



The Transcendent Calling: Understanding God's Presence

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Abstract: This paper analyzes God's experience as a companion of human life. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The subject of this research is a Montfortian priest. The research material is priestly reflection. To explore the data, we used phenomenological methodology, which explores the subject's experience of God. We used the content analysis method to analyze the formative experience. The results showed that the priest experienced God as the One who is always with him. The phenomenological experience in the vocation of a Montfortian priest gives some concluding points. First, God is the Companion. He does not leave the man. God's participation is evident in the mystery of the incarnation and the cross—the mystery of God emptying himself and becoming like a servant. Secondly, the priest saw the same thing, that God is present in joy and sorrow—the night changes.

INTRODUCTION

Every individual feels the experience of God. From this experience, people can give formulations about the experience of God, for example, God who helps, God who gives hope (Jürgen Moltmann), God who liberates (Gustavo Gutiérrez), or God who loves (Mother Teresa of Calcutta). In Hans Urs Von Balthasar's experience, he had an image of the God who accompanies him. The culmination of the idea of the accompanying God is the mystery of the incarnation and the cross.

We describe an SMM priest's experience working in Lanjing, Sintang, West Kalimantan. He sees the image of God as the One who is always with us. He shared his experience before taking perpetual vows. God's presence is felt in any situation, not only in joyful events but also in sorrowful events. God does not promise success, but God is faithful to accompany man. The knowledge of God is an experience of struggle in the discernment of vocation.

The accompanying image of God is an image that sees the mystery or work of God in human history. Von Balthasar was fascinated by the mystery of the incarnation and the cross. It is God who accompanies humanity to the end. The word *incarnation*, used in the Christian tradition, comes from the Latin *incarnatio* (in the flesh). It comes from the Greek translation *sarcosis*. *Sarcosis* literally means *becoming flesh* (Hünemann, 2017). The term *sarcosis* is closely associated with the prologue of John's Gospel, which speaks of the word becoming flesh (cf. John 1:1-18). In biblical terminology, the word *flesh* (Greek: *sarx*) refers to human

beings with all their anthropological dimensions. In theological terms, the incarnation is a historical fact that explains that the invisible God, who heard His word to man, now definitively appeared as a human being. Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:1-18). In the third century, the word “incarnation” was officially used in the liturgical rites of the Eastern Church, which in its theological definition was explained with the help of the concept of *hypostasis* (Hünemann, 2017). God’s inclusion of humanity was so extraordinary that He sent His only Son—God, who became flesh (human). God promises a savior who atones for human sin.

In theological interpretation, the word *incarnation* is equivalent to the word *kenosis*. *Kenosis* (Greek - *ekenosen*) means self-emptying. This word comes from the Christological passage in Phil 2:5-11. Christ Jesus is the One “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:6-8). The word *kenosis* or self-emptying refers to the willingness of Christ, who, although equal to God, was willing to become a man and take on the form of a servant. The concept of incarnation in John’s prologue and *kenosis* in Philippian Christology speak of the same reality: God has definitively revealed himself to the world in Jesus Christ. St. Leo the Great defined the incarnation as the event in which God assumed the condition of sinful humanity, *conditio naturae peccatricis* (Balthasar, 1990).

Herbert Vorgrimmer adds that Christ’s obedience to the Father prompted Him to strip Him of His glory as God and become man (Vorgrimmler, 2000). In this context, the theological equivalence between incarnation and *kenosis* appears. Although some theologians distinguish between incarnation and *kenosis* to emphasize certain theological aspects, both meanings generally refer to the event of God becoming man in Christ (Gewieß, 1948).

METHOD

This study is a qualitative research. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the informant, Fr. Fian Wekin, SMM. The interview questions were: a) How did he experience God in his pastoral care? b) From that experience, who is God for him? This exploration reflects priesthood through their mission amid the people. We describe the data for analysis. Then, we explore and reflect on the research data using the thoughts of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

The Covid-19 pandemic limited pastoral direct encounters with the people. Two important things they explored through interviews are: a) How they experience God in pastoral care and b) From that experience, who is God for them. It is an attempt to find their reflection on their personal experience of God through their mission among the people.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

My name is Pastor Fian Wekin, SMM. I want to share the experience of God that accompanied my vocation. I was born in a Catholic family. For me, Flores is a Catholic city. We may have different districts, but what unites Flores is the Catholic religion, thanks to the

preaching and planting of the seeds of faith from the Society of the Word of God (SVD) priests. There is a joke, “in Flores, not only humans are Catholic, but also other creatures.” It wants to illustrate the thickness of Catholicism.

Here, I present the results of his sharing. I, Fian Wekin, was faced with an up-and-down experience. I went through a dry spell for about six months before writing my vows. It was a new chapter in my life. It was the experience of the difficult times of deciding to live in perpetual vows first. It was a period of pilgrimage to the inner depths. After my pilgrimage, I also went on an excursion to myself. It was a time of seeing the romance of the past. It is a time of seeing and feeling my weaknesses.

“I’m frozen in him...
like I was enjoying a wilderness experience
there, I must find my innermost heart
I dive into the words of my heart
I no longer paid attention to the noise from outside,
whether it’s famous people, friends, or parents.
I want to get rid of it.
Enter my inner world.”

I felt my tears were very sensitive at that time. I was like a child who always asked God for a hug. I whined and asked Him for something. God never answered every question I asked. Those were the times when I lived *my “nothingness.”*

It was like living in a building without a floor and sleeping in a bed without a mattress. Comfort is not lacking in the monastery. Love is not lacking from friends. But, my heart kept running to the weakness of self. To the point that I lacked rest, ate poorly, and slept poorly.

It was an important moment of preparation for perpetual vows in my life. It is a historical moment that I will never forget. I don’t know what I will become, but I will tell you about this beautiful experience. The experience of “Void” or “Emptiness”.

In those feelings, I wrote a poem:

“I shouted questions and moaned repeatedly
as I broke above the clouds. There is no trace.
All that’s left are the conversations.”

In this experience, I continued to pray. St. Teresia’s experience of the child Jesus reminds me to “*continue to be a child*” in my spiritual relationship with Jesus. Thus, I continue to ask for Jesus’ grace and can cry and embrace him if I have done wrong. With sonship, there is an attitude of dependence. A child never feeds himself. The parents will feed him. In a spiritual relationship, “*There is no need to be a father*” because he can find his food if he is a father. Thus, he is no longer dependent on others.

My tears kept flowing when I was in front of the Blessed Sacrament. I lamented my fragility. I cried over my sin. I prayed for forgiveness for us monks who had hurt how many souls out there. How many abandoned children of priests and their women? How many victims of their infidelity? I felt that in my prayers.

“To love is to be hurt and sick,” said Mother Teresa of Calcutta. That is the Love of Jesus. From the cross, he still prays, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” The year 2018 was a year of grace for me. The year I had to decide to apply for perpetual vows. Since December 2018, life struggles have come my way.

At this moment, I was powerless to defend my vocation. The more I fought against myself and withdrew to the monastery, the more my heart struggled. I put my long struggle into God’s hands. So, I am enjoying the “turmoil” of life now. I continue to carry it in prayer. I tried to let God be involved in this important decision. It is no joke.

I realized, “Being a priest is not about joining the crowd. To be a priest is to be the person God wants you to be by listening to God’s voice”. Then, during this “confusion” period, I questioned: “Do I force myself to become a priest, or does God want me to?” I brought it up in my prayers for the past six months or so. I tried to wrestle and wrestle. Spiritual wrestling is not an easy thing.

My only long struggle is celibacy in priests and candidates for the priesthood. I am grateful that I have wrestled with this during my pastoral life and my time in the Company of Mary. There were ups and downs. But, thanks to God’s grace, I was lifted. God has saved me in these times. The next time for me is an even more difficult time. I have to continue to wrestle with my personal experiences. I was very weak in the psychosexual aspect. I had to obey my inner voice shouting, “Being a priest is not just dabbling. Being a priest must be holy and sacred. Don’t try to have the principle that it’s okay if it’s only once”. I have to be able to decide in favor of personal freedom.

Sometimes, I tried to break through, “Yes, if I fall, God knows I’m a weak human being.” Sometimes, I thought, “Ah...just be a priest; God knows, the important thing is to get up again when you fall”. I carry these struggles in my prayers. Lord, let me live my life directed towards You. May my decision later be an authentic decision, not based on profit and loss, but rather a decision from You. It is the voice that comes from You”.

I also don’t want to decide at a time when I’m in a state of doubt and indecision. I try to immerse it in my life of prayer and silence. I continue to believe that God will give me the best. God knows what is most honorable to Him, not according to my family, priests, or other believers.

The preparation period was a time of my absence. For some reason, the more I prayed and asked God to keep me on the path of my special calling, the more my heart kept pulling me out. I did not talk about this to many people except for a few, including my spiritual director. In times like that, I try to be a person who always looks inward. I let go of the person who has to please others. I no longer want my life to please others. I want to make every decision from the Holy Spirit and in His shadow.

I saw that God was inviting me to climb a “peak.” Then, he escorted me to the middle. Suddenly, in the middle of the journey, He left me to walk alone. I looked for Him and didn’t see Him. I called out, and He didn’t answer. Then, here I am walking alone.

“God invited me to climb a mountain. On the way, a beautiful view was in the middle of the mountain. At that moment, I almost wanted to stop in the middle and not continue God’s journey. If you want to climb His journey, there are more obstacles. It takes a “spirit of love” to reach the top. The experience in the middle of the journey, I had stopped and didn’t want to continue anymore. I then struggled ‘to continue’ or ‘not.’ This moment is what I felt in the seconds, minutes, hours, days, months leading up to perpetual vows.”

These days, I’m sick of seeing the face of a priest wearing a cassula and questioning the priest celebrating the Eucharist. Are they authentic human beings or not? Or was I hiding so much depravity under the label of obedience? I know how many victims are out there. How many issues are there about them? Whenever I go to adoration, I surrender my weaknesses to God. I remember Paul’s experience. Looking again at the experience of the Apostles. Almost all of them had fallen. Why does God still use weak people like them?

Prayers never got an answer. The more I prayed, the more confused I became. I silenced all the struggles in my mind. I wrote to my spiritual director every day. This experience was more difficult than studying and writing a thesis. It was a struggle with myself.

My inner words,

“At the last second, Satan brought me to the pinnacle of the world’s splendor. He offered me all kinds of things. From food to women to power”. My inner voice further said in a letter, “Satan will be happy if you turn to another path. It is the moment he tries to get people to the breaking point. He has let you all this time, and at the last moment, he wants to bring you back to the world”.

Days of embracing myself, “Lord, either I am strong in Your spirit later, or I fall like the priests who have already fallen.” I tried to continue to find the depth of myself. Sometimes, the prayer brings tears. Tears of sadness with my pretentious fragility in front of the crowd. In my prayers, I have yet to find an answer. I keep quiet and keep leaning on God. I express my joy when I meet my siblings and friends. They probably think I am normal and normal. In my room, my heart was thrashing. I live in a world that no longer fears sin. Sin is considered normal and natural. It is the root of my “indecision” about whether to step out or not. I see a flow of sin that is considered a pleasure. Sin, for people, is no longer a poison; instead, it is considered honey to be tasted continuously.

It didn’t just happen among the faithful; it extended to the monastery’s walls. Demons were tearing down the walls of the monastery. Almost everyone didn’t feel it and saw this as an ordinary, normal event. Then, in my room, I wrote a poem:

“God, I am broken in silence
my sins fall one by one
in front of my eyes.
I am now an admirer
or the condemner of sin
From the bottom of my heart, I moan
and continue to dwell.”

In my reflection, I wrote this: “Yes, Lord Jesus, you are indeed everything. You are the source of majesty and glory. You are the source of beauty and loveliness. There is nothing more beautiful than you, dear Lord! You cannot be seen. If you gave me eyes to see just once, I would have no doubts about this life”. I see that encountering Jesus is a lifelong process. It is

both felt and unfelt. There is an experience of God's absence in this life. Sometimes, I am left to walk alone. It is when I realize that I cannot walk alone. I need God's power to guide me.

"I've been out of the house for too long, and now cleaning the house by myself is hard work. I want someone who's been away for too long, and now I'm coming home. All this time, I've been cleaning and taking care of other people's homes too much. When I return home, I feel that my house is very dirty. I don't want to stay in it."

Home in my struggle is a symbol of the self. All this time, I've been taking care of and cleaning other people's selves and cleaning "other people's" houses. When I return to my "own" house, I sometimes don't feel comfortable at home. There is so much dirt in it. Thankfully, this is the time to clean up and, if necessary, to feel at home in it.

I put it in an expression of the heart:

Why do you grieve, O soul?
Come, drink wine on that vine.
Refill your almost-empty pot again.
You have visited the dark alley of your life
You have experienced the 'dark night.'
Remember, O my soul.
There will be a bright dawn still waiting for you
Savor the cup of the 'dark night'
Drink from the cup
Soon, it will pass
Drink up!
If necessary, until you are intoxicated.
Oh, my soul
Take a moment
Sleep in the bed of divine love
Thou shalt not tear the memory embroidered by divine love
He always leads you

I believe that the experience of the dark night needs to be felt. It hurts, and how much it hurts to dwell on it. I wanted to avoid it and seek solace by playing music and traveling. Still, he was my friend, and he wouldn't budge. Now, I obeyed him and invited him to walk together.

"If one has the eyes of love, then all the weaknesses and sins of others will be covered by the loved one has." My experience shows that I do not have the "*eyes of love*." So, I criticize more than I introspect. I tend to look outward rather than inward.

Based on Jesus' experience with a Samaritan woman, He had eyes and a heart to love. Hence, the woman's sin fell before His compassion and mercy. What about me? I ask God to make me His eyeball. In weakness, the power of God is made perfect (2 Corinthians 12:9). I see the above quote as a summary of my experience. Based on being blessed it makes me bold enough to take a step while realizing my weakness and sinfulness. Vows are, for me, a celebration of God's majesty and my fault (in this case, humanity from dust).

Paul said, "But this treasure we have in earthen vessels, that the abundance of the power can be from God, and not from us" (2 Cor. 4: 7). Together with Paul, I see: "But the Lord answered me: "My grace is sufficient for you, for in weakness my power is made perfect."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me”.

Walking around too focused on my weaknesses made me continue to hesitate and sometimes feel insecure about making decisions. It is still with me. While on retreat in Girisonta, I opened myself to God’s Grace. I no longer need to focus on myself. I am trying to open myself up to receive great grace from God.

There is a quote that I still neatly remember: “God continues to create and shape me every day.” I am not finalized. God is still creating me every day. God’s love comes first, more than my weakness.

I always walked to know myself for about ten years as a Montfortian. Good self-knowledge allows me to be independent and make choices and decisions freely and responsibly. My strengths are self-confidence, positive thinking, accepting people as they are, getting along with anyone, and being open to communication with anyone. My weaknesses include difficulty controlling myself, going with the flow, inconsistency, and lack of discipline. I don’t take good care of my physical health, such as smoking.

I see the importance of balance in this life. Balance leads to maturity. So, I have to balance my physical, psychological, and spiritual energy to manage the wisdom of God’s gifts for the benefit of others. There is time for work, prayer, entertainment, and friendship (by chatting and joking) to be a cheerful and joyful messenger.

CONCLUSION

God with us” is the formulation of an SMM priest who looks at his life experience and vocation. He recognized God through inner struggle. He feels that God’s presence has been there since the beginning. The mystery of the incarnation and the cross are evidence of inclusion. God wanted to become human. Jesus does not promise a straight and smooth path but the way of the cross. In Him, there will be joy.

The phenomenological experience in the vocation of a Montfortian priest gives some concluding points. First, God is the Companion. He does not leave the man. It is also beautifully summarized in the theology of Von Balthasar. God’s participation is evident in the mystery of the incarnation and the cross—the mystery of God emptying himself and becoming like a servant. Secondly, the priest saw the same thing, that God is present in joy and sorrow—the night changes. God’s faithfulness never changes. A God who is willing to empty himself is a God worthy of emulation. The call to be a priest is to be a servant to others.

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