



30 YEARS MAKING MAGAZINES

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The first issue of Vitral magazine hit the streets of Pinar del Río on June 3, 1994. Today marks our 30th anniversary. Vitral had been conceived, nursed, and designed on recycled paper, in the living room of my house at 50-G Sol Street by a group of lay people who, with great enthusiasm, presented it for the consideration of Bishop Siro at the Bishop See on an evening in May 1994. It included a lot of personal risk; it caused fear, uncertainty, sacrifice; but also passion, eagerness, challenge. It ignited the inner fervor that comes from being apostles of the truth. From that so-called "special period" in the 1990s to this terminal stage we are experiencing today, God has been with us. I don't have the slightest doubt. All those feelings, negative and positive, have grown bigger today. Creating and maintaining an independent publishing project in Cuba for three long and agonizing decades has been no easy task.

We must give thanks to God and also to the many people who, from the beginning until today, have collaborated faithfully and sacrificially in this project that is unique in its purpose and diverse in its forms: writers, artists, editors, designers,

proofreaders, typists, distributors in parishes, towns and universities, messengers on bicycles, operators of photocopiers, hand-pasters, leaf-by-leaf revisers, clippers, those who glued the spine, those who made the packages, the editorial secretaries, the secretaries of the Conference of Bishops, and of the bishop sees all over Cuba, of the parishes from Mantua in Pinar del Rio to Baracoa in Guantánamo. Thanks to the subscribers throughout Cuba, who contributed, if they could, with 12 Cuban pesos a year, two for each bimonthly magazine; thanks to their support we were able to print 12,000 copies of 60 pages every two months, without missing a single issue.

It is essential to be grateful, forever, for the patronage, enthusiasm, protection, encouragement and total trust that Vitral always placed in its director, in the editorial board and in its worthy advisor the then Father Manolo de Céspedes, who was the tireless, courageous and dedicated father and pastor of the Diocese of Pinar del Río and of its magazine Vitral; the Venerable VI Bishop of Pinar del Río, Monsignor José Siro González Bacallao, whom God has in glory, and that hopefully the Church will quickly begin his canonization process to make official what he is: a saint.

We did a survey in Vitral and it showed that each magazine was shared, loaned or given away to an average of 5 people who were not subscribed. Still today there are complete collections of the first 78 issues of Vitral, some of them bound in leather, such as one I saw, personally, in Mexico City, lovingly preserved in the display case of a private library. Others are humbly cared for in the old chest of drawers of a grandmother who rereads them and shows them to her grandchildren as a relic. Each time, these collections will have a greater testimonial value.

For 13 years we were punctual, without missing once, every two months, being faithful to this service. We give thanks to God and to all those who worked, risked themselves and sacrificed. I offer those 10 years and one month in which I was punished to work on a cart tractor collecting palm fronds. I am and will always be a palm-frond harvester: those were the best 10 years of my life; most of them with one foot on the palm fronds and the other foot in the halls of the Justice and Peace Commission at the Vatican, thanks to God and Vitral.

We are also grateful for Ediciones Vitral, in which we published more than 40 books and monographs, the result of our annual Literary Contest. Among them we published a historical book that had been considered lost, "Institutions of Eclectic Philosophy Edited for the Use of Studious Youth. Volume II. Metaphysics", by Father Félix Varela. A work written and published, for the first time, in 1812 in the Antonio Gil Typography in Havana, which was considered lost for almost a century and whose original, in Latin, was found, by Dr. Amauri B. Carbón Sierra, bound together with Volume I, in the Library of the University of Havana. Ediciones Vitral was the only publishing house in Cuba that accepted the republication of this work by Varela and did so in its collection Huellas in 2006 with a careful bilingual (Latin and Spanish) and facsimile edition. A jewel of Ediciones Vitral that marks the pinnacle of its editorial service, that included a children's magazine *Meñique*, a literary magazine *DeLiras* and several bulletins specialized in economics, education and computer science. Everything published in paper, magazines and books was also compiled and published on a website www.vitral.org that has disappeared from the network with all that creative richness.

However, on the day of the spring equinox, March 21, 2007, the new ecclesiastical authority of the diocese of Pinar del Río, to which the education center and the sociocultural magazine belonged, decided to intervene in the magazine Vitral with the purpose of changing its editorial profile, along with the extinction of the Center for Civic and Religious Education, founded on January 29, 1993. The last issue of this period was Vitral 78, March-April 2007, year XIII. The team of lay people who founded and published Vitral decided not to leave the Church, nor Cuba, and to take a sabbatical year to discern what to do to be faithful to their Christian commitment in Cuba.

Six months later, the Coexistence project was born, on October 15, 2007, on the significant feast of Saint Teresa of Jesus, Doctor of the Church, a mystic and poet of the Spanish Golden Age. That day we continued our civic education every Tuesday in the living room of the Toledo López family home. Four months later, on February 15, 2008, the magazine Convivencia: www.centroconvivencia.org was published on a new website. Here you can find both the complete collection of Convivencia, as well as the numbers from 1 to 78 of Vitral which, by the way, in another

incomprehensible decision, were deleted as you can see on its current website, but recovered in HTML on the Convivencia website.

In this way, the Center for Coexistence Studies and its socio-cultural magazine Convivencia are the legacy and continuity of the Center for Civic and Religious Education and its magazine Vitral. Today we reach 30 continuous years of this service to truth and "the freedom of light." Convivencia far surpassed the numbers of that Vitral (Stained Glass); we are already preparing the 100th issue for July-August 2024, but we have faithfully maintained our editorial profile, the language, the Christian inspiration, the respect for every person and the common good, and its bold and serene transparency. I share the happiness of having fulfilled my duty for 30 years with all the collaborators and sponsors who are here, there, or in Heaven today.

Since June 3, 1994, both publications have formed a single project, with the same purpose, having the same mystique and the same goal: to serve the Cuban people with the truth, even if our modalities and circumstances have changed. We are now independent from the State and from the pastoral structures of the Church. And, as always, we also do so now from the Christian faith, being faithful members of the Catholic Church, and remaining on the island, although always, then and now, open and in collaboration and coexistence with the Diaspora here, to which gratitude must also go for their support and literary and artistic collaborations.

On the 30th anniversary of this commitment, I want to thank God for the inspiration, inner strength and perseverance that come only from Him. And I would also like to thank the ecclesial community, thanks to our brothers and sisters, who have always supported us during these three decades and who, like this servant, are part of the committed laity of the Church.

And I must, want and desire, to give thanks also to that part of the Church which, although with decisions written in sometimes incomprehensible lines, has helped me to broaden the horizons of my Christian commitment beyond the intra-ecclesial service in which I was imbued since my childhood, when I ran around in the galleries of the Bishop See and was an altar boy in the Cathedral; going through many ecclesial commitments, until March 21, 2007, providentially the beginning of spring, a sign of new life. I have been almost all my life, thank God, a man of the

world dedicated to work at the heart of the Church, from the base to its top. Now, thanks to that inscrutable decision and, above all, thanks to the unfathomable designs of God, I have managed to be a man of the Church in the heart of the world, of Cuba, and of its two lungs, out in the open, without human umbrellas, but in the Hands of God, sheltered in the heart of Christ and curled up in the lap of his Mother who in Cuba is called the Virgin Mary of Charity.

For all this, for both stages, for my whole life, and even for what is to come and what I do not know, I thank God and give myself totally to Him in the making of His Kingdom here and now. Everything I have been able to do and will do, has been, is and will be to that end, from faith and hope. I am convinced, and I trust unreservedly, that, as another saintly Cuban bishop, Monsignor Adolfo Rodríguez Herrera, said: "Tomorrow, before the sun rises, the Providence of God will have risen over Cuba and over the whole world."

Thank you, Lord, for these 30 years of making magazines and offering ethical and civic education.

See you next Monday, God willing.

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