

BELIEFS IN MUTUAL TRANSFORMATION: A DIALOGUE/CONVERSATION THAT “HEALS”

STORY OF JOSE LUIS ENCINAS FROM PERU



I currently participate in the Mutual Learning Program and the dialogue space it promotes. Therefore, I was inspired to share an experience with clients seeking psychotherapy that involves what collaborative dialogic practices might call the conversation between beliefs and mutual transformation.

Belief systems constitute a set of meanings shared by a human community and embedded in people's language to talk about certain things that are considered fundamental to their lives, practices, and decisions. Belief systems cannot be understood as one aspect of context alongside others. Beliefs are the context. From this perspective, beliefs are not the explanations we make about things, but rather, they become the things themselves because people experience and feel them that way.

Margarita turned 80 and called me one night. She brought not only the anguish of a grandmother, but also her faith. It wasn't an abstract faith, but one that had sustained her life, her community, and now her hope for Fernando. In collaborative-dialogical practices, we don't work on people's beliefs, but with them, because they are the ground from which they walk, the language that shapes their world.

Fernando, 16, carried a pain that wasn't his own, but that lived within him: his mother's screams, the story of an origin marked by violence, the shadow of anti-anxiety medications, and the desire to escape. Margarita, at 80, sought help, not from a place of helplessness, but from a place she knew well: her trust in prayer and, at the same time, in therapy. These weren't separate worlds for her. Why should they be for me?

When he asked me to call Fernando to convince him not to leave, I was tempted to act like "the expert." But something in his voice reminded me that imposed solutions rarely last. Instead of taking his place, I returned the question: "How could you talk among yourselves so that Alonso



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can have his day of peace?" It wasn't a technique; it was an invitation to let the wisdom of his family find its own voice.

Two days later, Margarita called me again. Her story moved me: she had gone to church, had prayed until she felt the Blessed Sacrament responding. The solution—an entire Sunday for Fernando, free and sacred—didn't come from a therapeutic manual, but from a dialogue between his faith and his love for his grandson. Alonso accepted. Not out of obedience, but because the offer resonated within him as a legitimate space, mediated by something greater than all of us.

My colleague asked me afterward, "Do you really believe the Blessed Sacrament spoke to him?" And my answer was simple: "Yes, I do." Not because I deny other explanations, but because in the dialogical space, what matters is not the "objective truth," but the lived truth. For Margarita, the Blessed Sacrament had spoken. For Fernando, that voice was valid. And for me, it was a reminder that therapy is not about directing, but about listening: listening to the beliefs, the silences, the symbols that are already there, waiting to be summoned.

The sacred in the everyday

In this approach, there are no hierarchies between the "rational" and the "spiritual," between the "therapeutic" and the "religious." Instead, there is a web of meanings that are transformed in dialogue. Margarita didn't need me to provide a solution; she needed me to trust that she could find it. And she did so in the most human way possible: praying, doubting, listening, and, in the end, acting from what was sacred to her.

Fernando didn't need a speech about autonomy; he needed his own Sunday. A Sunday that, curiously, arrived wrapped in the language of the divine, but that spoke of something very human: the right to breathe.

The mutual transformation

This process not only changed Fernando and Margarita. It changed me too. It reminded me that, as therapists, we are not translators of other people's realities, but rather participants in a conversation where we are all transformed. Margarita taught me that sometimes, the most powerful resource is not in our theories, but in the faith, love, or intuition of those who come to us.

And perhaps, deep down, that's what collaboration is all about: the certainty that no one has the last word, but together we can find it—in a church, on a Sunday, in the silence after a prayer. Because healing doesn't always come from what we know, but from what we are willing to hear.