



Dehonians USA

PRIESTS OF THE SACRED HEART

February 15, 2024

Dear Confreres,

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Faculdade Dehoniana or Dehonian College of Taubaté, we join our Brazilian SCJs of the Brazil São Paulo Province in giving thanks to God for the educational vision of Fr. Leo John Dehon being carried out by committed SCJs in Brazil. I am honored to represent the US Province in taking part in this celebration and contributing to a day of lectures on education and theology from the perspective of our Dehonian charism. These will be for SCJs, faculty, staff, and students of the college. Fr. Carlos Luis Suarez Codorniú, Fr. Stefan Tertünte, and Fr. Raúl Gómez Ruíz are among the guest speakers.

Brazil was one of the first countries Fr. Dehon identified as a mission territory for the congregation. He traveled to Brazil as part of his 1906 South American trip, part of which was to visit the missionaries and give a conference on the Sacred Heart to the Benedictines of Rio de Janeiro. I have wondered how Fr. Dehon became interested in Brazil and why he chose to send missionaries there. Why Brazil? I decided to do a little research to learn more.

In the circular letter dated December 14th, 1993, Fr. Virginio Bressanelli, the Superior General at the time, and Fr. Silvino V. Kunz, General Councilor, wrote about the canonical visit and the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of our Dehonian presence in Brazil.

They wrote that the primary motivation for the first SCJs to go to Brazil was Fr. Dehon's desire to put his followers in the factories of Dr. Menezes, who had sent Fr. Dehon many invitations. Dr. Menezes sought to replicate the apostolic work taking place at Val-de-Bois (*Dehoniana* 1997/2). Fr. Bressanelli and Fr. Kunz did not provide additional details about how Dr. Menezes met Fr. Dehon or our apostolic work at Val-de-Boi in the letter.



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As Fr. James Schroeder explained, housing was provided for factory workers. Chaplains would “go to the people” who had to work long hours for low wages in poor conditions to provide them with catechism and spiritual and sacramental support. Due to long working hours, the workers had little time for family and their faith. They worked in hot, poorly ventilated, and noisy environments, which affected their health and well-being. Additionally, the factory workers lived in degrading housing conditions, often in crowded dwellings that lacked basic sanitation. Fr. Dehon was appalled by these conditions and took it upon himself to challenge the factory owners to improve both working and housing conditions. He sent several priests to these workers because he was worried about the lives of “those whose dignity was being exploited and degraded by the spread of industrialization” (Ledure, *The Spirit and Life of Leo John Dehon*, 6).

Val-de-Bois was the site of a textile factory in which Fr. Dehon collaborated with Mr. Leo Harmel to create a positive model of social initiatives for workers. While on a fact-finding trip to France, Dr. Carlos Alberto Menezes (1855-1904), a textile factory owner, discovered a Christian-owned factory in Val-de-Bois that had a chaplaincy that was entrusted to the SCJs. The working conditions in this Christian-owned factory were significantly different from those in other factories. Dr. Menezes wanted to do something similar to Val-de-Bois in northern Brazil. It was during this trip that he met Fr. Dehon and they stayed in contact with each other. In response to Dr. Menezes’ request, Fr. Dehon sent the first SCJ to northern Brazil in 1893.



Fr. Dehon with early missionaries in Brazil

In 2003, the South Brazil Province, founded by German SCJs, was divided into the Brazil São Paulo Province (BSP) and the Brazil Meridional Province (BRM). Brazil also has another province (Brazil Recife; BRE) and two districts (Maranhão and Mato Grosso). Presently, the Brazil São Paulo Province is among the largest entities in the congregation, with more than 200 members. Fr. Rafael Querobin and Fr. Fabio dos Santos are two SCJs from the BSP Province serving in the US Province. The BSP Province profile is characterized by a strong commitment to the parish

apostolate, vocation work, and formation. For the parish apostolate, the province is committed to mission *ad gentes* in impoverished and difficult communities.

Faculdade Dehoniana is one of the BSP Province's apostolates. The first theology class was held there on February 15, 1924, and included SCJ students from Germany. Work for the establishment of the school began with a request from Bishop Dom Epaminondas Nunes D'Avila e Silva, who, in 1913, asked Fr. Dehon to send religious to teach in his seminary. Fr. Dehon asked the German SCJs to consider the bishop's proposal. They responded positively, but the project was delayed because of World War I. It was resumed in 1919 with the arrival of the first Dehonians in Taubaté to start the building project. Today, the school educates students and forms seminarians from different Brazilian SCJ entities, dioceses, and religious communities. It offers undergraduate and graduate courses in Theology, Philosophy, Economics and Management, and more.

Discussions have begun to take place regarding the possibility of collaboration between the Faculdade Dehoniana and Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. This could include a scholar exchange program where SCJs from Brazil would teach or present at SHSST. I am hoping that the scheduled meeting with the General Superior, Fr. Levi Dos Anjos Ferreira, General Councilor, the BSP provincial superior, and school representatives during the centennial celebration will lead to some fruitful outcomes for both of our institutes.

Let us pray for the continued success of Faculdade Dehoniana through the intercession of Fr. Dehon.

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "V. J. J. J." with a stylized flourish at the end.

P.S. I am grateful to Fr. Emerson Ruiz of the BSP Province, Fr. James Schroeder, and Fr. Rafael Querobin for providing me with valuable information for this letter.