

THOUGHT OF BERNARD LONERGAN—INTEREST GROUP

Topic: Various Applications of Lonergan's Notion of Conversion
Convener: John Dadosky, Regis College/University of Toronto
Moderator: Cyril Orji, University of Dayton
Presenters: M. Shawn Copeland, Boston College
Mark T. Miller, University of San Francisco
Francis Clooney, Harvard Divinity School

The moderator began by stating the purpose of the Interest Group to communicate the thought of Lonergan to the wider community of the CTSA and to attempt to promote the wider application of his thought within the CTSA. He emphasized that Lonergan was a lifelong member of the Society and twice recipient of its highest award both when it was the Cardinal Spellman Award and later as the John Courtney Murray Award.

Prof. M. Shawn Copeland presented "A Role for the Notion of Conversion in an African American Theology." In her introductory comments, she helpfully reminded the audience that there had been a session devoted to Lonergan's thought but that for unknown reasons it fell away during the structural changes of the CTSA convention several years ago. She welcomed its return.

Her paper explored the role of Lonergan's notion of conversion, in particular Robert Doran's addition of psychic conversion in formulating an African American Theology. She asked "If Black people suffer from a psychic wound as victims of racism, how can we understand that wound?" W. E. B. Du Bois poignantly anticipated the need for a psychological conversion, given the black experience of "double-consciousness," of "twoness...of looking at one's self through the eyes of others." The category of psychic conversion led her to identify the African American condition as a psychic wound. Liberation from the labyrinth of doubleness may be mediated through a converted psyche, thus, not only enabling one's own healing, but that of one's community and one's world. The fruits of the conversion offer the promise of integration.

Dreams are an essential part of psychological integration. She analogized from this process to Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, which provides an image and inspiration for healing a nation, just as the dreams emerging into consciousness offer the promise of a more integrated psyche. Such healing calls for the praxis of redemptive love.

Prof. Mark T. Miller presented "Sartre's *Nausea* and Lonergan's Conversion." Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* is an influential classic of atheist existentialism. It casts the human quest for objective truth and goodness as futile. Instead Sartre advocates for an absolute contingency of being that frees a person to create her or his own meaning and value. Miller asks, however, "Does Sartre display religious conversion as Lonergan understands it in *Nausea*?"

Miller particularly has in mind the famous "chestnut tree" experience wherein the main character, Antoine Roquentin, has an experience of primordial oneness. As he departs the park he turns around and the park smiles at him. Is Roquentin undergoing a religious conversion? Miller also highlights the character of "the self-taught man," who in spite of being a prisoner of war under inhumane conditions,

discovered a love for all humanity. In addition, Miller cited the theme in *Nausea* of suffering and letting go, of facing one's own nothingness, an act which Lonergan believes can provide the seeds of religious conversion.

Prof. Francis X. Clooney presented "Intellectual Conversion as a Necessary Moment in Interreligious Learning." He began remarking on his lifelong acquaintance with Lonergan, including having taken a course from him as a Jesuit scholastic. Drawing on Lonergan's comments about intellectual conversion in *Method in Theology* and Richard Liddy's *Transforming Light*, he argued that this conversion is a necessary, though an often neglected moment, in mature interreligious learning. What Lonergan describes as the "stubborn and misleading myth" takes the form of a mistaken belief that other religions can be understood by taking a safe look at them, as if one can obtain information about another religious tradition, examine it, and pass judgment merely by a process of "viewing from afar."

Clooney argues that intellectual conversion is related to the transformation and clarification of consciousness studied in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. For Lonergan, the lack of intellectual conversion prevents one from distinguishing between the world of immediacy and the world mediated by meaning. Analogously for Patanjali, "the close connection between the seer and seen is a cause of suffering that is to be ended." This close connection between seer and seen flows from an ignorance. When one apprehends reality properly the mind rests in utter simplicity. The latter is the analogue for the fruit of intellectual conversion. There are other rich examples suggested such as the notion of yogic conversion. Clooney raised an original question for Lonergan studies, namely, the religious dimension of intellectual conversion.

The session concluded with a fruitful discussion with questions concerning the social aspects of Lonergan's thought or so-called social conversion, the question about the psychic woundedness of the victim and the victimizer in racism, and whether conversion is specifically Christian. The group looks forward to a contextual application of Lonergan's thought in San Diego in 2014.

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