


 LATIN AMERICA

Dramas & Tragedies OF A WRITER'S LIFE



Elsa de Aguilar (estudoclase@starnet.net.gt), of the Central American Theological Seminary in Guatemala, interviewed Dr. Emilio A. Núñez, a leading Latin American writer, speaker, and theologian.

Many factors lead writers to dedicate themselves to writing. Why and how did you begin writing?

I had the desire to start writing even as a young teen. My older brother wrote poetry and I believed I could write poetry. I presented him with my first poem, which he promptly declared was a good start ... for writing *prose*!

A few years later, I was asked to be the announcer for a radio program at a Bible institute. Since the featured speakers did not always show up, I had to be prepared with written four-minute messages.

Deadlines provide excellent motivation to write. When I have to prepare for conferences I am forced to write. One example of this is my book, *El Cristo de Hispanoamérica* (*The Christ of Hispanic America*), which began as a series of conferences given to university students and was later published as a book by Certeza.

I also have works I started without outside pressure. I have always wanted to write. When a young

person tells me he or she wants to be a writer, one of my first questions is whether he or she likes to read or not. I think that is the big secret to writing.

I learned to read at age five. Once I learned how to read, no one could stop me. My father always had books and magazines at hand. He was a typesetter. There were always books in my home. By age seven, I had read a novel in two volumes, and I kept on reading.

What books have had the greatest influence on you?

I left Catholicism at age 11 after reading *El Convento Desenmascarado* (*The Convent Unmasked*). Through reading the Bible, I understood that Christ was the Savior and the only one who could forgive me. Books on theology have helped me a lot in my ministry in Latin America.

Secular books help me stay in touch with reality. I just read *Viernes de Dolores* (*Holy Friday*), by Miguel Angel Asturias, a renowned Guatemalan writer. It is fascinating to see how he takes readers by the

hand to understand the realities of Guatemalan society. I also started reading a personal drama about Chiqui Ramirez, a woman who used to be a member of the guerilla. I make time for reading.

Why is reading important for writers?

If we are to communicate with today's society, we ought to read what is produced within it. Not only do we need to read, we need to put our writing to the test.

I decided to send articles to a secular newspaper in the city of Santa Ana, in El Salvador. I put my evangelical witness in everything and they still decided to publish 30 of my articles. The important thing is to stay current—to stay informed about how people are writing today.

I was recently at a gathering in Chile. Several youth surrounded me to thank me for my writings. It gives me great satisfaction to know that, at my age, I can still communicate with young people. The same thing happened to me last



“Put your writing to the test,” says Dr. Emilio A. Núñez, “Stay current to communicate effectively.”

year at Clade IV, in Quito, Ecuador, where they surrounded me asking about my books and future writing projects.

Who encouraged you to write?

When I first began writing, a professor at the Central American Bible Institute, Raúl Echeverría, who had been an editor at the Moody Bible Institute, encouraged me to write tracts. Then, he published some of them. *Tribuna Evangélica* (Evangelical Tribune), an Argentinean magazine, published some of my articles. Also, René Padilla, an important theologian, believed in my skills as a writer.

What obstacles have you faced?

All the dramas and tragedies faced by any Latin American writer: lack of time, lack of personal resources, lack of experience, lack of editorial support ... When I began, resources for research were scarce.

Getting an editor interested in your work, especially if you are not well-known, is really hard. You can contact one editor after another and still not get your work pub-

lished. An example is my book *La Sanidad Divina* (Divine Health). I presented the manuscript to a publishing house, but it was not accepted because it was feared the book would be too controversial. Still, someone else took the manuscript and published it unofficially, as a mimeograph. It got

all the way to Spain where another editor published it as a book, reprinting it twice and reaping the profits. I never got a cent.

Another time, I was asked to write a book. Once I had turned in the manuscript, the publishing house went bankrupt and the book was never published.

Still, I have gone far with my writings, achieving more than I ever expected. I received many thanks for my book, *Crisis en América Latina* (Crisis in Latin America). My book *Teología de la liberación* (Liberation Theology) was even translated into Korean.

What advice do you have for publishers?

I have a lot of sympathy towards publishers. I believe editors and publishers should have a sense of mission, of calling. I think most of them already have it. I also believe they should have a commitment to disciple and train writers. Publishers can have great ideals, such as supporting beginning writers or publishing important books.

Publishing follows the laws of consumer demand. Publishers must

cater to booksellers and booksellers must cater to buyers.

Writers who live in developing countries find that our societies do not have strong literary traditions. It is a pity that we do not have the evangelical resources to edit and publish not only for [Christian] readers, but also for society at large, addressing the context of our realities. Lack of resources means there are not enough serious books. We, writers and publishers alike, should strive not only to respond to the buyers, but also to respond to the realities in our contexts.v

