



Naming God in naming others

Theology seeks to name God but if God is found in those around us, then ought we not first to name others?

As a religious educator one becomes familiar with coursework and can map out exciting lessons to engage students, including the challenges of faith, the religious truths emerging from the Scriptures, time to meditate, the hope of ecumenical movements and social justice works, the wisdom distilled from the writings of saints etc.

And as religious educators over the years, scores of students are tutored, guided, taught, nurtured, prayed for and listened to.

As a religious educator one can name God to their students and allow their students to theologize or come to name God in newer terms.

So one day it happens that a familiar face turns up on campus and noticing the teacher who taught him to name God, he approaches eagerly, smiling face and bright eyes. And the teacher recognises that smile, knows the face, but has forgotten the name.

An engagement in discussions occurs, albeit a brief and superficial one, as the teacher can no longer remember the particular details of this student: his name, who he was, what was he like in class. So with a polite dismissal the teacher returns to her desk to pursue the study of God while curiosity eats away. Who was that student whose face was so familiar and yet with an allusive name?

And after searching and asking around, the name was revealed and with it poured out the bundle of stored information. A name given to a familiar face, to a character, a personality, a child of God who was a delight to teach, attentive in class, conscientious, hard working and one very close to a person's heart. And that was the moment. The name that revealed so much but it was all too late. It was gone, the moment to praise him, time for sharing was gone, the opportunity to see Christ in him missed. And so we name God to others but do we name them?

What use have we in theologizing about God when it is simply an academic discipline? Yet when this naming of God becomes a revitalising passion, that transforms our way of thinking and seeing, then surely our living will take on another dimension. Naming God is about calling us into life, to share our presence. In naming God, we are determining the way we name others. Yet more so, in others we see a name that brings us to life, that teaches us how to live God, how to know God in another way.

How can we name a transcendent God before we can even name our own sisters and brothers in the flesh? To name God is to name from the very experience of our lives. And if our experiences and relationships are peripheral, shallow and substandard, then how are we to know the truer, deeper name of a mysterious God? It is in the times we take to forge

human relationships that we become human, giving a name first to ourselves, then to others and then and only then, do we come to ultimately name God in a fuller sense.

So if only that name was recalled! If only we recognised others, took time to come to name others, then we would truly know God and live God. And we would name God again and again.

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