



Testimonies of a God Who Embraces All

Cristianisme i Justícia



With thanks to:

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INTRODUCTION

The publication you hold in your hands is a booklet of personal testimonies. In it, we will hear the voices of six people who generously offer us their testimony of faith, a faith that has grown during lives marked by suffering and resistance, exclusion and encounter, earnest arguments with God and the discovery of God's infinite love.

This booklet is in some ways a continuation of CJ Booklet No. 229, *The Recognition of LGBTIQ+ Persons in the Church*. It seeks to follow up on what James Martin SJ noted there: “Pastoral outreach to LGBTIQ+ Catholics is not simply a fad or a passing trend, or even something responding to cultural ‘pressures’; rather, it is a constitutive work of the Church and a mission that finds its ultimate roots in the Gospels.”

We believe that it is important to accept the fact that the Church, like society, is pluralist in nature. Apart from discourses and pernicious idealization, the Church is made up of people with very diverse beliefs and understandings of reality; some people have different experiences of their own bodies and of their sexual and gender identities*. And we want to listen to them. [Note: terms marked with an asterisk (*) are explained in the glossary at the end of the booklet.]

We are well aware, however, that the social and ecclesial context in which we move is complex. We live in a noisy and increasingly polarized world that is disturbingly marked by the global rise of the extreme right. It is a world in which structural, physical, and verbal violence against people on the existential margins is the order of the day. And those margins are becoming wider and more populated than ever; they include migrants and refugees, neurodiverse people, racialized children, people with dissident sexual orientations, and many others. These

are the “hidden exiles,” the “foreign bodies” of which Pope Francis speaks in *Fratelli Tutti* (97, 98). In the face of these realities, the Pope calls us to highlight “the universal openness in love that is existential rather than geographical. It has to do with our daily efforts to expand our circle of friends, to reach to those who, even though they are close to me, I do not naturally consider a part of my circle of interests. Every brother or sister in need, when abandoned or ignored by the society in which I live, becomes an existential foreigner, even though born in the same country” (FT, 97).

We also recognize that, within the Church, the realities of these “hidden exiles” have for too long been denied, condemned, and excluded, as will be seen in the testimonies that follow. Moral judgment (and sexual morality, in particular) has almost always taken precedence over living testimony, and little or no attempt has been made to listen to these sisters and brothers. It is time, therefore, to turn the tables and try to do them justice.

The space we offer below seeks to create a safe environment, a space of attentive listening in which our *thinking selves* (which is all of us—with our preconceptions, our doubts, our judgments, our prejudices, but also with our capacity to love) bow out of the picture and make room for *you who speak*. It is a space for thoughtful reflection that will distance us from prejudices that dehumanize LGBTIQ+* persons and will immerse us in a prayerful silence that bears fruit.

As we said at the beginning, the faith that pervades and sustains the lives of these persons enlightens us. It is a deeply rooted faith—“bombproof,” as Txus would say. It allows us to get a glimpse of the God of existence, who is Love, who is father and mother, tenderness and affection. This is a God who loves unconditionally, a God who embraces all, who does not alienate, who does not separate, who does not exclude anyone. This is a God clarified and glorified in Jesus.

Thank you—Pili, Bea, Antonio, Sònia, Txus, Niurka, and Juanjo—for your generosity.

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“MUCH MORE THAN TWO”

Pili Gómez and Beatriz Blesa

We are Pili and Bea. We received the gift of love, and we welcomed it, but not without personal and contextual difficulties, especially because of the ecclesial environment. We feel we are a *married couple*, because this sacrament is for us the sacrament of love, the love between two persons that reflects Christ's love for the Church. We love one another deeply, and we believe that this love is an image of the love of Jesus. As believing women, we have always been involved in our parishes, collaborating in youth ministry, in choir, in service to immigrants, and in any other field where we can help. Our involvement is born from a profound experience of the God of Jesus through his Word, liturgy, and community life.

A Path of Interior Liberation

Bea: Both of us have had to undergo a liberation of conscience in the process of recognizing and openly expressing our sexual orientation. In my case, this process involved simply accepting my lesbian condition, which required of me much effort, time, and suffering. For many years, I kept silent about my orientation, experiencing it with fear and a great sense of guilt. After starting psychological therapy, I was graced with a spiritual experience that finally allowed me to say out loud, to myself and to others, who I really was. From that point on, having discovered love and accepting that I had fallen in love with Pili, I was able to experience that love without feeling guilty or sinful. By yielding to it freely, I suddenly found that my affectivity and sexuality could flow freely and naturally, especially with someone who loved me in return and who shared my faith and the commitment that faith carries with it. Love drove away the fears I had internalized, even the fear of myself.

The only real conflict I had to resolve was that I belonged at that time to a religious congregation, and I had to discern between two loves that asked everything of me. In the end, my choice of Pili arose from my conviction that this was also an expression of God's love. Being with Pili allowed me to live out my commitment to Jesus and his Gospel, and at the same time it allowed me to live my affectivity and sexuality without fear. Throughout this whole process, I came to understand that fear does not come from God.

Pili: I formed part of another generation, so I was not burdened with the same experience of guilt. I wasn't very certain about what was happening to me when I fell in love with Bea, but I knew clearly that the love that united us was a gift and a blessing from God. I have always felt it to be gift of God when I meet a person who knows me completely, someone with whom I can share my deepest dreams, my wounds, and my daily journey as God gives it meaning and depth. At first, however, we kept silent. It was a silence that in my case was linked both to a fear of losing my job and to my desire not to hurt or scandalize anyone. My greatest pain was not being able to proclaim to the four winds the precious and sacred bond that Bea and I shared, a bond that is now more than 15 years old. Perhaps the path of inner liberation that I've experienced goes hand in hand with putting aside those inner fears that gripped me: the fear of what people would say, the fear of causing scandal, or the fear of having to live a double life that would prevent me from being myself.

Bea: When you recognize yourself as a person loved by your Creator, saved by Christ, and filled with the Spirit; when you recognize your love for another person as a manifestation of Christ's love for humanity, then the spiritual path gives you the interior fortitude you need to take a final step, that of public expression. You can do so because you finally understand that declaring that you love someone cannot possibly cause scandal to your brothers and sisters. And if it does, the problem is not the love, but a culture that is unfortunately swayed by a doctrine of the Church's magisterium, which distinguishes between licit and sinful loves.

Liberated Communities for Growing in Love

Bea: The community has accompanied us throughout this process. While we still refrained from acknowledging that we were a couple, our companions acted with great discretion and respected our privacy, but when we finally came out of the closet, they greeted us with joy and acceptance. And with the same joy they have welcomed the life of our sons, Andrés and Pedro, though they have not always understood our situation. Perhaps one of the richest experiences we have had in our group was the amicable confrontation with those who did not understand or share our choices, especially when it came to the question of becoming mothers.

This heartfelt sharing of our ideas, our faith, and also our difficulties has meant a process of precious growth in love and community. Both of us believe that it is important to meet and dialogue honestly with the community on the basis of our faith. In so doing, we recognize that, as creatures of God, we must meet gladly with others who are different and who make different options, but who engage us in a profound encounter between sons and daughters of the same God.

Pili: We see quite clearly that it is important to have the support of the people in the community, of those in charge, of the priests who accompany us. If the step we take is met with rejection, how can the community bonding be maintained? In fact, we know couples who are experiencing conflicts in their communities, and it is difficult for them to ask for support. Is the reason fear? In our community, even the less gay-friendly members have been taking steps, and while they still may have “philosophical” reservations, they feel that we are part of the family. Real change happens through personal contact, not through rational arguments.

Pili: In our process of liberation as persons and as a couple, our community’s encounter with *Ichthys*, a community of LGBT+ Christians, meant a “before” and an “after” for us. The *Ichthys* community asked our community for help because they were feeling excluded; they needed other friendly Christian communities to accompany them on their path. When Bea and I saw other Christians who were fighting for their faith and their identity, but were not afraid to acknowledge their identity publicly, we began to ask ourselves if we wanted to “live in the closet” all our lives. We felt that we had “outgrown” our present situation but did not want to stop growing our love. And, truly, this path is best followed in community.

From that moment on, events started to happen one after the other. Our life took a 180-degree turn, and, in less than two years, we formed a family.

Bea: These last few years of our community journey have been vital for us. Our Christian Life Community (CLC) of Ignatian spirituality has, since the last national assembly, been considering the theme of diversity as a new line of mission. We see diversity as a new frontier that needs a response from the Church and society. At the end of 2020, our community drew up a public manifesto defining itself as a diverse community, given that some of our members belong to the LGBTI collective while other are separated or divorced and living with a partner. The reality of our society and our world is present in our Christian community, and it cannot be otherwise. We feel tremendously proud to belong to an inclusive community, where all who follow Jesus have their place if they so desire. How can we not feel accompanied? These are the enormous gifts we have received in our process. We hope that they have benefited not only us but also other people and the Church as a whole.

Pili: Our story has made the community, both local and national, open itself to diversity, which is experienced not only as a mission but as an interior richness. The result has been that other companions have also been able to come out

of the closet in community, so that we now feel that we are “many more than two.” This feeling of being accompanied has also encouraged us to accompany other people. We have not had many references from LGBTI families within the Church, and we have faced a lot of reticence, but this is a call to which we want to respond as a family. If we have to open new paths, we are here and ready to do so.

The Sacrament of Our Faith

Bea: With our family, friends, and Christian Life Community, Pili and I held a “celebration of love” because we needed to be able to share with our people the Love that unites us. We did not want to compromise our priest by asking him to bless our union, so he attended the celebration simply as a guest, and no pictures were taken of him. Besides, we were well aware that the ministers of the sacrament of marriage are the contracting parties, so that we were ourselves the ministers in our celebration. We had absolutely no doubt that we were blessed by the Good God who had brought us there. We wanted it to be not only a celebration of our love, but an invitation for all those who accompanied us on this journey to renew their own love, because Love is the center of our faith. Should not the expression of Love toward strangers and migrants, and toward our friends and our families, as well as toward our partners, be the Sacrament of our faith and our Church?

That is the question that occurs to us when there is conflict about the blessings of same-sex couples. What is celebrated in the Church, sexual difference or Love? In our Christian life group, some couples told us that meeting us had made them reflect more on the real essence of the sacrament of marriage. What is really more important, a complementarity based on biological sex or a complementarity based on the specificity of each human being who forms a relationship founded on love? Deep down, what hurts us most is the exclusion of Christian couples who want to celebrate their love.

Pili: For us, forming a family has been the logical consequence of becoming a couple. After celebrating our love publicly and getting married, the question arose: what do we do with our desire to form a family? Obviously, there are doctrinal reasons not to get involved in this process, but the simple fact of living as a couple already places us outside what the same doctrine imagines as “God’s design.” Some community members questioned us about the children not having a father figure, and they wondered about the fact that there is no known biological father. But the truth is that we do not see this as a problem. Andrew and Peter are our children, and we strive to create for them a loving environment in which they can grow as persons and as believers. We count on the help of the community to enrich their lives, and we are seeing that our family enriches the life of the community in turn.

However, we did wonder about our desire to build a family because of experiences we went through in our own families.

Bea: In my own family, specifically, one of my brothers has not invited me to social events because I now have children, which means he can no longer hide me. It is not a problem of beliefs but of customs and prejudices present in our society and our culture. Our children have definitely brought us out of the closet, and that can have negative consequences.

We can therefore understand that some people find it difficult to accept our family reality. Still, our liberation process has taught us that other people's prejudices should not prevent us from living fully as individuals, as a couple, and as a family.

Pili: I came out to my family from the beginning, and like everyone else, they have had to go through a process. However, their attitude from the very beginning has been one of support and affection towards both of us. Today, all my extended family knows about our relationship, and they have accepted it as normal.

Being LGBTIQ+ in the Church

Bea: To begin with, our community offers us the richness of Ignatian spirituality and of the Church as a whole. In our everyday lives, we feel very much part of the Church. We are following the Lord Jesus ever more closely, surrounded by our brothers and sisters in the community and dedicated to serving the larger society. Our own community has helped us enter into relationship with numerous other Christian communities that have enriched us, and we continue on the road toward that fraternity dreamed of by God, where there are no distinctions whatsoever, because we are all sons and daughters of God.

Pili: Also, our relationship with the larger ecclesial community has been affected by the fact that we've always belonged to a parish since arriving in Seville. It's also true that we seek out places where we can celebrate and participate with a certain "tranquility" (curiously, most of the religious spaces where we find greater openness belong to religious congregations). When we had our children baptized, we went to a parish that, besides being the one we attended for Sunday Eucharist, was also a place where we knew we would not cause scandal and where we could participate in the pre-baptismal course as just another family.

At the same time, we both work in religious schools that belong to the Church. It is where we have always wanted to be. Our mission as educators has always been closely linked to pastoral ministry, and we feel fully part of the Church's evangelizing mission. We are fortunate to have the support and affection of our institution and our faculty.

Bea: In addition, we wanted our children to go to a religious school, and they have been well received in all school environments. We believe that it is very important for us to be visible and active in our children's school, participating as another Christian family in the school reality at all levels.

Our Mission

Bea: As a fruit of our process, we feel called to open new paths and to do so on several levels: in the community, in the Church, and in the larger society. When we give our testimony without fear or shyness, we help to normalize our reality as a Christian homo-parental family, and we offer our testimony as an example for LGBTIQ+ believers in other Christian communities. For an LGBTI Christian who is in a personal process of acceptance, seeing other people coming out of the closet and being welcomed helps them to follow their own personal path. Because we can no longer hide who we are, we make it possible for the community, the Church, and the other spaces where we move to take steps to welcome the realities of diversity.

Pili: Working with PADIS+G (the pastoral ministry for diversity and gender), we are trying to create synergies with other Christian and religious communities so as to collaborate in parishes that are sensitive to diversity. We are also taking steps to make ourselves known to the hierarchy. What is important for us is not the difficulties we may encounter; it is our dream of a Spirit-inspired path toward building a more inclusive and diverse Church.

When we assumed this mission, we were ultimately thinking of our children and the new generations. We know that they will not accept laws that discriminate and exclude or attitudes that divide Christians into first- and second-class believers. Our children will want to become active members of the Church only if we create an awareness of the Church as a community of equals and become convinced of this reality ourselves. Only then will our children experience the joy of proclaiming a Gospel that is truly Good news.

FORGIVING THOSE WHO HURT US. BEING LGBTIQ+ IN THE CHURCH, TODAY

Antonio Cosías

A question I am often asked is when I realized that I was homosexual. Actually, I became confusingly aware that I was attracted to others of the same sex around the age of seven, but I had no idea then that there was such a word as "homosexual." I don't remember the term "gay" either. To me, boys who were attracted to other boys were simply "faggots."

A Refuge Called the "Closet"

The offensive language, which I constantly heard, made me fearful of telling others what I was experiencing in terms of my sexual affectivity and identity. I was very confused, but unable to ask for help. Of course, I was afraid to say anything at home because of a sense of panic that for many years never left me: fear of rejection, of being cast aside, of being treated as a sick or a vicious person. I did not want to lose the love of my family or the esteem of my friends. I did not want to be the object of insults, exclusion, and contempt. I even feared being physically assaulted for being gay, as I had seen happen to other boys at school and in the neighborhood.

My family is a religious family, and I was raised as a Christian. My faith in those early years was shaped by religious teachings that predestined anyone like me to hell—that is, unless I was able to reject all those impure feelings and sinful desires, but they feelings and desires I could no more discard than I could my blue eyes. I was doomed to hell unless I wholeheartedly repented and prayed to God to help me stop being "like that." And indeed, I did pray frequently, and this was the basic theme of my prayer for many years.

From my boyhood I have memories of feeling anguish, of being continually on the lookout, of devising ways to keep others from knowing my inner self, what I really was, what I experienced and felt. I also experienced fear regarding my relationship with God. Little by little I constructed a refuge that I later learned was called a “closet.” In that secure place I tried to hide the real me. There I would fashion the masks I needed to keep anyone from knowing that I was different.

During adolescence I was considered something of an introvert. Despite being sociable, humorous, kind, witty, and a bit of a clown, I never talked about myself. I never told anybody what I was feeling; nobody really knew me. I got used to resolving any conflicts by myself, and I resigned myself to hiding an important part of being. Maybe that’s why I now feel that I am freeing myself from a heavy burden when I tell my story. It is as if I were tearing my own life apart and God was putting a name on each moment.

A Complicated Relationship

God and I have always had a complicated relationship. As I observed how other people (even people close to me) behaved with LGBTIQ+ persons, I did not dare to confess anything. What my educators taught me made me think that I was nothing but a sinner with very little chance of earning God’s forgiveness. After an unpleasant experience with a priest who ended up calling me “sick” and told me to see a psychiatrist, I stopped including any information about my affectivity or sexuality when I went to confession. Even so, I continued to be a boy who was more spiritual than religious. I kept hoping that God was more like the father of the prodigal son than a judge who would accuse me of being a deviant and sinner. That struggle has accompanied me throughout my life; it made me feel sad and overwhelmed in adolescence, but it made angry and outraged as I grew into adulthood. The clearer it became to me that I was not guilty for being “like that” and that I was not infected with any evil, the more I moved away from God, and the more I sinned against God.

As much as I imitated my friends’ behaviors with girls, it was just that: imitation for survival. At fifteen, my biggest problem was not that I felt homosexual and was stuck in the closet, but that I had to resolve a serious conflict between my faith and my life. At sixteen, the pressure was so great that I thought it would be best just to end it all. It was not difficult for me to get some pills, and I put myself to sleep. I closed my eyes, not wanting to wake up. The results ended up being just frightening for my mother and upsetting for my father, but they managed to make sure that no one knew that I had wanted to take my own life; they said it was just an accidental overdose. I spent a day in the hospital, got my stomach pumped, and spent several sessions with a psychologist whom I could

not tell the truth and who ended up diagnosing an adolescent crisis aggravated by my introspection. Nothing further happened; the crisis was just another item on my long list of secrets. Many years later I learned that my mother had found the note I'd left on the table that afternoon. I didn't even remember the note myself, and she never mentioned it to me.

That event did not help me to take the step of coming out, but it definitely made me more aware of the need for self-acceptance. At the same time, it reinforced my decision to remain hidden away, safe from any harm. The closet became sophisticated and my double life habitual.

Beggars of God's Love

A few days after my eighteenth birthday, I met a boy my own age, with more or less the same doubts and fears that I had. He was also still in the closet, terrified that his parents, family, or friends would find out. He was also debating whether to stop believing or to continue believing despite it all.

Alvaro had a very traditional religious upbringing. Now that he was beginning to face the reality of who he was, of learning to accept and respect himself, he was troubled by the paradox of a God who demanded that he sacrifice himself. I was experiencing that same contradictory feeling, though not so severely. For me, it was painful enough to keep that part of my life hidden, without having to struggle with doubts about faith. At that age, we were going through fierce but silent battles. In the midst of that war, as in previous and subsequent ones, my friend and I, like so many other Christian homosexuals, were begging for reasons to continue believing.

One day we went to Mass together where the gospel reading was from Mark 12. The passage speaks of love for God. It is not easy for a homosexual to love God until you realize that God is the one who first takes the initiative. It took me a long time to internalize that truth. It seems to me that my first conscious act of faith happened when I believed with conviction that God loves me passionately. From that moment on, I was able to fall in love with the Father. Before that it was impossible. Before that, I blamed on him all the prejudices that education and religion had been busy stuffing into my head and my heart. I could not accept a God who had created me imperfect, sinful, dirty, and consequently miserable. Such a self-image blocked any possibility of self-acceptance; it made it impossible for me to value myself as a person.

In Mark's gospel Jesus says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," but we have all witnessed how pious believers, professing great love for God, are unwilling to accept people who are different because of their sexual or gender identity, or even because of their skin color. This contradiction, which Alvaro experienced in his own flesh when his parents threw him out of the house for

being gay, made us reluctant to feel part of a confusing comedy where nothing is what it seems. It also prevented us from coming out of the closet, where we remained for a long time still.

Loving God and loving your neighbor are the same thing. It is impossible to love God without loving your neighbor as yourself. Both my friend and I struggled with these doubts for years.

Alvaro died of AIDS in 1990. In those years many others also died, while many Christians refused to love their neighbors and proclaimed that HIV was God's punishment against homosexuals. Alvaro died without his parents, who also refused to accept him as a neighbor and to love him as themselves. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your being, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself." But there was no heart, no soul, no mind, no neighbor to love, nor was there any God.

The Impostor Syndrome

For many years I was a catechist. At that stage of my life, I never really felt happy in the full sense of the word. Certainly, my experience as a catechist was gratifying, for I learned a lot and received even more. During that period, much to my regret, I was always respectable and respectful, never straying from the doctrine. But finally, I had to face the truth: I decided to stand before God with my cards face up. In a way, this decision also had a practical side. It was the hammer that hit the nail, making me feel the pain and notice the blood; it was a tool I had slowly forged until it became effective. I had to ask, "What am I doing here?" in order to search finally for answers.

My work as a young catechist did not help me to see the welcoming message in the gospels. I saw only the threats I thought were there, such as "If you don't stop being like that..." and I obviously could not stop being the way I was. As a result, I experienced much sadness and distress during that time as a pastoral animator. I disguised all those feelings, donning the masks I had learned to use since I was a child and pretending to be a "normal" heterosexual boy. I was not announcing to the girls and boys I was teaching the true joy of the Gospel. And here I want to ask their forgiveness for not having been strong at that time and especially for not having been brave enough to offer a word of hope to the LGBTIQ+ girls and boys who approached me while I looked the other way so as not to embarrass myself.

One afternoon, as I was catechizing some young people, I used Luke's text on baptism to help them understand what the sacrament meant. I spoke to them about being born again, leaving behind in the water everything that stains us, and allowing the fire of the Spirit to reinvigorate our lives. As I explained all that to

the girls and boys listening to me, I felt an immense inner emptiness because I did not experience or believe anything I was telling them. Suddenly, I was painfully aware that the persona I was presenting to them was a complete fraud. It had been a long time since water was enough to purify me or since the fire of the Spirit was enough to warm my double life. When the class was finally over, I looked for the person in charge of my team of catechists and told him that I would never come back.

Judging from what I have heard from other LGBTIQ+ Christians, this sensation of feeling like a con artist is quite common, especially among those of us who have performed pastoral tasks. Deep within ourselves, we experienced a fierce struggle between who we were supposed to be and who we really were. Did we think we were deceiving anyone? Either we had to accept our real sexual identity, or we had to rip it up by the roots and resign ourselves to being what polite society and strict religion expected of us. We had to bury our real selves and perpetuate a life of lies.

Giving Mercy a Chance

For almost three years I left everything behind. Abandoning my faith community, my pastoral work as a catechist, and the sacraments, I was left with little more than the inertia of prayer, which was increasingly brief and superficial.

I held onto a tenuous faith, but I was tired of waiting for God's voice, which was being drowned out by my own desperate cries. But finally I fell silent and was able to listen to him.

I was struck by Jesus' words in the Gospel: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who curse you" (Lk 6:27-36). These are for me among the most beautiful and radical of all the words we find in the scriptures. This saying of Jesus took hold of me and shook me, transforming and moving my heart more than anything else in recent years. Reading this passage from Luke, I found my trust in God evolving from nothing to everything. I was lifted out of desolation to the point of entrusting myself completely to God, with all my failures and gifts, and leaving nothing in the closet of resentment.

Luke captures the firm voice of Jesus in a few forceful phrases. Doing things while expecting nothing in return is not exactly the prevailing philosophy in human societies. Even less so are forgiving, loving our enemies, refraining from judgment and condemnation, and praying for those who slander us. Jesus says that this is how we have to behave if we want God to take our lives into account.

My first clear memory of thinking about this passage from Luke is when I was fifteen years old. On my birthday I went to confession. I looked for a church

where I was not known. Normally, I confessed with a priest from school who had always seemed to me friendly and approachable, but I had never dared to tell him anything about my sexual identity. This time I felt the need to talk to someone and express my doubts, my fears, and my anguish. I thought it best, therefore, to look for an unknown priest to whom I would be totally anonymous. In return for my confiding in him, however, I received a fierce harangue about the grave sin I carried in my soul and the terrible consequences that would result if I persevered in my shameful instinct. I believe those were his precise words because they stuck with me, among others just as painful. Saddened and disappointed, I sat in a pew for a long time until Mass began. The celebrant was the same priest who had heard my confession. When he came to the Gospel, he read that same text from Luke 6, completely unaware that every word of Jesus that he pronounced was totally contrary to what he had said to me a short time before in the confessional. That priest had not been able to put Jesus' words into practice, at least with me. He had given much more importance to doctrine and tradition than to helping a poor lad who was seeking consolation. Moreover, after condemning the boy, he gave him a mechanical absolution and a prescription for "curing homosexuality."

When LGBTIQ+ persons approach this passage from Luke for the first time, we do so with a deep sense of victimhood because we carry within us a long experience of affronts. We feel like aliens and enemies who are loved by very few; we are cursed and slandered; our cheeks are struck, our cloaks are taken from us, and we are permanently judged. This is our present reality, which we suffer in most cases without being able to speak out with complete freedom.

The pain of invisibility, fear, loneliness, and sadness persists even as the apparent normality of heterosexuals increases the feeling of victimhood. We are prevented from thinking that we could possibly become active subjects ourselves and treat others with the mercy that we never receive.

This text of Luke has evolved in me, over time and with experience, to the point where it moves me deeply and stirs my heart, because we LGBTIQ+ women and men are in no way strangers to the kind of treatment Jesus forbids. Quite the contrary: from the moment we are first aware of our identity, we LGBTIQ+ Christians live in a continuous process of discernment. We waver between accepting ourselves as we are and renouncing our identity and so living a lie. We waver between believing and not believing, between hating and forgiving. As a result, we have developed an enormous capacity for interpreting and adapting to all kinds of situations. The experience of feeling rejected has increased our capacity to wait until others' perception of our reality changes and acceptance becomes a fact. We wait patiently, hoping that hearts will change, and giving mercy a chance to take root in the souls of all women and men.

To Live According to God's Will

I do not believe, though, that we can just sit idly and wait for this word of Jesus to be fulfilled in us as passive subjects. LGBTIQ+ persons become truly subversive and radical when they begin to behave with the mercy that Jesus asks of us. It is we who must love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. It is we who must bless those who curse us and pray for those who slander us.

When we are struck on one cheek, let us offer the other cheek. If someone takes our cloak, let us give away our tunic as well. Let us give to those who ask of us and not demand back what others have taken from us. Let us treat others as we want to be treated. Let us be merciful as our Father is merciful. Let us not judge and God will not judge us. Let us not condemn and God will not condemn us. Let us give and God will give to us.

These attitudes, absolutely evangelical, undercut every argument that justifies exclusion, marginalization, or any homophobic attitude. When we have acted this way, we have been able to demolish prejudices and lay to rest the traditional teachings that have impoverished the authentic message of Jesus for centuries. We have touched hearts.

In return, we perceive that God loves us immensely not only as LGBTIQ+ persons, but as persons who live according to His will, giving love freely because we been loved freely by him.

Personally, I for too long felt blocked from giving myself because my rancor, resentment, and the sense of being a victim hijacked my ability to forgive. Without my realizing it, that negativity also affected my relationship with God and kept me from being faithful to his word. I found it very difficult to pray for those who slandered me, for example. As a homosexual, I am unfortunately exposed to many risks: to being hated, excluded, and slandered; to being insulted and robbed of my dignity; and to having my dignity stolen from me. People can be merciless toward me, condemn me, or single me out. They can do all this to me because I am different. But if I fail to respond with love, understanding, and mercy, renouncing even prophetic denunciation, then I will be like them. Because with the measure with which I measure others, God will measure me.

“A JOY THAT NOBODY CAN TAKE FROM US” (JN 16:20-23)

Txus Garcia and Sònia Moll Gamboa

Our testimony is marked by wounds and by love. Both of us have had to struggle against outright exclusion from our communities and against ostracism by the Church. At the same time, our trust in a God who is Love and who blesses and welcomes differences with tenderness has grown ever stronger throughout our lives. We believe—and we rejoice in the fact—that a new, more inclusive Church is being born, more like the primitive Church, in which we will all be recognized in our diversity. The resilience and resistance of those who have been excluded will be the key to building this new Church.

Sònia Moll: a Community That Is Wounded

Txus: When would you say your faith was first awakened?

Sònia: I was born into a practicing Catholic Christian family. My mother was very devout, and my father had been a priest for 19 years. At all times they bore witness to their faith, in both word and deed. We went to Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, attended catechism classes, said grace at meals, and attended religious schools. Even so, I was 13 years old before I first felt the faith not just as a matter of doctrine, but as an authentic personal experience. Some older girls came with us from Guineueta on the bus, and they spent the whole trip singing songs that spoke of God, but the songs were not at all ceremonious. The girls had so much inner joy, and later, during prayer, I was impressed to see them so centered, so connected. Those girls helped me put aside the idea that the Church and my relation with God had to be serious and solemn. This was also the first time that I experienced prayer as a loving dialogue with Jesus Christ, a

dialogue that was intimate and communal at the same time. And, above all, it was loving. From that point on, I began to feel a very deep faith.

Txus: I see that for you the experience of faith in community is important. When was the first time you felt that your faith community excluded you because you were a lesbian?

Sònia: It was in 1996, when I was 22 years old and still in the closet. I wrote a young adult book about a boy falling in love with another boy. It was what I myself had experienced as a teenager (I had fallen in love with a girl who never knew it), but I was terrified to think that people would believe the novel was about me. The fact is that my JOC-JOBAC group (Young Christian Workers-Young Christians from Poor Neighborhoods), for which I was an initiator, was very excited about the book, and we presented it in the parish. Shortly afterwards, the priest, who was young but very conservative, said that the book was not suitable for young people because it could confuse them as they “matured” their sexuality. He said that the book presentation should not have been allowed. I understood that it meant that I was not welcome in the community. That was the first time I felt pain. I had already been moving away from some of the Church’s dogmatism, but that situation, plus the fact that I was very soon after that expelled from my role as initiator, on the basis of very specious arguments, alienated me completely for many years.

Txus: When you’ve told me about that expulsion, I’ve felt that it left you with a wound that especially hurt because there was a strong bond. Tell me a little about the relationship you had with the Church before the presentation of the book.

Sònia: After confirmation, a new priest came to the parish and introduced the JOC-JOBAC. In this group, personal and communal living of the faith was joined with active social involvement. The group’s spirituality was based on Gospel values in solidarity with the workers’ struggle and, by extension, with all people suffering oppression in any area. Belonging to the group was a turning point for me. I felt very close to the community, I deepened my individual prayer life, and I developed a social commitment that has never left me. A friend and I were responsible for the initiation group of 15-year-olds; we were both 19. But then the advisor met with us (curiously, just after the presentation of the book), and he told us that we were not managing the group well. He said that our young people were “thinking too much” and there were sensitive issues that we weren’t prepared to discuss with them, such as sexuality. What he wanted us to do, basically, was to stifle critical thinking and penalize the bodies and desires of young people, depriving them of a realistic view of life in the light of faith.

Txus: This fear of sexuality, infused with clerical obscurantism, still creeps in and sanctions young people’s lives. There is a theology of the body that speaks of intimate relationships in terms that are cis-heteronormative* and patriarchal, geared strictly toward reproduction. But I have to admit to being surprised by

the narrow vision of the JOC-JOBAC members, who publicly proclaim that the Gospel permeates the whole of life. The Word of God should be a daily and absolute reality that includes not only socializing, work, and family life, but also our consensual loving relationships with our own bodies and those of others.

Sònia: Well, I figured I was dealing with individuals who were clinging to a coercive and punitive religious understanding of intimacy and relationships, as well as to the concept of “sin” that derived from it. Later on, I was able to reformulate this concept. I have understood that what we call “sin” is the absence of love, and that the absence of love is the denial of God. Because God is love, and nothing but love. And this is precisely what sin is: renouncing this marvelous gift.

Txus: Amen. I think that the treatment accorded LGBTIQ+ persons has much to do with this insistence on perceiving the body and intimate relations as a reason for scandal and sin. We are expelled from the community not because of our lack of faith, but because of our freedom of thought, body, and emotion. Holy Mother Church is like a real mother: she can be welcoming and attentive to the needs of her children, but she can also be a punishing, castrating mother who has no faith in us. Still, we have faith in this Church because we love God. The Church needs harvesters (Lk 10:2), but it refuses to let us help with the harvest. It is discouraging when the Church does not welcome those of us who are different: the black sheep, the lost souls, the ones Jesus loved the most. That is why we feel intense filial pain when we are expelled: the bond between a mother and her children is broken because the children cannot express themselves authentically. It is like when you move away from your immediate family because being close to them hurts too much and does not allow you to flourish. In order to live with coherence and truth, many of us have suffered this painful break with the Church. We feel banished from a space that we consider rightfully ours because we believe in Jesus, our friend, our brother, our love. This Pharisaical expulsion leaves very deep wounds. It is an evangelical contradiction that impoverishes the Catholic community.

Txus Garcia: Faith From a Divergent Body

Sònia: How did faith begin in you?

Txus: Since I can remember, I have felt deeply certain of God’s love, in a natural way. I remember when I was three years old and went to Montserrat with my parents. I kissed the Moreneta spontaneously, as if she was someone dear to me; it wasn’t because they told me to do it. My parents were not religious or devout, but they did feel a very deep ancestral spirituality, rooted in the need for shelter and answers. I come from generations of fishermen and farmers, people who lived their faith with childlike simplicity. They would look to the sky to ask for rain, or they would pray that a storm would not drown them at sea. They would

give thanks for the catch and the harvest and celebrate the joy of returning to port. Theirs was not the faith of rosaries or indulgences, nor the faith of those who have everything easy and can dedicate time to attend many Masses with a mantilla and new shoes. They had a very hard daily life. And when they celebrated the feasts, they gave profound thanks to God because they had food, shelter, and health. In my childhood, then, I was fascinated by the thought that there was a God who loved us, cared for us, and gave us shelter. From the time I learned to read, I was already poring over the Gospels and a children's Bible. I used to go to the Teresian Sisters' school and had easy access to their chapel, where I often escaped instead of going to recess. I felt at home there, just sitting in silence and looking at Christ. That's why I think the smell of a church has always comforted me: it feels like home.

Later, my faith grew with me. During my adolescence I had an intense love affair with Jesus, which I've never stopped feeling. At that time, since I hadn't yet made the transition,* my response to that infatuation was to become a nun. I tried that path with great joy and dedication: I undertook spiritual direction and was on the verge of being an official postulant, the step prior to novitiate. In the end this was impossible because I had many confrontations with my mother, who demanded that I stay close to home so I could take care of her. More than that, though, I detected things that disturbed me. Even though there were many very committed nuns who quietly did very difficult social work, the inconsistencies of the more influential nuns and of the Church in general bothered me and generated contradictions. I wanted to live the Gospel in a total and radical way on a daily basis, but I was confronted with ecclesial wealth, blind obedience to power structures, lack of contact with reality, and extremism. I also was not perceived positively by the nuns who had the most power of decision in my process. Besides, obedience has never been my forte! Between one thing and another, my profession was frustrated, and although I never lost my love for Christ, life took me on other paths.

Sònia: Do you think these nuns sensed that you were a queer* person?

Txus: I think so. I have always been very non-binary in my gender expression.* This is a complicated issue for the Church, which tends to be sexist and cis-heterocentric, determined to be strict about sex and wedded to an unhealthy kind of normativity. What really confuses individuals and the wider community is not our diverse existences but this biased kind of thinking that gets translated into a paternalistic prescriptions. When I was young, I didn't know how to name what I felt myself to be. In the 1990s—you lived through them too—there was no information and nobody to talk to. Besides, I was from the country. I didn't know what to call it, but I did feel a very particular affection for a friend. The nuns looked down on these "particular affections." Relationships in consecrated communities continue to be an obscure, unresolved question. People feel guilty for committing no other "sin" than loving someone in an environment that dis-

courages tenderness and human support, and that's how religious life is. In fact, I know nuns from different congregations who for this reason alone were "invited to leave and discern." The situation caused them spiritual crisis and emotional trauma.

Sònia: It's traumatic because we are excluded for who we are. Then comes the demonization of our non-cis-heteronormative sexualities, which are grouped together with all the sexualities not oriented toward procreation in the framework of marriage.

Txus: We are also excluded because of what we "look like." In my case, I easily escaped the male-female binary with my free gender expression. Today the Church still institutionalizes the gender binary and teaches that the only healthy, correct, and sinless relationships are within a procreative marriage. Anyone who deviates from this cis-heteronormativity falls far outside of canonical blessing and lives "in sin." This exclusion also applies to divorced people and couples who are not married. It even applies to asexual persons because if they do not consecrate their asexuality to God, it is not celibacy. Finally, consecrated persons who marry or who live as a couple are often deprived of their vocation and ministry.

Sònia: This insistence on controlling people's sexuality has nothing to do with faith. The most important legacy of my father, may he rest in peace, is that God is love. He said it all the time. God is unconditional love, which makes no distinctions. And this where you and I enter the picture: you a trans-man* and I a cis-lesbian* woman. The religious structure that purports to legislate our bodies is irrelevant, and it doesn't jibe with the message of the Gospels. Jesus was always close to those who were marginalized by society and by civil and ecclesiastical power structures: women, the poor, the sick, prostitutes, foreigners, lepers, etc.

Txus: Now that you mention these groups, it occurs to me that some Church leaders have inherited from the Pharisees (Lk 18:9-14) the feeling of being among the "chosen ones" who reject "impurity" and have no concern for the disinherited. Jesus chose to associate precisely with the undesirables of society. The Church hierarchy maintains a classist, exclusionary vision, instead of opting for the radically compassionate social message of Jesus Christ. As a result, all those people who do not comply with ecclesiastical laws are anathematized. But those precepts are not from God, who is welcoming and loving. They are from powerful men, who have decided what is pure and what is impure, what can be done and what cannot be done, who can be let in and who must be kept out, who can be blessed canonically and pastorally and who cannot be blessed at all. LGBTIQ+ people remain impure, along with sex workers and other "deviant" groups. We will never receive legitimization, equality, or respect. The most we can hope for is lukewarm tolerance, but only after being told to practice a eunuch type of existence falsely called "celibacy".

The Firmness of Our Faith

Sònia: This connects me with the present, which inflicts on us a second pain. We have talked about the first pain, the distance we feel from the Church: the pain of exclusion from community. People make you believe that your faith is worthless; you are unworthy and “impure,” so how can your beliefs be worth anything? This pain attacks a very important part of your humanity: your desire for incarnated transcendence. I felt this second kind of pain after I rediscovered my faith. I felt it when I looked for communities where I could share my faith without being singled out, excluded, or violated. The two of us experienced many things that did not weaken our faith—they even strengthened it—but they still did us violence because of who we are. For example, when I went to Mass with my partner, the father of one of the girls with whom I was going to catechesis refused to give me the peace.

Txus: That is serious. It is precisely at the kiss of peace that there should be no borders between human beings. That is how Jesus loves us. Moreover, he commanded us not to let grievances divide us: “Leave your gift there before the altar, and go first and make peace with your brother or sister” (Mt 5:24). This man who denied you peace was not following what Jesus says. He was the one who should not receive communion.

Sònia: Absolutely. In fact, now, at 51 years of age, I have lived openly and proudly as a LGBTIQ+ person since I was 33, and I have done so without self-hatred (for which I thank the transfeminist movement). Indeed, my faith has been strengthened by the certainty that God loves me unconditionally. For this reason, the rejection I’ve experienced in certain situations within the Church does not hurt so much. At times, certain grotesque situations have made me laugh. For example, one day I was holding hands with a girl, and we crossed paths with a woman who, on seeing us, began to make the sign of the cross compulsively. As she looked at us, her eyes were like saucers, as if she had seen the devil.

But there is still a central issue where the Church continues to hinder LGBTIQ+ people in expressing their faith, namely, in the sacraments. The sacraments are essential; they connect our life experience with divinity. For example, the sacrament of reconciliation is about healing encounter with God’s love; it has nothing to do with indulging sterile guilt. It is a reaffirmation that God loves us, even when we are not aligned with his unconditional love. The same goes for the Eucharist, which includes prayer, thanksgiving, and spiritual presence. Because we are queer, the Church considers us unworthy to participate actively in the sacraments. It does not recognize us as a couple, and so we have not been able to marry by the faith that unites us. We don’t go to Mass except at our own parish for fear of being denied communion. Even though you would like to be canonically ordained a priest, you cannot be—nor could I, if I wanted to be, because I

am a woman and a lesbian. This exclusion prevents us from living the faith in a Catholic community as we would like to, that is, in freedom, joy, and equality.

Txus: True, but I would like to say that I profoundly believe that a new Church is coming into being, one in which we'll be able to live without exclusions. Actually, it's the ancient, primitive Church! I know that we will make progress in our spirited struggle to build inclusive communities. I am certain that we LGBTIQ+ persons value the virtues of resilience and endurance, so that our faith ends up being bombproof. Those of us who are Christians in these contexts feel ostracized by orthodoxy, but we have a strong and very genuine spirituality. No structure can destroy our interior faith or the super-strong connection we have with Christ within us. We go forward loving Jesus, and by our actions we try to live the Gospel every day in a consistent way. Even though the rest of the Church excludes us, we include everyone, and we do so because we know what rejection is. As we have sung many times at Mass, we feel "a joy that no one can take away from us."

BEING AND BELIEVING IN GOD'S LOVE

Niurka Gibaja Yabar

God loves me as I am. This experience of extreme, gratuitous love has deeply marked my life; it allows me to affirm myself every day as a child of God. I believe in a God made flesh, manifested especially in those occupying the margins of society, and also of the Church: the poor and LGBTI+ persons. We no longer want the compassion that serves to appease consciences; we want to be recognized in our full dignity.

A Life Full of Grace

To speak of what the God of Life is doing in my life is to open the eyes of my heart and to smile at freedom with open arms. So many years have passed since you touched my life like a gentle whisper, and I continue to respond with joy and gratitude to the question: *How could I be without you?* And the answer fills me with delight: it would not be possible. I am with you, and you are part of my life, my history, my process, my dark nights, my tears of pain, and my shadowy sadness. But you are also part of my joy and my prayerful repose in your arms. You give me the strength and the courage to BE and BELIEVE without fainting; you give me the joy and the hope to continue walking; and you give me the freedom to shout to the world: "This is me, unique and unrepeatable, and there is no other!"

In the Spiritual Exercises I viscerally understood that the most important thing is that You love me, and the Love I felt in response was the *founding experience* that made me go out into the world, proud to be who I am. The flame of your Spirit in my innermost being continues to burn fiercely, bearing witness to what you are doing in my daily praxis: in my solidarity with the feminist sisterhood; in my accompaniment of so many people dehumanized by structural systems; in my strength to continue defending human rights as you did; in my outstretched

arm that continues to lift up so many people denied their identity; in my faith that continues to announce and shout to the world the Good News of all you are doing in my life. Both secular society and the Churches (who claim to have the power of your authority) must understand that your Grace also flows through the lives of those who are denied the sacred treasure of *their Identity*.

The Church As a Shared Table

Is it possible to be a trans person and a believer? This is the great question overshadowing our lives. I say with profound certainty that yes, it is possible. In the Church there is room for everybody. The Love of the God of Life does not deny or reject any human being. If you say you love God and do not love other people, then you do not love the God of the Gospels. “Love one another as I have loved you.” These words are the basic pillar for following the God of Jesus. By understanding, feeling, and living this message evangelically, I am able to continue to live in integrity my Being and Believing in Jesus, the God made flesh in humanity. We LGBTI+ believers no longer want the crumbs of conscience-calming compassion, much less do we want an impoverished charity. We want dignity, which implies walking in equality of conditions, opportunities, and responsibilities within the Church. In short, we want and demand to be recognized in our Identity, and this means having a voice and a vote within the ecclesial structures in which we also were baptized.

The Church today is called to be a shared table where all people have a place. The Church of Jesus announces, welcomes, embraces, and places all of humanity on high thrones of glory, especially those discarded by the norms of institutions and the structures of society

The Church's Unfinished Business

We cannot fail to hear the voice of the suffering servant who cries out for justice in ecclesial structures. Among other topics at the Synod—such as women and sexual abuse—the cry for the dignity and full inclusion of LGBTI+ persons in the Church was also heard. The Church, in fidelity to the following of Jesus, has the great responsibility to *walk together with and listen to* all believers. We should not forget that those who “occupy the central place” in the Church of Jesus are the outcasts, among whom are the LGBTI+ persons who do not feel accepted in the Church. The Church of the Jesus of the Gospels is called to *heal wounds, seek forgiveness, recognize, and welcome* into its bosom all those who have been expelled to the hinterland for being the way they are.

To seek forgiveness, to recognize, and to welcome are three actions the Church must perform in relation to LGBTI+ believers. The Church should ask forgiveness for having denied us the dignity proper to children of God, for having expelled us from the shared table because of our orientation and gender identity. The Church must recognize that our identity is as valid and as blessed as any other. And the Church must welcome us as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father-Mother who gives freely without leaving anyone out. The recognition of LGBTI+ persons within the Church means nothing less than that we have voice, vote, sacramental blessing, and active participation in ecclesial life. We, in turn, have the responsibility to be a living testimony of the Jesus who gave his life to save us, dignify us, humanize us, and divinize us. This will be possible only if we put aside human strategies, political calculations, and ideological battles. Instead, we must stand up boldly, daring to speak with the heart of God and to see with the eyes of God.

EPILOGUE: FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Juanjo Peris

"As adult Christians, we have the full right and the full duty to share our concerns and hopes. We remain always open to the living God and to the welcoming spirit of our brothers and sisters in our co-responsible, communal Church. We always seek to overcome sterile bitterness, and we have the sincere will to give witness, open spaces, and create communion. [...] The Spirit of the Crucified and Risen Jesus accompanies you, especially in the midst of shadows and crosses. Because of Him, our life is already Easter."

Pedro Casaldáliga¹

Many queer life stories tell of suffering rejection and stigma, but they are also full of honesty, authenticity, courage, strength, and resilience. They move from shame and fear to pride and visibility; they move from darkness to light. Thank you Pili, Bea, Antonio, Sònia, Txus, and Niurka for asserting yourselves as adult Christians and sharing your stories with all of us. We need to hear life stories that help us to overcome our fears and that make us reflect.

It is not easy to be openly gay in the Church. We have inherited a vision based on a type of "Greek dualism between body and soul"; it was a vision that despised the body and led to "mistrust and condemnation of sex and sexual pleasure."² Unfortunately, the Church has had great difficulty in living with sex and gender diversity: sexual relations between people of the same sex have long been

1 Pedro Casaldáliga in an unpublished letter sent to the conference on "Christianity and Homosexuality," held in Torremolinos (Málaga) in March 2003.

2 Luís Corrêa Lima SJ, *Teología y LGBT+: Perspectiva histórica y desafíos contemporáneos*. Buena Prensa, 2022 (p. 16). Corrêa also writes: "'Be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1:28) was written at the time of the Babylonian exile. For people expelled from their homeland and subjected to a foreign power, growth was fundamental for the survival of the nation, culture, and religion" (p. 62). He

perceived as a sin, a crime, a disease, or a threat. The accusation of sodomy was even used to justify domination and conquest.

Many indigenous and pre-colonial cultures knew about and accepted same-sex intimacy or the existence of a third gender. An example of this was the “Two Spirits” culture found among the original peoples of North America. This umbrella term, which includes various practices from different cultures before colonization, refers to gender variations or same-sex relationships that enjoyed community acceptance. Many “Two-Spirited” persons even had roles of responsibility, a situation that persisted until the arrival of European settlers.

Many queer people have grown up without bearings, living in fear and silence. Growing up in a discriminatory and fear-ridden society led us to live in guilt and shame, depriving us of the tools we needed for self-discovery and vital information, such as consent. Most of the problems for which LGBTIQ+ persons seek professional help are linked to the rejection they’ve experienced, often starting with the family or school.³ Suicide rates are higher among LGBTIQ+ persons.

Acceptance of one’s identity is a point of no return for many queer people. Coming out is an exercise in authenticity and truth. For a Christian, it means recognizing yourself as made in the image and likeness of God and knowing that God loves you and blesses you when you act as a queer person, because you experience your identity as a gift from God.⁴

For many people of faith, however, coming to terms with one’s identity can cause a painful rupture; it can even put one’s membership in the Church in crisis. “What am I doing here?” asked Antonio. The search for communities where we can be authentic and feel safe is something we all share. The concept of “sexile” describes well the experience that leads queer people to migrate in search of a place where they can live more freely and fulfill their vocation without suffering rejection, discrimination, or violence.⁵

also states that “sexual sin” was understood as the action of the genital organs or the improper use of “seminal fluid” (p. 35).

3 I quote the testimony of a fellow member of the London Gay Men’s Chorus: “I have taken drugs for 18 years because of trauma experienced during childhood, bullying at school, and the loss of my partner to AIDS. Many of those years I was involved in chemsex. These behaviors almost destroyed my life. I finally recovered and got off drugs in 2015. I decided to start LGMCA after a fellow choir member asked me for help for his addiction.” (Chemsex consists in using psychoactive substances for the purpose of long-term sexual intercourse. LGMCA is a support group for members of the London Gay Men’s Chorus who suffer or have suffered from addictions.)

4 Miguel Sánchez Zambrano, *Homosexualidad. Las razones de Dios*, San Pablo, 2022.

5 Ignacio Elpido Domínguez Ruiz, *Tú a Soria, yo a Barcelona*, Egalet, 2023.

Joining forces with other marginalized folks has been part of the identity of many LGBTIQ+ groups since their origins.⁶ This solidarity continues to be crucial because it generates spaces of encounter and communion. Already in 1969, the same year as the Stonewall revolt in New York City, LGBTIQ+ Christians formed support communities where they could be openly believing and queer.⁷ Even in situations of extreme stigma and exclusion, such as in the HIV+ pandemic, we look for a Church that accompanies us and refrains from condemning people who are suffering.

Stories overflowing with authenticity, truth, and courage can be a light for the whole People of God. We cannot waste the gifts of queer people, who “bring us a unique message of compassion, forgiveness, and self-acceptance.”⁸ They can help us progress toward a Church in which diverse persons can develop all their gifts. Such a Church will provide a safe space for young LGBTIQ+ persons to grow up with dignity and will offer spaces of reconciliation for those who have wounds that need healing. We want a Church that offers pastoral care to LGBTIQ+ persons and their families, a Church where we all have access to the sacraments, a Church reconciled with our freer, more diverse, more inclusive, and thoroughly decolonized corporal reality.

Thanks again Pili, Bea, Antonio, Sònia, Txus, and Niurka for shedding fresh light with your stories. I hope they serve to open spaces and create communion.

6 For example, Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, icons of the Stonewall revolt, created the STAR movement, which provided a home for trans and gay youth who suffered violence in the streets. An example of transversality in Spain can be seen in Alejandro Marín’s film “Te estoy amando locamente” (2023), which shows how the LGBTQ+ movement in Andalusia was organized in close solidarity with other groups waging social struggles.

7 In 1969, the Augustinian priest Patrick X. Nidorf founded Dignity in the U.S. He said that it “it seems obvious that the church does not meet the needs of the gay community.” Later, in 1977, Sister Jeanine Gramick and Father Robert Nugent founded New Ways Ministry in New York, an initiative dedicated to helping gay and lesbian Catholics.

8 Alan Downs: *The Velvet Rage. Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man’s World*. LifeLong Books, 2012, p. xv.

TESTIMONIALS

Pili Gómez is the wife of Beatriz and the mother of twin sons, Andrés and Pedro. She works as a teacher in a public primary school. She is a member of the Christian Life Communities in Seville (CLC). She is a deeply believing woman of the Church who has experienced the strength and importance of the Christian community in her life. For this reason, she is determined to continue fighting, from within, for equality in the Church and for a Church that grows to the stature of Jesus, where everyone has a place.

Beatriz Blesa, Pili's wife, has a degree in Hispanic philology and a diploma in religious sciences. She provides education in a religious center and nurtures her faith in the Christian Life Communities. The CLCs help her to carry out her mission from a perspective that is international, communitarian, and periphery-oriented. She is very proud to be part of the Church and her community as a woman and a lesbian. At the ecclesial level, she joins enthusiastically with others in the Women's Revolt in the Church, and she works with the team in Seville that promotes diversity-oriented pastoral ministry (PADIS+G).

Antonio Cosías Gila has a teaching degree from the University of Seville and studied catechetics at the Center for Theological Studies in Seville. In 2004 he co-founded the Ichthys Association for LGBTI+ Christians of Seville, where he is currently responsible for the Ichthys Social Networks and is part of the Accompaniment Team for LGBTI believers. For several years he has published a reflection on the Sunday gospel every week in his "Uncloseted God" blog (disinarmario.blogspot.com).

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Niurka Gibaja Yábar is a trans woman, theologian, and human rights activist. She holds a theology degree from the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (El Salvador) and a master's degree in systematic theology from the Universidad Pontificia de Comillas. Currently, she is on the executive committee of the State Federation of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Trans, Intersexuals, and Others (FELGBTI+) and is a member of Crismhom (the LGBTI+H Christian Community of Madrid).

Juanjo Peris is a social worker who currently lives in London and works mostly on issues relating to protection of vulnerable people. He is a survivor of sexual abuse in the Church. He studied in the seminary and worked for Caritas in Andalusia and Morocco, but both spaces proved problematic when he revealed his sexual orientation. He participates in the Social Area of Cristianisme i Justícia, and he sings in the London Gay Choir.

GLOSSARY

Cisgender / Cis: the terms used to refer to the identities of those whose gender coincides with the sex assigned at birth.

Gender expression: the external manifestation of individual gender through names, gestures, behavioral patterns, or physical appearance (clothing, personal aesthetics, etc.). It may or may not coincide with the person's gender identity or with traditional behavioral roles.

Gender: a cultural construction associated with individuals based on the biological sex assigned at birth. It includes the expectations, prejudices, and stereotypes that a society assigns to individuals. In our context, it has traditionally been constructed according to the binary structure (male - masculine / female - feminine).

Heteronormativity: the social and cultural regime that imposes heterosexuality as the only normal, natural, and acceptable sexuality.

Gender identity: a person's interior experience of gender, which may or may not coincide with the gender assigned at birth.

LGBTIQ+: acronym for lesbian (L), gay (G), transgender (T), bisexual (B), intersex (I), queer (Q) and other (+) sexual and gender identities that break with heteronormativity. Other letters are sometimes added to the acronym (such as A for asexual).

Queer: umbrella term for people who do not feel represented in the binary framework of gender identity and/or gender expression. It can refer to LGBTIQ+ persons in general but also can extend beyond them. The original English term means "weird" or "strange." It was used historically in a derogatory manner, but it was reappropriated by LGBTIQ+ persons in their struggle for social change.

Transgender: umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression does not match the conventional expectations of the sex or gender assigned at birth.

Transitioning: the social, legal, and/or medical process that trans persons undergo to achieve comfort with their body and gender identity.

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.

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