Rome, 27 January, 2009

- PART ONE -

Points from SCJ Entities
for Chapter Discussion

A. ARDENT LOVERS OF CHRIST

Fr. Dehon taught us to make “union with Christ in his love for the Father and for people the principle and center of our life” and to “discover more and more the person of Christ and the mystery of His Heart” (Cst. 17).

This union with Christ is a profound sign of his spiritual experience. His entire life was filled with the love of Christ. An ardent lover of Him and His Heart to such extent that at the end of his life he could say: “for Him I lived and for Him I die”.

As followers of Fr. Dehon, we are called to share in his experience. In our consecration to the following of Christ, following Fr. Dehon as the historical model of our consecration, we wish to be ardent lovers of Christ and so continuously formed that He becomes the true center of our lives and permeates our persons, communities, and apostolic activities.

1. In what way does our community/district/region/province help us, or can help us, to be ardent lovers of Christ?
2. How do we communicate to others – in our communities or by our preaching – our experience of Christ?

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The general impression upon reading the responses to the questions above is that everyone is agreed on the fundamental importance of centeredness on Christ and on his Heart as the core of his person. A formal, theoretical adherence alone is not enough; if we are truly ardent lovers of Him we will be so in our communities as well and of the human beings to whom our witness and missionary activity is directed; all this requires new and renewed enthusiasm, language, methods, and involvement.
A/1. Ardent Lovers of Christ

During their formation period SCJs learn of the love that comes from the Heart of Christ. To recall this centering during a general chapter is something beautiful. A great positive is the example of our confreres, the concrete experience of one who loves God. Moreover their example helps us in our daily life to convey our ardent love for Christ and to show our enthusiasm for the religious life.

The community is a great help in our attachment to Christ:

- when there is a clear and achievable community project/plan
- when members accept: schedules, prayer in common, sharing, lectio, meetings, recreation…
- when effort is made to build *sint unum* (welcoming brothers and guests)
- when *life in community is our primary witness and our chief apostolate*
- The Province, too, has a role in helping growth in Christ: proposals that come from the “Spirituality and Apostolic Life” commission assists the community with practical orientations.

Other important instruments are the community rhythm of life: praying in common, Eucharistic celebrations and adoration; lectio divina:

- We need to move from Bible study to sharing our faith experience and life (lectio) in light of the Word of God.
- We need to learn how to be reconciled (fraternal correction- celebration of the sacrament of penance…)
- We need spiritual direction and monthly recollection days.
- We need to deepen our personal spirituality, particularly through on-going formation which should be not merely intellectual but real and actual
- We need to merge personal and community projects and make them work together
- We need to be attentive to spontaneous moments of thankfulness and conviviality
- We need to be where society needs us.
- We need to understand better the society in which we live.
- We need to be welcoming to people outside the community.
- We need to be welcoming and work with laity and our neighbors.
- We need to appreciate what our brothers do and the example they give, not merely through organizational communications but personally and wholeheartedly.

*Being an ardent lover of Christ means feeling evermore interested in the problems of man.*

A/2. Communicating Christ

- We need to communicate by life and example to the young and to families chiefly
- We need to communicate solidarity, cordiality, and mercy
- We need to maintain a sober life-style
- We need to abandon the mindset of the “diocesan priest” and rediscover the Dehonian characteristics of life
- We need to promote and clarify (through acceptable conventions) the relationships between a religious community and the local church
- We need to have simplicity and professionalism and competence
- We need to utilize old and new methods for sharing and spreading our spirituality (in community, society, and ministry)
- As SCJs we need to be prepared to give ourselves in a special way for the sacrament of reconciliation
- We need to be committed to the worlds of learning and the social dimensions
- We need to proclaim our Christian experience not only intellectually but as a manifestation of our faith (witness and life).
- We need to do our service in charity as attentiveness to the person (patience, availability, compassion, and a spirit of sharing).
- We need to visit families, the sick, those in prisons, and people in trouble.
- Within our communities, we need to make better use of community councils (evaluation, discernment of personal and community programs and plans, fraternal correction…)
- We need to increase our “sense of belonging” (community and province levels) to grow in *sint unum*
- We need to rediscover Christ as the foundation of our personal and community life, and as the subject of the mission to which HE sends us with the gift of his Spirit

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B. WHO UNITES US IN BROTHERHOOD

Fraternal life in community is what the church asks of us again. In his priestly prayer Jesus prays that his disciples be one (John 17). Fr. Dehon’s reading of scriptures put great value on fraternity and community and drew from it the “Sint Unum” (Cst. 63). Fraternal community for us is the primary expression of our apostolic life (Cst. 60), even before we take on external duties and ministries. Community is the place of our humangrowth as well and the foundation of our turning back to God. Churches, ancient or newly established, along with their communities need to rediscover and live fraternity more deeply.

The new missions of our congregation, to which the love of Christ impels us, are henceforth places for the growth of internationality...

Inspired by a Dehonian reading of scriptures, we are called to freshen our call to live in brotherhood and fraternity, not solely at the mercy of spur-of-the-moment activities but doing so consciously and consistently in such a way that our lives become a witness to the world.

1. What are the elements that promote and favor a fraternal life? What are the elements that hinder it?

2. Aware of what Christ calls us to, what elements promote and favor a Dehonian life and what can we concretely do to assist the ministry of the promotion of vocations?

3. How do we open ourselves up to a spirit of internationality?

4. At a personal level, a community level, at a district/region/province level, the congregational level – how do we live up to our responsibility for material goods and their sharing (common accounts, solidarity, etc.?)

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B/1a. Obstacles

- hardheartedness and unwillingness to pardon
- complaining and fixation on one’s own woes
- gossip, envy, morbid curiosity
- quickness to judge, lack of truthfulness, prejudices, and skepticism
- being turned in on oneself and having a critical spirit that creates uneasiness
- lack of trust, transparency, and “good will”
- wide divergence between one’s theology and one’s spirituality
- individualism which is heightened by technological developments that can lead to serious divisions in fraternal life
- excessive attachment to work and to possessions
- irritating individualism and intellectual pride
- being attached to places or roles, rigidity, or its opposite, pliability
- destructive criticism
- holding a leading role and giving little attention to other persons
- internationality without realism (and consequent impoverishment of missionary activity in the place from which one departs)
- tribalism; belonging more to a clan or family than to the community
- secularism and adoption of middle-class values
- the immaturity of some of us
- a work community rather than a life community
- the lack of a plan and lives in parallel to the plan
- deference to one’s personal agenda rather than to the community plan
- "submarine" religious; (i.e., religious who lead a “double life”)
- … cold water and “bad food”
- life in a community/house as though it were a hotel
- to be reunited in fraternity and to build it up among us, we need to rediscover who Christ is

**B/1b. Helps**

- dialog, making plans together, community planning
- not a division of responsibilities, but true sharing
- hospitality and welcoming among SCJs
- availability and cordiality
- spending time together
- cultivation of a family spirit
- common burse and transparency in the use of money
- proper and beneficial use technology
- inter-province activities; collaboration among provinces; healthy internationalism
- appreciation of different geographical areas
- promotion of international communities
- learning new languages and knowing the ambiance and culture into which one is inserted
- promoting international meetings and the interests of others
- putting “new blood” into old provinces

**B/2. Proposals for SCJ Life and Vocational Ministry**

- youth ministry is the point of departure for vocational ministry
- vocational ministry requires collaboration with laity, diocesan priest, men and women religious
- communicate SCJ Life by preaching, publications, and meetings…
- Promote an annual meeting for vocations
- Promote the vocation of lay brothers in vocational ministry work
- Translate the works of Fr. Dehon that are helpful for vocational ministry into various languages
- Prepare brochures and folders on our spirituality
- Pray regularly and consistently in all SCJ communities for vocations
- Vocational ministry must be the commitment and objective of everyone; we need to employ new energy and creativity in vocational ministry
- Make sure the formation directors are themselves well trained and formed
- Make space on our web sites for young people (on Fr. Dehon and SCJ life)
- Only those people who are enthusiastic about their own vocation can do good work in vocational ministry
- Use the students in houses of formation for works in vocational ministry
- Work for total and complete acceptance and welcome for new people in formation (family spirit)
- Make sure people are aware very early on that a vocation is very demanding
- Appeal to youth with music, displays, and other new forms

**B/3. Internationality**

- promote new international communities
- Be open to congregational projects and plans (“We, the Congregation”)
- Study languages and cultures different than one's own
- Establish international formation houses in various geographical areas (from novitiate through all successive stages of formation)
Incorporate a period outside one’s own country into the program of studies
Have a section on our website with news about our missions
Promote collaboration among neighboring provinces
Do a sabbatical period in a different culture
Promote mission work for a limited time frame; avoid tourism and simple visiting
Do a Spanish language newsletter for Hispano-Americans
Multiply ESL (English as a Second Language) opportunities and possibilities
Promote a common preparation for final vows at the international level
“From this moment on, the missions are the place for international growth”
International communities must be prepared for, preferably by a common project of the General Administration

B/4. Use of Goods – Common Burse – Finances

The material goods we make use of always belong to the Congregation
- Nothing is yours/mine; everything is ours...and we stand for our common mission
- Common Burse: we need to verify this practice throughout all the entities of the congregation
- To make the common burse effective, we need to say NO to non-authorized bank accounts
- We need absolute transparency and clarity
- Permissions are needed from superiors according to various competency levels
- Bookkeeping needs to be clear and audit-ready
- Responsibility for goods involves respect for the environment and shared resources
- We must seek for financial self-sufficiency at least for our ordinary expenses
- We need to find new ways of financing ourselves and becoming self-sufficient
- We need to acquire a critical outlook on the way we ourselves live our poverty for the mission
- We need to promote NGO’s (Non-Government Orgs.) and investments in ethical funds
- We need to train treasurers and better appreciate trustworthy and competent lay professionals.
- We need to be constant contact with our benefactors, realizing that this is a form of ministry
- “The goods of every community are a concrete proof of God’s providence and the generosity of many benefactors” to which we are greatly indebted.

C. …WE PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

An experience of the love of Christ in our lives – the same faith experience that Fr. Dehon had, intimately united with the Heart of Christ (Cst. 4) – is the very reason that impels us to offer the Kingdom of God to humankind. This union with Christ is not just something that is found written about in our constitutions (Cst. 5) or part of a series of beautiful goals listed in our documents and personal plans, but something that needs incorporation in our fraternal life and our apostolates.

1. What courses of action, or processes, should we follow, what mindsets need changing, what structures should we revise, so as to advance the preaching of the gospel?
2. How do we impart our missionary experience beyond our own district/region/province?
3. Beyond our usual haunts and apostolic priorities (“go to the people...”, the new evangelization”), how and where do we proclaim Christ?

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We go out on our mission as sent by Christ – not as individuals but as a community – we are ever guided and assisted by the power of the Holy Spirit who renews all things and never ceases to amaze us.
C/1. Courses of Action for Evangelization

- **GO TO THE PEOPLE**
- We need to study the mindset and languages of the people – INCULTURATION
- We need to use social works to make sure our evangelization is complete and integral
- We need to abandon the idea of the “putty clay priest” (we are SCJ religious)
- We need to be involved in the diocesan pastoral plan and yet hold on to our specific identity
- We need to improve the quality of our catechesis and make better use of the catechumenate (RCIA)
- We need to listen better to Christians and promoters of CEV (Christian Communities - Comunità Evangeliche di Vita)
  - We need to be open to dialog with other religions
  - We need to maintain the central place of the Holy Spirit in our life of faith
  - We need to maintain the central place of the Gospels in our evangelization
  - We need to review and share our fraternal life, passing from the “I” to the “We” in our proclamation
  - We need to set up and use province commissions of evangelization
  - We need to examine all the works of the province and keep those which make a Dehonian contribution
  - We need to rotate responsibilities
  - We need to work in new fields
  - We need a little more spirituality in addition to enthusiasm
  - We need to share our experience of Christ and try to make the same emerge from the people (and not impose Western models)
  - We need to promote the spirituality of the Sacred Heart in a way that can be understood today
  - We need to proclaim the gospel as a community and not as individuals…
  - We need to support the people by looking at them not as objects but subjects of evangelization
  - **The basic direction of evangelization will be to communicate the Christ to whom we belong**

C/2. Missionary Experiences Outside our own Entity

- We need evangelists even on a temporary basis
- We need to share experiences and we need missionary preparations
- We need to encourage the missionary spirit right at initial formation
- We should concentrate on a few missions rather than be scattered about
- We need to persuade the congregation and a few provinces that there is great need of missionaries in the Western World (Europe and the secular West)
- We need to write articles on missionaries not only for our own magazines but also for others
- We need to reinforce the role of the secretaries for the missions
- We need to re-emphasize the recommendations on missions made at the General Conference at Warsaw
  - Where several provinces are collaborating, we need to chose one to be in charge
  - We need to re-establish the ‘missionary apostolic year/internship” during the period of formation or at the beginning of ministry.
  - We need to look at our missionary commitments in effect right now and their continuity
  - We need to review/validate/start anew our international missionary endeavors (India, Philippines, Vietnam…)
  - We need to deal with the reality in which religious live in isolation in their missions

C/3. The New Evangelization

**Ancient Christian countries need to be re-evangelized**

- We need to learn from the example of the first missionaries whom the leaders of the people stood in admiration of
- We need to be more creative in finding new ways to proclaim the gospel to young people
- We need to concentrate on working with the young – something that Fr. Dehon typically did
- We need to focus on new fields: internet, education, university life, politics, economics…
- We need to take the gospel to the over-crowded suburbs (new poor, AIDs victims, drug addicts, marginal people of all kinds…)
- We need to provide on-going formation to lay people and take the Dehonian Family more seriously
- We need to work for an intense instruction on the Social Doctrine of the Church
- PART TWO -

Important Discussion Topics for the General Chapter

Up to this point we have presented the suggestions that came from the various entities of the congregation as responses to the questions we sent by way of preparation for the XXII SCJ General Chapter. We cannot realistically treat every item, because the very nature of an Ordinary General Chapter is prescriptive (elections, examination and updating of juridical texts, the status of the congregation, future development planning…).

Consequently – after discussing the matter among ourselves and the outgoing General Administration – we feel we can determine certain pillars or weight-bearing columns; they thus give a certain concreteness to the general them of the Chapter and together are able to serve as the basis for certain action directions or orientations that the chapter delegates themselves can individuate and approve since they will be the work for the next six years.

FOCUS

1. **Christ at the Center.** This chapter intends to accentuate the central place that the Heart of Christ holds in our spirituality, our fraternal life, our apostolates. As “ardent lovers of Christ” we will have something to communicate to the world that is both interesting and indispensable. Without this “living flame” that burns in our hearts and spreads out from us, we run the risk of being very actively dynamic but without any soul, doers of deeds as managers but not as apostles or martyr witnesses, individuals who operate on their own rather than as passion-filled, alive and attractive communities.

2. **Fraternal Life.** This is our first and most important apostolic task. It needs talking about because for a religious it is the essential matter (like water for a fish…). From this basis, people will know that we are disciples of the Lord in the form of the Dehonian charism. It is not enough to be merely “generic hired hands”; we need to become workers specialized in building “the Kingdom of God in souls and in societies”.

3. **The Dehonian Face, Specifically SCJ.** Being “specifically SCJ” is a matter that should occupy first place, whether we live it in our fraternal community, or in holding it out to others in our apostolates, beginning with our parishes (we cannot be simple “diocesan priests” – often recurred in response to our questionnaire). To be such means training, deepening, searching for the same so that we can find ways to re-appropriate and re-establish our “Dehonianism”

4. **Missions, Internationality, New Fields.** The last General Chapter treated this matter as did the General Conference of Warsaw in a special way. The missio ad gentes is, in effect, the Dehonian DNA. Missions are not only those in classic mission territories; they are found in new arenas, new fields that need to be found out and contacted. We need internationality; we need to discover it and plan for it whether for the continuation of a missio ad gentes or for the new evangelization required for countries that have been Christian since ancient times.

5. **The On-going Formation Process.** (formation for formation directors and local superiors). If we do not engage in a process of constant, on-going learning and training it will not be possible for us to pass through the tornado-like changes taking place today without being overwhelmed. Seeing what the various industries invest in training their people should convince us that this is serious. We need to make sure there is a continuity of training and education in personal growth (both initial and on-going) with special attention given to formation directors and local superiors so they can be of assistance with wisdom drawn from life experience.
6. **Youth and Vocations Ministry.** We are concerned with youth because they are at once a frontier and our future. Fr. Dehon always kept his eye on them. If the church ever lost the working class, learning and science, feminists, it cannot risk losing young people. Hence we must speak of them not because they are useful “to us” but because they are important “of themselves”. **Vocational ministry** is exceptionally important to us and we need to have the courage to set before the young the consecrated life, making ourselves into “talent scouts” and walking with them on the way.

7. **Financial Self-sufficiency, the Common Burse, Self-Financing.** Financial resources are important for our work and the development of the congregation as it is found on various continents, even as we acknowledge well-known and growing economic disparity. Any reflection on self-maintenance, sharing of goods (common burse, international solidarity) and on “poverty for the mission” is an important task for a chapter, whether we look back or whether we look ahead by identifying new and financially sustainable paths in the future.

8. **Making Decisions and Follow-up.** In church circles we are not accustomed to make plans (objectives, schedules, etc…), but we are even less ready to initiate and maintain systematic follow-up programs. This is what a chapter does: we examine, we plan, but we also need to put into place schedules and methods for checking implementation of our plans and any decisions that we make. Making this aspect a part of our effort is an opportune and important aspect of our chapter work for the congregation.

**NEW WORK METHODS**

In concluding this type of *Instrumentum laboris* we want to end with some methodological observations; the chapter will continue to make use of traditional methods (discussion and approval of any juridical texts, etc…); but in addition some new ones. This is not the moment to introduce them. Let us say only that – as part of preparation for the chapter – it will be important to begin a dynamic that:
- helps every chapter participant to become involved
- avoids generic lectures and theoretical reflections
- is functional and aimed at reaching the real problems head on
- in order to come to concrete orientations and action directives for the next six years

We wish each one a positive experience in their discernment and decisions. The pre-chapter commission also wishes each one the best for their stay in Rome and for their work in service to the Kingdom of God, for the benefit of the congregation and the church for the world of today.

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