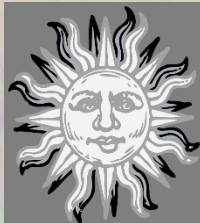


La Tradición Popular



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**350 years of faith and
devotion to Brother Pedro**

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350 years of faith and devotion to Brother Pedro

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Abstract

On April 25, 1667, Pedro de San José de Betancur, better known as Brother Pedro, died in the city of Santiago of Guatemala, capital city of the former Kingdom of Guatemala. Betancur was born in Canary Islands, Spain and he arrived at a young age in Guatemala, a country in which he deployed an arduous work focused on meeting the need of the most vulnerable sector of the society at his time. He was a Franciscan tertiary and founder of the Order of Our Lady of Bethlehem, whose approval he did not see. Popular piety refers to him as a character that radiated peace, reaching to transform many who had contact with him. In life he was considered a thaumaturge, a situation that grew at the time of his death. Although its official canonization by the Catholic Church took more than three centuries, its veneration began very early and has been increasing over time, proof of this are the innumerable platelets, ex vovs and objects that are preserved in a small museum, located in the temple of San Francisco El Grande, in Antigua Guatemala, a place closely related to the life of the saint. Throughout the country its devotees are counted, who request a diversity of favors, with health being the main one. Many claim to have received miracles thanks to his intercession. His life has inspired writers and artists, several parishes in the country are under his advocacy; as well as charitable and educational institutions. That is why, although not born in the country, Brother Pedro is called: the Saint of Guatemala, becoming an icon of traditional and popular Guatemalan religiosity.

Keywords: Guatemala, Pedro, Betancur, Brother, Veneration, devotees.

Resumen

El 25 de abril de 1667, falleció en la ciudad de Santiago de Guatemala, capital del otrora Reino, Pedro de San José de Betancur, mejor conocido como el Hermano Pedro. Betancur, era natural de las Islas Canarias en España, y había llegado muy joven a Guatemala, país en el cual desplegó un arduo trabajo enfocado a atender las necesidades de los sectores más vulnerables de la sociedad de su tiempo. Fue terciario franciscano y fundador de la orden de Nuestra Señora de Belén, cuya aprobación no llegó a ver. La piedad popular refiere que fue un personaje que irradiaba paz, llegando a transformar a muchos que tuvieron contacto con él. En vida fue considerado taumaturgo, situación que creció al momento de su muerte. Aunque su canonización oficial por parte de la Iglesia católica tardó más de tres siglos, su veneración inició muy temprano y ha ido acrecentando con el tiempo, prueba de ellos son las innumerables plaquetas, exvotos y objetos que se observan en un pequeño museo, ubicado en el templo de San Francisco El Grande, en Antigua Guatemala, lugar estrechamente relacionado con la vida del santo. A lo largo y ancho del país se cuentan sus devotos, quienes solicitan una diversidad de favores, siendo la salud el principal. Muchos aseguran haber recibido milagros gracias a su intercesión. Su vida ha inspirado a literatos y artistas, varias parroquias en el país están bajo su advocación; así como instituciones benéficas y educativas. Es por ello que, aunque no nacido en el país, el Hermano Pedro es llamado: el Santo de Guatemala, convirtiéndose en un ícono de la religiosidad tradicional y popular guatemalteca.

Palabras clave: Guatemala, Pedro, Betancur, Hermano, veneración, devotos.

Introduction

One of the most known historical figures in Guatemala was Brother Pedro de Betancur, a religious Spanish who lived in Santiago de Guatemala during the 17th century, he was distinguish for his charity and love for the neighbor, he founded social service institutions to help the most needed areas of that times, doing so was ahead of his time and it is a legacy that last till now.

Many had been written about the life and miracles of Brother Pedro since the 17th century to the present, this paper look doesn't try to be another biography but instead be contribution to understand the influence that the figure of the well know Guatemala's Saint has in the age of modernity and technologies advances that relegate to the background the expressions of popular religiosity.

Who was Pedro de Betancur?

Pedro de San José de Betancur, affectionately known as "Brother Pedro", was born on March 21st, 1226, in Vilaflor town, Canary Islands, Spain in a farmer and very pious family. Their parents were Amador Betancur Gonzáles y Ana García, he had several siblings: Lucía, Catalina, Juan Mateo and Pablo.

During his childhood he was a shepherd, dedicating his spare time to praying and meditation. His biographers had described him as a shy, humble, quiet and skillful child. At a young age he sailed to America, being his first destination Cuba in 1649, then to the harbor of Trujillo in Honduras, in which he heard about Guatemala getting to said:

"To that town I want to go, because with internal joy and high strength I feel lively to walk to it, after I heard the name, being the first time, I heard its name."



Portrait of Brother Pedro, that is keep in the Saint Brother Pedro Museum in Antigua Guatemala, Sacatepéquez. Photo by the author.

Arrival in Guatemala

He arrived in Santiago de Guatemala, today Antigua Guatemala on February 15, 1651. At this time the city was the capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala, it was the place in which between 25000 to 30000 people lived, they were indigenous people, Spanish, creole and afro-descendent (Chajón, 2027). Oral traditions said that when he arrived at the metropolis there was an earthquake, and Brother Pedro thought that was due to his sins.

When he just arrived, he got sick and had to stay in one of the few hospitals that were in Santiago de Guatemala. When he was there, he realized the poor state in which the sick and convalescent people must live, this inspired him in the future to establish a care home.

Once he recovered, he decided to become religious and entered the college Compañía de Jesús, however, Latin was very difficult for him to learn so he got demoralized and withdrew from it and left the city. It was said that he thought about going back to his fatherland or going to a territory never Christianized before to live there a torment.



Section of a painting that shows the moment in which the Virgin of Petapa encouraged Brother Pedro to accomplish his mission in Guatemala.

Museo de Santo Hermano Pedro, Antigua Guatemala, Sacatepéquez. Photo by the author.

When he arrived at Petapa, he went in a church and on his knees in front of an image of Mary, he spoke out his suffering at the same time he felt a strong sexual temptation attack him, he didn't doubt but instead he prayed to the Blessed Virgin that gracefully answered him, as many biographers have told. He prayed with the internal light that had illuminated and decided to not leave Guatemala because it is the place in which the Divine Providence wants him to stay.

Franciscan tertiary and the maintenance of the temple of Calvario

Once again in the metropolis, the life of Brother Pedro will have a twist due to the presence of charisma and example of Saint Francis of Assisi.

When he was free of the worries of the study and convinced that God did not what he was educated but humble and righteous, he started to ponder about the way of life that he must follow to assure the salvation. After a long and serious consideration, he decided to enlist himself as a tertiary of the Order of Saint Francis, for which he has long lived sympathy and he wanted to enlist to become a priest (García, 1930, pág 1, 3).

It is necessary to highlight that a tertiary is every person, man or woman, layman that has consecrated to the service in the Catholic Church, not living in a convent or monastery but outside. Is well known that Brother Pedro enlisted to the third Order of Saint Francis in 1653 and the next year he moved to some lander's property of the Temple of El Calvario in the outside of Santiago de Guatemala. Brother Pedro's stay in the temple of El Calvario will considerably mark his life while will lead it in a new lifestyle and future projects in

benefit of the vulnerable sectors in Santiago de Guatemala.

From the moment of his stay in El Calvario he was moved by his love for love and brothers, so Pedro de Betancur started his extraordinary apostolic work. The Holy Spirit the one in which he always wait and trust pushed him and played as divine, humble and simple tools in three Guatemalan characters: an old black man, who was welcomed at El Calvario, the younger boy Marcos known as Marquitos and an old lady named María Esquivel who was very sick with a terminal disease (Varios, 2009, pág.28).



Popular and devotional stamp that shows Brother Pedro taking care of sick people of any sociocultural group of that time.

His devotion to the Immaculate Conception

The Virgin of Conception is the one considered among the devotions of the Franciscan, the patroness of the order. The members of Saint Francis had a theologically fought for centuries to make the Catholic Church approve that Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin. It is not unusual that Brother Pedro shown a special devotion to this dogma and some statues of the mother of God, some of they are the one in the temple of the convent of Saint Francis in Santiago de Guatemala and the other is the one in the town of Almolonga today Ciudad Vieja in Sacatepéquez. It is said that Brother Pedro promised to defend himself with blood and life in the chastity of Virgin Mary by taking an oath:

Blessed and praised be the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar and Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Our Lady, conceived without original sin. I, Pedro de Betancur, swear by the Cross and for all the Gospels of God to defend that Our Lady, Virgin Mary was conceived free of the stain of original sin; I give my life if it is necessary to defend the holy conception. Because everything I have said is true, I signed it with my own blood. Jesus. I, Pedro de Betancur on December 8th, 1654. I, Pedro de Betancur said this (Damián Muratori y Francisco Albizúrez, 2001, pág.47).

Some collaborator said that nowadays among the believers this episode of the life of Brother Pedro is still remembered:

There are several things about him, one of them is the oath that said before a statue of the Immaculate Conception, he signed with his blood a document where he swore to defend the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. This oath

was ratified again in 2009 when the statue was taken back to Antigua Guatemala and went to visit Brother Pedro (Morales, 2017).

Another believer also said:

Brother Pedro can spend all the year doing penance, but when it comes to the festivities for the Immaculate Conception, posadas and Christmas. Brother Pedro was fond of those mysteries, and he was ahead at that kind of events of Virgin Mary and about her Immaculate Conception that at that time the dogma was not declared but he swore with his life to defend it (Zulueta, 2017).

A fun fact is that nowadays the devotion to the Virgin of Immaculate Conception is one of the strongest in Guatemala as several towns have her as their patroness, as well as some temples, brotherhoods and guilds. We can say that this follows the faith and adoration that Brother Pedro felt to this dogma of the mother of God.

Pioneer of Social Service

Brother Pedro helped indigenous people, slaves, wanderers and abandoned women and orphan children with everything he could do because he had a special empathy for them. This is presented in the following paragraph of a poem by Angelina Acuña:

The endless and limitless hands;
calluses in them but still strong;
of love and life are Brother Pedro's hands;
friends with the clod and the rock;
creating pillars and digging graves;
keeping on himself the fight of lifes;
and buried the falls apart of the ones who
died. (Acuña, 2002, pág. 59).

María de Esquivel, the woman that Brother Pedro helped to go through her time of sickness and prepared her for a death in dignity had donated a land in which he found in 1656 the hospital Nuestra Señora de Belén (Our Lady of Bethlehem), but after the approbation of Pope Innocent XI in 1687 it became the Bethlehemite Order dedicated to social service.

This place received the glorious name of Nuestra Señora de Belén (Our Lady of Bethlehem) because of the great devotion Brother Pedro had for the magnificent and indescribable mystery of nativity of the veiled in flesh. Because if in Bethlehem of Judah among straw was born the charity that is God, then among other straw will be born the charity of God in the Bethlehem of Guatemala (De Montalvo, 1974, pág. 27).

It is likely that some of the reasons that led Brother Pedro to establish his charity work were the poor sanitary conditions and lack of attention from doctors and nurses in addition with the fact that the few hospitals of Santiago de Guatemala, shared all these problems:

He realized how the society was in Guatemala in the 12th Century, especially the service for the people in need in a vulnerable area of that time. This is something that nowadays must be known, appreciated and admired because not being a doctor nor a nurse he established a hospital for convalescent in Guatemala (Díaz, 2017).

Many stories about the way Brother Pedro treated the sick who goes to the *Belén* Hospital have been preserved to the present:

No matter the social class the person belongs to, noble, slave or indigenous or if they were suffering of a common or severe disease, he would not feel nauseous or disgusted. He would serve them the same. Many times, he helped indigenous people take out the niguas under the nails of the feet, he washed their sore and even there were moments when he had not lint, so he used his tongue to clean them. (Pilon, 2002, 39).

There was a place for everyone in *Belén* Hospital, no matter what their sociocultural origin:

Brother Pedro's charity does not have frontiers; he serves all the poor with the same care. Everyone will be received with affection of his paternal arms and there will be love and space in his person for anyone: the noble, the prole, the black man and white man as well as the free man and the slave. He desired that in his *Belén* was a source of eternal water of health and charity for any who needed them (Daniám Muratori y Edwin Alvarado, 2015, pág. 58).

Nowadays several organizations that are dedicated to the care of the sick are named after Brother Pedro, some of them are the Pedro de Bethancourt National Hospital in Antigua Guatemala and Hermano Pedro Private Hospital in Guatemala City. He also established a school of first letters in which children and adults can attend, especially mestizo and indigenous people.



Front of the *Belén* temple in Antigua Guatemala, it is the place in which the Bethlehemite order was born.

The bell saint

Every night with a bell he went around Ciudad Santiago de Guatemala looking for alms to help people in need. "Remember brothers, one soul we own and if we lose it we won't get it back", this expression immortalizes Brother Pedro and has passed down through generations in a way that we cannot talk about Guatemala's saint without quote this famous phrase.



Popular and devotional stamp of the Mexican series "Cromos y novedades", this present Brother Pedro and his famous bell.

Creator of popular traditions

Brother Pedro was very devoted to the mystery of Christ's Birth, so he even established some piety practice to celebrate this event, and they generated some popular traditions that are still in the country:

Every Year to celebrate this great event (Christmas), he shows his heart in every way that he was able to and several days before he carried around a card of a new-born Jesus while encouraged everyone to prepare their souls with fasting, prayers and other spiritual exercises for this beautiful activity. During the first hours of this joyful night every social class attended with great religious emotion to see the holy procession that he arranged with statues of Mary and Joseph dressed up as pilgrims. Among an array of colorful

light and with the practiced songs this procession goes around the Hospital and then marches around the streets of the city, lighted by and decorated in a beautiful way and with all the glare that the resources of the neighbors allow, all this do it with order and piety. The procession returned to the Belén House at good time of the day and then the revered Pedro with some brothers and guests leave to have a little collation (light meal allowed on days of fasting) and after it they went to the Oratory to celebrate with new joy the Birth of Christ with drums, tambourine, rattle, castanet and other clerical instruments which they use to play some simple but merry songs that the piety Brother Pedro had composed (García, 1920, pág. 31).



Section that is at the *Beatas de Belén* temple in Antigua Guatemala, in which Brother Pedro is venerating the Infant Jesus. Photo by the author.

A procession of the Holy Virgin and Saint Joseph leave the Belén Hospital during Christmas Eve with people saying the prayer of the helpless as well, the Brothers of the Third Order goes with it and people with many tapered candles. With great devotion everyone prays the Holy Rosary of the Virgin divided into three ordered chorus. Behind the Virgin there are all the priests

and in front of her goes Saint Joseph looking door by door for a place to stay and with an angel with beautiful clothing, a boy, with sweet verses and songs is portraying the abandonment and problems that the Holy Virgin and his husband, Saint Joseph, lived that night until their arrival to the Betlehem Portal. We can see during this prayer that it makes many devoted and contemplative persons let the tears fall (Damián Muratori y Francisco Albizúrez, 2001, pág. 56).

These last quotes make a clear example of what are the so-called “*posadas*” that nowadays are celebrated on December 16th to 24th.

It is also believed that Brother Pedro has an important role in the evolution of the *alfombras* (carpets of elaborately designed made from sawdust, flowers, fruit, and other natural materials) which are made during the Holy Week, Lent and patronal festivities. According to Celso Lara (2009) since the 7th century *alfombras* of dust, sand of color and flowers were made by the citizens of the birthplace of the saint, the Canary Islands.

Death and veneration

Brother Pedro died at the age of 41 on April 26th, 1667. He was buried in the sacristy of San Francisco’ church, his remains were several times moved but since 1990 he rested in peace in Vera Cruz’s Chapel of this temple. It was said that his funeral paralyzed the city of Santiago de Guatemala:

The large streets of Guatemala full of people were witness of the nobler victory of virtues, something that they never were able to see until that day. That penitent body carried after death the victory over human passions, the

defeat of the desire and the restraint of the vice, all proud treasures of the battles of his spirit and the wars of his life (De Montalvo, 1974, pág. 106).

When he lived, he was already considered a saint, however there was a wait of three centuries for the catholic church to canonize him, the most long wait in recent history. His beatification process started in 1698 and on July 25th of 1771 was declared Venerable by Pope Clement XIV.

The Spanish religious Franciscan Miguel Ángel Murcia and José García Bauer were two persons who worked hard to make Brother Pedro rise to the honors of the altar.

Any person who has received a favor, grace or known about an extraordinary event effectuated by the Divine Omnipotence and the intercession of the Venerable Brother Pedro de San José de Betancur. Please communicate in person or send a letter, as soon as possible, to the Central Offices to the Vice Postulation to the cause in the Convent of the Capital Church of Recolectión located in the Nueva Capital de Guatemala de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción. If the person who has received favors is located outside of the capital, please write directly to us or notified about the event to their corresponding parish priest, religious Franciscan or Bethlehemite nun, whom who we request to communicate to make the following canonical investigation (Prensa Libre, 17 de julio 1961, página 6).

During the decade of 1960 to 1970 some activities were made to request a promptly beatification for Brother Pedro, some of them were the festivities and pilgrimages:

The Guatemala episcopate addresses a message to His Holiness the Pope John XXIII in which they ask for the canonization of the venerable Brother Pedro de San José de Betancourt. Yesterday afternoon in front of the Chapel in which the remains of Venerable Brother Pedro are kept, during the mass officiated by the priest Fray Miguel A. Murcia this request was read to thousands of believers as closing of the national request activities arranged by the brotherhood of Jesús Nazareno de la Merced in Antigua Guatemala (Prensa Libre, 17 de julio de 1961, página 6).

However, during the 20th century the portraits of Brother Pedro were widespread and public displays of veneration were becoming popular even though he had not been officially canonized. His popularity was such that the local Catholic Church had to intervene. At the Historical Archives of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (AHAG for its abbreviation in Spanish) preserves several letters that corroborate this, including one written by the Apostolic Vicar, Monsignor Ramiro Pellecer addressed to the Minister of Interior Roberto Herrera, from which we quote the following:

Dear Minister: I am writing to ask if for any reason any person or religious organization, or cultural group wishes to render public veneration Brother Pedro de San José de Bethancourt and requests permission from the Ministry to hold pilgrimages, processions or others activities, you deny it as this could harm the work that is being done in the Dicastery for the causes of Saints in the Canonization process which is in a summary state. In accordance with the canonical laws of the Church, public veneration of a venerable is not permitted before the venerable has been raised to the honors of the altar. I

appreciate your attention to my request, blessing. Sincerely (AHAG. 1).

And the answer of Herrera Minister was not long in coming:

Monsignor: I am writing to inform you that I received your letter (number 444) dated the 22nd of this month. I also want to let you know that the presbyter José María Furlán Meneses has already been notified that a procession or public veneration to Brother Pedro de San José de Betancourt cannot be held according to the reasons presented in your letter (AHAG. 2).

Several years of work, the moment of beauty came. On June 22nd, 1980, in Rome when Pope John Paul II include on the list of the blessed along with five evangelists from America of the 16th and 17th century: Marie de L'Incarnation Guyart and François-Xavier de Montmorency-Laval from France; Kateri Tekakwitha native of America; and José de Anchieta and Pedro de Betancur, from the Canary Islands.

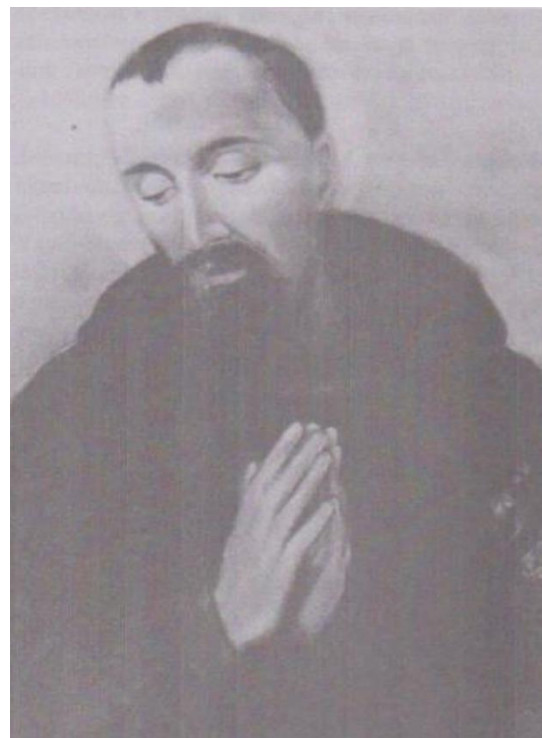
The beatification of Brother Pedro happened in a moment of high political and social tension caused by the beginning of a strong repression during the Civil War in the country. So, the figure of Brother Pedro was taken by some people at that time as a symbol of union against adversity. The first Vice-President of the Republic, José Trinidad Ucles Ramírez, said:

If we, the people of Guatemala, think about the figure of Brother Pedro during this hard and difficult times of the country, maybe with his illustrious example we can find the way to gather as a symbol of peace and develop for Guatemala (El Imparcial, 24 de junio de 1980, pág. 5).

The awaited canonization was 22 years later and was done by Pope John Paul II during his third visit to Guatemala at the Hipódromo del Sur on July 29th, 2002. During several centuries there were a lot of people who assured they were healed by the intercession of Brother Pedro, but the one who rise him to the honors of altar was the Spanish, Adalberto González from the Canary Islands who was diagnosed with incurable intestinal cancer as a kid and assured to be healed thanks to the intercession of Brother Pedro. On the day of the canonization, he was there with thousands of pilgrims from all around the country and other parts.

***Esquisuchil* or Brother Pedro's tree**

In the Mesoamerican world, of which Guatemala is part, during the pre-Columbian era, ancient groups who lived in this are worship some tree considered for them as sacred such as the Ceiba or *esquisuchil*, the flowers of the *esquisuchil* were used with medicinal and aromatic purposes. The chronicler Francisco de Fuentes y Guzmán (1932) said in Recordación Florida that the white flowers of the *esquisuchil* were used at that time to heal skin diseases and even the effectiveness was compared with the ones of the roses.



Popular and devotional stamps were used as official portraits during the canonization of Brother Pedro.

Brother Pedro liked flowers and knew the medicinal utilities of the *esquisuchil* and surely, he used in treatments for the sick that he received in his hospital, it is not surprising that he planted a tree of this in the garden of the *Calvario* temple on March 19th, 1667, according to the traditional oral tradition.

It is believed that the five-petal flower has the following medicinal utilities: it is a tranquilizer for heart diseases and blood pressure, used to clean the eyes and as a reliever for menstrual cramps and it is useful during pregnancy. It is said that it is also used as painkiller or anticancer (Torres, 2009, página 41).

Nowadays it is usual to see some believers surrounding that tree as well as the one that is in San Francisco temple. They are waiting for the flowers to fall because if you cut them, it will not work. There are several witnesses who mentioned Brother Pedro and *esquisuchil* in their stories. Mayra

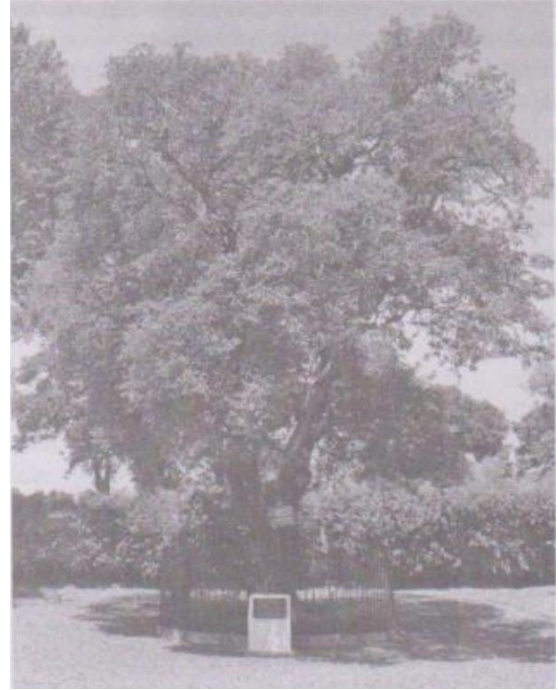
Ramirez, who sells candles, wax figures and other worship objects near Brother Pedro's grave, said:

Several people have told me that women have come here looking for *esquisuchil* leaves to make tea due to infertility problems. And they also pray asking for the intercession of Brother Pedro and sometime after they get pregnant. A lot of them have come to thank God and Brother Pedro (Ramírez, 2017).

Another vendor of the Brother Pedro Temple who asked to remain anonymous shared a story related to *esquisuchil* and Hermano Pedro's intercession with a family:

Several years ago, a niece of mine was about to turn 15 years old but suddenly she felt bad and went to see a doctor. After doing some tests they diagnosed her with advanced cancer, she was sad, so she asked for a visit to Brother Pedro for her birthday and when they arrived, she waited for an *esquisuchil* flower to fall and when finally, one did it she took it home and her mother made a tea that she drank for several days. After that she went again to the doctor and surprisingly, she was healed! Sometime later she came back to thank Brother Pedro and then she celebrated his birthday with great joy (Anonymous, 2017).

Several places of Guatemala, today has *esquisuchil* trees. The municipality of Petapa in the department of Guatemala has one, so those trees became one of the many memories Brother Pedro left in this country.



It is assured that *esquisuchil*'s flowers have medicinal utilities.

Photo by the author.

Miracles of Brother Pedro

María Zuleta, the person in charge of the Saint Brother Pedro Museum located outside of the San Francisco convent at Antigua Guatemala said that "Every photo, every crutch and miracle is a testimony of the presence and intercession of Brother Pedro" this being one of his main characteristics that make him be known as the saint of miracles. One person told us that even while he was alive there were some miracles attributed to him, among them the conversion of Rodrigo Arias de Maldonado, a man whose life was far from the moral law of the church of that time:

Brother Pedro knew about Rodrigo, an immoral young man who was flirting with a wealthy married woman, I think her name was Elvira. One day, when the lady was alone, Rodrigo took advantage of the situation and decided to enter her room, but upon doing so, he saw the woman's corpse with her chest covered

in sores and quickly ran away. At that time Brother Pedro was walking the streets helping the sick when he saw Rodrigo and told him to change his life. It seems that words really moved him so much that he did it, he changed (Campos, 2017).

Rodrigo Arias de Maldonado was a wealthy Spanish who lived in Costa Rica for many years, he served as Acting Governor in this area but later moved to Santiago de Guatemala, where he met Brother Pedro. He was a faithful follower who even took on the responsibility of maintaining the Order of Bethlehem going after Brother Pedro's death.

During the 19th century, the miracles of Brother Pedro were already famous. Domingo Juarros, one of the last colonial chroniclers, whose work dates from the last decade of 1810, said:

Our Lord granted his servant the grace to perform miracles. Some of these miracles have happened when he was alive, such as the resurrection of six people who had already lost their lives due to their poor health (Juarros, 1999, pág. 2444).

However, nowadays most miracles are related to the health of the believers:

There have been miracles here. Last week, a woman from Costa Rica said that she was in pain that prevented her from putting weight on her knee and walking normally. She asked her children to come here for her birthday. They brought her while she cried, stayed for Mass and wanted to make an enormous donation, but the church would not accept it. She said that she was healed (León, 2017).

Another person who was interviewed told us one of the many miracles attributed to Brother Pedro:

At the beginning of this year, my dad was very sick, and he had some awful attacks. My brothers and I take him to Organizations. We spent our savings because they did some tests and never ruled out the possibility of an operation. I was cleaning some windows when a person approached me and said to me: "Can I give you a donation?" I told her that she can enter the temple and leave her donation there. You cannot believe what she told me: "Brother Pedro told me that you needed it right now", and then she gave me all she carried. It was a miracle, it was God through Brother Pedro (Zulueta, 2017).

This is an example of how Brother Pedro does not have a specific focus area; you can pray for everything. It could be a physical or spiritual disease, economic situation, jobs or protection.



Crutches and prosthesis that people left to remember that they healed thanks to the intercession of Brother Pedro. They are in the Saint Brother Pedro Museum located at Antigua Guatemala. Photo by the author.

Nowadays his devotees are part of any social group and linguistic communities, there are plenty of people who assured us they had received the intercession of Brother Pedro for a miracle. There are also some believers from outside the country such as Mexico, El Salvador and Honduras.

Santa Ana [El Salvador] August, 1963.
Reverend Bethlehemite Nuns. Thanks to the powerful intercession of the Venerable Brother Pedro de San José Betancourt a miracle happened to me. For two years I had a house that I could not sell, but after praying with great faith, ten days ago I was able to sell it. While praying, I promised to send to your organization 25 colons (El Salvador currency from 1892 until 2001), which I sent through the Central Bank. I would appreciate it if you could share with me the address I should write on the telegram so that the money is delivered correctly. I pray for his soon beatification, please take note of this miracle. Sincerely yours s.s. Sara Martinez 's widow (AHAG 3).



Tiles with grateful messages for favors granted by Brother Pedro, Saint Brother Pedro Museum at Antigua Guatemala. Photo by the author.

His tomb is in the Temple of San Francisco El Grande at Antigua Guatemala, it is visited every day of the year and is located next to the room where people put tapers, candles, and other objects of worship are placed to pray for something or as a symbol of gratitude. There is also a museum dedicated to his life, which features tiles of gratitude, photos of people who received a miracle, as well as crutches, prosthesis and other objects that bear witness to the miracles granted to the devotees through his intercession for more than three centuries.

Brother Pedro's festivities

Brother Pedro died on April 25, but on that day the Catholic Church commemorates the memory of the evangelist Saint Mark, which is why, after his canonization, the Holy See granted April 24 as the celebration day of the saint of Guatemala (Puac, 2018). For several years, every Sunday before the day of commemoration of Saint Brother Pedro, a procession has been organized at the San Francisco El Grande temple in Antigua Guatemala to demonstrate faith and devotion to the Guatemalan saint.

Activities are held in various parts of the country to commemorate Brother Pedro's memory, such as in the city of Chimaltenango, where there is a parish dedicated to the saint, offering various activities such as fairs, piñatas for the children, masses and processions. Some people also have an altar of the saint in their homes for prayer and *novenas* (nine days of consecutive prayer, often for a specific intention).

Activities are held in various parts of the country to commemorate Brother Pedro's memory, such as in the city of Chimaltenango, where there is a parish dedicated to the saint, offering various

activities, such as fairs, *piñatas* for children, masses, and processions. Some people also have an altar to the saint in their homes for prayer and novenas (nine days of consecutive prayer, often for a specific intention).

I have had an altar for Brother Pedro in my home since April 18th, because a church group organized a *novena* and were visiting different homes to pray. When we were done praying for the rosary of the *novena* someone shared the life of Brother Pedro. In Chimaltenango, with faith we offer him some incense and flowers, and I personally pray a lot for the sick (Pérez, 2017).

A new activity added to the ones related to Brother Pedro, the pilgrimages to Antigua Guatemala organized by the presbyter Carlos Puac of the parish in San Miguel Arcángel at the Petapa municipality, department of Guatemala:

As a child, there were many stories about Brother Pedro and San Miguel Petapa. I always thought they held a big fair in Petapa, but when I arrived, I realized that was not the case, so I decided to revive Brother Pedro's memory in Petapa, since they did not even commemorate his day.



Brother Pedro 's tomb, church of San Francisco el Grande, Antigua Guatemala, *Sacatepéquez*. Photo by the author.



Procession in honor of Brother Pedro, Antigua Guatemala, Sacatepéquez. Photo by the author.

I organized a community mass on his festivity day, built an altar, explained who he was, and now he is better known to everyone. The idea of a pilgrimage to Antigua Guatemala born from all these activities (Puac, 2018).

At five in the morning, the believers take a bus from Petapa and, after one hour, arrive at the municipality of San Bartolomé Milpas Altas in Sacatepéquez. From there, they hike through the mountains surrounding the town where they will pray, then arrive at the village of San Mateo Milpas Altas in Antigua Guatemala, where they rest and eat. They then descend a hill to visit the village of San Juan Gascón and, from there, head to the city of Antigua Guatemala while praying the fifth mystery, in the church of San Francisco. In front of the tomb of Brother Pedro, everyone can pray individually. They take a break before the closing Mass of the pilgrimage at Calvario before returning home by bus.

The legacy of Brother Pedro

The local head of the Order of the Brotherhood of Bethlehem, fray Roberto Díaz said that we can find the legacy of Brother Pedro in different areas of the national life, especially in social work and religious activities:

Brother Pedro must be known in Guatemala for his social work and the legacy that we can summarize in several moments: 1) Neither a doctor nor nurse he established a hospital for the convalescent people in Guatemala. 2) He realized that the son of Spanish was the only one who have access to education but locals not, so despite he was not a teacher, he found a school for the education. Nowadays the Ministry of Education grants the insignia of Saint Brother Pedro to those teachers who have highlighted it in the education field. The third moment is because he found the one and only Order born in America during the Hispanic period (Díaz, 2017).



Brother Pedro monument in the cemetery of the town of Petapa, Guatemala. Photo by the author.

Brother Pedro did a lot in the social field. His Social Work, founded in the decade of 1980, assembled several organizations such as a nursing home, orphanage and a house for children with disabilities, he also founded a school for children with learning disorder, technical training courses and a clinic. It is highlighted the nursing home founded in 1987 located in the Historical Center of Guatemala City:

We, the Bethlehemite, will dedicate our time to the care and hospitality of people abandoned by their families and society, all guided by our vocation. We cover their basic needs: a home, food, a place to sleep and medicine, we also work with them in the spiritual area because we hope that when the time to go with God their soul is well prepared.

We will try to follow success of Guatemala, the Bethlehemite follow what Brother Pedro said that they should not rely on resources to live. We live thanks

to the Divine Providence and the good heart of people who gently share their food and clothes with us (Díaz, 2017).

Brother Pedro has the sympathy of a plenty of people, mostly catholic, that sees him as an example to follow as the creator of traditions. His message can be adapted to our current days:

I consider him a very interesting person, as he was pious, but also a man ahead of his time. He sought ways to ensure that people in need would never lack food and shelter, as well as spiritual nourishment and education, and he did so by self-giving all his body and soul. He had the idea of founding the hospital and spreading the Order throughout the world, and with his work he established the roots of the religion so that it will endure to this day. He is an example for everyone, young or old (Galicia, 2017).

We can say due to all the aforesaid, that Brother Pedro is a historical figure that has endured through centuries, his methods of teaching and social work were ahead of his time, as well as his example of love to the neighbor that still exist in a country which need the example of people who seek the good of others.

Conclusion

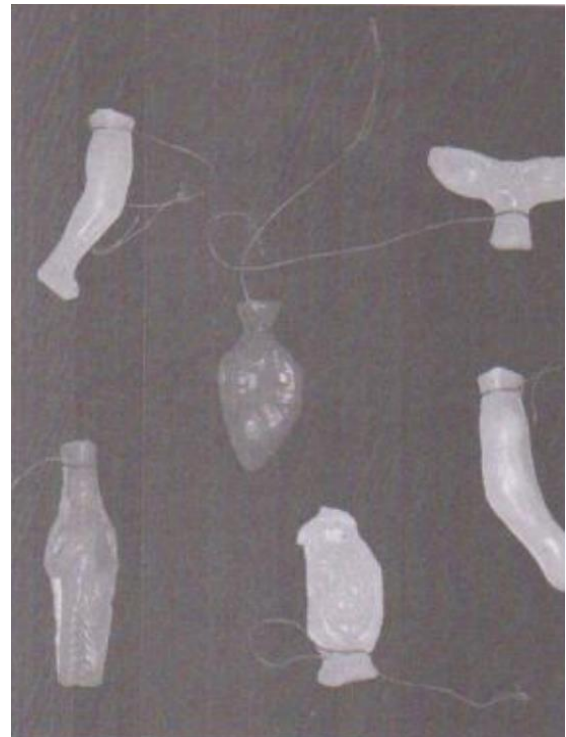
After 350 years, throughout the country its devotees are counted, who request a diversity of favors, with health being the main one. Many claim to have received miracles thanks to his intercession. His life has inspired writers and artists, several parishes in the country are under his advocacy; as well as charitable and educational institutions. That is why, although not born in the country, Brother Pedro is called: the Saint of Guatemala, becoming an icon of traditional and popular Guatemalan religiosity.



The figure of Brother Pedro highlights in a candle store in Antigua Guatemala, Sacatepéquez.
Photo by the author.



Local head of the Order of the Brotherhood of Bethlehem, fray Roberto Díaz.
Photo by the author.



Wax figures used to pray for the intercession of Brother Pedro.
Photo by the author.

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