

From a Foreign Land to a Land of Humanization

Approaching the Stranger within Us

The world of psychology is familiar with a tool for acquiring knowledge of oneself and others, commonly called the Johari Window.¹ This schematic tool, or diagram, by taking into account behaviours, emotions, sensations and feelings, enables the individuals present to recognize that there are four levels of knowledge in interpersonal relations: one zone known to self and others, one zone not known to self and others, one zone known to self only and one zone known to others only.

For everyone, then, there is an area that is unknown—or foreign—to the self and to others, an area that we are going to call here, a foreign land.² In fact, we all carry within ourselves a hidden area, foreign to the other, an area to which we only have access if we are in the presence of people who are willing to reveal it to us. Based on that observation, who—between me and the other—is the most foreign or the most unknown in an interpersonal meeting? To try to respond to that question, let us examine more closely the Apostle Philip, Joseph, son of Jacob, and Jesus, son of the Father, the Word made flesh.

Three Reading Windows

We have become so used to considering the stranger as someone from a different village or hometown, as someone from somewhere else, that we have come to have difficulty seeing things from any other angle. In point of fact, we are all a little bit foreign to one another, starting with the way we look at the person in front of us. Philip said to Jesus, "Show us the Father and then we shall be satisfied," and Jesus replied: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:8) In fact, what is preventing Philip from seeing the Father is that he is still too foreign to the life of the Father in Jesus; his gaze is taking a long time to pierce the outer human shell of appearances and the face of the Father remains, for him, in a foreign zone.

And what about Joseph, son of Jacob, coming face-to-face with his brethren in Egypt, while famine rages throughout the country. They do not recognize their brother, because they believe him dead, and he, Joseph, recognizes them but chooses not to make himself known to them (Gen 42:8). Joseph's brothers, coming from somewhere else and finding themselves in the court of Pharaoh, feel like pure strangers. On the other hand, Joseph disowned by his family and welcomed by Pharaoh, has become familiar with this land, which was formerly foreign.

Thus, from both sides, non-recognition—or the will not to recognize—creates a gap where members of the same family are unable to recognize a person who is of the same race as they are. Indeed, the story of Genesis emphasizes that fact by saying that they were "twelve brothers, sons of the same man in Canaan, but the youngest is at present with our father, and the other one is no more." (Gen 42:13) "The other one is no more;" someone whose name they will not even dare to reveal. Why? Perhaps it is because he

¹ A grid presented and used in 1955 by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, hence the name JOHARI, arrived at by melding the two first names: Joseph and Harry.

² Enzo Bianchi, 2008, *J'étais étranger et vous m'avez accueilli*. Translated from Italian by Matthias Wirz. Bruxelles. Ed. Lessius. Collection : *Le Livre et le rouleau*, 31, p. 9.

was denied as a brother and sold to foreigners, due to jealousy or envy... who knows? Disappeared from their eyes, he no longer exists and even though he has turned up alive in their presence, he is a complete stranger. Indeed, the foreign land takes its roots in the heart of the being and from internal attitudes arise behaviour that is unreceptive to hospitality towards others.

Going Down to One's Own People

In the wake of the questioning of Philip and the story of Joseph and his brothers, the Incarnation, the kenosis of the Son of God propels us deeper into this field of **foreign origin**: "He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him." (Jn 1:11) What does that mean? "Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave." (Phil 2:6-7)

Dressed in the skin of Adam, similar in every way to a human being, except for sin, this man of flesh, the Word, born of God, is not received. He also is locked away in a space of **foreignness**, the space in which the Light is slow to pierce the darkness. The stranger remains in the doorway, not welcomed for what he is in truth, he cannot reveal himself in the depths of his being except to the one who would dare to say: "It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over." (Lk 24:29)

However, the one we call the stranger, the one "from elsewhere," if he is welcomed, beyond his origins, challenges the stranger nestled in each of us. The response to this challenge can then transform a foreign land into a land of humanization. As soon as that happens, the borders shrink. The Father may, once again, send the Son among his people. In an eternal path of growth, we can then see in us, and in the heart of women and men of our time, the birth of filial attitudes and kinship that we are called upon to embody in our daily lives.

Giving New Meaning to Foreign Land

This reflection is intended as a starting point (not an end point) to give rise to deep stirrings within us. Philip (Jn 14:8) is called upon to change his view of Jesus; Joseph (Gen 45:3-4), after having tested his brothers, chooses to make himself known to them; the stranger on the road to Emmaus, the dead whose departure was being wept over, suddenly becomes the Living. Similarly, the memories of all our fathers and mothers in faith, starting with Abraham and Sarah, who were called upon to take the road, invite us to become eternal pilgrims and travellers in search of God. And in this pilgrimage, we must start off by first travelling in the foreign land that lives within us. Their physical displacements were nothing compared to the countless inner displacements that marked these people.

In such contexts, from purification to purification, they were led to make a Covenant with the unknown God who, over the centuries, was revealed to be the God of the Covenant. Not only did their foreign land become a place of communion, a land of humanization, but this experience enabled them to make a people able to welcome He who, henceforth, would bring them from this foreign land to the promised land. Our spiritual genetics will always bear the trace of that and that is why Peter, in his first epistle, exhorts his people, as they are and will remain, the eternal strangers and nomads (or pilgrims) (1 Pet 2:11) in this land of exile.

For Further Reflection:

Am I able to name my inhospitable land (my foreign land) that is called to become a land of humanization?

Upon hearing: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" and, in the light of Philip, Joseph and his brothers, and Jesus, Son of the Father, the Word made flesh; what evangelical novelty does this word of Christ arouse in me?

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