

Francisco Pérez de Antón

In Praise of Francisco Marroquín

**Universidad Francisco Marroquín
Guatemala**

© Copyright 1999 by Universidad Francisco Marroquín.
All rights reserved.

This booklet reproduces the full text of the Inaugural Lecture delivered by the author
at Universidad Francisco Marroquín on January 13th, 1992.

Translated by Julio H. Cole.

Cover: “Francisco Marroquín,” by Guatemalan painter Ramón Avila.

Impreso en Guatemala — Printed in Guatemala

It is said that there are three motives that encourage someone to give a lecture with pleasure: a large audience, a special occasion, and an attractive topic. Some would add a fourth element, namely a good fee, but since it is impolite to mention pecuniary matters from the podium, those who write on these matters prefer to remain silent on this issue, citing only the first three.

And to tell the truth, today these three conditions are indeed present. First, a tightly packed audience, composed of those who begin their higher studies in this institution, as well as those who have decided to renew their commitment with knowledge. Secondly, the fact that our University marks its coming of age, celebrating this year its twentieth anniversary. And third, the fact that the topic chosen for the inaugural lecture of the 1992 session is Francisco Marroquín himself, an individual towards whom I feel deeply devoted. Allow me then, above all, to express how honored and pleased I feel for this very special invitation, and how obliged I feel towards the authorities of the University, who have arranged for audience, occasion and subject matter to coincide so happily on this date.

I hurry to add, however, for your relief, that the purpose of my lecture today is neither to instruct nor to propose a learned thesis of the kind that customarily provokes flight or yawns, but to tell you a story and direct your feelings and affections towards an exemplary man, whose greatness of spirit would make him one of the key figures in Guatemalan history. My credentials, all told, are not many. I am not a historian, though I am much interested in history, and the only arguments that I could adduce in order to speak with certain authority about Francisco Marroquín are the facts that we were both named Francisco, that we were born in very nearby towns, and that both he (for 33 years) and I (for 29) would make of this country our second homeland.

Yet if these be not sufficient title, I do believe I understand, however, the mechanism by which a man becomes rooted in a foreign land and comes to love it to the point of making it his own. And it is precisely this element which authorizes me to approach Francisco Marroquín with a feeling of sharing with him that intimate and vital journey that allowed him to make of Guatemala, as the Spanish saying goes, “his nature, his destiny, and his grave” (*su natura, su ventura y su sepultura*).

But let us open the doors of history, and cross the ocean together, in order to take a bird’s eye view of the setting, the country and the time into which were born the boy that, with time, would become the first bishop from America, founder of Santiago de los Caballeros, and founding father of Guatemala.

A King, an Empire and a Sword

Towards the end of the 15th century, Spain was, in the European context, a remote and distant country that in its westernmost end featured a cape with the name of Finisterre, i.e., the end of the Earth. A few years later, however, a Spanish chronicler wrote these words: “*We have passed from being at the end of the world to being the center of the Universe.*” This was not just an expression of traditional Spanish pride, but an undeniable geographical reality. The world had suddenly doubled, generating a political, scientific, economic, cultural and demographic commotion of colossal proportions. The Iberian peninsula was now almost halfway between Jerusalem and Havana, and an epic legend of conquests, new lands, paradises, and fabulous treasures spread throughout the Old World.

During the first quarter of the 16th century, the years in which Machiavelli published *The Prince* and Erasmus his *In Praise of Folly*, Cortés conquers the Aztec empire, Alvarado subdues the territory of the Maya, Balboa discovers the Pacific, and Juan Sebastián Elcano proves that the Earth is not flat, but round. Influenced by books of chivalry, the *conquistadors* search for the Fountain of Eternal Youth in Florida, for the legendary Eldorado in Amazonia, for the Seven Cities of Cíbola in New Mexico, and for the mythical Queen Calafia in a place they will name California.

Europe, on the other hand, has serious problems. Luther has rebelled against the Pope and has sparked religious war. The young king of Spain, Charles V, heir to the empire of the Ceasars, tries to unite Christendom in a war that extends throughout France, Italy, Germany and the Low Countries. But the Roman Empire and the Catholic faith also face dangers from the East. The Turks have reached Budapest and have even set siege to Vienna. In short, both infidel and heretic, to use the language of the time, threaten to destroy more than a thousand years of cultural and political hegemony shared until then by the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

In the social sphere, feudal structures have begun to collapse and a new form of power, centered in the king rather than dispersed among lords and nobles, consolidates in Spain. In 1521 Charles V defeats the rebellious Castilian communities and suppresses their desire for autonomy. From then on, all power will be in the hands of the king and his ministers. A famous sonnet of the time, dedicated to the Emperor, reflected that ecumenical and unifying effort in these terms: “*The time is near, oh Lord, or is already here, / that glorious age promised by heaven ... / which announces to the world for greater joy, / one king, one empire, and one sword .*”

In a little over 25 years, a remote and small country (only 9 million people, the current population of Guatemala), has become the most powerful nation in the world. Sevilla is now the capital of Europe and of the Indies. A flow of glittering wealth reaches Europe from overseas. The Spaniard of that century acquires, unexpectedly, a universal conscience, and the Peninsula's youth abandon villages and townships, with sword and cross in hand, in a quest for gold and glory, singing songs like this one: "*Mi pueblo, mi natura, / España, mi ventura, / y el mundo, mi sepultura.*"

A Different Humanism

Immersed in this milieu, a young man grows up named Francisco Marroquín, born in the year 1499 in the province of Santander, in northern Spain, of noble and landed family. After completing his ecclesiastical studies and taking priestly vows, Marroquín studied at the University of Huesca, where he graduated with the degree of *licenciado* in theology and philosophy. Some years later, he was appointed professor at the University of Osma, where he met García de Loáisía, bishop of that city, confessor and personal advisor to the Emperor, and president of the *Consejo de Indias*. Marroquín soon attracted the attention of the bishop, who invited him to join his group of advisers and preachers, which also included the Franciscan Juan de Zumárraga, with whom Marroquín soon formed a deep friendship.

At the early age of 27, then, the young scholar finds himself in an exceptional position that will enable him to influence the events of this time. Marroquín will travel in those years to Burgos, Toledo, Madrid and Aranjuez, accompanying Loáisía and Zumárraga in their visits to the Emperor. He will also be present at the *capitulaciones* or negotiations that two famous *conquistadors*, Hernán Cortés and Pedro de Alvarado, hold with Charles V.

Everything seems to indicate that the Court will be the stage for the young man's future career. But his values and his calling point in another direction. Marroquín, like Zumárraga and many other humanists of their time, belongs to a reno-vating movement forged in the Spanish universities, where a strange idea, an unusual thought for their time, has arisen that questions the right of the *conquistadors* to wage war on the Indians, as well as their right to enslave the conquered peoples. All men, affirm the followers of this school of thought, are equal before God and under the law, and no society can call itself just unless it is based on the free exercise of human will.

The humanists of Salamanca, Valladolid, and Alcalá de Henares have created for the Emperor a problem of conscience. Injustice prevails in the

Indies, they state. And they demand for the natives liberty, equality and fraternity, centuries before the French revolutionaries. But in contrast to European humanism, which developed in the form of abstract reflections, Spanish humanism will be put to practice in a land plagued with thorns and blood, the New World, and on a humiliated and offended man, the American Indian. The ultimate end of these humanists and theologians is to bring to this concrete man the Christian faith, law, justice, and that which at the time was known in Spain as “*derecho de gentes*,” a legal principle inherited from the Roman Law, which recognized, in all men, equal prerogatives and attributes.

These ideas, acquired during his university stage, will mark the life and the work of Francisco Marroquín. Every intellectual movement, however, tends to march ahead of history, and the clash between the one and the other tends to create conflicts that, in turn, beget realities not always in tune with the ideal from which they were conceived. The drama that this young man will soon experience will be that of carrying to practice humanistic and humanitarian ideas in a world where deeds collide with the law, liberty collides with slavery, equality collides with injustice, and fraternity collides with rejection.

A Missionary’s Fervor

In 1527, Juan de Zumárraga, who has been ordered to Mexico as a member of the *Audiencia*, invites Marroquín to travel with him to the New World. Zumárraga, aged 53, who later became bishop of Mexico, founded their University and sponsored the first printing press on this continent, belonged to this *Pleiades* of humanists that I have referred to. For him, Christianity is not supposed to remain hidden among the theologians, since faith “*is better shown in good living than in good arguments*.” And he wanted Marroquín at his side in the task of imparting justice in the *Audiencia* of New Spain, the name by which Mexico was then known, because he had seen in the young man an inclination to act rather than to speculate about the sex of the angels or the number of them that fit on the head of a pin.

For Marroquín, however, it is not easy to leave Spain, nor to leave his position of adviser to the president of the *Consejo de Indias*, the highest royal authority in the administration of the overseas territories. His future looks to be both comfortable and brilliant. He has lost nothing in America. Nonetheless, Marroquín accepts the challenge. And the motive seems to us today quite transparent. For this young scholar, the propagation of the faith is much more important than his own ecclesiastical career.

However, to better understand his decision, it is necessary to return for some instants to our own time, so abundant in idealisms, and remember, for example, what Marxist internationalism has meant over the last 75 years. Only yesterday, millions of young people embraced this cause with the purpose of uniting with the workers of the world and carrying social revolution to all corners of the globe. Well, then, once we make the necessary qualifications and distinctions, the fervor of the Spanish missionaries of the 16th century does not differ much from that of many young people in our own days. Uniting all men under the sign of the Christian faith was an exciting and generous ideal that, for the missionaries, softened the blow of having to give up their nature and their own happiness in order to make the world their grave.

Such are, in my judgment, the motives that induce Marroquín to leave Spain in the year 1527, and travel with Zumárraga to Mexico. The Franciscan's influence on the young man will always be a close and decisive one, although not from nearby, since shortly after arriving in the capital of New Spain, an event took place that would alter Marroquín's destiny. Pedro de Alvarado is also in Mexico, where his life path crosses that of Zumárraga's young assistant.

How that cruel, ambitious and arrogant soldier managed to persuade Marroquín to leave the Mexican *Audiencia* in order to become a mere priest in the city of Santiago, in the valley of Almolonga (today Ciudad Vieja), is something that cannot be explained but for two reasons. One, Alvarado's attractive personality and way with words—the chronicler Gómara described him as an “*outspoken, witty, and very talkative man.*” The other reason has to do with Marroquín's character and vocation. Once again, full of faith and ideals, he found himself having to choose between remaining in the security of a position of importance, as ecclesiastical judge under the orders of Zumárraga, or descending to the position of mere priest in an unknown and isolated territory. And to judge from his decision to follow Alvarado to Guatemala we can only conclude that his sense of mission prevailed over the advantages and possibilities that a brilliant ecclesiastical career might have offered.

Guatemala, his Nature

To Marroquín, Guatemala must have seemed an ideal place to put in practice his humanistic ideas and build a new society and a new man. And if we stay clear of contemporary prejudices, born of worn out ideologies—like statements to the effect that Christianity was an instrument of Spanish domination—and if we think of Christian humanism as an ideal of liberty, justice and harmony between men of good will, we will come closer to understanding the yearnings that inspired the young priest.

Little could he foresee the monumental task that awaited him, nor that two dissimilar personalities, Alvarado and himself, would for almost fourteen years play the leading roles in a conflict between *caudillismo* and civil organization, between liberty and slavery, between justice and iniquity, between feudalism and the Modern Age. Alvarado embodied the medieval tradition, that is, the exercise of unrestricted power, like any other feudal lord, with an authority above that of *Cabildos* and royal officials. Marroquín, on the other hand, represented the modern mentality that centers the laws, legal violence and justice in the State.

History does not register open confrontations between these two men, perhaps because, in the words of Fuentes y Guzmán, “*the meekness of the bishop seasoned everything.*” Marroquín was a wise and discreet man who knew when to yield and when to stand firm, a talent exhibited by everyone who knows that confrontation is often useless. Old Cuauhctemallán, whose borders and boundaries had not yet been fixed, would be a witness to this conflict. But I am quite sure that, deep down, that inexperienced youth must have thought of Alvarado that which the French poet Louis Aragon would write centuries later about tyrants: “*Oh, you that manufacture deaths / you will not always be the strongest!*”

This modern and contemporary attitude of seeking compromise without yielding on principle would be adopted by Marroquín in order to face the transition between the feudal and violent world of Alvarado and the modern ideas of which he was harbinger. Thus, on April 18, 1530, both leave for Guatemala, and a month and a half later, they arrive in Santiago, today Ciudad Vieja, on the skirts of Agua Volcano.

Founded scarcely two years before, November 22, 1527, Santiago de los Caballeros is still an unfinished city. Nor is Guatemala a country in today's terms, but rather a group of small divided territories that Alvarado, after a bloody war, is trying to consolidate into a geographical and political unit. The Old Age in America is dying, giving way to a New Age, whose identity will be defined by the difficult symbiosis of two cultures and two different races.

The Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano has said that “*America was not discovered in 1492, because those who invaded her could not or would not see her.*” And it is true that, in many cases, this assertion is valid. But not in the case of our young scholar, nor in that of many others like him. Marroquín will soon discover that this place is very close to his nature, since his native land, Santander, is also a rough, mountainous, and wooded region. Thus, the

telluric factor would become for him more of a bond than an obstacle. Marroquín, then, not only saw Guatemala from the first day; he also felt her and loved her to his dying moment. And for 33 years, the natural beauty of this land would go on penetrating his spirit, creating within him that sense of rootedness that territory tends to infuse in men.

Clashing with Reality

But if the beauty of the place and its mild and healthy climate attracted him, the same could not be said of the terrible human drama unfolding before his very eyes. Santiago de los Caballeros is a place without God, without King, and without law. The servitude of the Indian, through the system of the *encomienda*, as well as slavery, in its most iniquitous forms, dominate the life of the territory. Law and justice are practically non-existent. To say nothing of Christianity, which, in that vile environment, is a mockery of faith itself. And as if this were not enough, the Indians not subject to menial work must pay the *encomenderos* a heavy tribute for being educated in the Christian doctrine.

This is the world to which arrives a young academic that has passed a good part of his life participating in an intellectual debate quite unrelated to the reality that is lived in the Indies. And it is not hard to imagine the shock and pain of the just man upon facing such a scene. Guatemala was almost a military camp, governed by an arbitrary captain, where one could still smell the odor of gunpowder and blood. Alvarado, an old-style *caudillo*, was no different in his methods from other, modern-style *caudillos*, and his ideas of political unity and coexistence included oppression and tyranny as deterrents. In such a situation, what sense did it make to speak of liberty where lordship was the right of the victor and servitude the duty of the vanquished? How to infuse the principles of equality and fraternity in a world where rejection of the other race was common practice? And what shall we say of justice, where abuses and crimes were committed with utmost impunity? What could an inexperienced youth like Marroquín do, facing a troop of men hardened by ambition and war?

In view of our own present conditions, which are in no small measure a transcript of the past, one might say very little. Fortunately, Marroquín was not a preacher nor a theologian of the cell. Thus, he concentrates more on what he *can* do than on what, according to others, *should* be done. For him, the moral sermon is not enough. Instead, it is necessary to act at once to gain wider areas of liberty and justice for the Indians. And so, with a realism somewhat inappropriate for his age, Marroquín begins to slowly perforate the walls of a community closed to the laws and to mercy.

A few days after his arrival, Marroquín swears before the *Cabildo* to the duties of his office, which carries a yearly salary of 150 pesos—a salary which he will never collect because the *Cabildo* does not have the wherewithal to pay it. The fact is that in Santiago not only are liberty and justice scarce, but so are essential goods such as bread, oil, and clothing. But Marroquín does not lose heart. Infused with missionary zeal, he visits, one by one, the villages and *encomiendas* of his province, with a little traveling bag, two shirts, a breviary, and an Indian to serve as his guide along unfamiliar roads.

Very few concern themselves with the comings and goings of that lone clergyman, who eats only toasted corn, three times a day, seasoned occasionally with *chichicaste* roots. Marroquín, however, is not only spreading the Gospel. He is also making a survey, as we would say nowadays. In each place he visits, he records the number of subjected Indians, as well as the tributes they pay. Only he knows the purpose of that survey, which he will one day use as a weapon of liberation.

First Bishop from America

The harshness and fatigue of those first years, however, will not show in any of his letters. Nor will they show regret. On the contrary, everything Marroquín does is illuminated by the perspective of a new society and a new man. These are years in which the young scholar perceives that nascent society, where everything that needs to be done is good, and everything he builds and raises is marked by the sign of permanence.

But legal and moral progress is slow, and cruelty and injustices are unceasing. Guatemala is still a hell, but the presence of Marroquín has begun to create new attitudes and new moral imperatives among *encomenderos* and soldiers. His efforts will be rewarded two years later, when the Emperor Charles V requests Pope Paul III to appoint Marroquín, “*a learned and worthy person*,” Bishop of Santiago. At the early age of 32, he becomes, not only the youngest bishop in the Indies, but the first prelate consecrated in America.

Such an honor, in a man of his age, might have gone to his head, might have made him try to further his ecclesiastical career, or seek another place where his talents might be more appreciated. But Marroquín was no migrating bird. Now, with more power and influence than ever, he is more than willing to expend his energies for the good of his diocese. Marroquín wants to make Guatemala his homeland, since, for him, homeland is not only the land where one’s parents were born, but also the land where one’s children are born. And they will all be his children: Indian, *mestizo*, and white. Guatemala will be a

land for creation and procreation, a land from which will sprout liberty and justice, a land to endow, in short, with the human dignity that it deserves.

Beyond the selfishness and greed of *conquistadors*, officials and colonists, who only see in Guatemala a place to plunder and seek fortune, Marroquín has seen a new society. And his letters to the Emperor confirm this purpose. But this is also confirmed by an anecdote, whose place in history is often as important (if not more so) than the big events. One day, when Marroquín was busy planning the new cathedral, Alvarado approached him to criticize what, in his judgment, was an excessively large temple. “*Why, and for how many people—said Alvarado—does your Excellency want so big a Church?*” To which Marroquín, with prophetic vision, replied: “*One day, Sire, it will not be big enough, though neither you nor I will see it.*”

Population Policy

The bishop’s dream would suffer, however, countless frustrations, especially once he realized that Alvarado’s plans differed from his own, and that Santiago was for the soldier from Extremadura merely a center for military operations: a place from which to plan, equip and supply new explorations. Thus, in January of 1534, Alvarado begins to arm a fleet in the harbor of Iztapa with the purpose of traveling to Peru, from which he has received news that an empire full of fabulous treasures, the Empire of the Incas, has been discovered.

Marroquín's disappointment upon learning of Alvarado’s lack of interest in peopling the country could not be greater. According to estimates by the historian García Peláez, the citizens of Santiago in those days numbered 650. Of those, Alvarado carried off to Peru 450. If to this we add 2,000 auxiliary Indians, we can understand the depressive effect caused by such a population reduction.

Marroquín takes then his pen and writes a letter to the *Audiencia* of Mexico, the first that we know of, where he states the need that the province has of a stable governor, “*one that will bring his wife here, one willing to settle in this land, knowing that he will not leave here for the rest of his life.*” In the hardness of this phrase we can glimpse the spirit and the political thought of Marroquín, as well as his rejection of those who “*plan to leave tomorrow and so treat this land like some- thing that will not last them long.*”

This would not be the last time that the young bishop would express himself in that manner. All through his life, the bishop would criticize soldiers,

officials, fortune seekers, even members of religious orders, for their indifference to the land. “*It would be a very good thing*—he wrote in another letter—*for those of us in these parts to lose all hope of returning to live and die in Castile,*” since where the land has been generous to man, “*it is only fair that [he] live and die [there].*” For Marroquín, it is indispensable that the people become “planted,” in the botanical sense of the term, that they toss roots here and bear fruit, and make of this land their nature and their grave. Guatemala could not be a provisional camp—a frontier territory from which to set out on new projects and conquests—but a permanent homeland.

But if the instability of the Spanish population disturbed him, he was concerned even more about the Indians. In the 16th century, not only was Guatemala a lightly populated territory (some 800,000 people in all of Central America), but war, slavery and new diseases were decimating and dispersing the indigenous population even further. Thus, for Marroquín, the only possible civilizing policy is to abolish slavery and cease all manner of aggressions against the natives, on the one hand, and to gather the Indians in towns in order to protect their lives and achieve better treatment for them. “*Since they are men*—he wrote to the Emperor—*it is fair that they live together and in company, which will greatly benefit their souls and bodies.*”

Marroquín has seen in cultural and physical cross-breeding the future of Guatemala, a path-breaking idea, like so many others of his. Thus, he proposed the Crown to force the Spaniards to marry Indian women, because “*from that fruit*— he says—*God and Your Majesty will both be served and the natives will be better treated.*” In other words, if the laws of God and men do not suffice against the abuses of soldiers and colonists, then the laws of blood will have to contain them.

But Marroquín is not satisfied with giving ideas, he also puts them in practice. A good example is the case of some land granted by the *Cabildo* to the diocese and located near Santiago, on the skirts of the volcano. Marroquín will donate those lands in order to found the first town, the first *reducción*, as they were called then, or “*pilot project*,” as we might say nowadays. That town, baptized by him with the name San Juan de Guatemala—a very apt name, no doubt, since it was a forerunner—is today called San Juan del Obispo, in memory of its benefactor and founder. A half-century after its foundation, according to the chronicler Vázquez, the town already had 700 Indian converts, a Franciscan convent, and cultivated land planted with corn and many fruit trees.

Justice Arrives

Marroquín's evangelizing, humanizing and civilizing efforts thus materialized in concrete deeds through a policy of defending the humble with vigor and confronting the powerful with intelligence. The bishop is 35 years old, but his authority is now beyond question. And, of course, he never rests for a moment. Marroquín obtains economic support from wherever and however he can, he organizes the diocese, brings Dominicans, Franciscans, Mercedarians, builds schools and chapels, bearing in mind the civilizing role performed for centuries by the medieval monasteries in Europe. Soon, his personal battle against slavery will be crowned by success.

In 1535, a defeated Alvarado returns from Peru. Not only was the expedition a failure, but the *conquistador* must now face trial for having penetrated into territories not authorized by the Emperor, and for taking Guatemalan Indians on the adventure, many of whom perished in the hellish climb to the Andes. The *Audiencia* of Mexico has dismissed him from the governorship of the province and has sent to Guatemala a "*judge of grievances*." To avoid trial, Alvarado escapes to Honduras, where he has been asked to fight rebellious Indians, and from there to Spain.

These events will be of great importance for Guatemala. The new judge, Alonso de Maldonado, also brings the title of provisional governor. A lawyer replaces a military man in power. As a result, Guatemala will enter a period marked by justice and law, and reforms which Alvarado had refused to carry out, in spite of royal admonitions and orders, will finally be enacted.

The basic instrument for this change will be the survey that, quietly and by himself, Marroquín had carried out in the years devoted to traveling the length and width of the province. This document, which Marroquín called *matrícula* ("registration"), will be the basis for a drastic "fiscal reform," if I am allowed an anachronism, only the other way around of how we would understand the term today. The content of the *matrícula*, as we have pointed out, was a detailed description of the territory, with the number of inhabitants, their economic and social conditions, as well as the amount of tribute, in gold, specie, or slaves, that the Indians paid to the *conquistadors*. The "reform" would consist of liberating the Indians from oppression, servitude and plunder, and a drastic reduction of the burden of tribute paid to the *conquistadors*. Also, the Indians were no longer slaves of the *encomenderos* and became vassals of the Emperor, which made them equal, in theory, to the peasants of the Peninsula.

The impulse that these two scholars gave to liberty, justice and coexistence is an example of what two men of good will can do for a society in conflict. The best proof of their success are the words that an Indian chronicler would write in the *“Annals of the Cakchiqueles”*: *“On the 16th day of May, 1536, arrived the lord president Mantunalo, who came to alleviate the sufferings of the people. The washing of gold quickly ceased and the tribute of boys and girls was suspended. Deaths by fire and hanging also quickly ceased, as well as plunder on roads on the part of the Castilians. Soon the roads would again be trodden by people, as they were before the tribute began.”*

The Indian chronicler repeats again and again the word *quickly*, as if he wanted to stress the speed with which the reforms were carried out. And from this we can only deduce that those changes were suggested by Marroquín in the *“registration”* that he delivered to Maldonado, who, without the bishop’s groundwork, would not have been able to make the appraisals of the tribute or carry out the changes so quickly. In this way, twelve years after the conquest, a scorned and de- feated people found balsam for their pains thanks to the un- tiring labor of their patron and defender.

The Return of Alvarado

But no reform, economic or political, is ever without per- sonal or social cost. In Marroquín’s absence, colonists and *en- comenderos* will raise their voices against the bishop, whom they will attack mercilessly, insulting him, slandering him, and showering upon him all manner of abuse. For them, it is not Maldonado, the new governor, who is to blame for their being deprived of the income which the tribute from the Indians procured them. It is the bishop who is to blame.

Marroquín, who has left for Mexico, where he will be consecrated as bishop by Zumárraga, will not learn, until much later, of the *“ugly and shameless words”* that have been said about him on account of the *“great reduction”* of income suffered by the colonists due to the reform of the tribute. Then, in spite of his sweet and conciliatory nature, he takes his pen in anger and writes: *“May God be my witness that I do not lie nor would I want to lie, and that in all the appraisals that have been made up to now, most did not deserve to give to their owners not even water ... And on my consecration and salvation I declare that I do reckon to have gone against the natives, in favor of the encomenderos and in each appraisal, by more than one fourth part ... That is the reason that this town complains against me, since, if we remember the past and all of them are so rich, what has been the cause, but my remaining*

silent like a unworthy prelate, pastor and protector, watching how the wolves ate my flock, while I remained idle and held my tongue?"

Marroquín thus made known to the *Cabildo* of Santiago the anger accumulated during nine years of impotence. And he denounces the insatiable greed and lack of sensibility and Christian spirit of those who live at the expense of the Indians. But now he feels safe. Santiago is governed by a man, Alonso de Maldonado, who imparts justice squarely and enforces the law at any cost.

This opening stage, unfortunately, would not last long. In 1539, Alvarado returns from Spain. The *conquistador* brings royal privileges and concessions that not only grant immunity from the pending trial, but also an order that replaces Maldonado as governor. His superb contacts in the Spanish Court, added to his diplomatic abilities, which he knows how to use when it suits him, have allowed him to avoid Maldonado's actions. Don Pedro has also married Beatriz de la Cueva, sister of his previous wife and both of them nieces of Don Francisco de los Cobos, private secretary to the Emperor. Along with the expedition comes a group of single ladies, who come seeking husbands among the colonists and *conquistadors* of Santiago.

To Marroquín, the fact that Alvarado returned not only with his own wife, but also with match-making inclinations, must have seemed like a miracle. But this change of attitude was only apparent. Alvarado is not at heart a colonizer, but an ambitious and restless soldier who has conceived the project, approved by Charles V, of organizing a new expedition, this time to the Spice Islands. Alvarado wants to cross the Pacific, reach the Orient, and open a new route to the species of India and China. Once more, he will embark on a project similar to the one that took him to Peru, subtracting from Guatemala all manner of economic and human resources with the heavy-handed arbitrariness that is his trademark.

Annoyed by this obnoxious man that "*neither looks at the land nor cares for it,*" Marroquín writes to Charles V, describing the tensions to which the colony is again subjected to on account of the governor. Alvarado's charm and way with words no longer fool him. Uneasiness between Indians and Spaniards is again manifest. With a governor like this, concludes the bishop, it is impossible to populate, civilize, or evangelize.

Marroquín, Governor

But every effort to retain the *Adelantado* is useless. In September of 1540, Alvarado departs for Mexico, leaving an exhausted city of Santiago. It will also be his last adventure. A few months later, on July 4, 1541, he dies crushed by a horse, at the age of 56, while preparing in New Galicia (today state of Jalisco) for his departure to the Orient.

From there on, events follow in quick succession. The news reaches Guatemala in September, and after the solemn funeral ceremonies, the Cabildo appoints as governor Alvarado's widow, Doña Beatriz de la Cueva.

That same night, September 9, a torrential rain begins. A flood of almost Biblical proportions falls upon the valley of Almolonga. Two days later, September 11, 1541, at two o'clock in the morning, a strong tremor breaks open a dike formed in one of the volcano's folds. The pent-up water becomes an irresistible avalanche of mud, sand, rocks and tree trunks that buries the city of Santiago almost completely.

The scene the following morning in that incipient city was one of almost total desolation. The governor had died, along with her ladies. Hundreds of Spaniards and Indians lay buried under the mud. The survivors extracted bodies from the silt and prayed and cried for their loved ones. On the third day, however, Marroquín gave orders to suspend the mourning and the funeral rites. It was time to tend to the wounded, provide shelter for the survivors, widows and orphans, rebuild the city and, if necessary, move it to some other place. At once, the bishop starts to work, like any other anguished survivor, scraping and digging in the thick mire.

Thus, from the ruins of Santiago arose the leader that the city needed in those crucial moments. But not by chance. At the age of 41, Marroquín was already the man everyone trusted. They knew from experience that the bishop would not accept defeat and that his fighting and pioneering spirit was capable of transforming an Apocalypse into a Genesis.

A week later, the colonists gather in the church. A governor has to be appointed. By common consent, they elect Francisco Marroquín and Francisco de la Cueva. And though the bishop at first refuses the appointment, in the end he accepts since, according to the words he wrote to the Emperor, "*I looked upon that republic as the father that I have always been to her.*"

The destruction of Santiago de Guatemala, today Ciudad Vieja, coupled with the death of Alvarado, would give way to a new stage in the life of Guatemala, marked by the sign of political and social renovation. The years that follow are a time of transition in which *caudillismo* will be replaced by new laws and institutions, such as the New Laws of Barcelona, by which Charles V abolished the slavery of the Indians, or the *Audiencia de los Confines*, the first court of justice in Central America.

In this controversial and evocative year of 1992, a year full of sensibilities and historic frictions, a year in which our generation makes a special effort to understand what 1492 meant for human history, it is also necessary to remember another important date. That date is the year 1542, when the *conquistadors*, *adelantados* and military rulers of America begin to submit to royal authority. The days of personal *caudillismo* were over, though its footprints would remain for many years, under the guise of diverse forms of vassalage. But the brief Middle Ages experienced by the American continent were ending thanks to the New Laws. The political, economic and social order was renovating. And in Guatemala it was Marroquín who marked the direction and character of that new historic stage.

Guatemala, his Destiny

On September 17, 1541, Marroquín and De la Cueva order the removal of the city to the valley of Panchoy and, a few months later, construction began on what we today know as Antigua Guatemala, a city whose 450th anniversary we celebrate this year. No one could imagine, however, that this would turn out to be a Roman task. But before everyone's eyes a city began to rise that would carry the seal of the bishop, that untiring man who, after making Guatemala his "*natura*," would now make of her his destiny, as father and founder of a splendid city, Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, which would become the third largest and richest city in America.

For 22 years, the mark of Francisco Marroquín will remain in each house, on each street, on each stone of the new Santiago. The bishop would participate in the planning and layout of the city until, a little later, he left the government in the hands of the civil authorities. But his generous spirit would be reflected in many public works, the fruits of his inexhaustible civilizing spirit, such as hospitals, schools, and an orphanage. Marroquín materialized thusly his early ideal of transforming Guatemala into a territorial and political unit based not on conflict, but on the coexistence of two different cultures and races.

The task was not always easy. In a moment of fatigue, Marroquín writes to the Emperor: “*The work so taxes spirit and body that we are all of us quite discouraged.*” In spite of everything, Marroquín will build the cathedral, will bring to Guatemala the *Audiencia de los Confines*, and will donate the lands destined for the Episcopal Palace for the construction of the new Court of Justice (today Palace of the Captaincy- General).

These will be two arduous and laborious decades, but also vastly fruitful ones, although, as usual, greed and strife, never absent, would force Marroquín to resort to all his stores of patience and tolerance in his dealings with colonists, officials and clergy. The hardships of those years are reflected in the following comment to Prince Philip: “*I have always sought— says Marroquín—peace and quiet for this republic, and I have sometimes looked the other way, so as not to grip so hard that it might burst.*” But he could not avoid opposing his ideal of rightness, liberty and justice to abuses and despotism, as would happen to him, years later, with Cerrato, a new governor, who, angered by Marroquín’s opposition, entered the cathedral and shot the bishop at point-blank, luckily without serious consequences.

On August 1, 1548, the bishop expressed in his correspondence one of his dearest dreams: to establish a University in the new city of Santiago. In successive letters to the Emperor, he reiterated the need for help in order to carry out such a great project. But he would have neither the time nor the resources. Even so, donated at his death the sum of 20,000 pesos and some land in Jocotenango, in order to found and endow chairs for the University of his dreams, an endowment that, in time, would help to create the University of San Carlos Borromeo.

In the letter we have mentioned, Marroquín requests the Emperor to send a good grammarian, a good artist, a good theologian, and a good chronicler. These could be obtained easily, he says, from the universities of Alcalá or Salamanca. And he immediately requests the Emperor “*to establish an institution for higher learning in the city of Santiago de Guatemala, which is of all these provinces, the greatest and most abundant and the one best suited for study.*”

These are truly prophetic words, and on the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of our University they acquire a special meaning, because I believe that the bishop’s ideals of liberty and justice tie-in directly with those of the Guatemalans that, in our century, made possible the dream of Marroquín and, very appropriately, baptized this University with his name.

Guatemala, his Grave

At this point, it might seem superfluous to praise Francisco Marroquín. Nevertheless, I am obliged to point out that those who knew him, in life as well as through his works, had nothing but words of praise for him.

Fray Tomás de la Torre, superior of the Dominicans in Chiapas, says that he was a man of “*great humility and charity.*” The Franciscan chronicler Francisco Vázquez states that Marroquín was the “*author of every good thing that this city enjoys, a true father and devoted pastor.*” The Dominican Ximénez describes him as “*a most singular man, guided by the Lord in order to compensate Guatemala and its provinces for the many misfortunes visited upon them.*” Fuentes y Guzmán calls him “*an exemplary man of clear memory.*” His modern biographer, Father Carmelo Saénz de Santa María, says that he was “*the founding father of the Guatemalan nationality.*” As for myself, I think that bishop Marroquín was, above all, the spirit of coexistence, through which he wanted to make of Guatemala a homeland for all: Indians, *ladinos* and Spaniards. But besides being the founder, teacher, pastor and first eminent person of Guatemala, Marroquín would be the embodiment of that Hispanic humanism that wanted to make of Christianity its mission, of the law, its armor, of justice, its sword, and of liberty, its flag.

Marroquín never returned to Spain. He would live here the last 33 years of his life, years in which he contributed to the philology, ethnology and culture of Guatemala, creating path-breaking institutions of unquestionable value. No one finishes a work like his totally satisfied. That is why, towards the end of his life, Marroquín confessed to feeling tired from such a long journey. “*I am old and poor,*” he says in a letter. And, thinking that his mission has not been completed, he adds with his habitual modesty: “*I have only done what I could.*”

Finally, April 18, 1563, on Holy Friday, Marroquín died in Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala at the age of 64. He went to his grave, says Milla y Vidaurre, “*accompanied by the blessings and the tears of the Indians who loved him and revered him like a father.*” His body was buried in the cathedral, though the gravestone was lost as a result of the earthquakes of 1773. To this day we do not know where the remains of the bishop rest. Of one thing I am sure, however. Wherever they are, and borrowing the words of Quevedo, “*dust they will be, but loving dust,*” dust that today fertilizes the land that he loved so dearly. But though we cannot carry flowers to his grave, thousands of Guatemalans remember him every day, in the surname that many adopted after his death, in this country’s hall of fame, in institutions, schools and, above all, in this dear University that carries his name with legitimate pride.

No nation can show greater gratitude toward that great humanist who was able to make of Guatemala "*su natura, su ventura, y su sepultura.*"



6 Calle final, zona 10 Guatemala
www.ufm.edu