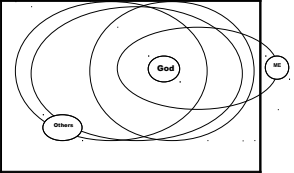


6

The Transformation Acts 9:1-20



When she experienced Jesus as the I AM, the Samaritan woman's thirst was fulfilled. The "seventh man" that she met had perfected everything. She did not need the empty water jar anymore: "The woman put down her water jar and hurried back to the town..." (Jn 4:28). This was her point of conversion, which was the result of her encounter with Jesus.

After their encounter with Jesus, the magi "returned to their own country by a different way" (Mt 2:12). If they had used the same way, they would have betrayed Jesus. Peter's reaction to his encounter with Jesus was a feeling of unworthiness, as we mentioned earlier. Jesus assured him that the journey had only begun, then "bringing their boats back to land they left everything and followed him" (Lk 5:4-11). Following Jesus is one of the common expressions of the encounter with Jesus. Zacchaeus' experience was expressed in his manifesto (Lk 19:8), which we have earlier discussed in detail, that had two parts: a statement of charity and an experience of "being justified."

One of the most powerful stories of conversion found in the New Testament is that of Saul of Tarsus. It was so powerful an event even for the early Christian community that the story is narrated at least three times in the Acts of the Apostles, two of these narrations are in the first person by Paul himself (Acts 9:1-22; 22:6-21; 26:11-20).

For me, the event of the conversion of Paul is a typical story of a "Spiritual Copernican Revolution."

This is a very profound symbol of what happens in our own personal growth process. In the "auto-centric worldview" of my childhood I am the centre of my universe. While we all need this assurance to a certain degree to build a sense of self-worth, when this is exaggerated it becomes the source of my pride. This is what the Greeks called "*hubris*" or "*hybris*". Conversion is an experience of the break-up of the hubris. It is a breakthrough for God!

Now let us get back to our story of the conversion of Paul. Saul of Tarsus was too sure of his faith. This was his hubris. Artists often depict Saul on horseback on the way to Damascus. Saul is on horseback with his band around him, too sure of what he is up to. He is engaged in the defence of his religion. The horse being a symbol of power and control becomes also the icon of Saul's hubris. His hubris is broken into by the ray of light. See the elements of the next scene: Saul is thrown down, a voice from heaven is heard, when he gets up he is blind, needs to be led by his servants, to a man - Ananias - who was apparently his enemy until a while ago. He is going to be told what to do. This reversal of scenes was caused by his encounter with Jesus: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21, RSV). He is now called 'Paul'. Interestingly, this name simply means, 'small'. This is the Spiritual Copernican Revolution. Through a powerful God-experience in the encounter with Jesus, my hubris is broken into. I see things in the right perspective. I welcome God as the centre of my universe, knowing well that I am one of the planets going around, unique though I am. I develop now a "theo-centric" worldview. And my life becomes an interaction with others who are also trying to find their space in the universe. This is the meaning of conversion, the effect of our encounter with Jesus.