

# From Exile to Glory: Bishop Peter Schumacher, C.M. (1839-1902)

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## **Introduction**

This article is not presented as a biography of Bishop Peter Schumacher, C.M., the second bishop of Portoviejo (Ecuador). Rather this essay is written as a pious remembrance of a venerable confrere and missionary. In his impenetrable ways, God led Fr. Schumacher on a courageous and self-sacrificing journey, making use of his meritorious life and enviable vocation. God led him from the arid desert, lacking in ideals (a place where we all find ourselves at different times if we become content with mediocrity) to the joy and fulfillment of imperishable glory, a glory to which he had always aspired.

Fr. Schumacher understood the psalmist's idea of "the perfect way" (Ps 18:31) and this led him to meditate on another passage: "The Lord guides the humble to justice... he teaches them the way" (Ps 25:9-10). This reflection enabled him to accept the consequences that flow from prayer centered on the mystery of the Son of God made man, who revealed the essence of his being and his action when he said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6).

## **1. His home and childhood**

On the shores of the Rhine River in Germany, on the road from Cologne to Aachen, there is a beautiful town called Kerpen (formerly known as Kerpen the Royal). It has a long history of wars with its neighbors, some ending in victory, others in defeat, the outcome being signaled by the hoisting of the flag of the conqueror: German, French, Spanish, as the case might be. A reminder of these events was seen in the fact that the ancient mansions were always occupied by the conquerors or princes who peacefully relaxed there.

On 14 September 1839, Peter Schumacher was born in the Christian home of Theodor Schumacher and Christina Niessen. He

was one of nine children; five died prematurely and four survived: Heinrich (the third child who was given this name), later married; Gerhard became a diocesan priest; Peter and Gertrud, twins, were called to the Vincentian Congregations, Peter to the Congregation of the Mission and Gertrud to the Daughters of Charity. The last child was born in 1844, immediately baptized and then died. Because he was not baptized in the parish church we do not know his name. According to his parents, he was the most beautiful of all the children.

Besides the loving and dedicated formation that he received from his parents and from the favorable spiritual environment in which he lived, Peter also benefited from the guidance and teaching of Jakob Wilhelm Statz, a prestigious educator at that time who knew how to win the hearts of young people through love, selflessness and understanding. All of these qualities enabled him to share his knowledge with these young people and form them for life. In this setting, young Peter was ready to receive his First Communion at the age of 12. Besides this "Eucharistic seed" there was also a "missionary seed" planted within him. The Vincentians, who had recently established themselves in Cologne and were attached to the Motherhouse in Paris from 2 July 1851, preached a mission in Kerpen. The people responded very positively and their Catholic fervor was reanimated. Later in life, this seed would bear fruit in the life of Peter.

Meanwhile, responding to his father's desire and the advice of Mr. Uhle, Peter, at the age of 13, went to Perl, Trier, to begin his initial studies in pharmacy and there began secondary studies. His young age, however, prevented him from entering this specialty and it was then that he was able to freely express his own desire: "They want me to be a pharmacist but I will not be one... be at peace though, I have decided to study theology, like my brother Gerhard" (he was preparing for the diocesan priesthood).<sup>1</sup>

Peter went to Münstereifel to continue his studies, with the possibility of later entering the university in Bonn. When Mr. Uhle, a family friend, entered the Congregation of the Mission in 1853, Peter became convinced of his Vincentian vocation. He dedicated much time in reflection and consultation with his spiritual director. In Cologne, he lived with the Vincentians during a period of discernment and later the Congregation accepted his petition to make his novitiate in Paris.

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<sup>1</sup> LEONARDO DAUTZENBERG, C.M., *Ilmo. Sr. Pedro Schumacher. Obispo de Portoviejo*, Translation by Dr. Wilfrido Loor (Vicar General of Msgr. Schumacher), Editorial Ecuatoriana, Quito, Ecuador, 1968, p. 19.

## 2. His missionary journey 1857-1902

### 2.1. Formation period

On 6 October 1857, Peter Schumacher, at the age of 18, began his missionary journey in Paris. There he entered the Internal Seminary (the novitiate) of the Congregation of the Mission, located at the Motherhouse. This was the foundational stage of his Vincentian vocation and he entered this stage of formation with a deep sense of responsibility and commitment. His missionary life emerges from the silence of this period of his life and we find documentation of this fact in the letters that he wrote to his family beginning on 5 October 1857. In this letter we find the following spontaneous affirmation: "I feel very happy, in fact I believe that there is no one else on earth more blessed than I."<sup>2</sup> This appraisal of his situation is complimented by many others which filled the letters that he wrote to his family.

Within the Congregation the data are more limited and discreet, as often happens, and one must take that into account if one would like to make a deeper analysis. "One knows Mr. Schumacher through his letters."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is good to consider the evaluation of one of his companions, who would later become the Superior General, Antoine Fiat: "His conduct in the novitiate always edified me; we singled him out as a model, and in reality he truly was one."<sup>4</sup> We can add to this Fr. Chinchon's (who was Novice Master at the Motherhouse for 26 years) recognized quality as formator. During this period of formation, it is important to point out some events that stimulated him and deepened his commitment:

- On 29 August 1859, his brother Gerhard was ordained a diocesan priest. Unfortunately his ministry was brief because he died on 27 May 1873;
- In October 1859, Peter Schumacher pronounced his holy vows;
- On 3 June 1861, in Cologne, and not in Paris, he received the order of subdiaconate and his family was able to participate in this event;
- On 14 June 1862, he was ordained a priest in Paris. A retired bishop from Latin America presided at this

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, cf. pp. 24-26.

<sup>4</sup> San EZEQUIEL MORENO, Bishop of Pasto (Colombia): "Funeral eulogy" in the Cathedral of Pasto (2 August 1902).

ceremony which was done very quietly. This permitted him a greater intimacy with God and allowed him to reiterate, in a peaceful way, his missionary desire.

## **2.2. Missionary in Chile**

This was his first assignment in the Congregation and it gave him great satisfaction. On 2 November 1862, with another missionary and 20 Daughters of Charity, among them his sister Gertrud, he began his journey across the Atlantic. Leaving from the port of Le Havre, they arrived at Cape Horn on 25 November and at Valparaíso on 11 January 1863. The sisters remained there but Fr. Schumacher and his companion continued their journey on 18 January to “La Serena,” the Vincentian missionary center. From there they traveled throughout Chile on their apostolic journeys. He remained in Chile for six years. He loved this mission and dedicated himself to the work there with all his energy and love. Unfortunately, he became ill and exhausted physically by the work. He returned to Europe in 1869 to recuperate his health.

## **2.3. Montpellier**

While in Europe, he spent some time in Kerpen with his parents and took four weeks rest in Cologne, in the house of the Vincentians. Upon his return to Paris, in the fall of 1869, his superiors assigned him to the seminary in Montpellier. There he dedicated himself to the formation and teaching of the seminarians, preaching spiritual retreats and other ministries. We are able to summarize his experience there with the words: “He was a sick man in search of health, but he worked like a healthy man.” Despite the care received and being in a good area of the country, he did not feel well in France: he suffered during the French-German War of 1870. Furthermore, his sights and his heart were on Chile and he sought the beloved “corner” of his service to the poor.<sup>5</sup> This yearning lasted for three years.

## **2.4. Quito - Ecuador**

In 1870 the first Vincentians arrived in Quito: Frs. Claverie, Lafay and Stappers. They awaited other missionaries in order to begin work at the seminary. As so often happens, and this particularly for Fr. Schumacher, the plans of God are not always in accord with the desires of men and so in order to respond to the

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<sup>5</sup> DAUTZENBERG, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

persistent pleas of the Archbishop of Quito, the superiors in Paris, instead of Fr. Schumacher going back to Chile, decided to send him to Quito, to take on the direction and new organization of the Archdiocesan Seminary. On 10 September 1872, accompanied by Fr. Gaudefrey, he arrived at his new destination. His work at the seminary would prove to be very difficult and very complicated.

The seminary was under the direction of the Jesuit community and was joined to a school which they also directed. This presented difficulties in maintaining discipline and also provided few vocations. This marked the prelude to a tense struggle against adversity in all its nuances: independence, vocations, economic problems, and a disastrous physical plant (on this matter, Fr. Foing, the Visitor, said: "This is an impossible place"). Indeed when describing the building that they took over and which was the former convent and novitiate of St. Francis, it was said that this place was very humid, lacked lighting and adequate fresh air, had uncomfortable living quarters and common rooms, etc. But providential resources were not lacking and, through human intervention, fundamental solutions were achieved little by little:

- Unconditional and continuing support from the Archbishop and the Papal Delegate;
- Effective and timely help from Gabriel García Moreno, President of the country and a great Catholic;
- Tireless concern of Fr. Foing, Visitor of the Province of Central America;
- The surprising organizational skill of Fr. Schumacher, who, besides being a good priest and a learned and competent teacher, was also an able carpenter and mason.

He realized that the deficiencies could not be overcome "with a few small repairs," and so he set in motion a tremendous work: the construction of a new building for the seminarians (major and minor). He undertook this work with a determined resolve and happily he was able to achieve his goal. With reason then, *La voz del pueblo [The Voice of the People]*, noted in 1873: "Fr. Schumacher knew how to multiply in an admirable way resources and strength; in his hand one was like ten... besides his intelligence, activity and constancy... his selflessness and heroic sacrifice deserve our gratitude, not only our words of gratitude but a gratitude that is expressed through action and commitment."<sup>6</sup>

It is impossible to go into further detail here. Rather this brief summary of his work on behalf of the Seminary of San José in Quito

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<sup>6</sup> San EZEQUIEL MORENO, *op. cit.*

enables us to understand that all of this would never have been achieved without an enterprising spirit driven by love. Yet even more important and deeper was the spiritual work that Fr. Suchmacher carried out during his 12 years in the formation of future priests.

The people of Quito had a very clear concept of his gifts as an educator and formator of the clergy. When they saw him in the street, they pointed him out saying: "Look, the man who gives us such good priests." Through a gift of God, he was very friendly and understood the young men. Everyone admired and loved him, but they also knew he was inflexible in matters of morality and righteousness. He demanded dignity and respect, discipline, responsibility and study from the seminarians, but he also knew, when the moment was right, to give them time for rest and relaxation.

In the classroom, his philosophical and theological lessons flowed with a marvelous clarity, since he knew how to teach. His most valuable and significant lessons, however, sprang forth from his priestly and missionary heart, as a living teaching, as a breath of prayer and holiness, of poverty, humility, charity, as nourishment of ideals in the young aspirants to the priesthood. Covering all the aspects that Fr. Schumacher took into account as a formator in Quito, he presents us with simplicity and as a synthesis that which he communicated to the new Superior General, Fr. Antoine Fiat, in a letter dated 8 January 1879: "With respect to the two seminarians in Quito, I believe it is my duty in conscience to inform you that the spirit that animates them is a very comforting one. Our major seminarians are outstanding in piety and their good will far surpasses our expectations."

Three significant events occurred during his 12 years in Quito and though he was not directly involved in them, they affected him greatly:

1. The vile assassination of the president, Dr. Gabriel García Moreno in December 1875. He was a generous benefactor of the seminary and a good friend of Fr. Schumacher.
2. The sacrilegious poisoning of Bishop Checa, the Archbishop of Quito, in the cathedral on 30 March 1877 during one of the celebrations of Holy Week. This was a difficult moment for Fr. Schumacher because he and the archbishop were joined together by bonds of close collaboration and mutual esteem.
3. He was particularly affected by the death of Fr. Boré, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, in June 1878. As a result of this event, a General Assembly was convoked to elect his successor. Since Fr. Foing, the

Visitor of Central America was unable to participate in the Assembly, Fr. Schumacher, as Vice-Visitor, traveled to Paris.

## **2.5. Bishop of Portoviejo**

The 12 years Fr. Schumacher dedicated himself to the service of the Church and the Congregation of the Mission in Quito made him an outstanding ecclesiastical figure in Ecuador. Today, when we historically examine the many good works that he accomplished, we are aware that the information that was sent to Rome showed that he possessed the necessary and admirable qualities that led Pope Leo XIII to name him the new bishop of Portoviejo. This nomination occurred in 1884 and he replaced Bishop Luis Tola, who was the first bishop of that diocese from 1871.

The Diocese of Portoviejo was comprised of two provinces, Manabí and Esmeraldas, provinces located between Quito and Guayaquil. The nomination of Fr. Schumacher as bishop was a great loss for the Church in Quito. But the needs of Portoviejo, an extensive diocese with few priests, required a good pastor. Therefore these realities were more urgent than the sincere desires of the people of Quito who wanted him to remain there.

He went to Portoviejo and was received with great applause from many good people who wished him success. At the same time, however, some clerics feared him to be an "Achilles heel," one who would challenge their lack of discipline and earthly lifestyle; thus they felt it was a mistake to name a foreigner as their bishop. Fr. Schumacher was ordained a bishop in the cathedral of Quito on 31 May 1885, the feast of the Blessed Trinity. Archbishop José Ignacio Ordoñez presided at this ceremony. The new bishop spoke of a curious detail: on 15 June 1851, he had received his First Communion on the feast of the Blessed Trinity, and on 15 June 1862, he was ordained a priest also on the feast of the Blessed Trinity.

Despite the long distance between Germany and Ecuador, his family was always very close to him affectively and he loved them very much. His family was able to be present for his Episcopal ordination and he considered this to be a true gift from heaven. His brother Heinrich presented him with a pectoral cross that he wore until his death. His sister Gertrud, a Daughter of Charity (María Luisa), who had gone to Chile with a group of 20 sisters and who had not seen her brother in 15 years, was in Quito from August 1884 and accompanied him at his ordination.

a) *Bishop Schumacher's initial contact with the diocese was his first pastoral letter dated 24 June 1885*

Today we are able to appreciate and analyze the thought that went into the conception and implementation of a true "program of governance." He saw obedience to the Divine will as the origin of his mandate to renounce his beloved work as a formator and become the tiller of soil in a new land. Mistrustful of his own strength but trusting in Divine assistance, he spoke with simplicity about himself as a member of the Congregation of the Mission that set him afire with missionary zeal. He greeted the people of his diocese warmly: "As I greet you today, for the first time, as the pastor of your souls.... I have no other title nor merit except that of knowing I have been sent to you by the successor of St. Peter, the voice and interpreter of the Divine Will."

Later he presents his program as necessities and tasks:

1. The lack of priests and the need to supplement the existing clergy with others;
2. The urgent need to visit the different places of the diocese;
3. The absence of religious communities and the need to bring them here to work in the area of education and in the missionary centers. But, there was also a need to see women's communities established in the diocese, dedicated to charitable works, e.g., consoling and comforting the sick and those who suffer from poverty, caring for abandoned children;
4. The need to create, immediately, some educational institutions;
5. The need to intensify devotion to Mary, the Immaculate Mother, placing before her all our desires and hopes:
  - May her name resound in the depths of the jungle, in the huts of the poor and in the lavish mansions of the wealthy;
  - May her temples and shrines, better than trails blazed with blades, indicate the happy road to peace.

In light of this valuable guide of his pastoral work for the Diocese of Portoviejo, and strictly following his outline, we can:

- recognize what he did;
- find explanations for what he could not do or others destroyed;
- discover the truth or falsehood of the cruel accusations of his enemies;

- recognize as well the state, revolutionary or Masonic machinations that worked against him and that, little by little, pervaded the environment, threatened him with death, and, in the end, ostracized him and forced him into exile.

b) *Let us call to mind some facts*

- Bishop Schumacher was truly tireless in his search for more priests. He looked for these both within the country and abroad, especially in Europe. He knocked on the doors of convents and religious communities (Vincentians, Capuchins, Benedictines, Franciscans, Jesuits, and others). He humbly asked for economic assistance (in the United States he could be seen in the streets begging for alms for his works). The most important and most lasting of his works was the construction of the seminary. Its success is seen in the fact that while there were only nine priests in the diocese at the beginning of his episcopacy, when he left it there were more than 50 priests.
- In the same way he knocked on the doors of the communities of women religious (Daughters of Charity, Benedictines of England and the United States) both in Europe and the United States. While traveling through New York, he met with Fr. Buenaventura, a Capuchin Brother, and spoke to him about the great spiritual needs of the diocese: young children and adolescents deprived of a Christian education for lack of teaching communities of religious. Fr. Buenaventura spoke to him of the Franciscan Sisters in the Convent of Maria Hilf, in Altstätten (Switzerland). The bishop traveled there and spoke with Mother Bernarda Buther who promised to send seven sisters to the mission.
- He obtained from Rome the necessary dispensations for them to leave the Maria Hilf convent and join the diocese of Portoviejo, freeing them even from the norm of observing the cloister. Mother Bernarda Buther and Mother Caridad Brader were among the group of seven sisters who traveled to Ecuador. They left Switzerland on 19 June 1888 and arrived in Mante on 4 August. They settled in Chone and the bishop had a dwelling built for them in the forest. These were heroic women and one of them, a novice, Otmaria Haltmeier, 22 years old, died because of the harsh climate.
- With the help of different communities who generously responded to his calls, he organized real days of charitable works at the service of the poor. He founded a school or a

handicraft institute, properly equipped with tools and work machines. He gave tools to the farmers and personally taught them how to use these tools. While he had an extraordinary gift for knowledge and books, he was also an expert in simple manual labor.

- In Europe he acquired a printing press that enabled him to produce books, messages, pastoral letters (24 in all), timely orientations, defense of the Church's doctrine against the errors of his enemies, a Catholic weekly newspaper, *El Hogar Cristiano [The Christian Home]*, which provided a wonderful way for him to communicate with and orient the diocese.

All these pastoral options set in motion caused hatred and indignation among the anticlerical groups that were inspired by revolutionary ideas. They looked for ways to rid themselves of this annoying person. They threatened him with death and while the bishop miraculously escaped the attacks, the road to exile appeared before him. Particularly terrible was the revolution of Alfaro, which set fire in the territories where Bishop Schumacher labored and which aroused outrageous calumnies against the prelate. His works and goods were expropriated, as occurred with the school which the bishop built and maintained and which later was called the Alfaro School, with real cynicism. After having completed ten years of pastoral work in Portoviejo, the bishop was obliged to flee to Quito where he arrived on 20 July 1895, with a broken heart and in need of finding tranquility somewhere else.

## **2.6. Colombia was the place [Túquerres - Samaniego]**

Accompanied by his good, faithful priests, he traveled at night to Colombia. That night, Quito became an open door to exile.<sup>7</sup>

Given the insecure conditions that were present and increasing, the Franciscan Sisters, whom Bishop Schumacher brought from Switzerland, established a house in Túquerres, at 3,100 meters above sea level. There Mother Caridad Brader was named Director General of the schools. She arrived there on 10 March 1893 with six other sisters and with the blessing of the people. When the bishop left Ecuador, Mother Bernarda Buther and the rest of her companions also had to leave. Mother Bernarda preferred to continue her journey toward the Atlantic coast of Colombia, advising Mother Caridad Brader to establish one group independently in Túquerres, while she

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<sup>7</sup> Fr. ÁNGEL AVINOÑET, Capuchin, *Biografía de Monseñor Schumacher*, pp. 135-171.

herself did the same in Cartagena. As a result of this mutual decision, two Franciscan communities were born: the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary Immaculate in southern Colombia and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary Our Help in northern Colombia. Both have continued in existence and the Church has benefited greatly from their apostolic labor.

The bishop remained in Túquerres, teaching theology to the young seminarians who had come with him from Quito. The altitude and cold weather affected him adversely and he remained there only six months. In December, he was offered the opportunity to preach a mission in the Valley of Samaniego. He found the climate more agreeable and the people very welcoming and obliging, so he decided to take up residence there and with the blessing of the Bishop of Pasto, today St. Ezequiel Moreno. The bishop entrusted to him the pastoral care of the Valley of Samaniego, in these terms: "Your Excellency, you are the proper bishop of these places." From that moment until his death seven years later, Colombia was his new homeland and Samaniego the land of his apostolic labor and also the fortunate land of his burial.

Tireless in his pastoral activity, he became a fervent apostle of the sacrament of Reconciliation and very concerned about offering timely solutions to the moral problems that confronted families as well as individuals in their personal lives. He opened a school for young underprivileged boys whom he orientated toward a priestly vocation. With regard to social projects, he collaborated with others in realizing his dream of providing drinking water to Samaniego. He also was the driving force behind the construction of bridges and roads. He organized a musical group to enhance the worship services and to provide entertainment for the people. With his own money he bought musical instruments in Belgium and he taught people how to play them. All of this, as well as his great goodness, earned him the respect and love of the people of Samaniego who considered his presence among them a true gift from God and who in turn gifted him as a sign of their gratitude. On the other hand, his enemies, who forced him into exile, continued to besiege him. The people of Samaniego, however, remained alert. Nevertheless, one day his house was broken into and money and some of the musical instruments were stolen.

## **2.7. The final Stage of a journey well traveled**

In 1902, on the feast of Saint Peter, the people of the area made a pilgrimage to Samaniego to pay homage to their beloved pastor. Despite his pain, he received them with great emotion and profound humility. A few days later, faithful to his pastoral commitments, he went to a house where four people were ill with typhoid fever. He

heard their confessions and prescribed a treatment for their illness. He, however, became infected. Five days later, on 15 July 1902, at 10:00 p.m., when nothing more could be done, he surrendered his spirit to God. He was attended by two Franciscan sisters who had arrived there from Túquerres. These sisters, accompanied by the Superior of the Capuchin Fathers and two other priests, united themselves to a grieving people who loved their pastor and solemnly, but humbly and simply, buried him in the way he had asked.

## **2.8. Analyzing a spirituality that never dies**

Bishop Peter Schumacher died in Samaniego (Colombia) at the age of 63, but his spirituality remains alive because we have studied him, and we “take him out of unmerited anonymity.” Without a doubt he was a person very privileged both humanly and spiritually with a true universality of gifts and aptitudes. Within his slender body, elegant face, blonde hair and blue eyes, we find a spirit with many values, a broad vision and courage of steel. There was a certain magnetism about him that attracted others to him. As a man of God and as a psychologist, he was esteemed as an illustrious and beloved formator. He communicated a vision of hope for the future and was rooted in sound doctrine. Yet he was never boastful but rather humble and simple. He clothed himself simply, in a frayed cassock, and often said: “On many occasions, poverty is the greatest wealth” and “I ought to be content with what is necessary, and few things are necessary.” He was a man of faith and had a special love for the Virgin Mary.

We might ask, why has his canonization process become bogged down? Is it our fault, or Rome’s, that we are not moving on this? The souls of many close friends accompany him in heaven: the saintly bishop Ezequiel Moreno, Blessed Mother Bernarda Buther and Blessed Mother Caridad Brader. Now is the time to promote the cause of Bishop Schumacher, either from Germany or in Rome or from Ecuador and Colombia.

I could find no better words to conclude this lengthy reflection than those spoken by St. Ezequiel Moreno, Bishop of Pasto, on 9 August 1902 in his cathedral, on the occasion of a memorial service celebrated for this friend and servant:<sup>8</sup>

*We find ourselves before a tomb that reminds us of a man who no longer exists, yet he remains with us; a man who is no longer counted among the living, yet he lives; a man who is dead, yet he speaks to us. Who is he?... Bishop Schumacher*

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<sup>8</sup> San EZEQUIEL MORENO, *op. cit.*

*will not die of old age, overwhelmed by suffering and long illness; he dies out of love. The deceased still speaks refuting his slanderers with his admirable virtues, with his good works on behalf of the people, with his doctrine, with his precious death.... The deceased still speaks and encourages all good people not to fear persecution in the defense of the truth.*

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