EMILIO CASTRO
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Emilio’s door was always open. When you wanted to talk with him, he welcomed you in. Relationships meant everything to him. That’s how I experienced Emilio Castro when I served on his staff at the World Council of Churches (WCC). And that’s what characterized his passionate leadership of the ecumenical movement.

Emilio’s heart and spirit resonate through his words in this revealing biography. One strategy in today’s ongoing quest for Christian unity and common witness is to create fresh “ecumenical space”, meaning new places and occasions to invite absent voices into ecumenical encounters. This defined Emilio’s way of being and working. He loved such encounters. Moreover, he never tired of inviting historic partners into vital and new challenging dialogue. While this necessarily found expression in institutionalized programs, for Emilio the roots were always in authentic relational engagement. Such stories shimmer through these pages.

Throughout his life, Emilio Castro never tired of wanting to integrate mission and evangelism into the core of the ecumenical agenda. He was strategic, pragmatic, and creative in doing so. My first day as the new director of Church and Society at the WCC, I met with Emilio in his office. He noted that I was raised with a strong evangelical background. I quickly pointed out, almost defensively, my ecumenical experiences. But he responded, “I know. But in this house, I want you to be an evangelical!” Emilio championed a theological and ecumenical understanding of evangelism that linked the call to follow Jesus with God’s liberating intention for all humanity. As he says in these pages, “In the Bible, the personal gospel and the social gospel are one gospel.”
One witnesses that enduring commitment in testimonial words and persistent actions throughout Emilio Castro’s pilgrimage.

As WCC general secretary, of course, Emilio was a tireless advocate of the whole ecumenical agenda, throughout the world. His recollections so skilfully curated in this volume include Emilio’s passionate commitment to eucharistic hospitality. That quest, pursued courageously by Emilio in encounters with the Catholic Pope, Orthodox patriarchs, and Protestant pastors, remained unsuccessful. In fact, movement in the life of the WCC on this issue has been replaced with regressive retrenchment.

Remembering Emilio’s words and passion around eucharistic hospitality is crucial for the ecumenical movement. At the end of Emilio’s service as general secretary, he travelled to Isai, Romania, for a consultation on spirituality with his long-time Orthodox friend, Father Ion Bria. Also a participant, I joined Emilio and Ion at dinner. Glasses of wine were poured. And then, with tears in his eyes, Emilio confessed and lamented that they had never found a way to officially share together the bread and wine. “But someday, Ion…” Emilio’s passion should help us bring that day closer.

One part of Emilio’s legacy that did bear lasting fruit was the conciliar process on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC). An impulse from the Vancouver assembly, the JPIC process came to animate much of the WCC’s work, which Castro helped to skilfully shepherd. He shares the neglected story of how the JPIC process motivated East German churches in their non-violent, candle-lit marches contributing to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Further, many will take note of Emilio’s defence of the WCC’s relationships with communist regimes prior to their demise.

At the 1989 San Antonio Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Emilio Castro gave a keynote address. The text was all prepared and he began to deliver it. But about halfway through, as his excitement grew, he set it aside and simply began to preach, with passion and inspiration. It seemed like a metaphor. Emilio knew how to work and maneuver within the institutional framework of the WCC, but his passion always sought to break free from its constraints, and inspire all to go further.

Finally, the ecumenical world owes a profound debt of gratitude to Carlos Sintado and Manuel Quintero Pérez. They have brought Emilio Castro’s words, and the convictions beneath them, to life. Countless hours of listening to Emilio share his experiences have produced this living legacy. With many others, I can hear and see Emilio through these pages, with his warmth, his humour, his deep wisdom, and his perpetual excitement about the ecumenical
journey. Carlos and Manuel have rendered a tremendous service through this effort. With the publication now of this English edition, the spirit and impact of Emilio’s passionate ecumenism, so deeply needed in our day, will find further avenues for sharing and discovery, enriching all who will read this inspiring biographical testimony.

*Wesley Granberg-Michaelson*

_WCC Director of Church and Society (1988–1994)_

_April 2018_
Ignacio Cirac, the director of the Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics in Germany, once said that in physics, questions are more important than answers and are basic for defining what the problem is. And when we combine pertinent questions with significant answers, the results can be of great value and interest.

That conviction has inspired us, the authors of this book, to attempt to preserve for posterity the ministry and experience of one of the great personalities of our continent. Perhaps it is because we have a debt of gratitude for our Christian ministry among young workers and students whose experiences and struggles have contributed to strengthening our ecumenical commitment and enriching our lives.

This book is an attempt to recover memories. Our intention is to show that the ecumenical movement is not an abstraction, but is made up of real people, real men and women, who have responded to Jesus’ high priestly prayer in chapter 17 of John’s gospel. The importance of our heritage, of knowing and acknowledging what others have done, is essential for understanding the present day and our place in the world. If we wish to advance beyond what we have received, it is imperative that we intelligently make that heritage our own.

Tertullian, that doughty early defender of the Christian faith who was also branded a heretic, asked, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the world of academe with the church?” Paraphrasing Tertullian, we could well ask today, “What has Plato to do with Emilio Castro?” Well, it so happens that Plato, in one of his dialogues, describes the Socratic technique of mayeutica. It is an inductive method, based on dialectics, in which we arrive at knowing the truth by asking questions. In the 15 months since we began our conversations with Emilio Castro and up to the day when we put our final touches on our manuscript to send it to the printer, we have been learning to use that technique to shed light on the rich pastoral and ecumenical journey of this man of faith.

Jorge Luís Borges in the preface to his 1941 book, The Garden of Forking Paths, states: “Writing long books is a laborious and impoverishing act of foolishness: expanding in five hundred pages an idea that could be perfectly
explained in a few minutes. A better procedure is to pretend that those books already exist and to offer a summary, a commentary.”

In the following pages, we give pride of place to the use of the spoken word by Emilio Castro, whom many recognize as an inspired eloquent preacher of the word. What an irony it is for us (and for Borges!) to attempt to show the importance of the spoken word by means of a written text. For so full and prolific a life as Emilio Castro’s cannot be captured in one book, nor in many books, however long. So, in order not to stray too far from Borges’ assertion, we have respected the eloquent spoken word of Emilio as he recalls and tells of significant aspects of his life. (Emilio’s words come from interviews for the 2007 Spanish edition of this book.)

The American novelist John Updike wrote that history buries most humans and tends to exaggerate the stature of those still alive — a serious piece of advice for anyone attempting to write the biography of a famous person during their lifetime. From the beginning, that maxim has saved us from the temptation of producing a flattering portrait or a eulogy. Alongside our research, reading documents and reconstructing the environment and events that serve as background to this biography, we have preferred to comment on and reproduce Emilio’s actual words. History is not simply what has happened, but also what is remembered.

Out of this narrative there quickly springs a portrait of an all-around Christian who scatters seeds of friendship wherever he goes, fostering understanding, but also not failing to crack the whip when the traders have to be driven out of the temple. Emilio is a Christian whose words and deeds express the gospel, who daily endeavours to discover what faithfulness to God involves, and who does not hesitate to risk his security to speak up for those who suffer. The indelible footprints and notable products of Emilio Castro’s unbreakable, inextinguishable evangelical zeal are still to be found in individuals and institutions in his native land, Uruguay, throughout the continent of Latin America and in many corners of the oikoumene.

Shining through the stories that make up this book is the humility of one who serves, seeking no reward, and who is always ready to go the second mile, particularly if it gives him the opportunity for a friendly change-making conversation. His evangelistic talent has been after the manner of Christ, a standing invitation that does not compel, but is offered with open arms on the cross.

As we finish and are rereading these pages once again, Emilio has found absences and unintended gaps and wishes to add these words: “Inevitably, these reminiscences are not exhaustive, nor can they be. Further memories, other
places and other friends come to mind, which have also meant a lot to me on the ecumenical journey. Their absence in this book does not mean that they are forgotten, but is perhaps the promise of further conversations.”

The authors of this joint project would be glad to have further conversations to correct and improve on their work. British-Greek car designer Sir Alec Issigonis once declared that “a camel is a horse designed by committee”. It is our hope that this joint effort results in at least a dromedary, but in any case, in something that is as close as possible to an overall view.

Carlos A. Sintado
Manuel Quintero Pérez
Geneva, November 2006