

In Memoriam

José Vidal-Beneyto, lucid, indomitable

In the past few years José Vidal's levantine gaze had become more uneasy than was customary, since he knew that time was running out. And he still had many things to say and to ponder. He still had many objections and a few agreements to express.

Multilingual and a born communicator, José Vidal lived 81 intense years, aware of the mystery and brevity of our existence, and fully utilizing the fantastic immoderate creativity that distinguishes the human species. A tireless worker, he thought and wrote with urgency for the advancement of humanity and to combat fatalism. Because he abhorred the inexorable.

In his own way. Everyone must live in his own way, never copying or yielding to the dictates of others. Each one observing the Earth from his "global window". As citizens of the world, with their own questions –including essential questions– that in no case should be imposed or borrowed, to live in a genuinely democratic context of authentic participation and representation, constantly in tune with the voice of the people.

We have sailed in the same ship, my dear friend, being aware, critical and at times disagreeing, always resisting herd mentality and the manipulations of the "grand domain". In the same ship, toward a common destiny, all seeking to collaborate in choosing the appropriate route, knowing –as in Leonardo Da Vinci's story– that when the storm breaks on board there will no longer be rich and poor, blacks and whites, young people and the elderly, women and men, but rather passengers to be saved if all of them work together, and if not, death at sea. All of them are indispensable. No one is replaceable. Although at times it will be hardly noticeable, everyone will leave their mark.

"We have to be ahead of our time", he repeated over and over again. And to do so we need foresight. He promoted "critical resistance" to stimulate debate and make the correct decisions both on a personal and collective level, attempting, despite it all, to put fundamental values into practice and denouncing the postponements and disguises that render democracy vulnerable. He firmly believed in the emancipation of the individual as a prerequisite for preventing civil society from becoming the alibi of oligarchic powers rather than the leader and voice of the people. Diversity, whose limit is uniqueness, is our wealth; union in universal principles is our strength.

Encounter, meeting, union. European Union... but also Latin American Union, African Union. Regional integration was one of his preferred points of reference.

I enjoyed his company and closeness at UNESCO. Few people have been capable of such sharp analyses, such precise diagnoses and such appropriate “treatments” in contexts of “immense complexity” –as our friend Edgar Morin would say- that characterizes the challenges of the age in which we live. Fascinating times, because for the first time in history we have the knowledge and the will to face those challenges, if we are capable of overcoming inertia and, having freed our wings of their weights, join hands and voices to invent the future. The future that José Vidal-Beneyto imagined and dreamed of. Let us work to honor his memory by avoiding another “lost opportunity”. Let us commit ourselves, as he did, to achieving for all human beings a quality of life that reflects our equal dignity; mobilizing in favor of social justice, in both good times and bad, sowing in both fertile and rocky fields.

When bad health had sapped his strength he tenaciously continued to defend his principles, viewing the world through the restless eyes of solidarity, seeing beyond mere appearances.

He left us a legacy of clarity, the will to persevere, to obstinately and determinately refuse submission, so that we do not docilely travel roads mapped out by others, to ensure that the future is the one we desire, a future of conciliation, solidarity and peace not ruled by those who from blurred positions have converted the Earth into a market.

He has become invisible but, as Miguel Hernández said in his elegy to Ramón Sijé, “to whom I loved so much, with whom I loved so much,” we will continue talking and discussing “so many things, my dear friend and soul mate”.

Federico Mayor Zaragoza

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