

# Reflection at the End of the Year In the Face of Other People's Pain, Let Us Stop Everything!

Papers no. 28. December 2023

Cristianisme i Justícia. Roger de Llúria, 13. 08010 Barcelona (Spain)

+34 93 317 23 38 • [info@fespinal.com](mailto:info@fespinal.com) • [www.cristianismeijusticia.net](http://www.cristianismeijusticia.net)

---

## Recovering the logic of what is evident

Indifference to the suffering of others has become an attitude considered normal in today's complacent societies. Just look away, and anesthetize yourself with compulsive consumption of experiences, objects, and Netflix series. Just pass by without seeing or stopping. This attitude is simply the reverse side of a system that keeps accelerating our lives, making them ever more precarious. There is no time or space for disruptions, for pausing and bending down to accompany and alleviate the suffering of others. Nor are we allowed to stand up straight and raise our voices against the causes of the suffering. How do we react to the pain of others? What anchors us to inaction? To what problems do we pay or not pay at-

ention? To what cries do we pay heed? What human imperative are we failing to take into account?

It would be a mistake to think that this indifference is just the result of individual irresponsibility, as if each of us had suddenly forgotten our condition as human beings and personally made up our minds to look away from the pain. Widespread indifference is an essential strategy of the system that subtly surrounds us, saturating our senses, blinkering us, and making us doubt the facts themselves. What we are seeing in Palestine is a good example of this. Both the evidence of the horror of the Hamas terrorist attack, murdering entire families, and the evidence of the Israeli army's horrendous indiscriminate bombings of the civilian population have remain concealed beneath the verbiage of pundits and

---

newscasters who have placed between us and the reality hundreds of screens filled with geopolitical arguments. This is what Pepe Laguna called a few years ago the “bandage of complexity,” something very typical of neoliberal arguments. In the face of this, Pepe urged us to recover the logic of “what is evident”:

The discourse of ‘what is evident’ finds its most appropriate expression in indignation. Faced with the suffering of the victims, the asepsis of politically correct language is useless; we must cry out against the perversion of a murderous system.<sup>1</sup>

And what is evident, in this case, is the death of thousands of innocent civilians under the bombs of an army that supposedly acts in the name of legitimate defense<sup>2</sup> but in fact is violating international humanitarian law. Recovering “what is evident” is an important first step in overcoming the indifference that dulls our feelings.

### **Stopping, turning, stooping**

The priest and the Levite pass by the wounded man in Luke 10:29-37. They do not see a person lying just off the road; they see a bloody body, an impure object. If they approached that “something,” it would prevent them from exercising their cultic functions towards God, since they would be stained by the wound and the pain. What a paradox is this vision of divine worship that passes over compassion for one’s brother! That is why they continue on without stopping, without contaminating themselves or deviating from their purpose. They are upright

men who believe firmly in their social and religious function.

Only the Samaritan is able to see in that “battered heap” on the roadside a person who needs help. So he stops... That is surely the key to everything: stopping. In the face of the pain and suffering of others, the only thing we can do is to stop everything, because what is happening is very serious, because every person is sacred. And that other can be anyone, regardless of their origin, their religion, or the color of their skin. Unfortunately, the more different from us we perceive “others” to be, the more distant we feel they are from us. As Judith Butler would say, we consider them less deserving of our tears and, by extension, of our indignation and our political action.

A few days ago, René Pérez Joglar, better known as “Residente,” the vocalist of Calle 13, released a long video on social networks brimming with empathy and self-criticism. He was not scolding, nor was he making amends to anyone specifically, but he conveyed in his words the heavy weight of pain he was feeling for each person murdered in Gaza. In that video René wondered aloud how it is that we are able to witness a slaughter like that every day on television without raising our voices and demanding that the world come to a stop, as happened during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Halt! Stop everything...

### **Moving beyond indifference**

Understanding and analyzing our social reality and the inequalities and violence it produces are no doubt essential to grasping the real problem and making a commitment to solve it. However, trans-

forming recognition into action is even more crucial if we are to become more effectively involved in the suffering of others. Taking responsibility for reality, bearing with it, and transforming it: such is the action the Gospel demands of us if we want to be true to the promise of the covenant between God and his people.

It is true that in a complex society like ours we must have institutional mechanisms that provide protection. We must have care-giving organizations and people specifically dedicated to such service, but that is not enough. We must all feel vitally involved in caring for our neighbors because there is hardly anything more important in this life. A few years ago, at the 7th World Day of the Poor, Pope Francis recalled that outsourcing social problems and their solutions is not the answer: “Delegating the task to others is easy. Offering money for others to do charity work is a generous gesture, but the vocation of every Christian is to get involved firsthand.”

Moving beyond indifference and truly paying attention mean conversion, the thorough eradication of the internalized individualism with which we’ve been inoculated from the Enlightenment to the present day. In the last 50 years, this individualism has been reinforced by the “zombie neoliberalism” of which Jamie Peck speaks.<sup>3</sup> It is a fierce force that turns us into erratic beings with a blank gaze, a dehumanized, dehumanizing mass. Our imperturbable inertia keeps us from being affected and moved by the pain and discomfort of others—or even coming into contact with it.

In our collective anesthesia we are putting our own humanity at risk. We

must urgently try to recover a more compassionate society, one committed to the common good, to universal peace, and to the most basic human rights. We must abandon the impassivity into which we have sunk.

Metz stated that being mindful of the suffering of others requires comprehending that the universal mission of Christianity is promoting “an ethic of cordiality and a culture of empathy that recognizes others in their otherness.” Perhaps the answer lies here: Do we recognize the Palestinian people as brothers and sisters in their otherness? Do we feel genuine solidarity with their suffering and fear?

Unless we face questions like these, we end up disengaging ourselves and trivializing evil, as Hannah Arendt put it. We cauterize the discomfort caused in us by the images of babies murdered by state terrorism; we watch the television news as if it were fiction and so as something inconsequential. We put on a raincoat that makes the pain slip away, and we eat another piece of Christmas pudding.

### **Closing prayer**

With the words of Lucho Espinal,<sup>4</sup> then, let us make a sincere act of contrition to the God who is both mother and father, as Víctor Codina would always remind us. Let us ask God that we not grow accustomed to injustice and that our indifference to other people’s pain not turn our heart into stone.

We have the bad habit of getting used to everything.  
We no longer are outraged by the wretched slums,  
or by the enslavement of the rubber-tree tappers.  
The crime of “apartheid” is no longer news,  
nor are the millions of people who die of hunger  
each year.

We grow accustomed to such things,  
we file the edges off reality,  
so that it doesn’t cut us deeply,  
and we swallow it calmly.

[...]

Lord, we have the custom  
of getting accustomed to everything;  
even our deepest wounds grow numb.

How we would love to see things always  
for the first time; how we would love  
an unchastened sensibility that allows us  
to be amazed and to rise in revolt.

[...]

Teach us to remember that You,  
Jesus Christ, have always broken  
the coordinates of predictability.

And, above all,  
let us never grow accustomed to seeing injustices,  
without anger and action being ignited within us

- 
1. LAGUNA, José (2011), *Taking stock of reality. taking responsibility for reality. and taking charge of reality*, Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia, Booklet no. 143.
  2. The UN has constantly repeated that Israel’s invocation of the inherent right to self-defense is not justified because it is being attacked, not by another state, but by an armed group from an occupied territory.
  3. [“Neoliberalism Zombie and the Ambidextrous State”](#) by Jamie Peck.
  4. Fragments of Lucho Espinal’s poem “No acostumbrarse” [Not growing accustomed], collected in EIDES booklet no. 93, *Oraciones a quemarropa*.