

Fr. José-Oriol Baylach, c.m.

by Andre Sylvestre C.M.

Last September, I had the great pleasure of a second meeting with Fr. Jose-Oriol Baylach, in the old Provincial house of Calla Rocafuerte. Though ill from cancer, he kept all his usual sprightliness. With very little reference to his illness he spoke mainly of his work in historical study. He was engaged in assembling all his sources needed for the life of our confrere, Mgr. Schumacher, one of the great Bishops of Ecuador. He was very interested in the promotion of the cause of Bl. Perboyre. On parting from him I felt, seeing his state of health and age, that I would see him no more until we met in Heaven.

Born 27/4/1914, in Mas de Cabrile in Catalonia, between Barcelona and Gerona, his family had given to the Church two confreres and a Daughter of Charity. He was one of that group of Spanish confreres, mostly from Catalonia, like the much regretted Frs. Majuan and Pares, who did their secondary studies at the Berceau, which resulted in them being fully bi-lingual. When I was in the Seminaire in St. Lazare (1938-39) he was a student there but we had little or no contact with the students. Due to the war he did his priestly studies in Spain. After ordination (1941) he went, in due course, to Ecuador, together with Frs. Majuan and Gonzalez de Rivera as well as a few French confreres.

Working in Ecuador in Seminaries - since that was the only work for confreres at the time - he specialised in Religious Sociology, rendering great service to the Ecuador Bishops in this field. Recalled to Rome in 1980 to take the place of Fr Cid, who had died, he was Director of Vincentian Publications at the Curia. His facility with languages was very helpful in this. I often met him during that time, in Rome and again at the funeral of a mutual friend, Fr. Majuan.

He had been pining to get back to Ecuador, to which he returned for good in 1989. He took up his sociological and historical pursuits. But during that year, the Visitor, Fr. Sorja died, while his successor, Fr. Montalvo, almost immediately after installation, died also at the end of that year. The confreres of the Province chose Fr. Baylach to succeed these two confreres in that sad series of trials. His age and experience enabled him to pick up the reins and so, it was under his wise guidance that the Province was enabled to face the future with confidence - with God's help, they will have 4 new confrere-priest in a few months' time.

Fr. Baylach was present as Visitor of the Province at the 1992 Assembly in Rome. He astonished us by the interest he showed in every subject of discussion, and by his wise interventions.

When his period as Visitor had finished, he once again resumed his studies in the field of history, but unfortunately, was unable to finish his work. So, it must be left to someone else to write the Life of Mgr. Schumacher.

"Good, wise missionaries are" so St. Vincent used to say, "the treasures of the Little Company." It is one of these treasures that the Province of Ecuador and all Fr. Baylach's friends are now mourning.

POST-SRIPTUM OF FATHER P. ROBERT MALONEY, C.M.

Let me add a brief postscript to André Sylvestre's tribute to José-Oriol Baylach. I knew Oriol well, having lived with him for three years here in the General Curia. He had a wonderful vivacity about him.

He also had a deep love for the Congregation. It was surely at the cost of great sacrifice that he accepted the office of Visitor at a rather advanced age. He was one of the oldest members of the General Assembly of 1992, but all those who were present, I am certain, remember his lively interventions.

Oriol was quite *"original."* Like David, he was capable of dancing before the Ark. I have fond recollections of him pacing up and down in the rec hall, with a smoldering cigarette hanging from his mouth (as all of us waited for the ashes to drop), recounting some tale, and occasionally breaking into song or dancing three or four steps! He often intrigued us with little pieces of information or piles of data that he had compiled about the Congregation.

He lived next to me. Once I thought he had burned to death, when I noticed that smoke was pouring out from under the door of his room. I barged in to find that he was not there, but that his desk was on fire (one of the hanging ashes had evidently found its way into the waste paper basket!). When Oriol returned to his room, obviously quite troubled by what had happened, the first thing he did was light up another cigarette!

I was in Paris when I heard the news of Oriol's death. I had many happy memories of him that day. I was also impressed by how many confreres came to me to express their sorrow at this loss to the Company. May he rest in peace.