

Re : Workshop #5 : To live in continuing conversion

Excerpts from the CIOFS manual: section: GOD WHO REVEALS HIMSELF

He who is «Almighty, eternal, just and merciful», the Most High who lives and reigns in «perfect Trinity and simple Unity», has a beloved Son. Therefore, He is a **Father** even though the word does not appear in this particular prayer. To him our desires come, miserable though we are, and they come in the certainty that they will be heard simply because of who he is and by His grace alone.

An itinerary is traced above along which human **activity**, dependent on God, combines with the **passivity** needed if we are to be «purified, enlightened and inflamed by the (divine) fire». Our guides, along this road, are the Holy Spirit and the beloved Son. Where do the footprints of this beloved Son lead those who follow Him, when they are set on fire by the Spirit, if not to the Most High Father? «To make our way to you» is the final destination of the journey. If love «for your sake alone» (*propter temetipsum*) leads the Father out of Himself towards his work in the world, this same love finally **redirects** everything back to Him who is the *Alpha* and the *Omega*.

Section: Comprehension of God and Conversion of man

It is well known that the word *penitentia* (penitence or penance) is a translation from the Latin of the Greek word *metànoia*. Hence, its meaning is to change one's mind, to change one's thoughts, to change the pattern of one's thinking.¹

The best word to translate the concept of *metànoia* is **conversion**, which is preferable to *penance or penitence*. In fact, these words, nowadays, carry a further significance beyond that of conversion, in that they also have overtones of “expiation” “punishment” and “practice of physical punishment either self-imposed or imposed by a superior”. This last concept could be, in a sense, still acceptable to the extent that these practices are meant to be an exercise freely chosen, to gain a greater self control, and in so far as they are aimed at a positive change. In practice the aim of an ascetical exercise is to ‘control’ the body and the material aspects of ourselves in service of spirituality. However, it is obvious to everyone (at least with the mentality of today) that such an approach is walking on a knife edge. So let us stay on the high road of understanding *metànoia* in its genuine sense of *conversion*.

Still, it is quite common for this word to refer only to a single event, a single moment in the life and experience of someone, from which quite a different road has been undertaken with the respect to the past, to initiate a whole new way of life. Here too, we must be alert because **conversion is not only an event occurring in a single moment, once and for all, but a process which concerns our whole existence.**

Even if **conversion** begins with a single, starting moment (or several moments) it is by its very nature **permanent**.²

1 *Metànoia* is strictly a New Testament word, indicating a break with the past and a living commitment of attitudes in response to believing the teaching about the Kingdom.

2 G.Tre Re, op. cit. “ There is a tension between **conversion as a permanent decision** and **conversion as a story**, a dynamic continuity, and between *initial* conversion and *permanent* conversion. It is a **continuous conversion**, a constant verification: the **growth of conversion** depends on successive interventions by the Spirit. Conversion, like Revelation, is structurally linked to the passage of time and also varies with individuals and circumstances.”

B. Häring in *Free and faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Clergy and Laity*, develops a dynamic concept between **radical conversion** and **permanent conversion**. He sees, though, both in the light of our **fundamental option**, So

In fact, life and human nature are such that the “route” that leads us to our destination, may be often lost. Therefore, it is obvious that true conversion begins in a given moment and continues throughout life, as our Rule wisely reminds us: *“United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance”, and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls “conversion”. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.* (Rule 7)

To speak about true conversion we need to place ourselves, and constantly remain, on a search.

We need to know towards what we should turn (convert) our attention, our minds, our lives. We need to be aware of how we are and how we wish to become.

It is fundamental that we know to what, to Whom we should convert.

It is obvious that **conversion depends essentially on Who it is to Whom we wish to turn.**

It often happens that, although in good faith, we think we have found God but, sometimes, our ideas of God may be mistaken. The result is that also our conversion may be mistaken.

The search for God can only be guided by the Father, through the Son and in the Spirit: *“No-one knows the Father but the Son and the one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.”* (Lk 10,22); *“Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven.”* (Mt 16,17).

We, like Francis who allowed himself to be guided by the Father, must follow that same journey in order to find the “one and true” God whom Jesus reveals to us.³

Conversion, therefore, must be ultimately understood as a son’s return to the Father. (Lk 15)

Conversion is a voyage during which we gradually learn to **die to ourselves** and **be reborn in God**. And the Father, rich in mercies, is always swift to give Himself in the Son, as we have seen, recreating us through the Spirit, making us new creatures, whole, and free from sin.

Once again, however, we must recall to our mind and to our heart what we have already said about faith: **do we truly believe?** Are we really ready to risk everything?

Or rather, do we continue to give a response which is partial and conditioned? To live in two quite separate dimensions, that of faith and that of our actual lives of which faith is not substantially part?

Let these words resound within us at all times:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God and believe in me” (Jn 14, 1).

conversion is a complex event which can be described as the dynamism of God’s love drawing the person to Himself. The culminating moment of this is justification, or the attribution of sanctifying grace to the “centre of the person's being” where self-knowledge and freedom are indivisible. But there must be a preparation for this culminating moment which must itself be a gift from God.

3 Catholic conversion is far from simply the adoption of certain beliefs added to a series of moral teachings acknowledged among Christian Churches. It is **only under the action of Him who alone can lead us to the Father**, (Mt 11,27; Jn 6,44; 14,6) **and of the Paraclete**, a change of life, involving both intelligence and will as a whole. (J. Pinard, da G Tre Re, op cit)

Everything is possible to God.

This is true, but not without us and our commitment to His will.

Anyone who is truly converted will “sell everything” because he has found the treasure.

Are we sincerely convinced that we have found “the treasure”?

To sell everything means to empty ourselves of everything, to make ourselves poor in order to be rich (truly rich). To empty ourselves is the indispensable pre-requisite because in the space we empty, God will enter and dwell within us, so that God’s presence within us will enable us to exclaim with Paul (as Francis did):

“I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me; the life that I now live in the flesh, I am living in the faith of the Son of God who has loved me and has given Himself up for me (Gal 2, 19-20); and further:

“For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain” (Ph 1, 21).