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# Crisis within Modernity: Léon Dehon and the Social Reign of the Sacred Heart

John van den Hengel

The French Revolution of 1789 played a central role in defining the narrative of its citizens. For the partisans of the revolution and the opponents of the revolution, particularly French Catholics, the narratives went in radically opposite directions.

In part, this was due to the gradually more accentuated visceral reaction of Catholics to the Revolution and its aftermath. For them the Revolution, with its declaration of the «Rights of Man», was not the new absolute point of departure of the French narrative but its crisis. The proposed denouement of the Revolution in *laïcité* was politically and religiously unacceptable. They saw it as a political aberration and as an attack on religion in society. The modernity that announced itself represented an evil, a counterforce that was to be rooted out at all costs. Most Catholics read the revolution as a crisis in their emplotment of French history. They proposed another narrative, another schema. For them the Republican movement that emerged from the Revolution as the political force of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an instance of decline that had to be suppressed in order for France to live up to its historical destiny. For those, on the other hand, who supported the French Republic, the French Revolution was the beginning of a new France, free from the oppressive feudalism of the Church and the monarchy. It proclaimed the equality of all its citizens, grounded in reason and refusing to bow to privileged authority. For them the Middle Ages had mercifully come to an irreversible conclusion.

Two different readings, two different emplotments of the Revolution. In the end, it turned out that the Catholic camp and its interpretation of French history did not prevail. The dominant plot became that of modernity. However, their refusal to capitulate to the Republican reading of France ended up becoming the crisis within French modernity. Because of the intensity of their opposition to the

grand narrative of France, their reading took on an apocalyptic form. In this Catholic emplotment of the story of France, the symbolization of the Sacred Heart and the «reign» of the Sacred Heart played an important role. For many French Catholics this was an «end of times» struggle for the soul of France.

In this article we will explore the symbolization and apocalyptic shading of the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the devotion to the Sacred Heart in the social writings of Léon Dehon, a cleric, a founder of a religious community whose spiritual, contemplative inspiration was drawn from this devotion to the Sacred Heart.

The apocalyptic, as a specific temporalization of history, can be traced back to the Judeo-Christian scriptures. There it appears as a literary genre of a series of texts dating back to the 2nd century before the Common Era, a time when the southern kingdom of Judah was threatened in its existence and identity by the Syrian Seleucids. Although the apocalyptic genre changed its role through the centuries, the apocalyptic form – no longer only a literary genre but also a world-view – accompanied the history of Christianity in the West, particularly in moments of political and religious crisis. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was clearly one of these moments.

For purposes of this article, we will adopt the traditional, biblical understanding of the apocalyptic. Dominant particularly in the biblical writings between 160 BCE and 135 CE, the literary genre of the apocalyptic created a unique temporal configuration of past, present and future, with a dominant emphasis on the future. Its starting point was a utopic, often mythical, beginning – the paradisaic myth, the liberation from Egypt, the prosperous Davidic reign – which was threatened by sin, rebellion, disobedience to God, and thus placed under judgment. The apocalyptic present is referenced as a time dominated by demonic forces and great suffering for the believer or the initiated. The apocalyptic texts are intended to encourage the addressees to remain faithful in these difficult times. They often contain a promise of redemption or restoration, by a royal, often transcendent being, if not in the present, then in a «final times» when an act of God – an act in which God «reigns» – will open it to a «glorious» future in which believers will be vindicated for their faithfulness.<sup>1</sup> The present time, filled with suffering and experiences of intolerable domination by evil forces, becomes tolerable through the hope of a future liberation. In other words, the apocalyptic is a unique Jewish mode of religious speculation about the future in a perceived time of crisis. The present, seemingly overwhelmed by unredeemable evil, lives with the hope of a liberation that will «soon» come.

<sup>1</sup> John Joseph Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Grand Rapids 1996; Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of the Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic*, Philadelphia 1979; Greg Carey, *Ultimate Things: An Introduction to Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature*, St. Louis 2005; Stefan Beyerle, *Apokalyptik und Biblische Theologie*, in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 52 (2010), 232–246.

The apocalyptic form has also continued to function in secular contexts beyond the Jewish and early Christian form of writing. In its transfiguration, the apocalyptic writings or prophecies retained the basic outline of the genre: an image of a glorious beginning (in Judaism, identified with the original innocence of paradise), the interruption of this beginning by a fall or a disastrous event (in Judaism, identified with the myth of the Fall), the deleterious situation of the current existence (in Judaism, the present time as dominated by Satan, Uriel or Beelzebul or the demonic), and the hope for «redemption» in an indeterminate future in which the ones who remained faithful will be vindicated (God's final reign, initiated by a messianic figure). The moment of the «final coming» is often presented as being preceded by a reign of Christ, lasting a thousand years.

### *The crisis for intransigent Catholics in France*

The situation of 19<sup>th</sup> century France was ripe for such an apocalyptic configuration of France's history by Catholics. The country was deeply divided between nationalistic, intransigent, monarchist, anti-revolutionary, often anti-Semitic, *ancien-regime* Catholics and the rationalist, liberal, radical, anti-clerical, anti-authoritarian Republicans.<sup>2</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the battle for supremacy between these irreconcilable views of France was intense and remained unresolved. As Frederick Brown expressed it in the title of his book, the struggle of the two ideologies was a battle «for the soul of France».<sup>3</sup> As a time of conflict, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was ripe for an apocalyptic reading.

A great part of this battle on the traditionalist side was fought by the clergy.<sup>4</sup> This is not surprising since in the post-Tridentine reform, the clergy, with a new self-awareness and power, played an ever more central role in the Catholic Church.<sup>5</sup> The reforms of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) had, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, produced a more articulate clergy. The clergy reasserted their presence par-

<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to determine how generalized this division was in France. In certain departments the opposition to the Revolution was not as intense as in others. On the Catholic side the main protagonists were clearly the clergy. See Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Catholicisme intransigeant, catholicisme social, démocratie chrétienne*, in: *Annales. Histoire. Sciences Sociales*, 27 (1972), 483–499.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Brown, *For the Soul of France: Culture Wars in the Age of Dreyfus*, New York 2010, 32. Of 19<sup>th</sup> century France, he says: «Possessed by an imposter since 1789, it had to recover its true self.»

<sup>4</sup> The clergy did not play this role exclusively in all parts of France, nor was the opposition to the Revolution by Catholics the same everywhere. See the analysis of the lay-led religious practices (in the absence of clergy) and popular political activism in the department of Yonne by Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religious and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France*, Ithaca 1991.

<sup>5</sup> François Plous, *Les curés historiens de villages et les tentatives de restauration cléricale après la Révolution*, in: *Le mouvement social*, 224 (2008), 21–33; Daniel Moulinet, *Laïcité catholique et société française. Les comités catholiques 1870–1905*, in: *Revue d'histoire du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1 (2009), 154.



ticularly after 1830.<sup>6</sup> Intransigent Catholicism was essentially clerical, that is, dependent on the clergy. As a consequence, the followers of the revolution were often anti-clerical.<sup>7</sup>

At first, the clergy's participation and reaction to the Revolution had been positive, despite the deaths and imprisonments of many of their colleagues. They sat as an indispensable part of the Constitutional Assembly of 1789.<sup>8</sup> They accepted the Assembly's primary goal, which was to end feudalism and the privileges of the nobility and the Church. They too sought to give new form to civic and religious life in France. There had been an increasing dissatisfaction among the clergy with the autocratic privilege of the nobility and Church leadership. And so, at first, the clergy took part in the Constitutional Assembly with some enthusiasm. They were not even opposed to the expropriation of the church's large property holdings (up to 10% of France's land mass) and the installation of a new taxation system. However, this positive approval changed when the Assembly insisted on a Civil Constitution of the clergy and sought to impose on them an oath of fealty to the new revolutionary state.<sup>9</sup> With this, the mood changed. They interpreted the oath as a total reversal of the social order. They found it unacceptable to abandon the role of the Church as dominant in the new constitution. They could not think of accepting the sovereignty of the French state over the Church. They had presumed that the Catholic religion would remain the state religion. Although a number of clergy accepted the mandatory oath, many did not. The *réfractaires*, the oath-refusing priests, became the vanguard of the conflict that tore France apart in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Raymond Jonas remarks, «The oath revealed a fault-line pointing backward toward early misgivings about the Revolution and forward toward rupture and counter-revolution.»<sup>10</sup> Church and state went their separate ways throughout the century. The impasse led to the separation of church and state in 1905 by decree of the government.<sup>11</sup>

This split was brewing for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The two sides were irreconcilable. Both had a vision, an ideology, about France that was diametrically opposed. For the Revolution, with its values of equality and liberty to prevail, the

<sup>6</sup> Having been reduced to around 30,000 in 1830, by 1880 the number of clergy had climbed to 80,000.

<sup>7</sup> See the thesis of Emile Poulat in his *Église contre bourgeoisie. Introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel*, Tournai-Paris 1977, 67.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Langlois, *Religion, culte ou opinion religieuse: La politique des révolutionnaires*, in: *Revue française de sociologie*, 30 (1989), 471–496.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791*, Princeton 1986. A slight majority of the clergy in France took the oath of loyalty but in some regions of France the clergy refused. In these areas, especially in the West of France, the future seeds of royalist revolt were sown.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times*, Berkeley 2000, 64.

<sup>11</sup> Ralph Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism 1789–1914*, London/New York 1989, 30–55; Gérard Cholvy, *La Religion en France de la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> à nos jours*, Paris 1991) and Gérard Cholvy/Yves Marie Hilarie, *Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine* (Tome I: 1800–1900), Toulouse 1985.

values of Catholicism would need to be crushed.<sup>12</sup> Both the ideology of the Revolution as well as that of Catholicism were deep seated, because as Paul Ricoeur notes, ideologies are bound up with the need of a social group to form an image of itself. Both groups were intransigent in their set identity.<sup>13</sup> The image of each group was grounded in a founding event: the French Revolution or the Republican movement for the one, the crowning of King Clovis or the monarchy and the Church in the *ancient regime*, for the other.<sup>14</sup> For a while, France worked with two calendars. In the course of the century, both groups formed a system of interacting symbols and rites that provided an institutional framework for their actions.<sup>15</sup> For the Republicans, for instance, these new symbols were the tricolor flag, the Marseillaise as the new national anthem, *la fête nationale* of July 14, the establishment of the Pantheon for the burial of revolutionary heroes.<sup>16</sup> For Catholics the symbols were more traditional, such as the monarchy, the transnational allegiance to Rome (ultra-montanism), the images and practices of pilgrimages, the maintenance of sacred places (Paray-le-Monial, Ars, Lourdes), the manifestations of the supernatural (apparitions of Mary, Sacred Heart as well as revelations and other otherworldly phenomena).<sup>17</sup> What these symbols were intended to countervail was what Dehon called the «social apostasy», that is, a nation without God, where the transcendent no longer entered into the values of the nation. The pro-revolutionary forces were at first at a disadvantage because the system of interacting symbols had to be invented in the face of the opposition, but the Republic was equally insistent on having its identifying markers.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Such was the conviction of the «Society of the Sacred Heart» founded by a few French exiles from the Revolution. Their exile ended only toward the end of the Napoleonic period. For them the Sacred Heart functioned as a sort of insignia for opposition to the values of the Revolution. Jonas, *France and the Cult* (see note 10), 90. Martin Dumont, in: *Le Saint-Siège et l'organisation politique des catholiques français aux lendemains du Ralliement 1890–1902* writes about this: «La signification de la République n'est pas, dans l'esprit des catholiques ... d'être une forme de gouvernement mais une théologie qui se dressent contre le catholicisme. Il faut que l'un ou l'autre disparaisse, tel est le choix qui s'offre aux catholiques français, et les principaux défenseurs de la religion, en France sont dès lors des opposants farouches à la République.» (Paris 2012, 10).

<sup>13</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Science et idéologie*, in: *Revue Philosophique de Louvain*, 72 (1974), 331–332.

<sup>14</sup> See the extensive coverage of the events of 1896 commemorating the fourteenth centenary of the baptism of Clovis in Martin Simpson, *France at Reims: The Fourteenth-Centenary of the Baptism of Clovis, 1896* (Working Paper: The University of the West of England), in: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/22097> (November 14, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *La raison pratique*, in: *Rationality Today/La rationalité aujourd'hui*. Actes du colloque international sur «La rationalité aujourd'hui» tenu à l'Université d'Ottawa du 27 au 30 octobre, 1977, edited by Theodore F. Geraets, Ottawa 1979, 231.

<sup>16</sup> For the tricolor, see Bernard Richard, *Les emblèmes de la République*, Paris 2012, 184–191.

<sup>17</sup> Eugen Weber, *Religion and Superstition in Nineteenth Century France*, in: *The Historical Journal*, 31 (1988), 399–423; Philippe Boutry/Michel Cinquin, *Deux pèlerinages au XIX siècle: Ars et Paray-le-Monial*, Paris 1980.

<sup>18</sup> See the manuscript of David Neuhold, *Patria und Nation bei Dehon – Symbole und Konzeptionen zwischen französischem Sendungsbewusstsein und der Wahrnehmung von Defiziten* on the role of the tricolor flag in the culture wars. Its popularity was such that Catholics sought to have the emblem of the Sacred Heart imprinted in the center of the tricolor (Manuscript).

Certain events in the 19<sup>th</sup> century only aggravated the alienation of the two groups.<sup>19</sup> Among the offensive memory markers were the excessive violence of the first leaders of the Revolution, the execution of Louis XVI, the execution of members of the nobility, the September Massacres of 1792 which cost many members of the clergy their lives, the Vendée uprising (1789–1793), the outrages of imperial France under Napoleon I and II, the revolutions of 1830 and 1848<sup>20</sup>, the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71 with its huge indemnification to Germany, the constant attraction of the right to strong men (Boulangism of 1870s) and the clamour for the return of a royal rule, the efforts of the Third Republic to expand *laïcité* in the 1880s and 90s through expulsions of religious from the work of education and hospitals and even from the country, the Dreyfus Affair (1896), all leading to the separation of Church and state in 1905.<sup>21</sup> Each incident was experienced in different ways by the antagonists. As M. Dumont remarks of the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

«The debates which took place at the centenary of 1789 are there to help recall that the wounds are deep and that the spirits are profoundly hostile to any rapprochement with the Republic. In fact, the meaning of the Republic is not, according to Catholics – but also without a doubt for a good number of republicans – intended to be a form of government, but an ideology contrary to Catholicism. One or the other must disappear, that was the choice presented to French Catholics, and the main defenders of religion are for this reason the implacable opponents to the Republic.»<sup>22</sup>

Throughout it remained difficult for the two sides to accept the position of the other and only aggravated the hostility between the groups, leaving no space for a hybrid vision of France. In this context, the devotion to the Sacred Heart took on a special role in 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

### *The political and symbolic role of the cult of the Sacred Heart*

Devotion to the Sacred Heart was popular in France prior to the Revolution. In fact, France was its birthplace through the efforts of John Eudes (1601–1680) and Marguerite Marie Alacoque (1647–1690). If with John Eudes the devotion was a spiritual antidote to the pessimism of Jansenism, with Marguerite Marie Alacoque the devotion was more ambiguous. The interior personal spirituality showed traces of the political. Marguerite Marie was strongly influenced by the

<sup>19</sup> Christian Amalvi, *Les deux Moyen Ages des savants dans la seconde moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *Le Moyen Age au miroir du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Actes du colloque de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (22–23 juin 2000)* publiés par Laura Kendrick/Francine Mora/Martine Reid, Paris 2003, 11–25.

<sup>20</sup> Sylvain Milbach, in: *Les catholiques libéraux et la Révolution Française. Autour de 1848* writes «Elle est toujours vivante: Elle nous entoure, nous domine» (*Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 362 [2010], 55–77).

<sup>21</sup> Claude Langlois, *De la violence religieuse*, in: *French Historical Studies*, 21 (1998), 113–123 and *La fin des guerres de religion: la disparition de la violence religieuse en France au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in: *French Historical Studies*, 21 (1998).

<sup>22</sup> Dumont, *Le Saint-Siège* (see note 12), 10.

complaint of the Sacred Heart to her of the indifference to divine love by people. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, this complaint of the Sacred Heart touched on the religious divide in France between Catholics and the Huguenots. However, this public intent of the devotion remained private. It allowed for a «personalized and somewhat sentimentalized form of belief» in response to the more individualized and interiorized faith of the Reformation.<sup>23</sup>

If, for the greater part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the private, internalized devotion to the Sacred Heart was predominant, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this private devotion became the symbol of opposition to the Revolution. In it, the anti-revolutionary forces found a language and narrative for their opposition. The devotees of a more politicized Sacred Heart saw themselves as restorers and repairers of a failed France. After the Revolution, the Sacred Heart devotion gathered to itself «all the misgiving about the Revolution»<sup>24</sup> and stood for a political call for restoration.

The evidence for this politicization of the devotion among commentators is extensive.<sup>25</sup> It had already manifested itself in Marguerite Marie Alacoque when she wrote to King Louis XIV at the end of her life asking that he dedicate France to the Sacred Heart and that he put the emblem of the Sacred Heart on the standards of the army. It was not until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the context of the French Revolution, that this effort became more sustained. Raymond Jonas chronicled the advance of the political cult of the Sacred Heart starting with the mass production of the emblem of the Sacred Heart as an insignia of the counter-revolution, the report that King Louis XVI had made a private vow to dedicate the nation to the Sacred Heart,<sup>26</sup> the wearing of the emblem of the Sacred Heart on the uniforms of the generals of the Vendée uprising, the pilgrimages to Paray-le-Monial with great participation of the nobility, the rise of a great number of religious communities under the banner of the

<sup>23</sup> Raymond A. Jonas, *Restoring a Sacred Center: Pilgrimage, Politics and the Sacré Coeur*, in: *Historical Reflections/Réflexions historiques*, 20 (1994), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Jonas, *France and the Cult* (see note 10), 94. Jonas makes much of the real or imagined vow of Louis XVI to dedicate the nation to the Sacred Heart and connecting the opposition to the Revolution right from the start with the cult of the Sacred Heart. «The king's vow to the Sacré-Coeur helped secure the status of the Sacré-Coeur as the preferred form of ritualized and symbolic resistance to the Revolution» (102).

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Baptiste Lemien, *Les grands desseins du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus et la France*, Paris 1915; Victor Alet, *La France et le Sacré-Cœur*, Paris 1889; Pierre Laligant, *Montmartre: la Basilique du vœu national au Sacré-Cœur*, Grenoble 1933; Jonas, *France and the Cult* (see note 10); Brown, *For the Soul of France* (see note 3); Gérard Cholvy, *La religion en France de la fin de XVIIe à nos jours* Paris 1991; Bernard Delpal, *Entre paroisse et commune: les catholiques de la Drôme au milieu de XIX siècle*, Valence 1989; Boutry/Cinquin, *Deux pèlerinages au XIX siècle* (see note 17); Caroline Ford, *Creating the Nation in Provincial France: Religion and Political Identity in Brittany*, Princeton 1993; Jacques Benoist, *Le Sacré-Cœur de Montmartre. Spiritualité, art et politique (1870–1923)*, Microfilm 1990.

<sup>26</sup> As R. Jonas says, «The king's vow to the Sacré-Coeur helped secure the status of the Sacré-Coeur as the preferred form of ritualized and symbolic resistance to the Revolution.» Jonas, *France and the Cult* (see note 10), 102. Much was made of the real or imagined vow of Louis XVI in 1792 when he realized that the royalist cause was in danger. *Une œuvre du Cœur de Jésus: Souvenir du vœu de Louis XVI*, in: *Messenger du Cœur de Jésus*, 39 (1881), 460–463.

Sacred Heart, the push to a consecration to the Sacred Heart as a strategy for national renewal,<sup>27</sup> the innumerable missions in parishes during the Restoration period, the *Année terrible* of 1871 interpreted by many as a chastisement of France leading to the consecrations to the Sacred Heart of many dioceses in France and the building of the Sacré-Coeur of Montmartre. As Jonas writes,

«The Sacré-Coeur served as the icon in a discourse of Christian populism, defining the people as a Christian people and linking the anxieties of a people to a transcendent struggle to safeguard the soul and destiny of a nation.»<sup>28</sup>

Gradually, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the devotion became linked with the national cause, and a particular vision of France. With the attempts to connect the devotion to Louis XIV, Louis XVI and Louis XVIII<sup>29</sup> and the desire to dedicate France to the Sacred Heart, it became clear that the proponents of the devotion were interested in creating an historical narrative in which the Sacred Heart played a counter role to the forces of the Revolution. The Sacred Heart became linked to the monarchist cause.

«The Sacred Heart devotion promised a Christian utopia, contingent upon fulfilment of divine demands. Those who did not believe, those who believed differently, those conspicuously lacking in righteousness had not only set the nation hurtling toward the disaster of Revolution; their apostasy remained the principal obstacle between a chosen people and its divine ordained destiny. By their stubbornness, they delayed the promised Christian millennium for France.»<sup>30</sup>

As Raymond Jonas points out, «The Sacré-Coeur was a soteriology, a salvation narrative with great moral and literary force.»<sup>31</sup>

### *The apocalyptic tone of the narrative of the Sacred Heart*

The soteriological narrative of the devotion of the Sacred Heart in the 19<sup>th</sup> century clearly followed the apocalyptic genre. The apocalyptic genre already broke through in the life of Marguerite Marie Alacoque. In the year of her death (1690)

<sup>27</sup> Based on a pamphlet by P. Lambert, *Le Salut de la France* which asked for the consecration of France to the Sacred Heart to make reparation and to give thanks for the return of the king.

<sup>28</sup> Jonas, *France and the Cult* (see note 10), 100.

<sup>29</sup> Louis XVIII was urged by Sophie Barat, the foundress of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, to fulfill the vow of Louis XVI to dedicate France to the Sacred Heart. Barat had been one of the first to begin the shift the devotion to a more public role, seeing in the Sacred Heart «a rich source of associations about France, its Christian mission and the post-revolutionary task of renewal.» (Jonas, *France and the Cult* [see note 10], 135) «An astute politician, Louis XVIII did not wish to make a public gesture, instead he provided resources for the building of a chapel dedicated to the Sacred Heart in Barat's convent.» (Jonas, *France and the Cult* [see note 10], 133–134).

<sup>30</sup> Jonas, *France and the Cult* (see note 10), 149–150.

<sup>31</sup> Jonas, *France and the Cult* (see note 10), 149. In a painting in the church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerois there is a woman, clearly identifiable as France, who invokes the Sacred Heart to obtain reparation for the profanations of the Revolution symbolized in the hosts dispersed on the pavement. Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore: un culto tra devozione interiore e restaurazione cristiana della società*, Roma 2001, 76.



she wrote a letter to the king, offering a kind of alliance of the Sacred Heart with the king against his enemies. In it, she wrote:

«This devotion was like a *last* effort of his love which would benefit people in *these last centuries*, with this loving redemption, withdraw them from the empire of Satan [...] and place us under the sweet liberty of the empire of his love.»<sup>32</sup>

In crisis because of the increasingly secularizing measures of the 19th century revolutionaries, the traditionalists' writings displayed more and more an apocalyptic tone. If, in the assessment of Frederick Brown, the cultural and political activity of the revolutionaries was of «breathhtaking skill and sophistication», the counter-resistance of traditionalists also intensified.<sup>33</sup> The Sacred Heart devotion could accomplish this counter movement only if it could evoke a grand narrative that had supported Catholics through the centuries. It did so by putting in place the four pillars of the apocalyptic genre:

(1) The story of a paradisaal beginning. The myth of origin of France for Catholics was the baptism of King Clovis in 496. Clovis was the first king to unite France under one rule. This image of a united France under a monarchical system of rule within a Christian heritage set the identity for France.<sup>34</sup> It connected the people with their king before God. The myth was hard to break. The regicide of 1793 that intended to break down the myth only strengthened it.<sup>35</sup> The power of this myth was invoked frequently in 1896, the 14th centenary of the baptism of Clovis.<sup>36</sup>

(2) The fall from innocence. Catholics interpreted the Revolution, the reign of terror, the execution of the king, the anti-clericalism, the resetting of the calendar to create another myth of origin starting with the Revolution, the subordination of the church to the state, the loss of the papal estates through the withdrawal of French troops, the laws of *laïcité*, as a breakdown of the original order in France. The demonic forces of this apocalyptic narrative were the original leaders of the revolution and their predecessors such as Robespierre and Voltaire. As we will see, for Léon Dehon, the demonic forces were represented by the Freemasons and the Jews.

<sup>32</sup> Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore* (see note 31), 72 (emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *For the Soul of France* (see note 3), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Raymond Jonas, *Sacred Mysteries and Holy Memories: Counter-revolutionary France and the Sacré-Cœur*, in: *Canadian Journal of History*, 32 (1997), 347–359. Reflecting on a window in the church of Changeaux, Jonas remarks, «The window illustrates an integral vision of Christian France – the vision of a Christian king among a Christian people. [...] The window describes a millenarian vision for the late nineteenth century – a magic kingdom for intégristes living in a secular age» (358).

<sup>35</sup> Christian Amalvi, *Le baptême de Clovis: heures et malheurs d'un mythe fondateur de la France contemporaine, 1814–1914*, in: *Bibliothèque de l'école de chartes*, 147 (1989), 583–610 and *Combats pour la mémoire à l'ombre du clocher et de la mairie: La Révolution au village de 1870 à 1914*, in: *Annuaire – Bulletin de la société de l'histoire de France*, 1989–1990, 23–40.

<sup>36</sup> At the transfer of the relics of St. Remi to Reims in 1896 Cardinal Langénieux implored God: «refaites avec notre pays...l'alliance que votre serviteur Remi a signée avec nos pères les Francs du cinquième siècle.» Simpson, *France at Reims* (see note 14), 1.

(3) Present life is experienced as under threat or as subjected to demonic forces. The sense of current history as under the judgment of God was very strong. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were constant calls for expiation and reparation. It is expressed in the pilgrimages to Paray-le-Monial, La Salette, Lourdes. The expiatory power of the Sacred Heart was also expressed in the consistent desire to have dioceses, but also the nation, dedicated to the Sacred Heart and to the building of a national shrine to the Sacred Heart in Montmartre. The sense of judgment was at its strongest in the experience of the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1871.<sup>37</sup> In the estimation of Raymond Jonas, the ritual acts of Catholics were a «revelation of the ultimate war between good and evil.»<sup>38</sup> The ritual acts were a cue for living the sufferings and the ignominious defeat.

(4) Implicit in the devotion was a promise of national redemption for France, if it dedicated or consecrated itself to the Sacred Heart.<sup>39</sup> In its millenarian form, the apocalyptic genre promises a reign of a thousand years prior to the end. Despite the current devastation, there is a hope for a political and religious restoration. The *parousia* will bring about the end of liberalism: God will reign once again also at the social level.<sup>40</sup> Believers, as Hilaire Multon says, rely on a «prophetic breath» to carry them through the present that will bring them to the «reign of God»<sup>41</sup>. This hope underlays many of the activities of clerics seeking the restoration of France.

If the revolution stood for the destruction of the royal power and the authority of the Church, in the restoration the devotion to the Sacred Heart stood for the antithesis of the Revolution and the reconstruction of a Catholic regime. As a prayer of the time expressed it: «O France, terrifying theatre, immense Calvary, where the Heart of Jesus has been crucified a thousand million times, pierced anew»<sup>42</sup>, the Sacred Heart was presented as a symbol of the covenant between throne and altar. In the reign of Christ, France and its king were to play an important role. The devotion was to be the way of regenerating society and the Church. It was an expression of the desire to bring France back to a religious unity beyond the Protestant reformation under a Catholic king: «Une foi, un roi, une loi.» Marguerite Marie Alacoque coloured her language of the Sacred Heart with images of a king: «It seems to me that it is similar to a king who does not

<sup>37</sup> «The Sacred Heart was the key referent within a Catholic historiography that related the history of France in soteriological terms, that is, as a salvation narrative.» Raymond A. Jonas, *Restoring a Sacred Center: Pilgrimage, Politics, and the Sacré-Coeur*, in: *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 20 (1994) 95.

<sup>38</sup> Edward J. Woell, *Counterrevolutionary Ritual in Rural Western France, 1801–1906*, in: *The Catholic Historical Review*, 88 (2002), 26.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *For the Soul of France* (see note 3), 4. This national redemption thrived on monuments, memories, rituals and the cultivation of millennial expectations along the lines of a reunion of a God-king and France.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Airiau, *L'Eglise et l'Apocalypse du XIX siècle à nos jours*, Paris 2000, 23–24.

<sup>41</sup> Hilaire Multon, *Catholicisme intransigent et culture prophétique: l'apport des archives du Saint-Office et de l'index*, in: *Revue historique*, 1003/1 (2001), 133.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore* (see note 31), 78.



think about rewarding until the conquest is complete and he has triumphed over his enemies, yes, then he will reign victorious on his throne.»<sup>43</sup>

The cult clarified for many the political developments around the violent revolution and its aftermath as a destruction of morality, the destruction of the true role of the king in relation to the Church, and the loss of the true role of France in the realization of the reign of Christ. It saw the devotion as *the* way to repair the damage: a return of the love of Christ that was despised by all these movements. Thus gradually the devotion became politically engaged, a decisive critique of the «world». «Reparation», «return of love», «oblation» became politically tinted words. It reflected a devotion of restoration, linked with the royal house because only a Catholic monarch could confront such evils. Ultimately, it meant a sort of hierocracy: a subordination of the political to the Church and society as subject to ecclesiastical directives.<sup>44</sup>

### *Léon Dehon and the Sacred Heart*

Léon Dehon (1843–1925), a priest and founder of a religious community dedicated to the Sacred Heart, reflected well the integralist and intransigent clergy of France, particularly of the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> He was born in north-western France (La Capelle in the department of L'Aisne) in 1843 and spent the greater part of his priestly life, beginning in 1871, based in the near-by industrial city of Saint-Quentin. Dehon's integralism manifested itself from his first activities as an assistant in the Basilica of Saint-Quentin. Not satisfied with the normal administration and practices of clerical life in a parish – he had, as he said, «only the greatest repugnance for this type of ministry»<sup>46</sup> – he adopted a ministry almost exclusively oriented to those excluded from pastoral attention. No one was to be excluded. He turned to the new industrial world, the *Cercles d'études* on social issues, the marginalized youth (child workers), the *Cercles des Ouvriers* (Albert de Mun), the newspaper *Le Conservateur de l'Aisne* and to education. His France was Catholic.

In an almost unsustainable rush of energy, he turned away from traditional pastoral ministry – sacramental ministry, catechism, visiting the sick – and its «selected families». Normal parish work became «a chain around his neck». He turned to the social and he created a religious community to mediate his vision.<sup>47</sup>

From 1873 on, he combined his social or societal vision with a victimal, im-molational and reparational version of the devotion to the Sacred Heart. He re-

<sup>43</sup> Mois du Sacré-Coeur: extrait des écrits de la Bienheureuse Marguerite-Marie, 108, E-book (November 20, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> See Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore* (see note 31).

<sup>45</sup> Integralism is a desire for a Catholicism subsuming every aspect of life.

<sup>46</sup> NHV 12/152. The sigla for the writings of Léon Dehon from DehonDocs, an electronic version of his writings found on [www.dehondocs.it](http://www.dehondocs.it).

<sup>47</sup> Yves Ledure, Léon Dehon entre mythe et histoire: L'oubli du sociétal, in: *Dehoniana*, 10 (2012), 100–101.

ceived this version of the devotion from his pastoral involvement with a female religious community – the Soeurs Servantes du Sacré-Coeur – which was expelled from Alsace because of the German Kulturkampf of Bismarck. As the community's chaplain, Dehon was greatly influenced by two powerful women: Mère Ulrich and Soeur Ignace. The sisters sought a congregation of priests who would make reparation for priests.<sup>48</sup> From them Dehon adopted, in the beginning, a highly personal, intimate version of Sacred Heart devotion.

In his first writings, no reference was made to the Sacred Heart as a symbol of the opposition to the Revolution and of the anti-clerical, liberal and secular policies of the Third Republic (1870–1940). In the initial period – the period of 1873, when he began his chaplaincy with the sisters, until 1889, he made no connection between the victimal life of the Sacred Heart and a social vision. In his *Notes sur l'histoire de ma vie*, Dehon mentioned that in 1874 he began to develop what he called «L'économie sociale intégrale».<sup>49</sup> By this, he meant to study of the economy that combines the temporal and spiritual without separating them. Until 1878 it is clear Dehon was still optimistic that the politics of France were still favourable to the Catholic cause. But with the elections of 1878, in which the republicans gained a majority, he began to realize that he would have to change tactics. This happened in 1889 when Dehon made the social connection of the Sacred Heart more explicit. It coincided with the publication of the periodical *Le règne du Sacré Coeur dans les âmes et dans les sociétés* (1889–1903). (henceforth RSC)

So what sort of devotion to the Sacred Heart did Dehon espouse in the 1870s and 80s prior to the social reign of the Sacred Heart? In his *Notes sur l'histoire de ma vie* (henceforth NHV), written after 1886 but reflecting back on his earlier life, Dehon rarely makes reference to the Sacred Heart. He made references to the national project of the building of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Montmartre (NHV 10/34 and 11/108) and the national act of consecration to the Sacred Heart in 1875 (NHV 11/127), but these were for him at the time symbols of the devotion. His interest in the Sacred Heart was mostly oriented towards victimhood, reparation, love, and immolation (NHV 12/139, NHV 1/121). In short, during these years, Dehon's Sacred Heart was first of all a deeply personal, intimist devotion to the Sacred Heart through love and reparation. During this time, he served the «politique de l'ordre». In the 1880s particularly after the disastrous elections of 1878, he began to realize that he could not rely on the official institutions to achieve his social vision. It is at this point that he began to join more and more with the more politicized French clergy. In the first period as a priest, the political Sacred Heart remained implicit. Dehon did not promote an in-

<sup>48</sup> See the two letters of the sisters written to Dehon on April 21 and May 25, 1877 in which they revealed their project to him. See André Perroux, *Le Père Dehon et Mère Marie du Coeur de Jésus. Les Prêtres du Sacré-Cœur et les Sœur Servantes du Cœur de Jésus*, in: *Studia Dehoniana*, 46/1 (2003).

<sup>49</sup> NHV 10/129.

tegralist approach to the Sacred Heart, but supported the efforts of others. The Montmartre project of the Sacred Heart and the national act of consecration to the Sacred Heart do not appear in his writings as overtly political. In his *mémoire* (NHV), he became the screen through which we can see the efforts of others to promote the socially or politically symbolic Sacred Heart but it was not his mission.

For instance, in 1882 he joins Bishop Gay to help him prepare a Crusade of Reparatory Prayer. For the bishop this is clearly an intentional political act to «assure the triumph of the Church, the salvation of France and of the world» (NHV 14/183), but for Dehon this crusade is more a personal act of penance rather than a political act.<sup>50</sup> At the time, he was too deeply engaged with educational matters – the running of the Collège Saint Jean – to be promoting the Sacred Heart in the political struggle for the soul of France. For Dehon, at this time, the devotion to the Sacred Heart had a much narrower, spiritual role, a deeply personal and pietistic love and reparation to the Heart of Christ for the failures of priests to live up to their vocation. This was not yet the struggle for France.<sup>51</sup> As he expressed it in 1877: «Our ideal is the Christian union of the owner and worker each reconciled to the other by the priest» (NHV 12/106).

Although, in this phase, especially in the latter part of the 1880s, Dehon used apocalyptic imagery, the reign of the Sacred Heart lacks concreteness. In a presentation on the devotion to the Sacred Heart on June 12, 1885, his first expanded presentation on the Sacred Heart, Dehon spoke only about the growth of the devotion in France; he said nothing about the dedications of dioceses to the Sacred Heart, the national sanctuary in Montmartre, the wearing of the emblem of the Sacred Heart by the soldiers in Vendée.<sup>52</sup> At this point, the Sacred Heart remained for Dehon a gift to France and of France.<sup>53</sup> It was not part of the culture war of France.

It is not as if Dehon was not aware of the political events around him. He manifested himself alongside the most intransigent of his time. He subscribed to *L'Univers*, the unbending, highly politicized, ultra-montane, monarchist newspa-

<sup>50</sup> For Bishop Gay the crusade was a failure. Dehon seems more optimistic, probably because his aim was more personal. He saw this as a fulfillment of the desires of Marguerite-Marie Alacoque. See André Perroux, *Le témoignage d'une vie*, Roma 2014, 368–369.

<sup>51</sup> The suggested penitential actions for the crusade according to Dehon were: a morning prayer offering the day's works, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament each day making an act of reparation for the Church and for France, and a monthly mass of reparation without a stipend and a personal gesture of victimhood offering up one's works, pains and penances.

<sup>52</sup> Without giving the reasons, Dehon does refer to the antipathy to the Sacred Heart in political France. In a letter of 1879 he writes, «On persécute les religieux qui portent le nom du Cœur de Jésus. On attaque les universités qui se proposent de le glorifier. On l'injurie spécialement dans la dévotion au Sacré Cœur, on veut le chasser de France» (CFL 1/44).

<sup>53</sup> AD (= Archivio Dehoniano) B 7/3.B Inv. 43.02 Discours – Cahier p. 8. The text is from a discourse on the Sacred Heart that Dehon held in Saint-Quentin on June 12, 1885. It is the first full text in which he presents his views of the Sacred Heart. The next full text must wait until 1896 when he published «La Retraite du Sacré Cœur». Again the devotion is not contextualized in 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

per edited by Louis Veuillot (NHV 9/104). Already very early in the 1870s he joined forces with Albert de Mun, the founder of the *Oeuvres des Cercles*, who was himself an intransigent Catholic, preoccupied with the social question, a monarchist enthusiast for the Count de Chambord and ultramontanist, much attached to Pius IXth's *Syllabus of Errors*.<sup>54</sup> However, in Dehon's writings of the time, nothing was said of this side of de Mun. In his *Notes sur l'histoire de ma vie*, he made his repugnance to the Revolution and its aftermath quite clear. He made reference to the insurrections and the «terreur» after 1789 and the «guerre de Vendée» of 1793, and the fierce opposition between the revolutionaries and the traditionalists (NHV 10/67–68), and the nightmare for France that was the Franco-Prussian war (NHV 8/160–165). But there was no reference to the Sacred Heart here. Even in the newspaper he founded, *Le Conservateur de l'Aisne*, extremely rightist in its politics, more traditionalist than the average inhabitant of Saint-Quentin could bear (NHV 11/120), there is no reference to the Sacred Heart. His involvement in the *Cercles des Ouvriers* of Albert le Mun<sup>55</sup> and with the social experiment of Val des Bois with Léon Harmel show that Léon Dehon was engaged in the events around the cultural and religious war in France. However, during this time he makes no connection between the struggles of France and the Sacred Heart. His establishment of a patronage of Saint Joseph was for him a means to heal «la plaie sociale» (NHV 12/74) but without referring, as others had done, to an apocalyptic theme and the role of the reign of the Sacred Heart. In these early years of his pastoral ministry he had not yet arrived at a vision of the crisis in France in apocalyptic terms, he saw it only as a «relèvement moral de nos populations industrielles» (NHV 12/74). The «crise sociale» is all that is imminent for Dehon at this time (NHV 12/91). He did not yet work with a coherent socio-religious vision.

The first time that Dehon used the phrase «le règne du Sacré Coeur dans les âmes et dans les sociétés» was on October 10, 1887 in conjunction with a request to amalgamate his Congregation with the *Oblats de l'Amour divin of Ecuador*. At this time there was a first intimation of a social vision of the Sacred Heart.<sup>56</sup> In his correspondence with Fr. Matovelle, Dehon acknowledged that the reign of the Sacred Heart was the second aim of his Institute, the first being, priestly reparation.<sup>57</sup> The exact meaning of «le règne social» at this time is not clear.

<sup>54</sup> Dehon admitted that his fiery Christmas sermon of 1871 in Saint-Quentin was inspired by Louis Veuillot. See Philippe Levillain, *Albert de Mun. Catholicisme français et Catholicisme romain du Syllabus au Ralliement*, Rome 1983, 120.

<sup>55</sup> Dehon notes, for instance, about the meeting of the *Cercles* in Paris (1875) that most of the participants were royalists (NHV 11/95), totally opposed to the upcoming republican constitution of 1876. He acknowledges that there is still a lot of enthusiasm at these meetings for «un reveil définitive de la vie sociale chrétienne en France» (NHV 11/115).

<sup>56</sup> Perroux, *Le témoignage* (see note 40), 413.

<sup>57</sup> AD, B 24/8b, inventaire 506.06. The term is found in the correspondence of Dehon with Fr. Matovelle who indicated to Dehon that what was primary for him was the reign of the Sacred Heart in souls and in societies. At the time – in 1887 – Dehon insists that this turn to the social is a secondary aim for him.

*Le règne social du Sacré Coeur of Léon Dehon*

In 1889, Dehon's interest and engagement in things political and social became much more pronounced. He founded the periodical *Le règne du Sacré Coeur dans les âmes et dans les sociétés*.<sup>58</sup> In the periodical, he gradually developed a way of combining the message of Paray-le-Monial – the reign of Christ in souls – with the reign of Christ in societies. Having been awakened to a more social understanding through, what Albert Bourgeois suggests, was in inherent social and political dimension of the original message of Paray-le-Monial,<sup>59</sup> Dehon began to gradually connect the more interiorized version of the devotion (a reparative priesthood) to a social and institutional reparation. In this Dehon was not an innovator here in the sense that he was the first. During this time of a dynamic spiritual movement in France, he became an important voice of those who refused to accept the isolation of Catholic life from the social and economic engagement.<sup>60</sup> How he envisaged this became clear in *Le règne*.

At a first glance, the tone and content of the devotion seem not to have changed. The content continued to swirl around the interior dispositions and actions of the devotion.<sup>61</sup> Between 1889 and 1893 the link between the private and the social is still tenuous. His social action, his activities with worker circles and the many social meetings he saw primarily as acts of apostolic charity, not as social engagements. However, he began to shift his emphasis. This was true not only of his social vision – his sudden move away from the owners to focussing on the workers<sup>62</sup> but also spiritually. Albert Bourgeois calls 1893 the «année charnière», the hinge year.<sup>63</sup> Dehon was at the height of his social activities and thinking.

<sup>58</sup> Léon Dehon began this publication on January 25, 1889 as a monthly publication. The content was a departure from his previous writings inasmuch as they were much more socially and pastorally oriented giving an expanded notion to the devotion to the Sacred Heart: the Sacred Heart in souls and in societies. In the publication he published a monthly editorial, mostly written by Dehon himself, a chronicle, and a number of articles. Almost all of the social writings of this time also appeared in «Le règne». The publication ceased in 1903. In all Dehon wrote more than 6000 pages in the periodical over the 14 years of its existence.

<sup>59</sup> In 1690, in a letter shortly before her death, Marguerite-Marie Alacoque urged Louis XIV to dedicate the kingdom of France to the Sacred Heart and to have the emblem of the Sacred Heart inscribed on the arms and standards of the French army. It is the first indication of the politicization of the Sacred Heart.

<sup>60</sup> Daniele Menozzi, *Sacro Cuore* (see note 31), points to Dehon as a classical example of this social turn. This shift occurred not only in France but also in Belgium, Austria and Italy.

<sup>61</sup> Albert Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon et «le règne du Coeur de Jesus. 1893–1903»*, in: *Studia Dehoniana SCJ*, 25/2 (1994), 40.

<sup>62</sup> Although Dehon began to shift his perspective more and more to the worker, his social vision remained corporative, that is, retaining a hierarchical view of the relation between owners and workers. The emphasis is on cooperation and mutual help. This corporative structure was to be in the service of religion. Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 234. However, we may not forget that Léon Dehon comes from a landed aristocracy and writes from his inherent sense of privilege.

<sup>63</sup> Albert Bourgeois points to 1889–1892 as «une sorte d'ouverture progressive à la dimension sociale et aussi politique que comporte nécessairement tout engagement pour le «règne»». *Le père Dehon* (see note 61)



What is significant in these years was how Dehon began to see an intimate connection between the interior devotion of the Sacred Heart and its social impact. It was at this time that the acts of reparation, the prayers, the acts of immolation and oblation of the devotion became a way in which the ills of the revolution could be overcome or healed. In other words, in 1893 he began to see the private acts of the devotion as a way to effect social change and transformation. In the notes for the retreat he made in 1893 – a very intense experience of the Ignatian exercises – it became clear that what he sought to insert into the social was what, in the Ignatian exercises, is called «pure love».<sup>64</sup> Pure love, as an image of God's love but symbolized in the Heart of Jesus, is a love that asks for no return. It is purely gratuitous. It was this sort of pure love that Dehon sought to insert into the social. This pure love was not translated into social action, it is the interior force that is invoked to invade the action. What Dehon sought was a social mysticism. That is why he considered his social work to be fundamentally operative at the moral and social level and not at the political level. He called for a «ligue suppliante», for public and private prayer, which he said was «la solution de la crise que nous traversons»<sup>65</sup>. The shift of perspective did not affect the devotion as such but only its aim, which he felt was destroyed by the Revolution – «l'ennemie directe du règne du Coeur de Jesus».

Dehon was convinced that the enemy would be destroyed not by social programs, by a greater emphasis on justice, but by love, the love that he had found in and was represented by the Sacred Heart. «It is necessary», he writes in the first article of *Le Règne*, «that the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, begun in the mystical life of souls, descends and penetrates in the social life of peoples.»<sup>66</sup> The distinction between private and public is almost erased. Albert Bourgeois insists that Dehon was writing here not as a sociologist but as a priest.<sup>67</sup> As mentioned above, his concern was moral and pastoral.<sup>68</sup> In other words, Léon Dehon wrote his social tracts in order to protect Christians who lived in what he considered the poisoned social environment of his time.

This vision implied a rather unique understanding of the Christian's relationship to the society and the state. Yves Ledure sees in Dehon's writings a direct alliance of people to the church, a relationship that supersedes the structures of

<sup>64</sup> The retreat notes are found interspersed in «Le règne» between 1898 and 1901 and in the *Oeuvres spirituelles* 2, 9–172. The role of pure love in Dehon was a frequent topic during these important years as the main propellant of his vision. A more detailed description of «pure love» is found in Dehon's «Les Couronnes d'amour» published in 1905. Pure love, Dehon writes, comes from the «grace to ask with each meditation to permit us to rejoice in the resurrection and the triumph of our Lord, for love of him, and forgetting ourselves.» (135).

<sup>65</sup> Bourgeois, *Le pere Dehon* (see note 61), 41.

<sup>66</sup> Léon Dehon, *Les opportunités du règne du Sacré-Cœur*, in: *Œuvres Sociales: Les articles 1889–1922*, Roma 1978, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Bourgeois, *Le pere Dehon* (see note 61), 99.

<sup>68</sup> Dehon sums up his social engagement in 1897 as follows: «un engagement pastoral pour une action religieuse qui va au-delà de la dévotion et de la charité.» (RCJ 1897, 41)

the state and of politics.<sup>69</sup> In this sense, the first allegiance of the Christian was to the Church, not to society, a state or a nation. Dehon would have stood side by side with the *réfractaires* after the Revolution, who could not envisage a primordial allegiance to the state. The relation to the Church was primary. And to both Church and state one does not belong directly. This happens only through intermediate bodies or associations. For this reason, Dehon never engages the political directly. It seems to indicate that the political had not yet been invented as a workable concept. What men like Dehon were interested in was not the «institutionalization of political Catholicism»<sup>70</sup>. They wanted «to depoliticize Catholic organizations and transform them to voluntary semi-religious associations.»<sup>71</sup> For Dehon one did not first of all belong to a political order. It was therefore as a people that the Church belonged legally to civil society. According to Dehon, one does not define one's position in function of the state but in relation to the Church.<sup>72</sup> This presupposes a notion of a pre-established Christian order where, as is clearly the case for Dehon, the Church was considered a perfect society. This, in turn, gave him an uncompromising key to judge society, particularly the secular model of France. In this, Dehon worked with the tools that his image of Church provided.

The cult of the Sacred Heart was for him therefore not only the starting point but also its end point. Although never explicitly presented as such, here we have the starting point of an apocalyptic vision of the 19th century in the thinking of Dehon. The point of departure of Dehon's position in the love of the Sacred Heart was itself a-historical or supra-historical. It was a theological starting point which Dehon assumed to have in his possession in order to make it historically viable. It was something that had taken hold of him and as such entered into his social question. However, he was not able to make it tangible in his social doctrine. It was a belief and Dehon wanted to make this belief operative in the whirl of the socio-political and economic history of France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although he was convinced that this was primarily a religious or social postulate – not a political one – it had institutional repercussions inasmuch as he believed in corporatism, decentralization, and the restoration of intermediate corporative or syndical social bodies, and in the final analysis, a conception of society in its totality.<sup>73</sup> These intermediate, corporative bodies, were for Dehon not political entities. For us they are. And so, for us, a social vision inspired by justice and

<sup>69</sup> Doctrine sociale et projet de société chez Dehon, in: *Rerum Novarum en France – Le P. Dehon et l'engagement social de l'Église* (Colloque de Paris, mars 1991), Paris, 1991, 140.

<sup>70</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe*, Ithaca/London 1996, 80.

<sup>71</sup> Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy* (see note 70), 60. With the fear of Catholics to form political parties in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kalyvas points to «the absence of a Catholic political identity» (87).

<sup>72</sup> Ledure, *Doctrine sociale* (see note 69), 133–145.

<sup>73</sup> See the interesting work of René Rémond on the basis of the ecclesiastical Congress of Reims of 1896, *Les deux congrès ecclésiastiques de Reims et de Bourges 1896–1900*, Paris 1964, 75.



charity of the Gospel must in the end promote institutional preferences. Because of his point of departure with all the tinges of the apocalyptic genre, his social teachings led Dehon into uncharted territory once he is forced to identify the historical agents of «pur amour» and the opponents of the Sacred Heart.

To do so we must begin with Dehon's own historical insertion in French society.

However well intentioned, such a shift of aim and erasure between private and public had repercussions that did not pass by unnoticed by members of the Congregation. For them this erasure was not clear nor acceptable. Exchanging the indeterminate reparation for uncommitted priests with a much more politicized reparatory aim, identifying what side one was on in a bitterly divided France, was for Germain Blancal one of the first religious followers of Dehon in Saint Quentin, a radical change which he was not prepared to support.<sup>74</sup> The distinction between the spiritual writings of Dehon on the Sacred Heart and what he began to write about in *Le règne du Sacré Coeur* was clear to the growing membership of the Congregation. The shift from the private, mystical view of Christ and the Sacred Heart, derived from Mère Ulrich and Soeur Ignace of the Soeurs Servantes of Saint Quentin, to the social, was perceived as a real break. In a letter addressed to Dehon by the dissidents in the community on July 6, 1897, the conflict was clear: we are a religious family, they say, devoted to the interior life with its aim to be a cult of «special love and reparation towards the Heart of Jesus». What is the meaning then, the letter asks, of «your participation in congresses in which the great questions of our time are discussed?»<sup>75</sup> Despite Dehon's insistence that his social incursions were only a natural outflow of his private devotion to the love of God, he could not convince his followers. They had difficulty to see in Dehon's activities and his articles in *Le règne* with their, at times aggressive polemical style, an outpouring of the love of the Sacred Heart.<sup>76</sup>

Despite Dehon's desire to mystically infuse the social realm with the love of Christ, his social writings in *Le règne* and the *Manuel social chrétien*, as well as his Roman Conferences of 1897, were by no means politically neutral. His ex-

<sup>74</sup> In the General Chapters of the Congregation of 1893 and 1896, Fr. Blancal challenged the leadership of Léon Dehon as the superior general. In a letter written after the 1896 chapter he said, «Nous sommes séparés par un abîme; nos manières de voir sont totalement opposées.» His motion to replace Dehon as superior general was defeated but Blancal was correct in noting the shift.

<sup>75</sup> AD B 48/4.2.

<sup>76</sup> Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 42. It is a thesis that Dehon maintains also in his «Manuel social chrétien» (henceforth MSC). Despite all the clear prescriptions of a renewal of social and economic life, the heart of the action is the penetration of all by the love of Christ. That is why social action is for him primarily a task of priests. As he wrote in the *Manuel*, «Le prêtre est le sel de la terre par sa vie de prière et de sacrifice. Il comprend qu'il doit s'appliquer à la prière et à la réparation avec d'autant plus d'instance quand les temps sont plus mauvais, les péchés du peuple plus nombreux et les obstacles au bien plus difficiles à vaincre. [...] C'est aux prêtres surtout que Dieu en donne la mission.» (MSC 110, in: OS II, 109).

pressions of *amour pur* cannot be divested of the intransigence of the Catholic position. However much Dehon wanted to present an a-political spirituality of *amour pur*, in the political reality of the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this was no longer understood. Despite his desire to infuse *amour pur* into the social reality, Dehon – even as a minor player – was an anti-revolutionary, he took a stance as an intransigent Catholic, he was anti-liberal, anti-freemason, anti-Semitic, anti-socialist. This is not to deny that Dehon's social stance remained imbued with a spiritual vision, but it was filled with an ambiguity of which Dehon was not always aware.

If one looks at the *Chroniques*, which form part of each issue of *Le règne*, there is no doubt about Dehon's allegiances:

(1) Within the context of his ecclesial stance, particularly between 1893 and 1903, he was a clear follower of Pope Leo XIII. As he stated in 1903 when he ended the publication of *Le règne*: «Je suis et je veux rester l'humble apôtre des encycliques de Léon XIII. C'est l'espérance du salut.» (RCJ 1903, 473) The encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Au milieu des sollicitudes* (1892) as well *Graves de communi* (1901) were received by Dehon as his marching orders. Dehon saw France through Roman eyes. Between 1896 and 1901, when Dehon seemed at times overwhelmed by personal troubles, he spent more and more time in Rome.<sup>77</sup> His ultra-montanism coloured his views of France, his beloved country.

(2) Born as a landed aristocrat, it is not surprising to discover Dehon's allegiances to a more hierarchical social structure, particularly in the beginning. The *Cercles des Ouvriers* of Albert de Mun, to which Dehon gave so much of his energy, were patriarchal and *patronal*, that is, dominated by the goodwill of the owners to the workers. The participation of workers was a concession, not a right. The social vision was corporative with religion as the motor of social progress.<sup>78</sup> Throughout, Dehon fought against a socialist form of democracy. For him the Christian social order – Christian Democracy – does not exclude a *natural and historical* hierarchy of classes.<sup>79</sup> He could not look beyond hierarchy and inequality. The role of the Church was to conserve, not to promote.

(3) Until the encyclical *Au milieu des sollicitudes* of Leo XIII, Dehon, with the majority of French Catholics, supported the monarchist cause. Dehon was deeply entrenched in intransigent French Catholicism. The French Revolution

<sup>77</sup> Bourgeois remarks how the *Chroniques* of the periodical *Le règne* were divided into three parts, where part 2 was always entitled France and part 3 other countries. Part 1 from 1893 to 1895 was entitled as «La question sociale», «La question religieuse et sociale», «Le Règne social de Sacré-Coeur», «L'Eglise et la question sociale», «Le Regne de Jesus-Christ». As indicative of Dehon's shift to Rome, from 1896 to 1903 the first part became «Rome», «Rome et l'Eglise».

<sup>78</sup> Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 234. The *cercles* with their corporatist structure began to diminish by 1896: «Les divisions politiques ont tué cette oeuvre», Dehon remarks at the Paris Congrès of 1896 (NQT XI/58v).

<sup>79</sup> *Les Directives Pontificales, politiques et sociales* (DPS 234). Such an arrangement meant «Le concept vrai de la propriété, la proportionnalité des devoirs à la capacité et la dispensation du superflu aux pauvres.» (234).

and the regicide were an abomination and an unforgivable atrocity. As he wrote in 1893, the centenary of the regicide, the killing was «the greatest triumph of his (the Reign of Christ's) enemy [...] the origin of the definitive defeat.»<sup>80</sup> The encyclical of Leo XIII put his intransigence to the test. The *ralliement* put into question the unremitting integralism of French Catholicism. For many, also for Dehon at first, Leo XIII's encouragement to accept the republican form of government felt like inviting the fox into the chicken coop. Dehon took the step, forcing him to incorporate republicanism within his view of the reign of the Sacred Heart. It was only in obedience to the pope that he could make the effort to refigure the notion of republicanism, releasing it from its *laïcité* and its anti-clericalism, rationalism and equality.<sup>81</sup> Even after *Au milieu des sollicitudes* Dehon's republican stance was one of obedience to the pope because he believed that «Dieu lui-même [...] a crée la monarchie» and to say that Christianity leads necessarily to the republic was for Dehon «ni juste ni prudent» because it would put all such governments against Catholics. (*Notes quotidiennes* [henceforth NQT] XVI/55–59).

(4) Dehon was an avid reader of the paper *L'Univers*, which was an ardent supporter of the role of the church, i.e. Rome, in the leadership of political and social life. For Dehon the church had an indispensable role in the establishment of the reign of Christ. For him there could be no other outcome in history. It was the church's task to assure that no other forces would obstruct the reign of Christ. The intensity of the struggle to maintain the operational capacity of the church became evident in Dehon's marked language regarding the Freemasons and the Jews. It was the experience of crisis in France's social and political life, which Dehon shared, that became a fertile ground for his apocalyptic views.

(5) Particularly after 1893, Dehon became a prime promoter of Christian Democracy (especially in *Manuel social chrétien*). M. Montuclard has pointed out three modes of a Christian Democracy. All three can be found in the writings of Léon Dehon: (a) Christian Democracy as a pedagogical study. Dehon highly promoted the study of Leo XIII's encyclicals; (b) Christian Democracy as a participation in the political process. Dehon became involved in the formation of the political party *L'Union National* in view of the elections of 1898 and again in 1902; (c) Christian Democracy as an ideology looking to a fundamental reorganization not only of society but also of the church toward a non-hierarchical society of equals in rights and duties. This form of Christian Democracy was halted by the publication of the encyclical *Graves de communi* of 1901. For Dehon the latter phase led, in part, to the suspension of *Le règne* in 1903.<sup>82</sup> In Dehon's ver-

<sup>80</sup> Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 41.

<sup>81</sup> On the *ralliement* to the republican government he writes: «C'est un devoir d'accepter le Gouvernement de fait, en vue du bien public, quelles que soient les préférences personnels de chacun [...] ce qui n'inclut pas qu'on doive donner approbation aux lois mauvaises dont il est l'auteur.» *Catéchisme Social* (CSC III/14–15).

<sup>82</sup> Maurice Montuclard, *Histoire de la Démocratie chrétienne*, Paris 1956. *Graves de Communi* is probably the reason why after 1901 Dehon's involvement with the social question diminishes. In 1905 Dehon leaves France because of the expulsion of religious by the

sion of Christian Democracy, the role of the priest was central: «Ces hommes sont peu instruits, mais ils ont étudié les questions sociales et ils sont dociles au prêtre» (NQT 10/80, 12–15 mai, 1894). Christian Democracy was not first of all about political government but a social, economic and legal arrangement for the benefit of all members of a society; for this it must listen first of all to the teachings of the Church.<sup>83</sup>

(6) Dehon was also a French nationalist and throughout had a vision of an ideal France. This was the France of the Middle Ages, with the king as the protector. «La France, sauvée par le Christ est devenue, par la volonté du Roi et du peuple, le royaume du Christ.» (RCJ 1896, 26–27) And even more strongly: «Nous voudrions retrouver en France un pouvoir chrétien.» (RCJ 1896, 162; in: OS I, 247) He held an integralist view in which the Middle Ages fulfilled his idealized image of France – in opposition to the society that emerged in the French Revolution. This France will find its fulfilment in the reign of the Sacred Heart: «Vive le Sacré-Coeur de Jésus qui a aimé la France» (CHR 1896/6) even though he realized that «Le Christ ne règne plus en France» (NQT 11/51v–52r). For him the reign would be achieved if official France paid homage to the Sacred Heart and when the flag of the Sacred Heart would become the national flag, and when the social and constitutional right of God over France would be recognized (RCJ, janvier 1896).

(7) He shared in the general anti-Semitism of French Catholics especially after his social turn and throughout the Dreyfus Affair. As he said in relation to the Dreyfus Affair in 1898: «La France est placée, en ce moment, entre deux lignes: d'un côté, les anarchistes, les socialistes, les juifs, les protestants, les radicaux et les maçons se servent de l'affaire Dreyfus pour enrayer une seconde fois les «ralliés» et le retour au catholicisme; de l'autre, les conservateurs, les patriotes et, en général, les catholiques qui au nom de l'armée et de l'intérêt national, veulent la clôture du scandale.» (CHR 1898/174) The significance of this will become clearer below.

The narrative of Dehon's life and social engagement was filled with struggle. He had been trained all his life to understand this struggle from his frequent retreats in which he constantly turned to the exercises of Ignatius of Loyola.

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Combes government. Dehon's intense engagement with the social question ended in 1903. He stopped his collaboration with the *Chronique des Comités du Sud-Est*. Excluded from activity in France, he turned his attention more fully to his leadership role in the Congregation, travel and spiritual writings.

<sup>83</sup> See Dehon's *Directions pontificales* (*Œuvres Sociales* (henceforth OS) II, 463–465). As defined by Professor Toniolo, «La démocratie chrétienne est une ordonnance de la société civile où toutes les forces sociales, juridiques et économiques, dans la plénitude de leur développement hiérarchique, coopèrent proportionnellement au bien commun, en aboutissant finalement à une surcoût d'avantages pour les classes inférieures», in: Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 279. In this context see the remark of Dehon in CHR 1892, 83: «La démocratie. – L'Église a baptisé le vieux monde avec Constantin et l'Empire romain. Elle a baptisé le monde barbare avec Clovis et les nations d'Europe, il lui reste à baptiser et à sanctifier la démocratie moderne.»

Through them, he came to understand what Ignatius denoted, in apocalyptic terms, as the two standards.<sup>84</sup> Life is a constant battlefield. One must choose the standard under which one fights. Although Dehon did not describe the conflicts in every instance explicitly in apocalyptic terms, in a number of places he did. So for instance in the *Catéchisme social* he wrote with nostalgia about the church's living out of the gospel during «la période privilégiée du Moyen-Age, la chrétienté médiévale dans son édification et à son apogée» (Chapter IX). In many ways for Dehon the Middle Ages remained the ideal which needed to be promoted and restored. The memory of the Middle Ages was the only real «space of experience» of a Christian Democracy for Dehon and many Catholics. In that context the *Catéchisme social* speaks in apocalyptic terms of the «decline» from this ideal in the Renaissance and the Revolution. It was what had led to the present crisis in France.

In his social writings, he identified two movements who aggravated the crisis in France and who were the reason for the decline. These two movements were liberalism and socialism. This movement is described, particularly in the issues of *Le règne*, in apocalyptic terms. The apocalyptic evil forces were the ideologies of collectivist or anarchist socialism and of individualistic liberalism. Of these two movements Dehon was most opposed to liberalism. If Dehon called socialism a «faux remède» to the ills of his time<sup>85</sup> – as opposed by the cult to the Sacred Heart which he called the «souverain remède» (RCJ February 1889, 53; OS I, 3) – he presented individualistic liberalism as a «sin».<sup>86</sup>

As Dehon wrote in his *Manuel social chrétien*, condemning the «laissez faire» economics of the School of Manchester, «The law of supply and demand and the free exchange makes everyone suffer. [...] It is a deplorable illusion [...] disorganizing society. The worker, deprived of associations that might sustain him and laws that might protect him, is defenseless. The ineluctable law of competition is only for the sake of market production and the lowering of salaries.» (MSC 143) The so-called liberalism accorded freedom to the producers only, very little, if any, to the worker.

### *The apocalyptic configuration of Dehon's world*

Léon Dehon did not consciously read the French Catholic history of his time apocalyptically but, nevertheless, the apocalyptic genre dominated his writings.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> In 1893 at the height of his entry into the social question Dehon made the thirty-day Ignatian retreat at Braisne. The retreat was determinative for his vision of the social question. See the comments on the retreat by Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 57–90.

<sup>85</sup> MSO 337. Dehon opposes socialism as a peril for society and the economy and as a false solution to the social question. He accuses Socialism for operating with «false ideas on society, work and property.» MSO Chapitre III.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to Abbé Six, 26 November, 1894. (AD B 20/7.5, inventaire 301.02).

<sup>87</sup> Léon Dehon has only infrequently used the concept «apocalyptic» in his writings. In almost every case it refers to the apocalyptic writings of the scriptures. He did not have a clear comprehension of the prevalence of the apocalyptic in Christian writings and saw it only as a scriptural genre not as a Christian world view.



Above I have already indicated how the devotion to the Sacred Heart in France pointed to the end times when Christ will reign and overcome the evils of the present. Dehon sought constantly for signs of this time whether through the national shrine in the basilica of Montmartre, through the dedication of a country (Ecuador), a diocese or the world to the Sacred Heart, or through his desire to have the emblem of the Sacred Heart on the flag of France. In this context, he used the term «Sacred Heart» in two ways: as a present devotional reality but also as an image of a future fulfilment. Between 1893 and 1903 the «Reign of the Sacred Heart in Souls and in Societies» came to mean more and more the renewal of the universe and the recapitulation of all things – especially France – in Christ.

In this context, reparation, an axis in his original devotion to the Sacred Heart, began to accrue another meaning. It took on a social colouration. It became increasingly a participation in the act of the cleansing of the world created by the revolution. It retained, as it had before, a somewhat pietistic act of consolation of Christ for the ways that Christ's love was ignored. Reparation was made through prayer and Eucharistic adoration as acts of being with Christ interiorly and to make up for neglect of others. Now, however, reparation obtained a social mission. It was to heal the social fabric destroyed by the Revolution. However, the fulfilment of this reparation was clearly in the future. In Christian terms, the reign of the Sacred Heart is a millenarian, apocalyptic term, referring to the millenarian reign of Christ before the final coming.

It is particularly in the social spirituality of Dehon that the future is expressed in apocalyptic terms. In these years, Dehon threw his energies into the social field, hoping to achieve the restoration of France and the world through the reign of Christ. Throughout the period of 1889 to 1903, he supported what he thought were the correct tools toward the establishment of the reign of Christ (corporatism, syndicates, social democracy). And he fulminated against the opponents of this reign. His attacks against socialism and liberalism, particularly when they identify the Freemasons and the Jews as the instigators of socialism and liberalism, are the most specifically apocalyptic in all his writings. Dehon's main desire was the reinsertion of God and Christ in the social forces of life and, in the end, the re-installation of a Christian civilization. French Catholics, and certainly Dehon, saw the socialists and the liberals proposing another France, another civilization without God and without the Church. The battle between this intransigent Catholicism and the social and liberal forces in France in some texts took on apocalyptic tones: a radical and irreconcilable battle between two images of France: the France of modernity and the France of traditional Catholics.

Dehon's integralism, but also his intransigence, demanded that there be a restoration, a return to the church. Airiau calls it «total, brutal».<sup>88</sup> To achieve its destiny, France must achieve a Christian civilization – there is no salvation for

<sup>88</sup> Paul Airiau, *L'Église et l'Apocalypse du XIXe siècle à nos jours*, Paris 2000, 58.

France *extra ecclesiam*. That was the main tenor of his social engagement. Through social democracy, he sought to find a way of transforming both the way of the church – Dehon and Leo XIII's «Go to the people» — and the path of the followers of the revolution. Dehon was fully aware of how formidable the obstacles were to the achievement of this vision. But that was equally true of the opposition. It too proposed a view, often millenarian, of society. In the words of Paul Airiau, liberalism «saw humanity liberating itself progressively from its slaveries in order to arrive at freedom and to install a political order which will promote and guarantee it»<sup>89</sup>. Liberalism made this promise of prosperity and peace mostly through free, untrammelled economic activity and scientific progress. Socialism, as Dehon saw it, did not respect the individual sufficiently. For him it was too collectivist with a tendency toward anarchism. However, liberalism was a much more destructive, pernicious force than socialism. Liberalism was based on a false notion of society and its institutions (MSO 153). Its *laissez-faire* position on the economy and the refusal to accept state regulation of work and its call for unregulated competition was for Dehon an unacceptable philosophy (RSO 11/39). Because he saw the historical process of both liberalism and socialism as almost inevitable, the apocalyptic imagery evoked for its defeat is not surprising.

The apocalyptic language is found especially when he moved away from generalities and identified who to him were the factual major agents of socialism and liberalism in France. These were the freemasons and the Jews in Europe. He called them the apocalyptic army of the Antichrist. Significantly, he did not do so in the original version of his *Manuel social chrétien* but only when he reproduced the *Manuel* in *Le règne du Sacré-Coeur*.<sup>90</sup> In *Le règne*'s version of the *Manuel*, Dehon was much more apocalyptic than in the original. The obstacles to this reign, the mythological demons that needed to be defeated, played a much more significant role. With the mythological language of the apocalyptic, Dehon now identified the so-called machinations and conspiracies of the Freemasons and the Jews as the great eschatological battle of the end-time between good and evil. The Freemasons and the Jews were described as the «Great Enemy»; the Freemasons were named the «lucifériens»<sup>91</sup> who promoted the «kingdom of Satan» and belonged to the «Church of Satan» (RCJ 1893, 554) and Jews were transformed into the figure of the Antichrist. In 1896 Dehon stated, «All the friends of the Sacred Heart ought to know the army of Satan in order to combat it.» (RCJ 1896, 134). In the same year, he added, «The secret societies are at the service of Satan, the enemy of God» (RCJ 1896, 368).

<sup>89</sup> Airiau, *L'Église et l'Apocalypse* (see note 88), 60.

<sup>90</sup> In the March and April editions 1895 of «*Le règne*».

<sup>91</sup> He may have been influenced by Leo XIII who in *Humanum genus* called the freemason the vanguard of the «kingdom of Satan»; for Dehon they become the «Army of the Antichrist.» (RCJ 1903, 427). Dehon adds, «Eblis-Lucifer est pour la secte suprême la divinité» (RCJ 1893, 377).



In the social texts of *Le règne*, where Dehon reverted to apocalyptic imagery to speak of the agents of the social malaise, he sought to historicize the apocalyptic by seeking to support the crisis language with a great number of historical details. This led, however, to an unsupportable confusion of the two literary genres: the historical and the apocalyptic. By combining the apocalyptic and the historical, the apocalyptic genre gave a specific tonality to the historical, making the historical details sound more alarmist, threatening, and subversive. The historical was transformed into the mythical. This mythological insertion in an historical narrative strains the credulity of the narrative. Chance events turn into a sinister plot in which an otherwise insignificant event becomes part of a conspiracy. In this way, Dehon presented Freemasons as supposedly practicing secret rites in Rome with demonic invocations that threatened the Quirinal and the Vatican. Freemasonry also was involved as a sinister force behind French politics (RCJ 1893, 611). In this context, Bourgeois speaks of a style that is «largement mystificateur»<sup>92</sup>. This also allowed Dehon to introduce into his text references to the imposter Léo Taxil and to the so-called prophetess Diana Vaughan who «revealed» the supposedly Satanic cult, practiced by the freemasons.<sup>93</sup> With the introduction of the apocalyptic into an historical text, events became mythologized. And yet, as Bourgeois notes, «Apart from all this devil talk, palladism and revelations from Lucifer, we are dealing with a real combat»<sup>94</sup>. By understanding the task of Catholics in these circumstances as a battle in preparation for the establishment of the reign of the Sacred Heart, Dehon made the Freemasons into mythological figures of the end-time. This is clearly an exaggeration and excessive.

With regard to the Jews, Dehon went a step further. Within the long Western Christian tradition, it is not unexpected to find Jews as the incarnation of the anti-Catholic forces. When Drumont published his infamous *La France juive* in 1887, Dehon wrote, «It was a declaration of war between the Jewish race and Christian society. The struggle will be long. It is one part of the great anti-Christian war.» (NHV 15/56) In relation to the Jews, Dehon talked of a «Jewish invasion», as the second division of the «Army of the Antichrist» (MSC in: OS II, 79–86). There was no doubt regarding the apocalyptic tenor of this remark.

Dehon was obviously not the first to describe the crisis in France in terms of the Jews. Nor was he the first priest. R. Byrnes calculated that about 30% of anti-Semitic books in France were written by priests. Nor was Dehon original in his descriptions. He was not an originator of this material but he was a follower of the economic and political anti-Semitism current in France, especially between 1870 and 1914. He was easily influenced by France's most proclaimed anti-

<sup>92</sup> Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 138.

<sup>93</sup> RCJ, 1896, 132–134. Not long afterwards, Dehon however warns against giving too much credence to the «fable of Diana Vaughan.» (NQT 13/5).

<sup>94</sup> Bourgeois, *Le père Dehon* (see note 61), 139.

Semites such as Drumont and his infamous *La France juive*<sup>95</sup> and by Guérin. From his writings one may deduce that he was very much influenced by another Abbé Démocrat, Garnier, who in 1888 wrote for the Assumptionist anti-Semitic journal *La Croix*, whose Action Social Catholique became the political arm of Albert de Mun's Catholic Workers' Circle Movement in the short lived Union Nationale.<sup>96</sup> Dehon not only shared Garnier's socially activist program but particularly his anti-Semitic outlook on the social and economic issues of the day. Like Garnier, Dehon's anti-Semitism was instrumental. As Caron says, «[Garnier's anti-Semitism] was intended to galvanize Catholics out of their lethargy and indifference», which, Garnier claimed, had opened the door to the Jewish-Masonic invasion. In the words of Caron, «If only the tyrants could be unmasked», France's Catholics would wake up and realize that it was time to throw off the infidel yoke.»<sup>97</sup> Caron is probably correct in pointing out that the unmasking of the masons and the Jews would help to unite Catholics against a common cause, the corruption of the republic.<sup>98</sup> The apocalyptic language could only strengthen this perception. It could help Catholics to rally around the social reign of the Heart of Christ as another social option to the socialism and liberalism of the time. They hoped that it would establish, if no longer a Catholic monarchy, at least a Catholic republic.

This is not the occasion to evaluate the content of Dehon's anti-Semitism. Others have already done so.<sup>99</sup> But few have noted the apocalyptic vision in his anti-Semitism. For Dehon anti-Semitism is the battle against the forces, such as usury and capitalism, that, according to him, were destroying France. They, he believed, were blocking the advance of the reign of the Sacred Heart. In that sense he wrote: «Anti-Semitism has become a force to reckon with; it is an army which has already celebrated its victories!» (RCJ 1899, 3)

In apocalyptic writings, historical accuracy – despite the great amount of seemingly factual detail that Dehon adduces to his account of the Freemasons and Jews – is not a core quality. His report on the Jewish influence on the Free-

<sup>95</sup> Paris/Trident, 1886. Dehon acknowledges that Drumont, as a journalist, is «forcé et violent» but basically correct. (NQT 3/87).

<sup>96</sup> At the time all the catholic movements, especially the Christian Democracy movement, the Abbés Démocrates were imbued with anti-Semitism. See Vicki Caron, Catholic Political Mobilization and Antisemitic Violence in Fin de Siècle France: The Case of the Union Nationale, in: *The Journal of Modern History*, 81 (2009), 294–346. For the journal *La Croix* see the still important book of Pierre Sorlin, *La Croix et les juifs (1880–1899)*. Contribution à l'histoire de l'antisémitisme contemporain. Avant-propos de Charles Monsch, Paris 1967, 346.

<sup>97</sup> Caron, Catholic Political Mobilization (see note 96), 316.

<sup>98</sup> Caron, Catholic Political Mobilization (see note 96), 316.

<sup>99</sup> A number of French historians have presented Léon Dehon among the anti-Semitic authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Paul Airiau, *L'antisémitisme catholique en France aux XIX et XX siècles*, Paris 2000; Pierre Pierrard, *Juifs et catholiques français*, Paris 1970; Les chrétiens et l'Affaire Dreyfus, Paris 1999; Jean-Marie Mayeur, *Catholicisme social et Démocratie chrétienne. Principes romains, expériences françaises*, Paris 1986; Umberto Chiarello, *Il canonico Leone Dehon e la questione ebraica*, Vitorchiano 2004, manoscritto; Yves Ledure (Ed.), *Catholicisme sociale et question juive: Le cas Léon Dehon (1843–1925)*, Paris 2009.

masons and on the social fabric of France was not measured by historical accuracy. In a recent book, David Nirenberg noted that in the major crises in Western history, the crises were frequently told «in Jewish terms»<sup>100</sup>. The presence of real Jews, he says, was not required. Such is the power of anti-Judaism in Western civilization that they often became the immediate interpretative framework of a particular crisis. The crisis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the crisis in the face of modernity, was a crisis, just as other crises in Western history, that contemporaries were explaining «in Jewish terms». They may not necessarily have been real Jews that were the agents of modernity in France. Indeed, it is questionable that a population of 70,000 to 80,000 could have had such a deep influence on 40 million people.<sup>101</sup> The scapegoats created by the Catholic intransigents – also by Dehon – are figments of the imagination. Even though the crisis experienced in the anticlericalism and the policies and ideology of socialism and liberalism was real, the central role of the Jews as the «source of this malaise» was not.

It is within that context that we need to place the anti-Semitic writings of Dehon. The anti-Semitic texts in his *Manuel social chrétien*, *Le Catéchisme social*, *La Rénovation Sociale Chrétienne* and in *Le Règne* lack historical accuracy and are primarily intended to find a tangible root cause for the social malaise, but they are tainted by the inaccurate lengthy anti-Judaic tradition. This was exacerbated by the apocalyptic imagery that coloured Dehon's anti-Semitism with the end-time battle of good against evil. The victim in this mythologization of the battle was for that reason not only truth but also real Jews.

For Dehon, the Freemasons and the Jews in France were the incarnations of the larger historical movement of the breakdown of Medieval Christianity: the Reformation and the Enlightenment. For this reason, the great enemy of French civilization for Dehon and the intransigent Catholics included the Protestants. The Freemasons were seen as the historical inheritors of the legacy of the reformation and the enlightenment. They are the sources of the social malaise who, according to the Catholic traditionalists, were thought to have brought on the decline of European civilization. In that context, the Jews were presented as the influence upon the Freemasons.

<sup>100</sup> David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism. The Western Tradition*, New York/London 2013, 380.

<sup>101</sup> At the time of the French revolution, it is calculated that there were approximately 40,000 Jews in France. Most were living in the eastern part (Alsace, Lorraine and around Metz), some in the area of Avignon and Bordeaux. Only a handful lived in Paris on a temporary permit. Most of the Jews were poor with few rights. With the emancipation of the Jews at the time of the Revolution, this began to change, but even with the addition of another thirty to forty thousand (less than 1% of the population) it is hard to accept that their influence was so pervasive. See Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism* (see note 100), 343–344.

*The reign of the Sacred Heart as a millenarian image*

Although Dehon presented his social program as an attainable social and economic project, it was constantly tinged by reference to the millenarian reign of the Sacred Heart. Some aspects, such as the option between a «workers-only union» or a «mixed union of workers and bosses», the acceptance or non-acceptance of the *ralliement*, the Sunday rest, or the shortening of the work week were realizable programs in the short term. But the establishment of a Catholic republic at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was clearly utopic, just as was the project of placing the French tricolor, emblazoned with the emblem of the Sacred Heart, in French churches. The coming together of the Republic and the symbolism of the Sacred Heart was unthinkable. Although Dehon thinks that Christian Democracy will lead to the Reign of the Sacred Heart, the former cannot be equated with the latter. The reign of the Sacred Heart in societies was clearly a millenarian and end-of-time dream. Just as the metaphor «kingdom of God» was clearly an eschatological and at times apocalyptic term in the New Testament, so the reign of the Sacred Heart is clearly an eschatological – and at times – apocalyptic concept in the writings of Dehon, even though the word «apocalyptic» is not found in his writings. The term «apocalyptic» had no currency in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was revived in biblical studies only in the 20<sup>th</sup>. However, the apocalyptic imagery was so ingrained in Christianity that it could not be avoided, even when the word had lost common usage.

In a similar way, one must locate his language about the Jews. On various occasions, he connects the Jewish question with the Sacred Heart. For Dehon there was no ontological distance of the Jews and Christians. However distasteful today the notion of Jewish conversion, Dehon was able to draw a line of possible continuity between Catholics and Jews through conversion: «Only he (the Heart of Jesus) will gain the Jews [...] What is to be done to hasten the reign of the Sacred Heart which Jesus Christ must gain?» (RCJ 1889, 58). He was even more clear a few years later: «God keeps them as a witness of history and of the sacred scriptures. He reserves for them still a great mission in the final times of the world. The genius of converted Jews and the power of their traditions ... contribute to the conquest of the world for Jesus Christ» (RCJ 1896, 498). And so despite his outrageous statements against the Jews, Dehon could include them in the future reign of the Sacred Heart: «An evening will come, gentlemen, when, in turn, the people of Israel will have to respond to the trial and separate their cause from those that outrage the living God... I see this people extending their arms as a cross, reaching out to the One whom they have pierced, loving him, enveloping him with their tears...» (RCJ 1898, 40).

## Conclusion

If one looks across 19<sup>th</sup> century France, it seems like an impossible utopia to think that one can attain the reign of the Sacred Heart as the end goal of a divided France. Dehon thought that, with a concentrated effort it would be possible to insert the devotion to the Heart of Christ into the social fabric of France as outlined in his *Manuel social chrétien*. He dared to hope that this would lead to a Christian social democracy. What he sought was a new version of Christianity, no longer monarchical, but democratic, not necessarily non-hierarchical, but inclusive of all the members of society. Certainly, it was an idealized image of society, difficult, if not impossible, to conceive in the face of the forces that for Dehon were too socialist and too liberal. It was the intrusion of the apocalyptic genre within this image, as identified in the purported plot of the Freemasons and the Jewish invasion, that accentuates the hurdle that must be overcome to achieve this mission. With the accession of Giuseppe Sarto as Pius X in 1903 Dehon did not pursue this project any further. He ceased the publication of *Le règne*. The political situation in France made it almost impossible to continue.

The law of separating Church and State, the expulsion of religious orders from France in 1905 and the permanent residency of Dehon until his death in 1925 outside of France, mainly in Brussels, stopped not only his involvement with Christian democracy in France but also his reflection on social issues. But his legacy stands. In the words of J.-M. Mayeur's:

«The profane is accorded its proper value, and the temporal its autonomy, the lay person frees himself from the tutelage of the clergy, the confessional reference is abandoned. The Church renounces its claim to indirect power over civil society through the mediation of some sort of «secular arm». It accepts to be only a «directive» power using its influence and testimony.»<sup>102</sup>

Léon Dehon gave us an image of Catholicism that found its outlet in social Catholicism; but he was unable to incorporate into his vision the emerging modernity in which religion played a less dominant role. Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Léon Dehon dared to believe that despite the conflicts, despite the implacable positions, the reign of the Sacred Heart could be established in France.

### *Crisis within Modernity: Léon Dehon and the Social Reign of the Sacred Heart*

In the foreshortened political space for Catholics after the French Revolution and the ascendancy of the republican movement in France, it is possible to note an increasing tendency toward an apocalyptic reading of the time among Catholics. An important tool for such a self-understanding was the devotion to the Sacred Heart, which experienced an explosive growth in France in the 19th century. The devotion provided a clearly apocalyptic interpretation of French history. The paper will explore this apocalyptic interpretation through the works of Léon Dehon, a priest and founder of a religious community dedicated to the Sacred Heart and a proponent for a social Catholicism in France. Particularly in his writings between 1889 and 1903 he promoted a social, apocalyptic reading of the Sa-

<sup>102</sup> Mayeur, *Catholicisme intransigent* (see note 2), 498.



cred Heart devotion as alternative to the Republican, secularist reading, founded on the French Revolution and the declaration of the Rights of Man. In searching for a redemptive moment, Léon Dehon looked to the social reign of the Sacred Heart as a way of overcoming the capitalist, industrial economy which he saw was wreaking enormous economic hardship for workers. The Sacred Heart and its social reign was a critique of the policies of the Third Republic and an alternative grounded in a concrete, religiously motivated, social action in line with the social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

Léon G. Dehon – apocalyptic reading of the time – french history – Third Republic – French revolution – social reign of the Sacred Heart – *Rerum Novarum*.

### *Krise in der Moderne: Léon Dehon und die soziale Herrschaft des Herz Jesu*

Im begrenzt erscheinenden politischen Raum, den Katholiken nach der Französischen Revolution und dem Aufstieg der republikanischen Bewegung in Frankreich hatten, kann eine ansteigende Tendenz zu einer apokalyptischen Deutung der eigenen Zeit durch Katholiken festgestellt werden. Ein zentrales Mittel eines entsprechenden Selbstverständnisses war die Herz-Jesu-Verehrung, welche im 19. Jahrhundert in Frankreich einen explosionsartigen Anstieg erlebte. Die Herz-Jesu-Frömmigkeit stellte eine klare apokalyptische Interpretation der französischen Geschichte bereit. Der Vortrag untersucht diese apokalyptische Interpretation im Werk Léon Dehons, Priester, Gründer einer religiösen Gemeinschaft, die sich dem Herzen Jesu widmete, und ein Vertreter eines sozialen Katholizismus in Frankreich. Besonders in seinen Schriften der Jahre 1889 bis 1903 propagierte Dehon eine soziale, apokalyptische Lesart der Herz-Jesu-Devotion als Alternative zu einer republikanischen, säkularistischen Interpretation, welche auf der Französischen Revolution und der Erklärung der Menschenrechte aufbaute. Auf der Suche nach einem erlösenden Moment erblickte Léon Dehon in der sozialen Herrschaft des Herzen Jesu einen Weg, den Kapitalismus als die industrielle Wirtschaftsform zu überwinden, die er als Ursache der grossen ökonomischen Not der Arbeiter sah. Das Herz Jesu und seine soziale Herrschaft waren eine Kritikfolie der Politik der Dritten Republik und eine Alternative, welche auf einer konkreten, religiös motivierten sozialen Aktion basierte, die der Sozialenzyklika *Rerum Novarum* (1891) entsprach.

Léon G. Dehon – Apokalyptischen Deutung der eigenen Zeit – Geschichte Frankreichs – Dritte Republik – Französische Revolution – Soziales Reich des Herzen-Jesu – *Rerum Novarum*.

### *Crise dans la modernité: Léon Dehon et la règne sociale du Cœur de Jésus*

Dans l'espace politique apparemment restreint qu'avaient les catholiques après la Révolution française et la montée du mouvement républicain en France, l'on constate une tendance à la hausse de l'interprétation apokalyptique du propre temps par les catholiques. Le culte du Cœur de Jésus, qui connut un essor fulgurant au 19ème siècle en France, constitua un moyen central d'une perception du monde correspondante. La dévotion au Cœur de Jésus proposait une claire interprétation apokalyptique de l'histoire française. Cette présentation examine cette interprétation apokalyptique dans l'œuvre de Léon Dehon, prêtre, fondateur d'une communauté religieuse se vouant au Cœur de Jésus, et représentant d'un catholicisme social en France. En particulier dans ses textes des années 1889 à 1903, Dehon propagea une lecture sociale apokalyptique de la dévotion au Cœur de Jésus comme alternative à une interprétation séculariste républicaine basée sur la Révolution française et la Déclaration des droits de l'Homme. En quête d'un moment rédempteur, Léon Dehon perçut dans la dominance sociale du Cœur de Jésus un chemin permettant de surmonter le capitalisme comme système économique industriel qu'il voyait comme source de la grande misère économique des travailleurs. Le Cœur de Jésus et sa dominance sociale étaient une critique de la Troisième République et une alternative se basant sur une action religieuse concrète à motivation sociale qui correspondait à l'encyclique sociale *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

Léon G. Dehon – l'interprétation apokalyptique du propre temps – histoire française – Troisième République – Révolution française – dominance sociale du Cœur de Jésus – *Rerum Novarum*.

*La crisi nell'epoca moderna: Léon Dehon e il regno sociale del Sacro Cuore di Gesù*

Dopo la rivoluzione francese e il successo dei movimenti repubblicani, lo spazio politico per i cattolici appariva restricto. In questo contesto si può identificare una tendenza crescente dei cattolici verso un'interpretazione apocalittica della loro epoca. Uno strumento centrale di tale interpretazione era la devozione del Sacro Cuore, la quale nella Francia del 19esimo secolo ebbe una crescita esplosiva. La devozione del Sacro Cuore rappresentava una chiara interpretazione apocalittica della storia francese. La presentazione esamina questa interpretazione apocalittica nel lavoro di Léon Dehon, prete, fondatore di una comunità religiosa che si dedicò al Sacro Cuore, e sostenitore di un cattolicesimo sociale in Francia. In particolare negli scritti realizzati tra il 1889 e il 1903, Dehon promosse una lettura sociale e apocalittica della devozione al Sacro Cuore come alternativa a una interpretazione repubblicana e secolare, basata sulla rivoluzione francese e sulla dichiarazione dei diritti dell'uomo. Alla ricerca di un momento di redenzione, Léon Dehon vide nella dottrina sociale del Sacro Cuore una via per superare l'economia capitalista industriale, in cui individuava la causa della grande miseria dei lavoratori. Il Sacro Cuore e la sua dottrina sociale rappresentavano una critica alla politica della Terza Repubblica e un'alternativa basata su un'azione concreta, sociale e religiosamente motivata, in linea con l'enciclica sociale *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

Léon G. Dehon – interpretazione apocalittica dell'epoca – storia francese – Rivoluzione francese – Terza Repubblica – *Rerum Novarum*.

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