

BROTHER WRITERS OF COLOMBIA

Br. Juan Vargas Muñoz

On March 19th 1991, the centenary year commemorating the arrival of the Brothers in Colombia came to an end.

The occasion was marked by an exhibition of textbooks written by Brothers in Colombia, organised by the National Library of Bogota.

During the opening ceremony, Br. Juan Vargas Munoz, Rector of De La Salle University, Bogota, spoke of the principal authors of these books. This article reproduces some of what he said.

During this same ceremony, Professor Hector Lopez' new book, entitled "Historia de la Universidad De La Salle", was on show.

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The influence of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the field of publication extends to a great many areas: education, culture, science, pedagogy, religion, politics, social questions and sport. In this the Brothers have walked in the footsteps of their Father and Founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, who wrote 26 works: 6 works on asceticism or spirituality which urge us to live the experience of God more intensely; 14 educational works inspired by the Gospel, which aim to make schools efficient from a secular point of view, while offering at the same time the means of salvation to children and young people, especially to the poorest among them; a collection of 5 short treatises, and thousands of letters. Fr. Mouchard was right when he said: "It is he who showed you the way along which your rivals follow some distance behind."

For a certain time, the Brothers based their own works exclusively on those of the Founder, and then they began to produce their own works. In 1785, Brother Agathon, Superior General, wrote "The 12

virtues of a good teacher". A few years later, he began a work on accounting. During this period, works appeared on arithmetic, French grammar, navigation, practical geometry applied to linear design, summaries of geography, the history of France and Christian politeness, etc.

In 1880, the the Brothers' Institute Writers' Committee came into existence. Its president was none other than Br. Gabriel Marie Brunhes who later would become Superior General. The Spanish form of his surname gave rise to the name BRUNO which subsequently appeared on innumerable textbooks for schools and colleges, as well as on works of a more general nature. The name "BRUNO" was usually preceded by his initials G and M, and that is why a whole group of textbooks was called the G.M. Bruno Series. Much of the G.M. Bruno Series was adopted in Latin America. The Brothers in Colombia added the La Salle Series to it.

The first Colombian Brother to publish educational works was Br. Luis Gonzaga (d.1916) who under the pen name-name of Pacifico Coral wrote two excellent works: "Extracts from Literature" and "Colombian Ephemerides". He was followed by Br. Idinael Enrique (d.1963), known as "an eminent author of didactic works", whose books became very widely known. These included, for example: "Introduction to the Botanical and Zoological Sciences" and the whole Castellano Progressivo Series which revolutionised the teaching of Spanish in Colombia. Together with Br. Fulgencio, he wrote also reading, writing and mathematical textbooks, as well as model lessons for the teaching of literacy to adults through Radio Sutatenza.

For more than half a century, Br. Justo Ramon was the best known Lasallian on account of his geography and history textbooks. Because of his expertise in methodology and teaching, he had few rivals in his specialised field. The value of his works lay in their contents and the way they were adapted to all ages, in his own unequalled knowledge of science, in his clear language and his literary genius. He published a "Geography of Colombia by natural regions", a "Universal Geography", a "Geography of America" and an "Advanced Geography of Colombia". In addition to this work he gave highly-rated courses on pre-history and the history of Colombia. He was also Bolivar Professor.

Br. Alfredo Tomas accompanied Br. Justo Ramon on his scientific expeditions and shared in his research. Other Brothers, too, made a considerable contribution to this field. We can be proud of such Brothers as Estanilao Luis, Florencio Rafael, Gonzalo Manuel and Ulberto Miguel, who are already dead; Brothers Jaime Gutierrez and Tomas Alberto (geography); Brothers Antonio Manuel, Claudio Marcos, Eugenio Leon, Estanilao Leon, Sebastian Felix and Florencio Rafael (R.I.P.), as well as Brothers Martin Carlos and Ramiro Pinzon (history and civic education).

Exceptional for their skill in handling the Spanish language are Brother Benildo Matias, author of an authoritative work on Spanish literature, which Br. Ramiro Pinzon (Rodolfo Eloy) later very skilfully adapted for use in the first three classes of secondary school. He followed this up by producing his own books for the three following years. Exceptional also were Brothers Estanislao Luis, Claudio Marcos, Gonzalo Manuel, Sebastian Felix (R.I.P.), Andres Romero and Andres Bernardo.

If we turn to mathematics, we find many works which are particularly valuable on account of their contents, methodology and teaching approach. There are textbooks on arithmetic, algebra, calculus, geometry, trigonometry, modern mathematics, accounting, physics problems.

The names of authors that come to mind especially in this connection are Brothers Agustin Alfonso, Ramiro Pinzon, Nestor Suarez, Horacio Tobon, Mauricio Torres, Gustavo Cruz, Nestor Barrera, Miguel Amaya Cadena, Julio Chavez and Juvenal Rios.

We must give a special mention to the works on mineral and organic chemistry (including sets of related problems) by Br. Claudio Felix.

In the field of philosophy, the leading exponents are Brothers Alfonso Norberto, Gilberto Fabian, Alvaro Llano, Jose Penagos and Martin Carlos. The latter has turned his attention also to sociology in a recently published book on poverty in Colombia.

Other branches of knowledge have been explored with a view to making them accessible to pupils: English language, civics and politeness, religion, singing, linear design, pedagogy and psychology as applied to education. These publications are the work especially of Brothers Ramiro Pinzon, Andres Rosero, Octavio Sanchez, Ruben Angel, Pedro Garcia, Jose Arturo Penagos, Luis Alejandro Ruiz, Oliverio Rodriguez, Isidoro Honore and Aranio Gallego.

The contribution of the Brothers to the field of the natural sciences and ecology deserves special mention. We recall with admiration and veneration Brothers Apolinar Maria, Niceforo Maria and Daniel Gonzalez

Patino (R.I.P.) who, like new Mutis, successfully completed a second botanical expedition and were acclaimed as the great wise Lasallians. There followed in their footsteps Brothers Ariste Jose, Idinael Enrique, Claudio Marcos, Antonio Camilo, Octavio Martinez (the present Rector of the Lasallian University Corporation of Medellin), Antonio Serna, Ramon Guevara, Luis Zamudio, Alfonso Enrique and Roque Casallas.

There is no doubt that Lasallian publications have been extremely influential in Colombian culture. Many of our fellow countrymen cannot do otherwise than express their heartfelt gratitude to the Brothers whose textbooks have enabled them to begin exploring the world of science and have given them the means to extend the frontiers of knowledge.

For a De La Salle Brother, to publish a textbook or a book on some area of culture in general was a special form of apostolate, of evangelisation of culture, an extension of his classroom teaching, enabling him to communicate his message to a multitude of children and young people he did not know and whom he would probably never know. These textbooks were in use throughout the country. They were inspired by criteria which were scientific, professional, and pedagogical. They were intended to instil an ethical and moral sense into the intelligence and hearts of the pupils. These textbooks were low in price so as to make them accessible to the majority of children and young people.

We have to admit, however, that competition from national and multinational companies have driven us out of the leading position we occupied for so long.

Developments in the sciences, technology and modern pedagogy are so numerous and exciting that we feel they hold new secrets in store for us and new channels through which to transmit our scientific, patriotic and Christian message to the young people in our schools, colleges and universities. We have to struggle as our predecessors struggled, but God will light up the way of the Lasallian Community and will strengthen its determination to seek ways of serving mankind through the spoken and the written word. The future expects new and creative initiatives of us.