu, Father Dehon adopts clear and direct language, characterized by a dialogue that encourages adherence to the content. With an effective rhetorical approach, Father Dehon does not limit himself to arguments based on faith, but also uses reason and scientific knowledge to support his positions. Father Dehon's argument is based on three complementary pillars: a) moral reason, which is based on a sense of natural justice and the dignity of workers; b) ecclesial doctrine, backed by the magisterium of Leo XIII, especially the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, and c) concrete social experience, manifested in the analysis of the situation of workers and the critical evaluation of the political systems of socialism and liberalism.

Father Dehon's argument makes his text persuasive, positioning him as a Catholic intellectual committed to attributing a public function to faith. His social vision is based on the coherence between spirituality and realistic analysis of society, although it faces limits in the face of modern complexity. The *Social Catechism* proposes a hierarchical and organic vision of society, based on Christian charity and justice, but this order is challenged by the advance of capitalism. Father Dehon did not yet have the concepts of the Social Doctrine of the Church that would later be developed, such as the common good, the dignity of the human person, the universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, and solidarity⁸. Thus, his reflection was based mainly on the initial principles of Leo XIII's social teaching, in addition to his own research. Therefore, it is understandable, as will be discussed below, that his analysis of reality begins

⁷ Cf. NQT 12/110; cf. NQT 12/127.

⁸ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE. **Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church**. São Paulo: Paulinas, 2005. **Chapter IV** [The Principles of the Social Doctrine of the Church]

with a historical perspective of medieval corporations⁹ (subsidiarity) and the concept of family, which often leads to a paternalistic approach to social relations.

2. The family in *the Social Catechism*

After this brief introduction to *the Social Catechism*, it is important to analyze the concept of family in order to evaluate the possibilities for updating the text written by our founder. In *the Social Catechism*, the family is one of the central themes, both as a social concern of Father Dehon and as an interpretive category.

For Father Dehon, the family is the primary social unit, because it is instituted by God and ontologically prior to the State¹⁰. It is presented as the "axis of society," from which the entire social body draws its virtues, discipline, and vital force¹¹. As the "cradle of civil society," the family has inviolable natural and religious rights that public authorities must safeguard¹². The protection of its stability and educational autonomy is essential, because the destiny of nations is prepared within the home¹³. For Dehon, civil society does not generate families, but finds them already established by nature and religion¹⁴, and therefore the family is a limit that the state cannot exceed.

In reading the text, we find three topics addressed by Father Dehon when dealing with the family: a) the family as nature as the basis of society, b) the inalienable right to Christian education, and c) the economic protection of the home.

Father Dehon establishes that the family is the "*first social unit, willed by God and sanctified by Him*"¹⁵, possessing natural rights that the state did not create and must only protect. He states that "*families are the axis of society, they are its strength. It [society] takes advantage of their virtues, their discipline, their riches, their fruitfulness*"¹⁶. To ensure this strength, he emphasizes the need to respect the "*law of stability*" (indissolubility) and the "*law of authority that God has established in the family*"¹⁷.

⁹ Cf. GADILLE, Jacques. L'impegno di Leone Dehon per la diffusione della Rerum Novarum. In: LEDURE, Yves (ed.). **Leone Dehon e la Rerum Novarum**. Bologna: EDB, 1991. p. 127-141.

¹⁰ Cf. CSC 258.

¹¹ Cf. CSC 20.

¹² Cf. CSC 8.

¹³ Cf. CSC 21.

¹⁴ Cf. CSC 20.

¹⁵ CSC 258.

¹⁶ CSC 20.

¹⁷ CSC 21.

In this sense, Father Dehon's interpretation of the Fourth Commandment is curious. In No. 12 of the Social Catechism, he states: "*Our theology manuals, since then, would have to have one more treatise, or even give a new development to certain other treatises, such as that of laws, justice, and contracts, and even that of the Fourth Precept of the Decalogue. And why not write directly about Christian politics and economics, or, if you will, social morality, following on from those that deal with private morality?*"¹⁸ What is it about?

The fourth commandment, "Honor your father and mother," is one of the pillars of *the Social Catechism* because Father Dehon sees in it the theological root of authority and order in society. Dehon affirms that theology textbooks should, from now on, develop notably "the treatise on the fourth precept of the Decalogue" to ground social morality alongside justice and laws. In Father Dehon's view, civil society does not create authority, but must recognize and enforce the "law of authority that God has established in the family," which serves as the primary model for all other forms of government¹⁹.

Dehon teaches that the duties of employers derive "especially from the fourth and seventh ['thou shalt not steal'] precepts of the Decalogue"²⁰. Thus, surprisingly, the *Social Catechism* establishes a direct analogy between the home and the workshop: "*the employer is the head of the working family, just as the father is the head of the natural family*"²¹. According to the Catechism, when the employment contract is concluded, the worker "enters in some way into the employer's family," as was the case in Val des Bois, at the factory of Léon Harmel, the "bon père." - which transforms a relationship that we now call "professional" into a moral bond of respect, mutual protection, and equally obedience²².

Thus, the fourth commandment justifies Dehon's concept of "social paternalism," where the responsibilities of the ruling classes are seen as an extension of fatherhood. Due to this articulation between employer guardianship and family authority, the duties of the owner or employer are not limited to the payment of wages, but extend to care for the morality, health,

¹⁸ CSC 12.

¹⁹ Cf. CSC 21. Historically, moral theology in the 18th and 19th centuries expanded the exegesis of the fourth commandment beyond the domestic sphere, elevating it to a principle organizing public and political life. From this perspective, the figure of the 'father' was analogically extended to the sovereign, the bishop, and the employer, consolidating a model of 'social paternalism based on natural hierarchy and filial obedience as guarantees of social stability. This theological structure underwent significant reinterpretations only with the emergence of the Labor Question and the subsequent systematization of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which replaced the logic of lordship and passive submission with the concepts of social justice, human dignity, and the subjective rights of workers.

²⁰ CSC 259.

²¹ CSC 61.

²² CSC 260.

and education of the worker's children²³ . Even the duties of magistrates and workshop managers are described as a "dilution [consequence] of the duties of a father." This is Father Dehon's interpretation of the family as the source of all authority and the key to understanding social and working-class reality.

A second topic is the right and duty of parents in the education of their children, a point on which Dehon is categorical in demanding autonomy from the state. This topic accompanies Father Dehon's life and thought in several books, especially when he refers to St. John's College. He instructs that parents should *"regulate the government of their homes according to Christian principles"* and exercise their right to *"raise their children in the Christian faith and customs"*²⁴ . Dehon sees school as an extension of parental responsibility, stating that parents should *"absolutely oppose their children attending schools where they are exposed to drinking the poison of impiety"*²⁵ .

²⁶²⁷ Finally, Dehon addresses extensively the material and legal conditions necessary for the survival of the family, focusing on wages and property. He defends the fairness of family wages, arguing that *"ordinary wages must therefore meet the normal needs of a head of household,"* allowing workers to provide *"sustenance, clothing, housing, and even the elements of honest and moderate recreation and savings."* On the legal front, he proposes inheritance reforms (succession and inheritance rights) to prevent the *"fragmentation of assets,"* which compromises *the "unity, stability, and perpetuity of families"*²⁸ . Among the measures to protect the home, he argues that *"the home should be safe from seizure"*²⁹ and that taxes should *"exempt the family home, whose preservation by the family is of such great interest to the State itself for the perpetuity of traditions"*³⁰ .

It is curious to note, as author David Neuhold points out³¹ , when discussing Father Dehon's relationship with money and inheritance, that this principle apparently did not apply to him. On the one hand, Dehon was a great advocate of the family as the nucleus of society and of the importance of protecting family heritage. However, Neuhold observes that Dehon acted in an apparently contradictory manner when dealing with his own inheritance. Dehon

²³ CSC 262

²⁴ CSC 258.

²⁵ CSC 258.

²⁶ CSC 128.

²⁷ CSC 127.

²⁸ CSC 231.

²⁹ CSC 228

³⁰ CSC 234

³¹ Cf. NEUHOLD, David. **Church and Mission, Money and Nation: Four Perspectives on Léon Dehon, Founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.** Madrid: Editorial El Reino, 2020, p. 478ff.

allocated his entire personal fortune, estimated at between 250,000 and 300,000 francs, to support the foundation of the Congregation and its initiatives, such as St. John's College. This decision broke with the Dehon family's "tradition of property" and drew strong criticism from his brother, Henri, who disapproved of the dispersal of the family estate for the benefit of the religious institution.

At the end of his life, Dehon revealed to his family that his works had consumed all his assets. He justified this material loss by considering the Congregation a new form of "spiritual family." In other words, Father Dehon saw the "Work" as an investment of greater value, treating the Institute almost as if it were his own "child" or legitimate heir to his material and spiritual assets.

In the dynamics of the vow of poverty, sharing one's possessions (inheritance) with the religious community is a normal practice, and Father Dehon acted in accordance with the vows he had made in 1878. However, his family did not fully accept or understand this, especially his brother, because he had diluted properties that had belonged to the family for years.

3. The Social Catechism today

In this third part of our text, based on the concept of creative fidelity, we would like to address *the Social Catechism* in terms of its potential. We know that it is a book that we can call "dated" (typical of an era), but it is also a work that has a certain prophetic and contemporary quality. Therefore, we can gather various insights from it.

3.1 "According to the times and circumstances" (CSC 1)

The first insight is found in the first paragraph of the text³². Father Dehon recognized that the teaching of the Church must be explained "according to the times and circumstances"³³. What does this mean? This expression indicates that the teaching of the Church is not a static system, but rather a dynamic organism responsible for formulating words of life, impacting the present, and responding to the new wounds of society³⁴. Today, times and circumstances are

³² DRIEDONKX, E. The centenary of Father Dehon's "Social Catechism," *Dehoniana 1998/3*, 9-12 [DEH1998-23-IT/7]

³³ CSC 1.

³⁴ CSC 5.

different. At that time, Father Dehon was extremely sensitive to the urgent needs of workers, the Church, and families and sought to respond to these needs by writing, pointing out new paths, organizing new social groups, and offering new horizons of hope such as Christian Democracy and the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus³⁵ .

In this sense, the next theological seminar to be held in Taubaté between the end of July and the beginning of August has as its theme *"Father Dehon in his texts: exploring the implicit authorial presence of Léon Dehon in his various writings."* The logo symbolizing this event features a pen shaped like a quill resting on the base of the design in order to unite the past and the present. It recalls the various writings of the Founder, including the *Social Catechism*, but also symbolizes the research work of the Dehonian Family today. This design presents the pen as the Founder's legacy to his spiritual family and the mission to continue writing the lines of this history "according to the times and circumstances." The pen in that drawing recalls Monsignor Binet's famous phrase at his funeral: "the pen that never stopped writing fell from his hand." That is, the responsibility of every Dehonian, in all times and situations, to present new forms of coexistence and fraternity. As also mentioned in the first number of our Rule of Life, it is a matter of *"making this charism bear fruit according to the needs of the Church and the world"* (Cst 1).

3.2 Identifying the mission of the Church

Secondly, in today's reading, it is necessary to overcome a certain "clerical optimism," a concept that describes Father Dehon's tendency to consider the Church and the return to "Christianity" as the only solution to all human and social ills³⁶ . At that time, Social Doctrine did not yet have the range of categories and concepts that currently guide analysis. For this reason, Father Dehon resorts to concepts from the Middle Ages (corporations) to find references capable of interpreting the transformations of that time. Following Father Dehon's example, it is necessary to accept the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities, recognizing that areas such as science, politics, and ethics have their own methods and must be respected by the Church, which can contribute by illuminating these fields in a prophetic way³⁷ .

3.3 Father Dehon, a man of frontiers

³⁵ CSC 514-521.

³⁶ DRIEDONKX, 1998, n. 20

³⁷ cf. GS 36

Thirdly, it is curious to note that Father Dehon, drawing on the Gospel and the teachings of Leo XIII, addresses issues that are not usually part of an "intra-ecclesial" discourse. Without ever neglecting the Gospel and doctrine, Father Dehon addresses social issues such as wages, strikes, labor relations, interest rate policy, income tax, large corporations, stock market investment, family housing, migration, etc. This stance in addressing frontier issues requires his religious family to have an understanding of the Gospel that is not limited to supposedly more religious themes. In *Social Catechism*, Father Dehon goes beyond the boundaries of Leo XIII's magisterium and therefore it is not only a "catechism" but a work that seeks conceptual dialogue with situations that were not – as they are today – topics of apparent theological citizenship.

Contemplating the life and message of Father Dehon, we realize that he was never a man of trenches. On the contrary, he always mastered the art of crossing borders and knew how to have a word for the diverse realities of society. Providentially, this conference takes place at the site of the overcoming of a great cultural frontier, which was the first mission of the young institute. Isn't this ability to talk about diverse and borderline issues part of our charismatic heritage? Father Dehon's advance into new frontiers was motivated by a curiosity about culture, the world, and understanding reality, an almost childlike curiosity that always led him to seek new interpretations of reality in the light of the Gospel and the Magisterium. However, it was also motivated by the understanding that the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus transcends all frontiers, leading them to what we now call the civilization of love.

Today, the congregation he founded, especially since the IX General Conference (2022) – *The Impact of God's Love on our society* – is called to cross these frontiers. Among these frontier issues, we can highlight the question of migration and war, a reality that affects families on every continent. Father Dehon, who personally witnessed the trail of desolation left by the Franco-Prussian War and the horrors of World War I³⁸, understood that armed conflict is the most lethal blow to the "law of stability" that he strongly defended for the home. For Father Dehon, protecting the migrant family today would be a requirement of social justice and reparation. From the perspective of *the Social Catechism*, this protection must materialize in the absolute guarantee of the "right to unity," preventing border policies or humanitarian crises from fragmenting the family unit, and in the requirement that migrants find what they need through dignified work, without being exploited because of their vulnerable condition. Since

³⁸ cf. J. J. ARNAIZ ECKER (ed.). *Dehon and the Dehonians in World War I*. Studia Dehoniana 64. Rome, CSD, 2018.

the family is "prior to social life and the State," Dehon would argue that the sovereignty of nations and their warlike pretensions cannot override the natural right of a family to seek security and bread.

3.4. Aggiornamento of CSC

The updating of the work must necessarily shift from a view in which society is seen as an extension of the family under the authority of a "father" to a perspective of integral and supportive humanism, where the Church acts as a leaven and a sign of dignity, but without the theocratic pretensions of past eras³⁹. As contemporary criticism points out, if in Dehon's time it was necessary to "go to the people" to popularize social theology, today it is necessary to dialogue with a secularized and, above all, polarized world.

In a timely update of *the Social Catechism* on the theme of the family, Father Dehon's most fruitful contribution is to show that the family is not only an object of moral exhortation, but a true "social subject" (cf. AL 56), without which neither the person nor society can develop in an integral way: God, he writes, "gave man the help of the family, of association, of the State," and therefore civil society exists to help and protect families, because the family is "prior to social life" and must have "its autonomy, its rights," and the "law of stability" respected⁴⁰. In light of this, the current crisis of the family cannot be explained solely by cultural changes, the weakening of bonds, or emotional instability; it must also be read as a crisis of the social conditions that make family life possible, because Dehon himself states that "man must find daily bread for himself and his family"⁴¹, that the normal wage must therefore meet the normal needs of a family. Father Dehon states that employers should be interested in the "housing of their workers" and the "good education of their children"⁴². In today's terms, without denying the paternalism inherent in some of these statements, this means that the family suffers not only from moral relativism, but also from insufficient wages, poor housing, exhaustion from work, educational fragility, and institutional crisis. Therefore, rereading Dehon today means recovering an integral vision in which the defense of the family requires at the same time bonds, education, fair work, housing, and social protection.

³⁹ CSC 9, 1374

⁴⁰ CSC 19-21

⁴¹ CSC 17

⁴² CSC 262

Conclusion

We conclude this reflection by revisiting the transformative legacy of *the Social Catechism*, a work in which Father Dehon took on the role of "popular educator" to translate the doctrine of the Church to the needs of the people. We have traveled the path that revealed the family as the "axis of society," a unit instituted by God and prior to the State. We have seen how Father Dehon based part of social morality on the 4th commandment, establishing a bridge between family authority and the responsibilities of justice and protection in the world of work.

The *Social Catechism* reflects the life of a man who gave his own inheritance to support his "spiritual family," the Congregation, and left us a spiritual treasure: the heart of Jesus. Today, the Dehonian Family is motivated to continue on this path through creative fidelity, recognizing that the teaching of the Church must respond to current "times and circumstances."

The "pen that never stopped writing" is now the legacy of his spiritual family. We are called to be "people of the frontier," crossing boundaries to engage in dialogue on urgent issues such as migration, the precariousness of the world of work, and the humanitarian crises that undermine the dignity of the home.

May the example of Father Dehon inspire us to fight for a society where the defense of the family is inseparable from the search for fair work, decent housing, and Christian education. By taking on this mission of social reparation, we bring the Dehonian charism to fruition (cf. Cst 1), transforming reality into the social Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus.