

# To the Letter



Reflections on the letters of Leo John Dehon, founder.....August 2009, No. 82

## To the Scholastics at Lille<sup>1</sup> 4 January 1893

My dear sons,

All of you have written beautiful and affectionate letters to me for the feast of Saint John and for the new year. I am responding to everyone at the same time and I am taking the opportunity to give you some paternal advice.

I think about your little group quite often. Soon you are going to begin to give us some priests each year. But will these priests live up to the ideal that I have proposed? Our purpose is very beautiful and lofty and I am going to repeat it to you as I described it to the younger students at the Apostolic School.

“Under the auspices of the Immaculate Virgin, the purpose of our Congregation is to give to the divine Heart of Jesus the adoration, praise, selfless love, and, above all, the special reparation that he himself requested from Blessed Margaret Mary in the great revelations of Paray-le-Monial; to tell him of our love and compassion in the outpourings of our prayer and our adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed upon our altars; to offer him our hearts immolated by means of the works,<sup>2</sup> the sufferings, and the sacrifices of each day and in the ministries which require the utmost devotion and self-denial, like

the care for working people and the poor and the foreign missions.”

You are studying philosophy and you should understand that the means have to be proportionate to the end. To attain so noble an end requires a preparation that is at once robust and delicate. It requires minds enlightened by good studies, wills strengthened by strict discipline, and hearts warmed by ardent prayer. All our obligations are outlined in these few words.

You should study diligently. How will you be good priests, capable of pleasing our Lord, if your ignorance leads you to act stupidly in his service? You should strengthen your will through discipline, mortification of your passions, obedience, and consistent observance of the rule. How can we offer reparation if we remain slaves of all the desires and weaknesses of nature? You should be men of prayer, and the life of prayer imposes great demands. First of all, it requires remote

preparation which consists of the habit of modesty and mortification. It requires habitual recollection and union with our Lord living in us.

Prayer produces results that allow us to recognize the degree of its progress. The soul who is living in the habit of prayer preserves the gentle feeling of grace throughout the day. When he is working, he does not lose a sense of the presence of God nor does he abandon the state of recollection. He is filled with the desire to please our Lord and to make him

loved. He refers everything to God and disregards the world. He readily obeys his director and his superiors. He has a great desire for mortification. In all things he loves to carry out the will of God. He practices perfect charity towards his neighbor. Do you recognize yourself in this portrait? It is a picture of the true disciples of the Heart of Jesus and this is what all of you should be.

Take heart! Set yourself to work and don't waste any more time.

I bless you most affectionately.

Your devoted father,

Fr. John of the  
Heart of Jesus



“  
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”

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This letter is cited by H. Dorresteyn, S.C.J. De Spiritualite P. Leonis Dehon. Romae: Apud Curiam Generalitiam, 1947, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase is originally found in a letter written by Fr. Rasset to his sister who was a nun in Haiti. When his sister had apparently expressed her frustration because of her lack of success, he reminded her: “Did you not say, your vocation is not in the works of the apostolate, but in immolation by means of works, and that is something completely different” (6 April 1880). Cf., To The Letter #66, April 2008.

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## Charles Bisgrove, SCJ

As I read Fr. Dehon's letter to the students at Lille, my mind and heart wandered back to my recent experience in India with our scholastics. How often I found myself giving our brothers in India "some paternal advice." In his letter, Fr. Dehon reminds the students of the purpose of our congregation and that the purpose is "very beautiful and lofty."

He reminds them of how important the spiritual life is, the life of prayer, their studies and the life of service. All of these make for a well-rounded person, one who is able to most effectively be at the service of the Church and the congregation.

Of all the reflections that he offers, I was most struck by his lengthy comments on prayer and how important a life of prayer is, how it opens one to God's will and the service of brothers and sisters. To live in the "presence of God" gives one's life a whole new orientation.

I often found myself reminding our Indian brothers of how important the interior life is, the life of prayer, and yet how easily we can abandon it. It is often one of the first things of which we let go. That is why it is so important for people to be encouraged. I see Fr. Dehon's letter to the scholastics as a letter of encouragement. I found that the most important thing I did in India was to encourage people because I found great discouragement among religious and priests. Since the Christian community in

India is only about two-and-a-half percent of the total population, living the Christian life to the fullest can be a challenge. The recent persecutions toward Christians have created more discouragement among people living the Christian life.

Encouragement is a powerful virtue. Perhaps Fr. Dehon's letter can offer us an inspiration to offer encouragement to others. The "Year of the Priest," which began on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, is another opportunity to offer encouragement. Who in your life needs a word of encouragement? Maybe today is your opportunity.



## Greg Schill, SCJ

"Wow!" This was the first thought that entered my head after reading Fr. Leo Dehon's message to his scholastics. Today, as we revisit Fr. Dehon's letter to his scholastics, we have been invited to listen to the wisdom, vision, spirituality and work ethic that he shared with the scholastics of his time. Dehon's emphasis on studying "diligently" has been a work ethic and valuable asset that I have strived to do throughout my academic career and my time as an SCJ.

The thoughts of Fr. Dehon during his time speak well to me today. Our hard work, prayer, devotion to Jesus, willingness to respond "diligently" to the needs of others and for us to be kind and respectful to our brothers and sisters

in Christ are all powerful moral characteristics that represent the vision and charism of Fr. Dehon.

Fr. Dehon's letter to his scholastics continues to make me mindful of the needs of others and my willingness to be present and attentive to my brothers and sisters in Christ. And being able to respond "diligently" to the needs of our brothers and sisters gives us the gift of generosity and selfless love. When we are capable of answering to someone's specific needs and we fail to act, we are not responding to the selfless love and generosity that Fr. Dehon envisioned. And be mindful that there are needs and demands that we do not have the resources and means to respond to. However, as long as we are doing our best, we are responding "diligently" to Dehon's letter to his scholastics.



## Questions

*Before answering the following questions please read the reflections on the reverse side.*

1. How did Fr. Dehon's letter to his scholastics impact your response to the needs of others?
2. The purpose of the congregation, according to Fr. Dehon, is "to give to the divine Heart of Jesus the adoration, praise, selfless love, and, above all, the special reparation... to tell him of our love and compassion in the outpourings of our prayer and our adoration of the Blessed Sacrament exposed upon our altars; to offer him our hearts immolated by means of the works, the sufferings, and the sacrifices of each day and in the ministries which require the utmost devotion and self-denial..." Do you live that purpose as an SCJ?
3. Fr. Dehon writes, "Prayer produces results that allow us to recognize the degree of its progress." What does that mean to you?