

Fourth Bishop of Guayaquil
1884 - 1888

[The most Illustrious and Reverend] Dr. Roberto Maria Del Pozo Marin. S. J.

After the death of the High Pontiff Pius IX, Cardinal Joaquin Pecci was elevated to the Pontifical throne on May 22, 1878 with the title of Leo XIII, and it was he who filled the vacancy which had existed after seven long years² of mourning in the diocese of Guayaquil with the election of the Jesuit R. P Roberto Maria del Pozo Marin, as fourth bishop of Guayaquil.

PERSONALITY OF MONSIGNOR DEL POZO

The most illustrious Señor Del Pozo was the scion of a distinguished family. He was born in Ibarra on the 25th of August 1836 and his parents were Señor Don Manuel del Pozo and Señora Dona Antonieta Marin. From his earliest years the child Roberto Maria evinced modesty devotion and circumspection and was occupied in the service of the altar and of the priesthood.

On February of 1851, he was one of the first who entered the Society of Jesus beginning his religious life with firm steps and with the greatest possible appreciation for the wise teachings of the eminent Jesuit priests, among whom were some who had been expelled by General Jose Hilario Lopez³, President of Columbia, a year before the entry of Roberto Maria.

When he had barely completed a year and a half years of his Novitiate, a decree from the government then kicks him out of his homeland, and at 12 midnight on the 22 of November of 1852 he accompanies some forty of the Sons of St. Ignatius of Loyola into exile who after a long and terrible six month journey arrived in Guatemala where the remaining Jesuit priests expelled from Bogota were waiting for them.

In Guatemala, the youthful Del Pozo delivered his first religious vows on the 30th day of May in 1853 and completed to the satisfaction of the superiors the studies of Humanities and Philosophy together with those of Latin, of Greek and of French and English. Later he was sent to Bogota to manage some secondary education courses, when by virtue of a decree of Señor President Ospina Perez the Society of Jesus was reestablished in Columbia in 1856. When once again, after the triumph of Gen. Tomas Cipriano Mosquera in 1859, the Apostolic Nuncio, priests and religious were expelled from Columbia, the young Jesuit student returned to Guatemala in the company of several priests of his community, on July 31, 1860, where he finished his studies in Theology.

After the triumph of Dr. Gabriel Garcia Moreno as president of Ecuador, this excellent magistrate reestablished the Society of Jesus. Consequently the first group of Jesuit priests arrived here in 1863. The next year another contingent of Spanish, Italian, Columbian and Ecuadorian Fathers arrived having stayed with Father del Pozo in Guatemala when he had been concluding his studies; shortly thereafter he received the Holy Orders reaching to the point of receiving Priestly Ordination.

1 This is a translation of a chapter from a book entitled "Parish Churches of the Archdiocese of Guayaquil" by Luis Arias Altamirano. Monsignor Luis Arias was a Jesuit priest and he served as Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Guayaquil for 30 years. He died in 2011.

2 This mention of "seven long years" is undoubtedly a reference to the fact that prior to the appointment of Roberto M. Del Pozo, Guayaquil had gone without a bishop for seven years. The previous bishop, Bishop Lizarzaburu, had died in 1877 and no replacement had been appointed in the interim.

3 Jose Hilario Lopez was president of Columbia from 1849 to 1853. He "...devoted himself to managing his estates until he was elected president. As chief executive, he carried out a liberal agenda. Education was made more secular, the clergy put on salary, the Jesuits expelled, tithe collection secularized, the ecclesiastical fuero abolished, clerical posts made elective, and Archbishop Manuel José Mosquera exiled. Also, slavery was abolished and legislation aimed at improving the status of women was enacted." -encyclopedia.com

He exercised the priestly ministry in the Republics of Guatemala, San Salvador and Panama. In this last nation, in the company of the Jesuit Father Telesforo Paul, who later became Bishop of Panama and then Archbishop of Santa Fe de Bogota, then sometime later Father del Pozo returned to Ecuador to reside in Guayaquil, in 1876.

The Canon Navarro, after commenting on the return of Father del Pozo to Guayaquil, continues: "Here he deployed his apostolic zeal to the extent that the President of the Republic, Mr. Jose Maria Placido Caamano, presented him to the Holy See for [the role of] Bishop of the Diocese of Guayaquil, and in early 1885 he was consecrated in Panama by his brother and companion the [most illustrious] Prelate Monsignor Telesforo Paul".

Monsignor del Pozo, well known in Guayaquil before being elevated to the Episcopate, worked very hard and lovingly in his Diocese, his feelings having been reciprocated by the beloved parishioners of the diocese, admiring in the Pastor the most zealous Custodian of their lives. He preached indefatigably, as he had done in Central America, spreading admirable light and science everywhere. He fortified the monastic life between the different religious communities [ie: religious orders] in existence at that time, establishing a species of competence among the members who then applied themselves to observing their [monastic] constitutions with more clarity all of which redounded to the spiritual benefit of the faithful.

He cared greatly for the cult of the Cathedral to which he presented a varied set of sacred dresses and objects for worship. Consequently the first group of Jesuit Priests came there in 1863.

DIFFICULTIES ARISING AND END OF HIS ADMINISTRATION

The Dean of las Heras says in his article: "The Government of Monsignor Del Pozo, from the beginning of his Episcopate, for various reasons was very agitated and turbulent. In the spirit of Fraternal Charity which we must show forth for all, we abstain from making any judgment. In April of 1888 he was forced to leave his diocese and homeland."

Leo XIII at some point of his pontificate opened the Vatican Archives to all scholars, and the wise Pontiff demonstrated that the church has nothing to hide. So it was, that even historians and non-Catholic scientists have been able to document themselves using these invaluable sources of religious history.

This explains why, without doubt, the Canon Navarro Jijon without making any judgment or failing to show charity has written in more detail about the painful events surrounding the delicate situation that forced such a meritorious and dignified Prelate to absent himself from his very own Guayaquil.

His voluntary exile was caused by the fact that he had appointed Dr. Miguel Ortega Alcocer to the Canonical Chair in the Cathedral Choir, an appointment that was rejected by the diocesan council on the contention that this appointment was the prerogative of the Holy Father.

Nevertheless, contrary to the will of the councilmen who abandoned their posts upon witnessing his entry, Ortega Alcocer took possession of his canonical seat in the presence of the Spanish Father Salvadores, the Vicar General, the elder Notary of the Curia, the Notary Public, the Secretary Angel Vanoni and the young Francisco paredes Icaza.

Bishop Del Pozo was on Puna Island from the early part of 1888 on a Pastoral Visit as recorded in the archival books of that historic parish while the accession to the Choir Chair by Ortega Alcocer was happening on October 15 of that same year. Vicar Salvadores had ordered the Canon Treasurer Dr. Pedro Pablo Carbo to pay the fees to the new Canon but the treasurer refused, protesting; so Vicar Salvadores proceeded to prosecute him for internal schism. Then Dr. Carbo appealed to the Supreme Court in accordance with the Concordat of that time and upon receiving an extremely impolite official response imposed a fine upon Salvadores and pronounced his court order. The enraged Vicar excommunicated the ministers of the court, extending the excommunication to Dr. Pedro Pablo Carbo, "In consequence a dense population stoned the facade of the Episcopal Palace [ie: the Bishop's Residence] on January 23, 1888 in an effort to mock [or disgrace] Salvadores".

So this is how the painful subsequent incidents of the next day, the 24th, began ...in which a confrontation between the mutinous people shouting "To jail with Neira (Lawyer of the Curia)! Out with Salvadores!" -and the police- resulted in the death of one Peruvian young man and in the grave wounding of some youths, among them a Chilean and a Colombian. On the 25th the city awoke to a state of mourning.

The reader can now well imagine how serious the state of mind of Monsignor Del Pozo was and the anguish that he had endured for these painful acts. This modest prelate who did not want his glory or the vanity of governing his diocese in that state of affairs; he preferred to move away from the episcopal city, and moved to the city of Lima from whence he resigned his Bishopric in 1905; whilst his death occurred on May 5, 1912.

The funeral ceremonies were presided over by the Honorable Apostolic Delegate accompanied by other Prelates of Lima and priests of the secular and regular clergy, as well as a select group of ladies and gentlemen of the cultured and Christian Lima society, in the midst of a simple and serious religious ceremony.

HIS MORAL CHARACTER: Canon Navarro has written thus about the virtuous personality of Monsignor Del Pozo: "Frank in his kindness, without affectation and without duplicity, he had a soul full of Christian benevolence and as the robust and lush palm tree he wished that all the disinherited of fortune could take shelter under it, under the protection of Christian charity; and since he possessed the secret of overcoming obstacles and accepting the ways of the Lord, he achieved with the faith that illuminated his intelligence, with assistance from on high and with the ardent charity that embraced his soul, he managed to effect a state in which the rich, great, and noble ladies shared with poor small commoner girls, founding and organizing with the main ladies of this town, that great, illustrious and fruitful institution called BENEFICENCIA DE SENORAS, because he knew that poor girls suffered and that is why he wanted Christian love to flourish in the heat of tribulation, as a leafy plant that shelters everyone with its shadow such that no one can deny its fruits. How many and how copious are the fruits that beneficial institution has collected, in the years that it has been in existence! How many hundreds of girls have formed under its powerful aegis; how many souls, free from the pitfalls that the world presents at every step, have formed their homes where pure faith and the practical exercises of our holy religion shine."

"In his life, the Honorable Señor Dr. Don Roberto Del Pozo gave lustre to his family, honor to his homeland, glory to God and an example of resignation and magnificence to his parishioners, teaching them practically how each ought to embrace the Cross that the Lord provides him. 'Justus ut palma florebit' " ⁴.

4 Psalm 92: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree"