

History of Zubiri Studies and Activity in North America

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Abstract

The history of Zubiri in North America began with his visit to Princeton University in 1946. Initial scholarly interest in Zubiri's philosophy was the product of work by Robert Caponigri and Frederick Wilhelmsen in the 1960s and 70s. Thomas Fowler learned about Zubiri from these gentlemen and began his work of translation and publishing in the 1970s. Caponigri's translation of *Sobre la esencia* and Fowler's translation of *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* were published in the early 80s. Others including Nelson Orringer, Gary Gurtler, and Leonard Wessell had been investigating Zubiri, and the four met at the I Congreso Xavier Zubiri in Madrid in 1993. Later Fowler decided that a focus for Zubiri studies was needed for North America and the English-speaking world, and he established the Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America in 1997. Shortly thereafter he completed and the Foundation published his translation of *Inteligencia sentiente*. The *Xavier Zubiri Review* was launched in 1998, with papers on Zubiri presented at the XX World Congress of Philosophy. The journal is now in its sixth volume. Interest in Zubiri's work continues to grow, and now many more people in North America are investigating his thought. Nelson Orringer's translation of *Estructura dinámica de la realidad* was published in 2003, bringing the four the number of published translations of Zubiri. Joaquín Redondo has translated Zubiri's theology trilogy and is now at work on other Zubiri translations.

Resumen

La historia de Zubiri en América del Norte empieza con su visita a la Universidad de Princeton en 1946. El interés erudito inicial en la filosofía de Zubiri resulta del trabajo de Robert Caponigri y Frederick Wilhelmsen en los años sesenta. Thomas Fowler sabe de Zubiri de estos señores y empieza su trabajo de traducción y publicación en los años setenta. La traducción de Caponigri de *Sobre la esencia* y la traducción de Fowler de *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* se publicaron a principios de los años ochenta. Otros incluso Nelson Orringer, Gary Gurtler, y Leonard Wessell estaban investigando la filosofía de Zubiri, y los cuatro se encuentran en el I Congreso Xavier Zubiri en Madrid en 1993. Después Fowler decide que un enfoque para los estudios de Zubiri es necesario para América del Norte y el mundo angloparlante, y con la ayuda de la Fundación Xavier Zubiri en Madrid, establece la Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America en 1997. Dentro de poco él complete y la Fundación publica su traducción de *Inteligencia sentiente*. La *Xavier Zubiri Review* se lanzó en 1998, con ponencias sobre Zubiri presentados al XX Congreso Mundial de Filosofía. El periódico está ahora en su sexto volumen. Interés en el trabajo de Zubiri continúa creciendo, y ahora hay muchos más personas en América del Norte que están investigando su pensamiento. La traducción de Nelson Orringer de *Estructura dinámica de la realidad* se publicó en 2003, y con esto ya hay cuatro traducciones al inglés de Zubiri publicadas. Joaquín Redondo ha traducido la trilogía de teología de Zubiri y sigue traduciendo otras obras de Zubiri.

Early History

The history of Zubiri in North America undoubtedly dates to his visit with his wife Carmen to Princeton University in 1946, where his father-in-law Amerigo Castro was lecturing. Zubiri remained in the United States for several months, visiting other cities including New York and Washington. At Princeton, during the month of October, 1946, Zubiri delivered a lecture in French, "Le reel et les mathematiques: un problème de philosophie", now lost. This lecture did not, apparently, lead to any further study of his work, though he was pleased to find a copy of *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, which he visited during his trip to that city.¹

First Scholarly Interest in Zubiri

Interest in Zubiri's philosophy in North America can be traced to the 1960s. Two persons were instrumental in introducing Zubiri's work to English-speaking audiences in those early days. Professor Fritz Wilhelmsen (1923-1996) studied in Spain and received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Madrid in 1958. He taught at the University of Pamplona until 1965, then moved to the University of Dallas, Texas. He published an influential book, *The Metaphysics of Love*, in 1962, later translated into French and Spanish. Though himself a Thomist, Wilhelmsen admired Spanish philosophy, and wrote sympathetically about the major thinkers active in Spain during the 20th century, including Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, and of course, Zubiri, whom he described as "the finest metaphysician in Spain today". Wilhelmsen himself never actually met Zubiri, and at the time of his book only knew his published works as of the early 60s. He does not seem to have pursued his interest in Zubiri's thought after that time, though he did travel to Spain frequently.

The second person who studied and wrote about Zubiri in those early days was

Professor A. R. Caponigri (1915-1984), of the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana. Unlike Wilhelmsen, Caponigri knew Zubiri personally, and attended some of his seminars in Madrid. But like Wilhelmsen, he also studied all the major Spanish thinkers of the 20th century, and did translations of some of their works. His first book on the subject, *Contemporary Spanish Philosophy*, was published in 1967, and contained an essay on anthropology by Zubiri originally written in the late 1940s, "The Origin of Man". With the collaboration of Theresa Sandok, O.S.M., Caponigri then took on the task of translating Zubiri's principal work as of that date, *Sobre la esencia*. He completed the translation in the late 1970s, and wrote an extensive introduction for it, as well as compiling a glossary of Zubiri's philosophical terms. Due to delays associated with the editorial process, Caponigri's translation, under the title *On Essence*, did not appear until 1982. Caponigri passed away before he could become familiar with Zubiri's later thought, published in the three volumes of *Inteligencia sentiente* and other works; as a result, his introduction, though valuable, does not reflect Zubiri's mature philosophy.

In the late 1960s, Thomas Fowler, then an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland (College Park, Maryland), became interested in Spanish literature and culture, and read Wilhelmsen's book. He learned about Zubiri from that book, and on a trip to Spain in 1968, secured copies of Zubiri's books then in print, viz. *Cinco lecciones de filosofía*, *Sobre la esencia*, and *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*. He was very impressed with the clarity and insight of the essays in this latter book, and began translating them for his friends to read. He visited Caponigri in South Bend in 1975, and learned a great deal about Zubiri and his work from him. Caponigri also supplied Fowler with the address of Ignacio Ellacuria, and recommended that he contact Ellacuria to obtain a letter of introduction to Zubiri. Ellacuria advised Fowler that Zubiri would

be happy to meet with him in Madrid. Eventually Fowler completed his translation of book, and he took the English manuscript with him on a trip to Madrid in September 1978, where he met Zubiri for the first time, and showed him the translation, entitled *Nature, History, God*. Zubiri was unaware of Fowler's translation work, and was quite surprised and delighted to see that the entire book had already been translated. They became good friends, and Zubiri told Fowler to go ahead and publish his translation. Fowler requested that Zubiri compose an introduction to this English edition, which he wrote and send to Fowler in 1980. In this now-famous essay, "Author's Introduction to the English Edition", Zubiri documented for the first time the three stages of his intellectual development (this work is known in Spanish as "Dos Etapas"). *Nature, History, God* was issued in 1981, by University Press of America. Fowler visited Zubiri again in 1982, and participated in one of the seminars, during which *Inteligencia y razón* was being discussed. During that visit, Zubiri asked Fowler to translate *Inteligencia sentiente*. He began the task later that year, but the complexity and difficulty of the work, as well as commitment to other tasks, meant that it would take about 16 years to complete. Also during that visit, Fowler met Diego Gracia, and the two quickly became friends. When Zubiri passed away the following year, Fowler maintained contact with Gracia, who has advised him and worked with him on subsequent Zubiri projects.

Among others interested in Zubiri was noted scholar Professor Nelson Orringer, of the University of Connecticut, who was investigating major Spanish philosophical and literary figures of the 20th century, including Unamuno, Ortega, and Zubiri. He published books on Unamuno and Ortega, and became known to the Fundación in Madrid. Orringer came to know of Zubiri through Antonio Pintor-Ramos, whom he met around 1980 at the *Semi-*

nario de Historia de la Filosofía Española held every other year at the Universidad de Salamanca. In his own words, he "devoured *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios* and *Sobre la esencia* and immediately recognized their author's historical importance." He was particularly intrigued by *Estructura dinámica de la realidad*, which he later translated (see below).

Gary Gurtler, S.J., of Boston College became interested in Zubiri in the mid 1980s, and spent considerable time in Madrid investigating his thought. He goes to Spain frequently to study Zubiri and other Spanish philosophers.

Also interested in Zubiri and actively publishing articles about him was Professor Leonard Wessell, formerly of the University of Colorado but now residing in Bonn, Germany. Wessell spends much time in Salamanca and is a friend of Antonio Pintor-Ramos and other Zubiri scholars. Orringer, Fowler, Gurtler and Wessell met at the I Congreso Internacional Xavier Zubiri in Madrid, July, 1993.

A gentleman originally from Spain but who lived most of his life in the United States, Mr. Joaquin Redondo, also knew of Zubiri and was extremely interested in his work.

By the early 1990s, it became clear to Fowler that though Zubiri's name was recognized widely, there was no central focus for Zubiri studies and research in the English-speaking world. After the I Congreso Internacional Xavier Zubiri, Fowler felt that something needed to be done to establish a Foundation in the United States, which would be the place where people could go to learn about Zubiri's thought, his works, and research done about him. Despite limited resources, he established the Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America early in 1997. Its original board of directors included Diego Gracia, Gary Gurtler, and Joaquin Redondo. Shortly thereafter, Nelson Orringer joined the Board. The Foundation was created with the following objectives:

- Publish and distribute translations of Zubiri's works.
- Serve as a resource center for research and study of Zubiri.
- Sponsor seminars on Zubiri, and sessions on Zubiri at major conferences.
- Allow scholars studying Zubiri to exchange ideas, papers, and other research material.
- When resources permit, sponsor established scholars to study Zubiri in Madrid, and fellowships for graduate students interested in doing theses and dissertations on Zubiri.
- Maintain a liaison with the Fundación Xavier Zubiri in Madrid and coordinate North American activities with those in Spain and elsewhere in the world.
- Ensure accurate translations and interpretations of Zubiri's works.

In addition, Fowler realized that outside of Latin- and South America, English is more widely spoken than Spanish, and thus it was important to make Zubiri's works and information about him available in English, to reach out to this broader audience. This audience potentially includes countries such as those of northern Europe and east Asia, where English is commonly spoken but Spanish is not. Because of differences in philosophical orientation of the English-speaking countries, a different approach to presenting Zubiri was also necessary (see below, section II).

Taking advantage of the new Internet technology, in April of 1997 Fowler set up an extensive website, www.zubiri.org, which included a hyperlinked bibliography, English translations of Zubiri's works available up to that time, biographical information, a glossary, announcements of conferences, sources for purchase of Zubiri's works in Spain, course and lecture notes on Zubiri, and other information of value to Zubiri scholars. The site remains

one of the most extensive devoted to Zubiri. To make difficult-to-access resources available, many journal articles were scanned and put on the web site.

After the 100th anniversary of Zubiri's birth in 1998, Fowler decided that a journal devoted to Zubiri studies would be appropriate, so he established *The Xavier Zubiri Review*, whose first volume appeared early in 1999. Volume 6, 2004, was published early in 2005. Also in 1998, Fowler received a request to go to Brasilia, Brazil, to teach courses on Zubiri at the Redemptoris Mater seminary there, which bases its philosophical formation on Zubiri's thought. He taught a course on Zubiri and Causality, and later Nelson Orringer also went and taught several courses. With the invaluable assistance of Nelson Orringer, Fowler subsequently used the Foundation to contact other Zubiri scholars, many of whom have gone to Brasilia and offered courses there. Detailed course material for several of the courses offered there is available on the Foundation's web site. In addition, the XX World Congress of Philosophy was held in Boston in August of 1998, and Orringer and Fowler organized a session on Zubiri, which featured speakers from United States, Spain, and Mexico. Fowler also presented two papers on Zubiri in other sessions at the Congress. Papers present at the Zubiri session were printed in the first volume of *The Xavier Zubiri Review*.

During its existence, the web site led many scholars to contact the Foundation, which supplied information to them and helped them with their projects, and also allowed them to contact each other directly. At least one English-language thesis on Zubiri has been written in recent years, *Human Essence: Existential Concerns and Zubiri's Theory of Open Essence*, by Celeste Weber Moore, and is available on the web site. The Foundation now has correspondents in Europe of course, including England, in Australia, throughout South America and Latin America, Japan, Philippines, and China.

In more recent developments, Fowler's translation of *Inteligencia sentiente* was published by the Foundation in 1999 under the title of *Sentient Intelligence*. This one-volume book includes the three separate volumes of the original, *Inteligencia y realidad*, *Inteligencia y logos*, and *Inteligencia y razón*. The translation was carefully read and revised by Gary Gurtler, who made many invaluable suggestions. The Foundation continues to publish *The Xavier Zubiri Review*, and is coordinating the translation of other Zubiri works.

Nelson Orringer intuited that the theme of becoming was peculiarly suited to the Anglo-American ethos, so he completed a magnificent translation of *Estructura dinamica de la realidad*, on which Gurtler and Fowler also did critical readings. The translation was published in 2003 by the University of Illinois Press under the title *The Dynamic Structure of Reality*. WorldCat reveals that it is presently the work by Zubiri with widest world circulation in research libraries. Orringer's research on Zubiri also enabled him to understand in depth the medical anthropology of Pedro Lain Entralgo, based on Zubiri's metaphysics. This led to his 1997 book, *La aventura de curar: La antropología médica de Pedro Lain Entralgo*.²

Joaquin Redondo has translated the Zubiri theology trilogy, which includes *El hombre y Dios*, *El problema filosófico de la historia de las religiones*, and *El Cristianismo*. These translations have been partially revised by Fowler and are available on the website that Redondo maintains, www.catholicphilosophy.com; they may be published by the Foundation in 2005. He is currently working on a translation of *Los problemas fundamentales de la metafísica occidental*. Others have announced that they are at work on translations as well. The Foundation is trying to interest a major publisher in publishing all of Zubiri's works in English.

In response to a request received by the Foundation, Nelson Orringer directed

the doctoral thesis of Desiderio Ferrer Delgado on the subject of relegation in Zubiri, which was approved in May, 2004, with the highest honors (*sobresaliente cum laude*). Fowler has also received other requests for faculty to direct dissertations, and assisted a student at the Gregorian University, Jaime Calderón Calderón, in the composition of his dissertation by supplying needed materials.³

Presently the Foundation is continuing its translation and publishing work, and also developing its web site. Nelson Orringer, Gary Gurtler, and Leonard Wessell continue publishing articles on Zubiri, as does Thomas Fowler, who has contributed a chapter on Zubiri to a book on the ontology of consciousness to be published by Harvard University Press. The Foundation is also negotiating with major U.S. publishers to issue all of Zubiri's works in translation. Redondo is composing an introduction to Zubiri's theological thought, and Fowler is writing a book on causality and its history, with reference to Zubiri's philosophy.

Besides Orringer, Wessell, Gurtler, Redondo, and Fowler, others actively working on Zubiri in North America are:

- John McGuire, Natural Law Jurisprudence Center, Berkeley, California
- Robert Bellah, sociologist, Berkeley, California, is using Zubiri's thought and cited Zubiri in his book, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (University of California Press, 1985), for his analysis of Pascal's writings which appeared in *Naturaleza, Historia, Dios*.
- Brad Elliott Stone, philosophy, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California
- Carlos Risco Risco, humanities, University of California, Berkeley, working in the area of clinical psychology and psychiatry. He has

presented papers in which Zubiri's ideas are used to help diagnose and cure patients. (He will be writing an article on his work for the next *Xavier Zubiri Review*)

- Robert Todd, Bloomington, Indiana
- Robert Geis, philosopher, New York
- Celeste Weber Moore, St. Andrew Hall Jesuit Novitiate and Le Moyne College, New York, who has written

a thesis on Zubiri (published in *The Xavier Zubiri Review*)

There are undoubtedly others who are unknown to the Foundation at present, but who use its materials and facilities. It is also of interest to note that U.S. University libraries collectively contain much material on Zubiri. Modern online data searching methods allow this material to be located and then requests to borrow or copy it can be made.

Notes

¹ Carmen Castro de Zubiri, *Xavier Zubiri: Breve recorrido de una vida*, Amigos de la Cultura Científica, 1986, pp. 83ff.

² Barcelona: Gutemberg: Galaxia.

³ Jaime Calderón Calderón, *La libertad como fundamento de configuración de la personalidad en Xavier Zubiri*, Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002.

Biography of the author

Thomas Fowler is president and founder of the Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America. He has taught at several colleges and universities in the United States, and

also at the Seminario Redemptoris Mater in Brasilia, a Zubiri center. He has authored numerous studies on Zubiri's thought, and translated two of Zubiri's works, *Nature, History, God* and *Sentient Intelligence*. At the present time he is doing research for a book on Zubiri and the problem of causality, a topic on which he has published several articles. He also works as a consultant to the U.S. Government in scientific and technical matters. In addition to his continuing work on Zubiri, he recently completed a book on the evolution controversy, a subject of life-long interest to him.

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