

# CONVERSATIO 2007



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Editorial**

*page 2*

**Statio Conference**

**STATEMENT OF DIRECTIONS 2:  
COMMITMENT TO MISSION AND PRIORY SHARING**

by Sister Mary Thomas Prado, OSB

*page 3*

**LIFE IS A MYSTERY**

(Excerpts from Talks on Kabir)

by Osho

*page 10*

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St. Scholastica's Priory  
Manila

Dear Sisters,

The Gospel for the first Sunday of October speaks of the power of faith: “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea’ and it would obey you. People of the world reading this would interpret it away as a hyperbole—an exaggeration of immense proportion. Maybe because the image of a tree uprooting itself and hurling itself planting itself in the sea is impossibly grandiose. And yet how many unbelievable things have been wrought by faith we have experienced or heard of. I remember when I was Dean of College, a teacher asked for a leave of one week to have a tumor in her neck operated on. Then Sr. Bea invited to be prayer partners with her and they prayed together every evening at a certain time. The teacher told me later on, one day at the designated hour of prayer, she felt herself being pushed back to her chair and she could not get up. The next morning the tumor was gone and she came to cancel her leave of absence because the doctor said the lump in her throat was gone! Who can explain that? I can’t, but it did happen. An explanation is offered by the second reading of this Sunday in the letter to Timothy: “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a SPIRIT OF POWER AND OF LOVE AND OF SELF-DISCIPLINE.” It is indeed the great insight of great religions that: GOD IS NOT OUTSIDE US BUT INSIDE EACH ONE OF US.” And if so, then we have within ourselves an inexhaustible source of power, strength, and love. But to harness this power within us requires faith—even as small as a mustard seed which is the smallest of all seeds. I think the healing of mind and body which all of us in one way or another have experienced in ourselves or in others is greater than a tree uprooting itself and hurling itself into the sea. Don’t you think so?

Lovingly yours,



Sister Mary John Mananzan, OSB

# S T A T I O   C O N F E R E N C E

## **SOLID MISSION FORMATION**

by Sister Mary Thomas Prado, OSB

### **Introduction**

In Rome some years ago, a monk commented that Benedictines in the Philippines tend to be more “active” than “monastic.” I wasn’t sure if he meant “active” and “missionary” as synonymous.

Our 11th General Chapter and the 16<sup>th</sup> Manila Priory Chapter have articulated clearly the Church’s view that every baptized Christian is missionary or is a participant in God’s mission. Vita Consacrata (n.25) states also that “the sense of mission is at the very heart of consecrated life.” That calls us twice to be missionary.

God’s mission then is at the heart of religious formation. In the Manila Priory we declared that this formation for mission aims to lead the Sister to: open her heart to the Spirit in faith; know and accept herself; understand and live the vows and other aspects of our life; commit herself to our mission as a response to God’s call (Proclaim, p. 17). What is yet to be articulated is – how can we bring this about? What is the PROCESS of forming a Sister to be like *this* missionary?

In January of this year, after listening to more than a dozen mission talks given by our Sisters who are/were missioned in other countries and just before their mission theology class, I asked the formandeas what they think the qualities of a missionary are. They mentioned the following spiritual attributes: grounding in prayer, intimate relationship with God, willingness and commitment to serve God and God’s people, readiness for trials. In priority order, the human dispositions they enumerated were: flexibility, adaptability, resiliency, responsibility, dedication and commitment, courage, strength, openness (to new ways, to possibilities and changes), capability to bear suffering and separation from loved ones, willingness to take risks, perseverance under difficult situations, tenderness, friendliness and sociability, patience, good health. Our document Proclaim (p. 18), lists the missionary dispositions of personal integration and spiritual maturity, humility, adaptability, asceticism, and healthy relating.

Again, the succeeding question regards the PROCESS. How does one grow into spiritual and human maturity for mission? How does one become committed and courageous in the service of God’s reign? What enables our Sisters to cross boundaries, go beyond their cultural tradition and ways, adapt to new modes of living and enter into new meaning systems? What makes us able to live in an intercultural community? What makes it possible for us to transcend our preferences, biases, cherished views, comforts, our very selves, and to rise above pettiness, boredom, narrow-mindedness, hurts, disappointments? What makes us move beyond self-interest and begin to empathize with others? How do we become flexible enough and take on tasks according to the exigencies of the present situation? Or what makes us bounce back after a bad day?

If the terminal goal of formation for mission is **to be formed in the heart and mind of Jesus** who showed us how to live God's mission, what is the central dynamics involved in this TRANSFORMATION?

There can be many answers. I would like to focus however on CONVERSION as this pivotal process – a process begun in our baptism, deepened in our entrance and embracing of the consecrated life, and promised to be lived daily until our last days in monastic life.

## I. BIBLICAL CONVERSION: DIVINE GIFT and HUMAN COOPERATION

“Before anything else, religious formation is a profound journeying into the depths of a process of conversion, laying the foundation for a life of conversion to the Gospel and communion in the paschal mystery of Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Religious formation, in whatever congregation or institute it is made, is an intensification of the conversion process started at baptism. Thus, the demands and levels of change or transformation are expected to be deeper during the period of formation of a candidate to religious life. Consequently, conversion in ongoing formation should even be more intense.

God's constant call to the people to return to God echoes in both the Old and New Testaments. The change of heart, *metanoia*, was heard preached from Old Testament prophets to John the Baptist and to the disciples after the resurrection. Jesus' very teaching was a profound conversion in the acceptance of salvation.

Biblical stories of conversion are diverse: dramatic turn-about for Paul; repeated and constant call for Peter; a change of perspective for Martha; a reclaiming of his lost identity for the prodigal son. Different persons, different conversion stories but the same end – recreation by divine grace or transformation.

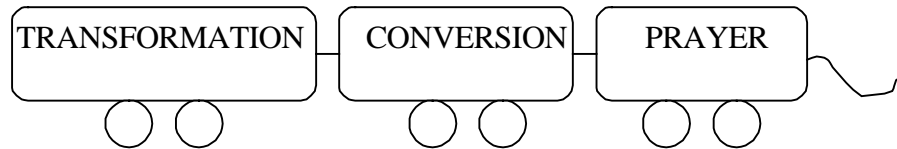
In our anthropocentric world today, we often think that we can “will” conversion all by ourselves. Then we wonder why we are still our intolerant, unforgiving, oversensitive, resentful selves. Isn't it perhaps that our starting point is the point missed? God gives the grace of conversion. God takes the initiative in inviting people to change. God's love creates the environment for a person to face himself/herself as in the parable of the prodigal son. God's awaiting embrace melts hearts of stone. And God's Son came for those in need of conversion and not for those who do not.

A free gift indeed but then it needs a soil where the seed can be sown and can grow. The gift of conversion can be choked, rejected, or its growth aborted by our psychic wounds and unmet needs, by our personal histories and personality flaws, acquired habits or simply, *mga capricio*. Even on fertile ground the gift of conversion yields harvest differently. The other pole of conversion therefore is human response or cooperation to the gift. Vita Consacrata (n.25) states: “The first missionary duty of consecrated persons is to themselves, and they fulfill it by opening their hearts to the promptings of the Spirit of Christ.”

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<sup>1</sup> Keating, Ted, SM and Janet Mock, CSJ. *Theological Reflection on Religious Formation in Becoming a Religious: A Process of Lifelong Transformation*, Chicago: Center for the Study of Religious Life, 2002, p. 51.

The BBC documentary entitled “The Disciples” shows the reality of life on the road in the Jesus movement. In this film we see the disciples as rough and flawed, capable of jealousy, selfishness, even violence. It shows them grumbling on how Jesus handled situations; how afraid and confused they were after the death of their leader. The film proposes that the life changing transformation happened after Jesus’ death – their experience of the resurrection, and most especially of Pentecost. In this moment of moments, they were transformed from fearful disciples to courageous leaders continuing God’s mission.



If we look at the “formation” of the disciples, the goal was to take on the heart and mind of Jesus (**transformation**). Jesus’ pedagogy was to call followers to live in proximity with him, to do what he was doing and see things through his set of lens. This meant being **converted** in heart and mind into his ways. But even if the disciples breathed the air that Jesus breathed and walked the road he walked, their best efforts weren’t good enough. They had to learn that conversion (and transformation) is GIFT from God. Furthermore, conversion takes place only with **prayer**. We have experienced ourselves that in prayer God takes over, that divine grace calms our nerves, dispels the venom from our mouths, clears our darkened minds, patches our wounded egos, and makes us see things in the light of eternity.

## II. BENEDICTINE CONVERSION<sup>2</sup>

The novice who wants to assume the monastic way of life pronounces three promises: stability, *conversatio morum*, and obedience (RB 58.17). There has been much deliberation regarding the meaning of these promises, especially the vow *conversatio morum*. The dispute has resulted in recent textual criticism’s conclusion that *conversatio* is the original reading and that it is not probably correct to reduce the phrase *conversatio morum* to the idea of morality.

Scholars agree that *conversatio* has a durative meaning implying a process, something that happens not only once but repeatedly or a sustained way of living. The idea of conversion for Benedict is continual, one that happens from the beginning to the end of monastic life. *Conversatio morum suorum* is taken by scholars to refer essentially to the traditional external practices of monasticism or fidelity to the monastic lifestyle. It includes notion of poverty and chastity. It is always in a social context, that is, it involves the person’s actions in relationship to others or one’s “citizenship” in the social body of monastics. It contains the renunciation of the former ‘wordly’ way of life and the assent to Christ. “To lead a monastic life” means in practice to live in obedience and humility, as well as to cultivate the traditional asceticism specific to a given monastery. Furthermore, when *conversatio* is used to refer to the monastic way of life, it means the external, concrete manifestations of the life or assuming the life patterns of the

<sup>2</sup> Prado, Sr. Mary Thomas, *Asceticism, Conversatio Morum, Stability and Community*. Anthropological Considerations of Key Elements of Monastic Life (Licentiate Thesis), Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1999, Chapter III.

monastic. It is putting the Gospel into practice. It is a reaffirmation of the promise of conversion at baptism.

Two other RB texts are considered important by T. Kardong: RB Prologue 49 and RB 73.1,2, with *conversatio* referring to monastic life as a dynamic process having a definite goal – progress in loving union with God. This dynamic spiritual growth for Benedict is possible in this life, a concept that is close to the Greek Church Fathers and the mystics of the Eastern Church.

In summary, Benedictine conversion implies an ongoing process; it means being faithful to the monastic practices and lifestyle; it is lived in the context of community or interpersonal relationships; it is turning away from one's former ways, habits, behaviors and taking on the way of Jesus; it means the daily practice of obedience, poverty, chastity, humility and asceticism.

Many, many years ago while at evening recreation in Baguio, Sr. Asteria suddenly appeared with a colorful swimming cap with flowers and a pail in hand. She told her Superior she was surrendering the pail (the swimming cap was forgotten) because it might hinder her return journey to God! A postscript to Benedictine conversion: it belongs to the mundane and the quotidian.

Conversion is this process that accounts for our internalizing the Benedictine values. It provides the *dynamism* to our vow of stability. Without our daily conversion, stability becomes nesting. We remain in the convent (because it is a safe place to be) but there is no growth. We just rearrange the furnitures in our nest.

### III. CONVERSION IN THE THEOLOGY OF BERNARD LONERGAN

Examining the nature of human understanding and consciousness, B. Lonergan takes conversion as foundational to his theology. He posits three types: intellectual, moral, and religious. The process involved in each type is changing the criterion of our choices and decisions from satisfaction to the good of value. A former professor presented the three types in understandable terms: *intellectual conversion* is a new way of seeing and understanding; *moral conversion* is a new way of choosing and acting; and *religious conversion* is a new way of loving.

During his time Lonergan already perceived that “we live in a culture and time when *experiencing* is dealt with as if it were sufficient to build human life upon.”<sup>3</sup> And so he begins with intellectual conversion – “the dawning awareness that our experiences can mislead us unless we seek to understand and critique them.”<sup>4</sup> In these post-modern times indeed experience seems to have the last word. The motto is: I experience therefore I am. How often we hear among us Sisters remarks such as: “*Basta, galit ako! Basta nasaktan ako! Ito ang karanasan ko at walang maka-contra nyan!*” The person seems to be saying, my experience of hurt is everything, or the experience of anger is the whole reality. We think for a while - how would this world look like if everybody else thinks the same way? Intellectual conversion is the process of emptying ourselves from this subjectivism and putting some rationality into our experience. It is to take

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<sup>3</sup> Keating, Ted, SM and Janet Mock, CSJ. *Theological Reflection...*, p. 52

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

some distance from experience and *explore it with the critique of suspicion*. What are the possible meanings of this experience? Is it coherent with the values I uphold? Or in the light of my being a religious, will I take this hurt as the last word? In Practical Theology it is said that every experience is *interpreted* experience. Yet, it must also be *examined* experience for otherwise, as Plato had said, we might settle for appearances and not search for truth. Intellectual conversion builds upon the idea that we are a people with a capacity for intelligent insights.

In psychology there are such things called *cognitive distortions*, all happening in the arena called our mind. They are:

- *all-or-nothing thinking* – seeing things in black and white categories
- *overgeneralization* – seeing a single event or detail (usually negative) and making a sweeping statement (“All the young/old Sisters are like that...”)
- *mental filter* – picking out a single negative detail and dwelling on it exclusively so that the vision of reality becomes darkened; similar to this is *disqualifying the positive* – rejecting positive experiences by insisting they don’t count for some reason or other; in this way the negative belief is maintained
- *jumping to conclusions* - making a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support the conclusion; the two kinds are *mind reading* and *fortune teller error* (anticipating things will turn out badly and feeling convinced that the prediction is already an established fact)
- *magnification (catastrophizing) or minimization* – exaggerating (such as one’s self-importance or someone else’s achievement), or inappropriately shrinking things until they appear tiny. This is also called the “binocular trick.”
- *emotional reasoning* assuming that the negative emotions reflect the way things are (“I feel it, therefore it must be true.”)
- *labeling and mislabeling* – an extreme form of overgeneralization, it is attaching a negative label instead of describing an error (“She is irresponsible” instead of describing what went wrong)
- *should statements* – motivating yourself with shoulds and shouldn’ts, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. “Musts” and “oughts” are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When the should statements are directed towards others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.
- *personalization* – seeing the self as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.

We can multiply examples from our own experience how we engage in these distortions, or what other “ruminations” are going on in our mind. When we live in community we know we need to change many of our behaviors. The process begins with an intellectual assent to the change. A simple personal example: when I was a postulant I was given the feedback that I was rude and impolite because I did not use the word “po” when talking. I tried to explain (and rationalize) that I am an *Ilongga* and we don’t have a word of courtesy but instead the rising and falling of our intonation as a sign of respect. When I thought about it more deeply I asked myself -- what is it really to learn the two-letter word and try so hard to put it in my vocabulary if I want to live in community for the rest of my life? After all, there are more important things in

life than being right. Intellectual conversion is this appeal to our rationality, the revision of our views, perception, and judgments if needed. A common expression in Tagalog is – “...*pero napag-isip-isip ko* ...” This sets in motion the process of a new way of seeing and understanding.

“*Moral conversion* is that drive in consciousness which pushes us toward keeping our actions coherent with our judgments.”<sup>5</sup> Lonergan believes that we are driven towards deciding and acting upon our insights. In this type of conversion we make mature and objective judgments. The criterion of our choices is from satisfaction to the good of value. It satisfies us to be in an assignment we are familiar with but then mission calls us where we are needed. We get to do what we want when we work alone but in community we need to collaborate with others. Choices in moral conversion are not always pleasurable, in fact they demand from us to grow up. In moral conversion we strive to be inner-oriented and engage our own internalized values.

“*Religious conversion* is the gradual fulfillment of a capacity for limitless love in an unconditional falling in love with God that transforms all other levels of conversion in such a way that the person becomes a living principle of benevolence and universalizing love.”<sup>6</sup> It is reaching up in active love and opening ourselves to God and other persons. It is going beyond kinship and blood ties, cultural loyalties and boundaries. Does our way of life bear this inclusive love? Is our prayer universalizing or does it remain parochial, centering only on the needs of family and friends? Until when can we say, let me first minister to my family in need (when our families have infinite needs)? An example comes to mind. In 2003, I was invited to our Priory in Windhoek. In a connecting flight to South Africa from Rome, I went to the ground office of Swiss Air. I was behind a Caucasian woman and an African man in the line. I heard the lady filing a complaint in behalf of the African man (who was very quiet the whole time) that he wasn’t served his meal on the plane. The woman’s passion to fight for justice for the man was very evident. This story has never left me for the many boundaries it crossed – a woman fighting for a man, a Caucasian fighting for the rights of an African. They may have belonged to different faiths too. By what other name can we call this act, if not universalizing love?

Where do intellectual, moral, and religious conversion occur? For Lonergan it is in the context of our interpersonal relationships, in the bonds of family, community, and society. “It is in these webs of relationship that the converted person becomes an instrument of God’s own love for humanity and all creation. The Triune God shines forth through the converted human being fulfilling God’s purposes in family, community, and society. The converted Christian seeks the highest good for self and the highest good for all.”<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

No Sister would like to take on the role of *zelatrix* (the formator in charge of discipline) in this day and age. Those who were in those shoes know how much time and energy are spent on repeating the same corrections and reminders over and over again.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56.

There is a part of us that is already a *converted self* but most part remains a *converting self* – still on the way and always will be on the way to integration. Initial formation merely initiates the process. St. Benedict’s call to conversion to monks upon entrance into the monastery is consistent with present-day belief in formation that candidates come seeking conversion (and needs to be taught to seek it if they don’t), not just affirmation of where they are. We abdicate our responsibility if we do not challenge in this direction. The older members, likewise, have the same task – a lifelong process of opening themselves to and cooperating with the gift of conversion. And so together, young and old, we need to create *communities of conversion*, communities committed to living evangelical intensity as a way of life.<sup>8</sup>

As we look around us and our unconverted society (and societies and communities in the world), we look at the contribution of our unconverted selves. “Our failure to take responsibility for conversion in our lives has communal, social, and even historic consequences.”<sup>9</sup> We think of cosmic consequences as well.

Let me end by quoting Ted Keating and Janet Mock whose article I have used extensively in this Statio conference. “Inherent in criteria for admitting new members, then, is the capacity and the willingness for conversion, for transformation – the ability to engage in the world deeply enough to find immense joy and heartbreak, to enter fully into the pathos and wonder of life. All human transformation originates in the passion of experience attentively engaged. Candidates who come fleeing the complexities of a chaotic world and seeking a static way of life, those who come with simple questions needing simple answers, will not find comfort in today’s or tomorrow’s religious life.”<sup>10</sup>

Conversion is for all seekers and lovers of God and of life itself. When God is encountered as a personal God, opening ourselves to this gift is nothing else but one great adventure. Who knows what we might still become?

### **Suggested guide questions for sharing:**

1. Who is the biblical model of conversion do you identify with?
2. How have you experienced conversion as primarily GIFT but also your cooperation with God?
3. What conversion are you called to at the intellectual, moral, and religious levels? What distortions in our consciousness, affection, and manner of loving need to be transformed?
4. How can we build *communities of conversion*?
5. What will it mean to you to practice conversion for the transformation of our society and the restoration of the integrity of creation?

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 60

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 62.

## **LIFE IS A MYSTERY**

(Excerpts from Talks on Kabir)  
by Osho

One must understand the Ah! of things and then all is understood. They say that philosophy begins in wonder. Perhaps. But philosophy always tries to destroy wonder – it wants to kill its mother. The whole effort of philosophy is to demystify existence.

The more you think you know, the less you have awe wonder, reverence, love. Existence then seems to be stale, flat; there are no more mysteries in it. And of course when there is no mystery outside, there is no poetry inside. They go together, they are parallel: mystery outside, poetry within.

The poetry can arise only if life remains worth exploring. The moment you know, poetry dies; knowledgeability is the death of all that is beautiful in you. And with the death of poetry you live a life which is not worth living – it can't have any significance, it can't have any celebration. It cannot blossom, it cannot dance; you can only drag. So maybe those who say that philosophy begins in wonder are right, but I would like to add one thing more: it tries to kill its mother.

Religion is born in wonder. Religion begins in wonder and ends in more wonder. That is the difference between philosophy and religion – both may have their beginning in wonder but then they part ways. Religion starts looking into mysteries and finds that those mysteries go on deepening. The more you know, the less you know, and the ultimate in knowing is ignorance. You become utterly ignorant, you don't know anything at all. A state of innocence is achieved. In that state of innocence, poetry comes to its perfection. That poetry is religion.

Philosophy is against religion – notwithstanding what the philosophers go on saying. There cannot be a religious philosophy as such; all philosophies are antireligious – because all philosophies search for knowledge, and religion searches for being. And these are diametrically opposite dimensions: knowledge is superficial, peripheral, being is central, essential. Being is when you are not, knowledge is when you are too much. Knowledge is an ego trip, being is egolessness.

Philosophy will give you ideas that you know, and religion will make it clear to you that you don't know and that you can't know – that truth is not only unknown but unknowable. And when you face the unknowable truth within and without, the poetry bursts forth, you are in a dance.

In that innocence is Samadhi, ecstasy.

So remember it, that religion is not any philosophic endeavor. It is poetic, utterly poetic; religion is poetry. It is not an accident that many great mystics have spoken in poetry. Kabir is one – his poetry is immensely beautiful. He knows nothing of language, he knows nothing of grammar,

but whatsoever he says is pure poetry. He does not bother about the forms, the styles; he knows nothing of poetics. But he is a poet, and one of the greatest.

Sometimes, if the heart has poetry, even prose becomes poetry. And sometimes, when the heart has no poetry, even poetry is prose. Poetry does not depend on the form of the expression, it depends on the content – it depends on the innermost core that is expressed in it.

Plato, one of the greatest philosophers of the world, has said that in his utopian state, ‘Republic’, poets would not be allowed; poets would be thought of almost like criminals. Why? What is wrong with the poet? There is something wrong with the poet in the eyes of a philosopher – because the poet is illogical and the poet remains in the state of innocence and the poet trusts the mystery of life. And the poet does not try to know; the poet tries to live this mystery, this existence. He is not worried about the why of it, he is not concerned with analyzing it, dissecting it.

When he comes across a flower he enjoys it. He loves it. He talks with the flower, he communicates, he dances around it, he celebrates it. But he is not bothered why this flower is red or yellow: “Why is this flower there at all? Why? Accidentally? Or is there a plan behind it?” No, the why never happens to the poet. He takes things as they are – he does not go into their past, he does not go to the original cause, and he does not bother about the ultimate end. This moment is all for the poet; he is absorbed in the here and the now.

And religion is the ultimate form of poetry, the essential form of poetry. So I say to you: One must understand the Ah! of things, and then all is understood. Remember, understanding is not knowledge, knowledge is not understanding. Knowledge is objective, understanding is subjective. You understand when you love. Knowledge is possible only when you are not involved in any kind of sympathy – love, compassion.

The scientist makes it an absolute criterion of knowledge that the knower should not be involved in the known. You should remain objective, you should remain aloof, indifferent. You should not get into the thing that you are trying to know; you should remain outside, utterly outside, uninvolved. Only then will your knowledge be valid.

The poet understands, the religious mystic understands – they don’t know. And understanding is possible only when you participate – not that you stand outside, but you dive in. To understand a flower means to become a flower, to understand a woman means to become that woman. To understand a man means to participate so totally with the man that all boundaries are merged, that your beings start overlapping each other, that there comes a moment of meeting when it is very difficult to say who is who. When two beings pulsate in such unison that it is almost as if they are one – when their hearts are in a rhythm, when they breathe as if there is only one soul, maybe two bodies but one soul, when the participation is so total – then only do you know.

Religion says: Existence is available to understanding but not to knowledge. The very requirement of knowledge – that of being objective, an aloof spectator – debars you. You will know much but you will not understand at all. You will go on gathering knowledge, you will become very much informed, but deep down you will not have any insight into the reality of

things. The Ah! of things has to be understood, must be understood. And understanding needs participation, understanding needs courage to dissolve yourself. Understanding needs a very adventurous mind that is ready to melt.

If you can melt with existence then you are religious. That melting I call prayer. When somebody has melted so deeply with existence that he is not there as a knower separate from the known, but the knower and the known have become one – in that moment the secrets are revealed. But then the mystery is not destroyed, the mystery is deepened even more.

Remember it always: if the mystery of your life goes on deepening then you are on the right track. If you start feeling that there is no mystery in life and you become knowledgeable, you are on the wrong track. Avoid philosophy and take a deep plunge into poetry. Be as much of a poet as possible – because the mystic is the growth of the poet. The poet is on the way to being a mystic, and only a poet can be a mystic.

It is better to read poetry than philosophy, it is better to sing poetry than to ponder over philosophical problems. Philosophical problems are superficial. And the whole effort is based on one thing: philosophy takes it for granted that life can be reduced to knowledge. And that is utterly absurd. Life cannot be reduced to knowledge; life is so vast, it is so infinite, and how can you reduce it to knowledge? – because you are part of life. And even if for logic's sake we can accept that one day comes when you have known all, you will still have remained unknown. The knower will have remained unknown.

And if the knower himself remains unknown, what is the point of all your knowledge? In your own house there is darkness – so what is the point of all the light that you see all around? You live in darkness, you are darkness. And there is no way to know the knower. Who will know it? – because knowledge means you will have to divide again. Poetry means unite, knowledge means divide. Poetry means bridges, and knowledge means break bridges. If the modern man looks so sad, empty, the reason is that philosophy has succeeded – the reason is that philosophy has released much knowledge. And the universities go on stuffing your heads with knowledge.

Remember with Kabir. Kabir is a poet, not a philosopher – mystic. He understands, but he does not know. In understanding, you feel; it is from the heart. You have the taste of life, it is on your tongue, but you cannot say it. No word is adequate to say it, no language potent enough to say it. All expressions look so pale compared to the understanding that arises in a mystic that he can say it only through silence, or at the most through poetry.

Poetry is very close to silence, because it says and yet says it not. That is the definition of poetry: it says and it says it not. It uses words in such a way that the silence is not disturbed. It uses sounds but in such a skillful way that the silence is enhanced, not destroyed.

Joseph Campbell has said: “those who desire and strive for salvation most earnestly are in their zeal bound the more, since it is exactly their self-seeking that is giving them their pain... When the Buddha extinguished ego in himself, the world burst into flower. But that, exactly, is the way it has always appeared to those in whom wonder, and not salvation, is religion!”

Let wonder be your religion, not salvation; salvation is again a philosophic concept. Let wonder be your dimension. Attain to wondering eyes again – you had them once when you were a child. All children are born full of wonder, but we destroy their wonder. We stuff their minds with knowledge – knowledge which is futile, knowledge which only destroys life. Knowledge which maybe is useful, utilitarian, but in the ultimate sense is just ho hum. You go on stuffing the minds of innocent children and sooner or later you succeed. They are helpless, and your success is their failure. Once they start feeling that they know, they have lost track.

That track has to be found again. Yes, it is lost, but it can be regained – because deep down somewhere you are still wondering; the knowledge remains only on the surface. Just dive within yourself and you will touch that core of wonder which is still there. You are still a child. And sometimes that child comes up. In moments of love, in moments of joy, sometimes listening to music or seeing a sunset, that child surfaces – and again you are running after butterflies and again you are collecting seashells on the beach, and again your eyes have a sparkle and again your heart is beating in a new rhythm. It happens to everybody once in a while.

The religious person makes it his very life. The religious person is one who makes it his very style: he lives in wonder, he breathes in wonder, he walks in wonder. Everything creates wonder in him – a pebble or a dry leaf is as wondrous as anything. The whole life is full of miracles for him. If you have the eyes of wonder then the miracle is everywhere; it is spread all over the place.

The existence is made of the stuff called miracle. It is miraculous, from one end to another – you just need to have eyes which are still capable of wonder. Eyes which are still capable of wonder are young, and eyes which are not anymore capable of wonder are blind and old and dead. Clean your eyes of dust. By ‘dust’ I mean knowledge. If you can learn only one thing being here with me, if you can learn wonder, you have learned all. If you can unlearn your knowledge you have learned all. If you can become innocent again as you were in your childhood, you are very close to God.

That’s why Jesus says: “Unless you are like children you will not enter into the kingdom of God.” And remember, that kingdom is not far away – it surrounds you. That kingdom is here. You are still in it, you have just lost the eyes to see it. The kingdom is not to be gained, eyes have only to be regained, rediscovered – and it is not a difficult phenomenon, because you once had those eyes. They are only covered with dust. The mirror has become covered with a layer of dust, but the mirror is there. Remove the dust, and again things will become beautiful, again things will have meaning and significance.