

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Circular 467

In Memoriam
Brother José
Cervantes Hernández



General Council
Rome, Italy

Circular 467

April 2013

**Brother José
Cervantes Hernández**



4 February 1929 – 7 September 2012

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

General Council

Rome, Italy

Brothers of the Christian Schools

Via Aurelia, 476

Rome, Italy

In the foothills of the Sierra Nevada at the base of Iztacíhuatl the town of Huejotzingo has prospered from ancient times. Amongst the numerous villages situated within its jurisdiction is to be found Santa Ana Xalmimilulco, the village where the Hernández Cervantes family occupied a family farm and where God blessed the Christian home composed of Francisco Cervantes Varela and of Leonor Hernández Munive with the birth of José on 4 February 1929. They had him baptised without delay in the church of the San Miguel friary at the commune head-quarters. The friary was built in 1524 just one year after the arrival of the first twelve Franciscans in New Spain led by Fray Martín de Valencia. His birthplace was the prophetic sign of the educational and evangelising work that Brother José would accomplish following the example of these 12 first evangelisers and educators of the indigenous people of Mexico.

He spent his early years between the family farm and the town of Puebla de los Angeles beginning his studies at the Colegio Benavente which had opened its doors in 1933, renewing in this way the presence of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in their Mexican founding cradle.

During his years of primary classes several Brothers made a deep impression on the soul of this child, amongst them Brothers Mariano Ramirez, José Manuel Ramirez and Brother Salvador Pérez, inspector at the time, who remained his friend right up to the end of his life. By their enthusiasm and dedication they inspired José, awaking in him a religious vocation – he made reference to this himself especially with regard to Brothers Mariano and Salvador.

Religious formation

*An adventure of listening and of Faith,
in the steps of the Lord...*

José made his way to the Junior Novitiate of Tacubaya where he arrived 6 September 1941. In this house he was to have two illustrious formators as Director – Brother Emilio Bautista Elcoro, a man of great finesse and a real formator who had the way of developing a convivial and open atmosphere among his junior novices. He utilised teaching skills and the scouting movement to obtain brilliant results in formation. The following year a new formator who was enthusiastic and devoted, Brother Victor Bertrand, forged and strengthened among these young persons high ideals of devotedness and commitment to the Lord giving the group a dynamic quality. José participated actively for almost four years in these processes of formation in prayer, work, devotion, discipline, order and love for the call received from God. During his final year of the Juniorate he followed his first year of studies at the Cristóbal Colón Primary Teachers Training College since he was too young to proceed to the Novitiate.

On 3 December he began his postulancy with 14 companions. He took the habit of the Brothers of the Christina Schools 25 January 1945 and was named Brother Alfredo Leopoldo. His formator was Brother Luciano, former Visitor, a man of integrity, an exceptional formator and a religious of great rectitude who knew how to inculcate solid convictions in these young hearts that were desirous of consecrating themselves to God in the religious life during those difficult times.

Brother José formed himself solidly in Lasallian life and spirituality. As a young Brother of deep faith and sincere piety he was able to find the will of God in regularity and conformity to the Rule and to make his own the values and virtues of constancy, generous devotedness, goodness and piety that his Director instilled into him. His novitiate ended with his first profession 26 January 1946.

In the Scholasticate he found an admirable formator in Brother Fernando Bautista, a progressive man, Doctor of Philosophy, a man impregnated with his vocation, an exceptional teacher who was able to model the future educator by awakening in Brother José the taste for intellectual development, for lessons well-prepared that were given with clarity and precision, the desire to seek perfection, the love of discipline and order – virtues that would characterise the teaching of the new master.

First apostolate

*It is because human beings are beings
at the planning stage that
we educators opt for a different person
and from then on we cannot
educate without hope..*

(Br José Cervantes, "Beginning education based on hope")

The Instituto Francés de la Laguna in the northern town of Gomez Palacio, Durango, was his first field of apostolate. He describes his beginnings as follows: *"It was during the cold month of December 1947 that I arrived at La Laguna...it seemed to me that dust was getting in everywhere even into the soul. However the gentleness of the community and people immediately dissipated my feelings of desert and solitude. I was the youngest. Mr¹ Emilio Reversat, Director, Mr Villalba, the "Inspector" - who at that time was a much-respected person - and a certain number of men who for myself as a not-yet 19 year old seemed to be full of experience like Mr José Sánchez who was just 31 years old and who left us, ripe for heaven, at 37...M. Navarette with the sort of character formed by illness and with a smile always on his lips, Mr Guero Bautista ever-selfless, "Professor" Rios as ever so unique and original, and the indispensable Mr Careaga... a total of some twenty Brothers, four of them young..."²*

¹ "Mr is here a synonym for Brother. Until the end of the 20th century, due to the strongly lay and anticlerical educational policies of Mexico the title of Brother was not used but rather Mr.

² Review "La Salle en México Norte" N° 266, November 1983, p. 8. Article of Br. José Cervantes about Br. Aniceto Villalba.

He himself describes his stay at the Instituto Francés de la Laguna: *at that time the expression “identity crisis” had not been invented and we didn’t suffer from it. We knew very well what we wanted, we took the means, and this yielded results. In this way - without wishing it – we became the protagonists of a fruitful community life which was reflected in the Christian life and spirit of the college. In the community our Director obtained regularity and fervour. Periodic dialogue with the Brother Director was a means of growing. Rest and holidays were assured – these were Spartan holidays in the Sierra de Durango but we were very happy.*³ It was in this community that he made his final vows 14 August in the Holy Year 1954 generously consecrating his life to the Lord and to the service of education.

These were 16 years of intense apostolic and educational work, 13 of them lived with Brother Aniceto Villalba who put entire confidence in him and fostered the development of his pedagogical, artistic and social qualities. He collaborated in the flourishing of the orchestra, the enormous choir and the gymnastic festival of 1 May. For ten years he was the chief inspector of the Instituto Francés de la Laguna, being the conscientious master of discipline and of the students’ academic development but his major task was to win the hearts of the students.

³ Ibid.

Student Brother

Faith in action leads to active seeking of a better preparation and new forms of commitment...

(José Cervantes: Editorial, La Salle in México Norte, March 1973)

Study was his great passion and he dedicated himself to it with great interest. In 1948 he became qualified as a primary school teacher and rapidly began a specialisation at the Normal Superior de la Universidad de Coahuila where he gained Master's degrees in Social Science and in Castilian Language and Literature. In June 1962 he moved to the capital of the United States to prepare a doctorate in Sociology. First he gained his Science Masters at the Catholic University in Washington and after five years he presented his thesis for the doctorate in Sociology (Ph. D.) from the same university.

He pursued the Institute religious studies courses with assiduity acquiring various diplomas: basic and middle courses, and the higher course in Sacred Scripture.

Language study was another of his passions. He mastered Castilian, French, Italian, English and German, which languages gave him access to culture and communication.

He communicated this passion for study to the Brothers of the District. As Visitor he promoted, encouraged and transformed formation structures so as to allow the Brothers to study and to gain university degrees over and above the qualification required for teaching.

During his time in Washington Brother José was a teacher in the senior Scholasticate and Sub-Director of the student

community. He maintained a presence in his District of origin by articles in the review *Kerygma* and above all in the review *Revisión de Vida*, which was new at the time, presenting the period of renewal.

He returned to the District after completion of his Second Novitiate. It was certainly a time of grace but at the same time a period of questioning and of new ideas arising from Vatican II which had just come to an end and likewise that of ideas that he was going to present to the next General Chapter of 1966. During the Second Novitiate he had a very interesting interview with the Brother Vicar General on the structure of the new Chapter, the existence of experts, the evolution of the new Rule, the Assistants and the limits they should have so that Visitors could have greater room to move. He returned to the District with many questions and a new vision.

In 1966 Brother José arrived in Rome in his capacity of Brother Inspector of secondary and preparatory sections of the Instituto Regiomontano de Monterrey, N. L. The religious community and the educational community had had some disappointments with the departure of several leading men. His presence was offer encouragement and support. He exercised a very important influence in bringing about significant changes in education. Among his numerous activities he was in charge of organising the twenty-fifth anniversary of the foundation of the Instituto Regiomontano with excellent results.

His presence in Monterrey society contributed to shaping certain projects among which the most important was the creation in 1968 of the civil association “Development of

Higher Education, AC” (FESAC) which aimed at the promotion, administration and direction of educational and cultural activities and whose president was Brother José Cervantes. The aim of this organisation was the search for new options in teaching which would offer a complete and humanist formation in the society of the revolutionary decade of the 60s, and the dissemination of Catholic principles within the school milieu according to the recommendations of Vatican II Council. These were the key factors which permitted the union of four religious congregations in view of creating the Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM). Thanks to his knowledge, his charm and his aptitudes in relationships and organising he succeeded in arousing the interest of important sectors of society and Church in the creation of this university.

July 1968 brought Brother José a new and unique experience in his life for seven months – being a Brother Director. The Scholasticate had been transferred a year earlier from Mexico City to Monterrey. During that year a new innovative house had been built to accommodate the young men in formation and the new Director. Brother José, who had to complete the building, furnish the house, decorate it and be the spiritual and intellectual guide for the young Brothers.

Brother Visitor

*"If authority is a service
my first word is to put
myself at your service..."*

(Inauguration speech, Revista La Salle, México Norte, 1969)

The General Chapter of 1966 opened new horizons in the life of Districts. In view of the first Chapter of the newly-formed District of Mexico North, Brother Visitor set up commissions to involve all the Brothers. The delegates were elected and observers were admitted to the second session of the Chapter. One of the main aims of these meetings was the election of the new Brother Visitor, a completely new element in the Institute. The lot fell on Brother José Cervantes.

A month later, 29 January 1969, the obedience was signed by Brother José Pablo, Vicar General, and Brother Maurice Auguste, Procurator General to the Holy See – the Superior was travelling in South America.

The ceremony of the conferral of obedience and change of Visitors was held conjointly with the blessing of the new Scholasticate 1 March 1969. Brother Victor Bertrand pronounced a moving farewell address. Brother José began his own address with these words: *"If authority is a service my first word is to put myself at your service..."* He continued his speech by saying: *Let us seek and proceed judiciously in our studies and teaching with compassion in our concern for the people around us and for the destitution of the poor person and for the service of the neediest, with humility as much in our prayers and our work as in the prudent understanding of our talents and our limitations. For many among us this will be the work of a life-*

time⁴. He concluded with the words of Jesus: “Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel”... and also “Greater love than this no one has than to give one’s life for one’s friends”. Four words indicate the trend of his mandate: humility, wisdom, prudence and compassion.

Concerns, projects, plans and achievements followed one another in the agenda of Brother Visitor, among them: the intellectual formation of the Brothers – both initial formation and continuing formation for Brothers already in community. Primary teacher training was changed to sending the Brothers Scholastics to University. Studies abroad were encouraged for a good number of Brothers and within the country a figure of 90% was achieved for Brothers of the District studying.

He fostered the participation of all in the study programmes and in District decisions. He organised the District into geographic regions. He thought up an attractive organisation of the District based on communities who delegated their members as members of commissions of formation, studies, catechetics and apostolic groups. Similarly communities elected Brothers to the District Council – the Brother Visitor retained for himself the appointment of three members. These Councillors represented the region of the District they came from and received the proposals of the commissions. He also created an Economic Council which analysed situations and proposed to the Brothers Councillors the studies produced.

Another innovation which contributed greatly to integration

⁴ Review ‘La Salle en México Norte’, No. 123, April 1969, p. 10, Inauguration speech of Br José Cervantes as Visitor.

and to District awareness was District Chapters to which all Brothers were summoned. This made possible an avoidance of the procrastinations and conflicts very much in vogue at that period, for example on questions of the poor, of vows or no vows.

Regular and follow-up visits were pursued with zeal. Thanks to these he had a contact and a personal dialogue with the Brothers, the educational community and the students.

Another very important aspect that he worked at was the District's economic situation. This began with a single house of formation half-built - the Junior Novitiate at Leon - but with debts linked to its construction. These debts increased with the creation of the Novitiate, Juniorate and Scholasticate, the Acapulco community and so on. The judicious appointment of Brother José Aceves to the position of District Bursar permitted the renegotiation of debts and payment of same during his mandate.

His sociology studies - and the vision acquired thanks to these - permitted colleges to implement considerable reforms in teaching methods and discipline. Brother José encouraged interpersonal relations and integrated all the elements of a school in educational communities. He was the promoter of personalised education and of the creation of preparatory sections in colleges - in certain ones of these there was a beginning of coeducation at matriculation level. In order to attain an increased degree of presence and effectiveness he requested the Superior General to appoint a Brother Auxiliary Visitor in the person of Brother Gilberto Lozano without neglecting these aspects in any way himself.

Many issues of the review "La Salle en México" present ped-

agogical and formation themes while others aim at the spiritual and religious renewal of the Brothers.

Brother José was Visitor in times of uncertainty and suffered at the departure of numerous Brothers. Every year at the end of the retreats there were losses and the groups of formation were less numerous. The second District Chapter sought the closure of certain communities so as to reinforce others. The criteria used were not perhaps the most adequate. The economic situation was basic in this decision-making and it is certain that the poorest or weakest disappeared from the District map. On the other hand he took great care of the formation teams in the houses of formation. He posed the question about the need for a separate postulancy which was not followed up. Formation plans were elaborated well before the existence of the *Guide to Formation*. No structure was suppressed before the creation of a better one.

He transmitted love of the Institute by his personal letters and by the study circles that he organised so as to promote knowledge of the Chapter documents, attempting to give life to them in the two District Chapters over which he presided. He spoke at CIL as presenter on Institute themes.

On 23 December 1974 in his last message as Brother Visitor, Brother José said to the Brothers: *“If I accepted six years ago to lead and govern the District it is because:*

- *I believed in you, Brother, whom I was seeking to serve*
- *I believed in the Mission that we accomplish and that I was wishing to enliven*
- *I had faith in God.*

*I received the District with an attitude of admiration and gratitude towards those who preceded me in its leadership. I stayed with you and all the Brothers of the District in a determined and resolute movement to 'share' and to continue in the direction previously recommended but with a new existential attitude with a different personal style and a markedly community design. I accepted responsibility to the utmost..."*⁵

Following a detailed analysis of the true situation of all aspects of the District he ended his reflection with the following words: *With you I have lived out an Adventure of Grace, quite simply the day-to-day history of men who by the light of faith and under the impulsion of love have traversed the ways. To live the saving mission as a De La Salle Brother is not a programme, it is an event, the only Event of History. We are the heralds, the prophets of something new, the prophets of Christ, Saviour*⁶.

At the end of his mandate as Brother Visitor, 22 February 1975, he was invited to three international centres, the first being CIL in Rome, for a course on "Sociology of the Religious Community". The second was at the University of Chicago as guest professor for a course on "Education and social change in Latin America". Finally he spoke at the renewal programme of the USA Region at Sangre de Cristo, New Mexico, as member of the leadership team. He gave Brother Directors a course on "Sociological factors in leading a community".

⁵ Review 'La Salle México-Nord', No. 182, Special Review, January 1975. p. 32. Information on the seven-year term of Br José Cervantes, as Visitor.

⁶ Ibid.

Upon his return he became Director of Educational Sciences at the University of Monterrey, a direction that he exercised for the year 1975 only, given that when he assisted at the Regional Chapter of Northern Latin America he was elected member of the General Chapter of 1976.

General Councillor

*“The Institute depends
on what we do for its
revitalization and restoration”.*

(Brother Superior's concluding words at the 1976 Chapter)

The opening of the 1976 General Chapter took place 14 April with a fervent and solemn Eucharist where the homily was given by Brother Superior General who made the following announcement to the Capitulants: *“Remember that you are working for the Church, the Body of Christ”*. For Brother José it meant living this time of grace and playing an important role because he was named Moderator of the Chapter Central Commission. The work he accomplished was very good – he was noted for his kindness towards the Brothers.

When the elections of 3 June 1976 took place Brother José Pablo was chosen as Superior General. It remained for the Capitulants to elect the Brother Vicar and the Councillors. The first vote took place 7 June allowing the election of four Councillors with Brother José among them. On the 10th, the Brother Vicar General and a additional Councillor were elected⁷.

During his period in Rome Brother José appeared as a multi-faceted personality, endowed with numerous gifts by the Creator and entirely dedicated to the educational mission to which he consecrated his time and energies. His facility in communicating, his creativity and enthusiasm were a source

⁷ Bulletin of the Brothers of the Christian Schools n° 218 p. 37. Election of the Brothers Councillor.

of inspiration and the opening of the charism of La Salle to new horizons – in particular within higher education⁸.

In examining the circulars of the Superior General in which he refers to Brother José it is seen that they formed a collegial government and that he was always a support for the Superior, a friend and a councillor at his disposal. Without eliminating the strong personality of Brother José they were able to get along well and Brother Pablo confided important tasks to him such as the composition of certain circulars that in various travels they undertook together or in which he participated as one responsible along with other Councillors or in being part of the group of Councillors who were making the visit.

In practice in his ten years as Councillor he had occasion to visit the whole Institute and to have a clear vision of the needs, emergencies, Brothers' projects and the apostolic works to which they were consecrating themselves. They were not always easy missions. One of the most difficult perhaps, requiring strong dialogue, extreme prudence and great charity was the visit to the District of Central America during the Sandinista struggle.

In 1979 he accompanied the Superior on the visit to the Districts of France during which there was a meeting of the Brothers Visitor and preparations were made for the coming tercentenary of the Institute. The following year he took an active part in the Paris Congress 7-25 July 1980 and the preparation for the Intercapitular meeting of 1981.

⁸ Ibid. N° 224, p. 17 à 19. The appeals of the world of today and the Lasallian response.

At the Paris Congress he presented a brilliant conference which he entitled *The cries of the world of today... and the Lasallian response*. He established a parallel between the world with which the Founder was confronted and that which we are facing today with its challenges. He enumerated in detail its characteristics and described how the Lasallian charism can offer worthwhile answers for the world of today.

He proposed challenges and urgent needs and ended: *"It is urgent that we like De La Salle believe in the transforming power of the Spirit who makes us men of faith, signs in the world of today... men who live and proclaim boldly the universal love of God"*⁹.

With General Councillor Brother Patrice he visited the Districts of Africa and met the 450 Brothers working in the twenty-two countries of the continent. Brother Superior produced an interesting description of this visit underlining simultaneously the existing problems and the successes.

He accompanied Brother Superior General on his visit to the Middle East in 1981 thus gaining knowledge of the problems of this region and of the missionary work of the Brothers in the land of Jesus.

Later with Vicar General Brother John Johnston he visited the District of the Netherlands.

The year 1982 offered Brother José the chance to get to know Asia. In the first months of that year he accompanied the Superior General in the visit to 13 countries of Asia. Later he made a rapid trip to Guatemala and Nicaragua and

⁹ Ibid p. 20.

finished the year by a visit to the Districts of Germany and Austria. In the intervals in Rome he worked hard at the final revision of the Rule.

Accompanied by Councillor General Brother Benilde Feliciano he carried out a visit of the Spanish Districts and of the sub-region of the north of Latin America. In the letter of 15 May 1984 the Superior General reported on the information received during this visit underlining the vitality of the region and his preoccupation with problems in Central America.

In 1984 occurred the 8th World Lasallian Congress in Mexico which was honoured by the presence of the entire General Council with Brother Cervantes playing an important role. That same year as with all the Brothers of Latin America he experienced with joy the canonisation of Brother Miguel.

The Brother Procurator General of that time wrote to us: *One aspect which particularly attracted my attention during years shared with Brother José Cervantes in Rome was his aesthetic dimension, his love for art and his exquisite sensitivity to the marvels of creation. The proof of this is that he confided to me one day that since his arrival in Rome one of his most extraordinary experiences was the contemplation year after year of the magnificent renewal of nature proper to Spring in these latitudes, a phenomenon that he had not had the occasion to experience until then*¹⁰. This same sensitivity and appreciation of art urged him in the tercentenary year to promote, conceive and carry out - at least in part - the renovation of the sanctuary of the holy Founder in the Mother House in Rome.

¹⁰ Testimony of Br Félix del Hoyo, ex Procurator General.

We could further cite many other achievements of Brother José Cervantes during his mission of General Councillor even if what has already been recounted gives us a clear vision of the important work accomplished by him both in Rome and in the different sectors of the Institute. However it is worthwhile recalling that one of the tasks confided to him was the monitoring of Lasallian universities across the world, He worked at this with a great deal of commitment and was led to conceive the idea of forming the International Association of Lasallian Universities, an idea that would have the support of many Brothers President.

As General Councillor he was invited by His Holiness John Paul II to form the editorial team for “Ex Corde Ecclesiae” the historic document for all Catholic universities published by the same Pope 15 August 1990.

Return and commencement of a fruitful phase

*“Brother...Keep your blazing fire!
Have no fear of the night,
The morning will be radiant in its joy,
Because the dawn is coming”.*

(Brother José Cervantes, Report to the District at the end of his mandate as Visitor)

On return to the District following his ten years of fruitful work in the Institute he rejoined the community of the Instituto Regiomontano. It was not easy for him to come back to a world that seemed too narrow. He proposed the creation of Lasallian formation programmes in the District which did not always have the hoped for success and which caused him a certain disappointment but which allowed him to launch into a new university horizon which made him happy and where he was able to cultivate all his creativity, his gift of pleasing, his capacity for organising and promoting both the quality of studies and the integral formation of young university students.

He fully consecrated the last 25 years of his life to university life and teaching. Three universities – two of them created by him – were his field of action.

Maker of men and of professionals

*“We will make of education
the hope for the possible.”*

(Brother José Cervantes, Report to the District at the end of his mandate as Visitor)

The year 1987 marked for Brother José the fulfilment of his desires as educator and gave him the possibility of accessing new areas in the Lasallian educational perspective of Mexico. He entered fully into university life as Project Director of Universidad La Salle of Mexico City and one year later was appointed President for the triennium 1988-1991. His programme as President as he said himself on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the University was to *...guarantee and show the university’s identity as a Lasallian institution of Christian inspiration. On the academic level the most noteworthy item was the creation of new programmes – Educational Sciences, Information Technology, Graphic design, Mechanical, Electrical and Industrial Engineering, and the most remarkable thing was the creation of the doctorate which altered the academic landscape. As for material improvements the Plaza-La-Salle was created, the Colegio Alemán, the Casa Rosada, Las Terrazas was purchased and renovated, the Chemistry building was constructed and renovation works were done in the auditoriums, and so on*¹¹.

In the thinking of Brother José aesthetic and artistic formation is an essential domain in integral university formation. This preoccupation was reflected in the embellishment of Universidad La Salle Mexico and the construction of two

¹¹ Commencement address as President of ULSA - Mexico.

universities that he created: ULSA Obregón a place of great beauty in the midst of an uncultivated area, and ULSA Chihuahua built in a magnificent natural framework whose architecture attracts attention by its lines and balance, reflections of the love of Brother José for aesthetics.

During his time there Brother José gave Universidad La Salle Mexico noteworthy recognition and strong impulsion – there follows the testimony of one of the Brothers President and of the Brother Visitor: “*Brother Cervantes opened up the university to the world and gave a continuity and impulsion to this image of openness that he had*”¹². However his actions, motives and achievements were not always understood by certain Brothers and he suffered as a result. Providentially the end of his involvement with ULSA Mexico allowed him to launch ULSA North-West at Obregón City, Sonora, of which he was appointed founding President.

For the Presidency of ULSA Mexico and for those that he founded – Monterrey University and La Salle University North-West and La Salle Chihuahua he could make his own the speech of Martin Luther King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, a speech that Brother José Cervantes quoted on several occasions: *Yes, at the time, it fired us up. With time it has become a classic of oratory – I have a dream... I too have a dream:*

- *I dream that UNIVERSIDAD LA SALLE shall fully live out its vocation to universality, seeking the truth without fear or reduction.*
- *I dream that UNIVERSIDAD LA SALLE shall truly be a*

¹² Interview with Brother Lucio Tazzer de Scrijver, ULSA México, September 2011.

community of searchers, of persons who dedicate themselves to their task of excelling in all domains proper to the university.

- I dream of the day when in this university we shall all recognise each other as BROTHERS – as De La Salle wanted it - when the hand that is open, free and extended will shake in a gesture of brotherly welcome the hand of the one reaching out, of the one in need or the one who hides it in fear.*
- I dream of the day when all of us who make up this university shall think more of being than of having - even where knowledge is concerned. I dream of the day when we shall truly be preparing ourselves to serve our Mexican brothers effectively.*
- I dream that our campus shall grow and become more attractive, of the day when to attend ULSA shall also be an aesthetic experience.*
- And I could continue to dream...When we want something we want it to the full. But I dream and I shall do everything for our university to be a SHARING UNIVERSITY where everybody, each at his/her level and in the appropriate place shall consider ourselves responsible for our destiny and our mission, where we shall all be ready to defend it and to dedicate ourselves to it¹³.*

Such were the priorities to which Brother José dedicated himself, for which he laboured and which he endeavoured to achieve in the responsibilities given to him.

¹³ <http://hoy.uls.edu.mx/?p=27984>, Commencement address of Brother José Cervantes as President of ULSA Mexico, February 1988.

Because of his Presidency, Brother José participated in the university life of the nation. In 1990 he presided at the Federation of Private Mexican Institutions of Higher Education (FIMPES) and encouraged the formation of the Mexican Association of Higher Institutions of Christian Inspiration (AMIESIC). Within the Lasallian Mexican universities he actively supported the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) and actively participated in the organisation of the Mexican La Salle Universities.

He received the doctorate honoris causa of the Lasallian universities of St Mary's California and of Minnesota.

Brother José – educator by the pen

“The world of education is a privileged domain for promoting the inculturation of the gospel.”

(Frère José Cervantes, To touch hearts)

His artistic sensitivity, his deepened knowledge of the social sciences, his teaching experience, his capacity for resonating with students and people in general, his gifts as an eminent educator, impelled him to take up his pen to express the richness of his thought and find way of touching hearts, of motivating wills and strengthening love of culture and personal development.

His pedagogy articles or those on religious topics are perfectly structured – from introduction to conclusion there is a logical sequence that clearly expresses the author’s thought – he creates enthusiasm therein, questions, opens new horizons and offers the reader the rich honey of wisdom.

When his writings were referring to the remembrance of one of the Brothers who have gone before us to heaven he produced beautiful accounts in which he shared his deep feelings, his brotherhood and human warmth. Being Visitor he knew most of them and this made it possible for him to tell the story of the Brother’s life and of his witness to dedication and fidelity which he often highlighted in poetic form. He said himself about poetry: *“It is our truest identity. It is all that we have within us without anyone being aware of it. It is sensitivity that never occurs to us...”*

The door that only one can see...

*Verses, suggestions that we write and memorise...saying all and nothing*¹⁴.

Here is a brief sonnet of thanksgiving to the Lord for bringing to an end his work as Brother Visitor:

THANK YOU LORD

I was happy Lord in the austere service
and the joyful conviviality;
when all was blue in my consciousness
or when the grey was digging the pit.

My maturity in proud springtime
gave the Brother his fullness of being.
The period taught me better knowledge:
neither hatred nor jealousy nor human ambition.

Thank you Lord for the place in the conflict,
for each thorn that wounded me along the way
you have placed a balm on the wound.

And I go thus on earth – a walker
making his way towards the distant boundary
where death changes into LIFE.¹⁵

His first publications were academic in nature being the result of his studies in the pursuit of his diploma *The adolescent and his world of language* (1963) and his doctoral thesis *Social class and Educational-employment Aspirations* (1970).

One of the writings where his vision as history-writer is perceived is perhaps the prologue to the book “La Salle en Méx-

¹⁴ Review “La Salle en México Norte”, No. 182, January 1975. PS to his report to the District at the end of his mandate as Visitor.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

ico I, 1905-1921” which he entitles: *Sowing is a gesture of hope*. In it he briefly shares the history of the foundation of the District of Mexico, associating therein his feelings and the cherished memory of loved Brothers who were enabled to give their lives for a cause, to be faithful, who put up with sacrifice and exile, bringing about the rebirth of the work of De La Salle in Mexico.

He establishes very well the link between historical facts of the country and lived experiences, recalling to the Brother and the reader that - three times over – we almost disappeared and experienced a new rebirth without any ambiguity in a religious lifestyle that proclaims our identity loud and clear with priority given to evangelisation, education and the decision to live in fidelity. We have three pages written from Rome that could serve as preamble to the book published on the occasion of the centenary of the arrival of the Brothers in Mexico: *One hundred years...Sowing stars*, a series of vignettes with an historical background but with validation of lived history and a certain anecdotal content.

Among his other books offering similar characteristics but with a solid pedagogical and doctrinal basis founded on the thought of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and which reflect his spirituality and his personal richness, we can cite: *Twelve facets of the one character*. Twelve comments on the Founder with application to the present situation follow one another right up to the end of the book where he tells us: “*La Salle is us, an expression invented some years ago in Mexico...Have we thought how much our attitudes, our acts and even our expressions come directly from Saint John Baptist de La Salle? It would serve little to be singing praises about the exceptional itinerary of De La Salle if our lives are not being challenged and inspired by*

*his... His constant seeking for the will of God...His love for and his identification with the poor, lowly and marginalised.*¹⁶

His writings are the best spiritual testament that Brother José has left us and he concludes them with a trilogy: *Educating based on faith*, *Educating based on love* and *Educating based on hope*. The three form a whole and are destined for teachers and parents, both educators by vocation.

In this trilogy Brother José unveils his soul as educator, formator and religious, setting out precise goals and objectives. He brings them together in a book that is very important both for what it tells us about himself and for the invitation extended to the reader to develop a spirituality – Lasallian spirituality. In the last vignette we read the following: *“By the spirit of faith you come to admire how in life’s puzzle everything comes together marvellously, even if certain parts of your life – one or another piece – don’t seem to find their place.* And in his epilogue he tells us concerning himself: *Like De La Salle I have felt the presence of God in my life. Like him I got there by accident. Like him I experienced the burning bush which lit up my encounters and from which the Lord spoke to me.*”¹⁷

All his writings - his thirteen books and courses - are backed by an extensive bibliography and are the fruit of his personal studies, of his deep ponderings and his living of the charism of a religious educator on fire for the Lord Jesus.

¹⁶ ‘Doce facetas de un mismo personaje’, ULSA Cuernavaca, October 2007.

¹⁷ Cien Años... Sembrando estrellas, Viñetas para un Centenario, 2005.

Human qualities

...a few punctuation marks contain many of the qualities of Brother José: smiles, tenderness, broad vocation, charisma, zeal, trust, fraternity, achievement, example, faith, self-mastery, service, vision, foresight, goodness, serenity, initiative, friendship, head and heart, ...

As a young Brother, Brother José was regular, as required by Rule, pious and generous in his dedication as a young man. His qualities of leader and organiser soon showed themselves when he assumed responsibilities at school. He exercised the post of Brother Inspector successfully while constantly supporting and obeying the Brother Director. He could be a good second, being creative and proactive, daring, a man of faith and of hope, with deep and authentic piety, perhaps not very expressive but convincing, close to the Brothers and teachers who worked with him, older Brother among his students, ever-faithful in his friendships. Gifted with an excellent memory he remembered his former students with a reciprocal affection and enthusiasm.

Brother José had a rich value system based on universal values such as the profound seeking for God, goodness, beauty and truth together, which enabled him to regulate his life by logic, ethics and aesthetics. He was motivated by a profound faith that helped him to make the Gospel his rule of life and to shine out in such a way that we were able to consider him as our Brother, our master and our friend. In him we recog-

nised ourselves as human beings, educators, Brothers, confidants, innovating spirits, lovers of art and friends...¹⁸

Brother José Cervantes was a man who was very acutely aware of the aims of his work and of his zeal to attain these. Often he was little influenced by people around him. His virtue had its dark side – this well-oriented zeal and these clear and precise aims provoked some difficult times of pain and suffering for many of his co-workers, Brothers and laypeople, but just as he was capable of passing over people he was also remarkable in begging pardon and pardoning when he became aware of his errors.

In the last phase of his life he contributed to the consolidation to the network of La Salle universities in Mexico. From 2006 he was in charge of the Lasallian formation centre and university leadership. He was a consultant of the Mexican episcopate within the Education Council. He was a presenter at all the CIL sessions in Rome and is the author of several works on education.

He leaves to us a great inheritance and a clearly-marked path that we should follow. Without any doubt his great passion was Lasallian university education to which he devoted himself right to the end of his days.

Sickness tested him like gold in the furnace. Firstly there were chronic illnesses and finally the doctors diagnosed a kidney cancer. He courageously underwent surgery and recovery but as he used to put it: they repair one part of the old shell (old car) then another breaks and that's what happened. The problem spread to the stomach and the intes-

¹⁸ Testimony of Brother Fermín I. Martínez Franco, missionary in Japan.

tines which refused to function bit by bit provoking serious problems – hospitalisation, surgery, hopes and fears about his health. But the Lord had already marked the hour for rewarding the good and faithful, wise and prudent servant. On the eve of the feast of the Nativity of Mary - 7 September 2012 - he peacefully rendered his soul to his Creator.

The funeral ceremonies took place at the Colegio Ignacio Zaragoza, Saltillo, Coahuila, in the presence of numerous Brothers, family members and many friends and former students.

