Luis Antonio Santaló Sors: Geómetra

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Don Luis Santaló nació en la ciudad de Gerona en Cataluña, España, y falleció en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, Argentina. Se diplomó en España y poco después se perfeccionó en Hamburgo, Alemania, donde por influencia del distinguido geómetra Wilhelm Blaschke, se orientó hacia la entonces reciente geometría integral.

Se radicó en Argentina en 1939. Al llegar a nuestro país se instaló en Rosario donde encontró un lugar de trabajo adecuado en el Instituto de Matemática de la Universidad del Litoral. Casóse con doña Hilda y luego de diez años de vivir en aquella ciudad, a la que siempre recordaba con afecto, viajó a los Estados Unidos donde visitó durante un año la Universidad de Princeton.

Al regresar de su estadía en los Estados Unidos se estableció definitivamente en San Telmo, Buenos Aires, y se desempeñó como profesor titular en el Departamento de Matemática de la Facultad de Ciencias Exactas y Naturales de la Universidad de Buenos Aires. Uno de sus tempranos y permanentes intereses fue la educación matemática en sus diferentes niveles.

Sus clases fueron siempre excepcionalmente claras y sus conferencias magistrales, éstas no sólo por la elección del tema sino principalmente por la calidad de la exposición. Y en esto constituían una lección para sus jóvenes colegas. Al impartir una conferencia el público atento recogía primero la información que él quería trasmitir y sólo después percibía la gran formación y capacidad del expositor. Finalizó su carrera docente como Profesor Emérito de esa Universidad.

Durante su ininterrumpida tarea como investigador publicó un centenar y medio de artículos en prestigiosas revistas internacionales y más de una docena de libros y monografías. Las referencias de muchos de sus trabajos originales pueden encontrarse en los índices bibliográficos de los libros 2) y 3) que se citan más adelante.

Para mencionar algunas de sus contribuciones digamos que dio una solución al problema isoperimétrico (*Abh. Math. Sem. Univ. Hamburg*, 10 (1935)), también lo hizo en espacios bidimensionales de curvatura constante negativa (*Revista de la Universidad de Tucumán* (1942-43)) y dedujo una fórmula análoga a la de Chern en espacios n-dimensionales de curvatura constante (1952). Sobre sus trabajos sobre contornos de recintos convexos (óvalos) recordemos, por ejemplo, su generalización de un teorema de Brunn y Kubota. Además la estereología -ciencia nueva que trata de detectar y conocer el interior de los cuerpos sin destruírlos- ha sido desarrollada por ingenieros y físicos que han tomado como base teórica trabajos de investigación de Santaló.

Entre sus libros se cuentan su, para algunos inesperada, 1) "Historia de la Aeronáutica" (1946), 2) el famoso "Introduction to Integral Geometry"(1953), 3) el primer volumen de la importante "Encyclopedia of Mathematics and its Applications" titulado "Integral Geometry and Geometric Probability"(1976), 4) "Vectores y Tensores"(1969) y los textos en colaboración: 5) "Geometría Analítica"(1955) y 6) "Geometría Integral" (1951).

Fue Investigador Superior del Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas y miembro de numerosas academias. En nuestra Academia Nacional de Ciencias ocupó el sitial denominado Julio Rey Pastor a quien él consideraba un maestro, un protector y un amigo.

Recibió, entre muchos otros, los premios Bernardo Houssay de la Organización de Estados Americanos y el Príncipe de Asturias de España.

Don Santaló era una persona noble, reservada, parca, austera y también un verdadero ejemplo académico. Cuando asumió tareas directivas lo hizo con idoneidad y soltura, sin buscarlas, sin utilizarlas para provecho propio y sin instalarse en su puesto. Su preocupación por la promoción justa de la gente joven, sin favoritismos ni discriminaciones, era bien conocida, aunque en caso de duda prefería el posible error por exceso. Su vocación de servicio la manifestaba en diversas formas e invitaba a los más jóvenes a imitarlo repitiéndoles que un docente universitario, además de realizar la necesaria investigación y la obligada docencia, debía dedicar diariamente una fracción de su tiempo a la realización de tareas en apoyo de la buena marcha del Departamento, del CONICET o de otros organismos de la cultura nacional. Sus intervenciones en esos menesteres fueron siempre positivas y constructivas y sus opiniones respetadas pues las fundamentaba con su proverbial sentido común y su hábil y medida retórica.

Don Santaló, hombre de sano espíritu, nunca estuvo preocupado por la aritmética en su curriculum, orientaba siempre que podía, aconsejaba a quien quisiera escucharlo, sea éste un discípulo, un alumno interesado en la Geometría o cualquier otro que necesitara de sus sabias advertencias o de su ayuda. Esto le consta al que esto escribe pues fue testigo. Los que tuvimos la suerte de tratarlo a lo largo de muchos años lo recordaremos siempre con gratitud y orgullo, el orgullo de haber conocido a alguien auténticamente grande.

Rafael Panzone.

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