



SUPERIOR GENERAL
CONGREGATION OF THE
PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART
Dehonians

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Caracas, December 18, 2025.

*To the members of the Congregation
To all the members of the Dehonian Family*

Letter for Christmas 2025

“And do you come to me?” (Mt 3:14)

This year that is coming to an end allowed us to celebrate the centenary of the death of Fr. Leo Dehon. Through various initiatives, we gave thanks to God for the gift of his life and his charism. Moreover, until 2028, when we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation, we have been invited to live “a period of profound spiritual and vocational renewal for each member of the Congregation and of the Dehonian Family.”¹

To help make this possible, one indispensable resource is frequent and reflective closeness to the life and work of Fr. Dehon. With this purpose in mind, now that we are about to celebrate the birth of the Redeemer, it is fitting to recall a very particular experience lived by the young Léon Dehon, which decisively shaped his life. He himself recounts it in his memoirs. He was barely thirteen years old. It was Christmas night, and he was serving at the altar in the Capuchin chapel in Hazebrouk:

“There I received one of the strongest impressions of my life. Our Lord strongly urged me to give myself to him (...). I had the impression that my conversion dated back to that day. How can I express all my gratitude to the adorable Child Jesus!” (NHV 1/52).

So intense was that experience that, just two years before his death, Fr. Dehon wished once again to bear witness to the mark that that Christmas left upon him:

“I feel a disconcerting sense of gratitude when I see how Our Lord prepared and preserved my vocation in such a marvelous way.”²

¹ «For Him I live: It is Christ who lives in me (Gal 2:20)», Letter at the beginning of the centenary of the death of Father Dehon and in preparation for the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation, Brussels 08.12.2024.

² “Je reste confus de reconnaissance quand je vois comment Notre Seigneur a préparé et conservé merveilleusement ma vocation” (NHV 1/57).

From this gratitude, and from Fr. Dehon's awareness of the call God addressed to him, I invite you to share in an approach to the mystery of what we are about to celebrate.

“A Disconcerting Gratitude”

One element that characterizes the most outstanding figures of the biblical narrative — from Advent to the Baptism of the Lord — is the widespread bewilderment they experienced. It was not easy, for any of them, to come to terms with what took place around the incarnation of the Word.

When the opportune moment arrived, God, faithful to his own acting way, desired — “as in the beginning” — the participation of certain collaborators in order to give a human face to his most intimate and definitive Word: Jesus. Among others, he chose an irreproachable elderly couple, yet without offspring; a young engaged couple, with almost everything still ahead of them; daring and attentive foreigners, journeying to reach the desired place, like so many today crossing seas and roads by night; he also chose field workers, people with hardened feet and light sleep, accustomed to long vigils by the glow of campfires — fires that today illumine the fears and anxieties of refugees fleeing so many wars and forms of violence.

God even counted on the collaboration of one who was still in his mother's womb. His name was John, as his mother had determined. He was a true champion of hope. From before his birth until the end of his days, he devoted himself entirely to proclaiming the Messiah. His life and his preaching left no one indifferent. One day, while baptizing along the Jordan River, Jesus came to meet him. Despite having announced him with fidelity and conviction, the Baptist did not expect the Messiah to come to him in the way he did: simply, without noise or fire in his hands, without defenses, surrounded only by people longing to live according to God's will. John could hardly contain his astonishment. His joy and his bewilderment merged into a single question: “And do you come to me?” (Mt 3:14).

What better disposition could there be to contemplate and celebrate the mystery of the Lord's coming than to allow that same question to continue echoing within us? In a way, it implies giving an account of the Jesus in whom each of us hopes: What characterizes him? How do you proclaim him? How and where do you recognize him? How do his life and message affect your personal project, your fraternal life, and your pastoral ministry? In seeking answers, recent words of Pope Leo XIV may serve as a helpful guide:

(...) It is not enough to profess the doctrine of God's Incarnation in general terms. To enter truly into this great mystery, we need to understand clearly that the Lord took on a flesh that hungers and thirsts, and experiences infirmity and imprisonment. “A poor Church for the poor begins by reaching out to the flesh of Christ. If we reach out to the flesh of Christ, we begin to understand something, to understand what this poverty, the Lord's poverty, actually is; and this is far from easy.” (*Dilexi te*, 110)

This is how John the Baptist understood it, and this is how he made it known to those who asked him what they had to do to be saved (cf. Lk 3:10–14). Many who heard him were left bewildered

and far from any form of gratitude. Quite different, however, is the grateful awareness that Jesus, incarnate in history, acquired regarding his own mission:

“At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the little ones’” (Mt 11:25).

“How Marvellously Our Lord Prepared and Preserved My Vocation”

Vocation, like the incarnation of the Word, always has a before and an after, as does every human event. The Word proclaimed throughout Advent gradually revealed how God prepared the collaborators mentioned above. Despite the demanding mission, they eventually expressed joy for the invitation God extended to them: Zechariah, with a voice matured in silence, blessed the Lord; Elizabeth, freed from her humiliation, acknowledged God’s work in her relative; Mary, rooted in divine mercy, said yes without limits; Joseph, having overcome his uncertainties, took firm steps to care for his family; the travelers from the East, captivated by the true treasure, did not give in to the schemes of a despotic ruler; the shepherds, like messengers from heaven, proclaimed the good news. And John? He continued to uphold the hope of his people, even unto martyrdom—just as, much later, our brother Fr. Martino Capelli, SCJ, recognized as worthy of being beatified in the near future, would do.

We see, therefore, that the transformation that took place in God’s collaborators involved overcoming resistance and misunderstanding, both their own and those of others. John experienced this as well. In fact, the Baptist attempted to dissuade Jesus from his intention to receive the baptism of water that he administered to sinners.

Why is it that, among those closest to Jesus — among those “who follow most closely the self-emptying of the Savior³” — there so often arises an attempt to divert him from the will of the Father? Is it to lessen the burden, to make the mission of the Son lighter, or rather to avoid risks or undesirable consequences in the lives of those who follow him? In a certain sense, Mary and Joseph also attempted this (cf. Lk 2:48–50), and Mary did so again later together with other relatives (cf. Mk 3:31–35). The Apostle Peter, for his part, did not remain behind. He openly opposed Jesus’ path when he announced the consequences that total fidelity to the Father would entail (Mt 16:22). Yet in the logic of the Kingdom, in Jesus’ understanding, only the one who loses his life—only the one who offers it for the Kingdom of the Father—gains it.

This is how Fr. Dehon began to understand his own calling, starting from what he experienced in connection with that Christmas night of 1856: “I felt the divine vocation from the first Christmas night (...) and I have not wavered since then” (NQT 44/128). This certainty, carefully nurtured throughout his entire life, gradually transformed him into a passionate collaborator in the cause of the Kingdom.

By repeatedly returning to contemplation of the mystery of Christmas, Fr. Dehon reveals to us that his deepest longing went far beyond becoming a renowned apostle or a prolific activist on

³ *Lumen Gentium* 42.

social media, as one might say today. His greatest aspiration was something else: to be a son, to delight in the merciful Father who revealed himself throughout his life, and to walk as a brother of Jesus toward encounter with all:

“I will remain in a habitual state of gratitude and filial love toward you, O my God, who gave me your likeness in creation and made me your child. I understand and desire to live this word of Saint Paul: ‘Live as beloved children’ (Eph 5:1). Child of God! What a beautiful title! How could I not love you, O my Father, with tender and filial love!” (CAM 1.31)⁴.

Let us ask that this Christmas renew us in gratitude. May the Redeemer, born in Bethlehem, never cease to surprise us—and even to unsettle us—so that he may rekindle in us the restlessness of the vocation of love and reparation to which each of us has been called. May we, from the variety of states of life that unite us within the Dehonian Family, know how to live as sons and daughters of God, especially attentive to the most vulnerable and wounded in our communities, in our families, and wherever God enables us to recognize them.

In the Heart of the Prince of Peace, a joyful Christmas and a hopeful New Year.

Fr. Carlos Luis Suárez Codorniú, scj
Superior General
and his Council

⁴ Léon Dehon, *Couronnes d’amour* I, 1905.

<https://www.dehondocsoriginals.org/publicati/OSP/CAM/OSP-CAM-0002-0001-8060201?ch=31>