

# TRAS LAS HUELLAS DE SÓCRATES: REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA EJEMPLARIDAD Y LA EDUCACIÓN DEL CARÁCTER

SARA MARTÍNEZ MARES  
JUAN LUIS FUENTES  
(Editores)



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“Y en verdad que podría tal vez decirme alguien: «¿No te avergüenzas, Sócrates, de haber observado una conducta tal, que ahora te pone en peligro de muerte?» A ese yo le replicaría con toda razón: «Estás en un error, amigo mío, si crees que un hombre que valga algo, por poco que sea, ha de pararse a considerar los riesgos de muerte, y no ha de considerar solamente, cuando obra, si lo que hace es justo o no lo es o si es propio de un hombre bueno o de un hombre malo»”.

Platón (ed. 1990). Apología, en *Obras completas*. Aguilar. 26e-28c



## In memoriam

A todas aquellas personas que perdieron la vida en poblaciones valencianas en 29 de octubre de 2024. A quienes las recordarán por haber ayudado a construir sus vidas y a formar parte de su historia, aunque el dolor evoque la pregunta desgarradora de la pérdida de un amigo: «¿Adónde podía huir mi corazón que huiese de mi corazón?» (Agustín, *Confesiones*, IV, 7).

A ti, porque sí que “llegaste a tiempo” a por tu madre, puesto que has contribuido a que ella tenga un sentido y haya vivido una vida.

A todas aquellas personas que sintieron una oscuridad y soledad aterradoras el miércoles 30 de octubre de 2024 en las localidades valencianas y en otras cercanas, porque ese día no hubo ayuda, no se supo ver la magnitud de la tragedia.

A todas aquellas personas que empiezan de nuevo, porque hacen suyo lo más excelente de las capacidades humanas, “la de transmutar una tragedia personal en un triunfo” (Frankl en *El hombre doliente*); para aquellos que podrán decir “mis bienes se han hundido, pero esto no me ha hundido a mí”.

A todas aquellas personas que siguen adelante porque el amor les empuja a hacerlo, porque hacen suya la frase del *Cantar de los Cantares* “Es fuerte el amor como la muerte (...) Grandes aguas no pueden apagar el amor, ni los ríos anegararlo” (Ct, 8, 6.7).

A todas aquellas personas que han escuchado sin dilación el antiguo grito de los débiles expresado en el libro del *Génesis*: “se oye la sangre de tu hermano clamar a mí desde el suelo” (Gn, 4, 10). A todas las personas que han hecho ríos, ríos humanos que muestra que sigue vivo el sentimiento de humanidad y de esperanza, porque encarnan dichos de antiguos filósofos y místicos “La adversidad es ocasión de virtud” (Séneca); “...y la luz brilla en las tinieblas, y las tinieblas no la vencieron” (Jn, 1, 5).

A todas aquellas personas que transforman en bien las corrientes aplastantes del mal, porque no desisten en “volver a hacer por amor lo que hace la gravedad” y porque muestran que: “la pendiente de la naturaleza propici[a] la subida hacia el bien” (Simone Weil en *La gravedad y la gracia*, 2002, p. 183).

A todas aquellas personas que hacen suya, a día de hoy, la frase de Hamlet: «Los tiempos están confusos. Oh, maldita desgracia, que haya nacido yo para ponerlos en orden», porque con sus capacidades materiales, personales o profesionales, ponen orden en el campo de batalla y recorren largas distancias para paliar el sufrimiento.

A todas aquellas personas cuya compasión habla al resto del mundo y dice que no somos sólo materia, números y álgebra, sino que, como “Electra, la hija de un rey poderoso, reducida a esclavitud, con la esperanza puesta sólo en su hermano, encuentra a un joven que le anuncia la muerte del hermano –y en el momento más rotundo de su desamparo, se descubre que ese joven es su hermano”. Como María Magdalena, desesperada igualmente al no encontrar el cadáver de su maestro, y detiene a un desconocido “jardinero” para preguntarle, siendo ese jardinero su mismo Maestro... Para todos los que ayudan a “reconocer al hermano en un desconocido”, porque es también “reconocer a Dios en el universo” (Weil en *La gravedad y la gracia*, 2002, p. 167).

A todas aquellas personas ejemplares, a “los santos de la puerta de al lado” (Papa Francisco), a todos aquellos que responden ante lo trágico de manera virtuosa y nunca han sido reconocidos, porque “¿cuándo te vimos hambriento y te dimos de comer, o sediento y te dimos de beber? ¿Cuándo te vimos forastero y te acogimos, o desnudo y te

vestimos? ¿Cuándo te vimos enfermo o en la cárcel, y acudimos a ti?” (Mt, 25, 37-39), y no lo saben, ni tampoco necesitan darle importancia, sólo lo hacen.

A todas aquellas personas que se resisten a posicionarse del lado de una lectura partidista, divisoria y polarizada. “Leemos las opiniones sugeridas por la gravedad”, decía de nuevo Simone Weil, esto es, desde el “papel preponderante de las pasiones [que uno salga bien parado] y del conformismo social [forzar a una opinión mayoritaria]”. A todas aquellas personas que se esmeran en “prestan atención a la realidad”, en otras palabras, ver que el sufrimiento no tiene color político. El samaritano es quien ayuda al judío herido: en la colectividad, enemigos, en lo particular, en el rostro del otro, prójimos.

A todos aquellos que necesitan denunciar la injusticia aunque no pretendan aumentar el círculo del odio, porque es legítimo pedir cuentas, como cuando ordena el sumo sacerdote golpear a Pablo en la boca tras una denuncia legítima y no se limitó a sufrir en silencio el ultraje, sino que respondió al pontífice: «Y a ti te golpeará Dios, muro blanqueado! ¿Y tú, que estás sentado para juzgarme según la ley, me mandas golpear contra la ley?» (Act, 23, 2 s).

Permítannos una aparente dedicación paradójica. A todas aquellas personas que, como último viso de esperanza, puedan dejarse llevar incluso por el ejemplo de Aquiles, a quien Apolo describe ante los dioses como “pernicioso, el cual concibe pensamientos no razonables, tiene en su pecho un ánimo inflexible y medita cosas feroces, (...) espíritu soberbio, se encamina a los rebaños de los hombres para aderezarse un festín (...) perdió Aquiles la piedad y ni siquiera conserva el pudor”. Aquiles tenía el cadáver de Héctor ya 9 días sin sepultar, una trasgresión impía y cruel que cometió dominado por la venganza; no obstante lo iracundo que pudo llegar a ser, ante la súplica del viejo rey Príamo, padre de Héctor, que fue a escondidas a pedirle el cadáver de su hijo diciéndole “respeta a los dioses, Aquiles, y apiádate de mí, acordándote de tu padre” (*Ilíada*, XXIV). Aquiles lo admiró y lloraron juntos acordándose cada uno de sus muertos, devolviéndole el cadáver de Héctor tras pagar su rescate (esto es, le deja honrar al cadáver).

También a todas aquellas personas que intentan sacar tajada del sufrimiento, porque “el mal ejemplo absuelve, el bueno condena” (Gomá en *Universal concreto*), porque vemos buenos ejemplos constantemente, porque los testigos permanecen aquí, en el lugar donde ocurre lo trágico y no sólo en los medios de comunicación, y porque el tiempo pondrá todo en su lugar.

# Índice

PRÓLOGO .....	13
José Manuel Pagán Agulló	
Capítulo I. A vueltas con la ejemplaridad: por qué la educación moral debería tomarla en cuenta.....	15
Sara Martínez Mares - Juan Luis Fuentes	
<b>PRIMERA PARTE. Claves actuales para la orientación del profesorado</b>	
Capítulo II. La ausencia de referentes en la educación. Origen, desafíos y vías de respuesta ante la emergencia educativa actual .....	35
Ana Risco Lázaro	
Capítulo III. The walking teacher: saints, heroes, and sages ‘in potential’ .....	51
Alicia Encío	
Capítulo IV. Testimony, exemplarity and moral education .....	65
Jorge López González	
<b>SEGUNDA PARTE. Teorías filosóficas y psicopedagógicas fundamentales en la ejemplaridad y el liderazgo</b>	
Capítulo V. Reflexiones para una ética de las virtudes personalista: la Psicología Positiva y la Teoría del Ejemplarismo Moral a la luz de la antropología de K. Wojtyla.....	79
Jesús Ibáñez Pérez	
Capítulo VI. La <i>relación interpersonal</i> , camino para la educación moral .....	95
Miriam Martínez Mares	
Capítulo VII. Ética del liderazgo en el pensamiento de Joanne B. Ciulla: Una reflexión en torno a la ejemplaridad moral del buen líder.....	109
Sara Carballeda	
Capítulo VIII. Metodología de emulación moral para el desarrollo del liderazgo ....	123
Jorge López González, Alejandro Landero y Salvador Ortiz de Montellano	

### **TERCERA PARTE. Filosofías de la ejemplaridad: El camino abierto por las escuelas de la antigüedad**

Capítulo IX.	Imitando a Sócrates. El ejemplarismo socrático en Aristófanes, Jenofonte y Platón .....	137
	Miquel Solans	
Capítulo X.	Perfección y humanidad del sabio estoico.....	153
	Daniel Doyle Sánchez	
Capítulo XI.	La mártir Vibia Perpetua (s. III A. D.): <i>exemplum fidei</i> .....	169
	Ángel Aleixandre Blasco	
Capítulo XII.	Caminos hacia el florecimiento: antiguos modelos de vida ejemplar.....	183
	Maria Silvia Vaccarezza	

### **CUARTA PARTE. Desarrollo moral a través de narrativas y obras artísticas de diversa índole**

Capítulo XIII.	Ejemplaridad moral y fragilidad en los hermanos Dardenne. <i>Tori y Lokita</i> (2022), paradigma del cine que educa la mirada y distingue entre modelos imitables .....	197
	Amparo Aygües Cejalvo	
Capítulo XIV.	Ejemplares morales en el cine de Capra. El papel de la mujer en <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i> .....	211
	Gracia Prats-Arolas	
Capítulo XV.	Acciones históricas ejemplares. Referentes para la educación secundaria .....	227
	Guadalupe Pérez Torregrosa	
Capítulo XVI.	“Anda con sabios y te harás sabio”. Conocerse y reconocerse en el ejemplo a través de las narraciones bíblicas .....	237
	Ana Belén Álvarez Haya	
Capítulo XVII,	Meursault o el martirio de un asesino.....	250
	Inmaculada Cuquerella Madoz	
EPÍLOGO	.....	262
	Santiago Alfonso López Navia	

# CAPÍTULO IV

## Testimony, exemplarity and moral education

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### SUMMARY

Moral exemplarity is a topic that has recently received increased attention from scholars in moral education, particularly since the work of Linda Zagzebski. In particular, the effectiveness and risks of role modeling have been discussed. Based on the discussion of Linda Zagzebski's ideas on admiration and exemplarity in the field of moral education, we introduce the notion of “testimony” as a complementary category alongside the notion of a “model”. Originating from the forensic domain, “testimony” is of relevance in theological discourse, referring to individuals who attest to known truths, typically based on firsthand experiences. Some classical biblical and theological texts shed light on the use of testimony in education.

This approach has a twofold educational value: first, it enables teachers to courageously transmit known truths despite their personal imperfections; second, it focuses students' attention critically from the character of the teacher to the truths and values implicit in the teachings.

### KEYWORDS

Exemplarism, testimony, model, moral education, virtue

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## 1. Introduction

Based on the discussion of Linda Zagzebski's ideas on admiration and exemplarity in the field of moral education, we introduce the notion of “testimony” as a complementary category alongside the notion of a “model”. Originating from the forensic domain, “testimony” is of relevance in theological discourse, referring to individuals who attest to known truths, typically based on firsthand experiences.

This approach holds a dual educational value: firstly, it empowers teachers to courageously transmit established truths despite their personal imperfections; secondly, it redirects students' attention from the character of the teacher to the truths and values embedded in the teachings. In doing so, it acknowledges the limitations of educators while empowering students to pursue moral learning regardless of their teachers' imperfections.

This article begins with a concise overview of Zagzebski and Bandura's propositions regarding moral exemplarism and modeling. Subsequently, we delve into the characterization of the witness's role, drawing insights from biblical texts and theological reflections on the teacher's function as a witness.

## 2. Moral exemplarism and modeling

Moral exemplarism is a multidisciplinary field that involves psychologists, educators, philosophers, sociologists, and theologians. In recent years, the “Exemplarist Moral Theory” (EMT) has sparked debates on moral education. According to EMT, moral learning occurs through emulation of the moral exemplars we admire or disdain, following reflection upon them (Zagzebski, 2010; 2017). In this way, individuals establish the foundation for their ethical concepts and moral practices. EMT defines moral virtues as traits we admire in exemplary individuals or models, traits that embody virtue.

Modeling, on the other hand, has been promoted by many educational and psychological theories, from the followers of Kohlberg's cognitive development theory to Noddings' ethical care approach, but above all by the neo-Aristotelian tradition of character education (Sanderse, 2024). While recognizing the inevitability of moral modeling and the influence exerted by certain individuals as moral examples, questions have arisen regarding the epistemological limitations of EMT, the perceived overemphasis on moral modeling, and the potential risk of it being used as a tool for manipulation and indoctrination (Brooks et al., 2022; Carr, 2019; 2023; Croce, 2019; Kotsonis, 2020; 2023; Szutta, 2019). Research has shown that non-exemplary or imperfect individuals, who are closer and more reachable, can also play a significant role in shaping individuals' moral practices (Han et al., 2017; Han & Graham, 2023). Additionally, belonging to a group and its values influences how individuals evaluate the behavior of moral models. Individuals are inspired and influenced by the behavior of moral models within their own group (Telesca et al., 2024).

This has led to a distinction being made between moral exemplars and role models. Moral exemplars serve as imitable existential examples of living virtuous lives, while role models inspire emulation on how to achieve certain moral ends in ordinary life, without necessarily imitating their specific behaviors (Henderson, 2024; Sanderse, 2023). In any case, the student remains the primary agent of their education, even in the moral sphere. Therefore, modeling should not be viewed as mere mimicry.

We learn not only from our actions but also from the information we receive from others (Bandura et al., 1963). By modeling, we acquire not only the skills necessary for certain tasks but also attitudes and behavioral norms that we apply in new contexts:

Much of human behavior is learned through observation and modeling. By observing others, individuals develop behavioral guidelines, which subsequently guide their own actions (...) Social learning often occurs through observing the behaviors of others and the consequences that follow. However, one significant advantage of modeling is its ability to convey widely applicable knowledge to large audiences through symbolic representations. By interpreting behaviors depicted through language and imagery, observers can transcend the limitations of their immediate surroundings (Bandura, 1986, p. 47).

Modeling occurs not only through observable actions (live modeling) but also through verbal communication (verbal modeling), even in the absence of real-life models.

The impact of verbally presented models is well-documented in experimental social psychology research (Bandura & Mischel, 1965). Learners selectively assimilate information that is meaningful to them, applying it to their own lives. Instruction is most effective when verbal explanations are complemented by observed demonstrations (White & Rosenthal, 1974). The modeling process is complex, and individuals may emulate behaviors of models even if they do not necessarily value their attributes positively, particularly if it results in gaining control over rewards (Bandura, 1969). However, individuals typically prefer to align their behaviors with values that maintain cognitive consistency in their self-concept. Thus, when individuals perceive shared characteristics with positively regarded models, they internalize other attributes of those models (Bandura, 1969).

In order to contribute to the discussion on moral exemplarism and moral education, this paper aims to explore the role of testimony in moral learning. According to our proposal, we not only learn from models but also from witnesses who, despite not being admirable themselves, influence our ethical decisions. While acknowledging the importance of models in moral learning, it is essential to consider the significance of witnesses.

While a witness is first and foremost someone who, through their words or actions, provides evidence that allows for judgment, they may also be worthy of admiration or emulation for his or her life consistent with his or her testimony. However, their intention is not solely to serve as a model but rather to transmit and communicate a truth. Testimony involves affirming the truth of events one has known and presenting them to others who serve as judges. Initially developed in the forensic context related to courts, the concept of testimony also extends to the moral and religious domains, where it plays a crucial role in establishing beliefs and guiding ethical conduct.

Similar to courtroom proceedings, there are moral witnesses who offer evidence for moral judgments to those who listen to them. These individuals do not position themselves as models (although they may be) but rather as witnesses to moral values. Understanding the role of testimony is crucial in moral education:

- a) It allows educators to bear witness to moral values even if they themselves are not exemplary models of those virtues. Many teachers in schools and universities hesitate to engage in moral education due to doubts about their own moral standing.
- b) It provides learners with the opportunity to critically engage with their teachers' perspectives, even if those teachers are not perfect role models.

The transmission or communication of a truth is the intention of the action of witnessing. What the witness seeks is not to be imitated or admired but for those who see

and hear him to "wake up" and discover a value, a truth, a good for their lives. From a witness, above all, we admire the good and truth they teach us, which resides not in him but in another to whom they bear witness and refer. The witness redirects our gaze, attention, and admiration towards a third party.

While it is agreed that possessing moral understanding is a fundamental epistemic and moral value, there remains controversy over whether it can be acquired through testimony or solely through intellectual exercise (Croce, 2020; Groll & Decker, 2014; Leonard, 2021). According to Zagzebski, we can reasonably treat exemplary models as epistemic authorities when they offer testimony, even when their domain of epistemic exemplarity is in the moral domain (Zagzebski, 2012). However, other authors argue that the testimony of exemplary models does not provide sufficient reasons for everyone to act as they do (Archer & Dennis, 2023).

Following Croce (2020), testimony is a pathway to moral understanding that includes a cognitive component for those who accept testimony, requiring intellectual engagement. Both the speaker and the recipient of testimony must engage in epistemic work. The speaker must convey true and justified propositions in a way that the listener can grasp their meaning. The listener, in turn, must apprehend the received propositions in order to understand and assess their significance.

Testimony is not an alternative route to moral reasoning and understanding but rather a complementary one. Being virtuous doesn't solely entail acting rightly; it also involves possessing appropriate moral judgment, even if one cannot articulate it. Similarly, when someone accepts moral testimony, they must engage in moral judgment. If they were to accept it without any judgment, the testimony wouldn't serve as a pathway to moral understanding, even if the testimony received were true. Virtue necessitates not just acting rightly but doing so for the right reasons. However, these reasons are not exclusively discursive.

In this context, John Henry Newman's (1960) insights on the illative sense, which can be applied to testimony, are illuminating. Newman employs the metaphor of a rope composed of various fibers, each akin to probable propositions. Individually, these propositions lack the strength to support a relatively heavy object. However, collectively, they become practically unbreakable, providing certainty:

It is evident that formal logical inference is not the method by which we actually attain certainty about concrete matters. Furthermore, after considering the preceding points, the true and necessary method becomes clear. It is the accumulation of mutually independent probabilities resulting from the nature and circumstances of the particular case at hand. These probabilities are too subtle and intricate to be formulated into syllogisms. Even if they were, they would be too numerous and diverse for such conversion (Newman, 1960, p. 261, translation by the authors).

### **3. Testimony in biblical texts**

Testimony, as previously mentioned, originates from the forensic and judicial domain, inherently entwined with morality. A witness is tasked with truthfulness to ensure justice through their testimony. Testimony also carries a fiduciary dimension, as witnesses not only recount what they've seen but also seek belief (Ricoeur, 2000). While testimony of oneself is possible (for instance, when a witness is simultaneously accused), it generally pertains to a third party.

The category of “testimony” is abundantly used in the Bible. In the Old Testament, prophets are the epitome of witnesses, interpreting and conveying God's will. They testify to God's existence (Ezekiel 6:7, 13-14; 7:4, 9, 27; 13:9, 21, 23), as does the people of Israel, chosen by Yahweh to bear witness to His goodness and power (Isaiah 43:8-13). The New Testament further elaborates on this theological concept, particularly regarding God's truthfulness. God is depicted as a witness (Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Philippians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:5, 10), Christ as a faithful witness (Revelation 1:5; 3:14), and believers as witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 22:20; Revelation 2:13; 17:6). The forensic aspect of testimony is evident in passages such as Matthew 18:16; 26:65; Mark 14:63; Acts 6:13; 7:58; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28.

In his letters, St. Paul also discusses the testimony of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16). Among the Synoptic Gospels, Luke extensively employs this category. According to Luke's theology, the apostles, akin to the prophets, serve as witnesses who have firsthand experienced Christ's teachings, ministry, and resurrection (Acts 4:20–22; 10:39). They testify not only to Christ's resurrection but also to His teachings and mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Consequently, they proclaim boldly: “We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Notably, God's assistance as the defender of Christ's witnesses is emphasized, especially in their encounters with adversarial authorities (Luke 12:10-12; Acts 6:16).

Among the various biblical texts, the writings of Saint John stand out for their extensive use of the category of testimony and the role of the witness. Saint John's emphasis on testimony, particularly in his gospel, is unparalleled in the entire New Testament (Brown, 1979; Hong, 2005). Below, we succinctly outline some of these characteristics concerning the witness and testimony as presented by Saint John in his gospel and the book of Revelation:

- Testimony is conveyed through a word (or a sign), which is intrinsically connected to the firsthand experience of what has been seen and heard (1 John 1:1-3; 4:14).
- Testimony is presented not only in legal contexts but also in the context of faith instruction, such as catechesis.
- The central figure as a witness is Jesus Christ himself. He testifies to the truth he has perceived and heard from the Father (cf. John 3:11; 8:38, 40; 18:37). He is portrayed as the faithful witness (Revelation 1:5; 3:14), exemplified by his life's testimony (John 8:38; 19:35; Revelation 13:8).
- Both the Father (John 5:32, 37; 8:18) and the Holy Spirit (John 15:26; 1 John 5:6-10), along with the Scriptures (John 5:39), bear testimony to Jesus.
- Jesus's disciples are called to be witnesses by virtue of having seen and heard him (1 John 4:14), and some even seal their testimony with their own blood (John 21:19).
- The Holy Spirit serves as the advocate and comforter of the martyrs (John 14:16).

The term "model" is also utilized in the New Testament. On occasions, the New Testament translates the Greek term “*typos*” as “model” when referring to a historical figure or event that elucidates a reality. At other times, “*typos*” is rendered as “example” when denoting behavior to be emulated, carrying a moral connotation. In either case, the model serves an interpretative function for those who observe or are familiar with it, aiding in the identification of the meaning or significance of an event. For instance, Saint Paul mentions that Adam served as *typos* (figure) of Christ (Romans 5:14), while he also

uses the term to illustrate that the experiences of the Israelites in the desert serve as a model for us to learn virtuous living (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11). Saint Paul further encourages the Philippians and Thessalonians to emulate the good example (*typos*) they have received (Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:9) and urges his disciples Timothy and Titus to set an example for others (1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7). Saint Peter similarly employs this terminology, urging elders to be models for the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

These texts suggest that, while highlighting the category of “testimony”, the significance of the category of “model” should not be diminished, especially in the realm of moral education. What is the connection between these two categories? The witness is someone who has seen or known an exemplary model, to which they refer; the witness imparts teachings and preaches good news that they have witnessed and heard. However, they guide towards the exemplary model not solely through the testimony of their words, but also through their life, which lends them credibility and authority. In the words of Benedict XVI (2007):

Educational work involves both freedom and authority. That's why, especially in the realm of education, the figure of the witness and the role of testimony are central. The witness doesn't just convey information; they are personally committed to the truth they propose. With the coherence of their life, they become a trustworthy point of reference. However, they don't refer to themselves but to Someone infinitely greater than themselves, in whom they have placed their trust and whose reliable goodness they have experienced. Therefore, the authentic Christian educator is a witness (n. 30).

The witness shapes lives both through their actions and their words. As Pope Paul VI (1975, p. 41), also emphasized, “the world needs witnesses before it needs teachers; if it listens to the teachers, it's because they are first witnesses.” The behavior of the educator becomes an explanatory model of the teachings they convey, with their consistency being a fundamental tool to inspire and guide others. However, the witness is not only a moral exemplar and perhaps an imperfect model; his or her words and actions merely refer to an exemplar, to a truth, of which they are only a witness. Even if not highly exemplary, the witness proclaims the truth they have known through their words. They don't rely on their own exemplarity to be believed but appeal to the conscience of those who hear their testimony.

#### **4. Theological reflection on the role of the teacher as a witness**

Augustine of Hippo is renowned for his theological work, particularly for his biographical masterpiece written around the year 398, *Confessions*. In this work, he offers his personal testimony of striving to live in accordance with goodness and truth. While biographies have a profound impact on moral education, they also carry risks of indoctrination for the readers (Croce, 2019). However, *Confessions* stands out as a text that addresses these risks by providing guidance on pedagogically presenting exemplary models (Brooks et al., 2022).

At the outset of his *Confessions* (1991), Augustine presents himself as a man bearing witness to his own sin and to God's transformative action, which compels him to declare, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.” Augustine presents himself not merely as a teacher but primarily as a witness. Throughout his theological endeavors, he consistently shares the insights gained from his role as a witness to the truth. As he aptly expressed in his *Confessions*, while the human

soul may bear witness to the light, it is not the light itself; rather, it is the Word of God (Agustín de Hipona, 1991, IX, 13).

There is a work by Augustine of Hippo that is particularly relevant to our topic: *De Magistro* (The Teacher), written in the form of a dialogue with his son Adeodatus around the year 389, three years after his conversion. Augustine's concern revolves around achieving effective teaching, considering the use of signs that, on their own, are incapable of imparting knowledge. In *De Magistro*, Saint Augustine presents a linguistic theory distinguishing between the *verbum* as a sensible sign (audible or written) and the *nomen* as the conceptual meaning to which the sign refers, which in turn refers to a thing. Augustine prompts us to recognize that –beyond the sensible signs we perceive, and even beyond the teacher who imparts knowledge– there exists an inner Teacher or Master who enlightens us and allows us to discern truth, despite the limitations of signs and those who convey them. The words of the external teacher serve as invitations that stimulate, awakening truth within the person with the assistance of God.

The teacher, in the act of teaching, appeals to the testimony of the One who speaks inwardly to the disciple. The disciples, "when they have verified within themselves that what is said is true, praise it, unaware that they are praising not so much the teachers as the taught" (Agustín de Hipona, 2003, p. 133). The primary educational agents are, in any case, the learner and the inner Teacher who operates through external mediations. The external teacher acts as a witness in service of a transcendent experience (Soto, 2005). The Holy Spirit comes to aid the weakness, not only of the disciple but also of the teacher, who testifies to the truth they have come to know.

In Augustine's proposal, we encounter both philosophical and theological limitations, largely stemming from his excessive reliance on the Neoplatonic theory of knowledge. This reliance results in a downplaying of the teacher's role in the learning process. Augustine posits the existence of exemplary ideas, serving as models for all things, which he believes exist eternally in the mind of God. Human beings, according to Augustine, come to know a reflection of these ideas through divine illumination rather than through abstraction. However, when we scrutinize Augustine's ideas alongside the reflections of Thomas Aquinas, we can glean valuable insights into the role of the teacher as a witness in the teaching-learning dynamic.

Thomas Aquinas posits that the teacher serves as an educator in the disciple's service, acting as the principal efficient cause of learning, akin to how a physician aids a patient. This role of the teacher is quasi-instrumental, as they provide tools and resources for the disciple's learning journey. Aquinas (1952, q11 a2 a1), suggests that the teacher, as a secondary efficient cause, furnishes sensible signs that act as means or instruments for the disciple's learning process.

Teacher (from the Latin, *insignare*) etymologically means someone who shows, who points towards an object, and therefore is a sign, an indicator. Without minimizing the importance and influence of the teacher in the acquisition of knowledge, this etymology underscores that in the teaching-learning process, the focus should be on the disciple transcending the teacher, with critical distance. While traditionally the figure of the teacher has been seen as the primary source of knowledge and guidance, it is equally admirable for one to learn more than the teacher who teaches. This dynamic highlights the importance of testimony as an essential component in educational exchange. When a person is in the position of learning and demonstrates a profound commitment to absorbing knowledge and applying it in their daily life, they are showing an act of testimony in themselves. This active commitment to learning (and the truth of this learning) not only enriches their own understanding but also inspires others to follow their example.

Testimony in the teaching-learning process goes beyond mere knowledge acquisition. It manifests in an attitude of openness to truth, a willingness to question and reflect on what is taught, and a genuine desire for personal and academic growth. This kind of testimony not only strengthens the relationship between teacher and student but also fosters a dynamic and collaborative learning environment which is understood in the light of the dynamics of human action (López González, 2024).

When a student learns from received testimony, they demonstrate a capacity for assimilating and applying knowledge that surpasses what the teacher can offer. This phenomenon underscores the importance of fostering a mindset of continuous learning and a willingness to seek knowledge in all aspects of life. Ultimately, the teaching-learning process is greatly enriched when both the teacher and the student recognize and value the role of testimony. By promoting a culture of learning based on testimony, an environment is created where personal and academic growth can flourish significantly.

While the teacher acts as a witness in the teaching process, it is important to acknowledge that there is an inner Master who provides an even greater testimony, communicated to both the disciple and the teacher. This transcendent dimension of learning suggests that true knowledge originates from a higher source, beyond the mere transmission of information by the teacher.

## 5. Conclusion

Moral education includes both the ethical examples that teachers embody in their daily practice and the moral lessons they impart directly through the formal curriculum or the informal dynamics of classroom and school life (Campbell, 2003). We not only learn from models but also from witnesses who, despite not being admirable themselves, influence our ethical decisions. While acknowledging the importance of models in moral learning, it is essential to consider the significance of witnesses.

Our proposal does not aim to diminish the moral exemplarity or role modeling of the teacher but rather to recognize that testimony is a complementary category with applications in the realm of moral learning. When pupils realize that the teacher's advice is not consistent with their life, this has a negative impact on their motivation to follow the teachers' advice. "Moreover, if what teachers expect from students is not in line with their own moral behavior, they will not be able to use other moral educational methods effectively" (Sanderse, 2024, p. 2). Witnessing has a dimension of transmitting a known truth (which is related to Bandura's verbal modeling) but also another dimension of lived truth, of coherence of life with the known truth (which is related with live modeling).

The biblical and theological texts we have provided allow us to characterize the role of the witness and the category of "testimony" as complementary to that of "model". Although we have drawn from texts of the Christian tradition, the proposal is valid for every educator, whether Christian or not. On the one hand, 1) it allows the teacher to teach truth and known good with boldness, even acknowledging their personal flaws and limitations; 2) on the other hand, it allows the student's attention to focus not so much on the teacher but on their teachings and their own responsibility in moral self-cultivation.

Some advantages of testimony in the field of moral education are as follows:

- It provides a critical distance between the disciple and the teacher, which is positive for both, by limiting the risks of excessive admiration of the disciple towards the teacher.

- It directs towards the object of learning (truth and good) that the teacher teaches, and towards the responsibility of the student themselves, avoiding the focus on the teacher.

Testimony, as we have seen in our discussion of Augustine's Confessions, is offered without the pretension of presenting oneself as a model even though it may indirectly have this effect. Being a professional rhetorician, Augustine is aware of the risks of abusing words to indoctrinate others. His proposal on the role of the teacher can be understood in light of this experience and the awareness of his own personal limitations as a model but at the same time as a witness. For an educator, the most important thing is to appeal to the known truth and good, to be a witness of the truth and good we teach, to enlighten others with the known, contemplated truth (Aquinas, 1994, STh II-II q188, a6). The teacher is a mediator between the inner Master and the pupil. He is a guide who teaches to interpret (In Greek *hōdigós*) and who leads (in Greek, *agō*) to the master. Moreover, the inner Master guides both the pupil and the teacher. Recognizing that both need the inner Master within allows for the foundation of an educational community.

In this way, we address the temptation to abandon the responsibility of moral education by imperfect teachers as well as the freedom in moral learning by students regarding their imperfect teachers. The “imperfect” teacher must be a witness and collaborator in the moral self-cultivation of their students. Students, in fact, do not expect the teacher to be their ultimate reference, but a guide encouraging them to learn, also in the moral sphere (Sanders, 2023).

In any case, the teachers require moral education themselves. Despite their interest and sense of responsibility as moral educators, teachers acknowledge that they do not have sufficient preparation in this matter. Our proposal can contribute to the teacher finding new ways to fulfill their educational vocation.

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