

The Price of Truth.

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It would be reasonable to expect from a systematic reflection that it should offer a balanced vision of all the aspects of a particular subject and that it should give answers to the most important questions that it generates. Readers will see that, in this article, that is not the case. At the end of these reflections they may have more questions on the subject of 'truth' than when they started. And that is the first thing that I want to share with you: the fundamental conviction that we shall not come close to truth if we try to repress what disquiets and perturbs us, or if we try to control it too quickly. We shall come close to truth, rather, if we hold it as a value to endure disturbance and to expose ourselves to it.

Introduction. 'Paying the price.'¹

The process of getting to know the truth always happens from a specific perspective. Our coming close to the truth happens from a subjective point of view, conditioned and limited by many factors. Part of this process is precisely to take account of one's own perspective and to make it explicit. I want to begin there, and for that reason I shall speak about my own personal and biographical starting-point.

The subject of these reflections, 'The Price of Truth', came to me in thinking about a book called 'Paying the Price.' The book comes out of a full and well-documented investigation into an assassination committed in 1989, whose victims were six Jesuits and two women from the Central American José Simeón Cañas University. The crime was committed by soldiers from the 'Batallón Atlacatl' but the order came 'from above', from government circles. The victims paid the price of bearing witness to the truth – exactly as Mgr. Romero had done ten years before. They denounced and made public before the international community what was happening in the country. They unmasked the crimes of a fascist-style government which drowned with brutal violence the people's legitimate call for more just and human conditions of life. The logical consequence was the hatred of those whose vital interest was precisely to conceal this reality. As the final consequence of their life-project, their vocation as Jesuits, they suffered the same fate as Jesus. Putting themselves, as he did, on the side of the victims of injustice crying to heaven, and making themselves their voice, cost them their lives.

'What is truth?' asked Pilate, after he had interrogated Jesus. St. John's Gospel tells how this really strange interrogation developed. (Jn.18:33-40) Pilate begins by asking Jesus 'Are you

¹ Teresa Whitfield, *Pagando el precio. Ignacio Ellacuría y el asesinato de los jesuitas en El Salvador*. San Salvador 1998

the King of the Jews?' Jesus' reply may seem evasive: 'My kingdom is not of this world.' Pilate then tries to corner him. 'So you are a king?' Jesus replies 'You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth.' And he explains this, leaving no room for doubt. Anyone committed to the truth has, unconditionally, the responsibility and authority of a king – to put it better, this is what it is to be a king, and the 'powers of this world' have no power over the witness to the truth. The kingly authority of the witness to the truth unmask and brings to an end any dominion of one human being over others. However, the witness to the truth pays, in truth, 'a high price': to be handed over to the torturers and their brutal execution. That is what happened to the Jesuits of El Salvador and to innumerable men and women throughout history, who have tried to live like Jesus. Whoever, before the martyrs, still asks 'What is truth?' has understood nothing.

1. Coming close to truth means initiation into mystery.

Our reflection is based on the conviction that we do not approach truth primarily through concepts and theoretical speculations. It happens, rather, as fruit of the process of living and with the passage of years. Truth is something to be striven for, suffered, loved – and it is given to us, above all, in 'casual' encounters. Truth is more likely to manifest itself to those who expose themselves to relationships with other human beings than to those closed up in themselves. Only at the end of life is it possible to discern how much 'truth' there is in one's own knowledge. However, I should like to invite you to accompany me on the road already travelled. I should like to share what has been shown to me over the years.

One of the 'encounters' that has been significant for me has been the encounter with the theologian and Jesuit Erich Przywara, on whom I wrote my thesis for the qualification for professorship in theology.² Przywara was one of the men who laid the foundations for Vatican II. However, he is one of the 'great forgotten' in the history of theology. In his work he insists on the traditions of negative theology. The hermeneutical key for understanding Przywara is Augustine's confession 'Si comprehendis non est Deus' – 'If you understand, then it is not God.' For Przywara not only is this the fundamental axiom for knowledge of God, but at the same time it expresses the law for all search for truth. With Sacred Scripture and the whole theological tradition Przywara sets truth in the context of God. Truth has something to do with the ultimate mystery, and definitive truth is itself mystery. Much as, in striving for truth, the rational and semantic ought not to be abandoned, that is to say what can be expressed in propositions of meaning, it is still the case that we come close to truth only in the process of 'reductio in mysterium.' Coming close to truth means initiation into mystery. Said the other way round, whoever believes that he 'has' the truth, that he possesses it firmly as property – or, paraphrasing Hegel freely, whoever believes that it is possible to 'box up truth in the coffin of concept' – such a person has certainly not encountered it.

² M. Zechmeister: Gottes-Nacht: Erich Przywaras Weg Negativer Theologie, Münster, 2000

Przywara refers time and again to the so-called ‘formula of analogy’ of the Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215): ‘For it is not possible to affirm such likeness between the Creator and the creature, without the need to affirm still greater unlikeness.’³ Concerning knowledge of God he interprets the formula in the following way: As human beings we have no other way of speaking about God than in human language. Although we are aware of its ‘anthropomorphic character’, there is no other road than running the risk of concrete, descriptive prayers, if we want to overcome the state of deaf unconsciousness. But it would be equivocation and falsehood if we were to say arrogantly that ‘we have understood God.’ The formula of the Fourth Lateran Council, ‘while the likeness is very great, the unlikeness is still greater’ confronts us with what follows: to the extent that the human images come closer to God, God reveals himself to us as ‘the ever-greater mystery.’

The closer we come to the mystery, the more we experience how language breaks down. A simple analogy makes this clear. If in the relationship between two people who love each other, one of them believes that he can guess the other’s intentions, or thinks that he knows everything about the other, it will mean the automatic death of the relationship and of the love. The closer we come to the other, the more our capacity grows to make true statements about the other. But our experience is also that the mystery of the other always transcends everything that we can express, and that what we can put into language is little and poor. What is shown in the relationship of two persons who love one another applies also to the effort to reach truth. Put in a pedestrian way, the pedants, the know-alls, the smart-alecks, are the death of truth.

2. Knowledge of the truth begins with recognition of the other.

The theologian Johann Baptist Metz has been another essential encounter, ‘truth-bearer’ for me. He has made me take account of the ‘anonymous dominion’ which the following epistemological formula has on theology: ‘Like can only be known by like.’ This formula, from Neoplatonist philosophy, means: the human being can know God, because the human spirit is spirit from the spirit of God. Definitively, it is the divine spirit in the human being which is to say, God himself, which is capable of knowing God. According to this, knowing God is a question, as in all real knowing, of ‘anamnesis’, an act of re-knowing something or someone known already. Metz formulates it like this: theology ‘was submitted to strict thinking about identity.’ And he places against this concept ‘the epistemological axiom corresponding to the authentically biblical mode of thinking about God.’ ‘There is only knowledge of one by the other through the unlike: astonishment, expectation, recognition, confrontation with the new: all of that belongs to the structure of knowledge of a theology that knows itself to be committed to the biblical thought of God.’⁴ For Scripture, therefore, knowledge does not begin when I find myself ‘with people like myself’, to affirm one

³Denzinger-Hünemann 806

⁴J.B.Metz: ‘Theologie versus Polymythe. Kleine Apologie des biblischen Monotheismus’, in O. Marquard (ed.) *Einheit und Vielheit*, Hamburg, 1990, p.182

another, but rather when I find myself with the other precisely as 'other'. This 'other' is never a copy of me myself, not the same as I am, but is the unknown, the alien – often the terrifying or disconcerting alien. Knowledge begins where the 'other' shows itself to me as something that resists being appropriated by me, something to which I do injustice, if I make it into my own 'image and likeness'; as something which questions, threatens and challenges my own identity.

'Recognising the other as other', however, is an ambivalent process, as I learnt it from Metz. Receiving the other as other may also happen with the purpose of dominating them. In fact, anyone who understands how others 'function' is capable of manipulating and 'calculating' them. This 'hermeneutic of dominion and comparison' is the key to 'success' - and at the same time the 'original sin' of 'western civilisation' in relation to foreign cultures.⁵ Looking at others from inside to subject them as objects of self-interest is exactly the opposite of what is understood as 'knowledge' in the biblical traditions. For these traditions 'to know the other' means respecting their otherness – and guarding and protecting their integrity in all dimensions: physical, psychological, cultural, political and economic. Thus, authentic encounter with another human being is at the same time the 'royal road' to knowledge of God – knowledge of the 'totally other.' The mystery of God reveals itself to me solely in the attitude of attentiveness and adoration, never in the form of 'taking possession'.

The knowledge of God is not an occult science and the love of God is not sentimental fervour. It happens to the extent that I allow myself to challenge and commit in encounter with the other human being. This opens me to the mystery in a process often painful – against every force of gravity that wants to keep me captive, circling round my own 'I' as centre of gravity. This process culminates in the attitude that Jesus calls 'love of enemies'. In the relationship with the enemy it is impossible to reduce the other to an 'agreeable complement' of my own 'I' in a romantic 'you to you'. And this is exactly the condition for the greater mystery to come and give himself to us. Truth reveals itself through the other only on condition that we have definitively renounced making use of it.

3. The epiphany of truth in the collapse of 'constructs.'

From Immanuel Kant and later it is to be acknowledged that reality cannot be perceived 'directly', without mediation. Thomas Aquinas' classic formulation, truth as *'adaequatio rei et intellectus'*, as coherence between object and mind, is radically questioned. My intelligence does not have direct access to the object, to 'the thing in itself' – to reality as it is objectively. For that reason, still less can we speak of 'real knowledge' as of the objective and faithful copy of reality in the mind that knows. First of all, who would be the judge who could verify such 'objectivity'? All human knowledge without exception is mediated by the 'categories', the *a priori* forms of understanding, which determine my perception and my understanding before any subjective effort of awareness. My understanding is determined

⁵ J.B. Metz, *Dios y tiempo. Nueva teología política* Madrid 2002, § 8.3. 153-160

by the models and concepts which have marked me. Without these structures which organize and order perception and understanding, reality would make the subject collapse like an amorphous and trouble-making chaos.

Given that as understood, on the other hand the danger of ending up confusing these constructs with reality itself always threatens. Schemes and simplifications are crutches which human reason inevitably needs, but which can turn themselves into armour which protects from everything that questions the 'I' itself, and the concept of the world itself. The 'truth-bearing moments' are precisely those in which 'the constructs' which have offered support and orientation until now are radically shaken and break down. New experiences do not serve to confirm patterns already known – and new knowledge does not serve to go on justifying the ideology already established. In such an experience of grace, beyond the catastrophe of collapse, the 'reality always greater' may break in. This, which may sound abstract, reveals itself only in what is real and rooted in the earth. The Brazilian poet and bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, campaigner alongside the landless, says in one of his texts: 'Everything is relative, except God and hunger.' This means that where people are hungry and where they die, is where, inevitably, the irruption of reality is manifest. No concept, no form of rationalization, can stop this epiphany of truth.

The conviction is deeply rooted in us that our European concept of the world is identical with 'reality as it is.' It is not an accident that Europe is in the centre of the map of the world. 'The real is us.' It takes vigorous shaking to make this narcissism totter. To speak personally, in Central America I experienced for the first time how it feels when the earth shakes forcefully underfoot. Geologists say that earthquakes happen when the continental plates clash against one another in the depths of the oceans. This has turned for me into a symbol of the shock of different perceptions of reality – and of the perspective from which the world is seen in the countries of north and south. To seek for truth demands courage to come out of safe armour and risk journeying on shaking earth.

4.'To make suffering speak is the condition for all truth.'

This key phrase in the 'Negative Dialectic' of Theodor Adorno masks the insufficiency of the usual theories of truth.⁶ Without doubt both the 'theory of adaptation' and the 'theory of coherence' involve moments that are essential and not to be surrendered. But to understand truth as a 'faithful copy' of the real may end, at the worst, in the worst cases, in the perversion of duplicating and reproducing existing cruelty and brutality - and 'objectivity' may degenerate into apathy in face of those who 'remain behind, struck down by blows under the ruins.'⁷ Thinking that truth can only be expressed in coherent affirmations from which conclusions can be drawn, may end in the perversion of being

⁶Th.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, Frankfurt/Main 1994, 29

⁷ Cf. Walter Benjamin, IX These über die Geschichte.

converted into armour which impedes the irruption of reality into concepts, and, in this form, impedes the epiphany of truth.

I want to illustrate this in a simple way with a personal experience. I happened to take part in an international conference on 'free trade in Latin America'. Dynamic, competent young people, representatives of the World Bank, debated with representatives of NGOs, 'non-governmental organizations.' The discourse of the World Bank representative was very well thought out and absolutely coherent in itself. On the contrary the representatives of the NGOs were ill-prepared, chaotic. They appeared to be clumsy preachers from a sect, inauthentic. They were not able to bring up anything serious against the coherent arguments of their adversaries, and did not succeed in breaking down their 'game of coherent language.' However, it became overwhelmingly clear that truth cannot be limited to what was said in the World Bank discourse. Despite their poor performance the representatives of the NGOs achieved one thing at least: they 'let suffering speak'. This does not justify in any way the intellectual laziness or the lack of scientific competence, since a way of thinking that seeks to put truth into words needs to dedicate a great deal of intellectual force and precision of concept to defending the cause of victims before an apathetic world, and demanding justice for them.

This struggle for the nature of truth, which I have tried to make real with this simple example, has been carried on for some decades at a high level of reflection between the theologian Johann Baptist Metz and the philosopher Jürgen Habermas.⁸ 'Anamnestic reason' against 'communicative reason', or rather Jerusalem against Athens, in the provocative formula with which Metz challenges a 'Greek' concept of truth and reason which does not know time or history. Against the Hellenist tradition Metz calls on Christianity's Jewish heritage. There is no truth that can be bought at the price of forgetting the victims. Listening to their voices, often violently silenced, taking them into account as exercise of their rights is decisive in the struggle for truth+++++ In this battle their cry has a weight incomparably greater than all the arguments.

The fundamental phrase in modern Western thinking states 'cogito ergo sum' – 'I think, therefore I am.' The self-consciousness of the subject is declared to be the imperturbable foundation of all knowledge. Consequently, the driving force of the learning process is, from its roots, the narcissistic dynamic. But, in reality, is it certain that truth reveals itself primarily and above all in those moments in which the subject, in immediate evidence, is sure of itself, the moments in which the 'I' defines itself as the centre of the world – and the 'rest of the world' is understood in relation to this 'I'? Or should not the privileged place for the revelation of the truth be sought rather in situations in which this 'I' is jolted out of its self-sufficiency: in those moments in which it is challenged by the 'others', and committed with

⁸ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz: *Memoria Passionis. Una evocación provocadora en una sociedad pluralista*, Santander 2007 § 18

them, absolutely and inescapably – above all for the ‘others who suffer’? Where people are hungry and dying, the ‘authority of those who suffer’ demands unconditional and absolute obedience on our part - and the cry of those who suffer is the only agency in the world competent to exercise such authority over us. This agency relativizes and overthrows any other form of authority and dominion. If we put ourselves under the authority of the suffering in conscious obedience, and commit ourselves with our whole existence to the struggle against premature and unjust death, we open ourselves to the eruption of truth and the revelation of truth. Otherwise we shut ourselves up into the lie of our own interests and self-idolatry.

5. ‘Doing justice.’ The way to truth.

I want to go back once more to the intuition which is the guiding thread of these reflections. Knowledge of the essence of truth is communicated to us in the course of our life in ‘annual instalments’, and grows in ‘casual’ encounters. In March 2007 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a ‘notification’ on the Christology of the Jesuit and liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, brother of the community of Jesuits assassinated in El Salvador. The criticism says, essentially, that his Christology is ‘too human.’ I am united with Jon Sobrino by a theological cooperation of many years’ standing, so I was also implicated in the polemic over his person and his theology. One of the participants in the debate, who was justifying the position of the Congregation, did me a great favour by summarizing his intervention in this phrase: ‘Certainly he (Jon Sobrino) can commit himself to the poor, but he doesn’t have to turn Christology upside down for that.’ My counterpart repeated this simple phrase constantly – and with it he helped me to understand something essential. I understood that, in practice, communication between us is impossible because two worlds are clashing against one another, two abysmally different concepts concerning the question which forms the road to truth and knowledge.

The point of departure for the first conception is that the divine truth concerning Christ, eternal and so immutable, has been expressed definitively in the true and correct affirmations of Scripture and the dogmas of the first Councils. This ‘*depositum fidei*’, deposit of faith, ought to be kept intact and proclaimed throughout history. The second conception also does not deny in any form the ultimate validity of Sacred Scripture and of the Dogmas. They cannot be betrayed. It shares, further, the preoccupation with announcing the mystery of Christ without reductionism and confronting the world with ‘the truth entire and complete.’ The difference between the two conceptions appears when we ask in what the way towards this truth consists. Some guard zealously an orthodoxy of correct expository affirmations. ‘Tradition’ for them signifies the repetition of something which is always and eternally valid, in a historical context which changes constantly. It is certain that, also following their logic, the ‘orthodox faith’ carries with it, as a consequence, an ethical imperative, but this has no relevance for knowledge of the truth. In the words of my counterpart in the discussion: First the dogmatic formulations which by definition are

immutable must be secured, and then afterwards, with much pleasure, he can 'commit himself for the poor.' The colloquial and spontaneous reply from my point of view would be 'You can recite dogmas backwards and forwards. But if you don't do what Jesus said and did, you have understood nothing, absolutely nothing.'

Saying that in reflective language, what is at stake in the confrontation of these two concepts is the validity and epistemological dignity of praxis. For the theology of liberation, as for political theology, praxis is not putting into practice a morality which we already know beforehand. Rather, the praxis itself is the way which leads to truth. The Bible, long before Marxist theory, has said it in clear language: 'He did justice to the poor and needy. Is not this to know me? says the Lord.' (Jer.22:16) This sentence, often quoted by Jon Sobrino, is unacceptable in the context of Greek metaphysics. Knowing God and doing justice are related in this sentence in a specific and irreversible way. 'Correct knowledge' and 'orthodoxy' do not come first, then as a consequence, *a posteriori*, 'correct practice', 'orthopraxis.' Rather, it is exactly the reverse. Only to those who risk themselves in praxis is the mystery of God going to be revealed. 'Doing justice' is the 'first act' – and all knowledge comes 'afterwards', all the pronouncements which express who God is are the 'second acts'. 'Knowing about God' is rooted in the praxis of justice – and if that is not so, it is empty sound which does not contain a grain of truth.

Johann Baptist Metz has formulated this axiom, in a precise way, in relation to the mystery of Christ: It cannot be that Christology already knows everything beforehand, so that following would merely be a pious addition, which remains completely irrelevant for the dogmatic formulas. It must be said, rather, that by following Jesus, by travelling the road which Jesus himself is, only in this way shall we know who this Jesus is.⁹ Metz illustrated this with his interpretation of a German story about the hare and the hedgehog. Its original meaning is to encourage the little, the disadvantaged, 'with short, twisted feet', before those who dominate and are always sure of winning. 'The hedgehog, bandy-legged but astute, went out one Sunday morning to walk through the field and without more ado challenged the hare (which had come back to make fun of his twisted feet) to a race through the furrows of the field. But before the race he went back home (for breakfast, he said, because he couldn't run well on an empty stomach) to look for Mrs Hedgehog – who, as is well known, looks just like her husband – and put her at the far end of the furrow, while he placed himself at the near end to run with the hare. The hare fell into the hedgehog's trap: he ran and ran through his furrow and each time, when he came to the end, the hedgehog 'was already there', and the hare, running from here to there, finally fell down dead in the field.' Reading the story 'against the grain' it is clear that Metz is on the hare's side. With this metaphor he criticises every theology that has never committed itself in the exhausting race through the furrows of history. Like the hedgehog and his wife, from the perspective of the spectators this form of theology shouts 'I've got there!' to those who are tired in the

⁹ Cf. J.B. Metz, *La fe en la historia y la sociedad*, Madrid 1979, pp.66 ss.

daily struggle. Such a theology is a know-all- already, and in whatever situation: unyielding, because it is already 'informed' that everything began well and everything will end well. It cannot fail, but at the same time it has nothing to say to those who are risking being left in the lurch themselves in the battle for a more just and human world. The truth of the gospel does not reveal itself from a theoretical and 'contemplative' distance, but only to those who risk themselves in the 'race.' 'So in this way I run... lest, having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.' (1 Cor.9,:26f.)

In a drastic form the 'little apocalypse' of Matthew confronts us with the fact, the decisive 'yes' to Jesus, who decides our eternal destiny, if we fed the hungry, welcomed the homeless, visited the captive. Whoever does not do this has not known Jesus. (Matt.25:31-46). This does not mean in any way 'reducing the mystery of Christ' to the merely human, or 'relativizing the dogmas', as the critics often state. Finally, in these verses Jesus himself, in a scandalous way, identifies himself at the same time with, on the one hand, the 'Son of Man' seated on his 'throne of glory' to judge the peoples at the end of time, and on the other hand with the poor devils of human history, the thousands of millions of victims, marginalized and excluded.

A Christology understood in this way does not relativize dogmas. Rather, it gives a clear answer to the request for the hermeneutical key needed for understanding them. Just as Metz tries to understand them not in a context of abstract metaphysical speculation but as formulas in which the primitive Church condensed the intuitions about Jesus Christ, which were revealed to them in the risk of a Jesus-like praxis. The following accounts from the evangelists are the 'breeding-ground' of all the dogmas. If that is so, the most important thing is not to cling minutely to the hermetically-sealed formulas. Rather these formulas will only show their full truth if we go back and translate them into the praxis from which they came. We shall only know the truth when we do the truth.

6. The poor, masters of truth.

In 2008 I was in Guatemala, travelling with a group of students from Bavaria. The specialist topic is called 'Cultural and Economic Studies', which prepares for a professional career in tourism-management, but also for cooperation in development. So the students' motivation covered the span between hopes for a well-paid job in the international cultural market and the idealistic desire for commitment to the struggle for a more just 'other world.' The conditions for admission to the programme are exacting, so those who have succeeded in being accepted on it have a fairly high level of self-confidence and self-esteem.

The central question in the weeks of our journey was 'What does integral and sustainable development mean?' The fundamental element was an experience of 'immersion' and 'exposure' in the highlands of the Quiché. 'Exposure' means that it was not about learning through the analysis and investigations that others had done before, but about exposing

oneself, directly, to reality – specifically to the reality of the poor indigenous families in the Quiché. We lived, worked and celebrated with them for a week. We heard stories of the brutal repression during the civil war years, and of the painful discrimination caused by a profoundly divided and racist society. But the main thing was that, in a world unknown to us, they received us with natural and loving hospitality. The family members introduced us into the relationship between them as human beings, but also shared with us the relationship of people with nature, with the cosmos, with God. And it was expressed with the moving intensity of colours, light and warmth.

Evaluating her experience, one of the students went straight to the core: ‘Suddenly I understood that the world is bigger and richer than what I knew of it before, first of all that poverty, satisfaction, wealth, clamour and love are defined in a different way than I had thought before.’ A confession like that, in the mouth of a privileged young woman from the ‘first world’ means a break-through. The young woman had wanted to contribute to the development of under-developed people, but she was turned into a human being who understands with gratitude that the poor can teach her something essential about life. With astonishment she accepted that she didn’t know everything already, and gave up thinking of herself as the pivot that the world turns round. Accepting that other can enrich me, means moving out of myself towards the truth. The classic doctrine on the virtues calls this attitude ‘humility.’

It is not the rich, ‘developed’ world that shares crumbs of its well-being, but the poor, who turn into the teachers who show humanity the way out of the crisis threatening it. Jon Sobrino sums up in this provocative and counter-cultural sentence: ‘*Extra pauperes nullasalus*’; away from the poor there is no salvation.¹⁰ This sentence has to be understood against the background of the other, well-known for centuries: ‘*Extra ecclesiam nullasalus*’, outside the church there is no salvation.’ It was a difficult and painful journey for the Catholic Church to learn that she is not the only ‘refuge of truth’, but that the whole world is the bearer of salvation and truth. To express this, and to avoid theology leaving human history, Edward Schillebeeckx wrote after the Second Vatican Council; ‘*Extra mundum nullasalus*’ outside the world there is no salvation.¹¹

Jon Sobrino presupposes and accepts that, but goes on asking whether ‘all the world’ is not too imprecise and vague, and if in such a formula the specific location does not disappear into the indeterminate. The prayer ‘*Extra pauperis nullasalus*’ takes seriously the desire to be found hidden in the ancient formula- the desire to ‘locate’ salvation. The question ‘ubi’, ‘where’, is important, because truth and the way to salvation do not reveal themselves everywhere in the same way. There are privileged places. The perspective of the poor is necessary so that the truth and the promises of the gospel can reveal themselves to us. I

¹⁰ Jon Sobrino, *Fuera de los pobres nay hay salvación*, Madrid, 2007, San Salvador 2008

¹¹ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Menschen – die Geschichte von Gott*, Freiburg 1990.

cannot understand what liberation from slavery means if I am not capable of empathy with the victims of dictatorships or the captives in Guantanamo. Quarrelling over the orthodoxy of Christology remains cynicism if we do not recognise that it is the poor from whom we need to learn what is decisive about the 'truth' of the gospel. We remain blind if we are not capable of seeing reality from their perspective, from the perspective of the victims of the trafficking of women, of child soldiers, and of the Africans who die of exhaustion in the Mediterranean in packed boats

7. Lying is murderous.

The 'exposure project' in the highlands of Guatemala made much more than a personal emotional experience possible. It was charged with an explosive force which turned into a radical challenge for our western civilisation and its 'truth.' The western world is delighted to present itself on the stage as protagonist of threatened 'universal human rights' and of 'underdeveloped cultures'. Faced with the millions of victims of an economic system sick at the roots, because it is driven by greed for money; faced with the unscrupulous interests of the armaments industry, which keeps alive the bloody trade of annihilation; faced with the unbridled exploitation of the resources of 'others', their workforce, their mines, and in this way also faced with the destruction of the ecological base of their existence and ours—faced with this scandal the self-image of the 'developed countries' can only be understood as the product of a gigantic collective repression. It is a psychological platitude, and common sense, made sick by what is repressed, says so. For that reason, western civilisation is either sick from its roots, or, much worse, in fact we are dealing with a monstrous collective lie.

'Everything is relative except God and hunger'. How to spell this out, faced with the fact that despite the 'millennium goals', solemnly proclaimed by the United Nations, poverty in Africa is increasing? These goals were already fairly limited. For 2015 they wanted to reduce by half the number of human beings who live in absolute poverty, which means less than a dollar a day to live on. If it were possible to reach this objective, then, 'only' 610 million human beings would go on suffering from hunger. But these 'optimistic conjectures' were made before the explosion of food prices through the scandal of the financial market and before the breakdown of the world summit on food in Rome in 2008. The defenceless victims continue to be at the mercy of the cynicism of those responsible for financial speculation, climate change and the trade in agro-fuels. At the G8 summit in July 2009, the club of the richest industrialised nations promised the poor countries 20,000 million dollars to promote agriculture. However, the balance of similar promises in the past does not give grounds for hope, because despite solemn promises they did not increase aid in past years, when it was cut drastically. Besides, the 20,000 million to combat hunger has to be compared with the 30,000 million spent to save the bankrupt financial system. Instead of conversion, we go on with cosmetics for the system.

What has all this to do with truth? Again it is St. John's Gospel (8:31-47) which directs us drastically to the answer. The confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish authorities is becoming more acute. And in this context Jesus says these beautiful words: 'If you remain faithful to my words, you will really be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' But the listeners reply indignantly: 'We are the descendants of Abraham, and we have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say: 'you will be set free?'' Jesus replies, sternly and implacably, 'You have the devil for your father, and you want to carry out your father's evil designs. He was a murderer from the beginning, because the truth is not in him and he has not held to the truth. What occurs to him to say is lies, because he is a liar and the father of all lies. But for me, because I tell you the truth you do not believe me.' This text establishes an unequivocal link. Just as it is not possible to separate truth from life, it is the nature of lies to bring death, to be a murderer, in Jesus' severe language. A little earlier, in the same chapter, the writer of the gospel tells how Jesus saves the adulterous woman from being stoned. Unmasking the murderous nature of the lie, which takes life from others, Jesus becomes the liberating truth and the source of life. But exactly for that reason, the men of power are determined that this truth must be eliminated, that it is insupportable for them, that Jesus must be wiped out at all costs. Jesus is turned into a victim of Pilate, the imperialist, and the Jews, 'political realists.'

8. Knowledge is possible only in the light of the redemption.

In the final paragraph of his 'Minima Moralia' Theodor Adorno writes this famous sentence: 'Knowledge has no other light than the light which comes from the redemption; everything else is used up in reconstruction, and comes down to mere technology.' Adorno, the agnostic Jew, atheist and at the same time profoundly a believer, will forgive us for making a Christian appropriation of his text. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus the light has shone which makes us see the truth- and without this light we should be blind to truth. In the cross and resurrection of Jesus, wounded and damaged life is rescued. We need the enlightening that comes to us from this event for us to open our eyes to the suffering inflicted and to the destruction of some human beings by others. Only in unconditional trust in the Saviour Jesus Christ can we bear this revelation of the truth. Through this 'judgement' we shall be converted and transformed into messianic men and women, freed from lies and darkness, able to 'do the truth.' (1 Jn.1:8)

For many it has become clear: we can no longer speak of truth in the singular; we have to rid ourselves once and for all of the idea that one truth fits all. Only the many different truths would exist, and we would have to accept with joy the multi-coloured plurality. This is, in part, a legitimate criticism of totalitarian and uniformist claims. However, acceptance of the enchantment of pluralism may cover a totalitarianism without precedent, which has the euphemistic name 'globalization.' Precisely because of that, it is indispensable to hold on to the demand of *one* truth and of its universal validity. This is related to what is deepest in the universality of Christian faith in God. 'God is God for everyone, or he is not God. '

(Johann Baptist Metz). However, if we call on God without calling with the whole weight of our existence for a more just and human world, we are not praying to the living and true God but to the idols of our own interests. Defending the universality of truth against all relativism does not mean subjecting others to our claims, either by the force of our arguments or, still less, by violence. Truth, valid for all, can never be turned into a weapon to secure the domination of some who are above over others who are below. Truth is to be used with prophetic force to unmask the 'lies of the world' and to risk oneself in commitment to a justice including all.

Summary: a small collection of aphorisms.

Truth is not 'owned' as secure property, just as earth, water and air cannot be owned. It does not allow itself to be 'boxed up in the coffin of concept'. Truth happens if we dare to come out in an exodus from the strong boxes made of our certainties and what is thought socially to be plausible. Truth is received; it reveals itself to those who listen and are on the road.

Truth does not happen primarily in building our thoughts with coherent, inescapable logic, and still less when our 'reconstructions' of what is real develops a dynamic which becomes independent and moves further and further away from reality. Truth happens, rather, when the unexpected and discordant troubles and disturbs us; when we see ourselves forced to radical questioning of our certainties because we do not know how to dominate and overcome the lack of balance in our concepts.

Truth does not happen primarily when we knock the other person down with the weapons of our weighty arguments so that the other has to give in to our coercive logic. Truth comes about rather when we allow the damaged and threatened lives of others to wound us and question us. Knowledge is power: truth makes us vulnerable.

Truth is not necessarily found where everyone is in agreement or at least a majority of votes points to it. Truth can be met also on the side of those who have the courage to stand up alone against an overwhelming consensus; of those who follow their own conscience and so risk meeting the prophets' fate.

Accumulated knowledge and collections of certain truths are turned into falsehood without 'the conscience which is necessary.' (Jürgen Habermas). Affirmations and propositions do not reach the truth if they have driven out of themselves all 'knowledge which yearns for what is lacking' (Johann Baptist Metz). Only the one who accepts sorrow and pain for what is still lacking is capable of truth.

Success is not the criterion for discerning truth from falsehood. Truth can be put in safety better among the ruins of a broken and shattered life than in the triumphal gesture of those who have become established +++++ It is dangerous to bear witness to the truth.

'Write what you see'. (Rev.1:11) Truth is a gift to those who are attentive and to contemplatives; to those who are able to see, and do not close their eyes too quickly, but are able to look at what is unbearable. The shock of the real frees us for the truth. 'Everything is relative except God and hunger.' (Pedro Casaidáliga)