Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender. Walter Conn. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.

ONE: CONSCIENCE AND CONVERSION

CONVERSION

Biblical vocabulary: nachom / metanoia ⟶ turning *from* (sin)

shub / epistrophe ⟶ turning *toward* (God)

History

- ◆ Christian meaning was influenced by cultural context of Middle and Neo-Platonism. The notion of philosophic conversion is present in Plato.
- ◆ Augustine's *Confessions* articulate a profound experience of inner transformation (intellectual, moral. and religious).
- ◆ Scholastic theology tended to neglect the experience of conversion for metaphysical analysis.
- ◆ With Luther, conversion as experienced returns to central place in Christian reflection. (Also, Ignatius of Loyola.)
- ◆ Pietism (Germany), Methodism (England), Great Awakening (New England) established a religious revivalist context in which conversion was central.
- ◆ William James: conversion as a psychological process of unifying a divided self.
- ◆ In recent years, many theologians have attended to the personal experience of conversion.

"Conversion is a highly confusing and controversial issue today largely because the term 'conversion' refers not to one reality but to an enormously wide range of very different human realities." [7]

> Needed are "criteria for discerning authentic conversion." [8] "The aim of this study... is to clarify the issue of authentic religious conversion by analyzing the human person's basic conversion possibilities." [9-10] Needed for this is "an adequate fundamental interpretation of the human person." [10]

CONSCIENCE

Conn notes a "lack of consensus on just what conscience is." [10] The search for an adequate understanding of conscience focuses his "attempt to construct an interpretive context for assessing basic human conversion possibilities." [11]

Reviewing recent literature on conscience "Lehmann, Nelson, McGuire, Macquarrie), Conn highlights John Macquarrie's notion of conscience as "a radical desire for self-transcending authenticity" [17], and notes that "to recognize a gap between the self one is and the self one could and, indeed, ought to be is to recognize the need for change." [17]

> The Gospels entail a call not only to development (change of degree), but to a change "of basic *direction*, a fundamental reorientation of the total self." [17]

"A conversion is authentic insofar as it is a response to a fundamental personal demand, which, because conscious, both is, and is revealed by, conscience in its most radical meaning." [17]

> "Conscience and conversion can be adequately understood only in relationship to each other." [17]

AUTHENTICITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

"The *criterion* of human authenticity… is the very *self-transcendence* which is effected in the realization of value through critical understanding, responsible decision, and generous love." [18]

> The meaning of 'self-transcendence must be specified.

SELF-FULFILLMENT, SELF-SACRIFICE, AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

Many proponents of *self-fulfillment* have an implicit understanding of the human person that is self-destructive in its naïve individualism. The self is understood essentially as "a bag of desires." [20]

> "People fail to perceive the paradoxical truth that authentic realization of their deepest human desires occurs only when they turn their primary attention from their own interests and desires and genuinely involve themselves in the needs and desire of others." [20]

Too often, the Gospel has been interpreted "as requiring the sacrifice or denial of the self's authentic realization." [20] This distortion has been used to ideologically justify oppression.

> "No authentic Christian interpretation can recommend the denial or sacrifice of the self as the conscious, creative, critical, responsible, free, and loving personal subject." [21]

> "Christian self-sacrifice consists in the denial of all those desires, wishes, and interests of the self which interfere with the singleminded commitment to follow Jesus." [21]

"*Self-transcendence* is authentic self-realization… Only a self affirmed in the reality of its objectivity, and realized in its essential potentiality for objectivity, is capable of transcending itself." [22]

> 'Self-fulfillment' images the self as a passive receptacle; 'self-transcendence' images "a self that is realized only in its active moment beyond itself." [23]

> > Cf. Frankl: fulfillment is "a side-effect of self-transcendence." [23]

> "For Lonergan, self-transcendence occurs in our effective response to the radical drive, the dynamic exigence of the human spirit for meaning, truth, value, and love." [24] This drive manifests itself in questions. Cognitional, moral, and affective self-transcendence is the criterion of authentic self-realization. "Fidelity to this law of the human spirit, this radical dynamism for self-transcendence, sums up the demand of the Christian life because it is a response to the divine within us – God's gift of love." [24]

CONSCIENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Conn argues that developmental theorists "implicitly use self-transcendence as a criterion of mature personal development, and that "these psychological theories establish the normative *meaning* of self-

transcendence in a concrete and especially illuminating fashion, and thus provide an integrated model of self-transcending subjectivity." [25]

<u>CONVERSION AND DEVELOPMENT</u>

Horizontal conversion: new answers to old questions within an established horizon.

Vertical conversion: radically new questions creatively restructuring content into a totally new horizon.

<u>Moral Conversion</u>

Conn interprets transitions between Kohlberg's stages of moral development as forms of conversion. Transition from preconventional to conventional is a shift from premoral (egocentric, satisfaction) to a moral (value) orientation. However variant the content, "morally converted horizons are such inasmuch as concern for value is their defining and constitutive character." [28]

<u>Affective Conversion</u>

We meet the challenge to close the gap revealed in moral conversion insofar as we fall in love.

The crisis of intimacy (Erikson) may occasion an affective conversion. Kohlberg's failure to attend to this is a basic oversight.

<u>Cognitive/Critical-Moral Conversion</u>

Piaget: Concrete operations systematize previously acquired cognitive activities. Formal operations free thinking from the here-and-now limits of concrete experience (adolescent idealism). Adult vocational experiences can integrate formal thought's universalizing abstraction with the empirical dimension of concrete operations into the power of realistic judgment.

This development is crucial for self-understanding as well as for understanding of world.

Cognitive conversion = the critical recognition of the constitutive and normative role of one's own judgment in knowing reality/value – discovering that the criterion of the real/valuable is in one's own realistic judgment. (Kohlberg's post-conventional moral reasoning).

<u>Religious Conversion</u>

Religious conversion = "the radical reorientation of one's entire life that occurs when God is allowed to move from the periphery to the center of one's being." [30]

One's illusion of absolute autonomy is surrendered. "Such total surrender is possible only for the person who has totally fallen-in-love with a mysterious, uncomprehended God, for the person who has been grasped by an other-worldly love and completely transformed into a being-in-love." [31]

<u>CONVERSION OF CONSCIENCE</u>

Character = the concrete shape taken by conscience (the radical drive of the personal subject for self-transcendence).

The developing dynamism of the person for self-transcendence takes specific, concrete shape "as it is formed by the discoveries, decisions, and deeds though which a subject creates his or her character." [31]

Continuity and discontinuity in fundamental conversion:

Discontinuity: "Conversion radically redirects and transforms the concrete shape and orientation of personal subjectivity." [31]

Continuity: basic conversion "occurs within the continuity of the subject's fundamental dynamism for self-transcendence." [31]

In chapters 2 and 3, "a critical model of the developing *self* will provide the basis for our later specification of the moral and religious conversions of conscience in terms, respectively, of autonomy and surrender." [32]

TWO: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE LIFE-CYCLE

THE SELF-CONSTITUTING "I"

"The personal subject must be understood in the very concreteness of its consciousness and becoming." [33]

Intentional operations (a) make objects present to the subject, and (b) simultaneously make the operating subject present to him-/herself.

Distinguish:

- o subject-as-subject / consciousness / "I"
- o Subject-as-object / reflexive intentionality / "myself"

Consciousness not only reveals the subject-as-subject, it *constitutes* it. And the personal subject is constituted as *this* personal subject only through the concrete particularities of its own history. In the process of personal becoming, the 'world' in which this personal subject lives changes.

Personal horizon:

- ▪ Subject pole: standpoint of the consciously operating personal subject
- ▪ Object pole: the subject's 'world'

"Personal horizons define a subject's world of feelings and knowledge, interests and questions in relation to his or her present reality – a reality rooted in a structural context of past achievement and dynamically oriented toward the future." [35]

Past achievement:

- • Source of future possibilities;
- • Sets limits to present capacities.

General structural dimensions of the subject's world:

- o World of immediacy

o World mediated by meaning
o World constituted by meaning

The personal subject is constituted by meaning in his/her very reality as a conscious being. "The conscious person becomes himself or herself through a radical, self-creating drive for meaning and value." [36]

"Development goes forward spontaneously or unconsciously as an ongoing adaptational effect of the subject's conscious, deliberate, step-by-step attempt to make sense of its natural environment as well as enter into and continue creating a human world of meaning." [36]

Conn's emphasis on the unifying *movement* through the stages. Stage transition results from the deepest human motivation: "the experience of a person struggling for self-transcendence and finding his or her present, concrete horizon inadequate to meet the complex reality of the natural, interpersonal, socially structured human world that is life." [38]

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AS SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

CHILDHOOD

Affective: Erikson's focus is on "the development of the individual in the context of his or her social environment." [39]

First crisis: trust/mistrust, successfully resolved in the psychosocial virtue of hope.

"Self-transcendence is a critical issue from the very beginning of personal development." [39]

Subsequent crises of childhood:

- Autonomy/shame-doubt ⟶ will power
- Initiative/guilt purpose
- Industry/inferiority competence

These psychosocial virtues are realizations of self-transcendence, and are foundational elements for various adult forms of self-transcendence.

Superego also develops during this period.

Cognitive: Piaget understands cognitive development as dominated "by a dialectical movement from cognitive egocentrism toward a decentered objectivity." [40]

Cognitive development is bipolar: discovery of self and cognitive operations occurs together with the construction of reality, in the interaction between child and environment.

There occurs (in the first 18 months) a "general decentering process whereby the child eventually comes to regard himself as an object among others in the universe that is made up of permanent objects." [41]

Conn prefers to speak of the infant cognitively constituting/creating (rather than discovering) itself as a self distinct from a world of objects.

Ages 2-7: "transition from direct external actions of practical intelligence to the *internalized* actions of thought, and preparation for the emergence of the *organized* internal actions called operations that are marked by reversibility." [41]

> Social relations lead the child to seek evidence for his/her thinking: "The child is always satisfied with its own thinking until it learns to consider the objections of others and then to internalize such critical discussions in the form of reflection." [42]

> > This ability to distinguish between fact and fiction emerges only gradually.

Ages 7-11: Emergence of concrete operations (systematically organized and internalized in groupings) situates the knowing subject within the much broader context of objective relations. This is a further decentering. This transformation of the child's world is "a constitutive factor in the developing conditions for the possibility of cognitive conversion." [42]

> "The arrival of these concrete operational powers seems to be the conditions for the psychological achievements of industry and competence" (Erikson). [42-43]

<u>Moral:</u> Kohlberg's meaning of 'conventional' is key to his specification of stages – "conforming to and upholding the rules and expectations and conventions of society or authority just because they are society, rules, expectations, or conventions." [43]

Levels are to be understood in terms of the self's socialization:

- o Preconventional: the egocentric individual, for whom social rules/expectations are entirely external.
- o Conventional: toe social person who has internalized and thus identifies with the rules and expectations of others.
- o Postconventional: the autonomous social person who has differentiated self from the rules/expectations of others and can thus accept/reject social rules on the basis of self-chosen general principles which underlie them.

Preconventional:

- ▪ Stage 1: Desire to avoid punishment and awareness of the superior power of authorities are reasons for doing what is right.
- ▪ Stage 2: Acting in one's own interest and allowing others to act in theirs.

Three significant trends begin to manifest themselves in the child's moral consciousness:

1. Intentionality of the agent becomes more important, merely physical consequences less.
2. Relativism (awareness of possible diversity of views of right and wrong) begins to replace a simplistic, totally right or totally wrong approach.
3. Punishment begins to give way to recognition of harm done to others or violations of rules as reasons for an act being wrong.

"Development from an egocentric preoccupation with punishment and obedience toward the self-transcendence of reflective perspective-taking and equal exchange." [44] But this limited self-transcendence remains "excessively oriented toward the concrete interests of the self." [45]

<u>Faith:</u> Fowler understands faith as "a knowing, a construing, or an interpreting of experience in light of a person's or community's relatedness to those 'sources of power and values which impinge on life in a manner not subject to personal control.'" [45]

>Fowler focuses on the structural core of this 'faithing,' which involves the total self (cognitive, affective, evaluative).

The first two of six stages emerge in childhood:

1. Intuitive-Projective: a fantasy-filled, imaginative state, in which the child's dependence on parents makes them prime authorities/references in the child's construction of reality.

>The ability to grasp experience in powerful images ("imagination") emerges in this stage. But the child's imagination is "egocentric."

2. Mythic-Literal: the preadolescent child appropriates stories, beliefs, attitudes, and moral values of the community in an uncritical and quite literal-minded way.

>There is not an ability "to narratize experience," to generate one's own stories.

<u>Self:</u> Kegan finds "the fundamental unity of the self that is developing" in "the meaning-constitutive activity that is the very notion of the self's development." [47] He sees the radical developmental activity as both the very creation of the object (differentiation) and the subject's relating to it (integration).

>He posits a series of qualitative differentiation of self from world, creating an ever more complex object of relation: relationship-to triumphs over embeddedness-in.

>By 18 months, "the pattern of developmental activity is set as 'an activity of equilibration, of preserving or renegotiating the balance between what is taken as subject as self and what is taken as object or other.'" [47]

>>This development is intrinsically cognitive (Piaget) and affective (psychoanalytic).

>>The experience of "defending, surrendering, and reconstructing a center" is the source of emotion. "Intrinsic to every decentering emergence from embeddedness to greater relatedness – which is experienced as a loss of center, a loss of self – are first the emotions of anxiety and depression. Then, as the balance begins to shift more decisively to the new self, there is anger and repudiation of the former self (subject) that in the developing balance is not at the object pole. Only when the new balance is fully established can repudiation give way to positive reappropriation." [48]

>The infant virtually *is* its reflexes. With transition to the *impulsive* stage, "reflexes become object of a new organizing center, a new coordinating subjectivity... The new impulsive self is embedded in the impulses and perceptions that now coordinate the reflexes: the self now *has* its reflexes and *is* its perceptions and impulses." [48]

>>- Cognitive: child is subject to its perceptions;
>>- Affective: child is subject to its impulses.

Imperial stage: The capacity to objectify impulses/perceptions establishes a new subject/object which creates a more enduring self.

There emerges an enduring disposition, a more consistent self-concept.

There is also "a new sense of agency: freedom, power, independence." [49]

The child "projects its need-embeddedness on to the other; it constitutes the other as the means by which its needs, interests, and wishes will or will not be fulfilled." [49] There is not yet any sense of shared reality, mutuality.

ADOLESCENCE

Cognitive: Transition from concrete to formal thinking (ages 11-12), involves interest in problems not related to everyday practical realities. 'Hypothetico-deductive thinking' allows one to draw conclusions from pure hypotheses as well as from actual observations. This "liberates the adolescent's thinking from concrete reality by empowering it to built its own reflections and theories." [50]

Formal thought can be egocentric, i.e., it can construct an idealistic world of possibilities entirely separated from and even opposed to, experience. Development of a 'realistic' equilibrium requires some experience of responsibility in the adult world.

Affective: Erikson posits *identity* as the key development during adolescence. Psychosocial identity is both subjective/individual and objective/social. "An inner ego synthesis of the individual is complemented by genuine role integration in his group."

Identity *crisis* results when persistent infantile identifications are brought in line with new self-definitions and irreversible role choices. Effective resolution of this crisis generates *fidelity* (the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged).

Erikson also posits a fundamental *ideological* orientation in adolescence, i.e., there is "a system of commanding ideas held together more by totalistic logic and utopian conviction than by cognitive understanding or pragmatic experience." [52]

Identity remains a critical issue throughout life, and must be redefined at every stage.

Moral: Maintaining the expectations/rules of family/group/nation comes to be seen as valuable in its own right ("Conventional").

Also, the adolescent's social perspective places the individual in relation with other individuals: shared feelings/agreements/expectations take primacy over individual interests.

The older adolescent takes the social perspective of the system that defines roles and rules and views individual relations in terms of their place in the social system.

State 4: social system orientation.

Faith: With the other developments of adolescence, faith must provide a meaningful synthesis of the person's more complex and diverse range of involvements; it must also offer a basis for identity, ideological orientation, and commitment, which thought deeply felt are still uncritical.

One's entire world of meaning is typically mediated by symbols which are 'dwelt in' in a precritical/naïve way.

Images of God tend to be personal.

"God" often bears "the role of the 'collective' other who sums up the legitimate expectations and the individual loyalties of the significant others and groups in one's life." [53]

The new cognitive abilities and experiences of adolescence plunge one into a wider and deeper world to be faithful.

Self: The self emerges from embeddedness in its own self-interest needs: the self no longer *is* its needs, it *has* them. Thus, the self can now coordinate its own needs with the needs of others. (*Interpersonal* stage.)

Shared feelings are the strength of this new 'conversational self,' located in an interpersonal matrix. The limit of the self "lies in its inability to reflect on the expectations, satisfactions, obligations of that shared reality because it *is* that shared reality, and thus subject to it." [54]

There are conflicts between the self-as-part-of-one-shared-reality and self-as-part-of-another-shared-reality. Without coordination of its various mutualities, the self lacks self-coherence.

Real intimacy is not yet possible because there is no self to share with another; rather than intimacy, there is fusion. The interpersonal self *is* its relationships.

Movement to the Institutional stage involves "the self's separation from its relationships in the creation of a coherent identity of its own across the interpersonal context." [55]

Rather than *being* its relationships, the self begins to *have* them. "The self transcends its interpersonal relationships, yet in a way that does not leave them behind but rather incorporates them into the balance of the new self-system" [55]

There can be excesses of control and sense of independent strength.

ADULTHOOD

Cognitive: However systematized and reflective, adult knowing always remains "in dialectical tension with the conflicting realities of the concrete context." [56] The ambiguity of reality is recognized, as is the relativity of contexts (historical, political, social, cultural, personal).

"The idealism of simplistic certitude gives way to the realism of nuanced probability." [56]

Affective: The realistic demands and lessons of adult social experience lead beyond ideological orientation to ethical orientation: "a universal sense of values assented to with insight and foresight, in anticipation of immediate responsibilities."

Young adulthood is "characterized by the crisis of *intimacy* versus isolation." [57]

"A basic resolution of the *crisis* of identity in adolescence is necessary for the young person to have the psychological strength and confidence to risk going out of himself to achieve even the fuller reality of personal identity that is found only in an intimate relationship of fidelity with another." [57]

"The strength of self-identity is in its capacity to risk the self-transcendence of intimacy and generativity." [57]

Love, though secured in intimacy, finds its fulfillment in *generativity*. The particular strength of maturity is care (responsibility).

The critical issue for old age is *integrity* (vs. despair); strength now is wisdom, which is both expression of a life of self-transcendence and promotion of self-transcendence in others.

Erikson understands human maturity "as characterized by an intrinsic dynamism to move beyond one's self and to be concerned for others." [58]

<u>Moral:</u> Formal operational thought provides the basis both (a) for conventional moral reasoning, and (b) for the critical questioning that can subvert conventions.

Kohlberg insists that most people never advance to the principled stage of moral reasoning. Thus, "cognitive maturity... is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for mature moral reasoning." [60]

Personal experience of moral decision/choice is essential for this development. Two such experiences are key:

1. Leaving home and entering a community (e.g., college) with a confusion of conflicting values can effect a relativistic breakthrough;
2. Experience of sustained responsibility for the welfare of others, and the experience of irreversible moral choice.

"Such experience is the principle crucible in which the adolescent's abstract, idealistic thinking is transformed into the adult's contextual, realistic knowing." [61]

Post-conventional morality is "characterized by autonomous moral principles which have validity independent of the authority of any persons or groups." [61]

Social contract orientation defines moral behavior "in terms of critically examined rights and standards commonly agreed upon by society." [61] There is stress on procedural rules for reaching consensus.

In stage 6, moral behavior is defined by "universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons." [61] Moral judgments as judgments of a personal conscience guided by universal principles and striving for a comprehensive context.

Moral maturity involves "maturity in the affective patterns of feeling and valuing." [62]

<u>Faith:</u> Breakthrough to Individuative-Reflective Faith (Stage 4) involves "a new self-awareness and personal responsibility for one's commitment, life-style, beliefs, and attitudes." [62] Tensions are collapsed into one or other pole. Multivalent symbols are 'translated' into conceptual meanings.

> Conjunctive Faith (Stage 5) involves recognition of "the integrity and truth of other person's positions." [63] There is a 'balancing' of opposites.

>> Tensions are again faced, showing how "all personal development… is a response to the tension of conflict, crisis, and disequilibrium."

>> A post-critical second naivete "retrieves the dynamism of the symbol in a new and powerful way, ready to encounter the mysterious riches of the personal and social unconscious." [63]

> Universalizing Faith (Stage 6) goes beyond balancing opposites "by transcending all dichotomies in identifying with all, including the transcendent, in a community of universal inclusiveness, of Being." [64]

>> "One is being most truly oneself in being for others." [64]

<u>Self:</u> The self emerges (Stage 5) beyond 'institutional' psychic organization to join others as fully personal individuals "as value-originating, system-generative, history-making individuals." [65] Kohlberg calls this stage "Interindividual."

> Unlike the 'fusion' of stage 3 relationships, stage 5 allows the *intimate* sharing of distinct identities. 'Counter-dependent independence' yields to 'interdependence.'

> The self can now recognize and tolerate emotional conflict within itself, being "open to it as an interior conversation." [65]

>> The interindividual self transcends the closed, institutional psychic system, and is open, dynamic, flowing.

> "The balance struck at the Interindividual Stage creates a distinct (differentiated) self ultimately realized in the very sharing of itself (integration), and thus includes in creative evolutionary tension what Kegan takes to be the two greatest yearnings in human experience: the yearning for separateness or independence (differentiation) and the yearning for Inclusion or connection (integration)." [66]

<u>SELF-TRANSCENDENCE AND THE DEVELOPING "I"</u>

Con posits self-transcendence as the central and dynamic reality of human development, from whatever perspective it is considered.

Erikson underlines the centrality of the self's unity as realized and manifested in the sense of "I", which seems comparable to Lonergan's 'self-as-subject'. This subjective sense of "I" is an obvious, but elusive, fact of existence.

> "One can reflect on the self that is 'me;' one can only experience the self that is 'I.'" [67]

Whatever the emotional involvements of the "I" throughout the course of development, "there remains for the 'I' a certain existential solitariness," sees as "seeking love, liberation, salvation." [68]

THREE: DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY AND CONSCIENCE

This chapter aims "to sharpen our focus on an integrated developmental model of self-transcending subjectivity as an explanatory understanding of conscience as critically grounding the meaning of fundamental conversion." [69]

DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY: ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

Nature of Stage Development

The different theorists have different understandings of stage development.

Erikson has a functional understanding of development, in which states are defined by psychosocial tastes and ego crises, with stages being essentially critical periods in which life-long tasks of ego identity are dramatically highlighted. There is a culturally defined psycho*social* component to each stage.

Piaget defines stages in terms of logical-cognitive structures, with each stage being a structurally different and more adequate (i.e., more highly differentiated and complexly integrated) organization of intelligence, realizing ever more successfully its invariant functions of maintaining an active equilibrium with the environment (through assimilation and accommodation). The stages are invariantly sequential, hierarchically integrated, holistic, and universal.

But despite differences, there is a positive correlation between the developmental sequences, and they can be integrated in a complex system which recognizes their complementarity. In common, they "focus on the person in transformation." [71]

Relationship of Stages: Hierarchy, Epigenesis, and the Imagination

Epigenesis (Erikson): Stages are "successive differentiations of parts which exist in some form from the very beginning" [72] Each developmental issue exists in constantly changing forms throughout the life cycle. Epigenesis leaves nothing behind as it moves forward. Strengths and weaknesses are brought forward in a transformed state.

'Higher' purposes will be effective only insofar as they have taken up and carried forward in transformed fashion the strengths of the earlier and 'lower.'

For Kohlberg and Piaget, higher stages reintegrate the structures found at lower stages at a new level or organization.

Thus, "even the most advanced patterns of logical knowing are always rooted in sensorimotor activities and symbolic-intuitive knowing." [73] But there is little systematic understanding of the development of intuitive-symbolic knowing in patterns other than the logical-scientific (which was Piaget's focus).

Still, Piaget's approach highlights the impact of the symbolic patterns of imaginative-feeling in "his critically realistic insistence that all knowing is constructive activity oriented toward creating reality, not the slavish copying of a naïve realism geared to reproducing an already existing reality." [73]

William Lynch links imagination with hope, as the possibility of envisioning what cannot be seen, discovering/creating reality in the realm of the possible. Imagination cognitively and affectively searches the possibilities and constructs a concrete context of value for creative action.

Ray Hart insists that imagination involves a distrust of the 'given,' and understands imagination as a series of mental acts which move us into the 'unfinished' world of human creation which always lies before us. "The imagining mind puts more meaning into reality than it takes out." [74]

The central 'unfinished' reality is the self.

Symbolic meaning can trigger an "imaginative shock" which can activate one's feeling-imagination, opening the self "to new possibilities by breaking through one's historical selves and retrieving unrealized potencies." [75]

By "symbol," Conn refers to the "affect-laden image that actualizes, reveals, and influences the multidimensional person in its wholeness." [75] Symbol as "made of affective understanding."

Many theorists (Rugg, Van Roo) make a distinction parallel to Langer's distinction between discursive and presentational symbolism. Piaget's focus is clearly on the discursive, leaving "much analysis to be done on the development of that understanding which is at the heart of moral life: the symbolic pattern of affectively discerning value." [76] But that "response to value must be critically translated into the practical logic of action." [76]

Mature moral living requires "integration of the symbolic pattern of imaginative-affective understanding with the discursive pattern's logic of practical understanding." [76]

Piaget and Kohlberg both insist that the limitations of lower stages (e.g., their egocentrism) are rejected in later development, but this positive gains made at these lower stages are carried forward and transformed by later stages.

Kohlberg on Affectivity

Kohlberg's central focus has been on the cognitive dimension of moral development. He acknowledges other dimensions, but has not clearly elaborated them.

One thing he has explicitly acknowledged is "the necessity of role taking ability for moral development." [78] There is some ambiguity concerning his understanding of the import of affectivity in this.

He does clearly posit that cognitional development and affective development have a common structural base.

For Kohlberg, the roots of the principle of justice "are to be found in the fundamental human reality of empathy, the awareness of other selves as having thoughts and feelings like one's own." [79]

His cross-cultural studies reveal that the overwhelming focus of moral choice/feeling concerns the consequences for the harm/welfare of other human beings. "Empathy does not have to be taught or conditioned; it is a primary phenomenon." [80]

> Such spontaneous empathy is organized by development/socialization into consistent sympathetic and moral concerns.

> "The essence of specifically moral reasoning, leading to judgments of moral value, is evaluation, which is rooted not in the purely logical analysis of concepts, but in the affective-cognitive apprehension of concrete human values." [81]

There is an insistence on the importance of affectivity, then, in Kohlberg's understanding of moral development, but his approach "needs to be filled out through greater attention to the affective dimension of moral reasoning." [81]

> Kohlberg has always stressed the fundamental unity of personality.

> Conn understands Erikson's psychosocial virtues (fidelity, love, care) as developmental successors to Kohlberg's fundamental empathy.

Kohlberg's notion of the 'objectification of needs' – where the self no longer *is* its needs, but *has* its needs -- involves putting one's needs at enough distance for the self to control them, rather than being dominated by them.

> Concrete persons – subject to various kinds of needs, ranging from survival to self-transcendence (cf. Maslow) – make moral judgments.

Fowler on Affectivity

"Fowler offers an expansive notion of faith in which knowing, feeling, and valuing form an integrated whole." [84] Nevertheless, cognitive structures seem to dominate Fowler's analysis of faith, even though he judges Kohlberg to give too dominant an emphasis on cognition.

> Even though Fowler's later writing give greater attention to the role of symbols, his treatment of symbols remains highly cognitive.

> Fowler's cognitive focus serves to prevent him from attending adequately to the developmental structure of faith's fundamental trust and loyalty.

From the 'logic of rational certainty,' Fowler has recently distinguished a '*logic of conviction*:' this self-constitutive knowing is a more comprehensive cognitive structuring activity, involving freedom, risk, subjectivity, and passion. At the heart of this 'logic' is the esthetic dimension of "images, symbols, and synesthetic fusions of sense and feeling." [87] In such knowing, the psyche returns to primitive, preconceptual, prelinguistic sources of energizing imagery.

James Loder presents a cognitional theory which understands all knowing as transformational. Five steps are specified, which are realized in a different way in each pattern of knowing:

1. Conflict: a rupture in the knowing context;
2. Interlude: waiting, wondering, following hunches, exhausting possibilities;

3. Constructive act of imagination: turning point where with convincing force an insight transforms the elements of the ruptured situation and the perspectives of the knower;
4. A release of bound up energy from the unconscious, and an opening of the knower to both self and situation as response to being freed from conflict and for self-transcendence; and
5. Interpretation of the imaginative solution into the original context.

Loder understands religious knowing as essentially a transformation of all other transformations, "a transforming negation of that radical, existential negation which is our potentiality for non-being." [88]

Loder's understanding of all knowing as transformational "provides a unifying context for seeing the intrinsic connections between his sense of convictional knowing as religious and all the other patterns of knowing." [88]

Fowler on the Self: Centering and De-Centering

Fowler posits a bipolar process of development: "in the single interaction of the individual and the total environment both an ever more fully personal self and an ever wider more complex world are created." [89]

Fowler clearly "advocates transformation rather than negation of the self." [89]

Bipolarity:

o An increasingly centered self, as one assumes the burden of constructing/maintaining a vision of reality, and of taking autonomous moral responsibility ("individuation");
o A gradual de-centration: "at each stage a more inclusive account is taken of persons, groups, experiences and world views other than one's own." [89]

Conn prefers these terms (following Lonergan): "the more authentically subjective one becomes, the more genuinely objective one is." [90]

Fowler recognizes the need for a theory of the self, which "take[s] seriously how character is shaped by previous decisions and actions of our life histories as well as by the images and stories of the communities in which we are formed." [90]

The Integrated Self: Judgment and Action

Kohlberg eventually distinguished between a 'judgment of rightness' and a 'judgment of responsibility,' thus giving greater attention to moral behavior. He finds "an increasing likelihood of moral action at each higher stage." [91] "… moral reasoning tends to become one with action through judgments of responsibility." [91]

Conn specifies "the basic condition for the possibility of action consistently conforming to judgment as the affective and cognitive integration of the whole self." [91-92]

Action will consistently follow convictional judgment made within the symbolic pattern of imaginative knowing and valuing, i.e., "from the center of the person where the affective and cognitive dimensions speak with one voice." [92]

This is where judgment-action are more consistently related in the higher stages; for there, judgments have been personally appropriated/made and truly express who one *is*.

"The integrated, active, relational orientation must be at the center of any interpretation of the person, for it is the living source of deeply personal judgments and decisions." [93]

CONSCIENCE AS DEVELOPMENTAL

"As judgment, conscience is the actively involved personal agent struggling to reach a concrete understanding and practical judgment as to what course of *action* he or she should take to respond in a creative and fully human way to the values in this particular situation." [93]

Kohlberg: Principled Moral Judgment

Two principles implicit in Kohlberg's analysis:

1. In moral development, one moves progressively beyond one's own narrow interests toward ever greater and wider values;
2. Moral judgment is always a judgment of the whole person, integrally cognitive and affective.

Conn posits the need to shift from Kohlberg's 'third person' analysis "to one centered clearly on the subject in the first person, concretely involved in a particular situation and struggling to reach an authentic judgment on a course of action." [94]

Kohlberg's rather abstract notion of justice as reversibility becomes a passionate, concrete, activist justice, with social distributive, as well as interpersonal, dimensions.

The scope of morality now becomes "the fullest realization of human value in every area of life." [95] Conscience is not "concerned with how one will most fully realize one's being as an originating source of value through action in the world." [95]

Value is concrete, relative to a context. The personal realities of character – vision and virtue – come center stage.

Gilligan: Care and Responsibility

Gilligan finds a distinctive moral focus on care and responsibility in women, in contrast to the common focus on justice and rights standard in developmental theories.

She posits a sequence in the development of care (which parallels Kohlberg's sequence of orientations):

1. Initial focus is on caring for the self to ensure survival.
2. An understanding of responsibility that is fused with a maternal morality of care for the dependent and unequal.
3. Assertion of a moral equality between self and other, and inclusion of both within the compass of care.

These developmental sequences are complementary, with both men and women needing to negotiate an integration of rights and responsibilities. Such integration "leads to a shift in moral judgment from

absolutism to contextual relativity: women's absolute of care being relativized by the perception of personal integrity and equality; men's absolute of equality being relativized by the recognition of individual differences and equity." [97]

> Needed yet is a full elaboration of "an ethic rooted in the responsive justice of intimate love and generative care." [98] The mature justice of Stage 6 (Kohlberg) is the cognitive structuring of empathy that is caring responsibility.

Gilligan does not adequately emphasize the fact that the sequential forms of care are differentiated by increasingly complex *cognitive* structures. But Gilligan does helpfully remind us that "the *language* of justice can be learned and used by persons whose empathy has never developed into mature caring." [99]

Conn is concerned with "an active, creative conscience, imaginatively striving to interpret experience and to construct a concrete world of meaning and value in its caring response to the actual needs of persons." [99]

Erikson: Mutuality in Ethical Orientation

Erikson posits an adult ethical orientation, based on socially integrated cognitive and emotional maturity. The adult orientation of responsible conscience is rooted in the virtues of intimate love and generative care, and is characterized by "active mutuality," which comes into its own in loving and caring adults who strengthen themselves as they strengthen others.

> "Self-realization for the loving, caring adult is self-transcendence." [101]

> By "virtue," Erikson means "the basic human strengths which empower our active commitment in an interpersonal world of value."[101] "Character" is a patterned set of virtues, and develops *relationally*.

Erikson understands conscience as "an active striving for ideals with 'a universal sense of values assented to with insight and foresight, in anticipation of immediate responsibilities.'" [101]

> Erikson distinguishes this from the superego of childhood and the idealized orientation of adolescence.

Erikson attempts to incorporate the inward/backwards/downwards methodological directions of psychoanalysis with an emphasis on those elements in a person's total existence which lead "*outward* from self-centeredness to the mutuality of love and communality, *forward* from the enslaving past to the utopian anticipation of new potentialities, and *upwards* from the unconscious to the enigma of consciousness." [102]

Kegan: The Self's Unity

Conscience, like the self, is at once irreducibly cognitive and affective in its fundamental unity.

"The mutuality of the conscience that loves and cares maturely must be clearly distinguished from the pre-identity interpersonal fusion of selves in search of themselves." [103]

FOUR: CONVERSION: MORAL, COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE

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KIERKEGAARD'S STAGES OF LIFE

Kierkegaard views the process of personal becoming as a dialectic of stages (aesthetic, ethical, religious), and movement from one stage to another requires what can only be called conversion. "Transition from one level or stage to the next is realized only through a conscious act of self-committing *choice*." [106]

> When one experiences despair over the radical limitations on the human spirit in a life governed by pleasure, one faces a set of alternatives: *either* remain in despair on the aesthetic level *or*, by an act of deliberate choice, move the ethical level (universal moral values).
>
>> Such 'moral conversion' is always made within a concrete choice.
>
> But lacking in the ethical stage is a realization of sin. Emergence of an agonizing awareness of sin confronts one with the decision of faith. The agony of recognizing sin can be overcome only by choice, by a deliberate affirmation of one's relationship to God.
>
>> Such a decision of faith is always a risk, a leap into the unknown.

Conn posits the need for "an integrated interpretation of the personal subject's becoming which includes both *development* and *conversion*.

POSTCONVENTIONAL MORALITY AS EXISTENTIAL

John Gibbs distinguishes 'natural' (preconventional and conventional) and 'existential' (postconventional) orientations in Kierkegaard's developmental sequence.

> He insists that Kohlberg's 'stages' 5 and 6 must be recognized as a significantly different *kind* of stage from the first four, arguing that postconventional moral orientations are not a common occurrence, nor are they spontaneous and essentially unconscious processes – two of Piaget's six criteria for 'stages.'
>
> While development in the first four stages proceeds 'naturally,' movement into postconventional morality requires 'existential' choice.
>
>> Gibbs: "postconventionality is the existential experience of disembedding oneself from an implicit world view and adopting a detached and questioning posture." [109]
>
>> He understands stages 5 and 6 as "constructive systematizations," which start from natural intuitions about morality and human nature.
>
>> - Natural stages = theories-in-action;
>> - Existential orientations = explicit reflection on theories-in-action.

EXISTENTIAL ORIENTATION AS SELF-CHOSEN

Conn, *contra* Gibbs, argues that principled moral reasoning is not necessarily explicitly reflective. What Conn understands as essential to stage 6 is the *self-chosen* character of ethical principles.

SELF-CHOSEN PRINCIPLES, SELF-CREATION, AND CRITICAL MORAL CONVERSION

Lonergan understands authentic self creation to demand conversion (affective, cognitive, moral, religious), which he understands as "the 'about-face' by which a person moves into a radically new horizon." [112]

> Moral conversion: a shift in the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfaction to values.

Lonergan largely understands personal development as a process of self-creation. "When authentic, this self-creations is a personal realization of the radical dynamism of the human spirit for self-transcendence." [112-113]

> - Practical: concerned with concrete courses of action;
> - Existential: the possibility of self-control involves responsibility for what one makes of oneself.

> Such 'self-control' can be rooted (a) in selfish concern for satisfaction, or (b) in concern for value.

> > "In the measure that one's living is a response to value, in that measure one effects a real self-transcendence." [113]

> The possibility of such self-transcendent response to value in sustained and consistent fashion requires a long process of self-creating personal development. A key factor in this process is "the transformation of horizon, the shift in criterion of choice named moral conversion." [113]

> Cognitive and affective development form the condition of possibility for moral conversion, which, in turn, "provides the programmatic base for the conscious, deliberate development of the sustained moral self-transcendence of human authenticity." [113]

Lonergan understands personal becoming as largely a matter of increasing the number of things one does/decides/discovers for oneself, i.e., it is a matter of emerging autonomy. But desire to decide things for ourselves prior to the development of adequate intelligence and willingness. This lag in development accounts for much of the tragic quality of human life. But despite that tragedy, one is left to exercise freely his/her "ever advancing thrust toward authenticity," [114] gradually growing in knowledge and developing his/her response to value.

> In this process of personal becoming and increasing autonomy "the subject may reach that crucial point, that existential moment when he discovers that his judging and deciding affect himself no loss that the objects of his judgment and decision; that it is up to himself to decide for himself what he is to make of himself." [114]

> > One recognizes oneself as an originator of value who creates himself in every deed/decision/discovery.

> Freely choosing oneself as free and responsible creator of value "establishes an entirely new personal horizon specified by value as the criterion of decision and choice, a criterion, indeed of one's living." [115]

Heretofore, the self's creation of itself is open-eyed and deliberate.

This establishes the possibility of re-creation of oneself in the light of better knowledge and fuller responsibility.

In contrast to the open-eyed, deliberate subject is the drifter, content to do/choose/think what everybody else is doing/choosing/thinking.

Conn distinguishes between *critical* and *uncritical* moral conversion.

One can uncritically turn toward some *given* set of values (whatever their conventional source); this is a real conversion, and is common in adolescence.

But critical moral conversion requires affective and cognitional development by which one can recognize and choose one's *self* as criterion of the real and the truly good in his/her own self-transcending judgments and choices.

COGNITIVE CONVERSION

Lonergan speaks of intellectual conversion as a movement beyond naïve realism (knowing = taking a look) by means of clarification and appropriation "of the radical dynamism and structure of one's own cognitive capacities and operations." [117]

"Lonergan has explicated the dynamic case of self-structuring conscious and intentional operations precisely as oriented toward self-transcendence." [117]

The worlds mediated and constituted by meaning become, as the subject develops, the objective correlates of the conscious operations that gave rise to them

All knowing is an active construction of meaning; every world of meaning is a created world.

The structure is one of questions for understanding giving rise to insights, and subsequent questions for reflection giving rise to judgments.

Insights occur in many different patterns of understanding.

"Judgment marks a key stage in the human process of self-transcendence, for when judgment is correct, one's *thinking* about the universe is transformed into a *knowing* of the universe as it really is." [118]

And beyond knowing the universe, we experience the need to act in it; thus, there are further questions for deliberation by which we seek to determine what is to be done.

Possible courses of action are grasped by practical insight, but deliberative questions about the goodness of a possible course of action are then answered by judgments of value. And if value is to be realized in action, there must follow a decision.

Self-transcendence is realized concretely as a felt exigence that decision conform to a person's best judgment of what s/he *should* do.

Related and cumulative questions and operations thus specify distinct levels of consciousness:

↑ Responsible

Reasonable

Intelligent

Empirical
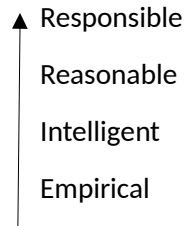
These 'levels' are interrelated/interdependent in that they are "successive stages in the unfolding of the dingle human dynamist of the human spirit for self-transcendence." [120]

This personal drive for self-transcendence is cognitive and affective.

At the level of deliberation, values are grasped in feelings. But feelings are ambiguous and require critical discernment.

When feelings do respond to value, we can be moved effectively toward self-transcendence.

When one' life is pervaded and driven by love, this being-in-love becomes the dynamic source of every conscious act. This fulfillment and realization of the dynamism of conscious intentionality realizes the meaning of the whole personal subject.

The drive for self-transcendence is a truly radical drive which unifies the entire reality of the personal subject in its dynamism (from the deepest recesses of the psyche and body), and integrates it in its fulfillment.

Explicit cognitive conversion consists in the reflexive discovery and taking possession of one's own questioning and cognitive operations as dynamically structured and oriented toward self-transcendence.

"Fully critical cognitive conversion is the conscious appropriation of the realistic structured development of knowing in the mature adult that dialectically relates formal operations to concrete contexts." [121]

Conn narrates incidents of discovery of one's own intelligence and reasonableness. Such 'reasonableness' involves the appropriation of reflective judgment, overcoming both rashness in judgment and obsession with certitude (cf. Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*).

In most cases, such cognitive conversion occurs in the contexts of personal relationships.

John Dunne discusses the way in which our hunger for certainty can be destructive or relationships, in that it disallows ambiguity. (Cf. *The Way of All the Earth*)

"To effect a surrender of the pursuit of certainty's" demand for the unambivalent requires a deeply and fully personal insight. This insight realizes – in a way that is at once both cognitive and affective – not only that the pursuit is intrinsically self-destructive, but that its surrender can only be achieved in fully personal forgiveness." [124]

Such 'forgiveness' liberates us from the pursuit of certainty and security for the pursuit of understanding and truth. Such a cognitive conversion can effect a deeply personal transformation.

Cognitive conversion occurs in the personal, symbolic pattern of understanding, as well as in the more highly differentiated pattern of theoretical understanding. "In this pattern, experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding all work together through feeling to create the appropriate concrete images for discovering and communicating the deepest personal meanings of one's world." [124]

Such cognitive conversion can be called conversion of the imagination.

"All personal conversions are intrinsically dependent on the quality and vitality of the symbols and stories available in one's community." [125]

"Conversion to the pursuit of understanding is the point of entry into our lives of genuine mystery." [125]

"The essence of cognitive conversion is one's recognition and grasp of oneself as a knower whose own self-transcending judgments – not some external norm – constitute the criterion of the real." [125]

It is this self-appropriation that distinguishes critical from uncritical moral conversion. Moral conversion is a dual choice on the level of responsible, existential consciousness:

- A choice of value as criterion for decision;
- A choice of oneself as free and responsible originator of value.

These choices are critical insofar as they proceed from realistic, objective judgment.

"A moral conversion proceeding from an intelligent grasp and reasonable affirmation of one's own dynamism for self-transcendence is a truly critical self-appropriation." [126]

Critical moral conversion involves "the discovery of one's own self-transcending subjectivity as the only available objective criterion of meaning and value for one's life." [127]

In a situation of cultural pluralism, purely conventional moral conversion will be constantly undermined.

An initial negative discovery of the inadequacy of conventional, 'already-out-there-now' values, can lead to "the positive discovery that in the moral life one must be one's own tailor." [127]

Needed is "the critical appropriation of personally discovered and affirmed values." [128]

CONVERSION TO POSTCONVENTIONAL MORALITY

Kohlberg's stages 3 and 4 represent an *un*critical shift from satisfaction to value as criterion of choice. Because of the limitations (cognitive and affective) of adolescent development, the desired good is identified uncritically in terms of interpersonal and social *givens*.

However uncritical, this is a real moral conversion in that commitment to conventional values involves a real personal transformation. Even uncritical moral conversion is a deliberate *choice* of value as criterion for decision.

Conn posits a dual dimension to the transforming process, one unconscious/spontaneous and the other conscious/deliberate. These two dimensions simultaneously characterize both conventional and post-conventional moral consciousness. "All our experience of moral transformation… suggests conscious struggle as well as unconscious gift." [129]

This involves a certain "correlation of stage transition and moral conversion." [130]

"The realization of a fully personal conscience characterized by Kohlberg's Stage 6 principled reasoning is substantially identical to a critical moral conversion." [130]

Ethical principles are now chosen autonomously, with open, critical eyes.

This does not mean that previously accepted values are rejected; rather, they may be "substantially reestablished on a new, critical basis." [131]

Moral reasoning at this level is universal, impersonal, consistent – rooted in the intrinsic dignity of the human person and in fully reversible justice as normative for relationships among persons.

Postconventional reasoning is the structure of committed, loving care of real persons in the complexity of concrete situations. Converted from the illusory pursuit of certainty to the open-ended search for the concrete good, its universalizing intent appreciates the relativity of human reality as well as the limits of its own perspective." [131]

Such "humility" is the cognitive dimension of "the fully personal humility which presses for continuing conversion." [131]

Conn highlights "the possibility that in this process of spontaneous, natural self-creation there may occur that existential moment when we actually discover that it is up to each of us to decide for ourselves what we are to make of ourselves." [132]

"Conversion is the conscious, existential dimension of the single transformational reality which in its unconscious, natural dimension is the restructuring that constitutes stage transition." [132]

"Conscience is the radical drive of the personal subject for self-transcendence…; mature, truly adult conscience is the self-transcending drive of the morally converted personal subject, and preferably as converted in a critical fashion." [133]

"It is extremely difficult to overcome the resistance with which the psyche spontaneously responds to the possibility of conversion, of moving into a radically new horizon." [133]

This is the existentialist notion of anxiety/dread.

Conversion to radically new horizon can be effected only by symbolic means which "tunnel to the center" of the established horizon's "imaginative and affective ground."

"One choosing of oneself as an originating value rests not only on the explicitly cognitive element of recognizing the human call to responsibility, but also on the affective dimension of feeling in the demand to respond to this call a joy over the prospect of growth toward more authentic life." [133]

There is a "transformation of dreams."

Such conversion is more a beginning than an end.

Moral conversion is significant primarily as a call to commitment to the endless task of continuing conversion.

<u>AFFECTIVE CONVERSION</u>

Affective conversion is a falling-in-love that effects a more or less radical transformation of one's life, which "turns one's self, shifts one's orientation, from an absorption in one's own interests to concern for the good of others." [134-135]

Affective conversion actualizes the possibility of becoming a living principle of benevolence and beneficence; thus, it roots the concrete possibility of overcoming moral impotence. It is a transformation of willingness.

In order to avoid connotations of passivity and sentimentality, Lonergan's language of "falling in love" must be carefully and critically understood.

<u>Cognitive Interpretations of Affectivity</u>

Lonergan's analysis of affectivity focuses on those feelings capable of disclosing value, which are intentional responses of the whole person. Such feelings are related, not just to causes and ends, but to intentional objects as responses. Such analysis stresses the *cognitive* character of feelings.

M.B. Arnold's definition of emotion is linked to Aristotle and Aquinas: "a felt tendency toward anything appraised as good, and away from anything appraised as bad."

Such "appraisal" arouses an "action tendency."

"Intuitive appraisal produces an action impulse, but in the end it is the motive established by conscious judgment and deliberate decision that determines action." [137]

R. Lazarus argues that evaluated possibilities available for acts in the concrete situation enable emotional *re*appraisal.

J. Averall views emotion as "an act of creative interpretation of experience." [138]

J. de Rivera contends that "emotions are ways of perceiving situations... in which a person unconsciously 'chooses' organizations, interpretations, and thus transformations of his or her being-in-the-world, leading to specific behavior." [138]

<u>Affectivity as Constitutive of Identity</u>

R. Solomon insists that emotions are both evaluative and constitutive, and that they are the source of most of our values. "Emotional expression is an attempt to make the world the way it *ought* to be." [139]

He insists that we are actively responsible for our emotions. "The ultimate object of emotional judgment is always our personal sense of self-esteem." [140]

Through emotions, we constitute our world. As such, emotions are projects; they are suffused with intentions to act.

Solomon views *love* as an emotion (a world) we *share* with another person. Love creates "a *shared* self." [141]

Romantic love is "a *dialectic* between this ideal of merger and the individual identity and free autonomy which love presupposes." [141]

Solomon insists that love is something we actively *do*: we judge, decide, choose to love.

Love is a set of constitutive judgments.

Reflection transforms our emotions.

"Reflective love, cognizant of its commitments as commitments, is not only prepared but chooses to face the inevitable problems of love." [142]

In reflection lies the possibility of emotional transformation.

"Who we are, and what our world is, is the 'collective and systematic result of all our various judgments.'" [142]

"Romantic love is singular in that its creation is a radically transforming re-creation of a shared self in a shared world with a shared interest." [143]

Romantic Love: Passion and Decision

Rosemary Haughton's thesis in *The Passionate God*:   We can make sense of how God loves by looking at the way people love, particularly the way of love called passionate.

Haughton's fundamental model of reality = *exchange*.

"Life means a complex, moving web of interdependence, an endless flowing of love. Reality is exchange of life, and this is love. But the exchange can be interrupted, blocked, and if the obstacle to the exchange is to be overcome, and a new sphere of experience entered, a *breakthrough* is needed." [143]

Romantic love is concentrated on one point where "it is enabled to break the highly defended barriers between two conscious and complex human beings." [143]

"The dynamism of romantic love smashes through ordinary awareness and creates the exchange of a spiritual power that not only penetrates the lovers and mores them into a more exalted sphere of experience, but reaches through and beyond them." [143-144]

Such love is "a radical realization of spirit in the flesh;" in such love, "lovers come to self-awareness in the awareness of the beloved." [144]

Haughton notes several characteristics of romantic love:

o   *Particular* and *single*: through one person;
o   *Painful*: There is a longing for completeness neither achieved nor possible;

- o *Halo of glory*: a sense of not being able to perceive clearly what one sees;
- o Peculiarly open to *corruption*;
- o Such love *changes the face of reality*: "People appear more lovable, compassion is easier, generosity and tender feelings seem to be nearer the surface." [144]

Four key moments in the pattern of romantic breakthrough:

1. Remote preparation: process of vague restlessness, desire, longing;
2. Immediate preparation: at some weak spot, there appears a profound recognition of a gap, which transforms vague longing into intense passion;
3. Breakthrough: difficult, painful self-giving – across a gap of 'un-knowing' – toward an intensely desired wholeness;
4. *Language* of an individual's community helps the person interpret the exchange of breakthrough. Such language grounds one's response to the question of what one will do about the breakthrough.

Romantic doctrine insisted that only a *commitment* to love – absolute, unconditional, permanent – was proper response to the *revelation* of love. *Amour voulu* is "a 'giving back,' in free but completely uncompromising dedication, of that which has been freely and undeservedly received." [145]

Haughton sees transformation as a response to the demand for the decision to love.

Loving requires self-surrender; but self-surrender requires being loved.

"Someone already transformed by love is needed, in order to convey an assurance of love sufficiently strong to penetrate the defenses of the flesh in another and let loose the power of the spirit… This is the work of the community of love." [146]

The support of love must be simply for the sake of love.

The fundamental criterion of love is that "it opens out and gives itself. Genuine love is open, self-giving, generous.

Mystical love helps Haughton see that *all* genuine love "actually reaches further than the human object." [146]

Genuine love remains responsive to the demand of the call for 'something more.' It is experienced as originating beyond one's very self and existing beyond one's control.

Yet the power of this demand is felt so forcefully "because it is the fundamental drive, the activity of the spirit of one's person, arising from the depths of one's very being." [147]

"Response to this demand" creates the person… for it means going beyond ourselves to others in responding to situations that call for love, thereby actually becoming the self-transcending person we are capable of being. [147]

Personal Transformation: Desire, Commitment, Service

Characteristics of love emerging from the reflections of Solomon and Haughton:

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1. Love is passionate;
2. Love has a cognitive character (passionate interpretation, judgment, decision, choice);
3. Love can be influenced, and even transformed by reflection;
4. However passionate, love must be distinguished from possessive desire.

Solomon and Haughton "have disclosed at the heart of an authentic human love a single source from which spring the movements of both desire and self-giving." [148]

Desire and self-giving reinforce each other in a single drive for value that mores one beyond oneself.

"Genuine desire and authentic self-giving become one in the realization of self-transcendence." [148]

But desire can also be easily distorted into possessiveness, so that human love requires something more than intense passion.

"Truly human love also requires what the courtly poets called *amour voulu*: the deliberate self-giving of the lover in the decision of commitment. By transforming passion into a definitive orientation, such decision constitutes the whole person in terms of a love reaching for ultimate value, and commits her or him to express this being-in-love for the good of the beloved." [148]

Affective conversion is, thus, a matter of *both passion and commitment*: it belongs to the interior world of feeling, but requires deliberate decision; it involves both intuitive passion and deliberate commitment.

"Falling in love" refers to "the unreflective desire to give oneself in which the self is experienced as passive and helpless because the desire is experienced as originating and existing beyond – and therefore outside the control of – the reflectively conscious self." [168-169]

"Affective conversion is a reorientation of the whole person, but especially of those prereflective desires which must support our reflectively conscious decisions, choices, and loving commitments." [148]

Reflective commitment needs the support of prereflective passion.

Feeling needs the guidance and stability of reflective commitment.

"Affective conversion *is* the transformation of our deepest life of feeling" [149] from obsession with self-needs to concern for the needs of others.

This reorientation is personalized in the decision of commitment to love; thus, the criterion for authentic affective conversion lies in action – service.

The principle operator of affective conversion is the *symbol*. "Affective development and conversion... are initiated by the transforming symbols communicated externally through various intersubjective, artistic, religious, and, especially, personally incarnated embodiments." [150]

Imaginative symbols of self-transcendence speak to our psychic life in a way that the logical discourse of reflection cannot.

Affective conversion is "'signed' in the other-centered transformation of feeling effected by symbols and guided by reflection, 'sealed' in the deliberate decision of commitment to love, and 'delivered' in the action of loving service." [150]

<u>Affective Conversion in Developmental Context</u>

Conn sees in Kegan's process of self/object differentiation and integration "a developmental context for systematic interpretation of affective conversion as a radical, transformational shift from obsessive concern for self-needs to loving, caring, responsible concern for the needs of others." [151]

> At each stage transition, there emerges a more highly differentiated and complex set of needs at the subject pole, with previously dominant needs shifted to the object-pole. "The more highly differentiated needs at each stage allow for a greater degree of affective self-transcendence." [151]

> Affective conversion is precisely the dimension of the structural transition from Institutional Self (4) to Interindividual Self (5). This represents a radical breakthrough in desire, so that "the only need that the affective self is not *subject to* is the radical human need for self-transcendence." [152]

When conversion occurs, it breaks through at the point where development would otherwise stop. "Conversion is the breakthrough or turning which enables a transformed self to continue developing in a new, more deeply human direction." [152]

> Erikson's analyses of "intimate love" and "generative care" are helpful in specifying that 'direction.'

> Such affective conversion grounds the possibility of sustained moral self-transcendence.

<u>CONVERSION AS SOCIAL COMMITMENT</u>

Conn insists that "the transformation of unjust social structures is rooted in the personal reality of critical moral conversion." [153]

Paolo Freire posits the ability to objectivize surrounding reality as a distinguishing human trait. To be human is to be aware of the world, dialectically related to it. But this spontaneous grasp of the world is uncritical. Conscientization is a development of consciousness which goes beyond this spontaneous apprehension of reality to a critical phase where the personal subject, by grasping consciousness itself, takes an epistemological stance. But for this to be authentic, there is required a critical insertion into history through commitment to historical action.

> Needed is the overcoming of *alienation*, which Conn understands as "the subject's estrangement from his or her own creative and responsible drive for self-transcendence." [154]

>> Alienation results in reification of the world, with its social, political, and economic structures – which are often legitimated by religion.

> Conscientization involves understanding that:

>> o   Oppression results from the world in which we live;

- o That world is structured;
- o Those structures are not eternally fixed but can be humanly transformed;
- o Liberation depends on committed participation in the transformation of the world.

Critical reflection and action is, thus, a universally human prescription. Accordingly, historical engagement in the ongoing transformation of the world effects "a reunion with the source of one's authentic creativity in the radical drive for self-transcendence." [155]

Conn draws three points from Freire to specify conversion:

1. Moral conversion has a social dimension;
2. Moral conversion must extend to the sphere of action; and
3. Conversion, in general, can be understood as a movement from the instinctively spontaneous to the reflectively personal.

Conn then returns to the relationship of development and conversion:

- ▪ Conversion requires *previous* development; and
- ▪ Conversion also requires *consequent* development.

"The adolescent and adult crises of psychosocial development occasion and provide the necessary existential conditions for conversions as well as for major structural stage transitions. In turn, *optimal* resolution of the psychosocial crises requires conversion." [157]

"At key points, development requires conversion, and conversion also occurs within a developmental process." [157]

"Conversion… must always be ongoing – seeking the full realization of that joyful, peaceful love which lures us." [158]

FIVE: CHRISTIAN CONVERSION: THE MORAL DIMENSION

The concrete personal conscience responds to value as embodied in concrete, affective images, symbols, and stories." [158] One's moral consciousness ('character') takes shape through one's appropriation of these living carriers of value through feeling, understanding, decision, and action.

History can be understood in terms of conversion to one or another cultural incarnation of a system of values.

Conn presently focuses on "Christian conversion as one particular way moral conversion is realized concretely in individual lives in terms of very specific personal and communal values." [159] He focuses on Thomas Merton's multidimensional experience "in order to concretize the meaning of Christian conversion in personal terms." [159]

MERTON'S YOUTHFUL CONVERSION

Conn is concerned with "the transformative turning points" in Merton's life.

The Children in the Market Place: Communism and Collapse

Conn understands Merton's reflections on his movement from a period of self-centered licentiousness to communism to be an example of *uncritical moral conversion*, a movement towards ideological orientation (Erikson) and conventional morality (Kohlberg).

> His understanding of Marx at the time led him to interpret his "unhappiness" in terms of the effect of social and economic reality.

> However limited his self-knowledge, there was a real desire to turn toward value.

> > This turn involved an acknowledgment of selfishness.

> Conversions – especially youthful conversions – "need the nourishing environment of a vital community endowed with transformative symbols and language." [162] Merton's early conversion seemed to lack such nourishment. But, while it was short-lived, it was a beginning in that he had come to some recognition that the self-centered life of pleasure is a dead-end.

Merton's life in 1935-1936 seems to have been in a continuous process of personal disintegration. Death of his grandparents and his own sickness led him to undergo "a death of his own: the fundamental condition for conversion." [164]

> Merton is a classic picture of the decline and fall of Kierkegaard's "aesthetic" hero. With his personal foundations shaking, and so much of his life crumbling, Merton was ready for new possibilities.

> The formation which had made him who he was could no longer sustain him; radical transformation was necessary." [164]

With a Great Price: God and Baptism

Part of the groundwork for Merton's conversion was intellectual, a version of cognitive conversion: the recognition of God's reality.

> He read Gilson, Huxley, Blake, Maritain: "these influences toward conversion were concretized for Merton in the person of a Hindu monk named Bramachari." [168]

> > His simplicity and detachment personified much of what Merton had been reading.

> > He had also developed a group of friends of shared these concerns.

> The cognitive, affective, moral, and religious dimensions of Merton's development seemed prepared for transformation.

> > The affective dimension ('desire') was beginning to play an active part in Merton's process of transformation, but it had not yet realized itself in strong conviction.

> A key step was his decision to attend Mass. "This moment was certainly an extraordinary one in his process of spiritual transformation." [170] The 'moment' included hearing a sermon on the Incarnation.

> > Merton writes: "I walked in a new world."

Yet while his reading became more and more Catholic, his life returned to its normal patterns. Nevertheless, a personal question came to dominate his consciousness: 'What are you waiting for?' He responded by seeking and accepting Baptism.

The Waters of Contradiction: Desert and Vocation

It took time for Merton to realize that conversion of intellect is not sufficient, that 'heart'(will) must follow.

"Moral impotence: the radical inability to sustain development, to bring decision into line with one's best judgment, to act consistently in the long term with one's decisions, with one's commitments." [172]

Moral conversion is always a challenge before it is an achievement. Successful response to that challenge requires affective conversion; one's being must become a being-in-love.

World events in 1939 led Merton to a personal recognition: 'I am responsible.'

He also experienced a strong and insistent attraction to priesthood.

"It became clear to him that his whole life was at a point of crisis: everything was hanging upon his decision. He sensed that his whole life was suspended on the edge of an abyss, an abyss of love and peace – God. He knew it would be a blind, irrevocable act to throw himself over, but he also sensed the consequences if he should fail to act – and he had had enough of that life." [173]

His *decision* to be a priest set a new course for his life.

Magnetic North: Franciscans and Failure

An experienced manifestation of God's presence "left an unforgettable joy and peace." [174]

Six months later, this peace was shattered by agonizing questioning of his vocation.

True North: Patience and Silence

Merton made a decision to "live in the world as if he were a monk in a monastery." [175]

Facing the draft forced him to ask serious moral questions about participating in war.

Responding to a felt need, he made a retreat at Gethsemani.

The Sleeping Volcano: Harlem and Gethsemani

A few weeks in Harlem opened his eyes to the reality of poverty. This led to a short-lived decision to work in Baroness de Hueck's Friendship House.

His decision to become a Trappist followed "a compelling imaginary experience of the great bell at Gethsemani calling him." [176]

With his entrance to Gethsemani, "the first phase of a lifelong conversion process had come to term." [177]

MERTON'S CONVERSION: A DEVELOPMENTAL ANALYSIS

<u>Cognitive Transformation</u>

Merton's reading provided a cognitive foundation for conversion which his flirtation with communism had lacked.

> Needed was "a liberation of his intelligence for a more authentic grasp of reality." [177] His reading opened Merton's horizon to the supernatural.

<u>Affective Transformation</u>

Merton describes "the long and difficult course of development in his affective life that led him to ever greater transcendence of himself, and finally to conversion." [178]

> Merton's early flirtation with communism involved interest in the abstract "good of humanity," whereas the affectively converted person is interested in "responding to the specific needs of concrete, flesh and blood people." [178]

> In Harlem (6years later), Merton dealt with social injustice by responding to the real needs of suffering people he knew as individuals.

What had occurred in the intervening six years was *friendship*. A small informal group had formed, and "together these truly good friends provided the support each needed to realize themselves in moving beyond the boundaries of their narrow, private worlds." [178]

> Mark Van Doren provided the nourishment of a strong model, without which a life of self-transcendence does not grow and flourish into conversion.

'Falling-in-love' refers to "a radical personal capacity for self-transcendence, for reaching out beyond oneself to the good of others." [179]

> Following Erikson, Conn notes that "a successful resolution of the identity crisis is a condition for mature ethical capacity, which is to say, for the intimate love of the young adult and the responsible caring of the generative adult." [178]

> 'Falling-in-love' refers to "an adult joyous love that is caring and responsible." [179]

Merton's decision to enter Gethsemani represented a significant resolution of an identity crisis that had been negotiated over several years time.

> This 'resolution' involved "discovery of the living God to whom Merton reached out in a affective self-transcendence which for the rest of his life would continue to deepen." [180]

> > Merton's 'experience' "manifests most lucidly the structure of affective conversion as a shift from the instinctive, spontaneous egocentrism of self-absorption to the personal, reflective caring for others of self-giving love." [180]

<u>Moral Transformation</u>

The cognitive and affective dimensions of Merton's conversion came together to effect transformation in his moral life.

> He had been in the process of making a decision that would be constitutive of his very life.

A contrast is evident in the positions on war he took at two different stages:

- o His 'communist' (1935) rejection of war in principle reflected a simplistic, ideological moral judgment (Kohlberg's stage 2).
- o His later (1941) position is much more nuanced, "the product of a conscience carefully formed" [181] in both theory and a sense of duty.

> His application for non-combatant objector status reflected "a perceptive understanding of the concrete realities of the situation." [181]

> "Now it was his genuine, tested commitment to value, wedded to intelligence that demanded careful, realistic analysis of the concrete situation, that motivated and guided his decisions." [182]

"Merton's development remains limited, however. His morality is still 'borrowed,' no longer from communism, but from Catholic just war theory.

> This provided a satisfying, 'conventional' solution.

>> But the subterranean presence of challenging questions was already being felt.

<u>Faith Transformation</u>

Merton's conversion is characterized by Fowler's Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective). He "takes seriously the burden of responsibility for his own commitments, life-style, beliefs, and attitudes. His identity is taking on a clear measure of self-definition." [183]

> But the source of authority remains 'on the outside' from Merton. His was a partial transition: "critical distancing from a previous assumptive value system without the emergence of a fully critical executive ego as internal authority." [184]

>> Merton's Christian faith is now personally appropriated, but it is not *critically* self-chosen, and, thus, is not fully post-conventional.

<u>CONVERSION: PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS</u>

<u>William James: Conversion of the Divided Self</u>

For everyone, "personal development... consists in unifying the inner self, by transforming the chaos of feelings and impulses into a stable system of subordinated functions." [185]

> This is true for both the healthy-minded/once-born, and for the sick-souls who must be twice-born.

> There is a battle between actual-self and ideal-self.

Conversion = " the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities." [185]

> There are diverse and relatively independent internal groups/systems within a person's consciousness, constituted by aims, ideas, and objects.

"Conversion means that a group of religious ideas, aims, and interests moves from the periphery to the center of one's consciousness, constituting the habitual center of one's personal dynamic energy. [186]

Two possible ways:

- Volitional conversion (conscious, voluntary)
- Conversion by self-surrender (unconscious, involuntary)

James sees the need for self-surrender as resulting from the fact that "personal will remains centered on the actual, imperfect self." [186]

"Surrender of personal will makes space for the ideal self to emerge from its subconscious incubation and become the center of one consciousness." [186]

James judges conversion not by its sudden or gradual character – not by origins or cause – but by its fruit for life.

James's acceptance of Starbuck's identification of adolescence as the normal time for conversion is problematic. He is insufficiently attentive to a connection between adolescent conversion and emerging sexual impulses.

James's central contribution is identifying conversion as conflict resolution.

Conversion and Identity

V. Bailey Gillespie identifies conversion as a change characterized by four constituent elements:

1. Self-unification;
2. Positive personal effects;
3. Intensity of ideological commitment;
4. Sudden or gradual decision.

Religious conversion "sets an orientation from which all of life is viewed." [188]

Gillespie three phases of religious conversion:

1. Preconversion: with questioning, tension, anxiety, and stress;
2. Crisis: with the sense of a greater presence, higher control, and self-surrender;
3. Postconversion: with its relief, release, assurance, harmony, peace, ecstatic happiness.

Religious conversion is both problem-solving and identity-forming.

Gillespie also focuses on adolescence, notably the age where Erikson places the crisis of identity. He virtually equates religious conversion and identity experience.

"The religious conversion experience provides a turning point in the life of the young person and answers the questions raised when the youth faces the problem of just what he is going to give his life to or for." [189]

Psychological Interpretations and Merton

Merton's 1938-1941 conversion was *the* turning point in his life, setting a basic direction.

There had already been a conflict between 'actual' and 'ideal' selves, with the subsequent unification of self leading to profound happiness and peace. There had clearly been a real self-surrender, though the depths of that was limited by the depth of the autonomy being surrendered.

Merton describes "an experience of a divided self being torn in different directions and finally unified in its energy and direction." [191]

> His decision-experience was both sudden and gradual; it basically occurred over a period of a couple years time, with key moments. This highlights the fact that it is the act of decision which makes conversion genuinely personal.

> > "In the process of self-unification, decision is ultimately constitutive of the self" [192] The conversion-decision establishes one's horizon.

Christian Conversion as Religious

There is a specifically religious dimension to authentic Christian conversion: a relationship to God in the person of Jesus Christ. Merton discovered "a relationship with Jesus Christ deep enough to give unity to his person and moral direction to his life." [193]

> But Conn interprets Lonergan's notion of "religious conversion" as referring to a more radical experience than that found at this stage of Merton's life.

Limitations of Psychological Interpretations

Conn finds James's location of conversion as an essentially adolescent experience to be inadequate. History's great personal conversions have been adult conversions, which have followed up earlier youthful conversions.

> Conn finds Gillespie's focus to be on a common developmental phenomenon of adolescence (ideology, fidelity, commitment), and only extrinsically religious.

> Gillespie (as well as James and Starbuck) have highlighted the *moral* dimension of Christian conversion.

> > James's descriptions of pre-conversion stages are reminiscent of Kierkegaard's aesthetic subjects.

> Gillespie's focus is largely on uncritical, moral conversion in adolescence.

Merton's experience was far deeper and more complex than typical, adolescent conversion.

> Adolescent conversions clearly do not exhaust the depths of transformational possibilities. But adolescent religious developments are the threshold to the world of genuinely adult religious possibilities.

> > Erikson's analysis of the crisis of integrity vs. despair holds much promise for analysis of adult religious transformation.

"Religious conversion is a special, extraordinary transformation of religious consciousness." [197]

We ordinarily become 'religious' through socialization; and in religious conversion, the 'religious' person becomes 'religious' in a new way.

Christian Conversion from the Psychological Perspective

"By establishing a personal, self-transcending relationship with God in Jesus Christ that is both affective and effective Christian conversion… moves Christian truth and value from the periphery to the center of one's consciousness and energy." [198]

This relationship "is the beginning of what may become an unending journey into the personal reality of God." [198]

CONVERSION: THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Conversion as Fundamental Option

Karl Rahner understands conversion as a basic choice to commit one's whole life to God. Joseph Fuchs also sees conversion as the fundamental disposition of oneself as a whole; it is achieved at the deepest center of a person, and yet only in and through particular, concrete acts.

Rahner insists that conversion is primarily unselfish love of neighbor. Karl Barth also insisted that conversion 'commences' and 'works itself out' in relationship to neighbor.

Jesus' Call to Conversion

Jesus' call is more than a call to moral obligation. His demand for conversion follows upon God's anticipatory salvific more." (Franz Böckle)

"Christian conversion is the joyous and grateful change of heart that results from hearing the good news of salvation: God's offer lf love." [200]

Shub means "returning home:" Jesus announces the possibility of returning home to God's unconditional love.

Bernard Häring notes that "one reaches conversion… through growing insight into one's sin and into the misery of being cut off from God." [200]

Theological Interpretations and Merton

Merton's identity, and thus his conversion, cannot be understood properly except in religious terms. His decision was a radical and fundamental orientation of his life: turning from sin to God.

Rahner correctly emphasizes "the radically conscious character of fundamental Christian decision as a personal experience." [201] Many chronological adults merely drift; personal conversion involves a conscious, deliberate decision.

Thus, only persons who have experienced transformation have been converted.

Merton experienced conversion as response to a call. His reflections highlight his having heard God's call at a time of utter wretchedness.

It was in a condition of anguished helplessness that he was able to recognize God's gracious offer and respond to it. Having begun to respond, he 'walked in a new world.'

Christian Conversion as Love of Neighbor

God's gift of love came first through Merton's friends, and one of his first responses was concern for the poor of Harlem.

> The faith of Christian conversion must be realized in love of neighbor. Christian conversion involves a transformation of the way one 'sees,' i.e., of how one understands 'neighbor.' It involves "the transformed justice of universal love and justice without limit." [203]

> 'Taking up one's cross' refers to loving service in the daily lives of Jesus' disciples.

Christian Conversion and the Transformation of Social Structures

The moral dimension of authentic Christian conversion takes concrete form in loving service of the neighbor.

> Gutierrez's 'spirituality of liberation' focuses conversion to the neighbor on the poor and oppressed. Thus, he insists that the "conversion process is affected by the socio-economic, political, cultural, and human environment in which it occurs. Without a change in these structures, there is no authentic conversion." [203-204]

>> As sin exists in social structures, so must conversion involve a "break" with these structures and transformation of them.

The Christian message insists on the conversion of persons that will bring about structural change.

> "Personal conversion does demand the transformation of social structures. But the transformation of social structures is also required for personal conversion. The Gospel calls us to work for both simultaneously." [204]

> Any conversion is limited, and must expand into the fullness of one's life. Continuing conversion, accordingly, must also expand into the social context in which it occurs.

The eschatological dimension of Christian faith insists that Christian conversion is never complete; it is 'not yet' as well as 'already.' It moves always "toward the open horizon that is absolute future." [205]

Empirical Criterion of Conversion: Doing God's Loving Will

Both psychological and theological views agree that "the empirical text of conversion is in its living." [205] As Jesus radically identified God's will with the well-being of men and women, the test of authenticity for Christian conversion is the empirical one of love for one's neighbor.

> The call to love one's neighbor has no limits. Following Jesus means being servant of all.

> To have any understanding of what God's will requires of one in loving commitment to the good of one's neighbors, a radical transformation of one's understanding is required. It involves 'losing one's life,' requiring, accordingly, that one walks in a direction diametrically opposed to the direction in which human beings spontaneously walk.

>> This starts one beyond moral, toward religious conversion.

Response to the call is gift, as well as demand. There is power of radical transformation in God's gift.

Christian Conversion and Development

Haughton insists that "transformation is a timeless point of decision, yet it can only operate in the personality formed through time-conditioned stages of development, and its effects can only be worked out in term of that formation." [207]

Further, transformation can occur only when formation breaks down.

Strong formation can even intensify resistance to needed change. "No one wants to change a more or less effective and comfortable pattern of living. Only a serious… challenge from one's interaction with the human environment will occasion change." [207]

"Christian conversion involves a new set of images, symbols, values constituting the *effective central* interpretative story in one's life… (it) brings about a transformation in the concrete shape and texture of one's life, in one's character." [208]

Thus, Christian conversion does involve a change in *content*; but there must also be a change of *structure*.

Authentic Christian conversion involves thinking, feeling, and acting in a new way:

- Moral: not just new values, but choosing value as the criterion of one's choice;
- Affective: not just loving someone new, but letting love become the central dynamism of one's life;
- Cognitive: not just knowing something new, but understanding one's knowing in a new way.

"The essential content of Christian conversion is a unique integration of these three conversions in the Gospel of Jesus." [209]

Jesus' parables turn every doctrine about life/love upside down.

"Christian conversion requires at least the previous acquisition of basic formal cognitive operations, a successful identity integration reaching toward intimacy, and moral reasoning of a conventional level." [209]

SIX. CHRISTIAN CONVERSION: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

Christian conversion is the beginning of an ever more profound journey into the mystery of God's love (i.e., religious conversion). It is a challenging offer to allow divine love to move more and more from the periphery to the center of one's life.

"It is a life struggling with the evolutionary dynamism of Jesus' life of love without limits, a dynamism that explodes every conventional idea about human life and love." [212]

JESUS, PARABLES, AND RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

The Parable as Invitation to Religious Conversion

Parables shake the foundation of conventional worlds, "forcing us to the dangerous edge of the postconventional precipice where reality admits no illusion of security." [213]

Parables subvert the 'say things are,' suggesting that the 'way things are' may not be 'God's ways.' The delegitimate our worlds, prodding us to think the unthinkable.

Parables are threatening, in that "they would leave us at the limits of relativity, naked and totally vulnerable before the divine mystery that is God."

Jesus as Parable of Religious Conversion

Jesus not only taught in parables but *lived a parable*.

Conn concludes that Jesus "faced the normative human conversion possibilities" [214], and can thus posit Jesus' life as a paradigm of conversion.

> "The public life of Jesus stands as a monument to the failure and utter defeat of reliance on one's own strength which alone can lead to the surrender of absolute autonomy in the acknowledgment of one's radical dependence on the power of God." [215-216]

> Conversion in Job: "allowing God to take possession of one's being through a free surrender of absolute autonomy." [216]

DEVELOPMENT TOWARD RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

Adult Development and "Stage 7"

Carl Jung insisted that the 'second half of life' is defined by concern with religious questions. Erikson's crisis of integrity vs. despair' is broadly 'religious' in nature; and in his later writings, Kohlberg has raised the possibility of a 'seventh stage' corresponding to the Eriksonian crisis.

> This issue of the integrity of the meaning of the self's life is a theological/religious question.

Kohlberg recognizes that a stage 6 individual, with his/her commitment to universal principles of justice, still is confronted with the fundamental question about the very justification of justice: 'Why be moral?'

> Response to this question entails an answer to the question of the very meaning of life – which is essentially a religious question. He sees solutions to this question as involving contemplative experience.

>> Such experience allows a more *cosmic* perspective, a sense of being part of the whole of life. This experience is often triggered by despair (Loder: experience of nothingness), with despair being overcome precisely in the contemplative experience of cosmic unity implicit in despair.

"Stage 7" and Fowler's Universalizing Faith

> Kohlberg's structural approach is problematic in that he seems to fail to recognize religion as having any intrinsic involvement in the development of the structure of moral reasoning; it appears to be 'added on' at the end.

Fowler argues that every moral perspective is anchored in a broader system of beliefs and loyalties: "faith precedes and is a matrix for moral reasoning."

"Moral reasoning at any stage is always rooted in and expressive of a particular faith perspective – of a person's concrete way of construing his or her relationship to the ultimate conditions of reality." [222]

Yet Kohlberg does seem to Conn to be correct in holding that postconventional religious perspective (Stage 7) follows upon Stage 6 moral reasoning.

There is a consistent pattern in the recent work of both Kohlberg and Fowler: "parallel stages of moral reasoning and faith developing together, with the highest moral stage followed by an ultimate postconventional faith stage." [222-223]

Kohlberg's "Stage 7" is a new kind of religious orientation, a postconventional religious orientation radically different from other religious perspectives.

"Stage 7" and Lonergan's Religious Conversion

The question, "Why be moral?", can only be asked in its ultimate religious sense by one who has taken possession of his/her self as a free and autonomous moral subject, and attempted to live out a serious commitment to justice and the realization of value in a very concrete way for some time.

"Only the person who has critically realized and attempted to live a life of fully human autonomy can truly experience the radical moral impotence constitutive of human existence." [226]

Having attempted to live an autonomous life of moral value, "one may realize the radical inadequacy of absolute human autonomy, and, beyond despair, be open to a totally new experience of one's existence." [224]

Religious conversion is a totally radical reorientation of one's entire life, in which "one allows God to move to the center of one's life, to take it over and direct it." [224]

Desire for total control can prevent the radical trust necessary for religious conversion. Nevertheless, "authentic religious conversion… does not destroy genuine personal autonomy, but preserves and transforms it by taking it up into a new horizon of unconditional love and ultimate concern." [225]

What is destroyed is the illusion of absolute personal autonomy.

Authentic human autonomy and unconditional surrender are complementary and mutually necessary.

Religious conversion is related to but is not always the culmination of structural development. In other words, "persons of thoroughly conventional morality and faith do experience the genuinely religious realization of their finiteness in relation to an infinite God or cosmos." [226]

Such religious conversion would be uncritical, but would nonetheless effect a radical relativizing (de-centering) of the self.

Egocentrism assumes the self to be the center of reality; religious conversion radically de-centers, allowing God to take over the center of the self.

The experience of liberation from the illusions of egocentrism is the concrete meaning of Erikson's 'wisdom.'

Still, a person of uncritical religious conversion is vulnerable to multiple distortions.

"Only the reality of falling-in-love... makes it possible for a person to surrender his or her self in any significant degree; and only the total falling-in-love of religious conversion makes an unconditional surrender of self possible." [227]

Having experienced the unqualified love of a personal God makes it possible to surrender the illusion of total autonomy.

The total surrender of oneself in love without conditions is the ultimate fulfillment and realization of the multidimensional process of self-transcendence: of moving beyond the self, of reaching out to others.

Religious conversion is *gift*: having recognized one's very existence as a gift of love, one is able to make a gift of one's whole life.

This provides a new basis for all valuing and efforts: "There now accrues to man the power of love to enable him to accept the suffering involved in undoing the effects of decline." [227]

Religious conversion sublates the achievements of postconventional moral development.

"A post conventional religious orientation that is at once both critical and rooted in authentic religious conversion preserves the authentically human dimension of morality, and transforms it by taking it up into a cosmic or divine context where the deepest human desire realizes itself most fully." [227]

Universal principles of justice are transformed by the power of life.

MERTON AT GETHSEMANI

The Early Years

Evident in Merton's early motivation was a detestation of his sinful past, and a desire for purification. Thus, powerful forces of self-contempt and negativity had entered the monastery with him.

Contemplation was understood as a journey in search of God in the depths of his true self; this involved making a sharp distinction between the true/inner self and the false/external self.

The peace and joy evident in Merton's recollection of his early years at Gethsemani portray "a wanderer who is profoundly relieved finally to be happily and peacefully at home." [229]

Initially, though, he was clearly unaware of his conversion's limits.

From the outset, there was evident a "desire for solitude beyond the ordinary possibilities of Trappist life." [230]

The 'shadow' of 'Merton the writer' continued to raise a problematic question of identity. This struggle between 'monk' and 'writer' yielded a unique mutual fecundation over the years.

"Neither the life of the monk nor the writings of the author would have been nearly as deep without the other's strength and vitality." [231]

Near the end of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, there is evident "the beginning of a movement toward the appropriation of his critical intelligence, a movement toward cognitive conversion which would eventually free him, not from the problem of 'the world' or of the monastery but from the alienating authority of an illusory monastic world." [232]

There are hints of Merton's finding a starting point in his own personal experience.

In the Belly of a Paradox

Merton's ideal of monastic solitude and the demands of writing found him torn in different directions.

The dynamics of conversion are such that Merton's questioning did not stop, but intensified.

He began to question the traditional identification of monastic obedience with following God's will, enduring an increasing critical self-possession.

Evident in The Sign of Jonas is "the clear emergence from Merton's struggle for identity of an autonomous sense of himself and of his own power of judgment." [234]

Emergence of the 'executive ego' (Fowler) gave Merton "the ability to distinguish the fundamental meanings and values of his life from the symbols which carry them, as well as the power to distance himself critically not only from those meanings and values, but also from the structure and institutions of society." [234]

- "The World"

In his first visit (1948) outside the monastery since his entrance seven years earlier, Merton found himself moved, not by hatred of the world's wickedness, but by compassion – recognizing the good and value of people in the eyes of God.

Further encounters with poverty forced a critical reappraisal of his romanticized understanding of the monastery as an island of purity in a world of evil.

He is "moving toward the critical realism of mature, adult judgment, toward full cognitive conversion." [235]

- False Self / True Self

The principal theme of *Seeds of Contemplation* was discovering God and one's true self. This metaphor of true/false selves enabled Merton to articulate the *transformational* pattern of 'discovery.'

Conversion is escape from the false self to reach the true self – and God. Sin is the false self acting as the fundamental center of one's life.

"In order to become myself I must cease to be what I always thought I wanted to be, and in order to find myself I must go out of myself, and in order to live I have to die." [237]

One "cannot enter into the deepest center of himself and pass through that center into God, unless he is able to pass entirely out of himself and empty himself to other people in the purity of a selfless love." [237]

Merton writes of appoint of recognizing one's absolute dependence upon God's infinite love. The way to this point "lies through a desert."

Only in the darkness of radical dependence can our deepest selfishness be stripped away.

- Ordination and Crisis

Near the time of his ordination (1949), Merton struggled with the demands of writing and the effects of having published *The Seven Storey Mountain*. A spirit of "indifference" emerged, which found him happy and peaceful. Great joy followed his ordination.

This period of consolation ended in late 1949, and he entered a period of transformational experience for which he saw Job as a guide. There were profound experiences of fear, terror, loneliness, which manifest themselves even in failing health.

But even in this period, his reflections return to the reality of trust.

He sensed life building up to a deep, but 'wordless,' decision – an experience of liberty and neutrality in which his life was given to God.

Merton realized that giving oneself in trust to God required a death in himself. Yet this death was not a loss of self, but a loss of one's absolute trust in self. The death remained painful precisely because there remained a self to suffer it."

"Merton knew why there are so few candidates for religious conversion!" [242]

- Resolution in Compassion

The pain of 'tearing the false self out of the center' meant 'making room for God at the center,' and Merton made new discoveries of solitude which found him peaceful and happy 'in the face of nameless, interior terror.'

Merton came to a realization of having come to the monastery, not to escape the world, but to find his place in the world. He felt a 'duty… to live, as a member of the human race.'

Becoming master of scholastics in 1951, he proceeded to find himself more and more a stranger to his previous writings.

He spoke of his care for the scholastics as having led him into 'the desert of compassion.' He was "beginning to take the Eriksonian task of generativity seriously in a very concrete and immediate fashion." [245]

Conflict emerged by 1955, with the abbot refusing Merton's request for transfer to a monastery where he could have more solitude. This experience, along with censorship problems, "helped to have Merton's critical powers to an even sharper edge." [246]

He was engaged in critical questioning of the institution of both monastery and Church, and his postconversion monastic romanticism was being radically revised.

<u>The Guilty Bystander</u>

- <u>Postconventional Social Consciousness</u>

Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander reveals "an emerging awareness of, and concern for, and involvement in the social and political dimensions of life." [247]

There are many background factors:

- His early concern about Harlem and World War II;
- His positive reassessment of 'the world;'
- His transformational experience;
- The continuing growth of his critical thinking;
- His relationship of loving care and responsibility for the scholastics and novices.

The experience of existential responsibility for others provided the needed context for the developmental orientation of autonomous conscience of universal ethical principles.

He insisted on a solitude aware of the world's needs.

Egocentric self-understanding needed to be abandoned to make possible true compassion for the world.

His critical moral conversion had deep affective roots.

The range of Merton's reading had expanded enormously; he developed a great interest in psychoanalysis.

He became progressively more critical in his reflection, insisting that faith required constant purification.

Merton opted against an ethic of subjective good intentions and 'for an ethic' focused on 'objective results;' this was an option for the necessity of critical moral conversion beyond the limitations of conventional 'good intentions.'

He posited an objective moral good, corresponding to the real value of being; obedience to this objective good will sometimes require going against social norms.

Freedom for a principled (postconventional) morality responding to real values was seen by Merton to be the deepest and most fundamental need of the human person. In living the principled life of postconventional morality we find true happiness.

The story of Eichmann illustrated for Merton the need for the truly principled orientation of critical moral conversion.

Merton feared that monastic life was excessively oriented to passive obedience, and cut off from authentic concern for the world.

Merton attempted to exercise "a morally principled attitude whose responsibility extends to the foundational structures of society." [251]

> He became committed to the cause of world peace, especially on the nuclear issue. He took a personal, public stand that challenged church and government.

> He wrote: "History is ours to make: now above all we must try to recover our freedom, our moral autonomy, our capacity to control the forces that make for life and death in our society." [255]

- <u>Religious Realization of Autonomy</u>

However much it is true that Merton developed "an autonomous principled moral consciousness in touch with the fundamental social and political realities of the time" [253], this autonomy was clearly relativized by his recognition of the need for religious surrender.

> It is total trust in God that allows real human freedom.

> His reading of Protestant theologians (especially Bonhoeffer) helped Merton recognize that the radical question was not the conversion of 'sinners,' but the conversion of 'the good.'

>> Conversion to a morally good life is not enough. Beyond this, the surrender in faith of illusory claims to absolute independence is necessary.

- <u>The True, Inner Self</u>

Religious conversion liberates us from the false self, from the superficial consciousness of the external self, from our empirical self, our individuality.

> Contemplation is the awareness that the superficial 'I' of this external self is really 'not-I.'

> The 'Fall' is our alienation from our inner self which is the image of God.

Conn relates Merton's 'inner self' to "Lonergan's analysis of the personal subject's radical drive for self-transcendence as it manifests itself on successive levels of consciousness." [257]

> "The true self exists as a drive for self-transcendence, but is still to be fully created as an actually self-transcending person." [257]

>> The external self is the personal subject regarded precisely as failing in self-transcendence.

Merton's true self is the personal subject fully alive on the highest level of responsible, existential, indeed, religious consciousness – most fully realized in its surrendering to God's love in religious conversion the claim of absolute autonomy.

"Christian religious conversion is a fundamental shift from the instructive but illusory assumption of absolute autonomy, the spontaneously defensive posture of radical, sufficient egocentrism, to the reflective openness and personal commitment of love in the total surrender of self to God.

The realistic recognition that one's very being is a gift of love prompts the loving gift of one's entire life." [258]

The Zen Hermit

Emotional involvement with a woman (1966) "seems to have secured for Merton his ability to love and be loved." [258]

By 1965, Merton was virtually living in a hermitage. He also seems to have achieved a relatively successful compromise between the demands of monk and writer.

He had come to recognize and accept his life as paradoxical – he had come to find peace in being dissatisfied! He realized that only in struggling do we find peace.

There was a continuing cognitive conversion which found him more and more at ease with uncertainty.

One influence in this was clearly his Zen experience.

"Merton was a man who breathed the air of divine mystery. He took critical possession of his autonomous mind, but, with paradox and contingency in his blood, he was immune to the reductionist illusion of an impersonalistic rationalism. Merton's converted intelligence was a critical mind that was in search of and would settle for nothing less than the one true Absolute which is *mystery*." [260]

- Transcendent Experience in Pure Consciousness

Zen has power to disclose the limits of rational consciousness; this provided Merton with an even more radical way of understanding the nature of the true self.

He writes of non-reflexive, non-self-conscious awareness.

In Lonergan's terms, there is reference to the subject-as-subject, in distinction from subject-as-object: the subject's own non-reflexive *presence* to itself.

This presence is the ground of intentionality but is most often lost in our fascination with objects – including ourselves as objects.

The subject-as-subject emerges on its own terms only in contemplation.

For Merton, this 'pure consciousness' could open to an awareness of God. Transcendent experience is a realization of God as Subject, not so much as object – a realization of God "from within a self that is at once lost and found in God." [262]

There is a radical change in this subject, an emptying of all the contents of ego consciousness, so that the Being and Love of God might be manifested.

Christian religious conversion: "the orientation toward transcendent mystery which climaxes one's radical drive for self-transcendence." [262]

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This orientation is conscious, but not objectified. Lonergan speaks of a mediated return to immediacy, a withdrawal from objectification to a prayerful could of unknowing.

The 'true self' is "the religiously converted self-transcending subject which has mediated a return to the immediacy of its own presence to itself." [262]

"As oriented toward transcendent mystery completely beyond the world mediated by meaning, this true, self-transcending subject may be drawn completely out of that mediated world into an unmediated cloud of unknowing." [263]

- Toward the East: Final Integration

Merton understood our age to be facing "the grave danger of losing the spiritual heritage of thousands of generations." [263]

The depth and integrity of inner transcendent freedom is desperately needed if global consciousness is to be more than 'a vast blur of mechanized triviality.'

Merton posited the 'final integration' of the true self as a state of transcultural maturity. The mature person "apprehends his life fully and wholly from an inner ground that is at once more universal than the empirical ego and yet entirely his own." [263]

The self remains rooted in concrete values, but is not bounded by a limited set of cultural values. There is insight into the relationship of sets of cultural values.

Such a discovery has universal *social* significance: the integrated person is a peacemaker.

But "the integrating actualization of the true self only follows upon the excruciating pain of the false self's disintegration." [264]

Essential to monastic life, Merton argued, is the 'business of total inner transformation.'

- Paradox Revisited

Fowler's notion of 'ironic imagination' (Stage 5 Conjunctive Faith) converges with Merton's central theme of paradox.

Through faithfulness to experience, one can pass through the clear, nearly bounded distinctions of conceptual knowing to a recovery of one's deep, imaginative symbolic life. There emerges both a radical openness to the truth of others and to the truth of one's own being.

Conjunctive Faith is "rooted in the experience of irrevocable commitments and deeds," and knows the sacrament of defeat." [265]

Such faith has a transforming vision of reality, but is also painfully aware of the limits of the existing untransformed world.

Merton was "convinced that... movement toward the world in all its richness, complexity, but also evil was a necessary condition for moving beyond the self in another direction – toward the depths of the inner self, the true person, and finally the reality of God." [266]

> Radical conversion is a long, arduous journey.

Merton discovered a radical paradox at the center of his being: only in losing yourself can you find yourself.

> He confronted this paradox when his 'feel' for the symbolic was freed to explore the darkness of the inner life.

> "Merton learned to accept in faith the paradoxical reality of his life." [267]

CONCLUSION: CHRISTIAN CONVERSION

Conversion is the transformation of conscience, i.e., of the person-as-valuer.

> Conscience is here understood as the radical drive for self-transcendence, for understanding/ truth/value/love.

> Conn's context for interpreting conscience is "a unified, explanatory theory of the self as a conscious subject developing cognitively and affectively through subject-object differentiation and integration.

Conversion is a vertical shift in structure from a spontaneously instinctive to a reflectively personal orientation toward truth, value, and love.

> Moral, cognitive, and affective dimensions of such structural shift in orientation are located by Conn at key developmental points, and are understood as the conscious counterparts of unconscious stage transitions and crisis resolutions.

Religious conversion is "the concrete form that a person's fundamental orientation to truth, value, love, and God takes when it is shaped by the Christian story." [268]

> The personal measure of Christian living is "the conscience which has experienced a Christian conversion at once cognitive, affective, moral, and religious." [268]

"The radical religious conversion of Christian conscience finds its fullest realization in loving compassion." [268]

> The surrender involved in this relativizes the moral autonomy of Christian conscience.

Christian religious conversion is the fulfillment of personal development toward self-transcending autonomy.