

SOME END-OF-YEAR REFLECTIONS FROM CJ

Transforming the world through tender-heartedness and affection

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Cristianisme i Justícia - Roger de Llúria, 13 - 08010 Barcelona

+34 93 317 23 38 - info@fespinal.com - www.cristianismeijusticia.net

Surely nobody looking at our contemporary world can doubt we need a revolution, an ecological, political, social, and economic revolution certainly, but most of all, one promoting tender-heartedness and affection. We cannot allow ourselves to love ourselves and love each other so little and so badly for a moment longer. Our bodies, minds, and hearts are no longer capable of withstanding so much hatred, selfishness, and despair. Any further continuance of suspicion, fear, and indifference is intolerable. We were made for love.

We are limited beings, with bodies having certain fundamental needs that evolve in the course of our lives. It is impossible to live without awareness of our fragility and finiteness. There is no ignoring our need of other people, since we cannot live without their love and recognition. We need one another, if we are to experience the warmth of human friendship and mutual esteem, to find consolation in our dependence on others, to find fellowship amid our fundamental loneliness. We need one another, if we are to feel, and actually to be, alive.

There is no affection possible without others for us to love. Affection is expressed in words, in gestures, attitudes, and deeds. Affection involves the whole person, transforming heads, and hearts, and senses. When we embrace, we are embraced; when we look into another person's eyes they look at us; our hearts are warmed by cordiality; when we are caressed we feel the better for it... No wealth can buy affection or dispel hatred, no money can build up hope and confidence. This is the daily task of each of us and of the whole community of human beings in our naked humanity, trusting of course that God has planed the seeds of Love in every man and every woman. Without affection and tender-heartedness, without devoting time and energy to caring, we are outsourcing costs, and the price for this is paid by our minds and bodies, by those who are most vulnerable and excluded, by the natural world, by women, children, neighbours, family, and friends.

In a world that is hostile towards life and humanity, that hardens hearts and pulls us apart, we take as our starting-point, and

as the lens through which to view the world and its people, a revolution favouring affection and tender-heartedness.

As 2015 draws to a close, we want to spotlight five areas that we believe to be in particular need of acceptance or transformation.

1. Matters of ecology

The symptoms of exhaustion that the Earth displays (shortage of drinking water, loss of biodiversity, loss of land available for cultivation...) and the warning signs that are visible everywhere (land becoming desert, the contamination of our seas and rivers...) are worrying in the extreme. To pretend that science and technology will sort out our ecological problems at some point in the future is a fallacy that anaesthetises us and encourages irresponsibility. In behaving thus, we endanger both our present and our future lives.

We are already suffering some ill-effects: we sicken, and our quality of life gets worse. But what in some places seems to be no more than a pose, something that nobody really takes notice of, is elsewhere literally a matter of life and death. There are places where climate change and other irresponsible actions towards our planet are indeed deadly in their effects. Abuses and their outcomes are not synchronised, and for that reason we have to overcome both spatial and temporal myopia, and exchange a fragmented, utilitarian view of reality for a holistic view informed by wisdom. The ecological revolution begins with us. A conversion to shared sobriety will not only allow us to live on less and allow others to live at all, but will turn out to liberate us too. We have to rediscover the prophetic dimension of those small everyday gestures that show other ways of living to be possible. It is in such a

manner that a culture of respect is created towards everything around us (habits of consumption, community ties...). We have to realise that how we relate to the natural world is no different from the way in which we relate to one another. Interpersonal relationships, and relations between the sexes, between cultures, people, and States, can take the form of domination, exploitation, and deafness... or of their opposite.

Our common earthly home demands our affection and tender-heartedness; it needs urgent action to preserve it. This has to be translated in terms of new ways of living in, of consuming in, and of conceiving of our relationships and the world around us, together with fresh forms of social participation and political action.

2. Intolerable inequality

By the end of 2015, we had, in Spain, reached unprecedented levels of inequality: 1% of the population is now as rich as the remaining 99%. The number of wealthy people (those with a million dollars or more) has grown by 40% since the current economic crisis began. Some six billion dollars are tied up in tax havens, in ways that it is hard to grasp. At the same time, poverty levels in our cities grow ever worse: more than a third of Spanish households have an average monthly income of less than €800, and if unemployment decreases, this is only by the creation of jobs that are precarious and underpaid... and so we could go on.

The utopian conditions enjoyed by the wealthiest are dystopian for the poor, unwilling as the former are to recognise that the wellbeing of the latter is the only way by which the wellbeing of all can be achieved.

We recognise the difficulties involved in changing a global hegemonic economic system that is deeply rooted culturally, but capitalism is legitimate only in so far as it is

capable of improving the lives of those who are worst off. When it does not do this, it clearly should be questioned. And we now know that we cannot continue to live as we do, if others are to be able to live better. But another reason why we cannot continue to live as we do is because such a way of life fails to make us happier, more human, and more involved with other people.

In the 'meantime' of this tale of suffering and pain, the affection and tender-heartedness that move us to compassion should lead to self-examination. What are these things that enchain us and dehumanise us? How can we live in a more committed, community-oriented way?

3. From hostility and rejection to hospitality and welcome

We are currently witnessing the forced movement of people on a scale that is unprecedented. Economic inequality has become dizzying. By buying up land and massively exploiting natural resources, capitalism has left immense areas without the least hope for the future, and the growth of armed conflict has led to a huge increase in the number of refugees, a figure that has now reached 60,000,000 people.

In the face of this situation, the world's rich and stable areas have rushed to defend their frontiers and to make things difficult for those seeking refuge, rather than protecting them, and addressing the root causes. The behaviour of some states is simply criminal. Even so, across the world more widely, we see a growing awareness that we are not going to solve the problem by building walls and fences. We need to find political solutions at a global level. Europe cannot continue in such disarray and indifference, washing its hands of things when it is an active cause of the underlying imbalance.

But a thorough-going effort is going to be required if we are to create a culture of hospitality in the place of hostility. We need to oppose those who seek political advantage from xenophobic talk, who feed on people's fears, and want only to build barriers between them.

Our own Biblical tradition is full of references to hospitality, since for people living in deserts, hospitality is key to survival, and that is the case for millions of people still, who have no future unless we make them welcome. This is an obligation on us that comes from a law of humanity that is inscribed in our hearts and that goes beyond mere legal requirements. The necessary changes will only come about if we can manage gently to lower the frontiers separating 'ourselves' from 'the others', becoming capable of seeing those 'other people' as our brothers and sisters.

4. A revolution in terms of caring

Concern for others, affection, and tender-heartedness are values said to be deeply rooted in women, but it is not acceptable for 50% of the human race so to delegate their responsibilities. Men should not allow themselves to lose out on the benefits for their own lives that caring for others brings with it.

If there is to be a revolution in terms of caring, if we are to build human relationships that are more egalitarian and just, it is necessary to expose the inequalities with which our world is riven. To achieve this, we need to locate the interconnections between a life based on equality between men and women in the spheres of social, political, and economic rights, on freedom, on the redistribution of work and wealth, on strengthening public services and so forth, and a life centred on mutual care and interdependence. There can be no genuine

social justice without due concern for those around us, or if we leave the caring work exclusively to women.

Only by restoring the balance between identities based on personal interrelationships (traditionally associated with women), and identities based on individualism (historically displayed by men as they maintain power, privilege, and the control of public spaces), will we find a way of developing the ethics of mutual care and collective responsibility so perceptively described by the philosopher Carol Gilligan:

In a democratic context, giving care is an ethical demand. Giving care is something human beings do; taking care of oneself and of other people is a natural human endowment. The difference is not between care and justice, between women and men, but between democracy and patriarchy.

Socialising care is, therefore, key for a collective taking on board, taking up, and taking on of the things that build up genuine democracy. And to this end it is important to realise we are vulnerable beings, and that concern for that vulnerability is a social responsibility.

5. The Year of Mercy

Pope Francis wants the Church to look at the world in a special way, from the perspective of mercy. He wants the Church and the People of God to look mercifully on all those who fail in their attempts at embodying the ideals proposed by Jesus. We must look mercifully on ourselves as well, when it is ourselves or our own Church that fail.

Mercy goes beyond justice. A just world would eliminate most of humanity's present problems, but the justice that requires us to 'give to each according to their needs' can, if we are not careful, lead to religious or economic meritocracy. We need, therefore, to insist on compensation for all those who do not win out at present. Without mercy, justice turns into cruelty towards the weakest, and a God who is just, but only just, seems implacable towards sinners. Jesus on the other hand surrounded himself with people who had no merit at all in the eyes of the society of his time: sinners, thieves, lepers, prostitutes, the blind...

Eyes of mercy are necessary if we are to see all those on the margins of our society as other than culpable and deserving of their own fates; they demand that human beings welcome one another unconditionally. To achieve this, the Church itself needs a revolution in favour of affection and tender-heartedness, needs to look mercifully on itself and on the world around us, needs to act compassionately.

We reach the end of 2015 in a particularly desperate and battered state, like 'sheep without a shepherd', tempted to close in on ourselves, and to postpone until another year the struggle for the better world we yearn for. In fact, however, it is now, when our troubles leave us naked and exposed, that we should place our trust in the power of affection and tender-heartedness, and change the world by starting on a small scale, beginning with our everyday lives and immediate interpersonal relationships.

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