

The Divine Pedagogy of Formation - X

THE AGONY OF A FORMEE

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Abstract

Jeremiah's story is unique in many respects. Through his writings he gave free expression to his emotional state into his mind to comprehend and decipher the confusions and conflicts he experienced during his prophetic ministry. It was a critical period in the history of Israel in which Jeremiah had to play the role of a prophet of doom, who had to remind the people of the consequence of their infidelity – the end of the kingdom of Judah. Jeremiah was entrusted with a difficult task. First of all he should root out, pull down, eradicate and tear down rampant evil structures of the society, namely the economics of affluence, which makes few richer at the expense of the majority of the population, politics of oppression and exploitation, and a static and triumphant religion. Only then he could build and plant a new society, based on the divine economics of equality, politics of justice and compassion, and a religion of God's freedom. His writings unveil an objecting, rebelling, lamenting, non-cooperating, difficult, repenting and suffering formee. God, the Divine Pedagogue had to employ a variety of refining methods to haul out the expected results from his elect under configuration.

Introduction

The formation story of Jeremiah is different from those of the already studied texts. There we were mainly interpreting the narrations of the OT authors. Here we directly depend upon the words of Jeremiah himself. He has given vent to his reactions and emotions, which he had to face in his life as the chosen one of Yahweh. We find in the texts the

portrait of an objecting, rebelling, lamenting, non-cooperating, repenting and suffering formee. The Divine Pedagogue directly responds to the situations, disciplining or comforting or even weeping together with the disciple. The pathetic picture of the distressed and tormented figure of Jeremiah will touch the heart of every sensible person.

Call

Context

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. He lived during the last kings of the Kingdom of Judah. The young man received his call in 627 B.C, and he served as prophet till 587 B.C, the time of the second deportation of the people to Babylon (Jer.1:1-3). It was a critical period in which Jeremiah had to play the role of a prophet of doom, who had to remind the people of the consequence of their infidelity – the end of the kingdom of Judah.

An Unexpected Encounter

Jeremiah was then leading a life of an ordinary youth, who nourished dreams of marriage and a joyful and peaceful family life. Suddenly the Word of God came to him (1:4-10), calling him to become Yahweh's prophet. The youth was not at all prepared to undertake such an office. It was the Lord who took the initiative.

The Divine Dictation

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;
And before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you
I have given you a prophet to the nations (v.5)

Implication I

The twofold 'before' introduces the prior personal involvement of God from the very beginning of conception of the infant. It was Yahweh who gave human form to the child in the womb of its mother. Even before that time Yahweh is said to have had intimate, personal and experiential knowledge of this new human being. The Hebrew verb *yada* refers not simply to the past tense, but indicates a continuing act. The Creator knew, knows, is knowing the whole person, his present and future thoughts, words and actions. It denotes the act of accepting Jeremiah as His own.

Implication II

The Divine Master not only accepted the youth as his disciple but also sanctified him before he came forth out of his mother's womb. The

verb *qds* implies two things, separation and service. The elected one is separated from everything non-divine and inhuman. He has to belong totally to the Lord. He/she has to live as *nivedida/n* (one who has become *nywedham*, libation), *arppida/n* (the poured-out-one), *thadiya/n* (one who belongs to Him), *thanmaya/n* (one who is full of Him, one who is conformed to Him), and *niyadha/n* (one who has the determined, decisive, definite, resolute, steadfast, unwavering, keen and devout attitude and aptitude). A consecrated person at any cost has to dedicate his/her life to make others also have the same experience of being the chosen ones of God. Thus service (*sushrusha*) is an indispensable element of being an elect. Selection and separation are for service.

Implication III

Jeremiah was consecrated even before his birth. Therefore he cannot escape his vocation which entailed great trials, sufferings and tribulations. The only way to escape the call was not to be born. We find the prophet, when he was undergoing agony, curses the day of his birth and the mother who bore him: "Woe is me, my mother that you have born me, a man of strife and contention" (15:10); "Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad saying, a child is born to you – a son... Why He did not kill me in the womb, with my mother as my grave... Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?" (20:14-18).

Implication IV

Yahweh has not only formed, knew and sanctified Jeremiah, but also has given him as a prophet to the nations. The Hebrew term *natan* literally means to place, put, or give. It has profound implications. This is not an act of appointment, as it is usually translated in the English versions. Rather, the chosen one is given to others. They can do anything to him. He is like a thing, which is placed in front of them. One may, in a sublime sense, say that he is no more a person, but a thing, which can be utilized according to the whims and fancies of the nations.

Reflection I

The narrative of Jeremiah provides light to the profound meaning of priestly and religious vocation. It is not humans who choose God; rather the choice comes from the Lord (Jn.15:16, 19). One is called even before the time of conception. The Lord knows that person very well, with his/her qualities, defects and good and bad attitudes and aptitudes.

That human being may not be a perfect and virtuous person. The Caller knows the called, his limits and limitations. One comforting part of it is that the Holy God had sanctified him/her before the birth. That person is separated and assigned to God alone, and it is his/her sacred duty to devote the life for making others consecrated persons. Since the call and consecration happened in the womb of the mother, one cannot escape his/her call, and leave the consecrated life according to his/her likes and dislikes.

Resistance of the Called One

Ah, Lord Yahweh,
Behold, I do not know how to speak;
Indeed, a youth am I! (v.6)

Explanation I

These words unveil the shock, bewilderment and emotional outburst of the one who encounters the Word of God for the first time. The astounding experience of the divine reality will make one confused and perplexed. Jeremiah makes a poor attempt to articulate in words his half-hearted and weak resistance before the all-powerful and consuming Word of God. He could not say, 'No'; he is powerless to withstand the piercing and penetrating force of the dynamic divine Word. At the same time he could not dare to say 'Yes' to the imposing Lord. The young man had a pre-sentiment that the divine call will deprive him of his private life, personal ambitions; his dreams and likes will never then be realized, since the divine mission will call forth a life of sacrifice, self-denial, isolation, enmity and persecution. Jeremiah knows that "he will be led to the places and situations, where he does not wish to go (Jn.21:18). Encountering the Word of God human being gets uneasy; he/she becomes afraid and confused. The youth wanted to say 'No', but he is incapable to do so; he wanted to say 'Yes', but he does not have the courage to commit himself. He is apprehensive and hesitant. One may call it a bitter-sweet (Ez.3:3), or a love-hate experience. The response to the call comes in the form of reluctant and puzzled objection: "Ah... Behold...I," as if he himself was not fully convinced of his arguments. Jeremiah knew in his heart that human objections are not valid before the divine decision.

Explanation II

The young man tried to excuse himself by saying that he does not know how to speak, since he is only a youth. Here he was not referring to his physical inability or impediment to speak. As his future life will show,

he was a skilled orator. The called one was alluding to his age, since youth were not allowed at that time to speak in the assembly. They could attend the discussions of the elders, but should remain silent. They had no authority to speak in the gatherings. Now Yahweh is electing and sending a young man to speak to the assembled congregation. Who will listen, who will accept his words?

Reflection II

It is very natural that call creates tensions in the life of those who embrace priestly/religious life, since it will bring out clashes between the divine and human wills. Jeremiah was not an exception to this reality. Right from the beginning there existed conflicts, which did not decrease as time passed; rather it increased. There were times when the prophet felt as if being suffocated by his assignment. It was a cross he had to bear throughout his life – an inevitable suffering which he had to carry to his end; from womb to tomb. This kind of life of the prophet gives the current chosen ones inspiration and encouragement in their struggles to remain faithful to their vocation.

Rebuke and Reassurance

Do not say, a youth am I;
Indeed to all to whom I send you, you shall walk,
And whatever I command you, you shall speak;
Be not afraid of their faces,
Surely, I am with you. (vv.7-8)

Explanation III

The human I (*anoki*) is encountered by divine I. Human *anoki* is feeble, hesitant, complaining, non-trusting, self-centred and earth oriented. But the divine *anoki* speaks in absolute, definite and military terms. The One who calls does not waver, he does not cherish doubts; there is no half-heartedness or either-or attitude. He demands that the called one has to walk to all to whom He sends him, and has to speak whatever He commands him. The human person is not sent to places, but to persons. The journey is depicted as a walking. The Hebrew verb *hllk* has profound significance. Abraham was asked to walk to the divine face (the literal meaning of Gen.17:1), by seeing the divine face in every face – human, animal, vegetable, mineral, and cosmic faces in day to day happenings. In the command given to Jeremiah it is implied that he has to walk seeing the divine face in everyone, everything and everywhere, as well as by bringing God's face to the persons and places. Further the called one is asked to speak only whatever the Sender commands him.

The one, who is sent, should not proclaim his own ideas and ideals. He/she has to do the task of a messenger, who has to communicate the very words of Master.

Promise of the Divine Presence

After speaking in assertive words in order to strengthen and hearten the wavering candidate, the calling One changes his harsh approach. He pours out words of consolation: "Be not afraid of their faces; surely (*ki*) I am with you (*ITKA 'ANI*)".

"Fear Not"

All most all persons who are assigned with a specific task are strengthened with the phrase "fear not": Gen.15:1; 27:17; 26:24; 35:17; 43:23; 46:3; Num.14:9; 21:34; Dt.1:17, 21; 3:2; 18:22; 20:1; 31:6; Josh.8:1; 10:8; Jg.4:18; 6:23; 2Kgs.25:24; Is.41:14; 43:5; 44:2; 54:4; Ez.2:6; 3:9; Joel.2:21; Zec.8:13; Mt.1:20; Mt.1:20; Lk.1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10. The called ones need not be afraid of anyone or anything. They are God's, who will protect and guide them in the vicissitudes, troubles and hazards of life. They can exclaim with the Psalmist: "I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side" (Ps.3:6); "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Ps.23:4)

ITKA 'ANI

"I AM": this is indeed the very name of Yahweh. The dynamic, living, personal, interiorized, burning, consuming and seducing presence of the Lord, so to say, becomes crystallized as to be transformed into the very name of the Almighty. In the New Testament Jesus the Incarnate Word calls himself *ego eimi* ("I AM"): Jn.8:24, 28, 54; 13:19; 6:20; 18:5. He uses that name with a predicative nominative:

- "I AM the bread of the life": Jn.6:35, 51
- "I AM the light of the world" Jn.8:12; 9:5
- "I AM the (sheep) gate": Jn.10:7, 9
- "I AM the true shepherd": Jn.10:11, 14
- "I AM the resurrection and the life": Jn.11:25
- "I AM the way, the truth, and the life": Jn.14:6
- "I AM the true vine": Jn.15:1, 5

The divine Master's all-powerful name could energize the life of Jeremiah. It is indeed the determined force in his life. He could speak, perform signs, utter salvation oracles and pronounce judgment oracles in the name of *ITKA 'ANI*. This "I AM with you" is the only ray of hope and lamp of assurance in the dark times of the life of the called ones. In this "I AM" they are destined to live, move and have their being (Acts.17:28). The expression "surely I AM with you" is the poetic formulation of Yahweh's oath of assurance, thereby He solemnly, absolutely and unconditionally commits himself that He will ever be the sustaining power of the life of the called one.

Reflection III

It is not explicitly mentioned in the text that the young man avowed his consent to his divine mission. But his consent becomes obvious from his words of a later time. While he was facing vocation crisis Jeremiah complains: "You have seduced me, and I have let myself to be seduced. You overpowered me and prevailed" (Jer.20:7). The desolate one remembers that he had been enticed and enchanted by the sweet words of Yahweh which were irresistible and over-powering. The Hebrew term *pata* means be simple, silly, enticed, allured, deceived, persuaded. It is used in Ex.22:16 for seducing a virgin. In Hos.2:14 Yahweh is said to allure Israel. The scene of his call remained fully imprinted in the mind of the prophet. It was a loving, a sweet-bitter and love-hate memory. A notable fact is that the divine Master does not react to these acrimonious, irascible and apparently blasphemous words of the chosen one. The relationship between the Master and the disciple was founded on intimate and spontaneous freedom, in which one could without reservation express his bitter feelings. The Formator seems to enjoy such outbursts and explosions.

Sign with Task

Then Yahweh stretched forth his hand and touched my mouth
And Yahweh said to me,
Behold I have put my words in your mouth;
Behold I set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to root out and pull down,
to eradicate and tear down,
to build and plant" (vv.9-10)

Sign

The symbolic act of Yahweh touching the lips and putting his words in the mouth of the prophet was intended to remedy the objection of

Jeremiah that he had no authority to speak to the public audience. Now it is not he, but the Lord who will speak; the chosen one is not uttering human words, but the divine words, which enjoy authority and weight. Yahweh's action and words amounted to a sacramental rite. The called one is empowered with the divine word, which is like consuming fire (Jer.5:14 "I will make my words in your mouth fire, and the people wood, and it shall consume them"), and like hammer that shatters (23:29 "Are not my words like a hammer that splinters the rock"). Also the Word of God became the cause of joy and delight of Jeremiah (15:16 "When I found your words I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart"). With these positive traits the Word of God had a negative impact in his life. It brought him derision and reproach all the day (20:8).

The Mission

The chosen one was entrusted with a difficult task. First of all he should root out, pull down, eradicate and tear down rampant evil structures of the society, namely the economics of affluence, which makes few richer at the expense of the majority of the population, politics of oppression and exploitation, and a static and triumphant religion. Only then he could build and plant a new society, based on the divine structures of economics of equality, politics of justice and compassion, and a religion of God's freedom.

A Call to Become a Failure

Jeremiah was called mainly to proclaim words of judgment to Judah. This task doomed him to become a failure. If the words of judgment come true and the people destroyed, then it meant that he had failed to bring the citizens back to Yahweh – the ultimate purpose of mission, for which threats of divine punishment were intended. Only in the case they reject the call to conversion there will be the need for judgment. Now they are going to be destroyed, which meant that the prophet could not lead them to repentance, which was the real motivation of proclamation. The destruction of the countrymen will be also his destruction.

What will be the effect if his words of judgment were not realized? Dt.18:22 makes clear that only when the words uttered by the prophet get realized, he could be called a true prophet; otherwise he will be a false prophet, through his mouth Yahweh had not spoken. Now the people were challenging Jeremiah: "Where is the word of the Lord? Let it now be fulfilled!" (17:15). This was the arrogant utterance of those who were unwilling to turn back to the Lord. Also in this case the prophet had failed in his mission. Also he had to become the laughing stock of the folk. They sneered at the poor man.

A Man of Paradox

When the countrymen insulted him, the chosen one turned to his Sender: "Do not be a terror to me; you are my refuge in the day of disaster. Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction" (17:17-18). Yahweh's envoy had said these words just before he had asserted: "You know I have not desired the day of despair." Immediately he demands the destruction of the people. In 18:20 Jeremiah says to the Lord: "Remember that I stood before you and spoke on their behalf to turn your wrath away from them". Instantly he adds: "So give their children over to famine; hand them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives be made childless and widows; let their men be put to death, their young men slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders against them, for they have dug a pit to capture me and have hidden snares for my feet" (18:21-22). In brief, the called one is forced to oscillate between the two poles of condemnation and intercession. In one sense Jeremiah is subjected to a definition of himself which he felt that the Master had imposed on him. The calling One wanted the disciple to become the living portrait of His own paradoxical attitude. The Lord will punish Israel because he loves them, and in corollary, that because the people have been punished, Yahweh once again loves them. Jeremiah was asked to adapt himself to the divine stance; he intercedes for his countrymen, and at the same time demands their destruction. This apparent paradoxical attitude resulted from the continuous conflicts and antagonistic confrontations with the people whom he wanted to bring back to the covenant Overlord. Jeremiah actually loved his countrymen and wanted to save them from the forthcoming judgment. But they were not allowing him by their defiance and hostility. This ceaseless aggressive attitude, one may say, slowly developed in the prophet a paranoid mentality. He thus laments: "I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying: Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of living, that his name be remembered no more" (11:19-20). As a member of the covenant community Jeremiah was supposed to stand together with them in the presence of Yahweh. The relationship has to be they + I. Now it is subverted and fragmented into I v/s they.

An Abandoned Disciple

The Divine 'Rejection'

As he was rejected by the community, the called one naturally turned to his Sender for consolation and support. Previously the Master had

been to him “a fountain of living waters” (2:13). But now He appears like a dried-out river bed only occasionally running with water. ‘Life’ has been replaced by uncertainty, by the intermittency of presence, and consequently by the possibility of absence. Thus the prophet felt that the relationship with the called One was also subverted and fragmented into I v/s You (Yahweh). The called one cannot understand this silence or apparent hostility of the Master. He protests and cries out: “Lord remember me, and visit me, and take revenge as regards *thyself* for *me* from *my* persecutors” (15:15, literal translation of the Hebrew text). Here we find a grammatical strain, a confusion of subjects. This torsion reflects the inner state of mind of the prophet. He thought that the Lord, whose spokesman he was, will take revenge on his behalf. The insult to him was actually an insult to Yahweh, but the Master fails to take action. This situation brings out the identity crisis in him. Is he Yahweh’s? The uncertainty is reflected in his words: “As regards *thyself* for *me* from *my* persecutors.” Jeremiah reacted negatively and grudgingly to this kind of indifference or lack of active support or protection from the part of the Master: “Whenever I speak, I have to cry out violence and destruction. So the Word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, ‘I will not mention Him or speak anymore in His name,’ His Word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot” (20:8-9). Thus the call has put the poor man in an inescapable dilemma. Even if he wanted to run away from the mission, he could not, since the divine Word inside him will consume his whole person, unless he did not put it out by proclamation.

Reflection IV

Here we find a mysterious and mystical dimension in the life of the called ones. Their apparent trials and sufferings are indeed a participation in the very agonies and aches of the inner being of the Deity. The loving Master wants to make his disciples friends, (Jn.15:15) to whom He opens the intimate anguishes and distresses of His heart. What a fortune and grace, which a human being can achieve!

An Enraged Disciple

“I never sat in the company of revellers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable?” (15:17-18)

One without Fundamental Rights

The called one laments that he cannot enjoy the fellowship with his dear ones and countrymen. His life has become one of abject loneliness. Its reason is illustrated in 16:1-9.

No Married Life

The One who called him forbade Jeremiah to marry and have children for the following reason (16:1-4). During the forthcoming judgment of Yahweh all the Israelite children with their fathers and mothers will be annihilated. The called one has to feel now itself the destructive power of the divine Word, as the people will feel it on the day of calamity. Yahweh compels Jeremiah to portray symbolically in his own life God's forthcoming judgment. He personally has to experience Yahweh's wrath, the burden of the word of judgment. The prophet struggles to understand the meaning of the divine order. He is puzzled and thinks that he is punished unjustly. God has denied him his fundamental right to have a family. The Israelite society was built on family, which was a tiny covenant community. To lead a single life was unheard at that time. The people will consider such a person an outcast. The called one laments and protests. That lamentation itself becomes a proclamation; a warning for the people to mend their ways, otherwise the same misfortune will befall them.

No Participation in Mourning Rites

Yahweh further asked Jeremiah not to participate in the mourning rites of his countrymen (16:5-7), which every member of the covenant community was supposed to do. One who keeps aloof from such ceremonies will be rejected from the society, since everyone was obliged to make the sorrows of others his/her own sorrows. The reason for such a prohibition was in view of the forthcoming judgment, when there will be nobody to bury the dead bodies and to perform the mourning rituals. The prophet did not like this injunction. He complains that he was punished unjustly, and tries to run away from the call to become the living symbol of Yahweh's forthcoming judgment. His lamentation was intended to serve as a proclamation to the people to turn back to the covenant Overlord.

No Participation in Festivities

Jeremiah was asked not to take part in feasting and rejoicing assemblies (16:8-9), which occupied an integral part in the life of the covenant community. Naturally the called one wanted to be present on such occasions, whereby he could show his solidarity with the countrymen.

His absence will be a sign of opting out of the community, and the people will consider him as a renegade. The prophet did not like this divine command. He grumbles. But his whole life has to become an integral part of the proclamation of the coming judgment. The Master uses his life in its entirety as a premonition for the people who had forsaken the covenant laws. The prophet by his abstinence symbolically foreshadows the times when there will not be any more joyful and festival gatherings.

Reflection V

Perhaps in no other call instances one can see such a pathetic and heartbreaking demand. Naturally no human being except Jesus, the new Jeremiah could subscribe to this self-emptying lifestyle. The Lord who loved his chosen people, who were treading the dangerous path, was compelled to have recourse to such a radical and extreme method. The chosen one had to suffer in anticipation the burden of the word of judgment. This lifestyle was imposed upon him for the salvation of Israel, if they would draw the salutary lesson from his lamentation. In a way such call is exceptional. Only through the special grace of God one can survive such an ordeal. But we should not forget that the call to the priestly or religious life is heroic. Christ demands such a self-sacrificing life: "If anyone would come after me, he/she must deny himself/herself and take up his/her cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his/her life will lose it, but whoever loses his/her life for me will find it" (Mt.16:24-25). This statement is categorical, absolute and dogmatic.

The Response of the Master

The divine Pedagogue does not try to console the bewailing and self-pitying disciple. Rather he responded in a harsh way: "if you *turn*, I will make you *turn* that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. You shall not *turn* to them; let they *turn* to you" (15:19).

A Demand to Turn

The Hebrew verb *shub* (turn) which appears four times in Yahweh's rebuke, is rich in profound and mystical significance. It is usually translated as repent, but actually it refers to total and unconditional turning back to Yahweh, with all heart, soul, strength and mind (Dt.6:5; Lk.10:27). The called one is asked to turn back from his limited world or microcosm, where he is only concerned with his own interests, likes, dislikes, ideas and ideals. He has to turn to the unlimited world of the Lord or macrocosm, which embraces the welfare of the whole creation

and cosmos. In 4:1 and 3:22 Yahweh makes the same demand to the people. They have to turn back from their evil and wicked ways of infidelity and rebellion. Jeremiah, one of the members of the covenant community, stands with them as sinful in the eyes of the Lord. Thus he has to reject his petty and selfish whims and fancies, and commit himself wholeheartedly to the saving will of his Master.

“I Will Make You Turn”

Usually this statement is understood as “I will restore you to your office.” But it gets a deeper significance, if we read the text in the light of Jer.31:18b (“Return me and I shall be returned”) and Lam.5:21 (“Return us to yourself, O Lord that we may return”). These texts put the stress upon the inability of Israel to turn back to Yahweh by their own strength. Now in Jer.15:19 emphasis lies upon the Master making the disciple’s own repentance (return) possible, and upon the restoration of the prophet to Yahweh himself. When the Lord restores the relationship between Himself and the disciple, then Jeremiah can stand against before his *Guruji*. Here we have the mysterious working of the prevenient grace. Without the divine initiative humans can never turn back to the Lord. He acts, which makes the humans co-operate with Him. The call of Israel and her existence as the covenant community resulted from such a prevenient grace.

“You Shall Not Turn to Them”

This command has a double sense. Like his people Jeremiah has sinned against the divine Master. The prophet himself has shown the same lack of faith, understanding and obedience to the Lord. Now Yahweh warns him not to continue to be like the disloyal people. This demand has a further deeper sense. Jeremiah has lamented against his special mission of becoming the symbolical portrait of God’s coming judgment. Now the divine Master does not promise him release from leading the symbolic life. The Lord admonishes him to reject the temptation for embracing the lifestyle of the ordinary people. Rather, he has to carry the cross of his special mission till death.

“They Shall Turn to You”

Touched by his example, the people shall be inspired to turn back from the path of disloyalty and rebellion, and turn to the Lord wholeheartedly. The divine statement has a further spiritual sense. Like the prophet they shall also experience the joy and peace of the pardoning and compassionate love of the Lord.

Reflection VI

Usually in the Lamentation Psalms Yahweh is used to respond to the bewailing persons with words of consolation and salvation oracles. Now He harshly and mercilessly deals with his chosen prophet. It does not mean that the divine Pedagogue was a cruel and heartless person who lacked the sentiments of affection and compassion. Even when the Master was uttering the apparently unkind and uncharitable reprimand, His heart was aching for the disciple. The suffering of Jeremiah was Yahweh's own suffering. The loving Formator never wanted to see the distress and the agony of the called one. Still He could not disclose this truth to the disciple. The picture of the lamenting prophet was the only possible way to open the eyes of the rebellious people to the forthcoming disaster; only it can call them to conversion so that they could escape the judgment. Here we find the agony of the divine Formator. He loves the disciple; at the same time He loves His chosen people. He never wants their destruction. The loving Lord makes use of the only possible way to save them. For this he, with an aching heart, allows the disciple to suffer. This pathetic figure of the Formator should touch human hearts. He had recourse to the same method in the case of the New Jeremiah, his beloved Son. God who so loved the world that he gave up his only begotten Son to the ignominious and cruel death (Jn.3:16). Indeed, here is unveiled the mystery of love!

A Weeping Formator

A God of Flesh and Blood

The God of the Bible is not the God of philosophers and theologians. He reveals Himself as the one who becomes one with humans (this is the meaning of Yahweh), who cannot live without the company of people. In the Bible He is depicted as a guiding, protecting, providing, liberating, leading, chastising, disciplining, threatening, punishing, lamenting, consoling, reassuring and saving God. One may say, He changes his attitudes and aptitudes according to the existential needs of the people. The ultimate purpose was to make them his beloved ones, his cherished possession and holy nation, so that they could lead a celebrative and blissful life on earth. It was for achieving this goal that He made Jeremiah a prophet of doom, a man of paradox, who was deprived of fundamental rights of a human being. The chosen one was made the symbol of the forthcoming judgment, which was intended to bring the conversion of the strayed people. Still He failed to achieve this desired objective. His 'inheritance' was ravaged. At this sight the loving Formator helplessly sheds bitter tears. The Book of Jeremiah presents His pathetic and suffering figure.

Lamentation in Jer.12:7-13

Text

- v.7 “I have forsaken my house;
I have abandoned my heritage;
I have delivered my dearly beloved
into the power of her enemies.
- v.8 My heritage has become
like a lion in the forest to me;
She has given out her roar against me;
Therefore I hate her.
- v.9 Is my very own heritage a speckled bird of prey?
Are the birds of prey against her on every side?
Go, gather to every beast;
Bring them to the feast.
- v.10 Many shepherds have laid waste my vineyard,
They have trampled down my field,
They have reduced my pleasant inheritance
to a desolate wilderness.
- v.11 They have left it a wasteland,
Wasted, it mourns before me;
The whole land is laid waste,
But no man lays it to heart.
- v.12 Destroyers have come
Over all the bare heights in the wilderness;
The sword of Yahweh devours
The land from end to end;
No living thing has peace.
- v.13 They sowed wheat and reaped thistles;
They have tired themselves out for nothing;
They are disappointed at their harvest,
Because of the anger of Yahweh.”

Words of Repentance

Emotionally Yahweh calls Israel “my house”, “my heritage”, “my dearly beloved”, “my vineyard”, “my field, my pleasant inheritance”. These words shed light to the divine heart’s loving vibrations. He uses words after words in order to give articulation to his deep love and dearest preference and favouritism for Israel. Then the Lord tearfully

acknowledges that He himself had brought about the judgment on the people: "I have forsaken" "I have abandoned", "I have delivered." Yahweh makes clear the reason for his action: Israel had acted like a lion in the forest, "roaring defiance" at her Lord, which called forth punishment. He allowed her enemies to attack her. Then He laments that they have laid waste, trampled down and reduced the country to a desolate wilderness. The land is mourning before Yahweh! In the text we can feel how much the Lord was suffering about the fate of the chosen people, which He was forced to bring upon her.

Lamentation in Jer.14:2-6

This is another text in which the divine Formator bursts into tears at the wretched situation brought out by drought:

- v.2 "Judah mourns, her cities languish;
Men sink to the ground, Jerusalem's cry goes up;
- v.3 Their nobles send their servants for water;
They come to the pools but find no water.
They return with their vessels empty;
Ashamed and dismayed,
they cover their heads.
- v.4 The produce of the ground has failed,
for there has been no rain in the land.
The farmers are dismayed;
They cover their heads.
- v.5 Even the doe in the field calves
and forsakes (her young),
Because there is no grass
- v.6 The wild asses stand on the bare heights;
They sniff the wind like jackals;
Their eyes are glazed because there is no grass."

Here the One who becomes one with the suffering people, makes their affliction his own. When Yahweh was leading Israel into the promise land, he made water gush out of the rock for the people to drink (Ps.78:20). Now the covenant people themselves have brought out this pathetic situation by becoming disloyal to Him. The Lord could not do anything, unless they repent. He was forced to helplessly and tearfully become a mute spectator. The Formator writhes seeing the misery of the people as well as the animals.

A Weeping Formee

Prophet in Tears

The Formator makes the formee to participate in His agony at the pitiable situation of Israel. In 14:17-18 Jeremiah makes his own the distress of his countrymen:

- v.17 Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day,
And let them not cease,
For my daughter – my people is broken in pieces
with a very cruel blow.
- v.18 If I go out to the field,
Then look – the ravages of famine.
Prophet and priest alike
Roam the land plying their trade,
And have no rest.

Although the prophet, against whom the people had turned and persecuted him, had earlier times asked Yahweh to destroy them with double destruction, now could not bear the plight of Judah. Their suffering makes the eyes of the chosen one overflow with tears ceaselessly day and night. He laments at the sight of corpses and the pangs of starvation, in the town and in the field.

Questioning the Formator

Now the prophet of doom turns to the Formator and flings questions after questions at Him (14:19)

- Hast thou utterly rejected Judah?
Dost thou loathe Zion?
Why hast thou stricken us
So that there is no healing for us.
We hoped for peace –
No good came;
For a season of healing –
but instead terror.

Here we find the disciple appears as the advocate of the aggrieved party in the court and questions the aggrieving Yahweh, as if He were the culprit. This is a wonderful part which a formee can play. Identifying with the people who deserved punishment, he/she could defend them and blame the Master as if He had committed injustice. The ultimate purpose is to force the Lord to desist from His punitive process. Only

one, who could totally make the agony of the people his/her, can have recourse to such a daring act.

Confession on Behalf of the Guilty

- v.20 We acknowledge, Yahweh our rebellion,
the perverseness of our fathers,
For we have sinned against thee!
- v.21 Do not spurn us, for they name's sake!
Do not dishonour thy glorious throne!
Remember, and do not break thy covenant with us.
- v.22 Can any of the false gods of the nations bring rain?
Can the heavens bring showers?
Art thou not our God, Yahweh?
We hope in thee,
for it is thou who hast made all things. (14:20-22)

Here we find the lofty trait of the divine call. The chosen ones have to take the sins of the community upon themselves, acknowledging the rebellious attitudes and perverseness of the people (addressing Yahweh in the name of the community, using 'we') and ask for mercy and pardon. Jeremiah pleads for forgiveness and kindness, basing his supplication on the compassionate name of the Lord and on the honour of His glorious throne. The mediator appeals Yahweh to remember His covenant with Israel. This is indeed a most effective and impressive way to influence the Master. Further, the called one acknowledges that the gods of nations can never bring rain and showers from the sky. There is only one God, and it is Yahweh, the maker of all things, in whom he together with the people put their utter trust.

The New Jeremiah

Jesus also made the troubles and distress of others his own. He shed bitter tears at the death of Lazarus (Jn.11:33-35). Foreseeing the future destruction of Jerusalem, the capital city which he dearly loved, the Son of Man inconsolably wept (Lk.19:41). His words in Lk.13:34-35 give vivid articulation to his inner pain: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look your house is left to you desolate." Jesus lamented about the forthcoming judgment which will befall Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, who did not hearken to the saving call of the loving God (Mt.11:20-24). By uttering woe oracles against the religious authorities who tried their best to prevent the

people from embracing the way of salvation (Mt.23:1-37), he wanted to lead them to conversion. In his prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age, (Lk.21:5-26) one can trace out the aches and pains of his affectionate heart. Even on the cross this new Jeremiah interceded for his countrymen, who, before the Roman governor persistently screamed, "Crucify him, crucify him" (Jn.19:6-15): "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk.23:34). Thus the Son of Man perfectly lived his call to be the Jeremiah of the New Testament times.