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Say Something Theological: The Student Journal of Loyola Marymount University Theological Studies

Lonergan's Concept of Conversion: A Path to Antiracism

By Laura Boysen-Aragon

Abstract: Racism is Christian America's original sin. Our country's foundation was built with the hands of more than ten million kidnapped and enslaved persons. The Catholic Church was complicit as enslavers and beneficiaries of enslaved labor as well as the marginalizing of Black Catholics. Given the limited attention that has been given to these origin stories in our country and our church, it is unsurprising that systems of racism perpetuate today. Catholic theologian and ethicist Bryan Massingale provides a definition of racism as an ethos that lives on in U.S. society. Since the murder of George Floyd, a heightened awareness of anti-Black racism has resurfaced in the United States. It is obvious that change is necessary. As Catholics we are called to actively live out the gospel of Jesus Christ, to repent and change the way we live, think, and love. Our tradition provides tools for approaching this change. The work of Jesuit philosopher and theologian, Bernard Lonergan and his student Robert Doran, identified concepts of religious, moral, intellectual, and psychic conversion which provide a framework for profound personal and institutional change that the Catholic Church and Catholic individuals can use in the work of antiracism. Lonergan's theoretical framework in conversation with activist-scholarship of Black Catholic theologians like Massingale and M. Shawn Copeland provide a contextual starting point for individual Catholics and the Catholic Church to better understand the Black Catholic experience and thereby discern what is necessary for change, ultimately leading to solidarity, active compassion, and an antiracist Catholic Church.

Key Words: Catholic Church; Racism; Bernard Lonergan; Conversion; United States.

"In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist."

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- Angela Y. Davis¹

“A religion that promotes self-transcendence to the point, not merely of justice, but of self-sacrificing love, will have a redemptive role in human society inasmuch as such love can undo the mischief of decline and restore the cumulative process of progress.”

- Bernard Lonergan²

In the months following George Floyd’s murder under the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer, an awareness of anti-Black racism resurfaced in the United States. In response, Pope Francis said, “[w]e cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.”³ Jesus’s message of the reign of God calls both individuals and the church to live up to Lonergan’s challenge to “have a redemptive role in human society.” Racism is a Catholic issue and one of the greatest examples of human decline.

Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984) was a Jesuit philosopher and theologian whose life’s work focused on elevating Christian philosophy and theology to meet the challenges of his time.⁴ Lonergan developed the concepts of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion in the belief that to be authentic, humans must achieve self-transcendence through a continual process of going beyond the boundaries of one’s knowledge and interests—to move from “false to true, from the evil to the good” to set “one’s life on a radically different course.”⁵ Lonergan’s theory of conversion can help individuals and institutions live authentically and in turn address one of the utmost sins of Lonergan’s time and our own: racism. In

¹ “Anti-racism and Criminal Justice Reform Resources,” UC Santa Cruz Institute for Social Transformation, accessed January 9, 2023, <https://transform.ucsc.edu/anti-racism-resources/>.

² Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 55.

³ Gerard O’Connell, “Pope Francis on the death of George Floyd: We cannot tolerate racism and claim to defend life,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, June 3, 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/06/03/pope-francis-death-george-floyd-we-cannot-tolerate-racism-and-claim-defend-life>.

⁴ Michael McCarthy, *Authenticity as Self-Transcendence: The Enduring Insights of Bernard Lonergan* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), viii.

⁵ Robert M. Doran “What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean by ‘Conversion’?” (lecture, University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto, July 15, 2011), 3-4, <https://lonerganresource.com/pdf/lectures/What%20Does%20Bernard%20Lonergan%20Mean%20by%20Conversion.pdf>.

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this paper, I will begin with a definition and description of racism in the United States. My focus is on anti-Black racism because of its unique roots in the U.S. institution of chattel slavery and the Catholic Church's complicity in slavery. I will describe Lonergan's concept of conversion and explain how it can be an instrument for both individuals and the Catholic Church to recognize and respond to the sin and system of racism in the United States. Lonergan emphasizes that conversion is an active and continual process, and as Angela Davis acknowledges in her quotation above, so, too, is the necessary approach to racism.

I am writing this paper from the social location of a White, cisgender, straight Catholic woman and U.S. citizen. I have some hesitations about focusing a paper on antiracism on the work of a White male theologian, but as the work of antiracism is for White people to do, I hope that the common point of origin will be helpful.

Racism in these Christian United States

Racism is often narrowly (and conveniently) defined as blatant acts of violence and bigotry as seen on the news. Images of masked KKK members, racial slurs, or segregated swimming pools come to mind. Racism has historically been defined by the White majority in the U.S. as individual actions perpetrated against people of color on the basis of their skin color. But non-Whites have long understood that racism is more insidious than those deliberate individual acts. Theologian and ethicist Bryan Massingale defines racism as "a *cultural* phenomenon... a way of interpreting human color differences that pervades the collective convictions, conventions, and practices of American life. Racism functions as an ethos, as the animating spirit of U.S. society, which lives on despite observable changes and assumes various incarnations in different historical circumstances."⁶

In the United States, racism is everywhere. Our country's foundation was built with the hands of more than ten million enslaved persons, and the Catholic Church was complicit as enslavers and beneficiaries of enslaved labor. As such, racism is the water in which we continue to swim. Likewise, the origins of Christianity in this country have roots in racism. Frederick Douglass spoke of two forms of Christianity: the slaveholding "Christianity of America," which enabled and supported the

⁶ Bryan M. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 15.

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enslavement, rape, and torture of millions of Black people; and the “Christianity of Christ,”⁷ which is diametrically opposed to those sins. Indeed, the conversion of enslaved persons to Christianity, thus enabling their salvation, was used as justification for the 400-year slave trade and enslavement of Africans in the United States.⁸

Racism is, in fact, America’s, and more specifically White Christian America’s, original sin. White people often become defensive in discussing racism, yet as Christians we acknowledge the idea of original sin and recognize that we are all affected by sin. We understand that sin, like grace, is mediated socially. We are shaped by the sin of our families, cultures, and societies.⁹ What we know and understand becomes normative, and those who are different become “the other.” Political and economic structures are built for the benefit of the powerful while the disadvantaged and oppressed have a knee on their neck. Black liberation theologian James Cone frequently wrote and spoke about this problem; while White Christians recognize their sinful condition, the power they hold, and the injustice that results, “they find it nearly impossible to do anything to relinquish their advantage.”¹⁰ We continue the sin by taking advantage of White privilege and perpetuating unjust racist systems and institutions.

Although the public conversation about race was reinvigorated in the U.S. following the murder of George Floyd, the conversation from the ambo reflected very little change. As I sat through mass, I heard no mention of White supremacy, White privilege, systemic racism, or the murder of Black bodies at the hands of law enforcement. I heard no prayers for the six holy Black men and women on the long path to sainthood who lived out their holiness in the context of the United States, nor any prayers indicating that Black lives matter. The silence was deafening.

In the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishop’s most recent pastoral letter against racism, “Open Wide Our Hearts,” the bishops acknowledge the sin of racism and call for a “conversion of heart.”¹¹ In fact, the bishops mention the word “conversion” thirteen times throughout their letter, without defining

⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 73, 71.

⁸ Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 96.

⁹ Thomas P. Rausch, *Systematic Theology: A Roman Catholic Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 144.

¹⁰ James Cone, “Theology’s Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 55, nos. 3-4 (2001): 11.

¹¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Open Wide our Hearts: The Enduring Call of Love,” November 2018, 7, https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts_0.pdf.

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the word or explaining how it can occur, and without naming the root of the problem: White supremacy, White privilege, and systemic racism. The bishops are correct to recognize the importance of conversion for both individuals and institutions, including and especially the Catholic Church; but we must look beyond the perfunctory description from the bishops to understand what this conversion really means.

Massingale explains that conversion can be the translation of “repent,” or the Greek word *metanoia*. “Repentance or conversion is a call to change our ways of living, thinking and loving. Repentance summons us to undertake a deep change.”¹² Our Catholic faith calls us to repent and believe in the gospel to prepare for the reign of God.¹³ Conversion is foundational to Christian living and is required to receive and prepare for the reign of God. Jesus’s mission was proclaiming the reign of God, or “God’s saving power breaking into history in a new way.”¹⁴ Jesus lived out God’s reign in his ministry. As Christians, we are called to follow the example set by Jesus. Discipleship requires us to actively live the gospels, to repent, to undergo the deep change of conversion.

Conversion is at the root of our faith, but as applied by the slaveholding “Christianity of America,” it is also at the root of the system of racism in U.S. society. In Albert Raboteau’s *Slave Religion*, he chronicles the role of conversion in creating and sustaining the system of chattel slavery in the U.S. that is the foundation upon which our current-day racist society was built. As mentioned previously, it was the conversion of enslaved people to Christianity that was a justification for slavery in the U.S. Gomes Eannes De Azurara, a fifteenth century Portuguese chronicler, rationalized that “for though their bodies were now brought into some subjection, that was a small matter in comparison to their souls, which would now possess true freedom for evermore.”¹⁵ This rationalization was repeated for “over four centuries by successive generations of Christian apologists for slavery.”¹⁶ This view of evangelizing at all costs was a perversion of the faith, and the justification breaks down quickly as Raboteau states that some philosophers and missionaries who acknowledged sin in the atrocities of

¹² Bryan M. Massingale, “Jesus Loves You. Can You Believe It?” *U.S. Catholic*, February 24, 2022, <https://uscatholic.org/articles/202202/jesus-loves-you-can-you-believe-it/>.

¹³ Mark 1:15 (NRSV).

¹⁴ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 81.

¹⁵ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 96.

¹⁶ Raboteau, 97.

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chattel slavery had to repeatedly remind enslavers that “black people were equal to whites in the sight of God.”¹⁷

As Catholics, we believe that we are all created in the image of God or *imago Dei*: Black or White, woman or man. Racism denies this divine recognition in others. Just as we now understand that racism is not confined to the blatant and individual acts of racism, but rather it consumes our entire U.S. society, so, too, is conversion necessary at a systemic, institutional, *and* individual level.

Lonerger and Authenticity

Conversion, self-transcendence, and authenticity are causally linked and are central to Lonergan’s thought. Lonergan recognized the struggle between authenticity and unauthenticity as essential to the human condition, and conversion and the pursuit of authenticity as essential to Christian life.¹⁸ As we grow as individuals, we aspire to become our authentic selves; as we grow as Christians, we search for an authentic relationship with God and an authentic faith tradition that evangelizes through a “genuine dialogue” with modern society and culture, that acts as an agent for positive change in the world, as did Jesus.¹⁹ Created in God’s image and likeness, we are drawn to God’s mystery and seek to become authentically who God created us to be. It is in knowing oneself and in living our authentic truth of goodness and love that we live out God’s reign. When a person or institution is inauthentic, conversion is necessary.²⁰ Lonergan makes a distinction between minor authenticity which relates to the individual and major authenticity which relates to the tradition itself.²¹

Massingale speaks of authenticity as requiring “the courage to engage in strenuous diligence, relentless self-examination, and ever-deepening and demanding levels of conversion.” For individuals,

¹⁷ Raboteau, 100.

¹⁸ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 130.

¹⁹ Rausch, *Systematic Theology*, 209-10.

²⁰ Bernard Lonergan, “Reality, Myth, Symbol,” in *Myth, Symbol, and Reality*, ed. Alan M. Olson (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 36.

²¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 80.

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authenticity “is the fruit of human cooperation with divine grace,”²² and he asks how one can tell that they are not followers of an unauthentic religious tradition. Just as conversion is essential for individuals, our church and faith tradition must also engage in critical self-examination and conversion. Massingale states that the authenticity and integrity of the faith itself is compromised because dominant theologies (which tend to be White theologies), through “false assertions of universality and normativity, [have] acted in collusion with forces of social oppression and injustice.”²³ Racism “deforms us into an alien identity radically at odds with authentic Christian belief.”²⁴ Racism prevents authentic Christianity and prevents us from being authentic Christians. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. warned of the risk of the Christian tradition losing its authenticity, resulting in the loss of loyalty by millions of followers and dismissal as “an irrelevant social club with no meaning,” unless the church recaptures the spirit of the early church that listened to their call to obey God rather than humans and thus “transformed the mores of society” in alignment with the example set by Jesus.²⁵ And in many ways, his warning has come to pass as more and more Catholics stop going to mass or even continue to separate themselves from the church.²⁶ The Catholic Church’s failure to address racism in an active and meaningful way continues to threaten its authenticity, relevance, and ultimate existence.

Lonergan and Conversion

Lonergan identifies three types of conversion – religious, moral, and intellectual. His student, Robert Doran, has developed a fourth: psychic conversion. Lonergan situates his discussion of conversion in the context of horizons. A horizon is “the limit of one’s field of vision.”²⁷ Such fields of

²² Bryan M. Massingale, “Black Theology and Lonergan: The Challenge of Authenticity,” (presentation, the Lonergan on the Edge Conference, Marquette University, September 22, 2012,) 6-7, https://lonerganresource.com/pdf/contributors/LOE-2012-12b_Bryan_Massingale.pdf.

²³ Massingale, “Black Theology and Lonergan,” 10.

²⁴ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 26.

²⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” *Christian Century* 80, no. 24 (June 12, 1963).

²⁶ Alejandra Molina, “Amid Black Exodus, Young Catholics are Pushing the Church to Address Racism,” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 19, 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/amid-black-exodus-young-catholics-are-pushing-church-address-racism>.

²⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 235.

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vision are not static, but rather vary based on one's perspective and where one is standing with respect to the horizon. Beyond the horizon there are blind spots, things that cannot be seen.²⁸ Horizons define the limits of one's knowledge and interests and can change depending on one's education, personal development, social background and environment, and the era in which one lives.²⁹ I would also add race and gender to this list of factors. For many White people in the U.S., White supremacy and systemic racism are blind spots. Because White Americans' perspective is defined by our race, it can be hard to see beyond our own privileged experience. Conversion is a movement into a new horizon beyond one's current field of vision, an "about-face" resulting in a new beginning. The change created by a conversion is not static, but rather for almost everyone it must be "continually renewed."³⁰ Because systemic racism infects nearly every institution in society, the work of antiracism is continual.

Religious Conversion

Religious conversion is conversion from "radical lovelessness" to being loved unconditionally and thus loving unconditionally.³¹ This love includes love of God, love of others, and love of community. While religious conversion may begin as a change of heart, ultimately it is a "total transformation of one's entire life" such that every action and utterance is strengthened by grace.³² Like Augustine, Lonergan differentiates between operative grace, or religious conversion, and cooperative grace, or the effect of the conversion and the movement toward a "full and complete transformation of the whole of one's living and feeling, one's thoughts, words, deeds and omissions."³³ When we are unconditionally loved by God, and we can live in that state of love, we love others and act out of that state of love. Love can be transformative when a White person intentionally places themselves into the

²⁸ Doran, "What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean," 3.

²⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 236.

³⁰ Doran, "What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean," 4.

³¹ Doran, 7.

³² Mark Miller, *The Quest for God and the Good Life* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013), 154.

³³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241.

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racist world of the oppressed to “personally feel some of the pain.”³⁴ Religious conversion can lead to moral conversion.

Moral Conversion

Moral conversion is a continual process of changing the criterion of one’s decisions “from satisfactions to values...opting for the truly good.”³⁵ Lonergan is not speaking of moral perfection. This process requires us to continue to recognize and remedy individual and group bias, to listen to and learn from others, and to evaluate our responses and values.³⁶ Moral conversion speaks to the decision, but Lonergan recognizes that deciding is only one step, “doing is another.”³⁷ As part of moral conversion, we must ask “is it all just for me?” or “is it all for a set of goals that transcend me?”³⁸ Decisions must be based on what is truly good, or what promotes the reign of God in the world. What would the historical Jesus have done in this situation?

Personal responsibility exists in the context of collective responsibility; we exist within community, and our decisions impact that community and our world in addition to us as individuals.³⁹ This is the decision that James Cone says White people refuse to make: to give up their power. White people will denounce “blatant racial injustice,” but are unwilling to give up White social dominance and privilege, so White supremacy continues.⁴⁰ A world in which this privilege is surrendered would be different. Decisions would be based on the recognition that racism is everywhere in every system in the United States. Such decision would prevent the four-lane highway from going through the poor neighborhood displacing residents where the land is the cheapest; such a decision would make sure that the historically underrepresented person of color would be hired for the job. This is a shift from the nationalistic individualism that defines so much of the U.S. to a system where housing, healthcare, enough healthy food, quality education, jobs with living wages, childcare, and clean air and water are

³⁴ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 118.

³⁵ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240.

³⁶ Doran, “What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean,” 14.

³⁷ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 240.

³⁸ Doran, “What Does Bernard Lonergan Mean,” 15.

³⁹ Doran, 15, 18.

⁴⁰ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 41.

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guaranteed for everyone—even at the cost of our nationalistic compulsion to make more and more money. This is opting for the truly good because that is what is required for the reign of God. The pursuit of the good can lead one to seek true knowing.

Intellectual Conversion

Intellectual conversion is a “radical clarification” or an “about-face” which eliminates “an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge.”⁴¹ Lonergan differentiates between the sensory world, which he calls the world of immediacy, and the world of meaning, which includes the lived experiences of a cultural community and the continuously evaluated judgments of community. As we see today, so many people accept as truth what they see on the news or social media, or their narrow-lived experience. They fail to question, reflect, verify, or consider contradictory or new insight. Theologian and student of Lonergan, M. Shawn Copeland offers the African American saying, “a heap see, but a few know,” which warns of judgments or knowledge based on what is only visible on the surface.⁴² Rather, knowing is a process toward self-transcendence and a composite of “experiencing, understanding, judging and believing.”⁴³ It requires asking both questions of intelligence, “what is it?” and questions of reflection, “is that really so?”⁴⁴ It is acknowledging White privilege and the benefits White people have enjoyed to the direct detriment of Black people. It is walking into a prison and seeing a sea of Black and Brown bodies who have been convicted of crimes and peeling back the layers of systemic failures and injustices that have disproportionately affected their communities from housing to municipal zoning, to schools, to health care, to environmental policy, to financial services. It is seeing how these factors have created a carceral system that disproportionately imprisons people of color and increasingly profits from this mass incarceration. It is recognizing that my success as a White woman is not only the result of hard work,

⁴¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238.

⁴² M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 175, fn.81.

⁴³ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 238-239.

⁴⁴ Doran, “What does Bernard Lonergan Mean,” 8.

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but also the benefit of my privilege from a system that sees my experience and my skin color as normative.⁴⁵

Psychic Conversion

Lonergan student Robert Doran identified an insufficiency in Lonergan's three types of conversion. The idea of psychic conversion began to emerge following Doran's intense and interesting dream activity.⁴⁶ Psychic conversion is the discovery of the link and internal communication between (1) understanding, which is grounded in the future, and (2) state of mind or mood, which tends to be a result of the past.⁴⁷ Doran states that psychic conversion

establishes or reestablishes a link that should never have been broken, the link between the intentional operations of understanding, judgment, and decision, and the tidal movement that begins before consciousness, emerges into consciousness in the form of dream images and affects, continues to permeate intentional operations in the form of feelings, and reaches beyond these operations and states in the interpersonal relations and commitments that constitute families, communities and religions.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ For additional discussion of the many manifestations of White privilege, see Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, July/August 1989, 10-12, https://psychology.umbc.edu/files/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf; and Bryan M. Massingale, "The Assumptions of White Privilege and What We Can Do About It: Amy Cooper knew exactly what she was doing. We all do. And that's the problem," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 1, 2020, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/assumptions-white-privilege-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>.

⁴⁶ Robert M. Doran, "Two Ways of Being Conscious: The Notion of Psychic Conversion," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 4.

⁴⁷ Doran, "Two Ways," 6.

⁴⁸ Doran, 7.

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Psychic conversion is intimately related to the Ignatian idea of discernment,⁴⁹ and asks the question, “how do I feel?”⁵⁰ in which feelings can be understood to link symbols and values.⁵¹ Psychic conversion establishes the link between the two “ways of being conscious” that Lonergan identifies as sensibility and intellectuality. Sensibility is our senses, imagination, desires, fears, joys, and sadness. Intellectuality is our conscious inquiry leading to understanding, speaking, weighing evidence, judging, deciding, choosing, and acting.⁵² Massingale tells us that one “cannot understand black people if one does not understand the pervasive sense of struggle that informs their lives and identity.”⁵³ Psychic conversion allows for this understanding; discernment can allow one to sympathize and begin to feel how others have felt. But conversion is an active process. Sympathy must lead to solidarity—a deep conviction that the struggles of others are deeply bound up in our own⁵⁴—and solidarity must lead to active compassion.

The Praxis of Conversion

Bernard Lonergan’s theory of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion, complemented with Robert Doran’s idea of psychic conversion, provides a theoretical framework from which individuals and the Catholic Church can consider the “about-face” necessary to be antiracist. These theories must be used in conversation with the activist-scholarship of Black Catholic theologians, whose lived experience combined with their theological expertise provides the context and creative praxis necessary to affect change.

When asked what White people should do with awareness and knowledge of racism, Bryan Massingale lays out several steps that can lead to conversion: (1) understand the difference between being uncomfortable and being threatened; (2) acknowledge the truth that “[t]he only reason for racism’s persistence is that white people continue to benefit from it” and sit in this discomfort; (3) admit

⁴⁹ Doran, 12.

⁵⁰ Lonergan, “Reality, Myth, Symbol,” 37.

⁵¹ Doran, “Two Ways,” 8.

⁵² Doran, 16.

⁵³ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 21.

⁵⁴ Massingale, *Racial Justice*, 116.

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ignorance and do something about it; (4) recognize racism's conflict with the Catholic Church's commitment to life; and (5) pray.⁵⁵ Massingale calls White Christians to authenticity. He challenges us to recognize our blind spots, eliminate misleading myths, transform our thoughts, feelings and actions, and opt for what is truly good.

Patrick Saint-Jean's book, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice*, provides a month of thought-provoking and at times challenging meditations and reflections in the Ignatian tradition, with the premise that "antiracism is not an optional aspect of spiritual life, but rather that it is essential to becoming all that God calls us to be."⁵⁶ Saint-Jean's process of discernment provides space for an "about-face" as he walks participants through experiencing, understanding, judging, and believing. In the silence of prayer and contemplation, we can occupy the liminal space between sensibility and intellectuality and ask ourselves how we feel about our complicity in systemic racism and what we will do to change.

M. Shawn Copeland describes conversion as the embodied praxis of Christian discipleship and eucharistic solidarity. In the eucharist, we "strive to become what we have received and to do what we are being made."⁵⁷ We strive for authenticity. Eucharistic solidarity challenges us to live out the demands of discipleship in the face of White supremacy and injustice. Everyone assembles at the table Jesus prepares, and as a community of faith, we are made new; "his Eucharistic banquet re-orders us, remembers us, restores us, and makes us one."⁵⁸ There is no "other" in the eucharist.

Much of Lonergan's work on conversion relates to the individual, but the conversion of many individuals leads to societal change. Lonergan acknowledges that conversion is "existential, intensely personal, utterly intimate;" yet, it does not occur in a solitary vacuum. Conversion of many can sustain and transform a community where people "help one another in working out the implications and fulfilling the promise of their new life." Once communal, conversion can become historical and be passed from generation to generation, from culture to culture while adapting for differing circumstances,

⁵⁵ Massingale, "The Assumptions of White Privilege."

⁵⁶ Patrick St. Jean, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice: A Month of Meditations with Ignatius of Loyola* (Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2021), 12.

⁵⁷ Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom*, 127.

⁵⁸ Copeland, 128.

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situations, and eras.⁵⁹ The Second Vatican Council represented a time when the Catholic Church made an “about-face” and transcended to greater authenticity. The Church’s current synodal process offers a similar opportunity for conversion. Conversion is not only for our time but can and should have a sustaining impact on future generations.

Lonergan’s theory of religious, moral, and intellectual conversion, along with Doran’s idea of psychic conversion, provides a framework for addressing racism that is within White Catholic tradition. The work of Black Catholic theologians embodies the active, continual, and lived process of conversion beyond the theoretical to the practical. Racism is one of the most devastating viruses plaguing the United States and the Catholic Church. It is beyond time for White people and the U.S. Catholic Church to release their death-grip on White dominance and privilege in exchange for compassion and active solidarity. Antiracism is essential to our personal authenticity and the authenticity of the Catholic Church. The Church must promote self-transcendence to the point of self-sacrificing love to have a “redemptive role in human society.”⁶⁰ It is time to repent and live the gospel.

⁵⁹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 130-131.

⁶⁰ Lonergan, 55.

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