

itself. Those who have seen that light, see everything else differently. If the prophets, mystics, saints could change the world, we can transform the world around us as that ordinary bunch of twelve nobodies did in the first century. Or in other words, God can work his wonders, not just through us, but through the men and women who agree to put their hands in His hands and allow themselves to be guided (Mannath, 2014).

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Experiential Knowledge of Self, God, and the World As Key Components for Transformation

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Abstract

Every religious has a desire to lead an authentic life. This authenticity can be realized only through an integral transformation in life. Often we come across consecrated people, who are disheveled, disheartened and disappointed as a result of their failure to live the ideals of religious life. The self, God, and the world are the three important elements in any religious ideals. This article is an attempt to show that an experiential knowledge of the self, God and the world, especially the poor, is an effective and essential component to facilitate both individual as well as collective transformation.

Introduction

Transformation is a frequently used term in religious life. We uphold the view that the goal of religious formation is transformation. The grace for transformation is one of the common petitions in our prayers. However, we are aware of the fact that transformation would not take place in a vacuum; rather it needs medium and mediation. One of the effective ways to bring about transformation in an individual is to expose that person an experiential knowledge of the self, God and the world, especially the poor. Let us explore these three components and see how they facilitate transformation.

Experiential Knowledge

There are two types of knowledge available to us: informative and experiential. It is possible to read a lot about the abject poverty in India and can gather enough data through research which is mere informative knowledge. Information is a vital part of transformation. However, it remains at the head level. The experiential knowledge is something deeper and profound. It is such knowledge that brings about change in a person. For example, regular visits to a slum can truly affect us. It may impel us to know more about the life of the slum dwellers. And we would ask ourselves constantly what can we do for them? In what way can we contribute towards the alleviation of their suffering? During the period of their formation consecrated persons receive lots of input about self, God, and the world. The question would be whether it has remained only as information or the information has percolated into their being and has led them towards transformation.

In the Bible, the word "to know" often stands for experiential knowledge. To know means to experience. "The initial Biblical invitation addressed to the heart of man is to know God in the total context of life rather than as the result of speculation. Knowledge for the Semite is more than a recondite process of understanding because it involves an existential relationship" (Leon-Dufour 1984:296). There is personal involvement in this knowledge. Therefore, knowledge could mean close fellowship of the family (Deut 33:9) and marital relations (Gen 4:1; Lk 1:34) as well (Leon-Dufour 1984:296).

Transformation

Transformation literally means 'a change of form'. Persons can undergo a transformation of character. There can be a transformation in one's behavioral pattern. But more fundamentally when we speak of transformation, it is at the realm of consciousness. This transformation affects one's psychological, intellectual and spiritual horizons. This change invites one to embrace a new world view and leads to a new self-understanding (Benjamin Baynham, 1995: 967). If we look at the life of the apostles, the resurrection experience was the turning point in their lives. It was a moment of transformation in their journey of relationship with Jesus. They were no more persons gripped by fear, no more self-centered persons, rather were gripped by the person of Jesus. Once they encountered the Risen Lord, they began to look at themselves, their life story, their life situation, their reality, and their God in a new way. It was a new way of relating to God, oneself, others and the cosmos. They noticed a qualitative change in their lives. The encounter with the Risen Lord made them new beings. The disciples were awakened to the

element of mystery in their lives, to a new awareness of the reality that transcended the immediate (Baynham 1995: 968). "Risen Lord is alive, He is close to us": This was a new level of consciousness. From then on the Mystery called Jesus became the focal point of their life and they wanted to live and to die for him. The experience with the Risen Lord led them to a deeper knowledge of themselves. They realized that they were not the masters of their destiny. As Acts powerfully puts it "For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 28).

Knowledge of Self: True Self - False Self

John Calvin in his work "Institutes of the Christian Religion" mentions that "nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves. But, while joined by many bonds, which one precedes and brings forth the other is not easy to discern" (Calvin 1975: 320). The self-knowledge and knowledge of God go hand in hand. Both components are quintessential in the process of transformation.

The pertinent question that one should ask oneself is: who am I? Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk, speaks of the self as true and false self. According to him often people live with an illusory self rather than their true self. Unfolding and identifying the false-self Merton says:

We must remember that this superficial 'I' is not our real self. It is our 'individuality' and our 'empirical self' [but it is not truly the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God]. The 'I' that works in the world, thinks about itself, observes its own reactions and talks about itself is not the true 'I' that has been united to God in Christ. It is at best the vesture, the mask, the disguise of that mysterious and unknown 'self' whom most of us never discover until we are dead. Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. This self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney. It is utterly frail and evanescent (Merton 1972:7).

We can term false self as 'ego' which wants to be independent of God. For the ego, a person is defined by one's own achievements, power, wealth, and talents. Here one derives happiness from what one has and one does which lead one to be more and more narcissistic. In other words, false self looks for security and happiness on external things. False self makes us believe that our self-worth and self-dignity come from external factors like talents, qualifications, wealth, power and so on. So we cling on to them and get attached to them. "When we operate at the false self level all our energy is involved in developing, maintaining and protecting our false self. ... For example, I may say

that I am worthwhile if I become a manager. This will make me strive for that position. Once I get it, then I will feel that I am somebody. After that, my preoccupation will be to maintain it at any cost (D'Souza & Wonsiewicz 2008: 64). When it is taken away from me, then I will feel worthless, which will create in me insecurity. Therefore, the mantra of the false self will be "climb the ladder of power" and "have more".

Every sin of ours affirms our false self and fortifies it. Thus, false self prevents us from discovering our true self. We tend to believe that our false self as the real self. Merton emphasizes this aspect saying that "every one of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. ...My false and private self is the one who wants to exist outside the radius of God's will and God's love - outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion" (Merton 1952:18). Those who are influenced by false self believe in doing their will rather than God's. This was the sin of the Pharisees. They relied wholly on their deeds and failed to depend on God. "When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they took their destiny in their own hands. Henceforward the scope of all their efforts would be to build up their Ego [False Self] and fortify it so that it would give them a sense of security and immortality independent of God who has now become their enemy and rival" (Ukken 2002:12).

A journey into our inner world will enable us to come in contact with our true self which is the sanctuary of one's being where God dwells. Thomas Ryan throws light on the aspect of true self mentioning that "self is a conscious subject, the essence of our human interiority, 'that' which is open to God and which recognizes God" (Ryan 2007:26). "I am a child of God, I am loved by Abba" is the realization as one begins to experience the true self. Our core-identity is that God loves us and we are God's children. Here one believes that one's self-worth and self-dignity flows from within since one is connected to God. The experience of our core identity should give us happiness and joy. The true happiness is found in one's union with God. Our true self will remind us of the scriptural texts like that we are created in the image and likeness of God (Cf. Gen 1:27). The Kingdom of God is within us (Cf. Lk 17:21). You are the temples of the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1 Cor 6:19-20).

Our functional identity is important but often the fear is that we look at it in isolation. We are called to look at our abilities, talents, power, wealth and activities from the angle of our core-identity. Then we do not become slaves of creatures, we do not absolutize them rather we use them for the service of God which will show our right relationship towards God's creation. Hence, one must remember that there is nothing wrong in having wealth, talents, power, position because these

are creatures of God and gifts from God. But one needs to have the right disposition, right attitude towards these gifts. Our attachment to creatures and our craving for power, honor and wealth reflect our emptiness within.

When we ponder over the request of the mother of James and John (Mt 20:20-28) in the Gospel, we understand that she wanted her sons to have important positions in Jesus' kingdom since she thought of him as a political leader. She might have thought that if her sons got prime positions in the kingdom of Jesus, they would be great. She was making this request under the influence of false self. She might have understood self-worth and self-dignity in terms of power and honour. But Jesus who was always guided by the true self made it very clear the values of his kingdom. Jesus said, "It will not be so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave". True self invites us to be counter-cultural.

To bring about transformation one need to ask time and again to oneself "who am I?" The response will be: I am a child of God (true self) and I am a sinner (false self). "To put on the 'New Man', we need to put off the 'old self' with all its illusory desires, that is, to become aware of all that components of our Ego (our 'possessions', riches, attachments) and renounce them or drop them. By 'denying' ourselves (our Egos), 'dying to ourselves', and 'losing ourselves' we save our true selves and become our true selves (Cf. Mk 8: 34-35)" (Ukken 2002:12-13).

The need of the hour is that we become aware of our false self. It means getting in touch with our attachments and bondages which do not allow us to make right choices. The destructive choices we make are a clear sign that our lives are governed by a false self. The focus of false self is self and not the neighbor. Whereas true self is based on love and its focus is the other. "Love is my identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name" (Merton 1952:37). When we are familiar with true self (self-knowledge), we begin to see the reality from God's point of view (knowledge of God). Then our choices will be influenced by true self. In other words, we will choose what God wants. Therefore, we cannot make a separation between self-knowledge and knowledge of God.

Knowledge of God: God is Love

The term knowledge of God reminds us the words of Jesus to his disciples "Who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8:29). One of the primary purposes of religious life is to know God intimately. Hence, the consecrated person

is confronted with this question time and again: "Who is Christ for me?" Christian life is centered on discipleship. A disciple has to know his or her teacher. A personal and intimate knowledge of Christ is essential to be a committed follower. Pope Francis as Cardinal Bergoglio had said that "what I tell people is not to know God only by hearing. The Living God is He that you may see with your eyes within your heart" (Bergoglio & Skorcka 2013:3). We become persons of encounter when we see Christ with our eyes and heart. The religious who have encountered Jesus lead their lives as per the dictates of true self. Despite tossed by temptations and struggles they hold on to true self, cling on to God for true happiness and joy.

Jesus had his foundational experience at river Jordan during the Baptism where he addressed God as *Abba*. He experienced God as a loving parent (Soares-Prabhu 2003:3). "You are my Son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased" (Mk1:11). These words manifested Father's unconditional love towards Jesus. This God experience kept him going amidst conflicts and misunderstandings and liberated him from inner conditioning and made him supremely free. He derived his authority from his *Abba* experience (Soares-Prabhu 2003:4-5). We cannot say that one who has God experience is free from temptations. Jesus too was tempted like any of us (Mt 4:1-11). The devil tempted him to have the pleasure, power, and honour of the world. But Jesus without yielding to the deceits of the devil confronted him and firmly showed his belongingness to *Abba* in the midst of temptations. Jesus was truly rooted in his true self while making choices. Even at the garden of Gethsemane he was aware that he was tossed between God's will and self-will but as the true Son of the Father, he said "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (Mk 14:36). Holding on to Father's love in the midst of conflicts was the hallmark of Jesus' life.

The disciples when they joined Jesus, they thought that he would be the messiah who brings political liberation to the Jews. As the disciples were with Jesus, the images that they had about him began to shatter. There was a gradual realization that more than a political leader he was a spiritual leader since he forgave sins. After the Last Supper, as Jesus began his journey to Calvary, the images of a heroic leader might have begun to crumble. They realized that he was a weak, fragile leader who carried the Cross. But after the Resurrection, when the disciples were totally downcast, he appeared to them and it was a transforming moment for them. They had an experiential knowledge about Christ. Mary Magdalene with joy uttered "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20:18).

The doubting Thomas proclaimed "My Lord and My God" (Jn 20:28). The two disciples on the way to Emmaus met the Risen Lord in the breaking of the Bread (Lk 24:13-35). John who calls "God is love" (1Jn 4:8) shares his intimate experience of Christ in his epistle. "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life" (1Jn 1:1).

The intimate knowledge of the Lord will invite us to be Christ-like. It is an experience of putting on the mind of Christ (Cf. 1Cor 2:16). In this journey of knowing the Lord intimately, as our gaze is fixed on him, we know that we are weak, vulnerable. But at the same time, we believe in God's love. He says: "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid" (Mt14:27). As we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, we also grow in self-knowledge. Here in this process deeper purification takes place from deep-seated attachments. It is basically transformation of attitudes. Surrender will be the attitude of the persons who have encountered Christ. Then we can joyfully proclaim like St. Paul "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Knowledge of the World: Proximity to the Poor

Till the Second Vatican Council, only the knowledge of God and self were emphasized in the process of transformation. During formation closeness to the life of the poor was not given its due. Today in our formation programme, live in experience with the marginalized has become one of the non-negotiables. Unfortunately, such initiatives often turn out to be one among many activities and fail to be life-transforming experiences. So our exposure to the world, especially to the impoverished, must impel us to live our religious life radically and prophetically.

Today we live in a world which upholds the "globalization of indifference" (*Evangelii Gaudium* 54). Many of us are tired of hearing the words like poverty and option for the poor. Maybe we have hardened our hearts to the cause of the poor. If we look at the Bible, the attitude of Yahweh was quite different. He was moved by the reality of the oppressed which was clearly seen at the burning bush:

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings. And I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them (Ex 3:7-9).

The context of the oppressed determined Yahweh's mission. He wanted to liberate them. Similarly Jesus too was passionate about the liberation of the marginalized. Therefore in his mission manifesto (Lk 4:18-19) the least, the last and the lost were included. He had a preferential option for them. The poor, marginalized and the oppressed were always close to Yahweh and to Jesus. Those were the beloved of God. The poverty and misery are the consequences of human sin and are not willed by God. We cannot envisage a God's reign with poverty and oppression because it is a reality where true fellowship and harmony govern. The Church and the theology today must opt for the poor and to listen to their cry (Pathil & Veliath 2005:81). Therefore today if we want to follow Christ authentically, it is not enough to be his friends (knowledge of God). Rather we must also be friends of the poor. Our experiential knowledge of self and God must move us to radiate Christ's love and compassion to the poor. As we have space for God, we are invited to have space for the oppressed in our hearts.

When we are affected by the life situation of the poor, they become our formators. They tell us what type of religious we should become. It is more than we evangelizing them, we are evangelized by them (*Evangelii Gaudium*:198). "We are called to find Christ in them, to lend our voice to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them and to embrace the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share with us through them" (*Evangelii Gaudium*:198). So we need to listen to them, listen to their cry. God not only speaks to us through the Word of God but also through them.

Liberation theologians today speak of the *epistemological privilege of the poor*. It means that as God is present and active in a special way among the poor and that they are the beloved of God, and as the poor totally depend on God's benevolence, they have a better chance to know more about God; they have the privilege to be with God and to know God. Therefore, God speaks today in a very special way through the cry of the poor, their struggles, aspirations, visions and hopes (Pathil & Veliath 2005:81).

In this sense, the words of Pope Francis make sense when he invites the consecrated persons to look at the reality from the periphery.

I also expect from you [religious] what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries. "Go into all the world"; these were the last words which Jesus spoke to his followers and which he continues to address to us (cf. *Mk* 16:15). A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly,

sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine (Pope Francis 2014).

Today if we want to be effective instruments in God's Kingdom, we need to experience the smell of the sheep not only during our formation but throughout our life. As our gaze is fixed on the Lord, in Him we must see the broken world, the world of the marginalized. Our closeness to the poor must motivate us to work for their cause and to seriously reflect about their reality. If we are affected by their reality, then we must take effective actions to alleviate their suffering. It must also help us to critique our lifestyle as religious. As the consumeristic values are creeping into religious life, we are blindly appropriating the mantra of false self: "Have More". But our experience with the poor must instill in us confidence to be counter-cultural and to believe in the age-old maxim: "Less is More" (*Laudato Si'* 222). By being simple and austere, we can be happy. Such happiness will come when we have true knowledge of self, God and the poor.

Conclusion

Our reflection on the experiential knowledge of self, God and the poor has made us realize that these are interconnected components in the process transformation. Transformation is not an overnight task but a life-long process. The more we base ourselves on true self greater will be our experience of God's love. God who is love is intimately experienced in the true self. The experience of the love of God should be lived out by loving our neighbour in a special way the underprivileged.

Often we discuss in our community gatherings the problems of religious life. Most of our problems boil down to ego clashes. In such situations, there is no room for true self, no respect for the other and also no scope for humility and forgiveness. The experiential knowledge of self, God and poor can be an antidote to all the ills of religious life. The experiential knowledge of these three components will make our life as religious meaningful and fruitful. A transformed and empowered religious will live in the light of true self seeing everything with the eyes of Jesus including the gray areas of others. Such a person will see the Divine not only in oneself but also in others, the poor and in the cosmos.

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The Divine Pedagogy of Formation – XIII An Eccentric Formee

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Abstract

The call and the response of Jonah stand out on account of its abruptness and unexpected twists. The trainee tries to evade his Guru by running away from him. The divine Pedagogue knew the obstinate and insolent nature of his trainee and prepared the belly of a whale to form and transform him. However, the self-righteous formee tries to indict his format or by finding fault with his works and belittles Yahweh by enumerating his crimes. He never cared about anybody else other than himself. The Book of Jonah ends with a question addressed to the representatives of God in every age. Whether to imbibe the divine perspective and become a true disciple is a choice left to us.

An Unexpected Command

A Strange Beginning

Usually, the books of the prophets begin with giving details of the author and the context. Strangely the book of Jonah does not bear a superscription. All on a sudden the prophet is given a commission. We do not know the earlier period of his formation, and how he responded to it. The opening of the Book is abrupt: "And the word of Yahweh 'was to' Jonah son of Amittai saying..." This statement is usually translated as "the Word of the Lord came to..." The verb *hyh* means "to be, happen". It refers to the abiding nature of the divine Word, which is living, active,