

In Memoriam, Fredrick D. Wilhelmsen: One Year Later

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On May 25, 1996 the American flag flew at half mast at the University of Dallas, in Irving, Texas, as ten priests concelebrated the Latin funeral Mass for Dr. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, the school's internationally known Thomist philosopher. They were led by the university's president and by its chaplain. On May 21, 1997, the anniversary of Professor Wilhelmsen's death, his family presided at a solemn high Requiem Mass said in the traditional Latin rite at Saint Thomas Aquinas Church, in Dallas. At both services colleagues and former students of Dr. Wilhelmsen sang and gave eloquent testimonials and eulogies.

Frederick D. Wilhelmsen was a major Catholic thinker of our time and a legend long before he died. His books and articles will be read well into the twenty-first century. Probably much longer. Wilhelmsen was a first rate metaphysician whose thought was based on the realist metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas. He also commented on the political, social, cultural, and religious realities of our age. His books on communications and the effects of technology on our society received an award from the University of San Francisco. Wilhelmsen's publications and lectures applying political thought to the realities of Spanish life earned him a knighthood from the exiled Carlist Claimant to the Spanish throne, a Bourbon prince. A superb speaker who taught with great flair, Prof. Wilhelmsen won teaching awards from two American universities (Santa Clara and Dallas). His enthusiasm for Navarre's Catholic culture led Pamplona's Muthiko Alaiak Pena club to make Don Federico an honorary member.

Along with L. Brent Bozell and Thomas Molnar, Frederick D. Wilhelmsen was a founding editor of *Triumph*, a Catholic monthly journal of opinion that ran for over ten years. He was also one of the organizers of the summer institutes in Catholic culture in San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Madrid, Spain, that formed hundreds of American Catholic thinkers and activists over a fifteen-year period. Wilhelmsen was one of the first members of the

Organizacion Internacional de Iusnaturalistas Hispanicos Felipe II, founded by Francisco Elias de Tejada. At various times in his life, Prof. Wilhelmsen was on the editorial boards of *National Review*, *Modern Age*, *Faith & Reason*, and other journals. In his later years Dr. Wilhelmsen was a member of the first advisory board of The Society of Catholic Social Scientists.

In the year between the two religious services mentioned above approximately sixty articles were published about Dr. Wilhelmsen. Most, naturally, appeared in the United States. Seven or eight were published in Spain. There have been tributes in Italy and Argentina. Copies of all these publications are currently on display at the University of Dallas. They form an expanding, informal, "FDW bulletin board." The articles run the gamut from obituaries in the Texas daily press at the time of Dr. Wilhelmsen's death to a nine-page summary of his career published in Madrid in Spanish by Miguel Ayuso Torres. Seven or eight Catholic philosophers have written—in English, Spanish, Italian—the remembrances, including the one by Robert Herrera that appeared in the first issue of *The Catholic Social Science Review*. A volume of the quarterly *Faith & Reason* was recently dedicated to the memory of Dr. Wilhelmsen.

The University of Dallas has received inquiries from graduate students in various countries wanting to know how to buy or borrow Dr. Wilhelmsen's books and articles, and how to obtain his bibliography, which, at last count, was made up of two hundred and fifty-three original titles.

In the year after his death, friends, colleagues, and former students of Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, as well as readers who never met him personally, have said and requested hundreds of Masses for the repose of his soul. Wilhelmsen's University of Dallas colleagues have organized Masses on their main campus and on the campus near Rome, Italy (where FDW taught for three years), which is actually in the shadow of the Pope's summer palace at Castelgandolfo. Various groups of alumni organized Masses in Dallas and San Antonio, Texas, which were accompanied by beautiful chanting. The Capuchin friars in Fort Worth, Texas, who are missionaries from Navarre, Spain, concelebrated a Mass in Spanish for the American Catholic writer who praised their homeland for over thirty years. Small groups of American colleagues and alumni from various summer institutes in El Escorial, Spain, have gathered for Mass in different spots throughout the United States, especially in and around Washington, D.C.

Elizabeth Wilhelmsen has mentioned several services for her father conducted in Spain's religious capital, Toledo. Francesca Juliana Wilhelmsen reports that a number of Masses have been said in the walled city of Avila, Spain, where the family lived in the late fifties. One was celebrated at the Dominican Monasterio de Santo Tomas, which was built by Ferdinand and Isabella in the fifteenth century and where the Wilhelmsens frequently went to church some forty years ago. Two Masses in Avila were offered for the repose of Dr. Wilhelmsen's soul at the convent where St. Teresa of Jesus lived in the sixteenth century. (FDW's former students are so far flung that he even has

one in the cloister of the venerable Monasterio de la Encarnacion!)

Alexandra Wilhelmsen reports that thirty or forty Carlists in Navarre attended a Mass for her father near Pamplona at San Miguel de Aralar shrine. In Madrid, on November 4, the feast of St. Charles Borromeo, Dr. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, “*el famoso filosofo catolico y pensador tradicionalista*,” was remembered at the annual memorial Mass for the Carlist branch of Spain’s Royal Family, which is customarily said according to the traditional Latin rite at San Fermin de los Navarros Church. Another Mass was said in Spain at one of the grandest churches in Christendom, the gothic Cathedral in Seville. At the request of a University of Dallas student, the Mass was recited in Latin just a few feet from the tomb of Spain’s most famous medieval crusader, St. Ferdinand, King of Castile and Leon. Three Texans who are former students of Dr. Wilhelmsen attended a memorial Mass for him in December at the medieval church in Gaming, that serves as the chapel for the European campus of Franciscan University of Steubenville. In Naples, Italy, a Mass for the well known Thomist philosopher was offered at the Dominican complex beneath the Crucifix that talked to St. Thomas and on the altar where the Common Doctor is reputed to have celebrated Mass frequently.

Professor Wilhelmsen’s family shared a few recent vignettes with me that highlight the impact he had on people’s lives through his profound thought, his dramatic lectures, prolific writing, and perennial enthusiasm. At the time of his death, University of Dallas’ Latin choir, Collegium Cantorum, was on tour in Italy. As the family wondered how appropriate Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony could be provided for the funeral services in the absence of Collegium, colleagues, alumni, and students from four or five small Latin choirs in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex came forth and offered to sing for Dr. Wilhelmsen. Shortly after the funeral, a group of Cuban exiles and Cuban-Americans from Miami, Florida, who heard FDW lecture a number of times and read many of his works composed a poem in his honor entitled *Montejurra* which they framed and sent to the family.

During her sabbatical travels in Europe in the Fall of 1996, Alexandra attended various scholarly conferences, banquets, and Masses at which there were tributes to her father. She was presented with unexpected obituaries, ran into a stand selling books and pamphlets published by FDW years ago, saw an add in a magazine for out of print works in Spanish by “*el gran pensador tradicionalista*,” and was asked for a good picture so a post card featuring FDW could be made.

One evening when Alexandra returned to her residence in Pamplona she found a surprise in her room: a bouquet of dried flowers and a small hand-made sign saying these flowers from Navarre were for the tomb, in Texas, of: “*El gran filosofo americano Federico Wilhelmsen. Sirvio a Dios, comprendio al Carlismo, amo a Navarra.*” The large card was signed: “*Con admiracion y agradecimiento, y pidiendo por el al que dijo ‘Yo soy la Resurreccion y la Vida,’ una margarita navarra.*” The flowers and message had been left there by a “*Margarita*,” a woman whose family served Carlism’s Catholic and

traditionalist ideals and exiled Carlist princes for over a century. The elderly German teacher had walked up four flights of stairs in order to deliver her modest tribute to Dr. Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, whom she had heard lecture a number of times in the early sixties when he lived in Pamplona.

During his lifetime Frederick D. Wilhelmsen published fifteen books. His sixteenth is scheduled for release by Preserving Christian Publications in the summer of 1997. Entitled *From My Pen and Podium*, the book is a collection of thirty-six popular essays. Like all of Professor Wilhelmsen's books that are in print and the *festschrift* published in his honor in 1993, *From My Pen and Podium* will be available at the University of Dallas Bookstore.

The University of Dallas' administration is currently preparing a booklet in memory of the school's internationally known philosopher that should be released shortly. This tribute will include his complete bibliography as well as the list of recent publications about him. Dr. Alexandra Wilhelmsen, at the University of Dallas, is currently collecting documents, photographs and tapes (audio and video) that help record her father's thought and chronicle his career. She would appreciate hearing from anyone who has materials that might be donated or loaned for duplication.