

Bishop Tulio Botero Salazar, C.M. (1904-1981) *

From Vatican II to Medellín

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Visitor of Colombia

Tomorrow in the archdiocese the centenary of the birth of Bishop Francisco Tulio Botero Salazar will be celebrated. In the concelebrated mass, at which the Archbishop of Medellín, Alberto Giraldo Jaramillo, will preside, the formators and students of Sepavi (Seminary of Philosophy) and the 40 confreres who have come to the theological updating course will represent the province. I write to you from the city to which he dedicated a good part of his life to invite you to join with us in celebrating this occasion with a real sense of belonging as members of the same Congregation and the same Church; we can do this by means of a vocational “reading” so that these reflections may be useful to you.

1. *Lectio*: what does his life tell us?

He was born in Manizales, Colombia on 9 March 1904 into a home of very strong Christian customs. Four days later, on the 13th, he was baptized. At the age of seven, 21 June 1911, he made his first communion. Between 1914 and 1918 he studied at the apostolic school, but he finished the humanities cycle outside, in 1923. He studied law for one year at the University of Rosario in Bogotá. He returned to the community on 17 February 1924, when he received the cassock in Santa Rosa de Cabal. Ten days later, on 27 February, he was admitted into the Congregation upon his entering the Internal Seminary in the Central House. His definitive incorporation came with the pronouncing of vows on 28 February 1926; at this point he

* This “article” is the same as Circular No. 5 for 2004 which the Visitor of Colombia wrote to the confreres of the Province on 1 March 2004 on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of this confrere bishop to be celebrated the following day in Medellín, Colombia. The circular follows the steps of a “*Lectio Divina*”: *lectio, meditatio, contemplatio et oratio*.

was studying philosophy and theology. He was ordained a priest by Bishop Ismael Perdomo, Archbishop of Bogotá, on 19 December 1931 in the primate cathedral.

He spent the first two years of his priestly ministry preaching missions in the Archdiocese of Bogotá with Fr. Emilio Cid. From 1934 he labored as professor of philosophy and procurator in the Major Seminary in Popayán. In 1941 he returned to the Central House as director of the Internal Seminary, an office he fulfilled while also acting as the private secretary to the Apostolic Nuncio from 1945. In 1948 he was named director of the Seminary at Tunja.

On May 7 of the following year, Pius XII named him as Auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop José Ignacio López Umaña of Cartagena. On 14 August 1949 he received the episcopal ordination in the cathedral of Manizales at the hands of Bishop Bernardo Botero Álvarez, C.M., who was then Bishop of Santa Marta. Acting as co-ordinators were Archbishop Crisanto Luque of Tunja and Archbishop Julio Caicedo of Cali. On 1 May 1952 he was assigned as the first bishop of the new diocese of Zipaquirá and he took possession of the see on 15 August. He labored there for almost six years, until 9 December 1957 when he was transferred to Medellín where he was archbishop for more than 21 years, from 2 February 1958 until 2 June 1979, when his resignation because of age was accepted. The coadjutor, Bishop Alfonso López Trujillo, replaced him. He died in that church which was his own on 1 May 1981, his 76th year of life, 57th of vocation, 50th of priesthood and 32nd of episcopacy.

2. *Meditatio*: what does his vocational personality say to us?

He was a bishop for almost half his life; the first half was divided equally between his family and the community. As a matter of fact, more than a little has been recalled and written of him in Medellín, as well as in Zipaquirá and Cartagena. But it is we ourselves who most evoke his belonging to the Congregation: he was the personification of the Vincentian identity which we recognize emerging from the Constitutions, which we have been reflecting on in that "Assembly mode" in which we still find ourselves. With that character he stamped seven generations in the novitiate. He kept close to the Congregation in a discreet way; he was a frequent visitor to the philosophy house in Medellín where the library bears his name. When we were students at the Bolivarian he paid the tuition with his own money.

- a) He consecrated his life to the fulfillment of the end of the Congregation, in the following of Christ the evangelizer of the poor, putting on his spirit and adopting him as the "Rule of

the Mission.” He dedicated himself to the promotion and evangelization of the poor; he helped enormously with the formation of the clergy. As soon as he arrived in Zipaquirá he started a seminary; and as soon as he got to Medellín he dedicated himself to the ongoing formation and the welfare of the priests. To that end he built the present building of the major seminary, founded the theology faculty in the university, opened the Paul VI House and set up the Ecclesiastical Social Security and the Common Fund for Priests. Many of the present priests in Medellín, more than 160, were fathered by him for the Church. They continue to recognize him as the model he was of unity and faith, shepherd and missionary, sanctity and worship, truth and teaching, authority and service, fatherly and pastoral love. But at the same time, the effort to form an adult and committed laity was never far from him.

- b) A man of exuberant apostolic vitality, he was creative and dynamic in responding to needs, always attentive to the gospel, the signs of the times and the urgent calls of the Church, doing his best to open new roads and using the means best suited to the circumstances of time and place (C. 2). For this reason he was enthusiastic about the Council and he allowed it to touch him as a *kairós*. Upon his return, on the first feast of St. Vincent de Paul he presided over, he affirmed that with the Council the Church had become Vincentian. Very soon he showed he was a bishop of the Council.
- c) A man of unshakable faithfulness to the Church, he expressed it in active obedience to the Holy Father. This characteristic made him a very important figure in the Colombian and Latin American Church. We have but to recall the II General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate which he promoted as its host and which made Medellín the first formal application of the Council, of the worldwide episcopate. But it was at home where he best projected his ecclesial enthusiasm: in 1961 he organized the Great Archdiocesan Mission, he created 122 parishes. One cannot forget that for 15 years he presided over the Economic Committee of CELAM. There, as in his other pastoral projects, he extended the organizing genius of St. Vincent and his good financial sense.
- d) He was, in a word, a spiritual man. This is the secret of his missionary dynamism, for he was first of all a believer, then a Vincentian, priest and bishop. He incarnated “those intimate personal attitudes of Christ which the Founder recommended to the members from the beginning: love and reverence toward the Father, compassionate and effective love for the poor, and docility to Divine Providence” (C. 6), and the Vincentian virtues of simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification and zeal.

3. *Contemplatio*: where do his life and his mission lead us?

The best way to keep his heritage alive is through our commitment, understood as the Fathers of the Church understood it, i.e. as a mystical experience of faith, and by being moved by his contagious Conciliar spirit. In this respect we recall that very quickly he rid himself of his trappings and, in a prophetic gesture, he left the episcopal palace to go and live near the poor. He participated enthusiastically in the Conciliar liturgy commission and championed this reform in his archdiocese. He firmly supported the foundation of the CELAM Institute in Medellín. He put his own local Church on track as the People of God and in dialogue with the world by means of the specialization of his priests, the Corporate Institute of Pastoral Action (ICAP), joint pastoral action, pastoral programs for youth, the Third Archdiocesan Synod, the creation of the Governing Council and the Presbyteral Council, the episcopal vicariates, the pastoral zones and departments, the promotion of education and culture by means of the Academy of Church History, Teachers' Training School for Young Women, the Bolivarian University, its faculty of sociology, the Neighborhoods of Jesus, the children's farms, the Isla Foundation for workers, the bank of social benefits for the lay employees of the curia, the special pastoral fund for poor parishes.

4. *Oratio*: what does his living of his vocation cause us to say?

Let us begin by recognizing that he personified in the 20th century the figure of Jonah about whom the readings for Wednesday of the first week of Lent speak (Jonah 3:1-10; Luke 11:29-32). The prophet, who was a sign of the nearness of God, crossed the city from end to end to proclaim the Word of God so that the people would be converted and that "God might see their works." Let us react with St. Vincent:

I thank God for all the graces that his goodness is granting to [you].... O Monsieur, how astonished those people are, in my opinion, to see their prelate living like a real bishop.... Of course, Monsieur, I have perfect confidence in the goodness of God, who called the bishop to the ministry... he will give him all the graces he needs to continue and to become perfect in the way of life he has begun.... Alas! Monsieur, what can we not hope for from a prelate who has so well regulated his own life and that of his servants; who has given so many corporal and spiritual alms in his diocese; who takes such care of poor...; who is blessed with the conversion of heretics...? What can we not hope for, I repeat, with regard to the graces and blessings to be granted to such a prelate and to those "quos vocavit in sortem operis ejus"? (SV II, 2).

(JOSEPH CUMMINS, C.M., translator)