



Jorge Carpizo

No Twilight for a National Hero

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Jorge Carpizo, a unique figure in Mexican legal thought, died March 30. In the strictest sense of the term, he was an authentic national hero. His entire life was one of exemplary coherence; he never compromised on matters of principle or lost sight of his objectives. Born in Campeche on April 2, 1944, he is quite justly considered one of that state's most outstanding citizens in the twentieth century, and he was always proud of his origins.

His untiring activity kept him studying, writing, and teaching throughout his life. He was a full-time educator. The qual-

ity of his work and institutional endeavors cannot be measured numerically, but certain expressions I have culled from the many pieces written on the occasion of his death are useful for estimating it.

His death caused shock waves. Highly representative voices expressed the prevailing grief and the admiration and respect that Jorge Carpizo inspired. At the March 31 memorial service held for him by the Institute for Legal Research, President José Narro made an eloquent, moving speech that justified classifying his predecessor as "a giant of our country" and defined his profile exactly: "A man of great capacity for analysis and synthesis, he constantly rejected insignificant rhetoric. He was always committed to truth and justice,

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to secular ethics and values, to work and the defense of the dignity of all persons.”

UNAM General Counsel Luis Raúl González Pérez recognized him as a “forger of generations who look to him as their source of inspiration,” and Miguel Carbonell showed that he was “a bridge between generations” to whom he transmitted “his creed of love of a job well done, his passion for the university, his unimpeachable moral code, and his commitment to human rights.”

Expressions of grief also poured in from the international legal community. “Outstanding in all his public activities and a personality of notable quality and human dimensions,”

said Jorge Reynaldo Vanossi, president of the National Academy of Moral and Political Sciences of Argentina. Professor Luis Pegoraro of Bologna called him “a beacon of culture and constitutional science.”

Among the messages from Brazil, the deans of that country’s constitutionalists, Paulo Bonavides and José Afonso da Silva, were effusive in their comments. Professor Bonavides deplored the loss of “a man with a vocation for good, for the law, for justice, for freedom, and for democracy. It is not only Mexico that loses one of its best jurists, but rather all of Latin America.” Professor Da Silva emphasized the fact that Jorge Carpizo always carried out all his responsibilities “with the most noteworthy vision of a public man, always leaving his mark of competence and seriousness in his pursuits.” The director of the São Paulo School of Law, Marcelo Figueiredo, referred to the loss of “natural jurist and a colossal public man.”

Domingo García Belaunde traveled from Peru to Mexico to offer his touching, elegant tribute: “Jorge Carpizo was not only an essential mainstay for me, but for the entire Latin American constitutional milieu.” Professor Álvaro Gil Robles, the European Union’s first ombudsman, mourned “the passing of a man who has given everything for his homeland, taking great personal risks and offering inestimable services to consolidate Mexican democracy.” Jorge Carpizo’s absence happens at a bad time for the country. As Manuel Camacho so rightly said, “Jorge is leaving us when he was going to be needed most.”

He left a memorable mark on every post he held. With just a few brushstrokes, I can exemplify this: as UNAM counsel general, he recovered three and a half hectares of land that had been occupied by private individuals in the wealthy residential neighborhood of Pedregal; as the director of the Institute for Legal Research, he organized Latin America’s first automated legislative informational system; as UNAM president, he built the Humanities Research City, created the National University Prize, promoted the transformation of the Research Technical Councils, and introduced important innovations in the spheres of academia, the budget, publishing, and computer systems. He founded and consolidated the National Human Rights Commission; at the head of the Attorney General’s Office, he waged a head-on battle against criminal activities that was memorable for its intensity and successes. In the Ministry of the Interior, he fostered the democratic transformation of the electoral system.

I cannot hide how much I will miss Jorge. The last time I saw him was a few days before his death at the Academic

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Club with Héctor Fix-Zamudio, a meeting that had become habitual with us. The previous week, my wife Patricia, my son José Diego, and I had enjoyed memorable repast at his home, prepared, as always, by Mary Quiterio. And in March, I was also with him in the company of two friends he loved very much, Carlos Marín and Miguel Lerma. There was happy, cordial conversation that we three will always remember.

A privileged intelligence, an exceptional cultural level, an unbreakable will, and unsurpassable honesty, joined with his firm sense of justice and democracy made Jorge Carpizo one of those people who only come around once in a great while. His curiosity about science was accompanied by a cosmopolitanism that led him to explore many corners of the globe prompted by his thirst for knowledge. He never practiced tourism as recreation: his travels were to inquire, systematic and serious. His solace was learning.

In 1997, when he represented us as ambassador in France, I visited him with my daughters Jimena and Sofía. He lodged us in the official residence, and one day, he invited me to an informal breakfast with a group of French deputies. Each legislator introduced himself, saying which district he represented. Then, our ambassador spoke to each of them in turn about their respective places of origins, mentioning monuments, public figures, and historic events that very often even the deputies were unaware of.

The best summary of his life is to be found in his own words, to be published posthumously by his brother Carlos Carpizo, and which can be considered the great epitaph of a splendid human being: "I tried to live the best way I could given my circumstances, and to serve Mexico and its national university with devotion....I leave loving with all my strength, convictions, and emotions our country and its —and my— national university."

As a man of conviction, Jorge Carpizo did not hide his affections or his antipathies; that is what all men of his caliber are like. What remains to us of Jorge is a dazzling body of work



and the indelible presence of a personality that will continue to inspire respect and admiration. In Mexico's institutional history, Jorge Carpizo will figure alongside those who dedicated their lives to broadening the horizon of freedoms, improving the condition of the weak, and expanding the world of ideas. The years and decades will pass, and Jorge will continue illustrating with his thinking and illuminating with his example. We can say, as Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera did, that he will not die completely.

Jorge Carpizo reached the zenith and stayed there. For posterity, he will remain in that place where his intelligence, his culture, his passion for truth and justice, his love of Mexico and the university, his social commitment, his unswerving character, and his humanitarian conviction put him. Jorge said a swift, serene goodbye; night fell without passing through twilight. ■■■