

# *Anamnesis through Artwork in Transformative Catechesis*

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## **I. Introduction**

Transformative catechesis is a form of religious education for adult Christians based on psychological transformation in a small group setting. Like other forms of religious education, it helps participants understand “the mystery of Christ in the light of God’s word, so that the whole of a person’s humanity is impregnated by that word.”<sup>1</sup> However, it differs from other forms in the way it achieves this understanding. In transformative catechesis, participants encounter the paschal mystery through a psychological process of dying, death, and resurrection.<sup>2</sup> In this way, understanding the mystery of Christ and being “impregnated” with the word of God are related directly to understanding the mystery of one’s humanity. Transformative catechesis does not relate scripture, liturgy, or doctrine to human experience, nor is it concerned with the “classic catechesis” of creed, sacraments, Decalogue, and Lord’s Prayer found in traditional catechisms. It does not reject classic catechesis but considers personal transformation to be necessary before an authentic profession of faith can be made.

This paper will present findings from the first clinical trial of transformative catechesis conducted in the spring of 2006 at Santa Clara University. The paper will analyze and interpret the findings for the purpose of refining the process, which has been adapted from Jungian analytical method. Like Jungian method, transformative catechesis helps participants identify and resolve issues blocking psychological development. However, it then uses this method to help them commit to Christ as adult disciples. The process involves *anamnesis* and storytelling through artwork, which participants analyze individually and collectively. The artwork used in the present trial contained traditionally religious and non-religious themes, representing a variety of periods and genres.

## **II. Transformative Catechesis and Jungian Method**

Analytical psychology can prove useful to religious education in several significant ways. First, it views the transcendent as more than the projection of unconscious desires or fears onto a parental figure that is then withdrawn through analysis. Although it does not recognize God as a distinct ontological reality, classic Jungian thought allows for an archetype of God that exists beyond the individual psyche and personal unconscious. Secondly, it regards the libido not merely as a sexual drive but the totality of psychic energy whose purpose is the integration of the self, including elements of the self that transcend the self. Human nature is seen as imbued with “spiritual energy” and not determined by or limited to sexual instincts.<sup>3</sup> This makes it possible for religious education to connect the encounter with self with the encounter with Christ’s dying, death, and resurrection.

In addition, analytical psychology follows a method in which patients identify unconscious conflict and resolve it with the help of an analyst. Whether the goal is overcoming antisocial attitudes, treating compensatory behavior, or solving developmental crises, analytical method is concerned with the transformation of the whole person. Instead of a break with the

past and the rejection of one's former life, analytical method builds on the past so that the old is transformed into the new without being lost or annihilated. It does not construct a new self but helps the patient learn new patterns of relating without denying the past. In fact, one's ability to overcome and integrate problems from the past is a crucial factor in achieving wholeness in the present. The former or old self provides the substance out of which the new self is born.

Similarly, transformative catechesis does not create a new self but helps un-evangelized adults develop a new, sacramental, vision of life. It does this not by encouraging them to ask, "Where do I find God in my life?", but "What prevents me from seeing 'other?'" This question reflects a concern for their ability to recognize God's grace before searching for and responding to that grace. Thus, transformative catechesis challenges Christians not to search for the God of their expectations (shaped by personal biography and conventional images of the divine), but to deconstruct their preconceptions so that they might recognize God as someone or something completely *unexpected*. For this to occur, adults identify and confront obstacles to wholeness, which block not only psychological growth, but commitment to Christ.

Both Freud and Jung recognized that the key to psychotherapy is the "transference" (*die Übertragung*), in which the patient assumes a dependent attitude toward the analyst, mimicking the earlier parent-child-relationship.<sup>4</sup> In transference, the patient projects the former images and relationships onto the analyst, who comes to personify these in the mind of the patient. This takes place as the patient, struggling with the demands of authenticity, wrestles with the projections in an emotionally intense way. Over time, the patient assumes responsibility for his or her recovery, recognizing that freedom and wholeness reside in the self. Then, as the patient seeks a new way of being in relation, he or she looks to the analyst as a model of psychological wholeness.<sup>5</sup>

Jung differed from Freud in recognizing the archetypal dimension of the transference; that is, the transference often goes beyond one's actual parents and childhood experiences to images, or archetypes, in the "collective unconscious" of humanity.<sup>6</sup> He also emphasized the reciprocal nature of the transference, claiming that the analyst is drawn into the therapy as deeply as the patient, and that without this interaction the therapy would be ineffective. Transformation is achieved through the "psychic interaction" that takes place between the analyst and the patient rather than through detached analysis, as previously thought.<sup>7</sup> This interaction constitutes the core of transformation.

### **III. Transformative Process**

The process for transformative catechesis follows analytical method and consists of *anamnesis*, *interpretation*, *discernment*, and *commitment*. In *anamnesis*, participants react to a painting or artwork introduced by the catechist. As a symbol, the artwork challenges them to recall events and images from their past that affect how they relate to themselves and others. The catechist encourages them to tell their stories as truthfully and completely as possible. *Anamnesis* is more than the retelling of past events; it is the recreation of significant experiences from the past for the purpose of catharsis and growth. Jung characterized this stage as "not merely the intellectual recognition of the facts with the head, but their confirmation by the heart and the actual release of suppressed emotion."<sup>8</sup>

In *interpretation*, the catechist challenges participants to move beyond their individual stories to consider the wider implications. When possible, the catechist relates their stories and images to the corresponding archetypes behind them. This is important if anyone in the group is having difficulty with images of father, mother, or child portrayed in the artwork, since not only

are these powerful archetypes in the collective unconscious, they also play major roles in the church. For instance, if a participant projects a problematic father image onto God (e.g., God as an abusive father), the catechist can help that person become conscious of the projection as well as model a different way of relating to the divine by sharing his or her faith. Thus, *interpretation* has a twofold goal for the catechist: interpreting the archetypal dimension of projections and relating individual stories to church history and teaching.

*Discernment* is the key stage in transformative catechesis. Transference is worked out during this time, when participants search for ways to reconcile religious faith with a personal biography that includes doubt, failure, and all of the ambiguity of adult life. It provides an opportunity for adults to assess their lives in light of the paschal mystery. The catechist's role is to help participants understand the ways in which their own dying, death, and resurrection share in Christ's and to model his or her faith by engaging participants. In *discernment*, participants discern whether their faith can be made adult (i.e., integrative and whole), and, if so, whether they can make the personal commitment to live that faith. This stage is the longest part of the process and differs from analytical method in its reliance upon the Holy Spirit and the involvement of the group.

*Commitment* gives ritual expression to the previous stages and moves the process from therapy to ministry by bringing it out into the open. *Commitment* is not the expression of a change that has already taken place, but is an integral part of the process. It is the final stage of transformation in which participants profess their faith publicly and re-commit themselves to Christ, incorporating the shadow elements of the unconscious. *Commitment* consists of a ritual adapted from the preparation rites for Holy Saturday in the Roman Catholic Church: gathering activity, collect, scripture reading, act of commitment, petitions, Lord's Prayer, collect, and dismissal.<sup>9</sup>

#### **IV. The Clinical Trial**

The first trial of transformative catechesis was conducted over an eight-week period from March to May of 2006 at Santa Clara University and involved seven participants, including the author as catechist: five women and two men, all Roman Catholics. One of the men and one of the women were native Spanish speakers, although they were able to communicate in English. All were involved in ministry, either as paid professionals or volunteers. In addition, most had graduate degrees either in catechetics, liturgy, or spirituality. Ages ran from the early forties to the late fifties. Two of the participants were from an upper middle-class background. All except one were of European descent. One participant had gone through extensive psychotherapy; another was a recovering alcoholic. All but one were parents and grandparents.

The catechist met with the participants prior to the first session to explain the theory and process of transformative catechesis, answer their questions, and have them sign a consent form. Each session consisted of eight-steps: gathering and welcome; meditation; introduction to the artwork by the catechist; journal writing; group discussion followed by a break; elaboration of the artwork by the catechist; group discussion; and a closing ritual prayer.<sup>10</sup> During the journal writing, the catechist asked participants to answer three questions based on the artwork: "How am I affected by the 'other?'" "How do I affect the 'other?'" and "How do I affect myself in the presence of the 'other?'"<sup>11</sup> Participants grappled with trying to understand and define "other" throughout the catechetical period.

The catechist hoped to see discussion of the artwork lead to the emergence of archetypes (e.g., father, mother, death) that were causing problems for the participants. Since transformative catechesis integrates these problems into the individual's faith, it was important for participants to become conscious of them. Toward this end, the trial was partially successful. Archetypes emerged in some of the artwork, such as Marc Chagall's "The Sacrifice of Isaac" and Lucien Freud's "Bruce Bernard" (one woman cried when telling the group about her hospitalized father whom she had just left), but were lacking in others, such as Edward Hopper's "A Woman in the Sun" and Artemisia Gentileschi's "Judith and Holofernes."<sup>12</sup> With Gentileschi, the expectation was that an independent woman acting to free her people might give rise to female archetypes, but most thought the image of Judith severing Holofernes' head too violent for their tastes. It became apparent that cultural conditioning concerning propriety and gender was influencing participants' views. Only two were familiar with the story of Judith, and none had heard of Gentileschi's rape by her teacher and mentor. Most were uncomfortable relating it to the painting.

The fact that participants had theological formation influenced how they judged the religious significance of certain paintings. This was most evident in the discussion of "The Sacrifice of Isaac." Participants were clearly uncomfortable with the idea of human sacrifice despite the wording of Genesis 22. 9-10, in which Abraham is ready to "slaughter" his son, and Chagall's vivid depiction of the poised knife. Instead, they preferred to spiritualize the story, believing it to be a "metaphor" for surrendering everything in one's life to God. This led to a discussion of family relationships, the roles of men and women in the family, and how to integrate problematic elements of religious myth into one's faith.

Early on, participants began to make thematic connections among the meditation, the title of the artwork, and the ritual prayer that were never intended by the catechist. These connections appeared to be expressions of a sacramental sensibility that resulted in a parallel symbol system, consisting of word on one side (personal stories, prayer, scripture, title), and image (artwork) on the other. Given this unexpected development, the catechist designed the next few sessions with themes in mind, adding the element of the liturgical calendar, since the sessions were held during Lent and Easter. Once this was done, however, participants began to see what was expected of them, bringing conscious functions to bear on the analysis of the artwork, rather than tell their own stories and, in doing so, explore their unconscious.

For example, during the discussion of Hopper's "A Woman in the Sun," the catechist brought word and image together, showing the title and date of the painting along with Hopper's name and a brief biographical sketch. This resulted in a free-flowing discussion of smoking (the painting is of a nude woman with a cigarette) and various counterculture movements during the sixties. The discussion remained at this conscious and, for the most part, intellectual level for the entire session. However, when participants were given no information about the artwork or its socio-historical context, as with Paul Cézanne's "Houses Along a Road," participants felt free to speculate not just about the painting, but themselves, their stories, and their faith. Cézanne's deserted country road, shown without title, date, artist's name, or historical background, gave them an opportunity to explore the unconscious part of themselves. One of them even imagined that the title of the painting was "The Road to Emmaus." Others described how it brought up childhood experiences long since forgotten.

When archetypal images did not surface during the catechesis, discussions remained theoretical and abstract. The catechist participated in the discussions, trying to move the group beyond the details of the painting, although there was no attempt to teach or instruct. When

participants became accustomed to telling their stories (this happened by the second session), there appeared to be movement from *anamnesis* to *discernment*. *Interpretation*, however, was less evident, due to the difficulties the group had with archetypal themes and the catechist's unwillingness to act as an instructor. Owing to the church calendar and schedules, the stage of *commitment* was rushed and not as transformative as hoped. Rather than being an integral part of the catechesis, it ended up being just another session. The ritual prayers were more effective in helping participants with discernment, because they were seen as teaching participants how to integrate the discussions with prayer.

Finally, the catechist observed a unique form of transference/counter-transference taking place through the selection of artwork. At least two of the paintings chosen reflected unconscious themes brought to the catechist's attention during his own psychotherapy in preparation for the trial. These themes were taken up by several participants, who reacted to and then adapted them according to their experiences and needs. The result was an unconscious interaction involving sacrifice, death, and gender roles that became conscious by the end of the catechesis. The extent to which these archetypal images and patterns were involved in individual discernment was not assessed.

## V. Conclusion

The clinical trial proved a success in its ability to attract and engage adults of various backgrounds in a new process that treats conversion primarily as an unconscious phenomenon rather than a conscious decision. It captivated them, allowed them to tell their stories, and offered healing regarding current relationships and/or formative memories. In that sense, it aided the psychological process of transformation, although one participant left with a feeling of never having "gotten it." For others, the eight-week process provided a respite from the demands of work and family. As one woman put it, "the real gift was taking time to be together and the shared experience we have had."

But the question remains whether Jungian method is an apt process for catechesis and whether participants actually progress through the stages of psychotherapy. Even if this is proven in future trials, one wonders whether transformative catechesis can relate this transformation to Christian faith. It is one thing to identify and accept previously unknown parts of the self; quite another to commit that integrated self to Christ as an adult disciple. The clinical group consisted of ministers with years of experience, yet they still had difficulty connecting the sessions and their personal stories to their faith. It is crucial, therefore, that the catechist be diligent in drawing out the archetypal dimensions of the discussions and relating personal *anamnesis* to the greater Christian story. This may prove to be the "psychic interaction" of transference.

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* (16 October 1979): AAS 71 (1979), no. 20. Hereafter *CT*.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Brancatelli, "Discipleship and the Logic of Transformative Catechesis," in *Spirit, Church, and World: Proceedings of the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the College Theology Society* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 219-44.

<sup>3</sup> Murray Stein, *Transformation: Emergence of the Self* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-84.

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<sup>5</sup> Murray Stein, *Jung's Treatment of Christianity: The Psychotherapy of a Religious Tradition* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1985), 55.

<sup>6</sup> For archetypes and the collective unconscious, see Carl Gustave Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, vol. 9, bk. 2, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 286-87. Hereafter, *CW*.

<sup>7</sup> Stein, *Transformation: Emergence of the Self*, 76. See *CW*, vol. 16, *The Practice of Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference and Other Subjects* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954), 137, 164-87.

<sup>8</sup> *CW*, vol. 16, 5.

<sup>9</sup> See Robert Brancatelli, "Jungian Analytical Method as a Process for Transformative Catechesis" (2006), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Brancatelli, "Transformative Catechesis: Graduate Program in Pastoral Ministry, Santa Clara University: Catechist Guide" (2006), 8.

<sup>11</sup> See Melissa J. Jones, "The Perceptions of Jungian Analysts on the Individuation Process in Group Psychotherapy: A Descriptive Case Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburg, 1983), 147.

<sup>12</sup> The paintings shown, in order, were: "Dos Figuras en Azul" (1961) by Rufino Tamayo; "The Sacrifice of Isaac" (1975) by Marc Chagall; "Judith and Holofernes" (1620) by Artemisia Gentileschi; "White Noise" (2004) by Valerie Ewert; "Bruce Bernard" (1996) by Lucien Freud; "A Woman in the Sun" (1961) by Edward Hopper; and "Houses Along a Road" (1881) by Paul Cézanne.