

The Divine Pedagogy of Formation - XI THE FORMEE, "HE-WHO-IS-FROM-GOD"

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Abstract

Samuel's story is unique on account of diverse grounds. It was not he, but his mother who made the choice in advance what and who he should be. This calls into question the logic of human freedom. The biblical answer to this perennial predicament is simple: It is not we who choose God; rather it is God who chooses us (Jn 15:16). We better drop our sense of entitlement and remain humble and grateful. Vocation is both a mystery and a grace. Like an exemplary pupil Samuel made himself totally available to his divine formator. He sprung into action whenever he was asked to and remained silent when was not called for. People with insatiate ego are constantly living in fear. They are afraid of silence and inactivity, fearing that people may utterly forget them. They make noise and wriggle to be in the limelight. The chosen ones should learn to lead solitary and unknown life, if that is the divine design concerning them. Samuel serves as a model for us.

Introduction

Here is an instance of a candidate, whom his mother offered to the Lord as His minister while he was a child (1Sam.1:22). We had in the past such stories, with devastating consequences. Often such candidates were forced to opt for such a vocation against their own will. This had brought about conflicts and agonies. Such persons had then two options, either to lead a double life or to dump their consecrated life eventually. Now the question arises. Is it correct to receive such persons to religious/

priestly life? Should not one embrace his/her call with total free will and choice without any external compulsion or influence? Humanly speaking, this is a valid argument. However, we have biblical texts which explicitly state that a person is pre-destined, even before he/she is formed in the womb of the mother, and God sets apart that person to Himself. We have studied in the last issue of this journal the story of Jeremiah, who was consecrated even before his birth (*Vinayasadana*, Vol. V, No.2, July 2014, pp.98-100). Paul speaks thus of himself in Gal.1:15: "God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by grace..." As we know, he had embraced the call only after his younger days, as he designates himself, "one abnormally born" (1 Chr.11:8). Still, while reflecting on his call, Paul finds out that he had been pre-destined by God before his birth. It is not humans who choose God; rather the choice comes from the Lord (Jn.15:16, 19). Human logic cannot fully understand this reality. It is a mystery, a grace. God made Samuel's mother as his instrument. Perhaps some of the readers may remember the classic cinema, *Desadanam*. This tells the distress and desolation of a young boy who was taken to the monastery in order to be crowned as its future *Acharya*. As he tried to return to the world, nobody, even his parents and companions, were ready to receive him, and he was forced to go back to the monastery. The implied message is that it is not proper to retract what was consecrated to God.

A Mother's Vow

The sterile Hannah had to suffer humiliations and abuse from others (1Sam.1:1-8). She silently wept and fasted. During the pilgrimage to the Shrine at Shiloh Hannah sat in the divine presence, invoked Yahweh and made a vow that in case the Lord would grant her an offspring, she will present him to the Almighty all the days of his life, and a razor will not touch his head (v.11). Hannah was dedicating the child as a Nazirite, who was not allowed to drink wine and liquor. Eli, the priest blessed her saying that Yahweh grants her request. After her return she became pregnant and bore a son. Hannah stayed at home until the child was weaned. Then she took the child to Shiloh with offerings and left the boy with Eli (vv.12-28).

The Concept of a Nazirite

The text of Num.6:1-21 speaks of the laws concerning a Nazirite. Such an individual is especially dedicated to God by vows of separation, abstention from products of the vine and regulation of not cutting the hair. According to the Israelite tradition such a person is endowed with charismatic gifts, like Samson (Jgs.13:5, 7), who was also consecrated

even before birth. Thus a Nazirite, in his life style, attests that he was the called one of Yahweh.

The Name Samuel

Popular Etymology

Hannah named the child Samuel, saying “because I asked the Lord for him” (v.20). Here it is assumed that the name originates from the root *s'l* = ask. Then the name would have been *semu'el*, “he-who-is from-God”. All scholars however do not agree with this proposal. Some suggest the meaning of the name, “his-name-is-En” (*simuhu'il*). We prefer the former popular etymological meaning.

It's Significance

A called one has to be necessarily “he-who-is-from-God”. His/her existence derives from the Lord, the disciple's *guru* and formator. One may make use of the expression of Paul in Acts.17:28: The called one has to live in the Lord, move and has his/her being in divine Formator. Samuel provides the best example of such a fellowship. As Hannah has asserted, for his whole life he shall be given over to the Lord.

The Call

The Training Days

Under the direction of the priest Eli the boy Samuel ministered to Yahweh (2:11, 18, 21; 3:1). This expression may mean that Eli instructed Samuel how to serve the Lord as a priest. The old man trained the boy how to exercise the sacerdotal duties such as performing the ritual offerings, as well as administering the blessings to the people. Samuel seems to have used these days of formation to grow in union with God. The statement of 2:26 implies this: “And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favour both with the Lord and with humans.” The trainee's devotional behaviour pleased God as well as the people. As the young man responded positively with the divine graces, the Lord wanted to raise him up as his prophet (3:20; 2Chr.38:18; Zir.46:13-20), seer (9:5-14, 18-21; 1Chr.9:22; 26:28; 29:29) and Judge (7:15; 13:13-14; 15:15-19, 22-23).

An Unexpected Encounter

It is said that at those days Samuel was spending his nights lying in the temple where the ark of God was kept (3:3). He took care that the lamp of God in the temple never to be extinguished. This attests to his devotional attention to the affairs of Yahweh.

One day while he was asleep he heard someone calling him “Samuel Samuel”. Promptly he responded *hinneni* (here I am), as faithful Abraham had answered the Lord in Gen.22:1. Thinking that it was Eli, Samuel ran to him saying, *hinneni*, for you called me (3:2-5). But Eli was not the person who called him; so he instructed the boy to return to bed. Again Samuel heard the same voice, “Samuel Samuel”. The young man once more ran to Eli, saying *hinneni*, for you called me. The old priest once more denied that he had called him. The same thing was repeated a third time. Then Eli realized that it was Yahweh who was calling Samuel. Sending the boy to bed the priest gave him the following instruction: “If he calls you, say ‘speak Lord, for your servant is listening.’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place” (vv.6-9).

Reflection I

The prompt and most willing response of Samuel, even though he did know that the one who was calling him was Yahweh, demands special mention. It showed that Samuel was a most obedient disciple of Eli. We do not find in him any trace of impatience or murmur. Usually the young ones will react at those who disturb their sleep. Only at the compulsion they will slowly get up muttering and oblige. Now Samuel, at hearing his name uttered, immediately responded: *hinneni*, and runs to Eli, saying *hinneni*. This incident was repeated thrice. At each time the boy readily answered. This is indeed an authentic trait of a formee. He/she should be ever ready to listen to the call, whether that of God, or of a human. It is noteworthy that Samuel had then not yet experienced the phenomenon of divine encounter.

The Divine Oracle

As Samuel was lying in his bed the Lord again called, “Samuel, Samuel” (vv.10-14). The boy immediately answered: “Speak! For your servant is listening”.

Reflection II

The word of Samuel is the most ideal form to respond to the divine call. Like some other persons in the Old Testament he did not try to make excuse or to set up conditions. He allows the Calling One to speak freely and unrestrained. Samuel addresses himself, “your servant”. Here we find the ideal attitude of a called one. He/she is merely an *ebed*, an underling. The divine Formator can do with this disciple whatever He likes. He can ask him/her any kind of sacrifice, even to lay down the life. The *ebed* will do anything for his Master. Jesus is the most authentic *ebed*, God’s Called One.

The Predicament of the Formee

Nothing is mentioned about the reaction of Samuel at hearing the words of punishment that is to befall Eli his master. It is merely stated that the boy lay in bed until morning and then, getting up early, open the doors of the temple. The divine oracle was a great shock to him. Most probably Samuel spent the night in great distress. He did not know what to say to Eli if questioned. The first encounter with the Lord was not at all a pleasant and peaceful one and did not bring any joy and encouragement. The freshly called one has to announce words of retribution and that to his beloved formator. As he was afraid, he kept mum.

A Resigned Master

Samuel could not escape Eli, who compelled him under the gravity of an imprecation to reveal the divine words (vv.16-17). The boy had to disclose everything. The priest responded with resignation: "Yahweh he is; let him do whatever seems best to him" (v.18).

The Mission Begins

Thus Samuel accedes to the office for which he was prepared from the womb. Now the moment has come and the Word of Yahweh began to be revealed to him. It meant that the period of his indentures was over. The apprentice is replacing the human master. Samuel began to realize the destiny prepared for him before his birth, his life's work as the instrument of divine Formator now lies ahead. The formee is henceforth to be the medium through which Yahweh will address his people. They came to realize that truth, as the Lord was with Samuel, letting none of his words fall to the ground (vv.19-21).

The Roles of the Called One

Samuel was entrusted with roles of the priest, prophet, seer, warrior, judge and man of God.

Priest and Prophet

As a priest he offered sacrifice, prayed to the Lord on Israel's behalf and anointed the king (7:5, 17; 13:8-12). The texts of 1Sam.3:20; 2Chr.35:18; Sir.46:13-20 refer to him as Yahweh's prophet. As the Lord was with him, letting nothing he said be ineffective, all Israel recognized that Samuel was attested as the divine prophet, revealing himself to him through His word (1Sam.3:19-21). Under the Prophet Samuel's leadership the Passover was solemnly celebrated in Israel (2Chr.35:18). Sir.46:13-20 thus presents him: "Samuel beloved by his Lord, a prophet of the Lord, established the kingdom and anointed rulers over His people. By the

law of the Lord he judged the congregation... By his faithfulness he was proved to be a prophet, and by his words he became known as a trust worthy Seer. He called upon the Lord the Mighty One, when his enemies pressed him anointed: 'I have not taken anyone's property, not so much as a pair of shoes...' Even after he had fallen asleep he prophesied... and lifted up his voice out of the earth in prophecy, to blot out the wickedness of the people."

Sirach's eulogy brings out pertinent traits of a formed one: She/he is called beloved by the divine *Guru*, i.e., the dearest one whom the divine Formator holds in great esteem. The formator will use His formee to establish the divine kingdom on earth. The called one has to serve as a judge over the people, discerning what is good and evil in the eyes of God. The formee has to prove himself/herself as the Lord's prophet through his/her faithfulness. In times of challenges and distress he/she has to intercede for the people and offer oneself as a sacrifice (1Sam.7:8-9; 12:23). His/her life should be a witness to his/her integrity. Even after death the called ones can lift up their voice out of the earth in prophecy in order to blot out wickedness out of the people.

Judge and Seer

The above cited text of Sirach speaks of Samuel as a judge (see also 1Sam.7:15). Before the establishment of monarchy in Israel, the Judges called by the Lord, served as the leaders. They, Yahweh's representatives acted as the heads of the family of Israel, bringing into their life both material and spiritual prosperity. Judges played the role of military leaders, and fought the battles in the name of the Lord. As shepherds they were called to lead the people to the divine rest, providing self-realization (*atma sakshatkara*) and God realization (*Iswra sakshatkara*).

Samuel is also called seer, (1Sam.9:9 (twice), 11, 18, 19; 1 Chr.9:22; 26:28; 29:29). In early days the prophets were called seers, since they had God's eye through which these man of God could see remote and future things and utter oracles in that light. In Sam.9:9 (twice), 11, 18, 19 Saul, who was looking for the lost donkeys of his father, went to Samuel, the seer in order to get information about the lost animals. It is believed that he through his inner eye could find out whereabouts of the donkeys.

Man of God

The called one is also known as man of God, 1Sam.9:6, 7, 10. Moses is given the same title in 1Chr.23:14. The servant who informed Saul about Samuel explains what is meant by that designation: "Look, in

this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let us go there now. Perhaps he will tell us which way to take" (1Sam.9:6). Usually men of God are approached with gifts. Because of this Saul hesitated, since he had no gift to offer to Samuel. But his servant had a quarter of a shekel of silver with him, so that Saul with his servant went to meet the man of God. After reporting the words of servant the redactor of the book of Samuel makes an editorial explanation: "Formerly in Israel when a man went to inquire of God, he said, come, let us go to the seer! For someone who today would be called "the prophet" was formerly called "the seer" (v.9).

Reflection III

The modern persons who are called also are given the roles of prophets, judges, seers and men/women of God. They have to constantly live in communion and communication with their divine Master. Such an intimacy could provide them the charism of seeing things with the divine eyes, and proclaim judgment whether condemnatory or salvific, on the contemporary events. This is the prophetic role, which the present called ones often fail to play. They are also given the task of the judge in the biblical sense, i.e., of shepherds who have to lead the people to the divine pastures and living waters, so that they could find self-realization and God-realization, and enter into God's rest. The divine intimacy which the called ones enjoy should be experienced by the common people, which will win the respect of all.

A Silent Period

After speaking about Samuel's roles of prophet and judge with the comment "and Samuel's words went out to all Israel" (literally "and the word of Samuel was to all Israel), the author of the book of Samuel does not speak about him till 7:2. During this long period of 20 years and 7 months Israel went through a critical period. In the battle of Ebenezer (4:1b-11) the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant, the visible sign of the presence of Yahweh. Thereby Israel lost their religious identity. Eli and his sons died (4:12-22). Philistines harrowed Israel (5:1-12). They were compelled to return the ark of covenant after 7 months, since the Lord punished them with great calamity (6:1-12). First it was brought to Beth-shemesh, but Yahweh struck down seventy of the people (6:13-20). The people got alarmed and mourned, and took the Ark of Covenant of Yahweh to Kiriath-jearim. There it remained 20 years (6:21-7:1).

Reflection IV

The author does not give any reason for the absence of Samuel at this stormy time, in which people of Israel were badly in need of guidance and leadership. We can only make the following assumption. The called one was silent because the divine Formator kept silence. The formee was not assigned any task. It would have been very painful and heart breaking for Samuel to remain as a mute spectator. It seems that the Lord wanted to teach his elected people a bitter lesson by allowing them to undergo such a terrible experience. It was the divine plan to bring them back to Him through these tragic ordeals. This was also a period of formative purification for the called one. One may think that the formee would have spent sleepless nights, shedding bitter tears at the happenings, and raising his heart to the divine *Guru*, pestering Him with tearful prayers and supplications for his beloved people. Perhaps we may compare the time as the days of dark night of the soul of the St. John of the Cross, as the period of the passive purification of the soul.

Returning to the Central Stage

As calamities ensued the people of Israel mourned and sought after the Lord (7:2). The people's readiness to listen to Yahweh gave Samuel a chance to interfere for them.

A Strict Demand

At getting this new significance to his prophetic commission, he addressed Israel: "If it is with all your heart that you are returning to Yahweh, you must remove the foreign gods from among you, as well as the Asherim. You must fix your heart on Yahweh and serve Him alone. Then he will rescue you from the grasp of the Philistines" (v.3). As a true disciple of the divine Master the formee demanded unconditional returning to Yahweh with all the heart. Without this *shub* (turn to) dynamism there will be no sense for their existence (see Dt.30:10; 1Kg.8:48; 2Kgs.23:25). The concrete demonstration of this act should consist in removing all the foreign gods whom the chosen people were serving in flagrant violation of their covenant commitment to the Lord. There should follow two more acts, striking blow to their hearts, (the literal meaning of the phrase) and serve Him only. The first one refers to the act of reparation, punishment for their unfaithfulness. The second one, serving Yahweh alone with all the heart, soul and strength (Dt.6:5) is a pre-requisite for the covenant people.

Reflection V

Here we find the true face of an uncompromising and unyielding religious leader. Samuel, as his name signified, has to act as “he-who-is-from-God”. The people had forsaken their God, who had liberated them, made them his own people by establishing a covenant with them, and given them the land. This was wicked treachery, which demanded uncompassionate, harsh and rigorous counteraction. Samuel provides a model for modern formators, who have become very lenient and indulgent, which has negatively affected formation.

Prayer and Reconciling Rites

The Israelites listened to Samuel and put away the foreign gods, and served the Lord only. At their positive response Samuel assembled all the people at Mispha (vv.5-6). There he prayed to Yahweh on their behalf, which was followed with libations of water, a penitential rite in association with the people’s fasting and confession of sins. Thus Samuel helped the community to purge their guilt. As once more the peace with the Lord was re-established Samuel could perform his role of judge, leading the people in the divine path.

Crisis and Solution

A Critical Situation

The Philistines, the arch-enemies of Israel once more came up against them (7:7-14). The terrified people this time took refuge in Samuel, and pleaded: “Do not keep silent from us from crying out for us to Yahweh (the Hebrew expression is idiomatic and doubly pregnant, which is difficult to capture in English), our God that He may rescue us from the grasp of the Philistines! (v.8). The Israelites knew that Yahweh is their God also, but they preferred to approach the divine representative, whose fervent and incessant supplications will be more effective than their entreaties. This is also the expectation of the modern people from the called ones.

Prayer as Solution

Then Samuel offered a holocaust, a whole burnt offering, and cried out to Yahweh on Israel’s behalf. The Lord listened to him and thundered in a loud voice against the Philistines, confounding them so that they were utterly routed. As an act of gratitude the called one took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshnah. He named it Ebenezer (the term means ‘stone of help’), explaining, “to this point Yahweh helped us”. It served as a votive stone expressing the gratitude and devotion

of the beneficiaries. The role of the called one is basically that of an intercessor, who can make war by prayer. The field is won by the divine warfare. Victory belonged to Yahweh, and the proper human posture is one of confidence and commitment. The modern formators have to instil into the hearts of the formees this truth. Because of the faithfulness of Samuel the divine Formator did not allow the Philistines to attack Israel again during his time of office. Besides, the captured towns were restored to them. Also the Lord brought peace between Israel and the Amorites.

His Task as Judge

Samuel could perform his task as judge of Israel without disturbance (vv.15-17), administering justice and leading the people to the divine rest. It was indeed Yahweh who ruled, the prophet being His agent. The land was secure under his leadership. The way how Samuel judged Israel is explained in vv.16-17. He would go in a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpha, always returning to Ramah, his home town, where he built an altar to Yahweh. This act of Samuel teaches the called ones that they have to always remember their indebtedness to the One who has called them, expressing it by acts of offering.

Vv. 15-17 are the synopsis of Samuel's subsequent career. He appears in 8:1 as an old man, sharing his administrative responsibilities with two incompetent sons. This act of making his sons as co-judges reflects how human considerations entered into his life. It was indeed Yahweh's prerogative to call a person into the office of judge. Nothing is said about the Lord's reaction to such an appointment. Of course it would not have been pleasing to Him.

A Turning Point in History

Then there occurred an unexpected incident, a decisive event that determined the future of the nation.

Embracing the Secular Ideology

The people wanted to be ruled by a king 'like' all other nations! (8:4-5). In this desire of theirs there seems to underlie a motivation similar to that of Adam and Eve who violated the divine command since they wanted to become 'like' gods (Gen.3:5). The people conveniently forgot that they had a call very different from that of other nations. Yahweh had liberated them out of the Egyptian slavery, made a covenant with them elevating them to the status of the holy nation and had given them a land, in order to reign as their king. Now they were rejecting

this unique privilege by succumbing to the temptation to be ruled by a human king like other secular people.

The Distressed Formee

“The thing was bad in the eyes of Samuel” (v.6). He was grieved at the demand of the people which was tantamount to the repudiation of Yahweh’s rule. The formee turned to his Formator: “He prayed to Yahweh” Here we find an ideal response of a called one. On such critical occasions there remains only one resort, to approach the One who has called him/her, and to give vent to the inner agony.

The Consoling Formator

Although the decision of the people had broken the heart of Yahweh, he hastened to comfort the formee (vv.7-9). The called one needs not to be too much aggrieved, since the people have rejected not him, but the Formator himself. They have repudiated Yahweh’s rule, an act which they were continuously repeating from the day when he liberated them out of Egypt, by going after other gods. In these words one can see the painful heart beatings of the loving One who had come down from heaven with the desire to become one with the suffering slaves. This exasperated Master still try to make monarchy as his approved institution. Yahweh twice asked the formee to listen to the people (v.7, 9). Still he entrusted Samuel with the task of solemnly warning the people about the eventual hardships which will befall upon them. The words, “yet you must solemnly warn them,” imply formal legal language. In the future the people will not be able to claim they were not aware of what was in store for them.

An Obedient Formee

The obedient response of Samuel provides the best model for the modern called ones who may be pressed to do things which were not to their liking: “Samuel reported all the words of Yahweh to the people who were requesting a king of him...” (v.10); “He repeated all the words of the people in the ears of Yahweh” (v.21). The formee warned the people about the folly underlying in their demand (vv.11-18). But they were not willing to listen to him and stuck by their request. Then the formee reported it to the Master. Once more Yahweh told him: “Listen to them and make them a king” (v.22). Accordingly Samuel proceeded for the selection of the candidate.

Anointing the Future King

Chapters IX-X give the details of the anointing ritual. The Lord made the chosen one to approach the prophet. "Now one day before Saul's arrival Yahweh had disclosed to Samuel the following: At this time tomorrow I shall send you a man from Benjamin. You will anoint him prince over my people..." (v.15-16). As Saul approached, Yahweh told the called one: "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you" (v.17). Accordingly the prophet anointed that young man (10:1-9). Following the divine instruction Samuel gave certain signs for Saul as proof that Yahweh has anointed him prince over his estate (vv.1b-7).

Acclamation of the People

There followed the summoning of the people to Mizpah (10:17-24). First Samuel once more reminded them of their rebellion against Yahweh in asking for a king. Then he proceeded to cast lots, and finally Saul was taken. Thus he presented the young man: "Do you see him whom Yahweh has chosen?" And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!" (v.24) – a phrase which expresses the popular acclamation of the king (1 Kgs.1:25, 34, 39; 2 Kgs.11:12 - 2 Chr.23:11).

The institution of monarchy was given divine sanction by declaring the Law of the Kingdom of the people, in which the rights and obligations of both the king and people were written down. The mediator laid the document up before Yahweh (v.25).

Farewell Speech

Pulling the curtain for his ministry as Judge Samuel made a last discourse to the people, in which he challenged them to prove whether he had done any injustice to any one of them (12:1-5). In the second part he drew the picture of their history of apostasy from the beginning itself (vv.13-15). As a proof for the evil they had done he called upon Yahweh and the Lord sent thunder and rain which greatly frightened the people (vv.16-18), so that they requested Samuel to intercede on their behalf. To this supplication the formee gladly consented (vv.19-25).

A Challenge

"Here I am! Accuse me before Yahweh and before his anointed! Whose bull have I taken? Whose ass have I taken? Whom have I wronged? Whom have I abused? From whom have I taken a bribe or a pair of shoes? Accuse me, and I shall repay you!" The people had nothing to say negatively. Then Samuel thus concluded his challenge: "Yahweh is witness against you today that you have found nothing in my hand!" (vv.3-5).

Reflection VI

Blessed are the called ones who could thus challenge the people of their mission with these words! Had the modern priest and religious such an untainted conscience! Then the Church would not have fallen into the present pitiable situation! Samuel could call upon his Master to be a witness for what he was claiming. This is indeed the true portrait of a disciple of Christ. Even today the Lord will be ready to demonstrate the power of the called ones who live a heroic life of total authenticity and uncompromising attitude towards the divine principles and dictates.

A Call to Intercede

When Israel got terribly afraid of the demonstration of the divine power, they begged Samuel to intercede on their behalf, so that they might not die (vv.18-25). At the same time they confessed that they had added another evil to all their sins in requesting a king of their own. Then the kind disciple uttered words of consolation, asserting, "Far it be from me to sin against Yahweh by ceasing to intercede on your behalf!" And he promised them that he will teach them the way that is good and right. But he cautioned that they must fear Yahweh and serve Him truly with all their heart.

Reflection VII

It is the task of the formed ones to continue their acts of intercession, even if the people rebel and turn against them and God. Otherwise it will be considered as a sin against the called one. This point is very pertinent in modern times, in which the priest and religious have to face very often the oppositions and cruel ingratitude.

Questioning the king

When the Philistines gathered to fight with a great army, cavalry and chariots the frightened Israelites rallied behind Saul at Gilgal (13:2-10). Before the battle Samuel had to offer holocaust and communion offerings. But the prophet did not come until the stipulated time. As the army began to drift away, the king himself offered up the sacrifice. As soon as he had finished the offerings, Samuel arrived. "What have you done?" (vv.11-15) – thundered the prophet. The king's explanations were not accepted. "You acted foolishly" – said Samuel. Since Saul did not keep the appointment with Samuel, and so also he did not carefully execute his divine appointment as king, Yahweh will find Saul's successor and appoint him king-designate. It was not just Saul's reign that was at stake, but his dynasty.

Rejecting Saul

Chapter 15 tells the story of the rejection of the disobedient king.

Instructing the King

According to the divine request Samuel asked Saul to attack the city of Amalek and slay every human person, animate and inanimate beings (vv.1-9). But the king was not punctilious in executing the details of the divine command. He spared Agag king of Amalek, and the choicest of the livestock.

Repentance of the Formator

At this disobedience the word of Yahweh came to Samuel: "I repent of having made Saul king, because he has turned away from following me and does not carry out my commands" (vv.11ab). Here we find the divine Formator cries his heart out before the formee. This is indeed a best pedagogy of formation. Sometimes the master has to open up his inner feelings and disclose his agonies before the disciple. It will greatly help the called one to get more united with the divine sentiments. It is as if the *guru* were seeking consolation from the formee!

A Crying Formee

Samuel was greatly enraged (v.11cd). The basic meaning of the Hebrew term *harah* is to burn. The formee's anger burned hot. It has the intensive meaning of flying into a passion. The called one cannot suffer at seeing the sufferings of the divine Pedagogue! "He cried to Yahweh throughout the night." His bitter tears could speak volumes. This should be the true mark of an authentic formee.

V.35 also betrays the anguish of the formee: "Never again before he died did Samuel see Saul; yet he grieved for Saul, because Yahweh had repented of making him king over Israel." (v.35). Here the verb *hitabhal* is used, which means mourn intensively. While *harah* primarily refers to Samuel's rage at Saul who had hurt the heart of the Lord, the second *hitabhal* mainly points to his distress on account of the king.

Indicting the King

The former disobedience of Saul has already forfeited his dynastic claims. Now the king has failed another crucial test and thus must accept the repudiation of his own reign. Samuel rose early to meet him in the morning (15:12-29). He saw the king who had just finished offering up the animals as holocausts to Yahweh. Confronting Saul he asked him: "What is this bleating in my ears and lowing that I hear?"

The king began to tell him that he was sacrificing the booty. "Stop!" – exploded the prophet. "Let me tell you what Yahweh said to me last night" (v.16). "Because you have rejected Yahweh's command, he has rejected you from being king!" (v.23).

A Yielding Prophet

Saul confessed his sin and begged Samuel to return with him (vv.24-34). Although the prophet first rejected this supplication, finally he consented to his request, as he was continuously entreating him. Then Samuel hewed Agag two pieces in the presence of Yahweh in Gilgal, as Moses had demanded the Israelites in Dt.25:17-15. In consenting to the persistent plea of the unfaithful Saul, we can find the human heart of the called one. Compassion should be the trade mark of the disciples of Christ. Samuel, however, declined to meet Saul till his death (v.35).

The Prompting Formator

The formee continued to grieve for Saul, because of Yahweh's repentance in making Saul the king. Although this act was pleasing to the Master, He did not want the called one to remain inactive weeping over it: "How long will you grieve for Saul, when I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go! I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have found me a king among his sons" (16:1). Samuel was afraid of the eventual vengeance of Saul. Then the divine Master has suggested a method. The prophet has to take a heifer and have to tell that he had come to offer a sacrifice. Then he can summon Jesse to the sacrifice. What he has to do afterwards will be told then (vv.2-3).

The Formee in Action

"Samuel did as Yahweh has said" (v.4a).

Summoning to Sacrifice

When the prophet came to Bethlehem, the elders of the village came trembling out to meet him (vv.4b-5). He pacified them and told them to consecrate themselves and participate in the sacrifice. Samuel himself consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

Dictate of the Formator

When the eldest son came, the prophet thought that he was the chosen one by the Lord (vv.6-13). But Yahweh said: "Do not look upon his appearance or his stature... For it is not as a man sees that God sees: A man looks into the face, but God looks into the heart." Jesse presented one by one his seven sons, but the prophet told him: "Yahweh has

chosen none of these.” The father got exasperated; then Samuel asked him: “Are these all the sons you have?” Without much enthusiasm Jesse replied: “There is still the youngest. He is shepherding the flock.” The prophet asked him to send for that lad, and was not willing to sit down to eat until the youngest son came. When David appeared, Yahweh told his formee: “Rise; anoint him; he is the one!” (v.12). At this word Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers. He then went up on his way to Ramah.

Reflection VIII

Very often the priests and religious will be tempted to think like Samuel, being influenced by the outward appearance, eloquence and other leadership qualities. To them the divine Pedagogue still repeats: It is not as a man that God sees; a man looks at the external aspects, but the Lord looks into the heart. Christ the paradigm of authentic formators, did not choose the intelligent, educated, noble and outstanding persons as his disciples. He looked into the hearts and called the poor, ignorant, undistinguished, unremarkable and lowly persons, so that “no one may boast before Him” (1Chr.1:26-33).

Death and Séance

Report of Death

The author of the book of Samuel has not recorded any of his further activities. It is only said: “Now Samuel was dead. And Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his village” (28:3). Anointing David was his last act. As the divine Master had not assigned for him any more tasks, he completely disappeared from the scene. This should be the ideal behaviour of every called one. They should not try to make their name heard. It is the temptation for humans to do so, fearing that the people may utterly forget them. The chosen ones should accept to lead a solitary and unknown life, as it is the divine design concerning them. Samuel serves as a model for us.

The Ghost Speaks

Saul had then become a pathetic figure, being engulfed in adversities and strives. The Philistines with a huge army came out against him. At that juncture he became so frightened that his heart beat violently (28:4-25). First he tried to inquire of Yahweh, but the Lord did not answer him, not by dreams or by lots or by prophets. The desperate king finally decided to contact a medium. He disguised himself and went to the witch of Endor and asked her to divine for him by the ghost of Samuel. At her divination Samuel came up from Sheol. The

prophet accused the king for disturbing him. The poor Saul described the situation and asked him what he should do. To this Samuel replied: "Why do you consult me, when Yahweh has turned away from you and become your enemy?" (v.16). Then he reminded the king of his wicked deeds of the past, and announced his tragic death on the next day itself in the battle field.

Reflection IX

The prophet was merely telling to Saul what the divine Master had prepared for the unfaithful anointed one. Of course he spoke severely, without any trace of mercy. The text does not give any hint to the inner feelings of the deceased one. From his former behaviour at similar situations we can conjuncture that his heart was throbbing with intense sadness. Whatever grievous the sins of the people, a genuine leader will not find satisfaction or pleasure in announcing the divine punishment for the wicked.