



Light Beyond Death: Luis Bermejo, S.J. (1929 – 2016)

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Fr. Luis Bermejo was born on 23rd March, 1929. He grew up in San Sebastian, Spain, and studied there in a school run by the Marianists. For his University studies he enrolled in Deusto University – Bilbao. During the first year, the students were taken as per custom, to the Castle of Loyola for a retreat. It was there that he experienced the call of God. So far he had never thought of becoming a Jesuit. But God has His own ways of touching a person. On the fifth day of the retreat, he went into the refectory for lunch. The reading at table was about the missions and listening to the heroic work of the missionaries he was irrevocably touched. The Luis who came out of the refectory that afternoon was a different man.

In September, 1947 he joined the novitiate and 4 years later was sent on a mission to India. First, however, he had to go to Kandy, Sri Lanka, to study philosophy for 3 years and theology for 1 year. Then when the Kandy Seminary was shifted to Pune in 1955, he came along with the crowd of other students. The staff of the Papal Athanaeum (now Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth) became aware of Fr. Bermejo's intellectual acumen and so invited him to become a professor of theology. After his ordination on 24th march, 1957, and final year of theology, he did his tertianship in Kodaikanal. After this he did his post-

graduate studies for one year at St. Mary's College, Kurseong, and one year in Rome at the Gregorian University which conferred on him his doctorate. Thus he started teaching systematic theology at JDV in 1961 and continued doing so for the next 30 years. He was also the Dean of Studies from 1965 to 1971 in Poona. About his teaching the present Bishop of Poona, Thomas Dabre, wrote: "He was my professor and I was proud to be his student. He was clear and pointed in his teaching. His theological books indicate that his theology was world class". Fr. Francis Parmar, Provincial of Gujarat wrote. "I am a witness to his popularity as a teacher and thinker. He was not afraid to perform his duties as a theologian, namely, to make the Church think and understand itself in newer ways."

What kind of person was Fr. Bermejo? He had a passion for truth, therefore his curiosity both about mundane things as well as theological questions was boundless. He was always asking questions. He was very fond of Church History to find out the Truth. In one of his early books, the questions he raised must have raised some ecclesiastical eyebrows with the result that the Prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome asked him to stop teaching. He obeyed.

The decision to remove Father Bermejo from the staff of Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth in Pune was conveyed to Vidyapeeth in August 1987. The mass-circulated news magazine *Illustrated Weekly of India* said that Father Bermejo was "summarily debarred" and was denied an opportunity to be heard. The magazine ran a four-page article, which said the "verdict amounts to a reversal of the policies of Vatican II." This charge was denied by Vatican spokesperson.

He was then summoned to Rome by the then Fr. General to continue his research and writing there. The fruit of his writing over his life time was 19 or 20 books. Bishop emeritus of Pune, Vally D'Souza, wrote: "I am immensely indebted to Fr. Bermejo for my spiritual and theological growth through his books."

Fr. Bermejo was a scholar and therefore a loner so that he could read, think, and write. He was not afraid to criticize opinions of others or situations which he perceived as weak or down right wrong. Sometimes, however, his own criticism of theological opinions could be and were itself be called into question.

Being a loner did not imply being aloof. He had warm friendships with a number of the staff members who comforted him when he was obliged to stop teaching. In his spiritual life he was not attracted to a Rosary or Litany devotion, but never missed a daily mass unless he was sick. He always made his own annual retreat even if he had given a retreat of 30 days to others in the same year. In fact, throughout his whole life he gave about 60 thirty day retreats.

Around 2002 Fr. Bermejo longed to come back to India from Rome. He wrote to the Rector of De Nobili about his desire to settle down there. Fr. Rector wrote back “Come”. And so he was back here for 13 more years giving retreats or writing books until he felt that he could no longer write effectively. He was happy here and the students enjoyed his presence.

During the course of last year he began to lose his short term memory. More recently he appeared to be confused on occasions. His appetite declined. However his death in the early hours of 30th January was still unexpected. Fr. George Pattery (POSA) wrote: “He died as he lived”. Though he was alone in his room at the moment of his death he was really ‘Alone with God Alone’ – the title of one of his books. The staff and students made his funeral mass beautiful and meaningful. 🌹