



Reflection at the End of the Year Rescuing the Meaning Of Words

Papers no. 33. December 2024

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At the end of each year, at Cristianisme i Justícia we try to reflect on the present moment with the goal of pointing out some possible lines of thought that can act as suggestions for the construction of a new future.

If we look at the world in its complexity (wars, violence, shared struggles, joys, etc.), we discover that we are witnesses to hope as well as witnesses to suffering. For every social achievement and each joyous celebration there is a faceless human being who cries on the margin of an unjust system. However, both history and faith teach us that these lives and these unjust realities can also be transformed in the here and now. Allying ourselves with the way that is incarnated

by God in Jesus, we have decided to begin here with the Word (Jn1), the Word that was at the beginning and that is incarnated afterwards to give life, and life in abundance (Jn 10:10). We are assuming the responsibility of recovering that life-giving Word as the starting point for transforming, for touching hearts and for nourishing at their roots the social struggles for a more inclusive citizenship, for the strengthening of communities, for the end to inequality.

Along these lines, the proposal that we launch today for the future is entwined with faithfulness to the words, and it is for this reason that we outline an incomplete and unique glossary. It is incomplete because all the words are

not there since there are missing some as important as freedom, justice, spirituality. It is unique because this glossary, which is born from and is built upon faith and the Scriptures, comes pregnant with meaning, an authentic meaning from which it IS possible to sustain life, living together, and dignity. Getting to the bottom of the question, this exercise in sociopolitical imagination arises from the will to recover and rescue some words from being held hostage and from the twisted appropriation that is given to them by post-Fascism.¹ Facing this affront, our little dictionary tries to drag into the light the feelings forgotten by those of us who serve everyone in our shared journey toward global justice.

Solidarity

From Christianity and its insistence on a struggle for justice inspired in the Gospel and realized through time by the Social Doctrine of the Church, we understand solidarity as an active commitment to those people who are the most vulnerable and excluded. It is an expression of the love of God toward all creatures, and especially for the crucified of History. It is a love that transcends boundaries and differences and seeks the elimination of the structures of oppression. Solidarity uncovers the dignity of all people and promotes equality. This solidarity is not paternalism or an unpolitical culture of “assistance” that tranquilizes consciences, as do some discourses – even within the Church itself. But rather it is profound Christian charity, a shared struggle of a just world where the common good might prevail over particular interests.

Life

Life is much more than the biochemical processes revealed to us by science, and in its essence resides a primordial fragility. We are vulnerable beings, small and finite. To affirm life implies having confidence in the possibility of easing vulnerability, of transforming the violation and preventing making others vulnerable. Not only are we alive, but we are also capable of generating life. Our defense of life goes far beyond the emphasis on the sexual and reproductive rights of women or a reduction to the purely biological aspects. A belief in life is to defend it as a whole and it is, above all, working for and vindicating livable lives that are worthy of being mourned, as Judith Butler wrote, that is, for all human beings. A right to life to its fullest supposes a celebration of all human life, whatever might be one’s national or social origin, one’s religion, one’s sexual orientation, one’s political opinion, one’s economic condition or any other condition (Human Rights, Art.2).

Resistance

We have been present for the appropriation of the word “resistance” by the most reactionary sectors. We frequently hear politicians or opinion makers set themselves up as symbols of “resistance” in discourse about social criticism or movements for emancipation which have appeared in the last decades. This gives us the paradox that the “resistance” claimed by the far-Right advocates for the recuperation of an idealized past which in practice perpetuated situations of dominance, oppression and even the ques-

tioning of democracy. In the face of this, we are claiming to rescue the profound meanings of the word. On the one hand, to resist is to sustain suffering, whether one's own or that of someone else, as Jesus sustained the Passion and the suffering of the Cross. On the other hand, both complementary and absolutely necessary, to resist is to exercise actively a permanent act of rebellion and opposition to that same injustice that wounds life. Resistance for that to which we aspire is the resistance of those who reject and launch an amendment to the whole about the dictatorship of one-sided, univocal and impossible thinking. Resistance is the conscious action of being the "yeast in the dough" (Mt 13:33) or "the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13) against the tyranny of the half-truth, the false security. Our resistance is entwined with true experience, just as defined by Javier Vitoria in his latest booklet: "Grabbing on to what is hard, obscure, and sticky in life, to overcome the temptation to 'throw in the towel' and to continue onward... then we know that against all appearances to the contrary, humanity 'is in good hands.'"²

Respect

By definition, sacredness arouses respect. The untouchable suggests the idea of an immaculate mystery, of something unfathomable. Sacredness calls out for an attitude of respect. And respect is a recognition of sacrality. From our point of view, being human forms part of the category of sacredness, including in a way that is truer and more profound than many religious realities and institutions. Or is this not the principal consequence of the Incarnation and the way of being

of Jesus? When the "other" is made into an adversary or enemy, when that person is stripped of all of his or her rights, when he or she is dehumanized through caricatures, clichés and prejudices that disfigure their faces, when the person is made into a malleable object which can be used at will, these are attitudes that suppose a devaluation of the sacred that is contained in the other. Starting from that point, we still reaffirm a closeness within distance, that geographical place of respect with which we exalt the life and the being of the other as mystery and reverence.

Truth

Truth is identified with reality. In so far as things exist, truth is saying that they do exist or discovering that they are. Over the course of years, we have been seeing an intentional fragmentation of the wholeness of truth. The truth has gone from being *what is* to what I say that it is. This fact is perceived when we note that the contemporary far-Right has been capable of denying the evidence of reality (for example, by denying the existence of climate change or sexual violence), and at the same time has come to affirm as presumed truths things that are contrary to all proven scientific data, such as in the propagation of lies concerning the supposed monetary help that was distributed by the State to migrant children. This is a delusion that has its consequences in the growing dehumanizing and criminalizing of migrant people who are in a situation of vulnerability. As the Christians that we are, we defend the necessity of reconnecting truth and reality, assuming the risk of delving into the

complexity of the matter, and becoming conscious of our smallness as compared to mystery and immensity. As believers, we rely on the fact that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6) and that God, in fidelity to the promise and the alliance with us, accompany us in our exercise of taking charge of, carrying on and bearing responsibility for reality.³

To Conserve

Similar to the concept of “resistance” which we have already rescued, the verb “to conserve” is frequently utilized by certain political forces of the far Right in order to reaffirm some values and traditions taken on as their own, which are anchored in a more or less distant past or in a supposed primordial origin. In this sense, they defend the need to conserve values, the Catholic tradition, the culture, etc., when facing the successive changes within society. This recovering of the past and of something original is always problematic. It favors an acritical identification with an imaginary past and it extends a feeling of insecurity and fear in facing the present and its complexity. We, on the other hand, understand “to conserve” as being faithful to the dictates of the Spirit, which is the breath of God which guides our steps and, facing the uncertainty of the present, gives us confidence that the same Spirit exhaled by Jesus on the Cross (Mt 27:50) illuminates our lives and our world with its splendor. But only an authentic discernment, both individual and collective as Church which opens itself to the Spirit, will be certain to conserve what is truly genuine in the historical transmission of the Good News of “God with us”. Only

through the action of the Spirit in discernment can we become familiar with the gift of God (1Cor 2:11-12, 14, 16) and fight to conserve it in our world.

We

One of the most distorted words and, at the same time, one of the most instrumental for contemporary populists is that of “we”. The unreal and false “we” that is praised by the post-Fascist groups is always set up in opposition to a “they” that represents the greatest otherness which one has to confront or from which to defend oneself. In the current sociopolitical reality, that “they” is incarnated in the figure of the Muslim, the undocumented migrant, the homosexual, the person who thinks and votes differently. But the dichotomous, fratricidal thinking fought for by the far-Right results in being unworkable for living together politically, the “social friendship” about which Pope Francis spoke in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti*. Faced with this, we wish to give thanks to God for the diversity of Creation (Gen 1) and we feel united as one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). This unity in diversity connects to the call of the Church to broaden the horizons of individualism or of violent nationalism and struggle for a “we” that grows ever larger,⁴ a “we” in which is included “all, all, all”,⁵ without exception or the exclusion of anyone.

Christianity

From its beginnings, Christianity was conceived of as a praxis of faith that unites the love of neighbor with the struggle for justice. The theology of liberation

actualized this memory and, more recently, the idea has been broadened by incorporating other vortices of inequality such as functional diversity, the killing of the environment, racialization or gender and sexuality, among others. This extended vision incorporates the values of the Gospel within social realities and denounces the structures of oppression. In this way, Christianity is changed into a spiritual, ethical and political pathway which, without being limited by dogmas, seeks to build the Kingdom of God, here and now, with justice, equality and caring. This is the tradition that we reaffirm before the appropriation of the term on the part of political parties who tie it, not to its origins, but rather to a historical situation of Christendom that allows them to justify flag-waving. Such an interpretation converts Christianity into pure political ideology, unattached to the Gospel

and the fraternal outlook of the Reign of God.

Vicent Martínez Guzmán, teacher and greatly missed friend and member of the Social Area of Cristianisme i Justícia, wrote in his book *Filosofía para hacer las paces* [Philosophy of Peacemaking, 2001] that “telling us things is doing things to us.” That is the root of the importance of language, of profound meanings and also of connotations, because words mold our conception of the world, and because, in time, they are the bricks with which we imagine and build the future. In this changing of the year, may we be able to continue rethinking the words for life so that we can journey on toward a world that is more fraternal and just. Merry Christmas!

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1. We will use interchangeably the term “far-right” and the generic term “post-Fascism” (cf. Enzo TRAVERSO, *Las nuevas caras de la derecha* [The New Faces of the Right], Siglo XXI, eds., 2021) to identify those present-day political currents located on the right of the political spectrum, characterized by a fluctuating and sometimes contradictory, ideological content, based on xenophobia, Islamophobia as the structural axis for a new nationalism, and an unequal distribution of political protectionism and globalization, authoritarianism and security.
 2. VITORIA, F. Javier (2024), *Dar razón de la esperanza en tiempos de incertidumbre* [Giving a Reason for Hope in Uncertain Times], Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia, Cuadernos no. 239, pp 24-25.
 3. LAGUNA, José (2011), *Taking stock of reality, taking responsibility for reality, and taking charge of reality*, Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia, Booklets no. 143
 4. Message by the Holy Father, Pope Francis for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, September 26, 2021: *Hacia un nosotros cada vez más grande* [Toward an Ever-larger “We”.]
 5. Discourse of Pope Francis to the young people participating in World Youth Day in Lisbon, August 3, 2023.