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Iglesia Descalza

a voice from the margins of the Catholic Church

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Teresa Forcades: "The flow of life can not be held back"

By Gemma Tramullas (English translation by Rebel Girl)

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Benedictine nun. Born in Barcelona in 1966. She's a medical doctor with a PhD in Public Health, a PhD in Theology, a feminist, anti-capitalist and a supporter of independence for Catalonia. The profound freedom and harshness with which she expresses her opinions on the medicalization of the body, sexuality and power cause small earthquakes every time she opens her mouth. Since April, she has been pushing a constitutional process to create a new model of government in Catalonia.



These first lines came from the 45th minute of the interview or -- what is the same thing -- this interview starts at the end, at the moment Teresa Forcades offers the best portrait of herself from a personal interpretation of a passage from the Old Testament: "The flow of life can not be held back," she says in a visiting room at the monastery of Sant Benet de Montserrat. "The most precious thing anyone has is this ability to live life every day, taking risks, and extracting pleasure from that risk. So we're excited to see someone who lives openly. Life isn't a scavenger hunt or something closed. It's a dialectic between the fascination of talking about freedom and the fear of being free. These are the basic dimensions through which happiness and the meaning of life come." Take that! Let the pharmaceutical companies, political and financial elites and the church hierarchy tremble, for here is Sister Teresa, the monastic version of Lou Reed's "Walk On The Wild Side".

In the monastery, you're just one among thirty-seven nuns, but outside, you're famous. How is that?

On a personal level, it's a pleasure because I get to rest from the media attention, which is like a servitude that I put up with sportingly. Not having this special attention in my community is essential for my mental health.

For you Benedictines, "nothing is easy, but everything is possible." But I fear that reaching 100,000 supporters for the constitutional process as you had planned might not be possible.

It's true that first I said we would reach this figure by Sant Jordi Day [St. George's Day - April 23rd] and now I'm saying by September 11th. Until then we're still in the process of seeing whether it jells or not, but a constitutional process is not a campaign to collect signatures.

Yeah, but it's been three months since you filed the initiative with the economist Arcadi Oliveres and you're at 40,000.

The most essential thing for the process to jell is not quantitative but qualitative. The treasure of the constitutional process is diversity, bringing together grassroots Christians, the *indignados*, radical leftist groups, and individuals who aren't from here or there, who don't identify with any social movement, but in whom this project inspires confidence. These politically unorganized people are our audience.

If you had gone on Tele 5, there might now be 400,000.

I don't know, because I have no interest in going there. We don't want masses of people who wave little flags at rallies; we need political activists. Nobody should sign up for the process who thinks this will be easy, because a revolution involves changing the rules of the game of a society and this means a possibility of social disruption, even confrontations. We are peaceful, democratic, and don't want to promote any kind of violence, but this isn't a treasure hunt. We're talking about changing society. If people sign up "to see if Arcadi and Teresa get us out of the crisis, it will be a resounding failure.



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But you wouldn't deny your popular appeal.

People active in politics asked me to push this process with Arcadi because they said I had cross sector credibility, but this isn't something personal. So that you'll see I'm consistent, I'll give you a scoop (*this interview was conducted in late June, so the scoop is history*). Next semester, I'm teaching classes at the School of Theology in Berlin. I'm not thinking of leaving the process hanging. I'll come every month and do what I have to do, but I don't feel that I'm running anything. That would be the worst of the worst, on a personal and country level.

You could have expressed your concerns like [Femen](#), using their naked bodies to make a political statement, but instead you do it wearing the habit.

The habit is a facilitator of freedom for me. In contemporary society, the weight of image is very strong, especially for women. I'm doing a study on the medicalization of genital cosmetics and it's appalling. What are we doing? Labiaplasties (labia majora and labia minora surgeries) are genital mutilation! When we say genital mutilation, we think it's something barbarians do, but here they do the same thing to you in a gynecological practice. And not only that, but the whole cult of youth. In that sense, a monastery is a place of freedom and sensibility.

Come on... Do they accept women with children?

Yeah, but not with the kids in here. (*she laughs*) But it's not like, since you're feeling oppressed, you go to the monastery. It only makes sense to come to this place if you have an inner experience of relationship with God and you feel called to this life.

You're often attacked through sex, as if because of being a nun, you were an asexual, repressed, frigid being.

For me the spiritual ideal is to vibrate with the full range of human emotions, and that naturally includes desire, which is one of the most creative dimensions of life. I don't think a person can be fulfilled while amputating their sexuality. I don't know if it's possible to enter a monastery and set aside everything sexual. In any case, it's not my experience. The ability to fall in love sexually has not disappeared in me and when that happens, it causes commotion in you, just as if you were in a couple and felt attraction towards another person. What do you do? You have to listen to what your sexuality and your affection are saying to you and see what you do with that. It's not about being repressed, but reframing what you're experiencing in a life that has some objectives and commitments.

You were a whirlwind in school. What's left of that girl?

I still have the curiosity and confidence and I think I've managed not to let uneasiness and dissatisfaction beat me down so much. As a child, I wasn't happy. I felt I didn't have any space, either at school or at home, or during adolescence, but this is no longer my dominant mark now.

The routine in the monastery is rigid. It's noon and you've already been up six hours.

Well, I have to admit that today I woke up later because I was at an event yesterday until late at night and ...

What patience the mother abbess must have with you...

You're absolutely right. You can write that now. She and all of them, because she looks favorably on the process, but one must also cherish the nuns who don't view it favorably and yet don't do anything to get me thrown out. When I was asked to promote the constitutional process, before saying yes I had to talk to my community about it. We had a discussion and voted, because some said "No way", "Don't get involved", and others, "Oh, great!"

What's your best time of day in the monastery?

The two individual prayer times. I usually read the Gospel of the day. I read the words that are supposed to have been uttered by a person who I believe is God, who is the first love who began the world and the one who waits for me and -- "zzzzp" (she makes a takeoff gesture) -- it resizes me, the antennas open and unfold. If I knew a resizing larger than what for me is living, I would choose it, but for now, this is the greatest.

You've always had a very strong relationship with nature. Does your tight schedule still allow it?

On Mondays and Tuesdays I go to a secret location in the mountains. For two days no one knows where I am and I don't see anyone. The community lets me do this; if not, I wouldn't endure.

Posted by [Rebel Girl](#) at 3:03 PM 

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