

O B I T U A R Y

**FATHER PEDRO ORTIZ VALDIVIESO, S. J.<sup>1</sup>**

(1926—2012)

Father Pedro was a man of few words: but every phrase that he spoke was full of significance. It was as though he spoke only in aphorisms. Perhaps his dominion of ancient and contemporary languages allowed him to understand well the meaning of each word and its true utility.

I knew Father Pedro precisely through his dominion of ancient languages that some call dead, as in the case now of Latin, that was excluded only a few months ago as reference language in biological taxonomy.

Four years ago, Alma Nohra Miranda, subdirector of the Javeriana Historical Archive, referred Father Pedro to us as the person who could help us in the copying and translation of an unpublished manuscript in the Archive, that Jaime Bernal and I thought might be an original of José Celestino Mutis, precursor of botany in our county in the 18th Century. As the task was expensive, and Father Pedro was at that time director of the Library of Theology and Philosophy, we asked him only to help us find a student who could take on the task. In a gesture of immense generosity, he offered to do it himself.

The combined work was the basis of the first book that we published with him in the year 2009, with the title "*Filosofía Natural Mutisiana*" (Mutisian Natural Philosophy), the second of a trilogy that we closed with the work "*Academia Mutisiana*" (Mutisian Academy), also with the collaboration of Father Pedro.

But this was not the only thing that we did with him in those 4 years that were unforgettable: in the middle of coming and going, while Father Pedro visited us more in the Instituto than we visited him in the Biblioteca, a new line of interdisciplinary investigation appeared that is a good model of the virtues of the University. Starting with a chance encounter in a transdisciplinary domain such as that we geneticists were researching in the prodigious holdings of the Javeriana Archives, an unsuspected research project began. Father Pedro, in one of his first visits to the Institute of Genetics, took

from his briefcase the finished task: it was the inaugural speech read by Mutis in the year 1764 in Santafé, with the title "*Oratio pro philosophia newtoniana contra peripateticos*," written and translated, with which we could begin the writing of the second mutisian work. At the end of the meeting, with the discretion that was typical of him, he took out a USB memory stick which he always carried, and asked if we could see it in some computer. On opening one of his archives, there appeared an orchid.

That lovely flower, that he himself baptised "*Santanderella amado-rinconiana*," and which he told us he wanted to classify with molecular tools, rather than just based on the phenotype, was the beginning of a line of investigation that has among its products an undergraduate thesis in biology (by student Laura Mazo), three scientific articles and more than 30 records published in Gene Bank, thanks to Sonia Quintanilla, who accompanied us in the last 2 years, dealing with Father Pedro's worries about orchid classification.

Father Pedro, whom we consider an emblematic naturalist of the Compañía de Jesús in our work "*Scientia Xaveriana*" (Javerian Science) — which treats the jesuits and the development of Science in Colombia in the 16th to 20th century —, has become for us the essential axis in botany just as we were for him in molecular genetics.

And it is that Father Pedro Ortiz Valdivieso represents for the history of science a new and brilliant link in the chain of historic persons that started precisely with Mutis, and continued in time with his santanderian countryman Eloy Valenzuela, then Francisco Javier Matis, José Jerónimo Triana, Ezequiel Uricoechea, Florentino Vezga, Enrique Pérez Arbeláez, Lorenzo Uribe Uribe and that ends in him, in what has to do with the Company of Jesus.

Author of the collection "*Orchids of Colombia*," published by Colciencias and now with three editions (one of them to be reprinted), editor of one of the tomes in large format of the "*Flora of the Botanical Expedition*" published in Madrid, main contributor

<sup>1</sup> Translated by R. L. Dressler.

of “type” specimens of the Javeriana University and worldwide reference in the field of orchids (I have seen how much Mark Chase, director of the Jodrell Laboratories in Kew Gardens in London, respects him, and of the admiration shown for him by the most renowned botanist in Colombia, Santiago Díaz-

Piedrahita), Father Pedro leaves a very deep print in world science. We hope that some member of the community has the energy and the capacity to follow in his footsteps.

For my part, I must thank having had the opportunity to know him in life.

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