Passages and Patterns of Paschal Faith

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The Roman Catholic Rite for the Christian Initiation of
Adults has been a marvelous instrument for facilitating
liturgical renewal throughout the church. Its culmination
in the celebration of the paschal feast has contributed
mightily to making the Easter vigil the primary liturgical
event of the church year. The rite has also helped us to
recover the emphasis on the unitary nature of the sacra-
ments of initiation: baptism-confirmation-communion, all
celebrated in sequence at the paschal feast. The RCIA can
also provide us a perspective from which to examine the
formation and transformation of paschal faith. What makes
it such a useful perspective for such an examination is
that there is such a clear line of differentiation between
the before and after of adult initiation, and the term we
most often use to make that line of demarcation is
conversion. Before the sacraments of initiation comes the
training of the catechumenate, climaxing in the Lenten
cycle prior to the paschal feast. After Easter comes the
mystagogy of post-baptismal catechesis, unpacking the
meaning of the sacramental life of the church for the new
converts to enable them to reflect on the mysteries they
are now experiencing from within the full fellowship of
the redeemed.

What is the difference between the before and after in
adult initiation? One difference is that the primary
theological question shifts from "How are we saved?" to
"How do we grow?" The question about what saves dominates
the catechesis by which the catechumens are prepared for
their baptism. And the answer to the question comes not
so much in the form of doctrinal instruction, but rather
through preparation for and participation in the sacra-
ments of initiation from within the heart of the Easter
vigil. Here in pure culture is the experience of God's
saving action in history, in our history--not only in the
born-again experience of the initiates, but in the experi-
ence of the entire community as we celebrate the passage
from darkness to light, from death to life, from sinner to
saved.

In mystagogy the question shifts from "How are we saved?" to "How do we grow?" The shift in focus is from justification to sanctification, from being born again to growing up to God. Some of us have been trained to be guarded about even asking the question of sanctification, much less providing trustable answers. Luther taught us well to keep our eyes focused clearly on the promises of God and let the matter of growing in faith to the power of the Holy Spirit working within us and on us as a potter works on a lump of clay. So concerned was Luther that faith be understood as gift of God and creation of the Holy Spirit that he defined faith as a mathematical point, meaning that faith as a human quality or act was beyond even phenomenological description. For all of his greatness, Luther was simply wrong about some things, and one of them was his notion that the experience of faith is not subject to empirical analysis. Though faith development theory would have been rejected by Luther precisely on these grounds, I am going to make it the head of the corner in my remarks about how we grow in a faith that is rooted deeply in the paschal mystery.

Faith Development

Psychologists these days rely primarily on developmental models for their interpretation of personal growth. Personal growth includes growth in faith, as well as in cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions of the personality. The heuristic value of developmental models is that they provide us with tools for a longitudinal as well as a cross-sectional analysis of faith. Both the formation and the transformation of faith take place within the context of the life cycle. As a result, there will be obvious structural differences in the faith of an infant, an adolescent, and a mature adult. That simple observation has profound implications for how we understand the praxis of initiation rites, the meaning of conversion, and the instruction of converts in the sacramental life of the church.

There are two rather simple observations that I wish to make about paschal faith from the perspective of faith development. One is that the formation of paschal faith can begin in infancy and be transformed throughout the life cycle according to a pattern of human development.

Thus the adult rite of initiation ought not to be regarded as normative in the practice of the Church if it precludes or denigrates the rites of infant baptism and confirmation as presently practiced by most mainline churches of Christendom. The second observation, building on the first, is that conversion is a process rather than an event, a process that is developmental in nature.

Historically, Christian initiation began as a unitary rite of adult initiation, and the RCIA is a worthy attempt to revive that tradition. Very early in Christian history a developmental pattern of initiation, consisting of infant baptism-catechesis-confirmation, emerged as a parallel process that almost completely overshadowed the adult rite. Already in 1946 Gregory Dix raised the question about which of the two should be considered normative in the life of the church. According to Dix, the Church can very well afford infant Baptism, even as the practice in the vast majority of cases provided that it is never allowed to be thought of as normal.[1] Aidan Kavanagh has become the strongest spokesman in a renewed emphasis in Roman Catholicism on the normative nature of adult initiation. I am assuming that his position is representative of a rather broad ecumenical consensus among liturgical scholars on this point, and I wish to examine it with some care from the perspective of faith development.

Kavanagh argues that the liturgical reforms implemented by the Second Vatican Council establish the solemn initiation done at the paschal vigil as the norm for how a person is to be received into the church.

> The document's purpose is less to give liturgical recipes than to shift the Church's initiatory policy from one conventional norm centering on infant baptism to the more traditional norm centering on adults. Nowhere does the document say this in so many words. If this is not the case, however, then

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1. Dom Gregory Dix, *The Theology of Confirmation in Relation to Baptism* (Philadelphia: Westminster-Dacre Press, 1946) 31.

the document not only makes no sense but is vain and fatuous. Its extensive and sensitive dispositions for gradually incorporating adult converts into communities of faith nowhere suggest that this process should be regarded as the rare exception. On the contrary, from deep within the Roman tradition it speaks of the process presumptively as normative.[2]

Kavanagh insists that a norm refers to the standard according to which a thing is done and not the number of times that it is done. Thus infant baptism may be normal conventional practice as long as those who are engaged in it realize that it departs from the norm as defined by the tradition. Disregarding for the moment the questionable historical judgment that infant baptism is not rooted deeply in the Church's tradition, we continue with Kavanagh's argument.

> Tradition's witness to the baptism of adults as the norm throws infant baptism into perspective as a benign abnormality as long as it is practiced with prudence as an unavoidable pastoral necessity, in situations such as the frail health of the infant, or in response to the earnest desire of Christian parents whose faith is vigorous and whose way of life gives clear promise that their child will develop in the faith of the Church. . . . The data of neither scripture nor tradition can be made to support infant baptism as the pastoral norm. But these same data clearly support the practice as a benign abnormality in the life of a community whose ministry regularly focuses upon the evangelization, catechesis, and initiation of adults of faith into their midst.[3]

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2. Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1978) 46.

3. Kavanagh 109f.

To speak of the abnormality as benign hardly softens the indictment which Kavanagh levels against infant baptism. That which is abnormal ought to be eliminated wherever possible. Kavanagh says nothing about how a parish priest is to determine what constitutes frail health or how to determine if the faith of parents is vigorous enough to allow the baptism of their infant, but it is obvious that there are enormous ramifications in his position for the conventional and, I think, traditional practice of Christian initiation by means of infant baptism.

What is gained by shifting the emphasis to adult initiation is the rich experience of conversion, which calls for a transformation of heart as well as intellect. The shift in emphasis also solves the thorny problem of how to speak meaningfully about faith in relation to baptism. Proclamation of the gospel precedes the baptism of adults, and the classical definition of faith as knowledge, assent, and trust makes sense out of their experience of initiation. Are infants capable of paschal faith? They surely are not capable of the richness of an experience of conversion within the context of the paschal mystery.

It is not obvious why the significant gains that are being made for the Church's renewal through the revival of the ancient catechumenate and rite of adult initiation need to be at the expense of the almost-equally-ancient rites of infant baptism and confirmation. The fact that the early rite of initiation, including the catechumenate, fell into disuse when infant baptism and confirmation became established practices does not mean that the latter should fall into disuse as adult initiation regains the prominence it deserves in a missionary Church. I would argue that the two be regarded as equally valid models for understanding the process by which a Christian is made. A continuum of infant baptism-confirmation assumes that the Christian faith is coterminous with the life cycle and that key developmental stages are milestones in that life cycle: baptism, catechesis, communion, confirmation, marriage, death. An adult initiation rite puts the emphasis on a conversion experience of death and resurrection within the celebration of the paschal mysteries.

The formation of faith is conceived of very differently in these two models. The classical definition for the

Page 10

formation of faith (knowledge-assent-trust) is implied in
the adult initiation model. A developmental understanding
of faith (by stages, as in personality development) is
implied in the infant baptism-catechesis-confirmation
model of initiation. In *Faith Passages and Patterns* I
have attempted to make a developmental view of faith
explicit.[4] It is ironic that in a period when faith
development theory is coming into its own as a sub-
discipline in the study of theology that Kavanagh and
others would have us abandon the structures by which the
Church has nourished and sustained the development of
faith even when there was no conceptual apparatus for
defining faith as a developmental process.

I think one reason so many are attracted to adult
initiation as normative for the Church is because their
theology of faith formation predisposes them to that
choice. Eugene Brand, a Lutheran liturgical scholar who
agrees with Kavanagh that adult initiation should be the
norm for the church, says this about infant baptism:

> Let us state openly that the church risks the Bap-
> tism of infants in the hope and trust that, as they
> become aware of what was done to them, and as they
> encounter the gospel in various ways, the response
> of faith will follow.[5]

Compare that to the faith formation in adult initiation,
which is rich in experience that touches the whole person
in mind, will, and heart. Memory can treasure this moment
of initiation in every tomorrow. None of this is
possible, of course, for infants; one can only hope that
they will be made aware of "what was done to them," as
Brand puts it. Small wonder that adult initiation has
such powerful appeal.

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4. Thomas Droege, *Faith Passages and Patterns*
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

5. Eugene Brand, *Baptism: A Pastoral Perspective*
(Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975) 40.

That appeal is less strong, however, for those who have less than healthy, fully developed egos. What about those who need some assurance that their citizenship in the kingdom of God is not dependent on their capacity to respond appropriately to the proclamation of the gospel and the best catechumenate the church can devise? Such persons need assurance that they have been claimed and named as God's children from the very beginnings of their ego formation and that this claim remains sure in spite of maladaptive ego development.

Only a developmental view of faith matched by a developmental process of initiation can provide the assurance that the promises of God reach back to the earliest beginnings of our humanity, all the way back to the womb and the safety of our mother's breasts. Faith formation begins as a response to the promises of God already then. We are only at the beginning stages of finding formulations which will do justice to the description of faith in its beginnings. The very least we can say is that trust is as basic to the beginnings of faith as it is to the beginnings of the personality, that trust is the foundation of faith and not, as the classical definition suggests, its capstone.

Two Models of Initiation

What we need is not a narrow initiation policy that will make adult initiation normative, but better theological formulations for understanding the formation of faith in both infants and adults. I would argue for two models of Christian initiation, both valid and efficacious, though different in form and function. To insist that adult initiation is normative after seventeen hundred years of Christian history in which infant baptism has been the normal practice simply because adult initiation preceded infant baptism by about two centuries is not a very convincing argument from antiquity. Compelling reasons are needed in order to change a practice that has become traditional (infant baptism as normal practice) for one that is considered to be more appropriate for the present (a unitary rite of adult initiation). The burden of proof is on those who wish to make a change. I do not think the case has been made convincingly.

Page 12

I do not wish anything I have said up to this point to be regarded as an argument against the renewed emphasis, especially in Roman Catholicism, on adult initiation. We all have reason to rejoice at this development. Among other things, the RCIA has once again centered attention on conversion, as is evident in the publication of a superb set of essays in a volume titled *Conversion and the Catechumenate*.[6] Conversion has received surprisingly little theological attention over the centuries. John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards are striking exceptions to this general rule. William James made conversion the core concern of the psychology of religion in the early part of the century, but then it faded once again into the background until Bernard Lonergan made conversion a key concept in his development of the idea of self-transcending subjectivity. I will be using the term in the remaining portion of this essay to describe the transformation of faith that has always been a central concern of mystagogy.

Conversion

We are only baptized once, whether as infants or as adults, but that pattern of dying as an old self and being raised as a new self is one which repeats itself over and over again in the lifelong journey of faith. In the words of Thomas Merton, "We are not converted only once in our lives, but many times; and this endless series of large and small conversions, inner revolutions, leads to our transformation in Christ."[7] Faith development theory can help us to better understand the passages and patterns of this transformation.

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6. *Conversion and the Catechumenate*, ed. Robert Duggan (New York: Paulist Press, 1984).

7. Thomas Merton, Letter published in *Informations Catholiques Internationales* (April 1973), quoted by M. Searle, "Journey of Conversion," in *Worship* 54 (1980): 48f.

I would suppose that for most people the paradigm conversion experience is St. Paul on the road to Damascus, a crisis with immense emotional impact providing a clear demarkation between before and after. This is not only the model for born again Christians, but also a model of what we expect from catechumens. This is the kind of conversion experience William James describes psychologically as that which brings unity to a divided self. St. Paul's experience is also a good illustration of the traditional theological understanding of conversion as an event in which one's life is recentered in Christ. That is how James Fowler understands conversion and, as a result, he makes a sharp distinction between conversion and stage change in faith development. Conversion is an event where the object of one's faith or the content of one's faith changes; stage change is a change in the structure of faith, structure referring to the cognitive and affective capacities of a person at a particular stage of his or her development.

The problem with this understanding of conversion is that it is too narrow and not very helpful for talking about mystagogy. All the emphasis in this traditional way of defining conversion is on what saves and none at all on how we grow. The appropriate theological rubric is justification rather than sanctification and, as Lutherans never tire of saying, that is God's work, not human work. Conversion, so understood, is event and not process. It's an irony that Fowler, whose theory is deeply rooted in the Methodist concern for sanctification, has no way of talking about conversion as a process. For that we must turn to Mark Searle and Walter Conn, both of whom talk about conversion as a journey and use developmental categories to trace the passages and patterns of a paschal faith beginning in baptism but continually in the process of being transformed. Searle is particularly helpful for understanding the passages and Conn the patterns of paschal faith.

The Journey of Conversion

Searle authored a remarkably lucid essay on the journey of conversion a few years ago. In that essay Searle defines conversion as

a form of passage or transition whereby a person may pass through to a new lease on life and enter into a new set of relationships with himself, the world around him, and with life itself. The journey of conversion, then, would be a journey through crisis, using the term crisis here to refer not only to moments of alarm and anxiety but, in the broader sense of any turning point or moment of change. A person who was able to live creatively through such crisis or conversion would progressively become, in St. Paul's phrase, a new creature (2 Cor 5:17).[8]

Any kind of life crisis is a call to conversion, according to Searle, be it situational (serious illness, loss of a job, death of a loved one) or developmental (midlife crisis). There are many such passages or crises in the becoming of faith. Using the metaphor of journey, Searle depicts the passages as dramas in three acts: (1) the setting out, (2) the adventure, and (3) the return.

According to Searle, no one sets out deliberately upon a journey of conversion: he is always called to it, perhaps we had better say, launched upon it, by circumstances outside his control. However we may react or try to cope, the kind of change provoking crisis and calling us to conversion always comes at a time and in a manner not of our choosing.[9] Whatever the nature of the crisis, it brings with it loss of meaning, a sense of chaos, and an inability to continue with things as they are. Images of the desert, of the dark wood and dark tunnels, are expressive of the inner turmoil.

The sense of disillusionment and entering into the darkness marks the beginning of the second stage, which is a time of disorientation, a wilderness period in the journey when we are uprooted from the past and not yet in sight of a secure future. If this is a kind of dying,

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8. Mark Searle, "The Journey of Conversion," *Worship* 54 (1980): 36.

9. Searle 38.

then the turning point, the moment of conversion, is an experience of surrender, of being saved, redeemed. This need not be sudden or dramatic, but in some mysterious way one is aware that the bottom has been reached and something new has been born.

Such a turning point, such a conversion, marked by a secret surrender to the God of one's life and more wrought than willed in one's depths, marks the beginning of the return journey. What has changed are not the circumstances but our vision. We see things in a new light. Whatever it was that tormented us is not gone but has been transcended because we are transformed. A revelation has been granted and out of it comes a new beginning and the promise of life and joy.

What Searle describes as a drama of setting out, adventure, and return is given a masterful theoretical treatment by James Loder in *The Transforming Moment*.[10] Loder identifies five separate steps in what Searle calls the journey of conversion. First, there is a conflict within oneself created by the onset of the crisis. Second, there is an interlude for scanning, for searching the depths of our inner self. Third, there is a constructive act of the imagination happening at the deepest levels of consciousness. This is not so much thinking as imaging, symbols and images being the language of mystery, the medium of expressing what lies beyond all telling. What follows this is release and openness, release from the conflict generated by the crisis and openness to a new self-transcending vision. And fifth, there is interpretation, a reintegration of one's worldview around the new vision.

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10. James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

If we had time, I would read to you one of Flannery O'Connor's short stories titled "Revelation."[11] The story is a marvelous example of the kind of crisis that serves as a call to conversion. If conversation lags in the group gathering later to discuss these matters further, I will read it to you.

Ritualizing Conversion

Well, what does all this have to do with liturgy in general and mystagogy in particular? Following the lead of Searle, we can say that the three stages of the ritual process correspond to the three stages of the process of personal crisis, the Easter vigil being a good example. Ritual serves to moderate the fear of change by putting the community of faith in contact with the life-giving powers of the sacred. One of the chief values in introducing the neophytes to the sacramental life of the Church is that it will enable them to face the many passages which are part of the journey of conversion, rendering those experiences intelligible and less terrifying.

There is, of course, only one basic sacrament, Christ himself. During Lent Christians everywhere have joined the company of catechumens in retracing the journey of Jesus toward Calvary, the climax being reached in the paschal mystery, the passage through suffering and death to the triumphant victory of Easter morning. This story of Jesus' passage from death to life is the paradigm for interpreting every experience of crisis. As Searle puts it so well:

> Every liturgical celebration of the Church, then, is an attempt to facilitate the experience of conversion by ritualizing it. That is what is meant when we say that each of the sacraments gives entry in its own way into the paschal mystery. The individual is helped by the Church to read the signs of his

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11. This story is published in *The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor* ed. Robert Giroux (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 488-509.

crisis as a call to faith and conversion. He is supported in his journey of conversion by the community's proclamation of its living faith in Jesus, dead and risen. The Church offers the story of the journey of Jesus as an archetype which both makes the present experience intelligible and ushers it towards its God-given conclusion.[12]

Thus every sacrament, every liturgical celebration, is an opportunity to live through the transition occurring within our own lives in explicit identification with the passage of Jesus through death from this world to the Father.[13]

Pattern of Paschal Faith

So much for an exposition of the transformation of faith that occurs when life's passages are understood in the light of the paschal mystery. We turn now to Walter Conn and his definitive study of *Christian Conversion*[14] for a better understanding of the patterns of paschal faith, or what Fowler calls the structures of faith, the human apparatus for receiving the revelation of God. The capacity of the infant, the adolescent, and the mature adult to respond to the call for conversion will obviously be strikingly different, and Conn rightly argues that we must turn to the developmental theorists to help us discern those differences.

Conn's focus on the structure rather than the content of faith is reflected in his definition of conversion. He acknowledges that conversion is commonly understood as a change in the content of a person's faith or fundamental orientation. In his approach, however, conversion is viewed from the perspective of structure rather than

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12. Searle 49.

13. Searle 49.

14. Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

Page 18

content, and may be understood as a vertical conversion: radically new questions creatively restructuring content (old or new) into a totally new horizon.[15]

Conn identifies four fundamental conversions: moral conversion, affective conversion, cognitive conversion, and religious conversion. What this means within the context of this essay is that there are four fundamentally different patterns by means of which a person relates to the world, including the world of grace. Conn's analysis focuses on these patterns and helps us to see that the kind of transformation that one expects in the journey of conversion depends on the level of one's development in the moral, affective, cognitive, and religious dimensions of one's life. The meaning of these categories will be clear in the way Conn uses them in the following description of Christian conversion:

> From the perspective of content or story, one must say that Christian conversion introduces not just a new story, but a new kind of story, a story with its own intrinsic requirements for cognitive, affective, and moral transformation. Authentic Christian conversion demands that one see, feel, and act in a new way. One must be morally converted, but moral conversion is not first of all choosing new values (content), but choosing value as one's criterion of choice. One must be affectively converted, but affective conversion is not first of all loving someone or something new (content), but letting love become the central reality, the dynamic principle of one's life. One must be cognitively converted, but cognitive conversion is not first of all knowing something new (content) but of understanding--and taking possession of--one's knowing, and thus one-self, in a new way. . . . In genuine Christian conversion, then, one does not simply learn a new doctrine about life or love (content), but through the life and love of Jesus one begins to understand the paradoxical truth that life is love, that the

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15.   Conn 27.

only truly self-fulfilling life is the life given up--even to death--in loving one's neighbor; through a relationship with God in Jesus one begins to embrace this truth; and through the following of Jesus one begins to live this truth.[16]

What I find helpful in Conn's study is the idea that conversion applies to the structure as well as the content of faith. The movement from one horizon of faith to another is nothing less than a transformation of the self in relation to God. That point is illustrated beautifully in the extended case study Conn does of Thomas Merton, in which he carefully delineates the crises of moral, affective, cognitive, and religious conversions in Merton's life and faith. I recommend Conn's book to you. It's not easy reading, but it's full of insights about the formation and transformation of faith. I will limit myself to two observations about the implications of his study for understanding mystagogy.

The strong developmental emphasis in Conn's study of conversion supports the idea that event must always be seen in the context of process, even as dramatic an event as the conversion of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Conversion is a process that happens again and again as the patterns of one's relating to the world get transformed and placed under the power of the gospel. However, one ought not to expect such transformation to occur until there is developmental readiness for it to occur. If for no other reason than this, you should have at least minimal understanding of developmental theory. Too often have I heard clergy making disparaging remarks about a person's failure to grow when there was no capacity to grow due to a lack of developmental readiness to do so. How a person responds to the call to conversion depends on his or her moral, cognitive, and affective structures for receiving the grace of God, structures within which the Spirit of God can work gracious wonders. But grace builds on nature; God respects the orders of creation.

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16. Conn 208f.

Another insight from Conn's study I think is significant for understanding the transformation of the Christian's life under the power of the gospel is that the call to conversion has meaning only for adults. In Conn's own words:

> From the developmental perspective, we can say that 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. Typically, then, Christian conversion would minimally require the development of advanced adolescence. Childhood Christian conversion, for example, makes no developmental sense. Even ordinary horse sense would suspect crediting a person we judge too immature for marriage with the ability to commit his or her life fully to God in Jesus. In sum, the peculiar content of Christian conversion requires advanced structural development.[17]

William James considered adolescence to be the ideal age for conversion, understood psychologically as an experience which brings unity to a divided self. Conn acknowledges that adolescent conversion may be both intense and memorable, but it does not begin to exhaust the depths of transformational possibilities that come only at later stages of adult faith development. The profound shifts that accompany cognitive, moral, and religious conversions are likely to happen, if at all, only with the deepening maturity of adulthood.

The most significant contribution of Conn's study, in my judgment, is his understanding of the relationship between autonomy and surrender in the process of conversion. What Conn calls critical moral conversion and Fowler calls stage IV individuative-reflective faith comes at a point when the executive ego is emerging and individual autonomy is possible for the first time in a young person's life. That happens for most young people during

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17. Conn 209f.

the college years, and the best study of its implications for faith formation is Sharon Parks' *The Critical Years.*[18] Conn's point is that self-surrender is self-defeating at a stage when one is for the first time assuming responsibility for understanding, deciding, and judging. However, surrender of one's autonomy is at the very heart of what Conn calls religious conversion, and it is possible only for a mature adult at the latter stages of what Lonergan calls self-transcending subjectivity.

Autonomy is possible only as the egocentric infant is gradually transformed into an increasingly individuating self, a self which becomes capable of differentiating itself from a nurturing ethos and gradually, stage by stage, becomes self-sufficient and self-responsible. That's a process of centering, and late adolescence and early adulthood are critical years for its development. Simultaneous with this process of individuation, there occurs, according to Conn, a

> gradual decentration in the sense that at each stage a more inclusive account is taken of persons, groups, experiences, and world views other than one's own. Increasing with each stage there is an effort to find and maintain a mutuality or complementarity with a widened cosmos of being and value . . . . In the paradoxical process of personal development, then, as the self becomes more individuated, its orientation becomes more universal.[19]

The decentering of which Conn speaks comes to full flower only in the mature faith of middle and late adulthood. The processes of centering and decentering are simultaneous and life-long, but discerning the balance between them and the timing of their emergence are of the utmost importance for understanding the patterns of a paschal

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18. Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

19. Conn, "Christian Conversion," 89f.

Page 22

faith and what may be considered an appropriate response to the call to conversion.

I'm afraid I've tried to cover too much ground in this opening address, something I warn my students against all of the time. I have invited you to consider two quite separate but related theses about the implications of developmental theory for the formation and transformation of paschal faith. The first thesis is that the adult rite of initiation ought not to be regarded as normative in the practice of the church if it precludes or denigrates the rites of infant baptism and confirmation as presently practiced by most mainline churches of Christendom. The second thesis is that conversion is a journey which has distinctive passages and patterns that can be discerned from a developmental perspective. What holds these two theses together is the simple and I think obvious observation that faith formation and transformation is a lifetime process of development. The observation, of course, is not obvious to everybody and was not obvious to anybody prior to the twentieth century.

Having stated my bias, I hasten to add that I am fully aware of the limitations of a developmental perspective in examining the passages and patterns of paschal faith. All of Luther's warnings against an empirical analysis of sanctification come back to haunt me as I reflect with awe on the wonder we are attempting to understand. The paschal mystery, both its content and the faith by which it is perceived and lived, can never be fully expressed with even our most sophisticated categories. I do hope, however, that you will find developmental categories useful tools as you go about the task of leading the baptized, young and old, into the mysteries of the sacramental life of the church.