

# Bustamante Zárate, Gilberto

## (1913–1986)

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### ENOC IGLESIAS

Enoc Iglesias Ortega, Ph.D. (University of Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico), is an associate professor at the Adventist University of Colombia and editor of the university journal of studies and research. He has written seven books and has co-authored two others besides having written numerous magazine articles. He has worked for the Adventist Church as university president, academic vice president, and general secretary, as well as university director of admissions and records. He is married to Aura Graciela González Arjona and has two adult children.

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Gilberto Bustamante Zárate was among the pioneers of the Adventist work in Colombia.

### Early Years

Gilberto Bustamante Zárate was born in Medellín, Colombia on September 25, 1913. He was the only child of José and María Bustamante who, through the ministry of Max Trummer, accepted the Adventist message in 1930 and were baptized in 1931. Gilberto Bustamante attended Adventist academy and college in Costa Rica where he completed his studies in theology in 1936. Because of his remarkable abilities, the Colombian-Venezuelan Union called him to work as an evangelistic speaker.<sup>1</sup> Bustamante was one of the first three professors<sup>2</sup> to teach at the Coloveno Industrial Academy when it was founded in 1937 in Medellín, Colombia<sup>3</sup> While teaching there, he was also a Bible worker, and when the Spanish professor left, he took up the teaching of that subject as well.<sup>4</sup> His skills in the Spanish language were evident in the creation of the journal *Antorcha Juvenil* (The Youth's Torch) in 1941. By that time, the school was called the Colombian-Venezuelan Academy.

### Early Administrative Responsibilities

Better prepared for his work, Bustamante returned to Colombia where he became a highly successful evangelist. He celebrated his first baptisms in Bogotá while he was serving as president of the Alto Magdalena Mission, a short-lived position he held from November to December of 1945<sup>5</sup> It was in the field of education where he left his most indelible mark. His theology classes prepared several hundred church pastors over the course of his seven years of teaching.

### Matrimony

While teaching at the Academy in Medellín, Bustamante met Paulina Urbina who became his wife and the mother of his two children, Rodolfo and Martha. Ever restless to improve himself, Bustamante left Colombia for the United States to study, first at the seminary in Washington, District of Columbia, and later at La Sierra College in Riverside, California.<sup>6</sup> As a result of his success, the *Anuario Omega* (Omega Annual) of the Colombian-Venezuelan Institute (ICOLVEN) dedicated a 1955 issue to him under the title “A Son of Colombia.” In the 1956 issue of the annual, there appeared several “ICOLVEN Words of Wisdom” and one was Bustamante’s prize-winning, “[I]f someone speaks ill of you, live in such a way that others will not believe him.” Another of his sayings was, “In each woman who passes by, see in her your sister, your sweetheart, your mother.”

## Career

Bustamante was called to be president of the Colombian-Venezuelan Institute, the first native-born Colombian to occupy this position. He was chosen for his personal qualities, his capacity for leadership, and his work ethic. “The Lord has greatly blessed him in his difficult work, and his perseverance in the fulfillment of his duties has even compromised his health. During his seven years of service, the Institute has progressed, which clearly reveals that he has not rested on his laurels.”<sup>7</sup> His work left behind a positive imprint on the institution.<sup>8</sup>

One of the enormous challenges that Bustamante faced was the procurement of the institute’s permit to operate. With regard to his strength of character, it was evident that Bustamante “had to take on this enormous challenge with maximum good will. Some church leaders considered that seeking government approval for their curriculum could cause the school to lose sight of biblical principles and the school’s independence, [...]”<sup>9</sup> He was able to secure this important permit from the Colombian Ministry of Education in 1957.<sup>10</sup>

Bustamante’s presidency over the years of 1957 to 1964 were characterized by his efficiency and rectitude, so affirm those who valued his negotiating skills. These same exemplary qualities of kindness and courtesy were evident in his role as husband, father, and friend of humanity.

Bustamante returned to the United States in 1965 where he worked for the Church until 1978 when he retired. In spite of his retirement, he participated enthusiastically in religious activities of the North American, South American, and Inter-American divisions. In addition to his numerous qualities of leadership, many affirm that his greatest strength lay in his musical talents which earned him an invitation from Billy Graham to join his missionary team during one of Graham’s evangelistic campaigns in Colombia.<sup>11</sup> He recorded many hymns, was an author and composer of various types of music, and translated over fifty hymns and songs for duos. Bustamante passed away on September 25, 1986, in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

## Legacy

The educational work of Bustamante as president of the institute can be summarized as follows: “1957-1964. First native-born president. Obtained the permission to operate from the Ministry of National Education, an extremely significant step in the school's progress, since the State recognized the quality of education offered at the Institute. [...] He adopts the State's curriculum without omitting biblical principles. He built the George W. Chapman Auditorium.”<sup>13</sup>

In order to better understand Gilberto Bustamante's attraction to the music of his time, one needs to know that Medellín was an important musical center, home to many recording companies.<sup>14</sup> Frequently, offers could come from over ten recording companies at a time.<sup>15</sup> Bustamante could have easily pursued a career as a popular singer—he had been invited to record with a famous Cuban singer in Medellín, at a recording studio of national and international renown. However, he preferred Jesus “to silver or gold [...]”<sup>16</sup> One recordings of his performances includes the following arrangements: *Al amparo de la roca* (In the Shelter of the Rock); *El Padrenuestro* (The Lord's Prayer); *¿Has oído el mensaje?* (Have you heard the message?); *La Biblia nos habla de Cristo* (The Bible Speaks of Christ); *Mi Amigo* (My Friend); *Mucho tiempo vagué* (I Wandered Far); *Pies divinos* (Sacred Feet); *Quiero olvidar* (I Want to Forget); *Roca de la eternidad* (Rock of Ages); *Si él cerca está* (If He is Near); *Soy la triste oveja* (I'm the Lonely Lamb); and *Ven a los pies de Jesús* (Come to Jesus Feet). The combination of music with a pastoral and educational ministry allowed Bustamante to reach people who were influenced by the Holy Spirit to listen to the hymns that he composed, arranged or sang.

The Colombian-Venezuelan Institute celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1987, at which time it was decided to name certain buildings. The administration building was named in honor of Gilberto Bustamante, former president of the Colombian-Venezuelan Institute, arranger and composer of hymns and songs. Among the alumni, professors, and staff that have made a difference in the world and in the Inter-American Division, the name of Gilberto Bustamante stands out.<sup>17</sup>

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## NOTES

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2. Tirso Escandón H. and Juan R. Mejía V., *Primera Jornada de la Historia de la Academia Colombo-Venezolana de Medellín, Años 1937-1940* (Medellín, Colombia: Imprenta ICOLVEN, 1942), 11.
3. Enoc Iglesias Ortega, *Instituto Colombo-Venezolano, Corporación Universitaria Adventista. Valores y servicio 1937-2000* (Medellín, Colombia: Litografía ICOLVEN, 2004), 12.
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6. Escandón, 54.
7. L. E. Torres G., *Compendio histórico del Instituto Colombo-Venezolano, t. vol. IV 1957 a 1963* (Medellín, Colombia: n. p., 1962), 4.

8. Iglesias, 167-168.
9. Ibid., 172.
10. Ibid., 171
11. Escandón, 55.
12. Ibid.
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16. William Robert Anyhel Brook, interview by author, Medellín, Colombia, July 14, 2019.
17. Escandón, 80.

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