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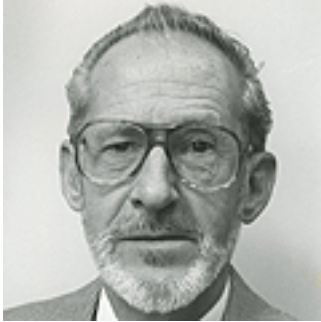
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Xavier Monasterio, 1926-2011

01.26.2011 | Faculty

Retired philosophy professor Xavier Monasterio, who had taught at the University of Dayton for 34 years, died Jan. 4 in Mexico City from cancer. He was 84.

Monasterio, a Paris-trained existentialist who rubbed elbows with the top philosophical minds of Europe, left an indelible mark on faculty and students alike, who remember him for his intellect and his compassion.

"For Xavier, the practice of philosophy was not some disembodied, intellectual exercise," said Margaret Knapke, who received undergraduate and graduate degrees in philosophy from the University of Dayton and taught alongside Monasterio in the philosophy department for 10 years in the 1980s. "He was brilliant, but his intellect was securely hitched to his heart. He had a passion for social justice in the world, but he also noticed the needs of those close by, and he preferred to act quietly."

Knapke said Monasterio was also memorable for the fascinating and true stories he would share with friends about his years in Mexico, France and the U.S.

Philosophy professor John Inglis recounts the stories he heard from Monasterio, who was born in Mexico City in 1926. The Mexican government in the early 1930s ordered his father, who was a high-ranking government official, to destroy a secret Catholic radio station. When it was discovered that his father was the secret operator of the station, he was put before a firing squad to extract information, though he was never executed. For his safety, Xavier had been smuggled out of the country by a priest.

Monasterio later earned a bachelor's degree at a Mexican university, a master's degree at Ysleta College in El Paso, Texas, and a Ph.D. from the University of Paris. In France, he studied under French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, attended parties with author and philosopher Albert Camus and lived so close to Jean-Paul Sartre that his apartment windows shattered when a bomb was detonated in Sartre's apartment in 1961.

He joined the University of Dayton philosophy department in 1966, though at the time he was hired, he could not speak English.

"He had been using a friend to write his letters to us," said Joseph Kunkel, philosophy professor emeritus and longtime friend of Monasterio. "We didn't know that at the time, and we never thought to ask. He later told me that he already knew two languages, so he was confident he could learn English. He and his wife moved to the U.S. two months before he started here and learned English by watching television."

As an existentialist, Monasterio represented a significant shift in Catholic higher education, Inglis said. His views differed widely from the traditional philosophical views of the Catholic Church, which was just beginning to open its doors to the wider world in the 1960s, Inglis said.

In part because of his Paris education and in part because of his Catholic faith, Monasterio became the most distinguished Catholic philosopher the University of Dayton has ever had, Kunkel said.

"If someone wanted to know what a Roman Catholic thought, they would ask Xavier. He was someone whose views they could trust," he said.

Monasterio received an award for outstanding teaching from the University of Dayton in 1986 and the University's Lackner Award in 1993 for making a noteworthy contribution to the Catholic and Marianist character of the University of Dayton. He wrote several articles and published a book, *To Be Human*, in 1985.

He retired from the University in 2000 and moved back to Mexico City after his wife, Genevieve, died in 2008. Genevieve Monasterio also taught at the University of Dayton in the languages department for nearly 20 years. They are survived by three children, George (Tamara) Monasterio, Juan Monasterio, and Maria (Mark) Wirbel; and four grandchildren, George, Marissa, Xavier and Sophia.

Funeral services were held in Mexico City Jan. 6. Friends are planning a Dayton memorial, with details to be announced later.

For more information, contact Cameron Fullam, assistant director of media relations, at 937-229-3256 or fullam@udayton.edu.