

BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

Circular 462

**In Memoriam**  
**Br. Rafael Martínez**  
**Cervantes**



General Council  
Rome, Italy

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November 2010

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*“Two qualities are needed by those who lead others, and should be particularly evident in them. The first is a high level of virtue in order to be models for others who would not fail to go astray following their guides, if the guides themselves did not walk in the right way. The second is a great tenderness must be shown by them for those entrusted to their care. They must be very alert to whatever can harm or wound their sheep. This is what leads the sheep to love their shepherds and to delight in their company, for there they will find their rest and comfort.”*

(Med. 33.2)

The characteristics which are indicated by St. John Baptist de La Salle for every Christian educator and for the Brothers are easily recognizable in the life of Br. Rafael: outstanding *virtue*, which served as an example for Brothers, formators, teachers, pupils, parents, past pupils and persons in general; as well as a special *tenderness* which made him have a suitable relationship with everyone, attentive to their needs, always seeking their welfare, concerned about the person and his needs, giving himself generously and continually to all.

In order to draw up this biographical note on Br. Rafael we have basically made use of oral stories and written testimony. Furthermore, Br. Rafael himself wrote some autobiographical notes about specific periods of his life between 1916 and 1991 which have served as references for us.

## First steps: 1916-1934

Rafael was born on November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1916 in Lagos de Moreno, a village in the state of Jalisco, Mexico, in a region known as Los Altos (The Heights). Its inhabitants have been known down through the centuries for their deep-rooted human and Christian values.

His parents were Don Miguel Martinez and Doña Maria de Jesus Cervantes (Doña Jesusita). His father, as well as several of his relatives, devoted himself to music and his mother was a primary school teacher. He had one older brother, Miguel (1914 - 1996) who, like him, became a Brother of the Christian Schools.

In those years Mexico was going through a succession of civil wars. During these struggles, his father disappeared and was never heard of again. *“Br. Rafael told on various occasions how during the religious persecution across the whole country, when he and his brother were respectively 5 and 7 years old, one night soldiers treacherously entered their house looking for his father. In spite of the efforts of Doña Jesusita, Don Miguel was beaten, taken out of the town and, as happened to many other fervent Christians, nothing was ever heard of him again”* (M.A.R.).

In this context of religious persecution, the early years of the life of Rafael were marked by the loss of his father, *“a deep wound which little by little was being closed in dialogue with God”* (L.R.B.C.), by the affection and education which he received from his mother and by the company of his brother Miguel.

Doña Jesusita, who was a school teacher, had to face up to educating her two sons on her own. Rafael made his First

Communion at the age of six on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1923, in the Church of the Rosary; that day he asked God that he be able to study in *a good school*. Later on, sick with tuberculosis, Doña Jesusita moved with her sons to Mexico City so as to be looked after by a relative who was a doctor. The latter succeeded in bringing about her recovery.

Doña Jesusita managed to get a job as a teacher in a government school and participated in forming a trade union of Catholic teachers. This brought upon her persecution and ill-treatment. The two boys continued their education in a government school but, in February 1929, an uncle helped them to get into the French College of the De La Salle Brothers in Mexico City. Furthermore, he also took care that they would study English. In the college they learned French. Later, Brother Rafael would also learn Italian when living in Rome (1966-1976) and German, in Vienna, in 1976.

On joining the college, the two brothers were given a scholarship by the Brothers in view of the economic situation of the family. Br. Rafael would recall this fact years later with profound emotion, feelings of gratitude and tears in his eyes. This experience marked him for life; Br. Rafael always took initiatives in favour of pupils with financial difficulties.

On finishing secondary school, his brother Miguel entered the Junior Novitiate of Tacubaya to become a Brother of the Christian Schools and later received the habit of the Brothers on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1930.

Rafael was 12 when he entered the Colegio Francés de la Salle. There he completed his primary, and secondary education and his school certificate in biological sciences. His Directors at the time were the French Brothers Gerardo Monier

and Adrián Gibert. In those days *“he showed special interest in the religion class and felt it strange that some of his companions did not participate.”*

Rafael recalls that when he was 14 he began to give catechesis every Sunday in the Escandón ‘colony’ with Brothers Benito Mas-sard and José Fromental and that the Br. Director invited him to join the Congregation of the Most Holy Virgin. In 1932 he started his School Certificate studies. At this early age Rafael was already taking his first steps as an educator: *“Br. Director, Adrián Gibert, asked me to give an algebra course to a student.”* Furthermore, *“In the Congregation of Saint Louis (of the Je-suits) they asked me to give English and arithmetic classes to a group of workers at a night school. With the workers I began the catechesis of each Sunday in what is now Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl – Borde Xochiaca -. I began to attend Night Adoration.”*

To complete the formation of the young people in the col-leges, the Brothers started various scout groups. The partic-ipation of Rafael in scouting was one of the most significant aspects of his life because of the formation acquired, the val-ues shared and the relations with Brothers and companions. He said with pleasure that many of the members joined the Religious Life or the priesthood.

In the Spring of 1933, *on returning from communion I told my mum about my wish to join the Brothers. She replied: ‘From the moment of your birth I consecrated you to the Lord. All He is doing is taking what is His.’* With great generosity she offered her two sons to God and to the Institute; she remained alone and died in the 1940s.

In his personal notes about this same year, Rafael writes: *“this year I have as my philosophy teacher Brother Nicet Joseph*

– future Superior General – *an unforgettable Brother. Br. Fernando Anzorena is finishing his doctorate in Philosophy and Letters.*” He always considered both Brothers very admirable and competent. These, as well as his Scout chief, Br. Benito Massard, would be three very influential persons in his life.

## His initial formation 1934 - 1939

Rafael entered the Novitiate in the house of formation of “Los Amores” on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1934. He was the first to enter the houses of formation with his secondary school studies completed. He first of all did his Postulancy and then received the habit of the Brothers on May 9<sup>th</sup> of the same year. His Director of Novices was the experienced French Brother Benildo Justino.

In those days the government prohibited Catholic education and the Brothers’ Schools were suppressed. Colegio San Borja, run by the Brothers, was confiscated and its educational activity became almost impossible. Obviously its classes continued for a number of years in secrecy up to its reopening in 1938. This period of Catholic education in Mexico is a history full of episodes of bravery and heroism.

In this atmosphere, so opposed to Catholic education and the existence of Religious communities, various Catholic schools and religious houses were confiscated. The young Brother describes this situation: “*in the novitiate we cannot wear the habit but I am perfectly happy*”. Rafael received as his religious name Br. Adalberto Manuel but given the laicism reigning in Mexico, he was always known as ‘Señor Martinez’, later as ‘Don Rafael’ and, in a colloquial manner, as ‘Don Rafa’ because of the familiarity and appreciation which he inspired.

Because of the danger of confiscation, they had to leave “los Amores”, change their residence three times and go to live in a rented house in Tlalpan, south of Mexico City. They remained there for several months. Of course the danger of this house being confiscated also seemed imminent, so the

Superiors thought it was opportune to move the Mexican Novitiate and Scholasticate to the United States.

This move took place in 1935, under the protection of the District of New Orleans-Santa Fe, with which there existed very good relations since it had been founded by French and Mexican Brothers who had left the country in 1914 immediately after the Mexican Revolution. The Novitiate was moved to Lafayette, Louisiana, site of the American Novitiate and the Scholasticate to Las Vegas, New Mexico.

On ending his Novitiate he wrote: "*August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1935: First Vows. Br. Assistant Nivard Joseph gave the Retreat. I am beginning to discover the action of the Holy Spirit. My consecration is growing. I wish to be faithful all my life. Rafael Chávez, Bernardo Zapeda (Scouts of Group VI) are accompanying me. On saying goodbye to the Sub-Director (Br. Bernabé Marie) I confided my fears to him. He replied 'courage and confidence.'*" An interior growth was noticed in the young novice and a docility towards the light of the Spirit which would accompany him all his life and would make him radiate '*courage and confidence*' at the human and spiritual level, to all who surrounded him.

Rafael did his scholasticate in Las Vegas, New Mexico where the young Brothers studied for their Primary Teachers Certificate, incorporated in the Sheart Training College of Las Vegas. There he was under his old teacher, Br. Bautista Fernando (Fernando Anzorena). About this period in his life he writes: "*the group of scholastics seemed to me not very convinced. I felt a little out of place. I was satisfied with the theology courses of Br. Director Anzorena.*"

The matter of 'feeling out of place' may perhaps have been due to the fact that the young Br. Rafael was a bit older than

his companions, with a better academic formation, more experience and maturity. He had finished his Secondary School studies and had mastered French and English. The formators considered the possibility that the young Br. Rafael should go directly from being a scholastic to being a formator, shortly before he began his second year of the scholasticate: *“in June 1936, I am appointed a teacher in the Scholasticate. I have to improvise a lot: Maths, French, Psychology. I continue my Theology course. I am in charge of singing. I am passionately studying my catechism.”*

## First years in community: 1939 - 1957

Starting in 1938, there began the gradual reopening of the works: first in Mexico City, then in Puebla (1932) and Saltillo (1937). In 1939, Br. Charles Thierry founded the French Institute of La Laguna in the city of Gomez Palacio and on June 13<sup>th</sup> of the same year Br. Rafael was sent there by the Visitor, Br. Dosas Lucien. At just 22 years of age he was 'Form Master' in 1<sup>st</sup> Year Secondary, and not long afterwards he was College "Inspector". He is able to find time for what was important: *"I prepare each catechism lesson in writing. Daily half-hour classes. I am studying Apologetics."*

Of his work as 'Inspector' he tells us: *"I continue with my Sunday catechesis in a neighbouring parish. I am preparing them for First Communion. I will be doing it each year up to 1952. I am doing the first writing of texts on the history of Mexico. Every Saturday we attend Mass with the group of the Congregation of the Most Holy Virgin. It is a suggestion from the Br. Director. I accompany the pupils to Mass on First Fridays. I have to look after the choir. Animating the Masses and First Communions is a great means of formation...In 1943 I begin the formation of the first group of past pupils under the slogan: Radiating Christ."*

In this college he distinguished himself by carrying out great work of animation with great vigour and enthusiasm, supervising the pupils, the Brothers and the teachers. A former pupil remembers it thus: *"It was the first days of September 1943, when I started my first year of Primary School in the French Institute of La Laguna. Since then, the first day of classes - when we arrived in the large courtyard - has remained imprinted in my mind. We all formed up in line according to the var-*

*ious primary and secondary classes. Suddenly we heard a strong, sonorous voice which rang out across the courtyard: STOP! and we all stood still and there was a great silence. It was the voice of the person then known as the Inspector of the Institute, Mr. Rafael Martinez Cervantes (we did not yet call him Don Rafa). He was tall, elegant, impeccably dressed and his presence was imposing.. I was 6 years old and Don Rafa was 25.”* (L.R.B.C.)

He was an excellent collaborator for Br. Director Charles Thierry, who was already elderly. In 1945 there was the arrival of a new Director, Br. Emilio Reversat. “*Would we be starting from scratch? God would speak*”. But there was not a good understanding between the two. “*The Br. Director asked that I be changed*”, he wrote years later.

In 1945 he began a course of *History, Geography, Civics and Spanish Language and Literature* at the Higher Training College of Saltillo in Coahuila State, a government institution. He took advantage of holiday periods to study and during the year continued with correspondence courses up to 1949. In 1952 he wrote his thesis on reason and faith under the title “*The Bible, a historical book?*”. The theme caused a great stir in the secularized circles of education but all the examiners approved it and remained profoundly admiring.

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1941 Br. Rafael made his perpetual vows, perhaps remembering what his mother had said to him: “*From the moment you were born I consecrated you to the Lord. All He is doing is taking what is His.*”

In 1947 Br. Visitor asked him to take over as Director of the Primary section of Colegio Cristóbal Colón in Mexico City. He carried out this responsibility till 1952. He managed to

memorize the names of the more than 1,500 pupils and their families. Down through the years he used to surprise them all by remembering them.

The past pupils from this period remember him with much affection and for his devotion, dynamism and gift of being good with people, which would be a constant all his life since “Education for Don Rafa is ‘leading, guiding persons in order to foster all their energies’ channeled to the exercise of their free will, their moral conscience and their true meaning in this life which is transcendence or looking towards the infinite. Culture is not an encyclopedic knowledge, still less a heritage of knowledge of facts accumulated from diverse formal, natural and humanistic disciplines. Culture is the daily conscious exercise of the activities carried out individually or in community which tend towards the truth by knowledge, to the expression of beauty by art and the practice of good through an ethical sense. For this reason Don Rafa used the word ‘culture’, which alludes to a constant task like that involved in working the earth; cultivating the human implies developing a new culture and leads man to move away from the structures of domination, of ignorance, of poverty and of violence.” (A.B.P.)

These were not easy years. Br. Rafael tells us: *“daily catechesis goes on in spite of the ‘spectre’ of government vigilance. We are beginning the Masses for the First Fridays and the Saturday Masses for the Scouts. Contact with the pupils is good. Perseverance today is good”*.

After giving up being Director of the Primary section, he went over to teaching the School Certificate classes in the same college. During the 10 years that he remained there,

he identified fully with the Director, Br. Pierre Lyonnet, and was, like him, dynamic, energetic and a good apostle of scouting.

At 32 years of age, in addition to working full time, Br. Rafael used the time to begin a Philosophy degree in the Centro Cultural Universitario of the Jesuits and finished it at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1953. Years later, in 1975, Rafael, who was keen on philosophy, got his Master's Degree with a thesis on the existentialist thinking of Gabriel Marcel. *'In a professional exam, in front of five professors with ideas and criteria very different from those exposed by the examinee in defending his thesis, he made such a good defense of his thesis that all the examiners approved it.'* (M.A.R.)

As a culmination of these years, in 1956 he had the opportunity of spending six months in a renewal session of the Second Novitiate in Bordighera, Italy, where his brother, Br. Miguel Martinez had been shortly earlier. At the end of this stage Br. Rafael was 40 years old and had sterling human qualities. He was a good Religious with a good academic foundation, had school experience and was prepared for any new challenges which the Superiors would entrust to him at an opportune moment.

## **New responsibilities 1957 - 1965**

In 1957 he was appointed Director of the Community and Director General of Benavente College in Puebla. This establishment included a primary school, a secondary school, a higher secondary school, a primary training college, a higher training college and a gratuitous school in the barrio of Analco. There was also a large boarding department for children and young people from all over the country, who, because of the lack of schools in their places of origin, came to this education centre. There were more than 20 Brothers in the community, many of them young. The newly formed Community of the Guadalupana La Salle Sisters was already a great support there. In addition to numerous Brothers, many Religious Sisters, priests and teachers who had no opportunity for studying in their own locality, came to the Higher Training College during holiday times.

With the help of sponsorship, he built the new installations for the gratuitous school, "*Ciudad de los Niños*" (The Children's City), with a primary and secondary school and added technical workshops. Furthermore he wrote a religion course for the preparatory school. In those years, "*13 centres were opened for catechesis for working class students and looked after by Brothers and students. Rural schools, looked after by training college students, were also opened.*"

At the beginning of the 70s, Mexican society and especially the Puebla region, was going through times of tension. Benavente College was the victim of threats over several days by groups of young agitators. In 1961 Br. Rafael was assaulted within the college premises. In spite of the situation, calm

was maintained “*avoiding responding to any aggression*”, on the express orders of the Brother Director and by taking the necessary measures for continuing the educational activities with the pupils.

For his part, the Archbishop of Puebla, Don Octaviano Marquez y Toriz, a past pupil of the Brothers, asked Br. Rafael to become advisor to a group of young people founded by a Jesuit Father. This fact later gave rise to various questions. Obviously we need to point out that Br. Rafael always sought to act for the good of the Church and society.

Those who lived with him in this community as well as parents and past pupils remember him with great affection for his devotion, dynamism and ability to get on with people. During his stay of almost 10 years in Colegio Benavente he developed great leadership with the Brothers of the District of South Mexico. His wide vision and preparation, as well as his attention to persons, led to his being elected as District representative to the 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Institute in 1966.

Appointed Visitor of the District, during the short time of his mandate he took care of the ongoing formation of the Brothers, encouraging study abroad and also brought about a good organization of the communities.

## Assistant to the Superior General 1966 - 1976

In 1966 the Institute held its 39<sup>th</sup> General Chapter during which Br. Charles Henry was elected as Superior General and Br. Rafael emerged as an Assistant General. His Assistancy was comprised of the Districts of North Mexico, South Mexico, the Antilles, Central America, Caracas, Bogotá, Medellín and Ecuador.

During the 10 years when he was Assistant, in spite of the difficulties associated with a period of major changes, he made an effort to apply *bravely and with confidence* the lines of renewal of the Church and the Institute among the Brothers, their Lay Partners, Past Pupils and within the works. He presided at Retreats, gave talks and animated meetings of Visitors and Directors. He took care of the interviews with Brothers and Lay collaborators and always sowed hope and optimism facing a future which looked uncertain.

As always, he continued looking after the initial and ongoing formation of the Brothers, so that they could exercise their education mission with quality. A witness to this preoccupation of Br. Rafael tells us: *"I consider that the academic formation of many Brothers is due to the impetus which Br. Rafael gave to their university studies, with many going to university where they received a preparation which qualified them with new drives and more vision for the education mission and for life"* (J.M.A.A.).

As Assistant he took a great interest in bringing the Cause of Br. Miguel Febres Cordero to a conclusion. He saw his efforts happily crowned and was able to be present with great joy at his Beatification in 1977 and Canonization in 1984.

While he was Assistant, with the delicacy which always characterized him, he supported the return from France to Mexico of Br. Benito Massard, who had been his teacher and Scout Chief and Br. Juan Fromental, Founder of the Guadalupana De La Salle Sisters.

Br. Rafael also participated as Assistant at the 40<sup>th</sup> General Chapter in 1976 and presided over the Commission on Consecration, which studied themes such as the degrees of belonging to the Institute and the status wished for the Institute, as a Religious Congregation.

At the end of the Chapter, Br. Rafael, along with some other Brothers, gave impetus to the Lasallian Fraternity *Signum Fidei*, which at present extends over more than 30 countries. Br. Rafael continued to accompany it with great zeal in Mexico up to the time of his death. A married couple who are members of this fraternity, write: "*Br. Rafael was spiritual advisor of Signum Fidei in Mexico for 30 years. We thank the Lord for we feel it was a gift to have known him, since he was the one who taught us to believe and keep faith in God. Along with Br. Manuel Olivé he was the first Brother who made known to us what Signum Fidei was.*" (E.H. and R.R.)

## Formator of young Brothers 1976-1984

On ending his mission as Assistant and returning to the District of South Mexico, Br. Rafael was appointed Director of the Novitiate and Scholasticate in Mexico City. Those who did their formation under him remember him with affection. In him they saw an example to follow, as a wise and expert Brother, *“with a story to tell.”* Some Brothers believe that the presence of Br. Rafael was fundamental in their formation and for their perseverance in their religious vocation.

He took care of the human and religious formation of the young Brothers and had the vision to encourage their university studies at different levels. So, they were able to follow courses of Sacred Scripture with the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit and later they would study Religious Sciences at La Salle University. The Scholastics used to study for their Higher Training College certificates during the holidays and the more advanced were sent to do university studies. He himself wrote of this period: *“The Brothers look after catechesis in Simon Bolivar Primary School. On Saturday afternoons they take care of all the parish catechesis. The School of Religious Sciences was opened for them in La Salle University.”*

The testimony which follows reveals the great impact which Br. Rafael had on those young people: *“I remember him as a man of faith, of firm convictions and with an excellent memory, marked by his experiences in defense of the faith and of education. Counselor, faithful friend, deep and reflective educator. He was my Director in the Novitiate and Scholasticate and we all*

*learned from him to attend to persons and as far as possible to respond to their needs. The aspects of 'association', 'shared mission', 'openness to the laity' were lived as something natural between ourselves and as a normal environment in our District. Personal demands, use of time, attention to others, academic formation with a view to pastoral ministry, are some other aspects of his legacy. 'Forming Christian and consecrated life starting out from the human', 'Working so that others may be better than ourselves', 'Always keeping Mary in mind', 'Not passing a day without interiorizing the Word of God', 'The future of Mexico is in education and especially in the work of Christian teachers', 'The more human the more Christian, the more Christian the more human...' are other key ideas which Br. Rafael shared with us as an example for the future". (P.A.A.)*

For 25 years Br. Rafael was a professor in the Philosophy Faculty at Universidad La Salle in Mexico. There he taught *Existentialism* and at the Faculty of Religious Sciences he taught *Theology in St. John*. In the review *Logos* of the Philosophy Faculty he contributed various articles on the person, his relations with others and values. Here he reflected with success his thinking and his personal commitment. His favourite philosophers both for reading and for his expositions were Gabriel Marcel, Max Scheler, Emmanuel Mounier, Alexis Carrel and Edith Stein. His main concern was not centred on intellectual aspects; with great determination he promoted the opening up of La Salle University to everything which surrounded it, by means of service and social collaboration.

In addition to his dedication to the initial formation of the Brothers, he worked intensely with his lay collaborators, fostering the Lasallian Family and always collaborating with the

*Signum Fidei* Fraternity. He promoted the holding of 11 Lasallian Family congresses in Mexico. All this dedication found its culmination in the 8<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Past Pupils in 1984 in Mexico City.

## His time at La Salle University 1984 - 2010

In 1984 he was appointed Director of the Brothers' community at La Salle University, which would be his residence and place of work for the next 26 years, the longest and one of the most productive stages of his life.

Always available, he continued working in the Novitiate for 10 years, teaching Lasallian Spirituality. At the university he gave courses at the Faculties of Philosophy and Religious Sciences: *Christology* in the Humanities Faculty and *Philosophy of Law* in the Faculty of Law.

He was the first person to receive a Doctorate from La Salle University in 1993, with a thesis on the Philosophy of Law. A former student writes: *"I had the privilege of having Don Rafa as my teacher for my Philosophy degree. He was an extraordinary teacher. When Br. Rafa entered the classroom the atmosphere became tranquil, calm and joy reigned. He was always smiling, cheerful, attentive, and amiable. His wish was that we learn the philosophical work of a given thinker but never separated from the life of the latter."* (A.B.P.)

From 1984 to 1987 he was head of the University Pastoral Ministry. At the end of the latter year he ceased to be Director of the Community and was appointed as Director of the Baccalaureat at the same university (1987-1991), which had two thousand students and 40 groups.

A mother, who is now a Signum Fidei member, writes about those years: *"I remember that his door was always open for any young people who were looking for him and in my case he was the key element in the formation of my son, who always had a special*

*appreciation for him, since whenever he needed advice he could always meet him. Br. Rafael would always listen to him and with the tact which characterized him knew how to direct him to act correctly.” (E.T.G.)*

In 1992, in order to coordinate different existing programs, the post of Vice-Rector of Formation was created in the University. Br. Rafael was appointed as the first Vice-Rector (1992-1998) In this position he developed new programs for the benefit of the University Community.

*“Don Rafa paid special attention to the emergence of the new student groups...This development had as a consequence the emergence of a group of critical students who pushed for change...With the increase of student participation in these bodies the need was seen for creating a support body. Thus there arose the Advisory Board for Student Groups in 1995. Don Rafa was convinced that the students entering the University should take with them an indelible memory of the time spent there, not because of merely academic questions but through having been touched in their souls, in their interior selves, by an indelible stamp which would attach them down through the years to their ‘alma mater’. This thought inspired the birth of the first general farewell ceremony in Plaza La Salle in 1996 and the first Welcoming Days in 1997” (S.V.H. and S.V.F.).*

*“And what can we say of his constant care for the students who approached him trying to find support when faced with the existing economic necessities and the wish to continue their degree studies and not cut them short? This gave rise to Don Rafa, along with a group of committed past pupils, founding the “Promoción Universitaria La Salle, A.C.” – a body which has benefitted generation after generation of students, through the Plan for Mutu-*

*al Help which has made the difference for hundreds of our undergraduates who had lost financial support for their studies, between continuing or giving up their studies because they could not depend on financing.” (S.V.H. and S.F.V.)*

The program for helping students with few resources was a reflection of his constant preoccupation with the human and spiritual growth of persons. It was his way of doing what others had done for him when he was a child, when he and his brother were given scholarships so that they could study.

At certain periods of his life, Br. Rafael went through serious health problems: *“Br. Rafael suffered from cancer of the esophagus and the trachea. At various times in his life he was treated with radiotherapy, the last in 1993, when he was completely cured, since it never reappeared. He considered it a miraculous intervention of God and the Virgin of Guadalupe, to whom he always had a profound devotion.” (M.R.B.V.)*

In 1999 La Salle University conferred on him, along with some other Brothers, a Doctorate *Honoris Causa*, given his outstanding career as a person, as a Brother, as an educator and as a university teacher. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2009 he had the pleasure of being present when his former pupil and the present Superior General, Br. Alvaro Rodriguez Echeverría, received his Doctorate *Honoris Causa*. Br. Rafael, when Assistant, had asked Br. Alvaro to study philosophy in the university.

## The end of the road.

On his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in November 1996, a dinner was held in his honour in the garden of the Community house, which was attended by Brothers, pupils, teachers, lay collaborators, members of Signum Fidei, past pupils and others. Ten years later when he reached 90, the festivities were repeated in honour of such a great event. On this occasion various Brothers spontaneously expressed what his life had meant for each one of them.

On leaving the position of Vice-Rector in 1998, he was appointed Advisor to the Rector's office. He continued with his classes in the Faculties, but from the year 2000 on he gradually started giving them up, finally retiring from the teaching staff in 2006. Up until 2010, shortly before his death, past pupils, collaborators and friends used to come as always to his office in the university looking for his advice and spiritual direction. *"When Don Rafa was in front of someone, everything else lost all meaning for him and for him this person alone monopolized the totality of his person and it was then that I witnessed the way of being of a living philosophy"* (A.B.P.).

*"During the last three years of his life, I had the opportunity of living with Don Rafael and, being his community director I always found in him a total disposition to obey, as when I asked him to stop giving philosophy classes in the University because of his advanced age or when I asked him to give back the keys of the car since it was very dangerous to drive at that age... difficult acts of obedience when one still feels well able to do the work"* (M.A.R.).

In the course of 2010 his strength and his health deteriorated noticeably. He needed to be put into a clinic where he re-

mained for some days. He recovered for some time and was able to return to the house; providing oxygen became indispensable.

*“He was great in his physical weakness in those last years... someone who had always depended on himself for everything, had to learn to depend on others for everything. With humility he was recognizing that the Lord was asking him to put himself totally in the hands to those who were helping him”.* (M.A.V.)

On Wednesday June 30<sup>th</sup>, in the evening, his breathing became more difficult and on July 1<sup>st</sup> he crossed the frontier between time and eternity. His funeral was attended by many Brothers, Brothers in formation, friends, lay collaborators, past pupils, members of Signum Fidei, students and others. Three Masses were said in the presence of the corpse. In the evening of July 2<sup>nd</sup> his remains were cremated and on Sunday July 4<sup>th</sup> after a Eucharist, they were placed in the chapel of the House of Formation at Tlalpan, in the presence of a large gathering. On Tuesday July 12<sup>th</sup>, the University Community gathered for a Mass for his eternal rest.

## Heritage and Witness

*“Don Rafa used to distance himself from the classical term which defines values as those qualities which make something or someone admired; he accepted this concept completely but he wanted to go beyond it: ‘something more profound can be found in the term’, he would say. ‘Value is a force of expansion but this force, this energy, this power, this vitality is not referring to mechanical aspects...to work, these are imprinted in human reason which captures with certainty the motions of the spirit’. Therefore in order to understand the essence of a value, Don Rafa gives this other version of his own definition: ‘a value is a force of the Spirit, the Spirit being the force which God communicates to man in his individual creation. It is the direction of life which he offers to him to build his self’. This offering is not an imposition but rather an invitation given to the individual’s free will: ‘man retains at every moment his freedom when facing every circumstance. He can say yes to the value as a direction and support for his action in building his person or go on another path. Every person is responsible for the option he chooses” (A.B.P.).*

*“Don Rafa has been for me the model of sanctity which has transformed my life, bringing me all the time closer to God”. (A.S.M.)*

*“Don Rafa was an imprint which left its mark on me, a light which enlightened me, the sign which showed me the road, at times so full of obstacles. He was always with me with his smile, his prudence; this personality so full of God, showed me how to walk”. (T.C.M.)*

*“There were two moments of prayer lived with him for which I would like to thank him as being authentic treasures... the prayer of the Our Father and that of the Angelus. Both brought me in an*

*almost imperceptible manner to loving the will of God in my life, to measuring myself constantly, as he said to us, against Mary the mother and teacher of Jesus in this fiat, in this saying 'May your will be done' and of course, against Jesus and his congruency of life which led him through love for us to suffer the torment of his death on the Cross." (S.)*

*"If I have to summarize in a sentence the profile of a whole life in the service of education, I would dare to say that he was 'a man for all times', a staunch defender of the family, always attentive to the signs of the present times and in constant search for new languages for dialoguing with the young. In the different scenarios in which God asked for his services, he took the opportunity to get to know and to love, closer to the world and to man, to touch its lights and its shadows, to know its greatness and its weaknesses. The life of Don Rafa ought to be for us now the promise and the announcing of the Kingdom of God already present in this world. This formator of future Brothers knew how to inculcate in them love for truth and for the good and for the devotion, sacrifice and responsibility which characterize a Lasallian Brother, given that the Brother has to consecrate his life to God and to the service of his Brothers through the human and Christian education of youth." (M.A.V.)*

Br. Lucio Tazzer, Visitor, in the funeral homily bid farewell to Br. Rafael Martinez Cervantes with these words:

*Rafa:*

*You are already in the House of Our Father and family. You are lucky because you are already enjoying the lovable company of Jesus and Mary. Now finally you are again meeting up with your beloved mother, Doña Jesusita, with your brother Miguel, with your former confreres that you admired so much: Nicet Joseph,*

*Charles Thierry, Paul Adams, Patrice Marey, Fernando Anzorena and others.*

*Brother Rafa, you are gone away bodily but you remain with us your Brothers, your friends and...your memory will remain forever in our hearts. How many good things about you we will remember which will make us feel the Father who gave us the gift of your love and your understanding shown in acts of love towards those of us who had the good fortune to be listened to by you and to receive advice.*

*Your memory, which we carry in our hearts, will accompany us with all the good things which arose from your great dignity as a Lasallian Educator.*

*Many thanks, Brother Rafael, for your humanity which allowed us to see Jesus, truly human, in order to be Christians.*

*RAFA, the Lord has called you. He wants you with Him in His Kingdom, but you will not be absent from our view. You will always be at our side since those things we loved in you have not died with you.*

We end this account of the life of Brother Rafael calling to mind, in his memory, the words of the poet:

*“Because I see at the end of my rough road,  
That I was the architect of my own destiny;  
That if I extracted honey or gall from things  
It was because in them grew the gall of tasty honeys.  
When I planted rose bushes I always got roses”.*

Amado Nervo