

Christians without bibles

Our doctors and all the other Cuban health professionals and technicians are an exceptional powerhouse. No other country has anything like it; just like our island's internationalist soldiers, they were trained in combat. Their missions overseas abide by strict ethical standards. Their services are offered free of charge, or they are commercialized according to the host country's circumstances. They are not exportable.

However, we do not have enough books. It is not sufficient that our libraries have ample numbers of books to be used for the constant reference requirements. Each one of our health professionals should possess a classical textbook covering their own specialty and if this person carries out or practices two, three or more assignments in the hospital or polyclinic, he or she ought to have at their disposition one classic copy for each of them.

Graduates of General Comprehensive Medicine receive their degree after nine years of intense theoretical and practical courses at the higher level. More than 50 different specialties are being covered by our health centers. Many of these require a basic degree from General Comprehensive Medicine. Inclinations are detected much earlier than that, for example, in surgery, cardiology, oncology, hematology, imaginology, transplants, sports medicine, and the future specialists are offered the opportunity to be trained in them simultaneously.

What is a doctor without an ideal, up-to-date textbook covering this knowledge going to do? If a surgeon doesn't have that additional textbook on surgery, what does he do? What does he do if he is a clinician in a general hospital and he also attends to a large number of elderly patients? Three personal classic textbooks must be at his fingertips: one for the general comprehensive physician, one for the clinician and one for the geriatrician.

Nowadays the specialties interconnect and combine together. Knowledge about nutrition, the nervous, cardiac and skeletal systems; appropriate medication, constantly being changed, requires a large body of information, both for the individual and the collective, to be shared by the specialists who generally make up the medical teams.

In medicine, many problems are urgent, and these emergencies need immediate decisions. My compatriots know what I am talking about, because they know about the centers for assistance and services, where they are located and who attends to them, at the local, regional or national levels, more than anyone can imagine. One has to add to the specialist's basic knowledge the intensive use of computers for information and inter-consultations.

Our national legislation has established the right to make use of any book that has been published in the world, for educational purposes, from The Iliad to One Hundred Years of Solitude. This is not the same case as publishing works for commercial purposes, works that are protected by authors' copyright laws. Some motivation must be offered to those who take pains creating art and science, in other words, enhancements for our spiritual and material lives.

Just a few days ago, someone sent me a non-professional film of the well-known ballet "Swan Lake", a subject on which I am far from being an expert, but which, in my current circumstances, serves as a pleasant distraction so that I am able to almost totally forget about time. For two hours I watched the incredible performance of a woman who is probably today the best dancer in the world in this ballet: Viengsay, the daughter of Cuban parents who are diplomats, and who was given the name in honor of a region of Laos where they had been representing Cuba.

There are performances which cannot be duplicated! A European critic once exclaimed. I agree. I couldn't imagine such an astounding degree of elegance and flexibility, without even the slightest flaw. This is the result of an entire school guided by Alicia Alonso, brilliant inspiration for our National Ballet, an artistic company that matches the high quality of the performer.

I knew that, backing up the ballerina, there was also a physiotherapist who, by now retired, worked for 36 years in one of the city's general hospitals and who, after the artist's every wearisome rehearsal day, worked with her for one hour a day to ensure her flexibility and strength in every one of the muscles that took part in her movements. "That way I can avoid any risk of strain", Viengsay declared a few years ago.

In a brief note, I urged this dance physiotherapist to write a book about his experiences with this celebrated ballerina.

As they later both told me, they had had the same idea about 5 years ago; but in the midst of a heavy daily work schedule, neither of them was able to take on the task. I think that this time I really convinced him.

This digression perhaps serves to communicate my present thought. Last January, I spoke about Elena Pedraza, the 97 year old Chilean physiotherapist who helped us so much in the development of this specialty that had barely existed in Cuba before the Revolution. After that Reflection of mine, she sent something written by Debra J. Rose, a physiotherapist from California, and published in Spain. From this copy we printed 10,000 for those offering these services in Cuba, including students in their final courses, and 500 were acquired from the publisher for the Cuban physiotherapists who are working in Venezuela.

From this text, we selected basic exercises that have general applications for the over-50 population, since it is necessary to educate our people in health related activities in general. It is impossible to have one physiotherapist for each of the millions of people that need to perform these exercises.

The European and U.S. hierarchy would love to buy up Cuban doctors, just as they do with graduates from African and Latin American countries, and from other places in the Third World, thus depriving these regions of the professionals that they have educated with such great sacrifice!

In one single African village -as we have already said and we shall repeat as many times as necessary- a Cuban internationalist doctor can at the same time train several excellent doctors at his side, in the biggest laboratory in the world, the community, to struggle against the particular diseases affecting each specific region in Africa. The books accompanying this doctor would be used as a common source of knowledge.

A health professional without a specialized textbook at his fingertips is like a Christian without a Bible.

As I am writing these lines on a Sunday afternoon, I repeat the idea of working on my Memoirs, if time would allow it. If someone pays for them, I would direct those funds to the publishing of textbooks, in Cuba, for our health professionals. Meanwhile, there are already more than 100 thousand previously guaranteed books that will be distributed in the coming months, not as thick, heavy, imported volumes, but divided up into smaller books, organized by chapters.

Tomorrow, the Meeting on Globalization and Development Problems begins. On the first day, the key-note speaker would have been our dear friend the President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa. He won't be able to attend. We are hearing the loud clarion call of war in the southern part of our continent as the result of the genocidal plans of the Yankee Empire.

Nothing new! It was expected!

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