

Vinayasādhana

Dharmaram Journal of Psycho-Spiritual Formation

VOL. VIII, No. 1, JANUARY 2017

The Divine Pedagogy of Formation - XV Formee as the Roaring Critic

Paul Kalluveetil

Little Flower Novitiate, Trichur, Kerala, India

Abstract

Prophet Amos was a formee who was seized by God's word. He became a living and loving image of his Master. At Yahweh's irresistible roaring he was compelled to undertake the ministry of a critic of religious, social, economic and cultural structures of the society. At the visions of the forthcoming destruction of Israel, Amos' heart ached and he pleaded for the divine mercy. Finally, the prophet was convinced of his Master's unavoidable decision. Gripped by the word of God he bluntly and crudely attacked the hypocrisies of the leaders. Amos did not fear their threats. He disclaimed the title of a professional prophet of that time. However, his oracles were oriented to a conditional future time of salvation.

One who is seized by Word

Divine Word = Human Word

"The words of Amos" - thus begins the book of the prophet. Here nothing is said about his call; like Jeremiah he does not qualify his words as the words of the divine Formator. Rather he says the prophecy as his own words. What may be the reason behind such designation? Indeed, Amos was speaking the words of Yahweh. But there happened an intimate identification and unification with his Pedagogue, on account of which he could without hesitation call the divine words his own words.

Reflection I

Amos serves as a model for the authentic discipleship. A formee is destined to be the loving and living image of his master. He/she could say with St. Paul: "I live, not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal.2:20). The formee should enter and abide in the world of the formator, as to become the dynamic reflection of guruji's ideas and ideals, visions, words, actions and the very life style. Only then the formation process will be completed.

The Name Amos

One cannot with certainty state what that name etymologically means. Probably it may be the shortened form of Amaziah, that means, "he who is carried (by Yahweh)". This interpretation sheds light into the depth of his vocation. The prophet, who was leading a life of a sheep breeder in Tekoa, was all on a sudden seized by Yahweh and compelled to live and speak as the divine mouth-piece. The location of Tekoa was on the border between the cultivated land to the west and the steppe (the wilderness of Judah) to the East, a place well suited for sheep breeders. It had a little military out-post of the Kingdom of Judah. He was engaged in tending Sycamore fig trees as well(7:14). These jobs served to give sharpness, rudeness and boldness to his style of speech. The divine call does not deprive one of his/her natural character. Indeed, Yahweh can make use of it to provide a threatening impact in the minds of the unfaithful people.

A Roaring Yahweh

"Yahweh roars from Zion, and thunders from Jerusalem; then the pastures of the shepherds wilt, and the head of the Carmel withers." (1:2)

The formee was giving articulation to his own experience of the irresistible power of the Master's word. It is compared to the roaring of a lion, the effect of which was terrible, the wilting and withering of the pastures of the shepherds and of the plentiful forests of Carmel. As the pastures belonged to the realm of the sheep breeder, it destroyed the source of Amos' livelihood. The rich vineyards and orchards also were devastated. It seems that divine Formator was rattling the secure and gratifying existence of the called one. Such an unexpected turn of events is an essential method in the pedagogy of formation. The aspirant should feel that the divine call needs to be lived in an entirely different situation. He/she should not cling to the old life style.

Accounts of His Call

Amos refers to his call on two occasions in 3:8 and 7:10-17.

Art of Compulsion

“The lion has roared, who will not be terrified? The Lord Yahweh has spoken, who can but prophesy?” (3:8).

Amos seems to address his adversaries who were not willing to take into account of the undeniable fact of the prophet’s call from Yahweh. The verb *dibber* emphasizes the act of speaking that is not limited to the time of Amos’ call, but also his new and new interventions. The called one is compelled to respond to the Formator’s order, since the divine command was like the roaring of a lion that will terrify all. There is no way to escape, otherwise the lion will pounce upon him and kill him. Here the called one is asked to prophesy and utter words of condemnation. Amos rebuts the attempts of the enemies to reject him as an unauthentic messenger of God. He defends himself by making use of question style that serves as cogent and irrefutable argument. Such an art is a most powerful weapon in the mouth of a formee.

Irresistible Command

Context

A Devious Plan

The priest Amaziah of Bethel was disturbed by Amos’ questioning of Israel’s blunt transgressions of covenant laws. He was afraid that the action of the prophet will affect the source of his income. The priest, induced by profit motive, was conniving at the immoral behaviour of the local people. Now the appearance of the prophet was turning upside down his comfortable life. The shrewd Amaziah had recourse to double talk. He sent a secret message to Jeroboam king of Israel, depicting Amos as a dangerous rebel and traitor. The priest cunningly kept silence of what had caused the prophet to pronounce the oracle of doom and woes, namely the covenant infidelity of the king and of the people.

Priest’s Crookedness

After this action he approached Amos, pretending to be his benefactor and advised him to leave the place, otherwise his life will be in danger. Sarcastic tone was implied in his word: “Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah, earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don’t prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king’s sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.”

The priest wanted to get rid of the presence of the prophet from Bethel. For this he pretends to advise Amos to change the place of his activity; otherwise the king's heavy hand will fall upon him. The prophet can earn easily his bread in the land of Judah. It will not be easy to get financial support at Bethel.

Response of the Prophet

A Blunt Disclaimer

"I am no prophet, nor I a prophet's disciple (7:14 a). I am rather a livestock breeder and one who takes care of Sycamore fig trees." (7:14)

Amos categorically rejects the attempt of the priest to include him in the professional guild of the prophets of that time. He is not a follower of any group, nor a political rebel. Like others he has no need of depending on such a job for earning livelihood. Amos asserts that he has a good source of income from sheep breeding and tending the Sycamore fig trees.

One Who is Grippled by Yahweh

"But Yahweh took me from tending the flock and said: 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (7:15).

The phrase "Yahweh took me" implies that Amos was unwilling to leave his livestock and Sycamore fig trees. The Lord had to 'take (*lqh*) him' forcefully. The verb *lqh* is used in 2 Sam.7:8: "I took you from the pasture from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel." David, the youngest son of Jesse was tending the sheep, and was considered as an insignificant fellow, good for nothing. But Lord asked Samuel to call him from the pasture and anoint him as king. It was an unmerited and unexpected grace, which the merciful God bestowed upon him. The same can be said about Amos. Further, he was given two commands: *lĕk hinnabe' 'al Israel*. Two orders without conjunction invite our attention. Amos had to leave immediately his lifestyle and undertake a most difficult task. Jeremiah received the commission: "Go and cry out" (Jer.2:2). Amos' assignment however was to prophesy.

Reflection II

Divine call is a gift, which demands a radical break with the past. It takes away the self-security and self-compliance. One can compare the prophetic life as leap into the dark. Naturally, the first inclination of the ordinary persons is to decline the call, which brings out risk, enmity and persecution. Amos was compelled to undertake the divine mission. Yahweh had to roar, take away the factors of ease and peace, which the

aspirant was enjoying till then. One may say that the call was, in certain sense, imposed upon him, from which he could not escape.

Reflection III

During the time of Amos there existed professional prophets, who converted that call as a means of livelihood. This is a great danger. We may perhaps find today such a static and profit-making perspective in embracing the priestly and religious life. This is indeed a temptation that may slowly give rise to an 'adjusting' and acclimatizing Church. The formators and religious authorities have to fight tooth and nail against this trend.

The Formative Art of Visions

The divine Pedagogue through the medium of five visions (7:1-3; 7: 4-6; 7:7-8; 8:1-2; 9:1-4) makes the formee understand the inner meaning of the task assigned to him. The first four visions have the same introduction: "Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me." Then the vision begins with the exclamatory word *hinnāh* (behold). After that, the vision is presented in concise and precise words. They present Yahweh's decision to bring upon the people destruction. However, the Master yields to the intercessory words of the formee. One can see the gradual hardening of the divine determination in the first three visions. By the fourth vision the devastation of the country is confirmed. In the last text the destruction of Israel is proclaimed.

Divine Pedagogy in the Vision I **Text (7:1-3)**

Amos saw that the locusts sent by Yahweh were devouring the second crop and grass of the land. If they consume everything, the country will suffer from acute famine. This possibility ate the prophet's heart out and he cried: "'Adonay Yhwh slahna' mî yaqum yaqub ki qaton hu' (My Lord Yahweh do forgive, I pray. How can Jacob survive? For small he is). At this supplication Yahweh repented and said, "This will not happen."

Reflection IV

It seems that the intention of the Formator was to fill the heart of the formee with the compassion, which He himself was feeling. The Creator's heart was indeed aching. He is a God of graciousness and compassion, one who is slow to anger and abounding in love (Ex.34:6; 2 Chr.30:9; Neh.9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Joel.2:13; Jon.4:2). How can He destroy his own creatures? He was experiencing inner agony, and wanted somebody to intercede on behalf of the wicked

people, so that He could relent. The divine Pedagogue had in his mind a further motive. The one, whom He chooses as his mouthpiece, should cultivate the same sentiment of compassion and anguish, even if he/she is constrained to utter oracles of doom and woe.

Reaction of the Formee

Amos though was a man of harsh and stern temperament, could not bear the tragic situation which was about to fall on his countrymen. By all means he wanted to prevent the calamity and with the painful heart turned to the Master. He used the language of prayer (2 Sam.7:18-20, 22, 28; Jud.6:22) and lamentation (Jos.7:7; Jer.1:6; 4:10; 14:13; Ez.4:14; 9:8; 21:5) in addressing the Lord as '*adonay yhwah*'. Thereby he stressed the absolute exaltedness of God as well as his compassionate nature. "Do forgive (*slah*)" was the prophet's plea. The Hebrew word means sprinkling for the purpose of cleansing. The compassionate Creator is called upon to blot out the sins of his people, so that the reason for punishment could disappear. Amos uses the name Jacob to remind Yahweh that he had forgiven the Patriarch even though he was naughty. Likewise is Israel. Further, Amos qualifies them as *qaton* a little baby who cannot survive without the mother's nourishment.

Reflection V

The called one must have a compassionate heart that pleads in most tender terms to the Almighty not to punish the people but to forgive their wickedness. He/she has to appeal to God by having recourse to the most emotional and arousing language that will touch the very heart of the compassionate Lord. It seems that the Formator himself has inspired Amos to speak in such a way. The human formators have to follow this divine example. Such an intervention brought a change of mind in the Lord. A powerful term *nhm* (repent) is used in the text. Yahweh 'repents'! He, who has not done any evil, reproaches himself for inflicting a just punishment on Israel. The human formators can imitate this kind of repentance. They as well as their formees, like Yahweh have to be ever eager to save the erring humanity through their meditation.

Divine Pedagogy in Vision II

Text (7:4-6)

The second vision was that of rain of fire. It was about to dry up the abyss and to devour the land. Then the prophet cried out: "My Lord Yahweh, stop, I beg you. How can Jacob survive? For small he is!" So the Lord repented, and assured that it will not happen.

Reflection VI

The prophet was dismayed at this calamity. According to the thinking of that time, this phenomenon referred to the catastrophe that utterly will destroy the very springs of the earth and its foundations. A formee's heart should embrace the whole earth and the entire creation. He/she has to be trained to get freed from the microcosmic horizon and to grow into a macrocosmic perspective. The reaction of Amos was similar to that of v.2, except the words forgive, that was substituted with the verb stop. The term *hdl* is used in absolute form, meaning "don't do," mitigating it with "I beg you" (*nā'*). It seems that the supplication has an unconditional sense; he does not dare to ask Yahweh to forgive the infidelity of Israel, since the unperturbed and reckless people were continuing in their immoral life. Rather his wounded heart ventures to ask the Formator to stop the punitive action. How celestial and sacred will be the call to discipleship if the formees can follow the example of Amos!

Divine Pedagogy in Vision III

Text (7:7-9)

"Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me: One was standing by wall with a plumb-line in his hand. And he said to me: what do you see, Amos?" I said: "A plumb-line". Then the Lord said "look, I am setting a plumb-line among my people Israel; I will no longer pass by. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam."

Explanation

Yahweh was standing on a wall with a plumb-line that the prophet could see. The focus in the text is entirely upon that instrument. The Lord was carrying out the task of inspecting the wall, whether it is strong or ready to fall. Yahweh's question had the catechetical style. The most intently alert formee answered with the single word. Then the Lord tersely announced the judgment that He will not "pass by", i.e. spare the covenant people (the term Isaac denotes the inhabitants of the Northern kingdom) no longer. The high places are threatened with destruction. Sanctuaries under the jurisdiction of king will be devastated, and the royal dynasty will fall prey to the sword.

Reflection VII

Yahweh by using the plumb-line finds out that the house of Israel was not standing in perpendicular straight line. The people no longer practise

justice and righteousness, the criteria that the Lord was expecting from them. What is then the further use of leaving them alive? The house of Israel should be pulled down. Here we find not simply the threatening tactics, but Yahweh's firm determination to destroy Israel. Nobody can change this absolute decision. Through the medium of the vision the divine Formator wanted to convince Amos that Israel's situation is so hopeless that the time for intercession has finished. The prophet understood that the divine punishment is well merited and upright. The formee could not open his mouth to speak a single word in favour of the people. He has to positively respond to the call to utter the divine words of doom and woe oracles. Amos knew that the compassionate Lord would not have recourse to such absolute language, if there existed any other possibility. What the prophet could do was to silently remain and to participate in the divine helplessness and pain.

Divine Pedagogy in Vision IV

Text (8:1-2)

"Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. Then He asked: What do you see Amos? And I answered: a basket of ripe fruit. And Yahweh said to me: the time is ripe for my people Israel; I will no longer pass them by."

Explanation

It was not an action of Yahweh but an object that caught the eyes of the prophet. The vision focuses from the outset on a basket of ripe fruit of the summer season. Then the Formator announces that Israel is ripe for the harvest, namely for their end or destruction. He firmly proclaims their total destruction. Thus, we can see in the fourth vision a progress from the former one, where the Lord was engaged in testing the straightness of the wall. Here his words implied that the test was over; now the time of total destruction of the nation has come.

Reflection VIII

It is interesting to note how the divine Pedagogue prepares the formee step by step to undertake the task of proclaiming doom and woe oracles. He makes Amos convinced of the need of such a mission. The inner meaning of the Lord's firm decision to destroy Israel gets rooted in the heart of the formee. There does not exist any further ground for supplication in favour of the people. This engendered in Amos a harsh and pitiless attitude to bluntly proclaim the imminent destruction of the nation. It seems that even at this juncture the heart of the Formator was aching and would have maintained hope against hope about a possible

conversion of Israel. Perhaps his condemnatory determination may have been intended for bringing them back to him. Also we cannot exclude the possibility of this attitude hidden in the mind of the prophet.

Divine Pedagogy in Vision V

Text (9:1-4)

Amos saw the Lord standing by the altar. He was smiting the tops of the pillars so that the thresholds were shaking. He was cutting off the heads of all the people. Nobody will get away from his sword even if they try to flee from him.

Explanation

While the fourth vision disclosed that the end will certainly come, the fifth vision indicates the way how the punishment will be inflicted. There was no more dialogue with the formee. He merely sees the vindictive actions of the Lord. Yahweh was occupying the altar of the temple where the sacrifices were till then offered, in order to smite the pillars with outstretched arm and strong hand. The temple smitten by Yahweh served as the epicentre of a quake whose radiating shocks bring the inescapable end. The sanctuary, which was destined to be the place of divine praise and worship, had then become the source of evil. This religious corruption had spread throughout the land. That was why Yahweh has begun his punitive action from the religious sphere, and all the inhabitants will be wiped out from the earth. There remained no way to escape the destruction. The nation that was once the cherished possession of the merciful Lord will be considered as the most detested people on earth.

Reflection IX

The series of visions terribly perturbed the life of the formee. There took place a tremendous change in his personality. The disciple was becoming united with the perspective of the Master. He was fully convinced that Yahweh was compelled to take the method of punishment, since all other means had totally failed. Amos experienced that the merciful Lord who carries the baby Israel at her breast (Is.49:15) and has engraved him on the palms of his hands (Is. 49:16) had to pay a great price for it (Hos. 11:8). He understood the depth of the people's ingratitude and infidelity. The abhorrent form of Israel's wickedness appeared in its nakedness before his eyes. It filled the heart of the formee with indignation: the whole body quaked with moral rage that prompted him to take to the streets to rail against the wicked people. To sum up, the formee became the incarnated form of the Formator's

emotional agitations. There echoed through him the divine voice; the roaring of the divine lion was reverberated through the human mouth. In Amos we find an authentic portrait of a true disciple who is called to give vibrating form to the ideas and ideals of the Formator.

Roaring against Criminal Nation

Roaring of Yahweh

It was Yahweh who was roaring against the perfidious Israel. Formee's role was to give articulation to it before the people. Amos "translated" it in a wonderful way through his words, gestures and postures. In him we find an ideal disciple.

Crimes of the Covenant People

The obligation of the chosen people was "to let justice (*misphat*) cascade like water, righteousness (*ds daqa*) like a never-failing stream" (7:24). Both terms *misphat* and *ds daqa* are the very traits of the Lord who vindicates the rights of the oppressed, marginalized and outcast by standing as their defender, leader and avenger. Israel was supposed to do the same, and to make these virtues roll along like water and stream that never dries up. But the people were competing between each other in transgressing *misphat* and *ds daqa*.

Yahweh makes use of two terms '*awon* (crookedness) and *pesha* (evils committed against the community) to indicate the people's wicked nature (2:4, 6). They have turned justice into wormwood and cast righteousness to the ground. Thus they themselves have destroyed the very foundations of their call as God's covenant people. In 3:10 the Lord complains: "They do not know how to do right and store up violence and devastation in their fortresses." In the eyes of the Lord the hoarded treasures of the wicked Israel were earned through violence and devastation. They have plundered persons and the property by murder and robbery. A list of the nation's crimes is presented in 2:6-8: sale into debt-slavery of the innocent and the needy; oppression of the poor; abuse of maidens; exploitation of debtors.

Crimes of the Businessmen

Yahweh exposes the business men's greedy urge to multiply possessions at the expense of poor. They exact the rent in grain, a trade commodity. Thus they impoverish the tenants. Cheap labour is used to build stone mansions and to plant lush vineyards.

Crime of Seducing the Consecrated to Sin, 2:12

The rich and licentious people have further committed a more heinous sin. At that time there existed in the Israelite society some Nazirites and genuine prophets, who, by their austere and ascetic life style challenged the wickedness and unfaithfulness prevailing among the opulent and luxurious class. Such immoral persons could not tolerate these devotees who had dedicated their life to Yahweh. The exploiters tried their best to seduce the Nazirites to drink vine and violate their vows. Also they threatened the prophets from uttering the words of doom.

Roaring of the Formee

The faithful disciple made himself the spokesman of the vindictive Master. He roars against the exploiting tactics practised by businessmen, against the seditious society ladies, against complacent, and against cosmetic religiosity.

Against Traders Who Cheat, 8:5-6

Most of the businessmen of that time were practising deceitful tactics. Amos roared against these oppressors of the poor who pursued their evil dealings with such zeal that they begrudged the time taken away from business on Sabbath and festive days. Thus they could not share the joy of such celebrative occasions. They used to spend such days in making more and more evil designs to be introduced on the next days. The malevolent merchants who had sold their souls to avarice and cupidity, used grain of inferior quality for sale; they falsified weights and measures tampering with the scales. This wicked even dared to trade human beings.

Against Society Ladies, 4:1-3

The prophet exposed the licentiousness of rich women of that time. These self-indulgent ladies, who were ruling over their husbands, used to demand men to supply them with intoxicating drinks and used to induce them to practise oppression and exploitation. Amos rudely calls them “cows of Bashan” of Mount Samaria – a shocking term of abuse. Bashan was a lush pasture plain where the cattle were gazing to their hearts’ content. Likewise these society ladies were devouring rich food and had become fatty women.

Against the Complacent, 6:1-7

The opulent and immoral group was living in self-complacency that they were secure and nothing will happen to them. They were day-dreaming that Mount Zion and Mount Samaria will protect them. They

disdainfully rejected the very thought of destruction of Israel and let loose a reign of oppression without any prick of conscience. These wicked people attacked and even killed the poor, and were leading a life of luxury and lust, lying on beds inlaid with ivory, and lounge on couches. They dine on choice lambs and fattened calves, strumming away on their harps. It is not from cups that they drink wine, but from bowls and uses the finest lotions in order to enjoy bodily comfort. These corrupt criminals do not show any concern over the ruin of the country.

Against Superficial Religiosity, 4:4-5

The prophet makes fun of the so-called religious practices of the rich people. They made themselves to believe that by offering sacrifices they could win the divine favour. They make pilgrimages to the shrines at Bethel and Gilgal. Instead of providing justice to the destitute (cf.5:21-24) they bring offerings and tithes to Yahweh. He calls them *your* sacrifices and *your* tithes, implying that the Lord of justice will not make them his own. The covenant Lord speaks thus through the mouth of his formee: "I hate, I despise, your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies" (5:21-23).

Reflection X

An authentic disciple of the divine Master will not be satisfied to limit his/her ministry to the religious field. Today the Lord of the earth demands his called ones to raise their voice against exploitations in business, against the luxurious and lustful lifestyle of the rich at the expense of the poor and the marginalized. The prophetic perspective of the call should be brought into the forefront, roaring against the prevailing superficial religiosity of our times. They should not connive against hedonistic trends seen in the life of the wealthy ladies.

Formee, as the Spokesperson of the Formator

A real disciple should utter the words of the Master. Amos provides the best model. He makes use of the following formulae in addressing the audience.

The Messenger Formula

In eleven of his oracles the prophet makes use of the introductory messenger formula, *ko 'amar YHWH* (thus Yahweh has said): 1:1, 6, 13; 2:1, 6; 3:11, 12; 5:3, 4, 16; 7:17. Six of the oracles have the corresponding concluding formula "'amar YHWH" (Yahweh has said):1:5, 8, 15; 2:3; 5:17; cf. also 5:27; 7:3, 6.

Divine Oracle Formula

The phrase “oracle/utterance of Yahweh” (*n’um YHWH*) appears in 2:16; 3:5; 4:3, 5; 6:14; 9:7. This style of speech gives solemn emphasis to the fact that the utterance is really the very words of the Lord. Nobody can stand against it, and the oracle of doom will certainly fall upon the wicked.

Oath Formula

The phrase “Yahweh has sworn by” is used to intensify the usual messenger formula: 4:2; 8:7; 6:8.

Proclamation Formula

The term “here” is used to command attentiveness: 5:1; 4:1; 8:4; 7:16.

Reflection XI

Only true prophets could speak in such a vigorous and aggressive way. For that they should lead a life of intimate union with the Formator. Only then they could feel the throbbing of the divine heart and give them appropriate articulations.

An Atypical Portrait of Yahweh

The book of Amos presents a totally different picture of the Lord. The formee has drawn out this portrait under the inspiration and impulse of the Formator. While the other prophets speak of Yahweh as the God of Israel, Amos bypasses that designation, in order to caution his countrymen that they had lost the right to claim the Lord as their own God. The ultimate purpose was to create in them the sense of the grave consequence of their infidelity, and thus impel them to turn back from their evil ways. Here we find a disciplinary strategy of the wisest Pedagogue. There are three hymns that sing the divine praises.

Amos 4:13

Amos concentrates on the supremacy of the Creator Lord, and calls him the most wise as well as fear-evoking judge: “He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, He who turns dawn to darkness, and treats the high places of the earth – the Lord God Almighty is his name.” No mention of His relation with Israel.

Amos 5:8-9

“He who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns blackness into dawn and darkness day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea and

pours them out over the face of the land – the Lord Almighty is his name. He flashes destruction on the stronghold and brings the fortified city to ruin.” God appears in this text as the Lord of nature, who has no connection with the chosen people.

Amos. 9:5-6

Also in this third hymn Yahweh does not appear as the God of Israel. Amos sings the divine praises, focusing on His dominion over the universe.

Reflection XII

The prevailing tendency in the Catholic Church nowadays is to gloat over her so-called right on the person of Jesus Christ, even though the people of other religions do not find her living the divine ideas and ideals. The prophetic obligation of the religious persons, as well as authorities is to caution the Church that she cannot claim that Christ is her exclusive property. The trend of proclamation of today should focus on depicting the Son of God as the redeemer of all the human-kind, as well as of the whole earth.

A Weeping Formator

Can a father slaughter by sword his begotten children, however wicked they are? The divine Formator exposed his aching heart to his formee, and enabled him to give articulation to it. The ultimate purpose was to make the formee a personification of His throbbing. God’s chosen ones should not be harsh and steely administrators of the divine punishment. An authentic formee, when he/she is constrained to utter doom and woe oracles, cannot do it without blinking away the tears.

Recalling the Past Acts of Salvation

We can hear in 2:9-10 the sound of sobs of Yahweh. With tears, He enumerates the saving acts done for Israel. The merciful Lord brought them up out of the land of slavery, and drove away the mighty and great nations in order to give them the land. He also raised up prophets to guide them in the divine ways, and the Nazirites to provide them models. However, Israel rebelled and turned away from their liberator and provider Lord. These thankless people were finding their pleasure in exploiting and destroying their own brethren. They had forgotten their history when they themselves were oppressed and helpless slaves. Were they not bound to show the same mercy that Yahweh had shown to them, towards their countrymen?

One Who Sobs out His Heart

The text of 4:6-11 draws out the picture of the lamenting Yahweh. He gives a list of his punitive efforts to bring back Israel to him, each narration ending with the chorus, "yet you have not returned to me", vv.6, 8, 9, 10, 11. He has taken the following disciplinary actions: famine, draught, blight and mildew, plagues, overthrowing some of the towns like Sodom and Gomorra. However, all his attempts were in vain. Israel refused to turn back to Him. Then Yahweh was forced to take the most horrible decision: "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (v.12). They had till then had to confront little, little misfortunes. Now all of them will be compelled to face the most tragic situation. The encounter with Yahweh will not be a saving event but the one that brings up eternal retribution. This verse implies the challenge: Be ready to fight against the just judge.

To Live = To Seek

A Different Orientation

All other prophets of doom were also proclaimers of oracles of salvation. The negative pole of the prophecy necessary leads to the positive pole. The book of Amos also presents a vision of salvation: "Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph" (5:15). This is indeed not an absolute, but a conditional promise. Israel may still enjoy life, if they mend their ways and live in the divine light: "Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba." (5: 4-5)

Avoid Running to Sanctuaries

At the time of Amos people restricted the concept of seeking Yahweh to visit the sanctuaries. They made themselves to believe that they could find there the divine presence. This trend can be seen even today. There is a tendency in the so-called religious people to enclose God's presence in the churches. This implies an attempt to imprison God in the sanctuary, and denies Him the freedom to enter into the day today life of the ordinary people. The called ones should fight tooth and nail this dangerous craze. The religious life of the rich of the Amos' times was limited to run to the sanctuaries to offer sacrifices, thinking that they could win the favour of Yahweh by that act. This amounted to bribe God. Yahweh through the mouth of the prophet categorically opposes this kind of 'idolatry'.

Embrace thob

In this context the covenant Overlord through the mouth of his formee commands: "Seek (*drs*) me; then you will live" (5:4). "Seek *thob* (good), not evil; ... hate evil, love *thob*; maintain justice in the courts" (5:14-15). The term seek denotes to become a person of total concentration and single mindedness. Every moment should be converted to an earnest endeavour to find out *thob* and fully possess it. One should show daringness to undertake every kind of sacrifice in this pursuit. For this it is necessary to hate and reject evil in every realm of life, and love righteousness. The chosen people must cherish even a trace of good found in any person and place. Truth, peace, joy, love, fellowship, justice, kindness, tenderness and compassion, etc are some of the traits of *thob*. Yahweh singles out one of them: "Establish justice in the courts," which was then frequently violated. The judges had no concern to vindicate the rights of the poor and marginalized of the society. The verdicts were easily influenced by bribes and partiality. The phrase "establish righteousness" means to make justice functional.

Reflection XIII

The Church leaders usually connive at the social transgressions prevailing in the society. It seems that their only interest is to protect the rights of the institutional Church, and they organize huge demonstrations and protests, if a single event of its violation happens. Nobody is willing to raise his/her voice in defence of the poor, who are the living temples of the loving God. Amos questions this tendency, and leads our attention to the basic trait of the chosen people, establishing justice.

Living for Others

To seek God practically means to maintain righteousness in the dealings with others. There should not be any place for oppression, exploitation and untruthfulness. Everyone should be treated as God's living images. This is indeed the true worship. We have to find God in others, as John states in his Letter (1 Jn. 4:20). There will be no ground for existence for those who eagerly do not spend their life for the cause of the marginalized, in whom God willingly reigns (5:6). These people who do not practise such kind of worship will be eradicated (1:4, 7; 2:2). This obligation is not left to the will of humans. Either live or perish. Only those who are engaged in such a pursuit qualify for the designation 'man'. The ego-seekers fall below the category of beasts.

Living in God

“Then you will live” (5:4-6) – asserts Amos. This same idea is emphasized in 5:14, “that you may live.” The very existence of those who are running after the phantom of egoism is in danger. The term ‘live’ belongs to the vocabulary of the vassal treaties. The sovereign grants the life as a gift to his faithful subordinate king. It means not mere survival but abundant life in all realms, filled with beatitude, welfare and happiness. The verb ‘to live’ is repeated thrice in the texts, in order to imprint in the mind of the audience this idea. Yahweh is the Lord of the covenant, and Israel his dependant vassal. Their very life, land, temple, and countless number is a gracious gift from God, for which they do not have any right. If they show unfaithfulness towards the fellow brethren, especially the marginalized, they will lose everything, affluence, security, political stability and prosperity. To use the covenant terminology, they will die. The modern formators should inject in the minds of the formees the idea that their vocation is a mere grace from God, to which they do not have any right. In case they fail to live the obligations of their call, this special privilege will be taken away from them. Likewise as God’s spokespersons they have to remind the faithful of the free nature of their membership in the Church. It is a gift, and at the same time a task imposed upon them to seek the Lord in the less privileged people of the society.

Vision of a New Paradise

Through Amos Yahweh speaks of special promises that are implied in the very concept of life, that He will bestow upon his seekers (9:11-15). It will have also secular and political dimensions.

An Everlasting Dynasty

He will rise up and stabilize David’s fallen tent. It refers to the re-establishing of the Davidic dynasty. The Lord makes use of the term ‘tent’ that is made for temporary use. It will not have solid and fixed nature. That was why the Davidic kingdom had fallen down. Now the covenant Lord swears that he will build it firmly that will enable it to last forever. Here we have a hint to the future everlasting reign of Messiah. Then the new Israel will not have anything to fear of the military aggression of other countries. All other nations will get a share in the divine graces. Even the former Israel’s adversaries Edomites will get membership in the divine kingdom, since they also are called in the name of Yahweh. Thus all peoples will enjoy status and share like Israel in this kingdom of God. Here we find a vision that extends to the

whole humanity. It seems to refer to the reign of Christ that embraces the entire inhabitants of the earth.

A Fertile and Fruitful Land

Yahweh speaks of the new earth in poetic and flowery language. It will yield such abundant crop as no one can ever imagine. The reapers will not have enough time to gather the fruits. The harvesting will not be over at the time of sowing new seeds. Thus, both the reapers and sewers will have to work together. Yahweh will bless the creation with the primordial harmony and rhythm that had then reigned over all the whole earth. Verse 13 b is worth citing: "Sweet wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills." As there will not be time to gather the ripe fruits of vine, its juice will drip and flow from the hilly places. What a mystical and celestial imagery!

Reflection XIV

The prophetic call of religious and priests should not end on a negative role. The God of the Bible is not a vindictive and vengeful deity. The Lord loves his creation and wants them to live as his loving children. In case of infidelity and rebellion He will be compelled to make them drink bitter medicine, in order to heal them. This is the only effective remedy. Only with tears the compassionate and tender Lord will do it. The human formators should imprint in their minds such a portrait of the divine Master. All their formation methods have to be oriented to help the trainees to imbibe this spirit. At the same time the religious and the priests should never compromise with the divine vision, and become feeble leaders. The God of Amos reminds us that the positive perspective has to be based on the condition of the peoples' willingness to repent and mend their ways.