

## A Tribute to Pere Villalba – Spirit and Humanism

Speech originally delivered at the ESDC-Escola Superior de Direito Constitucional, during a tribute session in honor of Prof. Dr. Pere Villalba (São Paulo, May 28, 2007).

Prof. Dr. Jean Lauand  
Fac. de Educação da USP

We are extremely honored and delighted to receive once more, in Brazil, the visit of this extraordinary intellectual and humanist, Prof. Pere Villalba, who has also been our dear friend for the last ten years.

Allow me to take this opportunity to introduce him in a broader, more appropriate fashion. Prof. Villalba has recently retired from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and is therefore, more available for "missions" in Brazil. The Escola Superior de Direito Constitucional would like to express the honor it feels to have him as a professor at this institution, an honor we feel every time he visits our country.

Every great artist has a special gift, a particular way of relating with the world that surrounds him. I remember another cherished friend, the unforgettable painter Fulvio Pennacchi who perceived reality from a chromatic point of view – as light and shadow, as a painting, while the rest of us only have a “normal” view” of it. The movie *Amadeus* tries to convey the same idea, showing Mozart composing an opera from the furious prosody of the lady who scolds him.



In Pere Villalba's case, we don't have a “point of view” as such: his “specific” interest encompasses it all, everything that is humane. Thomas Aquinas quotes, again and again, that Aristotelian sentence: “*anima est quodammodo omnia*”, an expression

of a fundamental legacy of the West: the spirit is the gateway to the entirety of reality and the spiritual soul, with its spiritual powers, is to “*convenire cum omni ente*”, as stated in the beginning of the *De Veritate*.

The intelligence, the willingness and love are limitless. While our sensory knowledge is limited to the *Umwelt*, to the world that surrounds us, the spirit has no boundaries. Pere Villalba has undertaken, throughout his career and life, this spiritual passion that captures his interest in everything human.

From his deep Catalan roots, Pere opens himself up to the universe. His ability to meet this challenge involve a profound knowledge, a deep understanding (meaning both to know and to savor the knowledge) of the ancient peoples. He has a unique knowledge of and relishes the Greek and Roman classic works and their medieval followers.

It's not our intention (the task would be endless) to list here all his titles - such as that of academician of the Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona or Doctor Honoris Causa (Philosophy and History of Ideas) of the Università di Palermo – or his outstanding and erudite works as thinker, translator and editor, some truly monumental such as those related to the *Arbor Scientiae* volumes by Ramon Llull for the Corpus Christianorum collection. Extremely attentive to the contemporary reality, when faced with each event and upon each incidence, Pere Villalba engages in a dialogue and discussions and gets advice from Cicero, Xenophon, Llull and Cassiodorus...

The reference to Cassiodorus is not a casual one. It wasn't by accident that a few minutes ago - during his conference on the Carian language and on his equally important work as an archeologist – Pere Villalba evoked the sentence from the *Institutiones* (XXXVI): “*Sit ergo antiquorum labor opus nostrum*”: May our endeavors be the labor of our ancestors.

The greatness of Cassiodorus – unfortunately, so little remembered – resides in taking decisive strides towards the formation of Europe and the West. The foundation of the Vivarium Monastery in 555, transformed the recently created Benedictine monasteries into an ancient preservation site, into a sanctuaries (*sanctuary* also in the sense of refuge) of classic knowledge threatened by the then prevailing barbarism.

Nowadays, upon witnessing, once more, the cultivation of the ancient civilizations and their values being threatened by the new age of barbarism — by productivity, massification and profit – whereby the university itself is being targeted, Prof. Pere Villalba's immense body of work emerges as a message of hope that the university will find its *universitas*, its original vocation of opening up to wholeness which, as we well know, also includes the spiritual component.

Through his interest in knowledge that transcends boundaries, Pere Villalba has contributed a great deal to the Brazilian cause. We owe to his generosity, besides the countless conferences and publications among us, the creation of this Journal (RIH), which he founded in Barcelona in 1998, in partnership with the CEMOrOc - Centro de Estudos Medievais Oriente & Ocidente da Faculdade de Educação da Universidade de São Paulo, where he holds the position of professor and founding member.

Beyond his unmatched knowledge and erudition, the dear professor and friend Pere Villalba also teaches us another lesson - on humaneness. Knowledge of the classics, according to him, is also the result of savoring reality as a whole and with reverence, which, according to Plato and Aristotle, is the principle of wisdom in itself.

When he was previously in São Paulo, Pere wanted to visit with the guaranis and we went to the *Tonendé Porã* village of Parelheiros. I was very impressed by the immediate empathy between the cultured European and the Indians. It was as if they

had been acquainted for decades, it was like a reunion of old friends. Not one of the guaranis' human characteristics such as language, religion and the arts was strange to him.



*Tonendé Porã*



Welcome Prof. Pere Villalba (*Tonendé Porã School*)

It was love at first sight between Pere and Ará, the then four-year-old little Indian, an experience registered in "Ará - Guarani Indian", a wonderful study published by Pere about the guaranis and the city of São Paulo (<http://www.hottopos.com/rih7/pere.htm>).



Zu Lai Buddhist Temple (Cotia – Brazil)

I would like to finish by quoting a paragraph from this reflection which, somehow, summarizes Pere Villalba's infinite good-heartedness:



“War. War kills me; it kills Ará, the little Indian, every time a human being collapses under fire. I kept on dreaming and, in my dreams, I was sure that if I took Ará to UN, if I showed her to the 'war lords', to my friend Bush, that if they saw Ará, they would stop all wars... If only I could, I would explain to them that every human being, every child is our most precious asset.”

Through his deep erudition, Pere Villalba teaches a great lesson on humaneness summarized by Paul the Apostle in two words: *sym-pathia* and *syn-khairia*, to suffer from your neighbor's suffering and to rejoice in your neighbor's well being. Erudition, in this case, goes above and beyond any knowledge – it's love.

Recebido para publicação em 22-08-09; aceito em 15-09-09