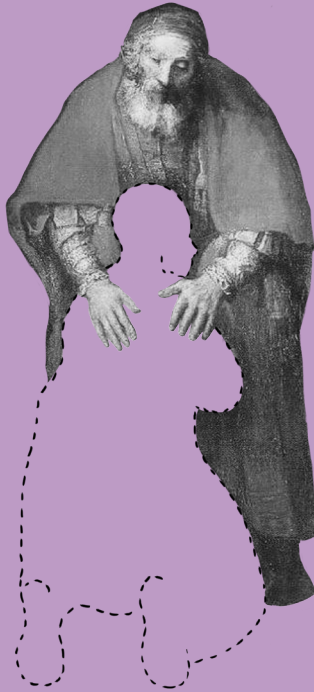


**booklets**

**LIFE'S EMBRACES**  
**Testimonies of Faith and**  
**Justice**



176

**Cristianisme i Justícia**



**LIFE'S EMBRACES**  
**TESTIMONIES OF FAITH AND JUSTICE**

Cristianisme i Justícia

INTRODUCTION: A FAITH WHICH EMBRACES JUSTICE, A SENSE OF JUSTICE WHICH LEADS TO EMBRACING FAITH ( <i>Manu Andueza</i> ) .....	3
TAKING A RISK BECAUSE OF OUR FAITH	
Testimony: The Necessary Risk Involved in Social Action ( <i>Eulàlia Pagès</i> ) .....	7
Theological Reflection: Through Silence and Prayer, the World Is Seen Through New Eyes ( <i>Julia López</i> ) .....	10
ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE MOVED BY WHAT IS INHUMANE	
Testimony: a Journey of Hope ( <i>Valeria Méndez de Vigo</i> ) .....	12
Theological Reflection: Sometimes It Is Best to Remain Silent ( <i>Francisco Javier Vitoria</i> ) .....	14
ASKING OURSELVES QUESTIONS BASED ON LIFE EXPERIENCES	
Testimony: Questions Are Important ( <i>Manu Andueza</i> ) .....	18
Theological Reflection: Walking Through the Neighbourhood While Crying Out to Heaven ( <i>José Laguna</i> ) .....	22
TRANSFORMING STRUCTURES WHICH ATTACK LIFE	
Testimony: Guardians and Witnesses ( <i>Nani Vall-llossera</i> ) .....	25
Theological Reflection: God Himself Walks Our Path ( <i>Tere Iribarren</i> ) .....	28
EPILOGUE: FROM FAIRNESS TO JUSTICE. THE TEACHING POWER OF THE TESTIMONY ( <i>José Laguna</i> ) .....	31
NOTES .....	32

**Cristianisme i Justícia.** The testimonies and the theological responses to these testimonies were developed by members of the Cristianisme i Justícia team during the Faith and Justice Seminar which took place in Barcelona in June 2017. People from various walks of life explained how they lived out the "embrace of faith and justice", and how this relationship gave meaning to their obligations. This booklet reflects, in some way, the nucleus of what we are trying to live out through CJ.

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# INTRODUCTION: A FAITH WHICH EMBRACES JUSTICE, A SENSE OF JUSTICE WHICH LEADS TO EMBRACING FAITH

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*Manu Andueza\**

“Someone’s testimony is a formal statement”. “What they know of a situation, after having promised to tell the truth”. These are two of the definitions which we find for the word testimony if we look it up in the Collins Oxford Dictionary.

As the definitions state, a testimony affirms something, and at the same time, it offers proof and an explanation for the truth which is hidden behind the statement. When we talk about testimony here, what we will be demonstrating is the truth of a lived experience, or rather, something which shows us a personal way of life, opening up new pathways for us to discover and experience.

Even though faith is not contagious, reading the testimony of others

can help us on our own journey, by introducing new ways to live, or by experiencing new forms of encounter that lead to that same faith. Faith has in fact a lot to do with personal encounter, with a lived experience that changes and transforms our way of understanding reality. It is about a journey that each of us must take, in which questions will guide us and help us move forward, and in which the journeying becomes the aim in itself, rather than the possible final answers.

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Faith also has a lot to do with our outlook, and this perspective affects the way we read the story: the same event can be interpreted in a different way depending on whether it is read through the eyes of faith or not. An element of how we read lies within us, in what we have lived and in what we have experienced, and in what we believe; but above all, in what we have personally encountered.

If we hope to embark upon the path of faith, what we need to do is make room for encounters with mystery, which will allow us to experience it for ourselves, and from there, the pathways of faith will be opened. In essence, it is as closely related to the mystical as it is related to our own outlook on life.

### **An appeal to bear witness**

But let's return to the notion of testimony. We were saying that this could help others to reflect upon and review their own experiences, as well as possibly leading them to new experiences. Pope Paul VI, in number 21 of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, encouraged us to bear witness to our faith:

Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good. Let us suppose that, in addition, they radiate in an altogether

simple and unaffected way their faith in values that go beyond current values, and their hope in something that is not seen and that one would not dare to imagine. Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. The above questions will ask, whether they are people to whom Christ has never been proclaimed, or baptized people who do not practice, or people who live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian, or people who are seeking, and not without suffering, something or someone whom they sense but cannot name. Other questions will arise, deeper and more demanding ones, questions evoked by this witness which involves presence, sharing, solidarity, and which is an essential element, and generally the first one, in evangelization. [51]

All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers. We are thinking especially of the responsibility incumbent on immigrants in the country that receives them.

This exhortation was undoubtedly a move to encourage all to try and bear witness to their faith, and Pope Paul VI was not the only Pope to speak of the importance of bearing witness. Pope Francis has spoken of the necessity of bearing witness to our faith on several

occasions. For example, we saw this when he explained that evangelising means bearing witness to our faith through our life (homily from 9/9/16); or when he reminded us that we ourselves need to be the witness, since being Christian is bearing witness to Christ (homily from 15/1/17); or when he emphasised that as Christians we are called to bear witness, with the words and life of the risen Christ (19/4/15); or when he stated that bearing witness to Christ is at the heart of the Church (6/6/14). We could go on highlighting the importance that Pope Francis has given to this issue, but through these brief points, we have already given the general idea. On more than one occasion, he has himself referred to his own life in order to explain certain aspects of his message.

### **Testimonies: being active protagonists in our own lives**

We also hope to give our witness here; a testimony of our faith, a faith which embraces justice, and a sense of justice which compels us to embrace our faith. Faith and justice, are intrinsically linked, and this can be seen through the entire history of the Church. We also find examples in the Bible, in both the Old and New Testament. This sense of justice reminds us of the social aspect of our faith. Furthermore, in the notion of the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus, we find an indissoluble union between the two issues. In the same way, a sense of justice can bring us closer to faith, since our experiences of justice can make us look at the world in a different way; an outlook which points to

something more: to an encounter with that which we know as God.<sup>1</sup>

This is why we have asked different people in this booklet to tell us about their own experiences and give us their own testimony; testimonies of lived experiences which will help us to understand, and invite us to discover faith from the perspective of justice. Furthermore, we would like these thought-provoking testimonies to establish a sort of dialogue with the reader; a personal and private dialogue which will help the reader search for the pathway of faith in their own lives, that faith which is a gift and at the same time, an invitation to live life in all its fullness.

These are testimonies that talk about relationship, encounter, and experiences of brother and sisterhood which help us to encounter the transcendent in the immanent - a perfect union which can be best understood through the person of Jesus of Nazareth. These are testimonies with commentaries and accompanied by various elements which may aid our own reflection and personal development. Therefore, each testimony gathered is accompanied by a theological reflection designed to help our understanding, and our own personal encounter with the issues raised.

This is certainly an invitation to look hard at our own lives, and become the protagonists in our own story, as Pope Francis has invited us to do on more than one occasion. We should not close ourselves off from others, but rather face our life by going out into the world in order to dialogue with it, and discover the footprints of God therein. In reality, it consists in returning to testimonies of faith –as

the early Christians did—, in order to offer a spirituality and practice which can help improve the world around us, by being bearers of the Good News, particularly for those left behind and marginalised, thus embodying what Christianity should be.

### **Fully aware and full of hope**

Christianity may appear to be just one more option when faced with other propositions that are on offer in the world today, yet we refuse to abandon our history. At the same time, we are aware of the times in which we live; a time when religion seems to be losing its place—though spirituality remains—; a time when people seem to be looking elsewhere for things they could find within. We confront this with the firm belief that Christianity can still be useful in the world, and offer a source of happiness and joy, as well as being a transformative element in the world. With this intention, we invite the reader to look at the various testimonies and the reflections that go with them.

There is just one final recommendation: this is not a booklet that can be read rapidly, as if it were a novel, trying to reach the end to discover the final outcome. There is no final outcome. That is for the reader to discover on their own journey. This text was written to be read slowly, testimony by testimony, leaving time between each one so that they can touch the heart. It might be an idea to have a pen and notebook handy, in which you can note down any thoughts that may come to you. Opportunities, new ideas for living out your faith..., but above all, questions; questions which bring us into a new dimension, and into an unknown and chaotic world. The immensity of this journey may frighten us, but at the same time, when discovering new ways of journeying through and experiencing life, it may also comfort and encourage us.

Therefore, we now leave the reader in a place of encounter and dialogue with the various testimonies. These are testimonies whose authorship is not important, but rather, what they can bring to us, particularly through our reading of the personal experience of others.



# TAKING A RISK BECAUSE OF OUR FAITH

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## TESTIMONY: THE NECESSARY RISK INVOLVED IN SOCIAL ACTION

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*Eulàlia Pagès\**

Finding ourselves in front of people with complex, fragile or precarious situations, brings with it the risk of being exposed to their reality and their lives. It allows their stories to capture, move and affect us. What troubles them, what bothers them, what motivates them? In this testimony, I don't intend to talk about people in typified situations that are easy to categorise or label, but instead, I want to demonstrate how organising all of these situations into categories often brings with it limitations, sadness, disorientation and despair.

The area of social action opens up a wide range of services that aim to respond to specific situations. Problems, weaknesses and difficulties which are all given a specific label: long-term unemployment, academic failure, family conflicts, migratory grief, poverty, isolation... These names, while they help

people in certain situations to form collectives, allowing various bodies, services, programmes or projects to offer them assistance, often lose sight of the specific names and identities of the people they help. This means it is very easy when labelling people for them to lose a sense of their own unique identity. It then follows that the person who cannot get a job falls under the label of *unemployed*; or that the young person who cannot adapt to institutionalised education becomes labelled as a *dropout*; that the family going through emotional and relationship breakdowns fall under the label *dysfunctional*; that the woman who crossed many borders becomes *undocumented*; that the person living in a financially precarious situation becomes identified as *poor* and that the man who has lost contact with his children, becomes a *single elderly 75 year old male*.

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\* Eulàlia Pagès is a graduate in Humanities and Social Education. She is currently working in the Education Department of the Badia del Vallès Council (Barcelona). She is a member of the team at Cristianisme i Justícia.

## **Trying to recover personal identity**

None of these situations are new to us. None of these descriptions, which pigeonhole people according to their needs or demands, are surprising or unknown to us. Yet what lies behind these different categories of identity? This is what we need to focus on in order to be able to make our social work meaningful and invaluable.

On the one hand, we could identify the dynamics –whether structural, social or political– that would explain exactly how these people reached this point. From the point of view of sociology, anthropology, the economy, political sciences, education or history - all of these can be used to analyse the situation from a variety of different perspectives. They can even be used to offer solutions or alternative paths. This analytical –and critical approach– is essential so that specific situations can be transcended and observed from a broader perspective, which does not blame people individually for the difficulties in which they live, but instead sees them as individuals within the social, political, economic, legislative, etc. context in which they find themselves.

However, we will now come face to face with Mark, Isma, the Cortes, Fatou, Khadija and Luis. In the cases of all of these people, these difficulties and limitations keep doing them damage, tearing them apart and weakening them. It is a challenge of social action to restore the identity of these people who are each subject to this system because of their issues, and who seem to remain at the margins of society be-

cause of what they are going through. Only this will allow them to become active members of the community, and rise above the type of difficulty that affects their daily life.

Coming into close contact with these people and recognising them as individuals means being affected by their suffering and wanting to face up to the injustice, lack of understanding, rejection or disregard that affects their daily life. It means believing that it is worth the risk of becoming involved in their lives, and allowing them to become involved in ours. In other words, it means overcoming that sense of doubt in order to see how we can make this possible.

## **Accompanying individuals and putting names on faces**

Marcos has been unemployed for four years. He took part in various training courses, he received advice on how to get through the curriculum, he took part in several interview processes, but at over fifty years of age, he cannot help but see that it is always other people –younger people, those with more training, or simply those that are luckier– these are always the ones who sign the job contracts.

Ismael is about to repeat his first year in secondary school, which means that his course will take two years longer than that of his classmates. This year, he didn't pass any subject, and he can't even think of one subject that he likes. Neither does he have any companion that wants to sit beside him, because they are all fed up with his sudden fits of aggression and the con-

stant interruptions which have become “part” of his education.

Often, the mother of the Cortés household remembers the teacher at the open education centre which she attended every afternoon fifteen years ago. There, the children had a great rapport with the educational team, but she cannot hide her reluctance in explaining what happened back then when her partner returned home after spending a long time in the bar.

Fatou finally found a room after being thrown out of the apartment in which she lived and which she shared with other families, on the birth of her second son. The final months of the pregnancy were very difficult, because she could no longer carry out the cleaning job she had in the houses where she had been given work. As well as this, she had no access to any form of income because she had no work permit or fixed address.

Khadija has not worked since she came back from Morocco with her family, and it is difficult making ends meet with the PIRMI (Minimum Income Insertion Programme) received by her husband. The monthly visit to the food bank and the assistance they receive with living expenses gets them as far as the 30th of each month, in spite of having given up college expenses and journeys on public transport.

Luis has had a run of bad luck. Now that none of his children live in Catalonia, the days seem long –too long– and social interaction is scarce. He is so lonely that a concerned neighbour visits him from time to time to see how he’s doing or to bring him to the health centre if he has an appointment.

## **Connecting with people takes time**

Working in the field of social action means that certain protocol and requirements need to be fulfilled which often have little to do with the specific suffering of the individuals involved; it involves looking for services or resources that can help meet the practical needs that arise and which cannot otherwise be met; it involves going through formalities and meeting deadlines so that programmes can be financed; it involves assessing social risk through various measures which are intended to be objectives; it involves prioritising and adapting specific actions according to the finances available... Connecting with people takes time. Yet this is the element which features less and less in the daily work of the socio-educational sphere: on the one hand, because there are so many people or needs to respond to; and on the other hand, because the amount of paperwork and formalities that need to be carried out in order to execute the work, (which I could go on and on listing out), take valuable time away from giving attention to the individuals themselves.

Involvement in the field of social action inevitably includes certain responsibilities –much of these tasks involve working with the public service, we must not forget– who fit people into certain categories of problems, as we have already mentioned. Often, this work is of a palliative nature, in that it does not respond to the real causes of each situation, but rather to the symptoms which are made visible because of the original problem; in other words, while social work hopes

to improve in some sense the lives of those it serves, in the majority of cases, it fails to address the actual causes –which are broad, complex and multi-factorial– which lead to the difficulties it tries to address.

Through social action, we can choose to serve and accompany people by putting names to faces, so that their specific story and suffering may be known, their anguish and worries, or their infectious desire to keep going through it all. At the same time, social work forms part of a network of re-

sources and services which make life more bearable for all of these people, but which often says very little about the dynamics that caused the situations in which they live. A difficult balance exists between the identity of the individual, which is local, subjective, emotional and at times anecdotal, and their identity in a wider context, which is global, objective, rational and easy to generalise. And during all of this, Marcos, Isma, the Cortés family, Fatou, Khadija or Luis continue with their daily lives, in spite of everything.

## **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: THROUGH SILENCE AND PRAYER, THE WORLD IS SEEN THROUGH NEW EYES**

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*Julia López\**

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude for the testimony given about the lives of Marcos, Isma, the Cortés family, Fatou, Khadija and Luis, which allows us to know their names, and find out about their lives and feelings, because they are more than their marginalised situation –poor, undocumented immigrants, unemployed, young people with integration problems...–; they have their own name which God calls them by, as He calls each one of us.

I would like to continue with a few words of Gustavo Gutiérrez, the liberation theologian: “Everything begins in silence, this is the first step to talk to God, this is the moment of listening and prayer, then the language borne in

this silence will come [...] from silence, prayer and contemplation, we will begin to see the world in a new way. Without this, liberation can end up being clouded by a frenetic form of activism or an incensed inclination to judge others, from which people also need to be liberated. To enter into the sacred ground of the Father requires purification, particularly in respect to false gods and the egotistical pride which enslaves us; the writings chosen here highlight the call to choose a path in life which takes us through the darkest depths of human society, the idols made by ourselves and the injustices of the modern world”. It is from this perspective of prayer that activism alongside the poor should emerge.

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\* Julia López is a Professor in Employment Law at the Pompeu Fabra University. She is a member of the Social Department of Cristianisme i Justícia.

## **The poor, those we will not look at**

Gutiérrez realises the insignificance of the poor in society, those that don't count, the invisible, those who do not have what they need in order to live with dignity, those who suffer in loneliness, the sick, those who are oppressed for their political or religious beliefs, their gender or their race... We cannot take their place: the poor "must be protagonists of their own destiny".

The question now is how we can engage with these individuals, how we can live out our vocation to accompany them, as set out in the Ignatian spirituality of the Jesuits –in capital letters no less–, to highlight its importance for St. Ignatius. Ignatian spirituality must be lived out by giving honour to his name: accompanying Jesus and our

fellow brethren, living out our vocation of accompaniment from a foundation of prayer, silence and peace.

Going against the utilitarian approach to our "time", which society imposes upon us, must be the first step. We need to rebel against this dehumanised approach to the use of time, whereby spending hours with people is considered to be unproductive. For this reason, the pathway of accompaniment must be done from a perspective of humility –we ourselves can do nothing; we work in God's name–, in search of aims which will make our pathway clear. An active Society is already a good in itself, because it allows the poor person to feel like somebody that counts, somebody that matters. Only from the point of view of humility and prayer can we carry out our social work.

# ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE MOVED BY WHAT IS INHUMANE

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## TESTIMONY: A JOURNEY OF HOPE

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*Valeria Méndez de Vigo\**

The photo was no bigger than the palm of my hand, the formal portrait of an Afghan family of seven. The distraught father took the photo from his wallet with shaking fingers, and placed it in my hands together with his wife's ID card. Only the man and one of his sons, aged about eight, made it to Serbia, where I met them at a transit centre on their way further into Europe. The others got lost at a lethal pass of the journey to seek refuge: the Iranian-Turkish border, reputedly dangerous because of the mountainous terrain, the weather and the risk of being intercepted by border guards.

“I was walking with my family and the guards started shooting from both sides. We were stuck. I grabbed my son's hand and ran, and the others went somewhere else to escape. Now I don't know where my family is”, the man said. Did you try to search for them?

“I couldn't! If I moved, the guards would shoot. And then we had to keep running: the smuggler had a stick and a knife; he was hitting me to make sure I don't stop”. He asks helplessly: “Is there anyone who can bring my family back?”. Then, his son speaks up, fighting back tears, and bravely names each one of his missing brothers and sisters, counting off his fingers: “Ali, Mohammed, Farzona, Mortaza... four and, with my mother, five”.

This forlorn pair has kept travelling with the rest of their group, carrying with them only their shock, sense of loss and fading hope. Only God knows how many families have faced such a heart-breaking predicament on their desperate journey to find a safer place than that allotted to them by fate. Nowadays, the route that most refugees are taking into Europe –from Greece onwards– is packed with parents, chil-

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\* Valeria Méndez de Vigo has a degree in Law. She is currently working in Rome, in the Social Justice and Ecology Secretariat of the Society of Jesus.

dren and grandparents. That parents are doing this for their children is beyond doubt; their sacrifices and dreams are for them. But refugees must resort to such risky means to travel that their bid to save their family often leads to loss instead, temporarily –or tragically– permanently.

### **All the way there, I held her in my arms**

Reza, an Iranian refugee who is a translator on the Greek island of Lesbos, will never forget a woman he tried to help just after she landed. “I saw her stomach swelling fast and shouted that we had to get her to hospital. All the way there, I held her in my arms. She was begging me, not for herself, but to look after her daughter. The next day, I went to ask her family how she was. She hadn’t made it”. So perilous is the journey that many men choose to go alone, to try to pave a safer way for their family to follow –a brave plan that may be foiled by stringent family reunification policies in Europe. Mohammed comes from Erbin, a besieged zone east of Damascus. First, he left for the capital but then quit Syria altogether after army intelligence came twice to look for his brother. That was the last straw. “I left my wife and children with my mother. I miss them so much”, he says, when we meet at the transit centre in SlavonskiBrod, in Croatia. “Now I heard that it will take two years for family to be allowed to come. I can’t stay alone for two years”. Mohammed can no longer talk now. He blinks away tears, looks away and draws hard on his cigarette.

### **Nour, eight months pregnant**

Nour’s husband fled the Syrian city of Aleppo five months ago after receiving a threat, “a paper that was so dangerous”. He went to Germany but Nour did not wait to follow him through legal channels. Eight months pregnant, she set off for Greece with her father and brother because, as she keeps saying, “I couldn’t stand it alone in Syria anymore”. Nour’s daughter, aged one and a half, clings to her. “My baby needs her father, she is always calling “daddy, daddy”. And I miss him so much, so much, I am waiting for the moment to meet him”. Nour left for the journey undeterred by the fear that she may give birth on the road. I meet her in SlavonskiBrod. “I am so, so tired –she says–. We have been on the road for ten days. The worst part was getting stuck on the Greek side of the border with Macedonia, due to a strike by Macedonian taxi drivers”. At least eighty buses packed with refugees waited at a petrol station for days for the border to open. “I stayed seven days in the bus, I was so cold and we had very little food”, recalls Nour. I last see her waiting patiently for her relatives in the “tracing corner” of a big tent. Despite her ordeal, Nour smiles often. She says philosophically: “It is difficult everywhere: In Syria and here”.<sup>2</sup>

### **Something that touches the depths of our being**

Talking to refugees – since although this is not their whole identity, we will refer to them as such here because be-

ing a refugee really is something that permeates their lives— touches the depths of our being, which is a very positive thing, but it can also lead to feelings of despair, sadness, empathy and pain in the face of so much suffering and abandonment. At the same time, there is pain, rage and indignation in the face of injustice, as well as frustration when faced with the fact of not being able to do anything about it... It also causes us to ask ourselves if what we are doing is any help at all... Finally, when you work with refugees, your own situation reveals many contradictions: you are with the refugees and you empathise with them, but, at the same time, you are not facing the

same situation they are; you want to accompany them, but in reality, you are only a spectator who will have moved to another place after a while where you can continue with your life. It is clear to all that you are in a totally different place from which you can only watch their suffering. Neither must we forget the hopes we raise in the refugees themselves, and how to deal with them. In talking to them, listening to their stories, their experiences and their suffering, as well as in seeing their ability to move forward in the face of adversity, you will experience contradictory emotions that bring you face to face with the most fundamental questions of life and death.

## **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: SOMETIMES IT IS BEST TO REMAIN SILENT**

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*Francisco Javier Vitoria\**

### **What would God say to them, what would a theologian that believes that God liberates the poor say to them?**

On many occasions, I have tried to listen attentively to refugees. Each time, their voices and their faces break into my theological discourse for what seems like the longest time. And I reach the same conclusion: whether in this room, or at my comfortable office

desk, I have nothing to say to refugees about hope. After a few moments of silence, what can be said? Instead, we bear the experience together as, minute by minute, the silence becomes heavier. We become aware of its increasing heaviness and note how this pause can create momentum, building thought processes and timetables of hope. This is something that the Association for Peace (*Gesto por la Paz*) taught me back home.

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This pause in speech does not arise from our lack of knowledge about utopian dreams, nor our lack of theological arguments concerning hope - we have plenty of those. The language of hope does not belong to those who talk about it, but rather to those who are suffering. Those who carry hope are not the mouthpieces for the rampant neoliberalist movement we see today, but rather their victims, and those who show compassion to them.

The voices and faces of refugees invite us to share their suffering, to allow ourselves to feel their pain and experience their infectious hope, violating the prohibition of suffering that is decreed by our globalist culture of indifference and apathy.

Without this vital knowledge, simply reading the *Theology of Hope* by J. Moltmann, for example, would not be enough to offer Christian words of hope to refugees.

## **Indignation**

“There is the potential for indignation to generate hope: allowing ourselves to be affected by the inhumane, which wounds when it is avoidable and offends when it is guilty, this is the path of hope” (X. García Roca). When we feel rage and anger at the plight of refugees, yet we do not shout out in the public square “This is not right!”, we cannot say that we really love them. There are situations, like that of refugees, in which love without anger is not real love. As Christians – Albert Nolan pointed out– we nearly killed our love because we thought that our anger was a mortal sin.

This indignation fuelled by compassion should not be aimless, but should instead become a drive, energy, determination, courage, and creativity that allows us to be able to offer hope to refugees, since “only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope.” (Walter Benjamin).

When we begin to listen to refugees... we understand better what it is like to be “on the move”, animated by hope that knows no borders, driven by strong concern for the future of our children.<sup>3</sup>

...negative news does not appear to deter the newly-arrived refugees too much. They keep hoping to find at least a safe place, and opportunities to work and to study, and to give their children a happier future - the top priority of every single parent I met. They cling fiercely to hope because they can't afford to do otherwise. Like millions before them, they have staked everything on their gamble for freedom. And since I met them, all I can think is: how many will find the new life they sacrificed everything for, and what can we do to help them?<sup>4</sup>

## **Solidarity, care and compassion**

The alliance of compassion with indignation generates solidarity with refugees and allows them to cultivate hope. This is what members of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Europe are dedicated to, alongside many other organisations, as well as the anonymous individuals who appear in these narratives. They work in those areas of Europe where men, women and

children live, needing hope in order to survive, and exploring the pathways of solidarity that lead to hope:

Ahmed and Asha escaped ISIS in Raqqa. When I asked how they felt, they looked at one another and exchanged wide smiles. Ahmed said: “Like someone who was dead and has come back to life”.<sup>5</sup>

These mouthpieces for hopeful solidarity proclaim through their united endeavours this most essential utopia (R. Bahro), the vision of a “new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth” (G. García Márquez).

### **Adoration and gratitude**

A Crucified Messiah brought us Christians an enduring and lasting hope allowing us to believe that another form of globalisation is possible, and to seek ways of escaping the concentration camps the world has created. The sacred suffering of the Crucified Messiah is not a different type of suffering to the “unholy” suffering of refugees. Their suffering is as sacred as that of Jesus. In each one of their stories, we are met with the Crucified Jesus, and in order to challenge our hope, he asks us: “Where were you when they abandoned your Lord in the refugee camps?”, “when I was forced to become a migrant, did you welcome me?”, “Truly I say to

you: anything you did for these, the least of my brethren, you did for me.” (cfr. Mt 25:31-46).

Christian hope is “an indignant hope on its knees”. “Indignant” together with the Son of God, because of the human destruction caused by injustice, violence, intolerance and indifference. “Kneeling” in the face of suffering brethren, as a means of expressing not only our adoration at the presence of the Christ within them, but also our gratitude because of the experience of having passed from death to life, for the love of our brothers and sisters (cfr. 1Jn 3:14).

### **The God who cares for Life and Fraternity**

My life is destroyed [...]. I don't sleep at night; I think and think about so many things. Outwardly, I may laugh and joke, but inside I am dead. People tell me to pray, so I pray: God, why do you allow these things to happen?<sup>6</sup>

We live in a world that is built around the power of money, and in which egoism and injustice prevail. Yet at the same time, God keeps breaking into the world in order to build a transfigured reality: the Kingdom of God. Theological reflection should shed light on this, showing how and why things happen, and above all, making us turn our gaze time and again to the Gospel narratives, helping to make them the center of our Christian life, at both a communal and an individual level.

We need to recognise the importance of these real testimonies when we talk about God. These stories have

been, are, and will be of real importance in the validation of different ways of speaking about the God of Life (whether it be magisterial, theological, catechetical or pastoral). The accounts and memories in these testimonies help us to keep reality a priority when we interpret them. They make us aware that labels are never as valuable as listening to real events. The experiences of the witnesses of kindness, care, compassion and solidarity in the refugee camps are a permanent invitation to interpret the most recent events in history with compassionate love and radical solidarity with victims of injustice. Experiences and stories like these “redeem” God from His insignificance and dishonour in the history of suffering, and instead spreads news about a God of Friendship, even in the midst of a holocaust of poverty. In other words, they once again verify the statement

that one author of the Kabbalah attributes to God, speaking to the faithful: “If you bear witness to me, I will be your God; if you don’t, I will not”.

I conclude with the closing words of the document *Journeys of Hope*:<sup>7</sup>

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Hb 11,13-16).

# ASKING OURSELVES QUESTIONS BASED ON LIFE EXPERIENCES

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## TESTIMONY: QUESTIONS ARE IMPORTANT

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*Manu Andueza*

If there is something I can be grateful for, it is the questions that were raised as I grew up, which were at times challenging. Among others, I owe a special debt of gratitude to all those who were from my neighbourhood. I was already an adolescent when I discovered the reality in which I had been brought up. I remember the day in college when I heard someone say that I must be a member of the lower classes because of where I came from, and what my father worked as; a reality that I had never questioned. My reality was normal for me and this in fact came as a surprise to me.

### **I should have been lower class**

I was born in an area in which among my neighbours –who were also my playmates as a child– there were several people from the ethnic gypsy minority. I remember questions about life which came to me thanks to them.

I remember a shop on my street in a very special way: it was run by a really nice man, he sold newspapers, notepads, pictures, some sweets... If you called in to him, you were sure to get a smile and a sweet. One time, I went in with my mother to buy a notebook. Another mother came in with her children. There was a picture on the floor, leaning up against the wall. The children started to kick it, right in front of the nice man, who was now sweating, when faced with the impassivity of their mother. When they left, the shopkeeper managed a faint smile and said: “they’re like that. Other things are more important to them. Their culture is different and we have to understand that and welcome them, even though it’s hard at times”. I found the whole episode hard to understand, and I didn’t understand the shopkeeper either. Yet he valued the people and the fact that they came to his shop more than he valued that painting.

I remember once when I was almost asleep, pretending to be fast asleep, and I heard a Romani woman talking and asking my mother if I was asleep. She said yes. Later on, when she left and I woke up, my mother told me she had invited her over to our house to give her some soap.

These are the kind of life lessons which awaken interest, open the mind and heart, and make us start to wonder and to think about something beyond the reality we can see, a hidden presence, which is nevertheless present.

In my neighbourhood, there were several women that had bad reputations. It was often talked about. I remember one of these that had three children, each one weaker than the last. The eldest, some years younger than I, usually missed some of his classes every week. Every time he saw me, he would come over, give me a kick in the behind and run off laughing. I said it at home and was told they would talk to him. Taking advantage of the fact that I was older and stronger, the next time he tried to do it, I grabbed him and spoke to him. I discovered that he had only wanted to talk to me and be my friend..., but he didn't know how to approach me. Human kindness had been buried under layers of bad relationships. He had seen so much, so many beatings, his heart had suffered so many broken dreams that he didn't even know how to approach people. Years later, I met him again, when we were both adults. He told me he was working as a doorman in a club, and that if I ever wanted to go, he would let me in. I never went, but I thanked him for offering...; he said I was his friend.

## More questions

There was also a lot of violence in my neighbourhood. One of my first childhood memories was connected to our balcony. It would later become a balcony where I would take refuge, where I could go to think and pray, to find myself alone and with the infinite, to seek out moments of eternity. I must have been between five and six years old. A strong hand, my father's, grabbed me and dragged me from the balcony with strength and speed. Moments before there had been the sound of a gunshot. Moments earlier, the police had shot and taken the life of a man right in front of our door, just below the balcony where I was. Later, they said they were looking for someone else, that they had made a mistake, I don't know. A life had ended. And it was the start of many questions. Questions which didn't seek answers. Questions which bothered the mind of a child. Questions which were looking for something more. Questions which opened into the transcendent.

## Why?

Years later, violence came back to our door. This time, there was a bomb near our home. It exploded, and with the explosion, took the life of a fourteen year old boy, the same age as me at the time. Two days earlier, we had been talking to each other for a while. Why? Was that it? Was no one going to say that this pain was enough? By that time, I had already experienced an interior presence that was stronger and closer to me than my own self, to whom I prayed in the name of the Father.

But if there was anything that led to questions, if there was anything that opened me up to something beyond, and the search for something more, if anything was to make me discover God in the midst of existence and life, that made Himself present through questions and the search for justice, it was the world of drugs: people were messing with drugs on my doorstep. Everyone knew it. Even the police, who coincidentally were never there at the day or hour when everyone knew the drugs were arriving. Sometimes, they would make a swoop and catch a small-scale drug dealer. A few days in a cell and that would be it. A few days without a troublesome neighbour on the streets and then everything would be back to normal again.

More than once I had to jump over some young guy with a needle in his arm in order to get to my home. Questions, more questions.

### **My neighbourhood, my family, brought me closer to God**

On the balcony again. From there, I could see the rooms in the flats opposite. From there, I remember seeing two people, half naked, they were only young. They were both shaking. A needle in the arm would always end in tremors like this, and thus began my questions again. Why? Why do some people live like this, and yet we manage to live so peacefully? Is that just the way it is? Are there not opportunities for everyone? Are there no answers in this unjust and disfigured world?

These questions led me to seek out and desire justice. And along this path,

I encountered transcendence; a transcendence that was taking on a form and a name, primarily through the means of experience and presence. My neighbourhood, my family, brought me closer to God.

Discovering the final judgement of Matthew (Mt 25:31-46) was the equivalent of discovering life and the meaning of all these experiences and questions. Perhaps it was there that my journey began; a journey which led to me volunteering in prison, working with those involved in the world of drugs, assisting the homeless, and working in developing countries... Places where justice leads to faith. Experiences of lived faith through encounters and relationships. Journeying was part of this too; journeys in knowledge, experience and life.

### **Causes and activism**

The cause of justice and solidarity with these groups of people was conquering my heart, everything else was sidelined. During my adolescence and in a socially and politically charged atmosphere, some flags were being raised in my conscience: the cause of the Latin American people in their struggle against terrible military dictatorships, the cause of the excluded sectors of the population in our new Spanish democracy, the cause of ethnic minorities and peoples not recognised by homogenizing states... These causes led me to seek out groups, organisations, and other people who would help me to transform my anger into work, my awareness into personal and practical love, and my dreams into projects for my life.

Along this wandering journey, I came to know faces and names, stories of loneliness and suffering, of rebellion against the establishment, of a determination to build new ways of life and new opportunities for invisible people. There was one constant which emerged in many of these relationships: there was Someone else that was sustaining this, that was giving meaning to this hope and rebellion, giving joy to this daily grind in spite of these stories of daily suffering. This Someone was becoming more and more present in my daily life. Me, who had disowned this unmoving and absent God so often, this God that was used to justify atrocities and manipulate consciences! Now His face was being revealed to me in a new way, an unexpected and surprising way, in the faces of Romani children, ignored by the city that had marginalised them; in the scars of the people from Vallecas, supporting their brave struggle against the heroin that was ruining their lives; in the testimonies of those who gave their lives quietly and compassionately for the most forgotten people; in the fertile blood of the Latin American martyrs; in the grateful smile of the abandoned, disabled and sick people from Las Hurdes; in the generosity of the countless people who put their lives at the service of others, stripping away my egotism, my desires for self-fulfilment, my personal dreams of greatness.

## **And it was the God of Jesus**

The face of God was conquering a heart that was still in its youth, but which had now decided to not live in vain, to not wander through life aimlessly, to live for a greater reason than my own happiness. And this was the God of Jesus! This same Jesus that I had always admired, who I had always looked to for inspiration in guiding my steps and making decisions. This same Jesus that was ready to revolutionise the world. This same Jesus that was a poor man among the poor, a child among the children. The same God that I had rejected so many times, because I confused Him with mediations, with the notion of an institution that was anchored in the past and intransigent in the face of historical change, with people that represented this institution and that unscrupulously gave Communion to murderous dictators, while they condemned and silenced those who gave their lives for the Gospel and for the poor. The God that was conquering my heart did not come from there, but rather from the true Body of Christ, from those who today embody this Suffering Servant, this mistreated and rejected Son of Man. It was not the God of the liturgy that I knew, as solemn as it was empty, but rather the God of the simple embrace, of the celebrated testimony, of shared hope. This was the God that drove me to walk in the transforming steps of Jesus.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: WALKING THROUGH THE NEIGHBOURHOOD WHILE CRYING OUT TO HEAVEN

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José Laguna\*

The testimony of Manu Andueza is the account of a spiritual journey and, like many such journeys, starts with big questions: Why such gratuitous violence? Why does there seem to be no solutions for such an unjust and disfigured world? Why does God remain silent in the face of suffering? However, unlike some airy spiritual journeys, Manu's questions are rooted in a very concrete reality - his journey began with very "grounded questions" and this is what is important. Since even though these last few questions are ones we all ask, the real, lived trauma that leads to these questions radically affects their answers: "tell me what type of suffering you are experiencing and I will be able to offer you the answer that you need". Heidegger already raised the fundamental philosophical question: Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? Theology is something else: it arises from the suffering of victims and, along with Ellacuría, asks itself: Why is there death where there should have been life?

In the religious sphere, it is not the same seeking God from a perspective of slavery in Egypt as it would be seeking God from the tranquility of a settled life among the pyramids. It is not the same getting to know God from the perspective of a violent neighbourhood as it would be getting to know God on

a spiritual retreat in a peaceful retreat house overlooking the sea.

### **"Seismologists"**

In his childhood, Manu lived through situations that he didn't know how to explain, and that he says, "I found hard to understand".

The structural violence which is rampant in what we call the "fourth world" is far from the romantic notion of "believers yearning for their liberation". If only there were seismologists who could detect hidden movements of kindness and solidarity which occur underneath the ruins of lives scarred by academic failure, chronic unemployment or living through drugs hell. The example of the neighbourhood shopkeeper helped him to tune his hearing and sight so that he could pierce through the cloudy barrier of violence: "Yet he [the shopkeeper] valued the people and the fact that they came to his shop more than he valued that painting". An apprenticeship that, with the passing of time, would allow him to look beyond the surface of what were wounded behaviours: "I discovered that he had only wanted to talk to me and be my friend..., but he didn't know how to approach me. Human kindness had been buried under layers

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of bad relationships. He had seen so much, so many beatings, his heart had suffered so many broken dreams that he didn't even know how to approach people”.

Jesus was a great “seismologist”: where others saw a public sin, he saw a woman that had loved much; where others saw a tax collector who was complicit in the Roman occupation, he saw a son of Abraham; where an older brother saw an unjust father who would not punish the sin of his prodigal brother, he saw a father who was compassionate in the extreme. To claim ownership of our own outlook on a world full of backbiters that want to tell us what we should think requires a visual form of asceticism, which our performance-based society that reduces everything to labels, does not allow.

## **A balcony**

According to religious symbolism, elevated places are spaces that are favourable to encounters with the divine. In Biblical tradition, God usually reveals Himself on mountain peaks: Moses received the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai, Jesus was “transfigured” on the Mount of Olives and, according to the evangelist Matthew, Jesus climbed a mountain in order to proclaim the Beatitudes. In Manu's testimony, there is another elevated place: a balcony; a balcony from which questions ascended in the form of gunfire and the shouts of junkies, sounds of uncomfortable questions airing their grievances with God just as Job had done: “Why? Was that it? Was no one going to say that this pain was enough? ”. Cries that

led to the ultimate question of injustice: “Why? Why do some people live like this, and yet we manage to live so peacefully? Is that just the way it is? Are there not opportunities for everyone? Are there no answers in this unjust and disfigured world?”.

And among the questions which rose from that balcony amidst the cries of despair, he began to sense the whisper of the divine response which always comes along the gentle breeze: I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty, I was a prisoner... The final judgement of Matthew is the Rosetta stone which allows him to decipher the hieroglyphics of what is happening down below, on the streets: “Places where justice leads to faith”. To arrive at faith through the struggle for justice; there may be other paths, but access to God through Jesus passes through Mt 25.

## **Structural sin**

During his adolescence, Manu discovers the underlying basis behind all injustice: “During my adolescence and in a socially and politically charged atmosphere, some flags were being raised in my conscience”.

The realisation that all of this suffering is interconnected, that something called “structural sin” exists, which links the violence of his neighbourhood with Latin American dictatorships; or the inferno of drugs with the trafficking of women; the coldness of refugee camps with the pain of child soldiers; or ethnic minorities with... A tight net of injustice woven like a spider's web by a sin which invades everything, and which can only be

fought against by creating grace-filled structures.

### **“And it was the God of Jesus!”**

Towards the end of his testimony, Manu is full of joy: “And it was the God of Jesus!” The pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of suffering, which during his childhood and adolescence had appeared painfully fragmented, now began to form into the face of the God of Jesus: “The God that was conquering my heart did not come from there, but rather from the true Body of Christ, from those who today embody this Suffering Servant, this mistreated and rejected Son of Man. It was not the God of the liturgy that I knew, as solemn as it was empty, but rather the

God of the simple embrace, of the celebrated testimony, of shared hope”.

Manu’s account is a spiritual journey, a personal path which, through his testimony, invites us to reflect upon five verbs:

- *Being present* in places where suffering raises questions.
- *Being accompanied by* “seismologists” who teach us to see what is at the heart of injustice.
- *Looking out* over the balcony several times in order to see reality and cry out to heaven.
- *Discovering* the mysterious and intimate connection that links all suffering.
- *Reconstructing* the suffering face of God in order to comfort, thank and celebrate Him.

## TESTIMONY: GUARDIANS AND WITNESSES

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*Nani Vall-Ilossera\**

Working as a family doctor in Primary Care involves being open to the most intimate details of the heart and body of an individual, and it is a privileged vantage point from which can be observed the dysfunctions and collateral damage of a society and a culture that is fighting against life and leaving a trail of victims in its path. As Iona Heath explained, the work of a family doctor involves being both a guardian and a witness. A guardian of people's health and a witness to their life and death, to their resilience and their ability to keep moving forward, from illness and infirmity, through joys and difficulties. In the primary care setting, a bond of mutual trust and responsibility is established between the professional and the patient. Illnesses come and go.

One only needs a day like I had today in my surgery to realise it.

### **One day in the surgery**

Carmen has come in because she can't take anymore. A few months ago, she was renting an apartment where she could live with her husband and children, after getting over being evicted from an apartment she could no longer afford. After signing the contract, they made some improvements to their new flat. Two months later, the real owner of the flat appeared, demanding their property back. They had been scammed and are awaiting a new eviction at any moment.

Dolores is a middle-aged Venezuelan woman. She arrived a month ago with her two grandchildren, both boys. They are seeking asylum and today, finally, they are allowed to access healthcare. They are living in a hostel.

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Javier has come to ask me to explain why what seemed like an insignificant health issue when he was seen a few weeks ago, has now turned out to be a serious illness. I feel so sorry for him.

Juan asks me to visit him at home because he is dizzy and shaking. Once I arrive, he explains that he doesn't feel well, but mostly he is very cold. Since his children are not able to contribute to the heating bill, which he cannot pay with his pension, his heat has been turned off and he doesn't know how he can get it on again.

María has lost her appetite and ten kilos in weight over the past few months. I need to investigate the cause.

Sonia is worried about work problems. The company where she works has given them impossible sales targets and the atmosphere has become intolerable. They are counting the number of times staff go to the bathroom and timing how long they are gone. There are rows every day, the staff are being belittled and their treatment is degrading. She cannot bear it and is becoming more anxious and cannot concentrate.

From the little I hear, and my attempt to gain a broader understanding of what is wrong in each consultation, I have become a witness to the reasons why people become ill, or feel unwell or not at ease, or begin to lose their mental health or their reason for living. It is easy to understand why globally, biological and genetic factors have a relatively small impact on our health compared to social factors. This is why my work in the surgery, as I will explain below, has as much to do with communication and my relationship with the patient, as it has to do with medical science.

## Six transforming verbs

### *Recognise*

For some of my patients, the primary care setting is one of the few places where people are recognised by their name and given the dignity of an individual with rights, and sometimes the only setting where they are cared for and treated with kindness. I'm not just referring to the situation of undocumented immigrants, but also the growing number of people with no support systems in their community, lacking attachments and company, and to the huge number of workers that are suffering the consequences of the exploitative and dehumanising labour market.

### *Welcome*

Giving space and time so that people can build and explain the account of what is happening to them.

### *Accompany*

Sickness, discomfort and death are situations which reveal the vulnerability, the difficulties and the fundamental interdependence of human beings. Accompanying people through this realisation, instead of hiding it, is in itself healing work.

### *Offer good science*

Offering and administering the best science possible based on critical and exhaustive study, while being aware of the existence of bad science which serves interests other than the health of people and communities. Offering

humble science, which accepts its own ignorance and limits in many situations and its inability to integrate the subjectivity of each individual human being, which does not create false expectations or feed into the fallacy of immortality or a life free from sickness. A science which is applied with humility and prudence to each human being.

### *Empower*

Helping to find resources which each individual has available to them in order to protect and shelter their vulnerability, their difficulties and their need for fundamental human interdependence: words, affection, trust, solidarity, patience, silence, friendship... Helping to build these resources individually and collectively.

### *Not expropriating*

Not removing or hiding within Medical Science the ability and duty that we all have to look after and care for one another. Not turning something that should be collective responsibility into an individual one; not turning what should be an essentially human contact into a primarily professional and scientific one.

### **Personal connection and political commitment**

I have been accompanying and caring for people that have been entrusted to me for the last twelve years, which is nearly all of my life as a fully trained specialist. Over time, links have been

forged, along with responsibility for people's health and rights, mutual affection, acknowledgement and recognition of their ability to move forward and face adversity, respect for their autonomy and their decisions. These connections can influence, compromise, overwhelm and even hurt, but also humanise, shelter, protect and give meaning to life. My patients, through their trust, appreciation and warmth protect and shelter my vulnerability, my difficulties and my essential interdependence.

Finally, when you connect with suffering on a daily basis, when you give it a name and a context, and you have an outlook that is sensitive to the causes of an illness, taking someone's part is an almost automatic movement which leads you to commit yourself politically to their cause. It is difficult not to be a feminist when you contemplate the consequences of patriarchy in relation to women's health, in their opportunities to be happy or to just simply live. You will be convinced to become an ecologist because you will see the increase in respiratory problems and other issues as a result of the growing pollution in the air we breathe. When you realise that the choice of health-care system affects the health of those who need its potential ability most to combat, if only partially, the effects of the cycle of poverty, illness, premature death, or when you can verify the fact that certain political decisions threaten to destroy the national health service, it would be unthinkable to remain silent. When you know that exclusion from health services or the law on foreigners is causing death, because some of your patients have suffered the conse-

quences, it would be inhumane not to act. This is why, each specific patient in the surgery, feeds and directs my de-

sire to commit to improving society by transforming the structures which go against life.

## **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION: GOD HIMSELF WALKS OUR PATH**

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*Tere Iribarren\**

On reading the testimony of Nani Vall-llossera it made me think about any given day in the life of Jesus. The concern of the Master for those who suffer stands out, and Mark recounts these episodes vividly, without putting too many words in the mouth of Jesus: Jesus preaches the Kingdom through “deeds”, this will become His authoritative speech.

### **Jesus the doctor**

#### *The mother-in-law with a fever*

Jesus, on leaving the synagogue (Mk 1:29-31), went with the disciples to Simon’s house, where Simon’s mother-in-law was found to have a fever... Jesus went to her, took her by the hand and helped her up. Perhaps the presence of the Master made the fever go so she could begin serving them. It is lovely to think how the doctor approaches you, takes you by the hand and helps you to get up...

The life of a doctor –as Nani says– is “Helping to find resources which

each individual has available to them in order to protect and shelter their vulnerability, their difficulties and their need for fundamental human interdependence: words, affection, trust, solidarity, patience, silence, friendship...”.

#### *The leper*

In the life of Jesus, as in the life of any dedicated doctor, there is hardly any time to rest (Mk 1:40-45): in the evening, Jesus healed many sick and when it seemed to Him that the day was drawing to a close, “...a leper came to him beseeching him, and kneeling said to him: If you will, you can make me clean. Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, “I will; be clean.”.

These are similar to the encounters with the patients “Juan... dizzy and shaking”, or “María who has lost her appetite”...Like so many others... The welcome of Jesus, the welcome of Nani offers words that humanise, integrate and liberate. Preaching the Father’s love should be about giving it a human face, not seeking God through

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disembodied spirituality, but instead expressing that love through the Spirit that lives in our hearts.

### *The man with the paralysed hand*

Another striking example is that of Mk. 3:1-6: He went into the synagogue and met a man with a paralysed hand... Jesus breaks the rules and heals on the Sabbath... Life has moments of uncertainty. The healing of the paralysed hand is above the law. The Law of God is not restricted to the Temple, it is found in the everyday.

“...when you connect with suffering on a daily basis, when you give it a name and a context, and you have an outlook that is sensitive to the causes of an illness, taking someone’s part is an almost automatic movement which leads you to commit yourself politically to their cause”. Just like Jesus, who broke the Sabbath laws.

### *The sick woman*

Or in Mk 5:21: There was a woman who had suffered from haemorrhages... She had heard about Jesus and, from behind, through the crowds, she managed to touch the hem of his garment... Jesus, realising that power had left him, asked: “who touched me?”.

Any patient treated by the doctor that wrote this testimony is a lucky one: “I have been accompanying and caring for people that have been entrusted to me for the last twelve years, which is nearly all of my life as a fully trained specialist. Over time, links have been forged, along with responsibility for people’s health and rights, mutual affection, acknowledgement

and recognition of their ability to move forward and face adversity, respect for their autonomy and their decisions”.

### *The deaf and dumb man*

Furthermore, it is interesting to look at the Gospels and see how Jesus values the human body, the hands, the eyes, the ears. How attentive he is to all their needs and illnesses... I will finish with the text of the deaf and dumb man (Mk 7:31-37): they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him. And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue;... He said to him: “Be opened...” And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

Above all, this draws attention to the involvement of Jesus, since he puts his fingers in the man’s ears and touches his tongue. There is nothing more comforting than to think: “you did it for me”.

This is how the testimony explains it: “These connections can influence, compromise, overwhelm and even hurt, but also humanise, shelter, protect and give meaning to life. My patients, through their trust, appreciation and warmth protect and shelter my vulnerability, my difficulties and my essential interdependence.”.

## **Conclusion**

Several years ago I was looking to see how and where God was in my specific reality, small and misguided as I was,

hurried and facing difficulties characterised by the exhausting timetables of a teacher. And I came across a text that woke me from all doubt and cleared all mists of confusion. This is why I would like to share it as the best theological approach. God is there when:

- Responsibility is accepted and borne freely.
- The person acknowledges and accepts their ultimate freedom which no earthly power can take from them
- The journey into the darkness of death is accepted with serenity, and understood as the beginning of a promise we can't understand.
- We regard the sum of our life's experiences as good, even if we cannot calculate or measure their worth, because they were given by Another as a gift.
- When the fragmentary experiences of love, beauty and joy can quite simply be experienced as a continued promise of love, beauty and joy, without giving in to the cyni-

cal scepticism that can be seen as a cheap replacement for the ultimate consolation.

- When the bitter and disappointing events of every day are endured serenely and patiently, even to the last day, sustained by a strength whose force is forever elusive.
- When one dares to pray in silence and in darkness, and knows that he is heard, without thereafter being able to discuss or dispute his answer.
- When lack of hope can be seen as a mysterious kind of consolation (without any indulgence in cheap comfort).
- When we reach the point of entrusting all our certainty and all our doubts to the silent and encompassing mystery, that we now love above all our personal achievements, because these have become worthless idols to us.

“This is where we truly find God and His liberating grace, where we experience what we Christians call the Holy Spirit”. (Karl Rahner, SJ)



# EPILOGUE: FROM FAIRNESS TO JUSTICE. THE TEACHING POWER OF THE TESTIMONY

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*José Laguna\**

I don't know what Goodness, Justice or Love is. I know people who are good, other people I would view as just, and every day I meet several fathers and mothers who go to great lengths out of love for their children. We can glimpse the brilliance of these powerful words (Goodness, Justice, Love, Wellbeing, Truth, Liberty, Hope, Salvation, Faith, Future), through the spark that we catch a glimpse of in the life of women and men that we share the carriage with on our way to work. This is why testimonies are important: they bring us closer, like a path of small lights, to the luminosity of these powerful words we have capitalised. This is what this booklet aims to achieve: a deeper look at Faith and Justice by looking at life's embraces.

Personal testimony is the opposite of narcissistic exhibitionism. Anyone who offers their testimony does not want to talk about themselves any more than the literary genre obliges them to, since they must express themselves in the first person singular. The person narrating a snippet of their biography invites us to accompany them on a shared journey towards the horizon of these powerful capitalised words. This is why testimonies are a form of pedagogical writing, since if we accept the invitation to immerse ourselves in the story, this journey will take us by the hand towards the threshold of these great words.

Giving a testimony does not mean recounting a series of anecdotes or writing about a collection of unconnected events, it is about weaving a biography together by using the thread of a vitally important theme which the reader can follow. The person giving their testimony is not just telling little stories which reveal their daily life. A testimony is a window which opens out and allows us to look at a personal event which always has a deeper meaning.

Real testimony –that is, one which does not present itself as a moralising tale– is at the frontier of art: the painter tries to depict Beauty in his work and the musician tries to express Harmony in his symphony, even though both know in advance that neither the canvas or the music score are capable of containing the entirety of an artform which will always remain beyond their reach. Painting, music, poetry, film... and testimony! These are all simply chinks allowing light in from something of an infinitely greater splendour.

The testimonies gathered in this booklet are intriguing stories, journeys, windows, insights, thresholds, living pedagogy which makes the echoes of great words resonate within us, thoughts which are so often drowned out by the digital bustle of a hyperconnected world and the economy-focused noise of our deafening neoliberalism. Unlike the loud voices of some philosophies and religions which aim to dazzle using words as grand as they are blinding, giving our testimony is almost like whispering. We alone

cannot know if God is Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. Yet, we can know this from things that are told to us: that once there was a father who waited each morning for the return of his prodigal son. We know that once there was a shepherd who had one hundred sheep and left the ninety-nine in the desert to look for the one that had strayed. It was told to us that, in the small town of Naïn, Jesus was moved when he came across the funeral cortege of a widow who was burying her only son, and –as it was told to us– that such was the commotion caused by the scene that, pitying the pain and misfortune of the woman, Jesus brought her son back to life. We also heard about another woman, a Samaritan lady, who recognised the carpenter from Nazareth as the Messiah. And if all that were not enough, we also know about some male evangelists in the first century –who like all men in that period, did not give any heed to women’s testimonies – and who were left with no other choice than to rely on the “weak and questionable” account of the women who told them that the tomb of the crucified Galilean was empty; some angels clothed in white had revealed to them the surprising news about the body: Jesus had risen from the dead. The Church should never forget that it arrives at Faith and its companion Justice from the embrace of a compassionate father, from the concern of a shepherd for his flock and through the testimony given by a group of women.

Last night, I ran to a nearby train station, just as the last trains were about to leave, and for fear of being left behind, I hurriedly jumped on the first train I reached at the platform. When the doors of the carriage closed and the train began its journey, I started to worry about whether I was on the right train to bring me home. I looked around desperately at the passengers nearest to me and asked loudly if this was the train going through my city. A gentle nod from two of the passengers was enough for me to find a seat and close my eyes, so I could doze until my station was announced. This is why testimonies are important: so that we can trust that the train will arrive at our destination, without needing to read any illuminated signs. Thanks to all those in this booklet for allowing us to get on their carriage for a while, and for awakening in us the whisper of powerful words that had been asleep.

## NOTES

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1. We remember the words of Benedict XVI: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” (*Deus caritas est* 1).
2. The previous testimonies come from the chapter entitled “Breaking Family Ties” (p. 25-32), which is part of the publication *Journeys of Hope: Stories of Refugees on the Road to Europe*, developed in 2016 by the Jesuit Refugee Service. Taken from: <https://www.hospitalidad.es/wp-content/uploads/material/sensibilizar/JourneysHope.pdf>.
3. *Journeys of Hope...*, p. 12.
4. *Journeys of Hope...*, p. 22.
5. *Journeys of Hope...*, p. 15.
6. *Journeys of Hope...*, p. 64.
7. See note 2.



**Cristianisme i Justícia** (Lluís Espinal Foundation) is a study center that was created in Barcelona in 1981. It brings together a team of volunteer scholars and activists who desire to promote social and theological reflection that will contribute to the transformation of social and ecclesial structures. It is part of the network of Faith-Culture-Justice centers of Spain and also of the European Social Centers of the Society of Jesus.

The collection *Cristianisme i Justícia* introduces some of the findings of the seminars held by the Centre as well as some of the essays of its staff and contributors.

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