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Eucharistic Prayers of Reconciliation

Reflections on Moral Conversion

By Dr Tom Ryan, S.M.

Introduction

These reflections are prompted by two events. First, there is the recent introduction of the new translation in the Eucharistic Liturgy. The second is the recent comment made to me by a fellow priest. His parishioners generally find the Second Eucharistic Prayer for Reconciliation the most appealing of all the Eucharistic Prayers.¹ From this comes a question: if we are moved by the Liturgy, does that make us better people? What, then, is the relationship between Liturgy and the moral life?

These took me back to ponder the two Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation and the relationship between these and moral conversion. I will outline firstly some basic thoughts on conversion, then offer some points of comparison and contrast with the EP RI and EP RII before making some concluding comments.

Conversion

When we hear the word 'conversion' perhaps the first reaction of many people is the image of a sudden 'turn around' to God – as in the story of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Caravaggio's painting captures this as an unexpected, dramatic and life-changing experience.

But is this typical? Such 'moments', for instance, may be the end of a long process – as with St. Augustine in the garden when, in reading the Scriptures, he has a moment of insight, divine light thrown on life in which he sees everything differently. It may also take the form of an awareness of a shift in one's attitude that is noticed only when a person looks back in a process of personal reflection. Or it may be the coincidence experienced by Edith Stein, the brilliant philosopher in Germany. Staying overnight at a friend's place, she found it hard to sleep and picked up the autobiography of Teresa of Avila. She read through the night and in the early hours closed the book and said to herself 'this is the truth.'

Whether such events are sudden or gradual, they have a common element – the sense of something 'given', a 'grace' from somewhere or someone else beyond the person. What differentiates them is the setting – the extraordinary context for Paul, or a realization of a change that has already occurred within day-to-day life, or the slow emergence into the light for Augustine, or, finally, the serendipitous circumstances of Edith Stein's shift in her personal horizon.

When we speak of 'conversion', then, we must remember that it can occur in different ways – in its context, forms, object – namely conversion has different 'intentionalities.'

Building on the forms of conversion developed

by Bernard Lonergan, Conn sees it as '*the radical drive for self-transcendence realized in creative understanding, critical judging, responsible deciding, and generous loving*'.² A brief discussion of this sentence leads us to consider *moral conversion*.

Intellectual conversion ('realized in creative understanding, critical judging') is concerned with clarifying how we perceive reality and interpret its meaning in that we '*advance beyond ideologies, prejudices, and oversights that blind one to the truth*.'³

In *Religious conversion* ('generous loving') a person is radically grasped by ultimate concern or love. '*It is a falling in love unconditionally, leading to surrender to the transcendent, and a gracious being-in-wholeness*'.⁴ Christian conversion for Lonergan is the phenomenon of God's love being poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit given in Christ. It is possible for a person to experience this without naming or '*thematizing the phenomenon in Christian categories*'.⁵

This brings us to *moral conversion*.⁶ I anchor this discussion in a case study.

A Case Study of Moral Conversion

Bartolomé de las Casas (1474-1566), a young man in minor orders, went to Central America in 1502. He was part of the *encomienda* system whereby the crown granted a person a specified number of natives for whom they were to take responsibility for them. In reality, this meant slavery. Las Casas exploited the Indians in their work. He was initially moved by the preaching of the Dominican friar Montesinos who opposed the practices and the system itself. But Las Casas considered he was humane and that he did not need to change. At one stage, he was refused sacramental absolution because he had neglected the Indians in his care, but this still was not sufficient to prompt a shift in his views. In 1514, now a priest, while preparing sermons, he read the text of Ecclesiasticus 34: 22

A man murders his neighbour if he robs him of his livelihood, sheds blood if he withholds an employee's wages.

Reading this, his conscience was triggered. This moral 'insight' was 'further illuminated by religious faith'.⁷ This was the turning point. He went on to join the Dominican order. He spent the rest of his life, some of these as a Bishop, by action and writing, fighting for the rights of Indians and opposing the *encomienda* system and its exploitative practices.

It is helpful to tease out the particular elements in this shift in moral awareness in Las Casas. Reading the Scripture text prompts Las Casas to be more attentive to what was happening around him.

Not only did he notice things he had not seen before. He came to understand social situations and the Indians themselves differently. There followed an appreciation that he was confronted by a moral truth (about right and wrong) that demanded some sort of response, hence responsibility. Within the framework of the Gospel and religious faith, he 'came to see Indians as children of God, and then arrived at the more profound insight that, in the suffering Indians, Christ himself was present.'⁸ Through his subsequent life, he made a significant contribution 'to the development of the doctrine of rights, liberty and cultural progress, and anticipated many of the concerns of liberation theology.'⁹

Two Forms of Moral Conversion

Moral conversion ('responsible deciding') entails a shift from satisfying the self or being influenced by bias (in oneself or one's culture) to pursuing what is truly valuable and good as offering the criteria for moral decisions. Gelpi distinguishes two forms in this process. In *personal moral conversion*, one comes to evaluate 'interpersonal relationships in the light of individual rights and duties.' Alternatively, *socio-political conversion* 'evaluates the justice or injustice of social institutions in the light of the common good.'¹⁰ These forms of moral conversion were evident in the life of Las Casas.

What is it precisely that differentiates *personal moral conversion* from other forms of conversion? Essentially, it engages judgment, namely, 'prudential deliberation.' One judges and makes choices 'in the light of the absolute and ultimate claims that individual rights and duties make upon the human conscience.'¹¹ Gelpi gives an example from his own life. He judged then decided he would not allow himself to be influenced by racial prejudice or bigotry in his personal dealings with African-American people.

Socio-political conversion also deals with make wise and prudent judgments, but differs in its scope and criteria. Firstly, from the interpersonal realm it moves out to embrace the larger, impersonal, social institutions in which we live, namely, government, Church, economy, culture. Secondly, the measure of moral discernment and judgment goes beyond personal rights and duties. It includes the common good which strives to bring about a society where all members 'can with reasonable access share in and contribute to its benefits.'¹² Again, Gelpi cites his own personal experience. At one stage, he reached a point where he made a public commitment to struggle for justice – against racism, poverty and social violence, for women's rights and defence of the environment.

Liturgy: Moral Formation in Reconciliation

Having clarified a contemporary approach to moral conversion, we will need to keep in mind that, in the Liturgy, the acknowledgement of the need for God's healing and forgiveness is central. Moral change and the sensitizing of conscience is not some-

thing we can bring about on our own. Naturally, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a privileged moment by which the saving mercy of God is present in the Church's life.

By entering regularly into the mystery of the Eucharist ('the sacrament of reconciliation par excellence'¹³), we progressively are freed from being slaves to sin, from fear of death, and over time, 'put on the mind of Christ' (1 Cor 2:16).

In the Penitential Rite we recognize the need for the mercy and healing action of God that 'in our sins we go before God.'¹⁴ In the Liturgy of the Word, the acknowledgment of our reality moves to being open to the awakening of conscience 'eager to be formed in truth.'¹⁵ Consistently present in the Liturgy and the Eucharist is Christ's role as the 'integrative power of reconciliation'. In his, he brings the world to the Father and gives himself to us as the bread of life to become one with Him and to share with us 'his power and capacity of become good and holy.'¹⁶ As Paul says, God in Christ is reconciling the world to Himself and we called to share in that task – as Ambassadors for Christ.

In the light of what we have said so far, we will now compare the two Eucharistic Prayers of Reconciliation to see what light they throw on the process of moral transformation effected in worship.

Moral Conversion and the Two Eucharistic Prayers of Reconciliation

Both these Eucharistic Prayers were promulgated on the occasion of the Holy year 1974-1975. Each was composed in a modern language, (EP RI – French, EP RII – German) and then translated into Latin. With the insertion of these two EPs in the official Liturgy of the universal Church, we find an instance of the Roman Rite adapting liturgical traditions fashioned at the local level or for a particular event and inserting them into the Liturgy of the Church for 'use in diverse places and new times.'¹⁷

It is clear in both Prefaces that reconciliation is the work of God. But this needs our cooperation in allowing the Holy Spirit 'to move human hearts.' It is also the work of the Trinity. Foley reminds us that Reconciliation is as much a mirror of the unity in diversity of the Trinitarian life as it is a work of the Trinity.¹⁸ But what differentiates these Prayers? Their distinctive characteristics are encapsulated in their respective Prefaces. It is here that we anchor the discussion around three elements: theme, tone and *tempo*. Concerning theme, what is conversion in these Prayers? Concerning tone and *tempo*, how does conversion occur?

What is Conversion in the Preface of these Eucharistic Prayers?

In both EPs, the Latin verb *convertere* is used in a specific context: EP RI Preface 'turn back to you in spirit'; EP R II Preface- 'discord is changed to mutual

respect' and Post Sanctus 'O Lord, so that, converted at last to you...' *Moral conversion is essentially a 'return' to, or a 'restoring' of, right relationships. How are these conveyed?*

In EP RI, it is through its central theme, namely, the New Covenant, anticipated in the Preface in Paragraphs 2-4 (L. 10-28). Drawing on biblical imagery, EP RI's stress is on reconciliation coming only come from God as a free gift. Humanity's desire for peace and reconciliation can ultimately never be fully realized simply from its own efforts. The history of that divine gift, of mercy and forgiveness consistently offered, is found 'in the long history of the covenant made with the Hebrews' which is ratified and fulfilled 'on the cosmic level with the death and resurrection of Christ.'¹⁹ This Preface focuses on moral conversion as *personal* and communal, primarily in relationship to God. From there, it broadens to include the human family and then the cosmos with the arms of the Saviour 'outstretched between heaven and earth.' *Socio-political conversion* is not in the foreground.

By way of contrast, in EP R II, beginning with the Preface, conversion as centred on 'right relationships', is built on a reflection, in thanksgiving and hope, on 'the signs of the times' present in the world made in the light of the mystery of reconciliation.²⁰ The Preface is anchored in the context of *socio-political* conversion and its implications for the personal form of conversion. Its specific focus is the various realms of human relationships where the forces of division (hatred, vengeance and discord) are engaged by the power of God's Spirit.²¹ This is significant, and even, as Roll notes, 'remarkable', in that the emphasis right from start of this EP is on the 'living and efficacious work of God in our world here and now', namely, 'even in a secular world where God is often experienced as absent.' Roll continues by noting that the strength of EP R II is its 'global' scope.²²

The Church is seen within this global context and is not apart from, and immune to, the division, dissension and discord of the world. The community gathered around the Eucharistic table needs the healing gift of the Spirit to take away 'everything that estranges us from one another.' The Church pleads to God, the Holy Father, that it be a 'sign of unity and an instrument' of God's 'peace among all people.'²³

McCarron reminds us that this is not a Eucharistic Prayer 'about reconciliation.' As a 'theme' it is drawn into the same dynamic of other Eucharistic Prayers, namely of memorial thanksgiving and intercession.²⁴ It is a condensation of past, present and future. In EP RII (with its counterpart R1), reconciliation and conversion act as 'particular lenses to narrate and remember the whole economy of salvation which culminates in the whole mystery of Christ.'²⁴ This brings us to the second question:

If we consider tone and tempo, how does conversion

occur?

Clearly, as both Prefaces indicate, the action of the Spirit in 'conversion' is on the minds and hearts of people. Only from there can right relationships be restored. For our purposes, I would like to focus on one way in which this occurs, namely through the role that the structure of the Prefaces and their proclamation have in transforming moral awareness.

As we have seen, each Preface has its specific theme and focus. But, as with a poem or a piece of literature, one can ask what is their peculiar *tone*? Each has its own 'voice' which is carried by the images, language, and sentence structure that give each Prayer its own cadence and rhythm, revealing and creating an affective state in the participants. And allied to this, particularly in language that is meant to be publicly proclaimed, what is the role of *tempo* in that process? We will consider this first.

In EP RI, the 'elegant and poetic' style of the original French 'translated well into Latin', in Roll's view, but not into German.²⁵ However, it does seem to have been captured in the English translation. While there are no triadic patterns, contrasts and alliteration as in EP RII, the unbroken sentences of the English translation assist in giving it a 'lyrical' movement.²⁶ As it is read aloud, one can detect a pattern of ebb and flow in its 'music.' For instance, in Paragraph 2, (L.10-15), the sentence structure suggests a tempo of *rallentando* as it moves from God's constancy and mercy to our trust in divine forgiveness. In that same Paragraph, the divine 'spurring' to possess 'a more abundant life' creates an anticipation that is answered in Paragraph 3. In this next paragraph (L. 16-21), the sentence structure suggests a pace of *accelerando* as it moves towards its climax, namely that 'abundant life' is only possible because of God's fidelity. In tracing the effects of conversion ('turning back to you in spirit') in hope, desire and trust, the same Paragraph 4 (L. 22-28) resumes the *rallentando* movement, closing with 'entrust themselves more fully to the Holy Spirit.' There is, then, a quick shift into Paragraph 5 towards a crescendo with its 'strong images of joy and praise leading into the Sanctus.'²⁷

Again, the slight quickening of pace in the climax in Paragraph 3 is reinforced by the closing image and its tone. It is one of intimacy and security, namely, a constantly renewed (by reflecting on the history of the Covenant) 'bond of love so tight that it cannot be undone' (L. 21). This is not about not having freedom of choice (that we have no say in the matter). It is rather that, no matter how fickle and wayward we are in observing the Covenant, 'nothing...can ever come between us and separate us from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8: 39).

Taken together, the language, images, sentence structure, cadence and rhythm (sound-feeling) go to make up the emotional texture and mood created and conveyed by the Preface of EP RI. The overall *tone*

conveyed is one of security and reassurance. The *tempo* suggested by its structure enhances this. It a renewed sense of confidence that God, rich in mercy, is truly our rock ('Gibraltar of love') as one commentator suggests.²⁸

On the other hand, there is a different affective texture and *tempo* in EP RII. It is marked by tripartite rhythms, alliteration, antitheses and images that act as rhetorical devices which, in their very performance, tend to create a sense of peace. The contrast between enemies /dialogue, adversaries/join hands people/meet together with the triple binaries of hatred/love, revenge/forgiveness and discord/mutual respect are so phrased that there is an interfusion of form and content. As Roll notes 'the text embodies what it states' and the repetition of these tripartite rhythms brings 'a certain resolution of tension and a coming to rest.'²⁹ To convey this tone and highlight contrasting images, its contrapuntal structure and the musicality of the 'triplets', the overall 'pace' of the Preface is meant to be, not that of ebb and flow (as in EP RI), but something more even, closer to *legato*. With a constant forward movement, the 'dissonance' of counterpoint, as in music, must come to a final resolution in consonance. So too, the structure of EP P II is such that the effect on the hearer resembles the end of a piece of music in which an harmonic cadence brings a sense of resolution and repose.³⁰

These rhetorical strategies are aimed at deepening the conviction that frames the Eucharistic Prayer itself, namely, that reconciliation and peace are beyond human capacities. They are gifts. God through the Spirit alone can bring these about through the conversion of mind and heart. In this Preface, the unity of form and content, the interplay of tone and *tempo*, the resolution of opposites, the coming to rest as in a piece of music – all evoke a sense of hope, peace and renewed confidence in the listener. These may well explain the appeal of EP RII.

Conclusion

We often see the old theological adage *Lex Orandi lex credendi*. Don Saliers adds the phrase *lex bene operandi* – 'the order of prayer is the order of believing is the order of doing well.'³¹ Our investigation has been tantamount to probing that added phrase in a specific context. Four things stand out. First, while acknowledging the centrality of the individual, both Eucharistic Prayers of Reconciliation, as mirrored in their Prefaces, see the person, sin and conversion as essentially *relational*. In this, they mirror a shift in Catholic consciousness about the scope and nature of the moral life.

Second, as with Bartolomé de las Casas, moral conversion takes place generally over a period of time from a range of influences, especially the Liturgy.

Third, and allied with this, our investigation has revealed the careful and balanced design of EP RI and

RII – theologically, ethically, liturgically and rhetorically. How they 'touch' people clearly, but not exclusively, will also depend on human factors. For instance, there is role of the central characters in the liturgical 'drama'. Of particular importance is the leadership of the Celebrant of the Eucharist in pastoral and rhetorical sensitivity.

Finally, these two Eucharistic Prayers, in their structure and affective texture, have the capacity to shape and change minds and hearts. In other words, to do what the Liturgy is meant to do – to bring into reality what it signifies.³²

References

1. Henceforth EP RI and EP RII for easy reference. The English texts are under Endnote 32.
2. Walter Conn, (1986). *Christian Conversion*. (New Jersey: Paulist, 1986), 1.
3. Donald L. Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist.,1998), 34.
4. R. N. Fragomeni, 'Conversion', In Downey, M. (Ed.), *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press., 1993), 230-235, at 234.
5. *Ibid.*, 234 seq. Drawing on the work of Jung, Gelpi argues that Lonergan's model of conversion should be modified to include 'affective' or 'psychic' conversion. Here, a person takes responsibility for their emotional development along lines that are psychologically sound. Affective conversion, then, involves identifying and rejecting biased archetypes, scenarios or paradigms that distort one's emotional responses and affective life. The 'raising of consciousness' concerning, for instance, racism or sexism, is an effort to reconfigure one's perception and to restructure one's emotions. See William Spohn, S.J., 'Notes on Moral Theology, 1990: Passions and Principles,' *Theological Studies*, 52: 1 (1991), 69-87 at 80.
6. The discussion here is indebted to Brian V Johnstone, C.Ss.R., 'The Dynamics of Conversion' in Dennis J Billy, C.Ss.R & Donna Lynn Orsuto, *Spirituality and Morality: Integrating Prayer and Action* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1996), 32-48.
7. Johnstone, 'The Dynamics of Conversion', 34.
8. Johnstone, 'The Dynamics of Conversion', 34.
9. Johnstone, 'The Dynamics of Conversion,' 34.
10. Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience*, 232.
11. *Ibid.*, 31.
12. *Ibid.*, 31.
13. Joyce Ann Zimmerman, 'EP RII: The Mystagogical Implications', in Edward Foley et al [Eds.], *A Commentary on the Order of Mass and The Roman Missal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 503-508 at 503.
14. Dennis J. Billy, C.SsR., and James Keating, *The Way of Mystery: Eucharist and Moral Living* (New York: Mahwah: Paulist, 2006), 63.
15. Billy and Keating, 71.
16. Billy and Keating, 73.
17. Richard E. McCarron, 'EP RI and II: History of the Latin Text and Rite', in Edward Foley et al [Eds.], *A Commentary on the Order of Mass and The Roman Missal* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 453-463 at 463.

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17. It is clear that, as Foley notes, 'the reconciling mission is not only a trinitarian work but also a revelation of the trinitarian essence.'
18. Edward Foley, 'EP RI: The Mystagogical Implications', in Edward Foley et al (Eds), *A Commentary*, 485-490, at 489.
19. Roll, 'EP RI Theology...' 465.
21. Richard E. McCarron, 'EP RI and II: History of the Latin Text and Rite', in Edward Foley et al [Eds.], *A Commentary*, 453-463 at 457.
22. Zimmerman suggests that by starting with the open acknowledgement of sin in terms of grave violations of both human and divine 'rights', EP RII might function as a sort of 'truth and reconciliation commission' for the worshipping community that opens the way to reconciliation. See Joyce Ann Zimmerman, 'EP RII: The Mystagogical Implications' Edward Foley et al [Eds.], *A Commentary*, 503-508 at 503.
23. 'God's gracious mercy is poured out in secular matters as well as religious, on private relationships as well as world crises, and on persons without regard for their individual characteristics or circumstances. God works in the present no less than in the past.' Roll, 'EP RII Theology of the Latin Text and Rite', 493-4.
24. McCarron, 'EP RI and II: History of...' 463.
25. McCarron, 'EP RI and II: History of..' 457.
26. Susan K Roll, 'EP RI Theology of the Latin Text and Rite', in Edward Foley et al (Eds), *A Commentary*, 465-471, at 465.
27. Roll, 465.
28. Roll, 467.
29. Edward Foley, 'EP RI: The Mystagogical Implications', in Edward Foley et al (Eds), *A Commentary*, 485-490, at 488.
30. Roll, 'EP RII Theology of the Latin Text and Rite', 493.
30. In comparing the new 'literal' translation with its earlier 'dynamic equivalent', one cannot but notice, at times, the difference and wonder: which is better when measured by rhetorical and stylistic standards? At times, the old EP R II version has a 'flow' that is more satisfying to the ear. The phrasing of the antitheses is rhythmically and musically more balanced. It is worth reading the old version aloud: 'Your Spirit changes our hearts: enemies begin to speak to one another, those who were estranged join hands in friendship and nations seek the way of peace together.' How does the abruptness in 'peoples seek to meet together' compare with 'and nations seek the way of peace together'? Or which is more persuasive: 'we know it is you who turn our mind to thoughts of peace' compared to 'we know that by testing us you change our hearts to prepare them for reconciliation' or 'when understanding puts an end to strife' compared with 'and discord is changed to mutual respect'?
31. Don Saliers, 'Liturgy and Ethics'. *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7: 2, Fall 1979, 139-171, at 139.
32. These renditions of the ICEL Translation are taken from Edward Foley et al [Eds], *A Commentary*, 442-3