



# Nobody Cries When We Die

## By Dr. Patrick B. Reyes

### September 2019

#### Overview by Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, inaugural CDF Proctor Book Club Curator:

Patrick Reyes offers a Christian autobiographical work like no other in *Nobody Cries When We Die*. Readers of other autobiographies will recognize some deep and abiding themes reminiscent of St. Augustine, Thomas Merton, or James Baldwin and the occasional mention of a poet or two. At the same time, this narrative of a Latinx young man coming of age speaks with an original and compelling voice to tell of his journey from a childhood of abuse to an ennobling sense of calling as a practical theologian. To be sure Reyes' is not a theology burdened by propositional doctrine but rather a vibrant and compelling invitation to seek and find healing meaning in life's journey. Subtitled *God, Community and Surviving to Adulthood*, Reyes' account reminds us that all of life—even salvation—is corporate in nature. We are in this together.

In an early desperate moment, Reyes strains to hear the voice of God seeking words of comfort, succor, and grace. Instead he begins to glean a purpose for his own life, a vocation, mission, and calling. Through a narrative fraught with harrowing experiences he comes to recognize that finding purpose is a matter of life and death. In choosing life he is aided by mentors, friends, and his community which, though marginalized by dominant culture, nonetheless holds residual strengths. From prison cells and homeless shelters as well as elite educational institutions, Reyes transforms from the frightened and confused boy who sought nothing more than safety and dignity. A cautionary tale for a society which continues to regard children of color, ethnicity, and poverty as background noise to an increasingly closed system constructed to preserve privilege, this book inspires us to "call others to life" as its author sums up his own hard-won vocation.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Reyes recounts a prison-based Bible study at which he asks participants, "What did you survive?" How would you answer that question? What do young men and women in your community need to survive on a daily basis as they struggle for the life they dream of for themselves and their community?
2. The roles of God and community feature prominently in this account. God's purpose, grace, and hopefulness are often mediated by friends and mentors that continue to "show up" for the young Reyes. "Showing up" thus becomes a touchstone of his theology and practice of ministry. Who are you "showing up" for? How and when are you "showing up?" Beyond a personal response, name the ways your community and culture can "show up" for young people.
3. Religious faith is woven through the fabric of this journey from boyhood to manhood. Faith is cultivated both through those who show up and through the community's valuing of the young. How might faith traditions

better shape community and culture to both witness to and be attentive of children and youth? How might congregations and other faith groups help the young to discover and pursue their purposes in life?

### Discussion questions from CDF Proctor seminary faculty Dr. Derek Hicks:

1. The book asks “how am I going to live in a world that wants me dead?” In what ways can this book function as a toolkit for doing identity forming work in communities of color?
2. How might we introduce God within a context and community where God seems absent or disinterested?
3. A sub-thematic cord of trauma runs through the book. How does Patrick’s use of this theme reveal that ways it can positively impact vocation or “call”? What are the broader implications that we might apply to ministry work within/for immigrant and migrant communities?
4. In reference to Patrick’s idea of finding God in the everyday as a vocational influence, where is God in moments of abuse and how do we apply such a question of theodicy to the creation of a vocation? And what then does it mean to discern vocation out of trauma?
5. How do we create vocation from a “call” to simply live and survive? And how might we, drawing from Patrick’s text, apply this call to leading others also discerning their vocational call out of traumatic experiences?

### Opportunities for Action:

*"To those who grow and live on the border, or whose families have crossed, this valley of the dry bones is much too real. It exists in our subconscious, our lost and subjugated histories. It exists in our present, with the Sonoran desert that separates the U.S. and Mexico, filled with the tears, the failed journeys, the bones that dried out on their journey to answer God's call to new life. **Throughout my narrative, I have talked not just about my plight, but the plight of the community, the struggle of my family, and the journey of people for whom the weight of suffering is so great that the sound of God's voice is muted. This is where we are called. As Christians, we are all called to the borderlands—the borderlands where people are on the brink of physical, intellectual, spiritual, psychological, and social death. And we are called for these bones to rise. This is answering the call to life and, in turn, calling others to life.**" (Nobody Cries When We Die, page 175)*

In America today, immigrant families live in a state of constant fear deliberately inflicted by an administration intent on making immigrants, low-income communities, and communities of color feel unwelcome. If you feel driven to heed the call “to the borderlands,” we ask you to stand up for the rights and safety of immigrant families in this country. The [“Protecting Immigrant Families, Advancing Our Future”](#) campaign is an effort by diverse organizations from across the country to advocate for immigrant communities by providing education, research, and action. The Children’s Defense Fund is actively involved in these efforts and you can take a stand, too.

Join the Protecting Immigrant Families email list to receive a weekly debrief including timely calls-to-action, recent developments, and new threats that impact immigrant families: <http://bit.ly/PIFCampaign>