



The author of *"The horror of the Islamic State: Syrian Christians and Iraqi refugees in Lebanon"* has visited Malaga to explain to groups of schoolchildren the situation of the persecuted Christians. Now Jaume Vives prepares a documentary about his recent trip to Iraq.

How did your vocation to denounce journalism arise?

At school, I spent more time in the director's office than in class. My family is Catholic, but I started to get away from the church: Party, girls, drink... Until there was something else. On a Saturday night, I met a group of young people who, instead of dedicating the dawn of Saturday to do nothing, to take time and throw it away, which is what I did, what they did was to travel the streets of the center of Barcelona distributing food and blankets to the people on the street. I remember coming from the party street, sitting in bed unable to sleep, still with the disco beep in my ears, looking at the floor and saying, "What a shitty life! What are you doing?" And yet return from being with the youth of San Jose, which is what it is called that group, and three minutes to be fried. And I thought, "I want to communicate this to people, who in theory are my friends, who are like me. That the good that has made me do it to other people and from there is born my passion for telling stories".

You tell unconventional stories...

After my experience with the youth of San Jose, I decided to tell the stories of the people of the street, elderly people who are dying alone in their homes, junkies, drunks, etc. I was starting from the basis that my limitations were that I would never feel loneliness as these people feel because I have my family and friends waiting for me at home. In other parameters, two and a half years ago, the same thing. I saw that there were Christians who, in the XXI century, we're dying for Christ. By not giving up on Christ they were losing everything: home, car or work. We are ashamed of Christ for ridicule, not to ascend at work or fear to lose him... Every day we say no to Christ and those people, who play live, are saying yes to Christ and losing everything, even their own lives. And I said: "Well, now you have to tell those stories that are an example for us." That moved me to go to Lebanon

two years ago and to Iraq this summer. From the first trip came a book and the second, God willing, a documentary will be released in January or February.

In what situation are the Christians in that country?

They are people who, a year and a half ago, lost everything, and everything is everything. They left with the change they had that day and nothing more. They arrive in cities or Christian neighborhoods that were designed for 8,000 people and, suddenly, have 60,000 inhabitants. You find people sleeping on the streets, in parks or abandoned buildings. Time passes and basically, it is the Church -not the governments, nor the ONGS who gets them tents. Displacement centers are built, but winter comes and the problems that the cold brings. So, the same thing: it is the Church that gets the stores replaced by freight containers like the ones we see in the ports, but enabled as homes. It is a subhuman situation. In summer they are ovens. If the air conditioner breaks down, you can barely breathe ... The little that has dignified its situation has been thanks to the Church, religious organizations such as Help to the Church in Need which is the institution, today in Spain, that more and better is helping these Christians.

In persecution, faith becomes firmer have you witnessed it?

There are impressive testimonies of faith. For example, a mother who is taken from her three-year-old daughter from her arms, abducted, knows nothing about her except that she is in Mosul with a Muslim family as a sex slave. They ask her if she forgives and says "I forgive those who kidnapped my daughter just as Jesus on the cross said: Father forgive them for because they do not know what they do". Or you see a parent who has been killed by the son while having breakfast quietly at his home in Qaraqosh and tells you that he is not angry with God, that this is the "Islamic State" thing, that they have never felt abandoned by God. You see people who are completely abandoned to the Lord's arms. These people would have every reason to rebel against God, because all the suffering they have comes from being Christians, for professing a faith. But they, instead of saying "why is this happening to me?", instead of shouting "Why?", are reaffirmed in their faith.

What do you have to teach Western Christians?

There, people no day stopped going to church to pray and was playing live, while here we complain if we have a bad schedule. You see that, for them, Christ is not an idea, nor a theory, nor are they voluntarist. They have only hope in God, not their strength. Here, sometimes, we go to mass to meet, we do this because it touches... For them, Christ is something concrete, it is something alive, as it can be son or house, and therefore they are willing to lose everything as long as they do not have to deny Christ.

The bishop of Qaraqosh Told us that he was very happy with his diocese because, despite having lost everything, despite having nothing, despite living very precariously with the little food and water that the church gives them; they care

about getting chapels, they don't stop practicing faith. The common life of the center of displaced is made around the life of the parish. Every morning, families will pray lauds; In the afternoon, the rosary; and every day at mass they have to put chairs outside because inside the church is not fit.

The transmission of faith must be difficult in these circumstances.

People know that by baptizing their children, for having a Christian name, when they are older they will most likely suffer persecution. And yet they baptize them. They know that being in a church, at any moment there can be an attack. We met a family father who had life solved, a lot of money and a good job, but that was a little frivolous on the subject of faith. He told us that on August 6th (the day they lost everything) the Lord entered his heart and transformed it. And you see that father who now spends his day talking about the Lord to his daughters. You see how those girls tell you that they forgive those who have done this to them. Then they are fortunate that there are a lot of Christian channels. They don't see nonsense there. There is a special channel for Muslim converts to Catholicism, Christian cartoon channels and catechesis for children. In the end, what unites people, families, is faith. When they have lost everything, they have nothing left, they only have faith. That is what families share in their internal and community jurisdictions.

What do they think of the dechristianization of Europe?

In Lebanon, it occurred to me to say to a family: "Look, I am here because in my country people are ashamed of the faith that you are dying for" and the guy caught a wave of impressive anger. He said, "I don't understand. How can people be ashamed of that! That's partly a problem that priests don't give you a reason to be proud of your faith". It is not just the fault of the priests, it is also the fault of the laity. But it is true that we are ashamed and say, "I will not speak of the Virgin in public because they will think that I am crazy". Certainly, their people respect very much the clergy and the nuns because they see how, being the only people who could leave there if they wanted, choose to stay with them. While everyone tries to flee, they stay and do not live in palaces, live in the centers of displaced with them. And not only that, but they are also responsible for these centers. This is not a privilege, but it is a very important burden because they have to watch, they have to take care of the families. Between 500 and 1,000 families are under their responsibility. They have to be aware that they do not lack water, food, electricity, because without air conditioning is a hell, that children do not lack education, that can study even in a precarious way... Not only do they not leave, but they work, and those who more.

They're giving a spectacular example.

Hunger, Ebola, war... Nothing seems to be able with the missionaries.

When war comes to a country, many NGOs are the first to march if they are not guaranteed security. If they don't let them work there, they will take care of the people of the country outside that country. When you see the NGOs running to March, the missionaries stay and come to help. The church has given an incredible testimony. The nuns of Libya, for example, are still there. You see the Dominicans who have killed a lot or the Daughters of the Sacred Heart. People who are giving up their lives for Christ and those Christians.

The bishops of the countries in which there is persecution ask us to pray are it any good?

We think it's no use, we've stopped believing that prayer has any effect, no power. We think it's a way to relax mentally ... It has real value and effectiveness to end this drama. Prayer has ended wars. If we are not aware of that, we are not going to pray. We are not going to pray! It is that Europe has lost faith. That is one of the reasons why Western media do not talk about this. There is talk of war, but not of persecution because it does not fit into our schemes that people are willing to die for Christ. And since it does not enter, we do not believe it and the media does not echo it. Likewise, since it does not fit into our schemes that faith is not a fairy tale and that prayer has power, we do not pray. They tell you: "Please pray for us. We pray for you." And the archbishop of Mosul, who was one of the last Christians who fled when the jihadists took him on June 10, 2014, told us: "two things: if you want to help us, pray for us and live the faith bravely and coherent where God has placed you".

The church has always considered the blood of the martyrs as the seed of new Christians.

The Bishop of Qaraqosh, Petros Mouche, told me that they are convinced that with their example flourish new vocations, new Christians. Not only in the east but also in the west. I mean, his martyrdom, his example, is going to help Europe recover some of that faith that it has lost. Father Douglas, the pastor in Baghdad, told us: "The grace of the blood of the martyrs is what allows us to continue in that country, that we have not yet disappeared."

Are these Christians among the refugees we are going to receive?

As a matter of statistics, most are Muslims. In Iraq, the percentage of Christians is between one and three percent. Most of them, in Kurdistan.

In the face of the reception of refugees, there are opinions on the ground what do you think?

This is a major challenge in which there are several things to consider. On the one hand, do not fall into naivety. We have a "good-looking" speech to take care of. All the people I met in Lebanon and Iraq, and not just civilians, but priests, bishops,

military, told us that the problem that they are suffering we already have in our homes, in Europe. Emil Nona, the Chaldeans archbishop of Mosul, in an Italian newspaper, said the same thing: "Our suffering is a prelude to the suffering that you, Western Christians, suffer". Here I always say something about the refugee issue: generosity and prudence. Generosity, and here we have a very clear example that is Lebanon. It has 4 million inhabitants, is 50 times smaller than Spain, is much poorer and also a few years ago was at war with Syria.; However, it is hosting 1.2 million registered refugees, 800,000 unregistered, as well as half a million Palestinians and thousands of Iraqis. Here in Europe, we fight if I take 3,000 or 5,000 because I cannot accept more. In this sense, we are quite sorry, but then you have to be prudent too.

But it runs the risk of being politically incorrect...

I have no problem talking about this, although sometimes our ears screech. I will quote what Father Douglas said: "Christians of the East are the only Christians in the world who have seen the face of evil, and the face of evil is called Islam. It is not called the Islamic State, it is not called jihadist terrorism, it is not called Muslim radicals, it is called Islam. Islamic State is Islam one hundred percent. The natural tendency of Islam is war ». That does not mean that all Muslims are miserable. There are beautiful Muslims and very unhappy Christians. But in the case of the Muslim, it will depend on how he positions himself concerning his religion. It is no coincidence that more than 90% of the countries where there is the persecution of Christians are Muslim countries. For a Christian, it is almost impossible to live in a Muslim country. Less than 10% are dictatorships: China, North Korea, Azerbaijan, etc. If we are not aware of that, if we are not aware of what Islam is, we will have a very serious problem. We think that they are a few and that they are a few uncontrolled in Syria and Iraq and that is not true. In the surrounding countries, there is no war, because in Saudi Arabia there is no war, the same is happening in Syria under the control of the Islamic State There are crucifixions, there are beheadings and no kind of freedom for Christians. In Iran, there are stoning to women who have committed adultery. And they are Muslim, Sunni or Shia countries, it does not matter. If the Westerner is not aware of what Islam is and falls into error, in the trap of that good-looking discourse, what is coming at us is quite fat. The Bishop of Qaraqosh told us: "Islamic State is already in your houses". There is one thing that cannot be forgotten and that all people have the same dignity. That is evident. This is something that cannot be discussed, but if we are not aware of what Islam is, we will have very serious problems. And, surprisingly, it is not the Sunni Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar or the Arab Emirates that welcome those refugees who are mostly Sunni Muslims ... We welcome them and they say they fund mosques here, but they do not welcome an only refugee that cannot be tolerated anywhere.

The World panorama looks dark. Is there any reason for hope?

God. That's the word of hope. I remember talking to a priest from a monastery in

Alqosh, almost the only Christian of Nineveh in which to-day the bells still ring, where you can continue celebrating mass, and said: "We have lost hope in every man. We know that humanly there is no hope, everything looks very black, we have felt abandoned by men even by Christians in the west, but we have not lost our hope in God. " And the same was said by Monsignor Emil Nona, and that is what he writes in the introductory letter of my book Journey to the Horror of the Islamic State: "What keeps us standing is our Christian hope which is the hope set in God." And that is the only hope that serves in this world because if we wait for men or ourselves, we will be frustrated again and again. The only one who does not disappoint is God.