



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS
(DEHONIAN FATHERS)**

Tuesday, 10 June 2003

*Dear Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and
Members of the Dehonian Religious Family,*

1. I am pleased to greet you at this special audience while the work of your General Chapter is coming to a close. Thank you for your visit!

I extend a cordial greeting to you all, especially the newly-elected Superior General, Fr José Ornelas Carvalho. I cordially thank him for his courteous words on behalf of those present and of your entire Institute established in 37 nations. To him and to the members of the General Council I extend my warmest good wishes for an inspired service of guidance that will foster the authentic progress of the Congregation and keep intact its original profile, which the Founder desired.

2. This year is the 125th anniversary of religious life of Venerable Léon Dehon. You have wished to commemorate it with a special *Dehonian Year* that ends on 28 June, the day when you will be commemorating his first religious profession. He himself recognized it as the day on which your Congregation came into being. I hope that this will be an incentive to you to go back to your origins with that "creative fidelity" (cf., *Vita Conscrata*, n. 37) which will keep intact your charism, distinguished by constant contemplation of the Heart of Christ, conscious participation in his reparative sacrifice and zealous dedication to spreading the Kingdom of the Lord in souls and in society, since it is precisely the rejection of God's love which is the root cause of the evils in the world (cf. *Constitutions*, n. 4).

It was this original inspiration which, in the second half of the 19th century, prompted Léon Dehon to give birth to an original spiritual and missionary experience at Saint-Quentin, France. The

Founder's own enthusiasm must guide you, dear Brothers, in discerning and improving the areas of your apostolic action, also involving lay people in the "Dehonian Project".

3. The Chapter which is now drawing to a close has enabled you to "revisit" the foundations of your charism with the commitment to adapt them to our day, aware of the precious timeliness of your mission. I hope that you will treasure the orientations that are the outcome of the work of these days so that, by putting them promptly into practice, the Congregation may continue safely on its way, producing abundant fruit for the Church and for the world. However, for this to happen, it is first of all necessary that Christ remain the centre of your life and your works. Fr Dehon wanted his disciples, faithfully following the divine Teacher, to be *prophets of Love and servants of reconciliation*; persons totally intent on striving for holiness and able to communicate the reconciliation and love that the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with his death, obtained for the humanity of all time.

4. In your work, dear Brothers, you are called to confront the challenges of the present time in history and you have certainly been granted to experience that every human being truly needs to know and encounter God. However, only in personal and community prayer is it possible to find the indispensable spiritual energy to bring this demanding mission to completion.

As the theme of the Chapter proposes, be "*Dehonians on mission: hearts open in solidarity*", who are ready to face the needs of today and to improve your apostolate in the contexts of spirituality, the mission "*ad gentes*", your presence in social life with special attention to culture (cf. *Constitutions*, n. 31).

Your activity in the field of religious information and documentation is also well known. Examine closely "the signs of the times", and never let fidelity to the Catholic doctrine and the Magisterium of the Church weaken so that you can render, through your publications, too, the indispensable service to the truth, the first form of charity.

5. Dear friends, your Institute's history has now reached the goal of 125 years of existence and activity; it has been a journey full of merits and apostolic fruits. Continue with courage and dedication!

I entrust to the heavenly intercession of the Virgin Mary, Queen of the Rosary, and of Bl. Juan María de la Cruz, Protomartyr of your Congregation, the resolutions and effective choices that have resulted from the work of the Chapter.

I pray God that you may continue with renewed dynamism on the path of holiness and of service to the Kingdom of God. I accompany you with my affectionate thoughts, as I cordially impart a special Blessing to you who are present here, to your Confreres and to all the members of your spiritual Family across the world.

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