

1.2.- In Anger: Primo Levi



Primo Levi was born in Turin in 1919 to a Jewish family. He fought in the anti-fascist resistance in 1941. Primo Levi was one of the 7500 Italian Jews deported to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. He was one of the survivors. He tells his experience in his book *The Truce* (1963). He never forgot the horror he saw and suffered. Other testimonies from his suffering were *If this is a man* (1958) or *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), among others. He died in 1987.

"His hair and beard were grey, the beard greyer than his hair. He had an ironic look and a mischievous smile. A very structured intelligence, with detailed memories. At some point during the interview, he took the paper on which I had written my questions and drew the map of Auschwitz on the back: with the central Lager, the annexe camps and with the names of some prisoners. He spoke quietly, without interruption: I mean, without resentment. Many times I have wondered about this mildness, about this gentleness. And the only reason I could find is that Levi did not shout, he did not insult, he did not accuse, because he did not want to shout; he wanted something more: he was getting us to shout. He renounced his own reaction to provoke ours. His reasoning was courageous. His mildness, his gentleness, his smile—which had something shy, almost child-like about it—were actually his weapons." F. CAMON, in J. FUCHS, "The Power of Words".

If this is a man (1947)
You who live safe
In your warm houses,
You who find, returning in the evening,
Hot food and friendly faces:
Consider if this is a man
Who works in the mud
Who does not know peace
Who fights for a scrap of bread
Who dies because of a yes or a no.
Consider if this is a woman,
Without hair and without name
With no more strength to remember,
Her eyes empty and her womb cold
Like a frog in winter.
Meditate that this came about:
I commend these words to you.
Carve them in your hearts
At home, in the street,
Going to bed, rising;
Repeat them to your children,
Or may your house fall apart,
May illness impede you,
May your children turn their faces from you.
Primo Levi, in *If this is a Man*, 2003.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Look for information about Primo Levi. What is Auschwitz? What happened there? Why?
2. What characteristic would you highlight in Primo Levi's personality? Why? Could you please establish a relation with the photo?
3. What situation is Primo Levi describing in this poem?
4. What do we learn from this poem?
5. When is a human being no longer a human being?
6. The term "dignity" is not in this text, but it could help you. What constitutes a person's dignity? How would you relate the dignity of a person with the name of this unit "The Integral Dimension of a Person"?