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CONVERSION

An ending?
A beginning?
A daily choice?

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LIFE IN ABUNDANCE
THE JOURNEY OF CONVERSION

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In John's gospel Jesus states, "I have come to bring you life, life in abundance." (John 10:10)

Our response to Jesus' desire for us necessitates our willingness to enter into a process of conversion. The conversion we are speaking about here is not a conversion to a new religion as such; rather it involves the re-orientation of one's whole life. The Greek word, *metanoia*, describes conversion as a radical turning or redirection of our lives. "The time has come," Jesus said, "and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe in the Good News." (Mark 1:14-15). The Hebrew word *shub* describes a more comforting description of conversion as a coming home to God's unconditional love. (Luke 15: 1-32) Both words convey an experience of God that dramatically changes the course of one's life.

This transformation does not occur overnight. It involves the long, day after day, year after year struggle through darkness and confusion as well as deep joy and happiness as we discover our true selves in God.



As a professor of spirituality, I have had the privilege of teaching many courses that deal with the topic of conversion. Over the years I have found that the one approach that has been most helpful to students both for their own lives and the lives of those to whom they minister is that of Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J. The basic premise, throughout his writings, is that the human person has a radical desire to reach out, to move beyond and to enter into the process of self-transcendence which leads to a life of authenticity and integration. Thus, Lonergan describes conversion as not merely a change or even a development but a radical transformation which follows on all levels of our being: religious, moral, and intellectual. He also emphasizes that such conversion is found in our experience. Thus conversion is uniquely personal and historical. Other theologians such as Robert Doran, Walter Conn, and Bishop Edward Braxton have expanded Lonergan's modes of conversion to include the affective, ecclesial and social dimensions of the human person. I have found that what students particularly appreciate are the descriptions of the modes of conversion. In the words of one student, "Conversion has always been something vague and abstract for me until you put it in the context of the modes of conversion. They provide a concrete guide for assessing one's growth and identifying one's blind spots."

These modes of conversion come alive when they

are viewed through the life stories of real men and women. Their conversions help us to make sense of our own. The plan of this essay, then, is to provide a brief description of the modes of conversion, and then illustrate how they find expression in the life stories of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day and Oscar Romero. Each of these great friends of God demonstrate for us that there are optimal times in our lives when different modes of conversion take center-stage as we work through and integrate various dimensions of our personality in our quest for a life of authenticity and integration - the goal of the conversion process. Space permits us to reflect on only a few of the most significant conversion experiences in each of their lives.

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Fr. Lonergan describes religious conversion as a falling in love with God in an unrestricted fashion. It involves the discovery of God as real. Lonergan emphasizes that falling in love with God is not our initiative but God's; that is, in the words of Romans 5: "God floods our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 5:5) I am reminded of Blaise Pascal's dramatic encounter with God - the one he wrote about and sewed into the liner of his coat.

"The year of grace 1654....from about half past ten in the evening

Until half past midnight.

FIRE

'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,'
not of Philosophers and scholars.

Certainty, certainty, heartfelt, joy, peace.

God of Jesus Christ.

God of Jesus Christ.

My God and your God.

'Thy God shall be my God'

The world forgotten, and everything except
God!"

All of us know from our own experience that falling in love is just the beginning of a relationship.

Learning to love - a love that combines eros, the drive toward communion and agape, a love that puts the well-being of others above our own - is a life-long challenge for all of us.

INTELLECTUAL CONVERSION

Intellectual conversion occurs when a person begins to change his or her way of looking at reality. I recall a seminarian saying to me, "I just want to know the Truth!" This young man was involved in the unrelenting desire to understand and make sense of life on a cognitive level, raising the questions, who am I? Who is God? What is the meaning of life? Who is God? It is not just a knowing, but a knowing that leads to insight about the truth that guides our lives.

MORAL CONVERSION

Moral conversion leads to the awareness that, as one matures, the criterion for decision-making must evolve from self-satisfaction to the pursuit of value. Most importantly, moral conversion involves the struggle to attain self-consistency between the values one affirms and the deeds one incarnates. It involves the never-ending quest for authenticity in one's public as well as private worlds.

AFFECTIVE CONVERSION

Psychic or Affective conversion attends to the important role emotions play in revealing the truth and value of our lives. It involves the celebration of life's joys as well as the healing of life's wounds. It centers on feelings, emotions, compulsions; the facing of self-destructive attitudes and strategies that can block our desires for healthy growth and development.

ECCLESIAL CONVERSION

Ecclesial conversion involves the turn to others; the recognition of our need for community. It is based on the recognition that we become who we are in

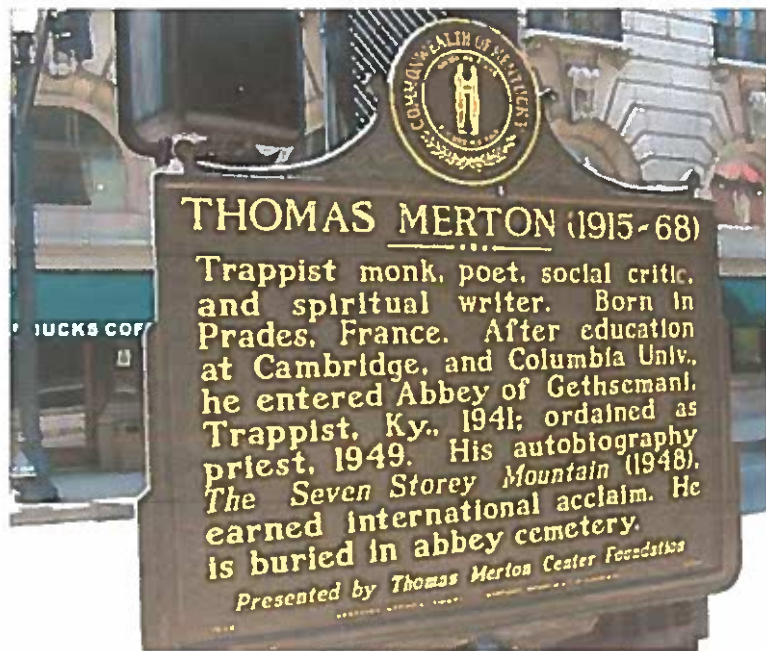
and through our relationships. For the Christian this community is made up of those who come together as disciples of Jesus Christ, and who we wish to celebrate and perpetuate that discipleship through word, sign, sacrament and deed.

SOCIAL CONVERSION

Social conversion involves a reprioritization of one's values in recognition of injustices within society. Such an awakening leads to a commitment to bring God's kingdom of love, peace, and justice into the world. This conversion recognizes the distinction between private charity and social justice: Private charity is concerned with caring for the needs of those around us. Social Justice is dedicated to the eradication of the institutions of injustice that make up the culture of death: poverty, war, racism, sexism, pornography, abortion, sexual trafficking of women and children, etc.

Loneragan emphasizes that Christian conversion is not one more conversion to be added to all the others, but the specific shape these conversions take when viewed through the lens of Jesus' life and values. He also identifies important principles that govern our journey of conversion:

- 1) God comes to us in our history; that is, our journey of conversion does not call us away from life, but to enter more fully and deeply into our own humanity with all its ambiguities.
- 2) The modes of conversion do not normally occur in a chronological sequence; they overlap and interpenetrate as we mature in our Christian identity.
- 3) One mode of conversion may not be as fully developed as another in a person's life. To see how these modes of conversion come alive in the lives of real people is both fascinating and uplifting as we note how uniquely God loves and guides each of us to the discovery of our true selves in Him.



THOMAS MERTON

Origen, a third century theologian, stated that the spiritual journey is long and convoluted.

Surely that observation is true about Thomas Merton. He was born on January 31, 1915 in Prades, France to Owen Merton, a New Zealand painter and Ruth Jenkins, an American Quaker and artist. Merton was baptized in the Church of England, following his father's wishes, yet, he had no official introduction to religion of any kind by his parents. The first three years of his life were a time of happiness and contentment as his parents doted on his every word and new discovery. But tragedy struck early as Merton learned of his mother's struggle with and death from stomach cancer. Looking back on his life at the tender age of 8, in his autobiography, *Seven Story Mountain*, Merton states,

"When I was eight years old, running loose among the rocks and the prickly pears of Somerset Island, Bermuda, I was in just the position of divorced parents. My father wanted to take care of me, but he did not precisely know how. I was without a family, without a school, without a church. I had no morals and no God. I would not even be able to say if there was such a thing."

Tragedy struck again, when at the age of 15, Merton learned his father had died of a brain tumor. At that time he described himself as an orphan, alone in the world.

There were many experiences, but we will fast forward to his college years at Columbia University. Merton had been reading widely for several years. He was especially fond of Freud and Marx. His involvement with Communist thought seemed to give him interior peace: "I was in the thick of conversion. It was not the right conversion, but it was a conversion." In 1937, his life was forever changed when he picked up *Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* by Etienne Gilson. This was his first encounter with a way of understanding the God of Christianity. The word that quite literally opened a whole new world to him was the Latin, *aseitas*. It meant "the power of a being to exist absolutely in virtue of itself." (SSM, 172). "I had never had an adequate notion of what Christians meant by God," he stated. "I think one reason for my profound satisfaction with what I now read was that God had been vindicated in my own mind. This dismantled my former image of God as 'a dramatic and passionate character, a value, jealous, hidden being.'" (SSM 173) Merton's conversion to a Christian concept of God - one that his restless intellect could accept - was the beginning of his ecclesial conversion; that is, his desire to enter the Catholic Church.

"All of a sudden something began to stir in me. It was a movement that spoke like a voice: 'What are you waiting for? Why are you sitting here? Why do you hesitate? You know what you ought to do. Why don't you do it?' I stirred in my chair. I lit a cigarette, looked outside the window at the rain, tried to shut up the voice. 'Don't act on impulses,' I thought. 'This is crazy. Read your book.' But the voice persisted. Merton got on his raincoat. 'And then everything inside me began to sing - to sing with peace, to sing with strength, and to sing with conviction.' At the rectory, 'Father, I want to become a Catholic.'" (SSM, 216)

Merton's entrance into the Catholic Church was soon followed by a desire for priesthood which found expression in his acceptance by the Trappist community at Gethsemane Monastery near Louisville, Kentucky. Merton was 27 years old. As he walked through the door of the monastery, Merton had a profound experience of finally coming home. And in describing the fulfillment of his dream of priesthood, Merton would state, "This is the one great secret for which I was born."

In many ways it is difficult to separate Merton's moral from his affective conversion. Moral conversion calls us to move out of a life of self-satisfaction to one of value. That shift will only take place when we find ourselves loving another or others in such a way that we put their well-being before our own. Merton's friends and mentor, particularly teacher and mentor Van Doren at Columbia University, helped Merton put the hedonistic years of his past behind him as these friendships brought stability and joy to his life, and helped him to go outside of himself in a movement of self-transcending love. Another significant, life-changing example of affective conversion was his experience at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, when at forty-three years of age he took his first trip out of the monastery in seven years "At the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another, even though we were total strangers. This experience was like waking up from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness." (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 157) This experience had a profound impact on Merton's spiritual and social conversion. What followed was an intentional shift in his life and writings from a spirituality of withdrawal to a spirituality of involvement. He acknowledged that it was not the world that was evil, but his own unresolved issues that he had projected onto the world. He stated emphatically that the monk must

avoid being a "guilty bystander" - the title of one of his books which expresses Merton's growing awareness in the 1950's and 1960's of concern for and involvement in the social and political dimensions of life, especially the issues of racism and peace.



The underlying motivation for the gradually confronting and integrating of these dimensions of life can only be found in Merton's spiritual conversion. In the words of theologian Walter Conn, "religious conversion is not just a process of becoming "religious" but a totally radical reorientation of one's entire life, of one's very self that allows God's own loving life to move in from the edges and corners of our lives to take possession of our hearts and to permeate our very being" (*The Desiring Self*, 128). Merton's final religious experience before the giant Buddhas at Polonnaruwa in Ceylon as well as his writings on contemplation, attest to a life permeated by his transforming union with God. "If we enter into ourselves, find our true self, and then pass "beyond" the inner "I" we sail forth into the immense darkness in which we confront the "I AM" of the Almighty." (*Inner Experience*, 9)



DOROTHY DAY

Dorothy was born on the 8th of November in 1897 in Brooklyn. She was the third of five children. Her father, John Day, was a newspaper man, a sports writer whose specialty was the race track. Dorothy's talent for writing came from her father. Her mother, Grace Satterlee, a stay-at-home-mom, was always remembered by Dorothy with grateful affection, a mother as near to her as her father was remote. Dorothy's earliest religious experience took place when the Day family lived in California. She was around seven years old. Dorothy was playing school with her sister, Della, in the attic of the family home when she came upon a musty old bible. She began reading the Bible to her sister: "Slowly, as I read, a new personality impressed itself on me. I was being introduced to someone. I knew almost immediately

that I was discovering God. Here was someone that I had never really known before and yet felt to be One whom I would never forget, that I would never get away from." (Union Square, 20) Dorothy knew her life would be forever changed. This religious experience became the motivating force behind Dorothy's unrelenting search for God through the joyful and often difficult moments of conversion that were to follow. Reflecting back on her life, Dorothy stated, "All my life I have been tormented by God," a character in one of Dostoevsky's books says. And that is the way it was with me." (Union Square, 19)

The mode of conversion that played an all-encompassing role in Dorothy's life was her social conversion. It began in her last year of high school where she was exposed to radical politics through her brother's newspaper job with, *The Day Book*. This publication described the harsh working conditions in the factories and department stores of Chicago. Dorothy began taking long walks toward the west side of Chicago. In her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, she states, "I walked for miles, pushing my brother in his carriage exploring interminable streets, fascinating in their dreary sameness, past tavern after tavern, exploring the slums of Chicago." Walking these streets as a 15 year old, she pondered the plight of the poor and the workers and felt, "from then on my life was to be linked with theirs; their interests would be mine...I had received a call, a vocation, a direction in my life. I wanted to play my part, I wanted to do something toward making a "New Earth wherein justice dwells." (Union Square, 37)

This discovery of her vocation led to the beginning of Dorothy's moral conversion. While at the University of Illinois, Dorothy strove to attain moral consistency between the values she espoused "I was tearing myself away from home, living on my own, and I had to choose the world to which I wanted to belong." (*The Long Loneliness*, 42) Dorothy intentionally became part of the working poor. She chose to live a simple life, to earn her keep through

manual labor; she was often out of work and money; she knew what it meant to “taste the hardship of poverty.” It was during this time that Dorothy raised what she called the “great question.”

“Why was so much done in remedying social evils instead of avoiding them in the first place? ...Where were the saints to try to change the social order, not just to minister to the slaves, but to do away with slavery? (LL 45)

Dorothy would soon experience the consequences of her choices. In the spring of 1917 she joined suffragists in Washington picketing in front of the White House to protest the exclusion of women from voting. She, with a friend, was arrested, imprisoned, and placed in solitary confinement. This experience was a wakeup call to her naiveté and idealism. She asked for a bible. As she prayed the psalms, she experienced a profound solidarity with the brokenness and sinfulness of humankind. “The only thoughts that brought comfort to my soul were the lines from the Psalms that expressed the terror and misery of man suddenly stricken and abandoned....I was that drug addict, I was that shop lifter, I was that woman who killed her children, who had murdered her lover. The blackness of hell was all around me.” (Union Square, 7)

A second mode of conversion that had a profound impact on Dorothy’s spiritual life was her affective conversion. Through a friend, Dorothy met Forster Batterham. In her autobiography she describes him as an anarchist, an Englishman by descent and a biologist. She also admitted that he was an atheist and an opponent of all institutions. Dorothy fell in love with Forster and he with her. For the first time in her life, Dorothy truly believed that her partner loved her. She found a degree of peace and happiness in their love that she had not experienced before in human relationships. This experience of the joy of loving and being loved led her to God. “I could not see that the love between a man and a woman was incompatible with the love of God...It is because through a whole love, both physical and spiritual, that I came to know God.” (LL 135) Dorothy was

filled with gratitude and began to pray. Years later, in an interview with Robert Coles, Dorothy stated, “I don’t think prayer for me has only been connected with sadness and misery...When I felt joy and fulfillment in this world, I have always wanted to say thank you.” (Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion*, 56)

Dorothy discovered she was pregnant at the age of 28. She was overjoyed. Unfortunately, Forster did not share Dorothy’s bliss about parenthood. He didn’t believe in bringing children into such a violent, toxic world. He also became irritated at her growing interest in God and religion. Tamar Teresa was born on March 4, 1926. She occasioned Dorothy’s ecclesial conversion. “No human creature could receive or contain so vast a flood of love and joy as I often felt after the birth of my child. With this came the need to worship and adore.” (LL 139) Dorothy decided to have Tamar baptized in the Catholic Church. She wanted her daughter to have a moral structure and a community that she never had. She knew that decision would probably lead to the end of her relationship with Forster. She struggled fiercely with this decision. “I did not want to be alone. I did not want to give up a human love when it was dearest and tenderest.” (LL 145) But she also felt strongly that she wanted her child to believe and “if belonging to a church would give her so inestimable a grace as faith in God and the companionable love of the saints. Then the thing to do was to have her baptized a Catholic.” (LL 145) In December 1927, Dorothy followed her daughter’s baptism with her own. Her motivation challenges the rationalization of many today who state they are spiritual but not religious. “I had heard many say that they wanted to worship God in their own way, and did not need a church in which to praise Him or a body of people with whom to associate themselves. But I disagree with this. My very experience as a radical, my whole make-up, led me to want to associate myself with others, with the masses, in loving and praising God. (LL 139)

Five years following her entrance into the Catholic Church, Dorothy was searching to find a way to support herself and Tamar through work which linked her religious faith, her commitment to social justice and her vocation as a writer. Everything came together in her meeting with Peter Maurin. He had developed a program of Catholic social action and he wanted Dorothy to help him implement it. Through his influence, Dorothy realized that she did not need to leave behind her concern for issues of social justice, but found that they resonated with the best of the Church's moral and social teaching. The intellectual conversion she experienced through Maurin's instruction provided the principles upon which the Catholic Worker Movement and her commitment to corporal and spiritual works of mercy would be based.

The many years that followed in her life bear witness to the deepening interpenetration and integration of these modes of conversion. In his book, *My Life with the Saints*, Fr. James Martin, S.J., summarizes the powerful impact of Dorothy's life. "In 1973, at the age of 76, Dorothy was arrested and jailed for her participation in a United Farm Workers rally supporting Cesar Chavez and the rights of migrant workers. A striking black and white photograph taken that day, shows the birdlike, gray haired woman wearing a second-hand dress and sitting on a folding chair. Dorothy gazes up calmly at two burly police officers, armed, who tower over her. It is a portrait of a lifetime of commitment, the dignity of discipleship, and the absolute rightness of the gospel."

OSCAR ROMERO

Oscar Romero was born August 15, 1917. He was the second oldest boy of eight children to Santos Romero and Guadalupe de Jesus Galdamez. His family were very devout Catholics. They lived in the town of Ciudad Barrios, in the territory of San Miguel. Romero's journey of conversion was much like most of those who grow up in a Catholic family; that is, a gradual process lived out in the context of

a committed Christian life. A biography of Romero described him as a very pious child, attracted to solitude, prayer and a vocation to the priesthood. At the age of 13 his father arranged for him to apprentice with a carpenter. Neither his father nor mother encouraged further education or his dream of the priesthood. Oscar sought out the town's mayor to intercede on his behalf. His father relented and allowed Oscar to attend the minor seminary in San Miguel.



Romero's seminary formation lasted from 1930 to 1942. He established a reputation as an above average student who was prayerful, virtuous and concerned with service to others. He was ordained on April 4, 1942. Those who knew him described him as the "quintessential Churchman," one who throughout his life represented the Church in positions of leadership. His reputation as a hard worker and a perfectionist led to increasing administrative duties for the Church. He was consecrated auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador in 1970 and Bishop of the Diocese of Santiago de Maria in 1974.

Fr. Romero's journey of conversion began in earnest in 1966 when he made a retreat at the Francisco Retreat Center. He was 48 years old and in the midst of a mid-life crisis. After nearly twenty-five years of ministry he felt physically and emotionally depleted by the demands of his responsibilities and the consequences of his decisions. Clearly he was in the midst of an affective conversion as he described the lack of intimacy and the painful loneliness in his life. He acknowledged that his rigidity and

demanding attitude had provoked the animosity of his fellow priests. He admitted his difficulty with controlling his temper; his obsession with perfection of himself and others; his repressed sexuality and fear of intimacy which prevented him from establishing wholesome and life-giving friendships. (See Damian Zynda, Archbishop Oscar Romero) Two members of the retreat team - Fr. Juan Izquierdo, his spiritual director, and Dr. Dardano, a psychiatrist - were invaluable in helping Fr. Romero gain insight into his character and personality. Dr. Dardano diagnosed Fr. Romero as having an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCPD). Fr. Juan Izquierdo recognized the religious expression of this personality disorder and helped Fr. Romero deal with his perfectionism and scrupulosity. Romero deeply appreciated their efforts to help him gain insight into his behavior. He began in earnest to work on these blocks to healthy human and spiritual development by consciously developing more positive attitudes and behaviors. He also rededicated and recommitted himself to serving God and others in a more loving and personal way.

Romero's intellectual conversion began in earnest in 1970, when as Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, he registered for a week-long pastoral conference whose purpose was to discuss the results of the Medellin Conference of Latin American bishops and to determine how they would implement the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. He lasted one day. He could not accept the theology and pastoral practices recommended by the Council. He began to oppose them, writing an article entitled "Medellin, Misunderstood and Misinterpreted."

While Romero was resisting the implementation of the Second Vatican Council's vision, he was, at the same time, forced to confront the growing oppression and violence toward the campesinos as they struggled to improve their lives. Within three years, Romero underwent a radical, social conversion that had profound implications for himself, for the poor, and for the Church. Life experience, particularly relationships, often serve as

a catalyst for conversion. Such was true for Romero. Initially, Romero had aligned himself with the twelve oligarch families who controlled the vast wealth of El Salvador. He also had supported government policies and denied the government's involvement in the widespread disappearance, torture and murder of civilians. Three life experiences changed all that. First, on June 21, 1978, the massacre of Las Tres Callas opened his eyes to the violence perpetrated by the military. National Guardsmen shot and hacked to death six men from the Astorgas family for their efforts to educate and catechize their people. This incident forced Romero to confront the brutality of the military. It also motivated him to undertake a serious study of the Medellin documents as well as Pope Paul VI's encyclical, "On Evangelization in the Modern World." He acknowledged that he had misunderstood the message of the Vatican Council documents. Second, his mind and heart were opened and his compassion increased as he listened to the heart-breaking stories of widows, mothers and daughters describe the episodes of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons who were taken from their homes, tortured, mutilated or killed right in front of them. Finally, the experience that crystallized his conversion was the assassination of Fr. Rutilio Grande, S.J., a friend, teacher and former rector of the national seminary who was very popular among the priests and laity. His death unmasked the true oppression of the government and anyone who sought to help the poor rise out of their poverty and oppression. The government did not anticipate the activity and influence of the Church under the leadership of a bishop who had been transformed by his love for and commitment to his people. Romero decided that there would be one mass on Sunday, March 20th at the diocesan cathedral as a communal expression of mourning and in protest of Fr. Grande's murder. Romero increased his preaching against the oppression which continued and expanded. He began to receive death threats. An excerpt from a conversation with Dr. Jorge Lara-Braud illustrates the distance Bishop Romero had traveled on his conversion journey.

"I'll tell you the truth, doctor. I don't want to die. At least not now. I've never had so much love for life! And honestly, I don't think I was meant to be a martyr. I don't feel the calling. Of course, if that's what God asks of me then there is nothing I can do. I only ask that the circumstances of my death do not leave any doubt as to what my true vocation is: to serve God and to serve my people. But I don't want to die now. I want to live a little longer." (Zynda, "Thesis," 55)

Bishop Romero was assassinated two days later while celebrating the Eucharist. Once again, we witness the powerful influence and impact of a dedicated Christian who allowed himself to be changed and transformed through decisive moments in his journey of conversion. Damian Zynda insightfully describes how grace transforms human nature when one is open to God's loving yet challenging action in one's life.

"Bishop Oscar Romero began as a conservative supporter of the government and an enemy of its opponents. He grew into and finally died as an outspoken advocate for human rights. Along the way he grew from a fearful, ecclesial autocrat into a courageous, collaborative leader who displayed an energy, self-confidence, interior freedom, joy and self-integration heretofore unseen." (Zynda, Thesis, 56)

CONCLUSION

I began this essay by sharing with you Fr. Bernard Lonergan's description of conversion and the modes of conversion through which the journey of conversion finds expression. To realize that there are various dimensions of the human person that seek integration reminds us that the journey of conversion does not take place in a day but rather necessitates the commitment of a lifetime. We saw these modes of conversion come alive through the life stories of Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day

and Oscar Romero. Their graced response to the challenges of the conversion process illustrates for us how uniquely and personally God is involved in each of our lives, drawing us to wholeness and holiness. Hopefully their conversion stories help us make sense of our own and those to whom we minister. Most importantly, each of them illustrates for us that grace works in and through our human nature; that is, the conversion process does not take us away from life but calls us to meet God in all the experiences of our lives, especially those optimal times when different modes of conversion take center stage and seek resolution and integration. This awareness is especially important for those of us involved in the ministries of spiritual guidance, spiritual direction, and pastoral counseling. Each day, through the challenges we face, like Merton, Dorothy Day and Romero, we are being invited to some new form of conversion – that is, we are being invited to "a more abundant life."

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Thomas Merton sign photo attribute:

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Thomas Merton room photo attribute:

Bryan Sherwood

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Dr. Cooney-Hathaway frames her essay on conversion by Christ's words in John 10:10: "I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly." She explains that all types or modes of conversion involve a letting go of past fears or anger and an openness to new possibilities, a whole new way of living. Reflect on your life-conversions and how they opened doors for you to live more abundantly. Consider also areas/ways where you might be resisting deeper abundance. Would such a discussion be helpful if you were accompanying someone in counselling or spiritual direction?
2. In the life of Thomas Merton, conversion began unfolding as he came to understand the Christian God and through the altruistic and self-sacrificing love of good friends. The experience of "Fourth and Walnut" in downtown Louisville brought it all together for him: God could be found in every relationship; Merton entered into involvement in social concerns of the day. Have I had a "Fourth and Walnut" turning point when I suddenly realized I was already in communion with God through others?
3. For Dorothy Day, it seems that social awareness and desire to be God's change agent took her into deeper communion with God in prayers of thanks and in reading the Psalms. These concerns led her to recognize her need for the Church. Have I had an "ecclesial" conversion – if so, how and when? If not, pray for it for yourself and others around you.
4. Archbishop Oscar Romero's conversion process involved a mid-life crisis as he dealt with perfectionism and scrupulosity; he opened his heart to intimacy and friendship especially with the poor – and that changed everything! Who are the "poor" in my life that might be my own means of discovering a life of greater spiritual abundance?



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Dr. Cooney Hathaway authored the book, *Weaving Faith and Experience: A Woman's Perspective* as part of a Call to Holiness Series on Catholic Women's Spirituality, published by St. Anthony Messenger Press.

In addition, she co-authored a successful Lilly Foundation grant of \$1.5 million for the education and formation of ecclesial lay ministers. She has been the Project Director for the implementation of this grant. She has also received the Pope John Paul II Memorial, The Splendor of Truth Award, by the Catholic Lawyers Guild, Diocese of Lansing, Michigan.