

To the Letter



Reflections on the letters of Leo John Dehon, founder.....April 2009, No. 78

To the Novices at Sittard

8 May 1910

My dear sons,

I received your delightful little letters and I was deeply moved by them. I see that all of you have a good spirit and that you are truly united to your superiors. Your novitiate will be blessed and you will become good religious of the Sacred Heart. Always maintain these dispositions of humility, union, and charity. Make the most of the months that you still have left there. Oh! the novitiate is such a beautiful time! Later on you will be caring for souls, and that too will be wonderful. But now you have only to concern yourself with the good Jesus, our divine king. You are in his royal court, you are serving him, you are speaking to him and listening to him throughout the day. Whenever I go to see the Pope, I feel envious of the prelates in his court, those who have the good fortune to always be near the Vicar of Jesus Christ. I told the Pope that in our novitiates we have daily exposition and reparatory adoration. He was quite pleased with that because reparation is so necessary at the present time. Our vocation is truly beautiful, but it is delicate, it calls for a great

deal of generosity, abundant zeal, and great care.

We read in the book of Daniel that the king of Babylon had chosen for his court young men who were pure, without any defect, well educated, prudent, and wise (cf., Dn 1:4). The king of heaven is no less demanding. He desires novices who are as pure and obedient as angels. Our Lord chose St. John to be his confidant and to entrust him with the care of his mother (cf., Jn 19:27), we should be the St. Johns in our Congregation, to be companions of Jesus, his friends, his consolers, and the servants of his Mother.

Never become discouraged, your vocation is the most beautiful that anyone could ever have. Death will be sweet after a life consecrated to the Sacred Heart. Our Lord will truly welcome those who will be able to say: I have spent my life offering you a daily tribute of love and reparation. Let us pray for one another. Let us love one another (1 Jn 4:7). Let us avoid like the plague all criticism, divisions, and a bad attitude.

I bless you most paternally,

L. Dehon



To the Scholastics of Holland

31 January 1918

To my dear Scholastics,

Thank you for your kind letter and devout wishes. Work and pray well, but always in the spirit of our vocation. Every house must have at least two hours of adoration each day. Avoid negative attitudes and criticism as you would the plague. Love one another (Jn 13:34), be charitable to each other, for we are the disciples of St. John the Evangelist.

The Holy Father is urging us on, he truly loves our Work and he wants to be the Pope of the Sacred Heart. It is a great grace to know that we are so closely united to the Successor of Saint Peter. He is preparing to canonize Blessed Margaret Mary. On January 6th while promulgating the decree on her miracles, he delivered a heartwarming address on the great growth that the devotion to the Sacred Heart will experience as a consequence of this canonization; since I was there he gave me a special blessing on behalf of our mission.

Pray that our General Chapter after the war may strengthen our love of devotion, union, and charity. I bless you most paternally.

L. Dehon



The congregation's early years.

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“The fundamental goal of formation (the theme of this year’s *To the Letter* reflections) is to help us become Christians, to say ‘Yes’ to Christ. If it does not do that, then we are playing games,” says Timothy Radcliffe in *Sing a New Song: The Christian Vocation*. In these two letters and in all of his writings on initial and life-long formation, this fundamental goal appears to be utmost in the founder’s mind and heart.

Reflecting on the two dates of the two letters, 1910 and 1918, we might remember that the first was written within four years of the start of World War I and the second letter as WWI was about to end. Interestingly, historians mention that just four days before the end of the war on November 11, 1918, French soldiers near La Capelle, the birthplace of the founder, witnessed the approach of several German cars bearing white flags.

The two popes in the letters were Pius X (1903-1914) and Benedict XV (1914-1922); the latter canonized St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1920, which is referred to in the second letter. Looking at the two dates on the letters, I became aware too of how old the founder was when he wrote them, 67 and 75, respectively, and how alive and vibrant he seemed to be.

Two themes, in particular, caught my attention, the first dealing with the importance of virtue. He mentions virtues such as humility, charity, generosity, and he quotes from the Book of Daniel about the virtues of being pure, well educated, prudent and wise.

Bernard Haring in *The Virtues of the Authentic Life: A Celebration of Spiritual Maturity* defines virtue as “a form of competence that enables us to grasp the melody of life as a whole

and to arrive at that basic option for good that brings all our thoughts, desires, and actions to maturity.”

The second theme that stood out for me in both letters was the founder’s call to us to become like the “beloved disciple,” the one who rested on the heart of Jesus at the Last Supper, the one who was at the cross when the rest of the disciples ran away, the one who took the mother of Jesus into his home, and one of the very first eye-witnesses of the Lord’s resurrection.



Paul Kelly, SCJ

“...reparation is so necessary at the present time.” May 8, 1910, L. Dehon

Over the past 40 years, kneeling or sitting before the Blessed Sacrament during Eucharistic Adoration, my understanding of reparation has taken on various understandings. Never once, however, have I thought that this was wasted time. Being in an age of “doing” and productivity, I have never felt that this time in the Lord’s Presence was anything but a precious gift for me personally and for those to whom I minister.

At the present time, filled with precarious financial crises and wars raging, the mending and knitting of broken people and broken promises seems all the more urgent.

At the present time, given worldwide atrocities and petty personal

grievances, The Heart once pierced by a lance is pierced again when I fail to reconcile, conger up old wounds, fail

in the “dispositions of humility, union and charity” and want everyone else to change but ME!

At the present time, reparation is so necessary. With dwindling numbers, and an aging membership

how am I a leaven in the new ministries that will unfold? Do I build walls of isolation or hide behind titles or accomplishments? Do I repair what is broken around me or rage at the lack of solutions? Am I am reconciler, or one who grinds the old axes of past slights and resentments? Do I unite or divide by my words and actions?

“...reparation is so necessary at the present time.” May 8, 1910, L. Dehon



Questions

The following questions may help you in your reflections:

1. How do I understand reparation? Is it the same or different than Fr. Dehon’s understanding?
2. How is reparative adoration connected to my ministry?
3. Fr. Dehon writes that the novices should “Always maintain these dispositions of humility, union, and charity.” How do you actively work to maintain these dispositions? Or do you? What other dispositions are important to an SCJ religious?