Books of Interest

Alexander Ezechukwu O.C.D.

The subject of transformation resonates with many people because human beings are ever on a quest for a more meaningful existence. In seeking to connect with the deeper dimensions of existence—such as love, compassion, unity, and consciousness of a more fulfilled and authentic way of living—a secure pathway for guidance becomes important. The book **The Triple Way to Transformation** by Susan Muto has, as its subject, this very pathway to transformation.

For Muto, the work of spiritual formation "facilitates our openness to the transcendent dimension of life while enhancing our unique-communal participation in every aspect of personal and shared responsibility." The aim, however, "is to unfold slowly, methodically and consistently a basic, universal, and classical approach to the process of Spirit-guided formation, re-formation and graced transformation in accordance with our unique-communal life call in Trinitarian love."[1]

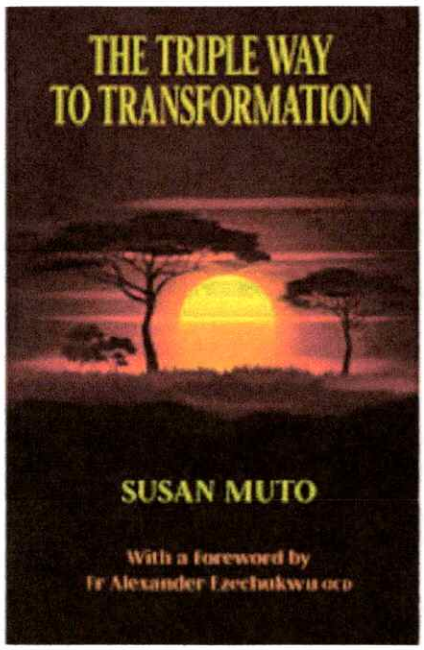
One of the most significant issues that Muto addresses in the book is what she understands as the sad fact that people give up on the journey of transformation. This, for her, seems to be due to a misconception of the classic description of the spiritual journey—the threefold path of purgation, illumination, and union. This misconception could arise from a more informational approach to the spiritual life that might give the impression that the journey through a threefold path could be conceived in linear terms. And so people can get discouraged when they do not see themselves arriving from one stage to the next at a particular time they expected to be there. This then can give rise to despair and depression, leading a person to think that the journey is not for them but for an elitist few. They may also buy into the idea that given their struggles and mistakes, they are either not good enough for what it takes to make the journey or that God is not interested in them. Muto contrasts this depreciative attitude with the disposition towards purifying formation, meaning that our weaknesses and failings in fact provide us with spiritual opportunities. In this light, every single day becomes an amazing story of being formed, reformed, and transformed by the Lord. So, for Muto, the concern is to find a way, a path, to move people from depreciation to appreciation; from an analysis of self that puts them in a negative stance towards life to an awareness that, in every experience, there is an opening to an upward uplift to the transcendent and the transforming graces of God.

In order to do this Muto explores the metaphor of the 'way' which is evident in the title of the book. Her approach to the topic of the spiritual journey would be helpful to a person showing an opening or interest in spirituality, as it is a gentle and an empowering approach.

Perhaps this way may speak to the situation in many western countries where Christianity is rapidly in decline despite the many centuries of building up a fortress of intellectual theology. Such intellectual theology has exposed the need for a complementary theology/spirituality of formation as advocated by Muto—the kind that takes the truths of faith and embodies them in everyday life. If not embraced then, when chips are down and life crises, whether personal or societal, arise one will be left totally vulnerable.

Muto's approach has implications for how faith communities approach faith formation. The challenge would entail, for example, adopting a creative and imaginative approach in the area of catechesis for example. In other words, taking theological information in small doses and having an experiential reflective conversation that inspires someone to think about how that information is going to affect the person's life in its entirety—body, mind and spirit. This approach is knowing how to apply the information about the faith to one's lived experience. The 'how to' is the key question behind Muto's formative spirituality approach. In other words, as regards the Catholic or Christian tradition one would be asking questions like: how do we live what we profess to believe? How is it that we don't? Why is it that after many years of informational theology we choose formation traditions foreign to Catholic doctrine and start living by them? How is it that cradle Christians are so vulnerable to a secularistic, humanistic, atheistic, existentialist world?

In **The Triple Way to Transformation** the ongoing journey throughout life of purified formation, illuminating reformation, and unifying transformation is an identifiable thread that weaves its way through the book and is supported by the writings and experiences of several spiritual writers in the 2000-year Christian tradition. It is a work that manifests Susan Muto's many years of reflection on the spiritual journey. It also shows her conviction that information alone about this path is insufficient. It needs to be complemented by understanding how such information informs, reforms and transforms lived experience. This is the purpose of applied spirituality, to find a way to bridge the gap so that what one believes and how one lives become more and more harmonious and integrated. This too, is the aim of **The Triple Way to Transformation**.



The Triple Way to Transformation.
By Susan Muto
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