



MISSION FOR THE REIGN OF THE SACRED HEART:

ECUADOR – FIRST PERIOD (1887–1889)

Letters between Father Dehon and the first missionaries in Ecuador

Lett. 1. Léon Dehon to Alexis de Sarachaga

[Saint-Quentin], June 8, 1887

I read Fr. Matovelle's article in the Bulletin with great interest. I share the ideas of this man of God. Our small, nascent congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart would love to exercise its zeal in countries where the faith is suffering because of the clergy. Devotion to the clergy is our goal. We would gladly go and found clerical schools in South America a little later on. We are still few in number: about sixty, of whom twenty-five are priests. You are at the source of the graces of the Sacred Heart in Paray-le-Monial; pray a little for us. Send us some vocations when opportune. Ask the Sacred Heart for the grace that we might found a clerical school in Paray and another one in Ars. These are two sources of priestly graces. Ask for the prayers of Fr. Matovelle and his committee on our behalf. Please accept the expression of my religious respect,

L. Dehon

Lett. 2. Léon Dehon to Julio Matovelle

Saint-Quentin, October 10, 1887

Our goal is indeed the same: the Reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in souls and in societies, especially in priestly souls. Merging seems desirable to me: 1° because the goal is urgent and it is good to work towards it immediately and in agreement across both continents; 2° France and the Republic of Ecuador are the two nations that have a special grace to work for the Reign of the Sacred Heart; 3° our collaboration will bring you closer to Rome, where later must be the center of the work. Would you accept a change of name? We are eager to have the Sacred Heart in our name. Baron de Sarachaga will send you excerpts of our Constitutions. You will see that they are almost identical to yours. We are ready to make a few modifications to them, for example, to place greater emphasis on the goal of the social Reign of Jesus Christ. It seems to me that the practical means for the merging would be for you to send one of your priests here, who would become one of our

councilors and remain in regular correspondence with you. We do not yet have the approval of Rome, but we hope to obtain it soon. It has been requested by nearly thirty bishops. We currently have 26 priests and about 40 novices and scholastics. Another society of priests of the Sacred Heart in the south of France also plans to merge with us. May we soon unite our efforts to hasten the Reign of the Sacred Heart! Let us pray together to Blessed Margaret Mary and to the martyr Garcia Moreno so that they may obtain for us the blessing of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for our projects. Please accept the expression of my religious devotion.

L. Dehon

Let. 3. Léon Dehon to Julio Matovelle

Saint-Quentin, March 31, 1888

The Holy See has just granted us the favor of a decree of praise. Thank the Sacred Heart of Jesus with us. By joining us, you benefit from the same decree. We believe that the merging will be very advantageous for our works. My councilors and I accept your proposal. Your Statutes perfectly match our goal; we will insert them in their entirety into our Constitutions. Our goal is to respond to the desires expressed by Our Lord to Blessed Margaret Mary. We want to live the Eucharistic life, a life of love, of reparation, of prayer, of thanksgiving. As for reparation, we offer it more particularly to Our Lord for consecrated souls, because He told Blessed Margaret Mary that the infidelities of these souls wound Him more than others. As for the name, we will ask for the name of Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the second approval. Besides, we are already known here under this name of Oblates of the Sacred Heart. I hope the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars will grant it to us. The means you propose for the merging are the best. Send us two students for October or November. They will complete their studies with our students at the Catholic University of Lille. Around the same time, I will send you two priests to begin with. Father Blot's spirit is truly ours as well; we use his book on the Eucharistic Heart. How fortunate you are to have restored the social Reign of Our Lord in Ecuador! It barely exists anymore in our Europe. This great grace will return to us through America. The life of Garcia Moreno is making a great impression in France. It will help us combat liberalism. For the government of the Congregation, we have established until now that the superior general be elected for six years and be re-eligible. Do you insist that the superior serve for life? There are reasons for and against it. I am sharing with you a brief letter from a pious abbot who has written excellent booklets on the life of reparation and immolation. I am eager for our merging to be fully consummated. It will truly be so only after the exchange of subjects. Relations will then be more frequent and easier. In a few months, the two works will be completely unified. Let us therefore be *cor unum et anima una* [one heart and one soul] for the Reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and for His consolation. Please accept my fraternal devotion.

L. Dehon

Let. 4. Irénée Blanc and Gabriel-Marie Grison to Léon Dehon

September 26 [1889]

One would think they had been transported into the midst of a new nation, completely different from that we have lived with until now. In the interior of the country, the different classes of society are easily recognized by their clothing, which is extremely primitive for the poor, dressed only in rags. Here, a better appearance is noticed everywhere: men and women are clean and decently dressed. There is perhaps less religion here than in the interior, except however with regard to devotion towards certain saints, or certain traditional feasts, for which they prepare with a solemn novena. People come from afar to make the novena, which ends with a general communion and a public procession. One must have great indulgence for these poor people during other times of the year, because of material circumstances and customs. There are so few priests! The churches are so far away and the roads so disastrous that religious practices are becoming increasingly rare. It is a great misfortune, for the people are simple and good, although lacking in education. One finds, alongside the corruption that affects the commercial and cosmopolitan class in various degrees, a truly angelic purity; it is not rare – we were told – to see young people of eighteen or twenty who have kept their baptismal innocence. The isolation in which each family lives is a safeguard against many perils for these poor populations. It would suffice to bring the common people to approach the sacraments, even just three or four times a year, to maintain them permanently in a state of grace. But alas! The priests are so rare! *Parvuli petierunt panem et non erat qui frangeret eis.* [The little ones asked for bread, and there was no one to break it for them.] Many people find themselves in the material impossibility of approaching the sacraments. You will hardly believe what I am about to say, and yet nothing could be more exact: there are towns of three or four thousand souls that only have Mass once a month, and in certain villages, a priest has not been seen for ten years! In Manabí, even more than in the interior, one can say: *Messis multa, operarii pauci* [The harvest is plentiful, the laborers are few]. Valiant workers, ardent and intrepid youth, come then to join us. The harvest awaits you, abundant and magnificent. You will gather it with joy for the greater glory of the Heart of Jesus. The Bishop inaugurated a new system of missions this year that is producing excellent results. During the holidays, he assigns the nuns to go to the villages to prepare children and even adults for confession and communion. Then, he goes himself with one or two priests to hear confessions, to give communion, and to administer confirmation. A few days after our arrival, he invited us to accompany one of these missions. The Benedictine Sisters of Bahia and two Sisters of Charity from Portoviejo had prepared little girls, little boys, and even a few adults to receive the sacraments, so that we had nothing else to do but to hear confessions. These good people were so happy to have the sisters that they wanted to keep them. But I must conclude a letter that is already too long. May our dear little apostolic students from Fayet, Sittard, and Clairefontaine pray fervently for the missionaries, while waiting to come and join us. We all embrace you, dear and venerated Father, asking you to accept our respectful affection *in Corde Jesu et Mariae.*

I. Blanc, G. Grison SCJ