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Conversion: A Reflection On The Influences Involved In The Personal Eternal Change Event Within The Global Community

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CONVERSION:

A REFLECTION ON THE INFLUENCES INVOLVED IN THE

PERSONAL ETERNAL CHANGE EVENT WITHIN THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

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PREFACE

The Acts of The Apostles, during St. Paul's time in Athens and before the

Areopagus, recorded that

> While Paul was waiting for them [Silas and Timothy] in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking and listening to the latest ideas.)
> Paul then stood up in the meeting in the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.
> The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. *From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'"* (Acts 17:16-28, NIV) [emphasis mine].

An early paraphrase of the above italicized section is:

> "From one forefather he has created every race of men to live over the face of the whole earth. He has determined the times of their existence and the limits of their habitation, so that they might search for God, in the hope that they might feel for him and find him – yes, even though he is not very far from any one of us" (Acts 17, Part of Paul's Speech to the Gentlemen of Athens, THE NEW TESTAMENT in Modern English, translated by J. B. Phillips, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 285.

And, another and more recent paraphrase of that same section is:

"Starting from scratch, he made the entire human race and made the earth hospitable, with plenty of time and space for living so we could seek after God, and not just grope around in the dark but actually find him. He doesn't play hide-and-seek with us. He's not remote; he's near (Acts 17, "Athens," par. 5, The Message, The New Testament in Contemporary Language, Eugene H. Peterson, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 1993), 242-243.

St. Paul wrote a special letter to those in the largest city of the known world at that time, who knew of their conversion:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).

Two paraphrases also of this verse are:

The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do (Ephesians 2:10, THE NEW TESTAMENT in Modern English, translated by J. B. Phillips, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), 413; and

He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work He has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing (Ephesian 2, "He Tore Down the Wall," par. 2, The Message, The New Testament in Contemporary Language, Eugene H. Peterson, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 1993), 354.

Between St. Paul's proclamation and its fulfilled human realization there had to be a divine encounter, a conversion which needs to be continuously re-captured and re-emphasized in our twenty-first century world. The purpose of the thesis has been an attempt to provide such a reflection.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

"What is conversion?" has become both an interesting and challenging question in our post-modern world. It all depends on what is meant by conversion. Some people say that conversion is a psychological process. Others, that it is a sociological experience or happening. Again others, that it is an anthropological advancement. In addition others say that it is a cultural progression. And still others, it is a philosophical blend or a religious or theological occasion. However any attempt is made to define conversion academically, that definition may become rather confining. It could be that with the focus on human inducements, the dynamic of the real Source of conversion can be missed. The consideration of any spiritual change with eternal manifestation necessitates looking beyond the human factors. The movement toward the decisive conversion event may be initiated by the dynamic of a God-directed process, happening, advancement, occasion, progression, or some other means. Yet, it is only when the second-part of that dynamic, a response of humility and repentance with faith, has been activated that God seems to continue to work. It is then by the Holy Spirit through the provision of the Son, Jesus the Messiah or the Christ, that the third-part of the dynamic, an event of transformation or "being born from above," can be appropriated as God's "birthing" of new Life with the provision for peace, joy, and love. This eternal event has the potential for instigating a commitment of obedience, for providing individuals the opportunity for living out their purpose, and for emboldening the Church to be "salt" and "light" for the whole world.

DEDICATION

This research study and evaluation has been dedicated to those men, women, and children; husbands, wives, and families, many of them nationals, who have been willing to lay down their lives so that others throughout the globe can come to the Reality of Life found only in Jesus because they are understanding their incarnational opportunities, praying without ceasing, discerning the "wind" of the academic tools, using their leadership in effective strategies, and depending on the Holy Spirit for conversions.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural decent, nor of human decision or of a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:1-5, 10-14, NIV

INTRODUCTION

Change seems to be a part of human life. Every situation in life has changed from what was considered as normal only yesterday. Each of us is certainly different today from what we were last year, last month, or even last week. Change is especially evident in nature as revealed in the aging process and the seasons. In his classic work, Alvin Toffler introduced how this phenomenon can accelerate so rapidly that it becomes overwhelming: "Change is the process by which the future invades our lives, and it is important to look at it closely, not merely from the grand perspectives of history, but also from the vantage point of the living, breathing individuals who experience it."[1]

While most changes are inevitable, people are also gaining a better understanding of the world and of themselves because of the global communications revolution. Technology is allowing people, resources, and information to travel quickly and relatively economically around the globe. But many who are facing these recognizable changes are beginning to ask, "why isn't what we are trying to doing actually working?" or, "can we do better?" or, "how can we get rid of the *status quo*?"

Some people appear to be eager for any kind of change. This may be a change to perceive something different, to make something different, or even to be able to transform and make a difference. But a more probable reaction is that sense of stress which comes with change. Toffler expressed this as an "adaptive reaction," a response to

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[1] Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, Paperback ed. (New York: Bantam Books in arrangement with Random House, 1970), 1.

the physical, spiritual, and social changes around us.[2] People have become somewhat

anxious, although not totally indifferent to change. Individuals are beginning to ask how

can or does any of this affect us personally? At the same time there seems to be a

growing global fear regarding the changes that the future might bring.

To Change the World

In looking around and listening it does seem to be obvious that people are

becoming more and more restless. Some have a constant yearning and hope that things

could become good and even better. A few are regarding change as coming too slowly.

David Bornstein suggests that the barriers that once impeded at least social change are

disappearing rapidly.[3] He provided a reminder that many of the sociological changes are

relatively new because until fairly recently many global citizen were tightly restricted.[4]

Bornstein also endorsed that there are those who have powerful ideas that can change

people's lives, individuals who would like to bring about a difference that could change

the world.[5] Lyle Schaller has referred to such people as agents of change or "change

agents."[6] These change agents want to and believe they can change the world by human

and natural means. Bornstein suggested that for those advocating such changes and the

solving of human problems on a significant scale, "these are propitious times."[7]

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[2] Toffler, *Future Shock*, 338-342.

[3] David Bornstein, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, Updated (2nd) ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

[4] Bornstein, 10.

[5] Bornstein, 1.

[6] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Change Agent* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1972).

[7] Bornstein, 10.

Some social scholars have been proposing that change can be "brought on by a few of these persuasive people; that change can and should come about by "social epidemics."[8] On the other hand, some social leaders are proponents of a more personal modification for social change. Nelson Mandela, in looking for innovation, is quoted as saying that: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."[9] In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, Warhol changed the emphasis from external to internal when he proposed, "They always say that time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."[10] And, Barack Obama, who globally has come to epitomize change at least governmentally, has stressed that this reality needs to be even more personal:

> Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."[11]

So, while the proponents of change continue to encourage social change, it appears that real change must start with the individual. Yet, many are also suggesting that personal change may not be accomplished by any outside human intervention.

Most changes are usually beneficial. However, any kind of change which occurs in society, or even a change ensuing within, which is just for the sake of change, can have immediate results and dire consequences which often can be more disastrous than the

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[8] Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York: Back Bay Books/ Little, Brown, 2002), 30-88.

[9] *Goodreads*, s.v. "Quotes About Change," http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/change (accessed November 7, 2012).

[10] *Goodreads*, s.v. "Quotes About Change."

[11] *Goodreads*, s.v. "Quotes About Change."

status quo. The eagerness for any kind of change must recognize the one qualification

offered by James Davison Hunter as being vital:

> Change does not always occur in the direction that people propose or with the effects for which people hope. There are almost always unintended consequences to human action, particularly at the macro-historical level and these are, often enough, tragic"[12]

It would appear that without some understanding and value attachment, change could be

just like "jumping from the frying pan into the fire." However, it would seem that there is

at least one change that can have positive and lasting consequences.

A Change That Can Be Eternal

The eagerness and longing for change does appear to go much deeper than

physical and material needs, much deeper than economic concerns, even much deeper

than sociological endeavors. In spite of the attempts by all humankind to contain this

craving in looking for answers that would seem more culturally acceptable, it does appear

that at the root there is a yearning for personal change. For everyone at some time there

seems to be something of a "void in the soul." At the bottom of this craving there appears

to be an innate desire to be in a right relationship with the Creator, to come into spiritual

and even eternal reconciliation, to have an opportunity for the realization of the kingdom

of heaven, for comforting, for inheriting the earth, for being filled with righteousness, for

obtaining mercy, for seeing God, for being called the sons [children] of God.[13] Because

of this reality, it would appear that there is the necessity to be reminded of what Goethe,

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[12] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47.

[13] Jesus, "The Beatitudes," Matt. 5:3-9; Luke 6:20-23, and unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 1984).

the German playwright, poet, novelist, and dramatist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries wrote: "Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least".[14] It is possible that a special personal change that is not only spiritual but also eternal is of much greater importance than any social change or changes that can only be temporally realized.

In order to better understand this idea of a need for a personal alteration, it is crucial to consider that the concept of *change* is not just a verb which may mean to make different in some aspect, to make radically different or to transform, or to take a different position, course, or direction; but *change* is also a noun in which there is an alteration, a substitution, a transformation, or a conversion. Rather than being just a progressive endeavor or even an historical effort, real personal change can occur because of an action leading to an event which can become perpetual and even eternal. Because of this actuality there is the necessity for a discussion with some reflections on the incident of conversion and on the fact that globally, individuals and even peoples do have the opportunity for a complete change that provides for that sought-after spiritual and eternal reconciliation with God.

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[14] Thinkexist, "Quotations of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe," Thinkexist.com, http://thinkexist.com/common/print.asp?id=180010&quote (accessed November 7, 2012).

CHAPTER ONE: THE UNDERSTANDINGS OF CONVERSION

Introduction

In society, mainly in religious circles, there has been a growing concern regarding the occasion of change which has generically been called conversion. Not only theologians, but psychologist, sociologist, and cultural anthropologist are attempting to define conversion as it relates to their particular academic field. But the question that needs a twenty-first century resolution remains as to what is the reality of conversion. Where did the concept as it relates to people originate? Why is it even important for academic research? How is it applicable globally? The researcher in this investigative study has tried to deal with a comprehension that is more definitive: an understanding that is based on a primary resource, on personal verifiable observations, as well as on encounters with a significant sampling of global individuals and people groups.

Any form of conversion is certainly about change in that conversion is the antithesis of immobility. In the sphere of religion, the word *conversion* generally has come to mean the moving from one religious group to another so as to be called a new convert. But its meaning is much more important and fundamental. More specifically, in Christian domains since at least the time of the translation of the Authorized or King James Version (KJV) of the Bible in 1611, this timeless event has traditionally come to mean an eternal change or a divine restoration: a change, or a turning, or a turning back. It is similar to the word that was used secularly in areas of construction and mathematics

in the sixteenth century.[15] The description given to the word conversion, once globally

and exceptionally limited in usage, was that conversion should be viewed as a human

action of turning in position, direction, and/or destination and especially the action of

turning from, turning to, or a turning back or even returning to the living God with eternal

consequences. This seems to have involved a holistic change or transformation from one

useless form to another more valuable form. It could be described as similar to the effect

of metamorphosis in a butterfly. But today, the description of conversion has come to

encompass everything including a general change or general conversion; a religious

conversion; an anthropological, psychological, sociological, cultural, or theological

conversion; or a more specific and spiritual biblical conversion. These various treatments

of the fact of a change has necessitated this research on the concept of conversion in

order to provide a contemporary reflection on the influences behind this unique and yet

global change event, an event that has repercussions for personal life now and beyond

rather than the prospect of endless death.

As a result of the uncertainty caused by the expanded usage of the term,

particularly by secular academics venturing to be sought-after and relevant, the concept

of conversion is in danger of losing any of its significance. Throughout this study the

seemingly now more antiquated, however basic, meaning of conversion has been

employed with all other types of conversions described adjectively. Even then, whether it

could be defined as a biblical conversion, an authentic conversion, a genuine conversion,

or a realistic conversion, just the word conversion will be used throughout this thesis.

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[15] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. s.v. "Conversion." (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 870-872.

The Problem

The research problem this project addresses has been a reflection on how individuals have comprehended conversion and have realized and are realizing a permanent holistic change. This is a change that they believe has allowed them to come into not only spiritual, but eternal reconciliation with God the Creator. This is a reconciliation that realistically can only be accomplished through Jesus, described as the "Anointed One" or "Sent One" from God, or the Messiah of the Hebrew Bible and the Christ of the New Testament. As such, the research problem has become an attempt to find a way to express and confirm the original essence of conversion.

In response to this problem the researcher has reviewed the ostensibly relevant psychological, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and theological literature relating to conversion, as well as any other trends considered to be conversion. Next, the researcher has significantly explored the concept of reconciliation or of eternal change in its original biblical characterization. Then the researcher has compared the academic literature with the biblical concept. To help in confirming the findings, the researcher has developed an anonymous personal information guide administered in five venues by key change agents. This has resulted in an exploration of how individuals and peoples have experienced conversion in a broad, but limited global context, particularly in Thailand or the East, in Guatemala of Latin America and in Ghana of Africa or the South, in Bulgaria or the North, and in America or the West.

The Context of the Problem

Because it is not strictly objective, it may be impossible for the fact of conversion to be understood by many. At least currently there seems to be a great deal of confusion especially in academic research. This has lead secularist Karl F. Morrison to write in the Preface of his *Understanding Conversion* that

> the distinction between the name "conversion" and what was called conversion is plain. In fact....there are three quite different terms: a phenomenon called "conversion," the name "conversion," and the thinking that made it possible to separate one out of the undifferentiated mass of human experiences by calling it "conversion." To telescope all this: we have something felt (the experience of conversion) and something made (the name "conversion"), and the process by which the feeling was reduced to the name.[16]

The current bewilderment could be because of various attempts at contemplating two or more quite different concepts. On the one hand there has been the growing redefinition of conversion appearing to be the more rational, observable, and intellectual facets of psychological, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and theological understandings of what appears to be taking place. These generally seem to be able to only reference a "religious" conversion. On the other hand, there is the description of the almost imperceptible and uniquely transformational God-event which occurs totally outside of human efforts. Unfortunately, the former descriptions have progressively continued to erode our general understanding of the traditional incidence of conversion. The result has been that idiomatically, conversion has become just a "turning over a new leaf", embraced actively as just "a radical behavioral change or social transformation", considered even more actively as "coming to the Christian faith", contemplated passively as the most rational religious choice, and adopted even more freely, religiously, and

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[16] Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1992), Preface, xiii.

allegorically as just a wise person "coming to Bethlehem." However, conversion appears to be a change much greater than even the socialization realized by the transported Elf[17] or the renovation undergone by "despicable me" Gru, [18] although there are some who might consider it as similar in character to a fairy-tale.

Terms Used in the Project

Importance of the Terms

With such broadminded treatments currently in vogue involving the term of conversion as compared to what previously was a rather unique and restricted term, there has been the need by the researcher to provide definitions for some of the most important expressions referenced and used quite spontaneously in the study within the context of conversion. Their delineation has been necessary in order to remove as much vagueness and subjectivity from the discussion as possible.

Definitions

Alteration: the activity or process of altering or making a change or modification in personal character.

Change: the process, activity, or fact of a shift by an alteration in the state or quality, in this case especially of mankind, in which the future invades personal lives.

Change Agent (agent of change): an individual with a generalized role function having a strategy for and the composition to stimulate change.

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[17] David Berenbaum, *Elf* (family comedy film), directed by Jon Favreau (New Line Cinema, 2003).

[18] Cico Paul and Ken Daurio, *Despeciable Me* (American computer-animated family action comedy film) directed by Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud (Illuminated Entertainment and Universal Pictures, 2010); and Cico Paul and Ken Daurio, *Despeciable Me2* (American 3D computer-animated family action comedy film), directed by Pierre Coffin and Chris Renaud (Universal Pictures and Illuminated Entertainment, 2013).

Conversion (generic): the action of turning in position, direction, and/or destination; the action of turning from, turning to, or turning back or returning so as to be changed or transformed from one useless form to another more valuable form.

Culture: the integral pattern of human knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors that depends upon human training, learning, and transmitting the knowledge of mind, tastes, and manners to succeeding generations.

Dynamic: the forces of continuous productive activity resulting in an eternal change.

Event: something that happens and which then becomes the outcome of an experiment or the final incident in a legitimate action.

Eternal: a continuum without intermission and with an infinite duration.

Factors: the energies which actively promote and contribute to the production of a result.

Forgiveness: the willful act of the pardoning of a debt or fault by giving up feelings of resentment against an offender without any claim to a requital.

Holistic: relating to or concerned with the whole or complete system rather than with just the parts or a concern with the mind, body, and soul of humankind.

Image of God: the intellectual, emotional, and volitional human response that can be reflected throughout all human life.

Life: the sequences of physical, mental, and spiritual experiences that make up the temporal and eternal existence of an individual.

Perspective: the human capacity to be able to view things mentally in their true relations or relative importance.

Phenomenon: an observable fact, event, object or aspect known through the physical senses rather than by thought or intuition.

Reconciliation: the act by which two ends or opposing sides are brought together.

Regeneration: the result of becoming formed or created again through a radical change for the better or of a restoration to original strength and properties.

Substitution: the act, process, or result of replacing one thing for something of equal or better quality.

Transformation: an act, process, or instance of a complete change or of being changed in form, composition, structure, appearance, character or condition similar to that of a metamorphosis resulting in a striking difference in position.

Delimitation of the Problem

This research has been limited to significant psychological, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and theological literature, and the Bible involving the concept of conversion. While being considered globally, the research has been limited to the experiences of a sample of individuals within people groups in specific geological contexts. Also, this research has been geared to provide a broad definition, yet it has been limited in scope so as to assist the Church in its mission of global partners becoming messengers of reconciliation, with a practical prototype for conversion.

Assumptions

The first assumption of the research has been that the researcher may have a bias because of having personally comprehended conversion or divine reconciliation with all of its imminent and eternal ramifications.

Another assumption has been that it is God who has taken the initiative to reach out to humankind with love and grace. This has been fulfilled and demonstrated by God coming in the person of the Son, Jesus. As a result, God authoritatively offers the opportunity for forgiveness and justification with himself for eternity.

A third assumption has been that God has provided a special, or holy, written revelation for humankind, the Bible which has now become available in the language of most people groups.

The fourth assumption has been that God has been at work throughout history and even now in the lives of peoples and individuals in order to bring about eternal reconciliation with the individuals and peoples of his creation.

A fifth assumption has been that psychological processes, sociological experiences, anthropological advancements, cultural progressions, theological occurrences, or some combination or blend of these affirmations may exhibit a significant moral impact upon the lives of individuals and peoples leading them to a place where the reality of conversion can occur.

The final assumption has been that God appears to have gifted and called global partners and now directs them in strategies for creative opportunities in which conversion for individuals and peoples can take place.

Sub-problems

In order to accomplish effective research this thesis project has had to address four contingent problems. These sub-problems are the logical components of the major problem and are necessary in the discussion in order to determine, describe, and possibly

rediscover how individuals and peoples within the global context change in their

relationship to God within their unique "world."

Review of a Significant Portion of Relevant Literature

The first of these sub-problems has been the review of a significant portion of

apparently relevant psychological, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and theological

literature related to the topic of conversion. Out of the tremendous quantity of available

materials has come the need to glean any possible information from books mostly

generated by co-authors and from single-authored periodicals.

Exploration of the Biblical Concept

The second sub-problem has been the exploration of the biblical concept of

conversion. This investigation has been done in the original biblical contexts by

investigating the concept in the original languages so as to better understand the meaning

in its earliest settings.

Exploration of Individual Responses

Finding a way to explore how individuals have responded to and described their

eternal reconciliatory opportunity has been the third sub-problem. The researcher has

worked with key change agents, innovators, and global partners involved in diverse

global venues who have been willing to administer an anonymous personal information

guide. Particularly, this has been obtained from expressions in the four social innovation

world paths from Thailand, Ghana and Guatemala, Bulgaria, and the United States.

Development of a Theoretic Model

The fourth sub-problem has been the development of a theoretic model of the dynamic involved in conversion as evidenced in all global contexts. This model requires practicality in understanding while being significant enough to assist global partners in becoming more effective in ministry.

The Setting of the Project

The research has had its setting primarily in America, with some British influence. It has included a Northern research foundation. Naturally it has contained motifs from the West, but also themes from the East and South out of a concern that all epistemological expressions are voiced. Research into this matter, especially in the previous century, appeared to indicate that a great deal of material has been offered by many scholars in several academic camps. At the same time there has been a great deal of speculation and uncertainty regarding what secularly has been referred to as any kind of permanent spiritual or religious conversion. This study has been an attempt to alleviate some of the turmoil and provide a solution to the problem so as to encourage the continuation of opportunities for individual and group conversions. The methodology implemented has been research on the biblical contexts of the subject, research on the current academic literature relating to the subject, a comparison of these resources, and the development of a clarification and then of a working model for conversion.

The Importance of the Project

The researcher has noted a disparity between what looks like long-lasting life changes taking place in the lives of individuals and peoples in some parts of the world as

compared to that of other parts. In several venues there seems to be a great deal of human effort expended to bring about spiritual change.[19] Unfortunately, where there has been the most human effort, it appears that there has been little success, in that few individuals or groups have been experiencing conversion. Hopefully, this research and analysis should help those involved to alleviate some of the discrepancies.

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

The researcher has recognized the reality that conversion taking place in lives and culminating in an eternal change cannot be totally and adequately explained by objective academic rationale. Religious or spiritual change can be encouraged by human labor, but the culminating event of conversion appears to be outside of all human effort. As a result, the researcher has pondered if there is a way for a plausible explanation, if others were recognizing the same problem, and if there could be a solution. The solution which has been fostered has been especially meaningful for the researcher, especially with the achievement of a practical model.

The Importance of the Project in the Immediate Ministry Context

It appears that an incredible amount of resources and human energies have been going into efforts to bring about conversion, a trend that is especially peculiar to North America. It seems that these have produced some limited, but perceptible results. At the same time, there appears to be a current surging dynamism for conversion among individuals and peoples in many other global settings. For holistic change to be effective, a better understanding of what is taking place in the lives of individuals is needed. This is

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[19] The understandings and observations of the researcher and the comments of global partners expressed to the researcher regarding the areas of Bulgaria and the United States vis-a-vis the areas of Ghana, Guatemala, and Thailand.

especially important with the recognition that there is a tremendous difference between religious conversion or "converting" from one religion or one religious designation to another, or from being non-religious to religious, and that of conversion. The goal of this thesis has been that through research, all those who are interested and involved in global transformational ministry are assisted in achieving a better understanding of the dynamics that can be occurring within their immediate ministries.

The Importance of the Project for the Church at Large

Even though this research has been limited to much less than a total global setting, because of the many far-reaching global opportunities granted to the researcher, an awareness has been developing concerning what an incredible impact a restored understanding of conversion could have upon the growth of the Church. In being the universal body of called out ones who have each experienced eternal reconciliation and the re-establishment of peace, harmony, and friendship with God, the Church, with a better appreciation of the dynamic involved in conversion, has the potential to be globally revived. The results could also help the Church better fulfill its purpose and realize the blessing of following the divine command. The Church needs this infusion of a better understanding of the eternal change dynamic in order to not be just a religious organization, but to be and to do all that God intended. The Church needs to be able to demonstrate that the Great Commission given by Jesus at the Ascension continues to be valid even in our post-modern milieu.

Sub-problem Treatment

Review of the Related Literature

The first sub-problem treatment has been a review of a significant portion of apparently relevant psychological, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and theological literature regarding the conversion phenomenon. This has then resulted in the initiation of a comparison between the information in that literature with what seems to be the biblical concept of the realistic change occurring in the reconciliation and resulting relationship with God the Creator. The data needed for this sub-problem have been insights, observations, and conclusions from the enormous body of literature related to the problem. Acceptable data have included the works of acknowledged scholars and their insight and has again been restricted by the capacity of the researcher. These resources have been located in relevant psychological, sociological, anthropological, cultural, and theological literature, as well as from journals and articles. The data, other than those obtained from the Internet and the researcher's personal library, have been available as a result of the researcher's academic status. The data have been systematically organized and evaluated so as to assist the researcher in coming to an overall understanding of conversion from an academic perspective.

Exploration of Conversion in the Bible

Since the second sub-problem of this research has been the exploration of the biblical concept of spiritual reconciliation with the Creator or spiritual conversion, the data required have been the insights, observations, and conclusions from God's special revelation, which is literarily referred to as the Bible or Scripture. In addition, there has been the requisite for data from biblical literature related to the problem.

The first criterion for acceptable biblical data has been that it must be coming initially from sources closest to the initial documents prepared in their particular original language. The second criterion has been in the inclusion of the works that have come from acknowledgeable biblical scholars. This exploration has been limited by the insight and capacity of the researcher in doing acceptable exegesis.

The data have been located in Scripture, commentaries, biblical theological works, journals, and articles, and discovered in the library of the researcher, Bethel Seminary library and its affiliates, and via the Internet. Again, other than that which was obtained from the researcher's personal library and the Internet, the data have become available as a result of the researcher's position as a global and contextual leadership scholar.

Working with Key Agents in the Exploration of Conversion Opportunities

The third sub-problem has been in the working with key change agents in diverse global venues with an attempt at exploring how individuals and peoples have responded to the opportunity of conversion in their global context. This sub-problem has been handled through informal personal interviews by the researcher with key change agent partners in their particular global setting. The data which have been made available has been from willing unspecified individual participants who have provided insights, observations, and conclusions. The insights and most importantly the afforded information have helped in coming to a better understanding of conversion. Additionally, most of the respondents have provided their historical faith narratives which have helped in the development of a more complete perception. The anonymous questionnaire data has been returned to the researcher personally and electronically through the

administrative means of the acknowledged global ministry leaders. Their interpretation has been limited only by the insight and capacity of the researcher. The data have been systematically organized and evaluated, including deciphering the results so as to demonstrate the validity of the biblical basis.

Development of a Model of the Dynamic Involved in Conversion

The fourth sub-problem treatment has been with the development of a model of the dynamic of conversion which can be evidenced in all global situations. As a model it has had to be practical in comprehension yet significant enough to assist global partners in becoming more effective. The criterion for acceptable data for the model has been that it comes from all researched resources: secular and theological literature, the revelation of God's word, biblical commentaries, theological works, books, journals, and articles, as well as from those global partners and chosen individuals who have accepted participation in the survey.

Conclusions on the Research Approach

The thoughtful and rational development of the problem and the design of the research have been essential aspects of the project. The researcher's definition of the terms used, the delimitation of the problem, and the assumptions have helped to make the research project more comprehensible. A clear solution to the problem has been difficult, as indicated by the sub-problems and evidence in the literature review. A considerable amount of effort was required in obtaining the data of the many anonymous individuals. And, a significant part of this research has been in developing a standard which can be useable for ministry by global ministry associates.

CHAPTER TWO: ALMOST EVERYONE APPEARS TO HAVE A LITERARY
OPINION ABOUT CONVERSION

Introduction

The concept of conversion for humans presents a challenge in our postmodern world. People are willing to accept a context with just about any incident regarded as being relevant for others and as a result it could be impossible for conversion to be understood objectively. During just a little more than the last hundred years, but particularly in the first and last thirds of the twentieth century, there had been considerable academic research and writing on the general subject of conversion. However, at the time of this research project there has developed a great deal of confusion or at least considerable differences of opinions regarding conversion, especially in academic research.

While the word "conversion" is not just a sacred term in that the word is now used just as much in secular as religious works, the literature which has been reviewed for this study has been concerned with religious conversion, biblical conversion, psychological conversion, and spiritual conversion, to say nothing of Christian conversion. Also adding to the general summary have been the definitions and comments of numerous religious reference works. The observed diversity in their characterization of conversion has indicated that even religious conversion has become a subject about which almost everyone appears to have an opinion or at least their own personal definition. Nevertheless, the researcher has found even the secular literature to be helpful in dealing

with the extent of the problem. And, the immensity of the literature has demonstrated the need for more focused research.

To assimilate all of the materials necessary for consideration, the researcher has divided the literature regarding conversion into a number of interconnected categories. The literary categories are related to what looks to have been the area of expertise of the writers. These categories of reviewed literature have consisted of: (1) those which affirm a more theological characterization of conversion as an occurrence; (2) those which classify conversion as a psychological process; (3) those which portray conversion as a sociological experience; (4) those which categorize conversion as an anthropological advancement or cultural progression; and (5) those which may provide further insights into conversion from a global perspective.

Included in the resource categorization there has been a summary of the distinguishable issues in each area and a small piece of information about some of the major contributors. In a later chapter, there has also been some interaction with at least one of the more important or recent contributors. This has helped in beginning to grasp a few of the highlights of this immense subject, at least in a religious or spiritual sense. As with all words, there can be differences and changes in meanings because of the usage in a particular context which can obliterate their original meaning. It should be obvious that this may have become the case with the word "conversion."

Conversion as a Theological Occurrence

In the development of the various categorical designations, it has been important to begin by focusing on literary resources that appear to provide both an historical and general summarization of conversion from the early as well as later theological

perspectives. A number of theological scholars, in reflecting on how an individual or a group can come to God, have arrived from several different theological assessments. For some, it has been more rational; for others their work is more systematic. But for most, conversion as a realistic occurrence has been considered as either continual, advancing, or most significantly, as a spiritual event.

<p style="text-align:center">*Joseph Alleine*</p>

The initial discussion of conversion began with a work published in 1671 by Joseph Alleine, an English Puritan and non-conformist, who had served as a pastor while doing extensive writing. Although it became known simply as *Alleine's Alarm*, it has been republished, even most recently in 1978 as the original *An Alarm to the Unconverted.*[20] Prior to this time in the seventeenth century, there does not appear to have been any written discrepancy regarding an understanding of conversion or the need to turn back or return to God. In his alarm, Alliene dramatically pointed out the mistakes, nature, and vital necessity for each individual to experience a true change in their relationship to God. He submitted that "conversion is not the taking upon us the profession of Christianity," the "putting on the badge of Christ in baptism," the fallacy of the self-justification of "moral righteousness," "an external conformity to the rules of piety," nor "the mere chaining up of corruption by education, human laws or the forces of affliction."[21] He proposed that while "the Author of conversion is the Spirit of God," the efficient cause is both internal grace and external intercession, that the ministry of the

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[20] Joseph Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted (Alleine's Alarm)* (1671; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978).

[21] Alleine, 19-22.

gospel by the instrument of the Word makes conversion both "personal and real," and that "the final cause or end of conversion is man's salvation and God's glory." [22] Alleine is said to have died at the age of thirty-four after suffering tremendous persecution, particularly from others within the organized Church.

Jonathan Edwards

The necessity for spiritual responsive action had been more concretely echoed by Jonathan Edwards, an American preacher and theologian. In 1746, he provided a work entitled *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* based not on a feeling or even moderate emotion, but on the now archaic term coming out of the sixteenth century for the action of producing a favorable disposition or an alteration. His work has now come to be known simply as *Religious Affections*.[23] In Edwards' view, a conversion based on biblical doctrine is impossible unless the "soul is 'affected' and the will disposed."[24] Edwards, a witness to the Great Awakening in 1733-1734 later wrote about his experience in 1737 in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*. John E. Smith, a Professor of Philosophy at Yale University edited Edward's three-part treatise into one work in 1959. He commented in his introduction regarding the time of Edwards by citing the early Connecticut historian Benjamin Turnbull who had written that while there had been the situation of a "lifeless morality" in the Connecticut Valley in the early eighteen century,

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[22] Alleine, *An Alarm to the Unconverted*, 27-29.

[23] Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 1746, vol. 2 of *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959).

[24] John E. Smith, "Editor's Introduction," in Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections (Religious Affections)*,1746, vol. 2 of *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 15.

"it pleased God in his sovereign mercy to begin under the influence of Edwards in Northampton an extraordinary work of conviction and conversion which had never been experienced in New England before [or since]."[25] For Edwards, conversion was "a great and universal change of the man, turning him from sin to God."[26] As such he considered conversion to be the very first of his proposed twelve evidences or signs of true religion or the "gracious affections."[27] He expounded on this by saying that

> all spiritual discoveries are transforming; and not only make an alteration of the present exercise, sensation and frame of the soul; but such power and efficacy have they, that they make an alteration in the very nature of the soul; "But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18). Such power as this is properly divine power, and it is peculiar to the Spirit of the Lord: other powers may make a great alteration in men's present frames and feelings; but 'tis the power of a Creator only that can change the nature, or give a new nature.[28]

Edwards also proposed that only in conversion can a person discover God's moral perfection and glory of love and be able to rejoice in God.[29] His work of *Religious Affections* also has importance in that in it he especially described the response of the emotive will or the antithesis of rationalism that was then on the horizon.

Charles Haddon (C. H.) Spurgeon

Another well-known earlier contributor in this discussion has been Charles Haddon Spurgeon or C. H. Spurgeon. As a Particular Baptist, Spurgeon was considered

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[25] Smith, "Editor's Introduction," in Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* citing Benjamin Turnbull's *A Complete History of Connecticut* in two volumes originally published in New Haven in 1818 but referenced by Smith as the New London edition of 1898, pages 2 and 105, 3.

[26] Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 341.

[27] Edwards, 197-239.

[28] Edwards, 340.

[29] Edwards, 246.

England's best known preacher as the "people's preacher" for most of the second half of

the nineteenth century. It was in his sixth sermon on the subject of conversion on July 19,

1874, that he delivered one of his most significant responses. In it he considered the

question: *Is Conversion Necessary?* Twenty years earlier and only four years after what

he referenced as his own spiritual change or conversion, Spurgeon, at the age of twenty,

had become the life-long pastor of London's famed New Park Street Church where he

frequently preached long before the time of electronic amplification to more than ten

thousand.[30] So he answered his own question, in the form of a sermon, with a resounding

"yes," indicating that the supernatural spiritual change which he and most people at that

time experienced and understood as conversion was still imperative. [31] Possibly this

understanding of conversion should give clarity as to why a sharp definitive distinction

should continue to be crucial in any academic discussion of this momentous biblical and

theological concept.

C. S. Lewis

A name that has more recently provided a key resource for the discussion has

been scholar and novelist C. S. (Clive Staples) Lewis. In his very late teens and early

twenties, Irishman Lewis found it necessary to leave school in order to serve in the

horrendous trenches of World War I. He was wounded and two of his colleagues were

killed by a British shell falling short of its target. But it was not until much later that he

reflected back upon those earlier years. Lewis biographically wrote about having "passed

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[30] About Charles Spurgeon, The Spurgeon Archive, http://www.spurgeon.org/aboutsp.htm (accessed November 29, 2013).

[31] C. H. Spurgeon, *Is Conversion Necessary?*, July 19, 1874, Conversion #6, vol. 20, no. 1183, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit. In Public Domain, Pensacola, FL, Mount Zion: SBSCOhost eBook.

from Atheism to Christianity" in which he contemplated that "how far the story matters to anyone but myself depends on the degree to which others have experienced what I call 'joy.'"[32] His use of this term for his conversion may indicate that he had been influenced by that affection of joy referred to by Jonathan Edwards.

His efforts are noteworthy in this context of conversion research because, as a religious seeker, Lewis had initially moved, over a period of a couple of decades, from Atheism to the Theism that he refered to as "merely symbolical and provisional practice."[33] As a result, his mid-life religious choice in those early 1930's became either mystical Hinduism or non-mythical Christianity[34] and so he wrote:

> I was by now too experienced in literary criticism to regard the Gospels as myths. They had not the mythical taste. And yet the very matter which they set down in their artless, historical fashion – those narrow, unattractive Jews, too blind to the mythical wealth of the Pagan world around them – was precisely the matter of the great myths. If ever a myth had become a fact, had been incarnated, it would be just like this. And nothing else in all literature was just like this. Myths were like it in one way. Histories were like it in another. But nothing was simply like it. And no person was like the Person it depicted; as real, as recognizable, through all that depth of time, as Plato's Socrates or Boswell's Johnson (ten times more so than Eckermann's Goethe or Lockhart's Scott), yet also numinous, lit by a light beyond the world, a god. But if a god – we are no longer polytheists – then not a god, but God. Here and here only in all time the myth must have become fact; the Word, flesh; God, Man. This is not "a religion," nor "a philosophy." It is the summing up and actuality of them all.[35]

It was finally in his fifties that Lewis realized and fulfilled his need to move from Theism to the opportunity for a dynamic conversion. When the bombing of Britain began in 1940, he was a civilian connected with the Royal Air Force. British airmen knew that

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[32] C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: the Shape of My Early Life*, 1956, rep. (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1984), vii.

[33] Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 234.

[34] Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 235-236.

[35] Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 236.

just after thirteen missions they would be reported as either missing or dead. So, as a

result of his spiritual change, Lewis decided that he had to speak out. He was invited by

the BBC to give a series of informal apologetic radio talks during those war years that

crossed denominational boundaries. These became the "The Case for Christianity" or

"Broadcast Talks." As a result, based on those talks and on his earlier works, "Christian

Behaviour" and "Beyond Personality" he provided a composite entitled *Mere*

Christianity.[36] In it he described "the practical conclusion" which "means something

much more than our trying to follow His [Jesus the Christ's] teaching;" that "today, this

moment, is our chance to choose the right side."[37]

In one of his final chapters of *Mere Christianity*, "Nice People or New Men?" he

responded to an interesting question challenging conversion: "If Christianity is true, why

are not all Christians obviously nicer than non-Christians"?

> What lies behind that question is partly something very reasonable and partly
> something that is not reasonable at all. The reasonable part is this. If conversion to
> Christianity makes no improvement in a man's actions – if he continues to be just
> as snobbish or spiteful or envious or ambitious as he was before – then I think we
> must suspect that his 'conversion' was largely imaginary; and after one's original
> conversion, every time one thinks one has made an advance, that is the test to
> apply.[38]

C. S. Lewis appears to have understood and therefore exemplified throughout his

life that with all the personal changes that do occur over a lifetime, even when one has

experienced conversion, life is not a sentimental religious experience with a remedy for

all ills or difficulties.

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[36] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952, 1980; hardcover reprint, 2001, New York: HarperCollins Publishers [HarperOne], 2004).

[37] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 60-65.

[38] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 207.

J. B. Phillips

Still another contributor to the general understanding of conversion has been English clergyman and prolific writer, J. B. (John Bertram) Phillips. He has become best known because of the first translations or paraphrases of the New Testament which he completed in 1958 as *The New Testament in Modern English*. Phillips had found this translation necessary because the people in his church, especially the young men, did not understand the Authorized Version of the Bible concerning the need for conversion.

In 1956, Phillips had given his description of conversion as even implied by the title in his early book, *New Testament Christianity*. He wrote that in his experience, people appeared to be "not so much sinful as bewildered" and that they needed to be "shown Christ as He really is;" that God "became focused for our understanding as well as our salvation in the Man, Jesus."[39] From his perspective, people needed to be shown the "new quality of living available through the living Spirit of Christ" and shown the "spiritual 'dimension' – that this little life is only a part of a vast scheme which God himself is working out."[40]

Phillip's conversion work has become an important influence in the development of a clearer understanding because of its clarity and "other world" perspective. In the third and final impression of his work which was in 1971, now only slightly more than forty years ago, Phillips commented that when he was asked to write a new Foreword he first had found it necessary to ask himself, "Do I still believe this or has life's experience so modified my beliefs that it is really rather embarrassing for the book to be re-issued at

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[39] J. B. Phillips, *New Testament Christianity*, 1956, reset 1958, 3rd imp. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), 153.

[40] Phillips, 153-154.

all?" And his clear conclusion: "I have done my homework, I have read the book through very carefully and there is absolutely nothing basic which I would alter in any way."[41]

Phillips completed his concern for a New Testament Christianity with:

If we will train ourselves to see life from the true point of view, we cannot help seeing how very slowly it dawns upon modern man that his real problems, his real conflicts, can never be resolved on the physical plane. A man may travel far faster than sound, but that does not help him in the least to deal with the problem of his own marriage which is fast breaking up. He may successfully launch an artificial satellite, but that does nothing to solve the squalid conditions in which his fellow-men have to live only a few streets away. He may invent and produce commercially 3-D television for every home, but he has not made the slightest contribution towards solving the problems that arise in home, industry and nation – the selfishness, cruelty and greed, the fears, resentments, and suspicions, that poison our common life. Perhaps the time is not too distant when the bankruptcy of scientific achievement to solve human problems will become increasingly obvious. Perhaps Man will then return, not indeed to rediscover any old-fashioned 'hell-fire' religion, but to seek realistically that quality of living which transforms personality, and which we may fairly call 'New Testament Christianity.'[42]

Among his many writings, Phillips also wrote *Your God Is Too Small* later in 1961. In it Phillips responded to the reality that many people cannot experience conversion because they have been crippled by their limited idea of God, often portrayed as the stereotype of a "resident policeman," "heavenly bosom," "pale Galilean," or "parental grievance." Phillips demolished these unrealistic obsessions keeping people from an acceptance of a spiritual change or conversion and noted:

Many people today are living, often with inner dissatisfaction, without any faith in God at all. This is not because they are particularly wicked or selfish or, as the old-fashioned would say, 'godless,' but because they have not found with their adult minds a God big enough to 'account for' life, big enough to 'fit in with' the new scientific age, big enough to command their highest admiration and respect, and consequently their willing cooperation.[43]

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[41] Phillips, *"Foreword"* in *New Testament Christianity*, 5.

[42] Phillips, *New Testament Christianity*, 158-159.

[43] J. B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961).

Phillips continuously stressed the importance and the need for the "drastic

conversion" in order to "know" God so as to have a relationship with him for the longer,

eternal, or "Real Life."[44]

Paul Tillich

German-American Paul Johannes Tillich, the existential philosopher and

theologian, had raised the philosophical question of *What is Religion?* which was

translated and printed after his death.[45] For Tillich, widely regarded as one of the most

influential theologians of at least the middle of the twentieth century, conversion was not

so much an occurrence as a continuous contemporary theological response to the

environment of life. He expressed this as a "religious function of Faith" when he wrote:

> Directness toward the Unconditional…we call *faith*. Faith is a turning toward the
> Unconditional, effective in all functions of the spirit. Faith, therefore, is not
> identical with any one of the other [religious] functions, neither with the
> theoretical, as a frequent misunderstanding supposes, nor with the practical, as the
> opposing conception ["unfaith"] contends. Faith is not the acceptance of certain
> objects as true; it has nothing to do with acceptance or probability. Nor is it the
> establishing of a community relationship, like confidence or obedience or the like;
> rather, it is the apprehension of the Unconditional as the ground of both the
> theoretical and the practical. But faith is also no special function alongside other
> functions. It comes to expression only in them, and is their root.[46]

Tillich continued in the response to his own question by suggesting that religion is

the result of faith and that "Faith is directedness toward the Unconditional in the

theoretical and practical act."[47] Yet, even though Tillich suggested that this happening or

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[44] Phillips, *Your God is Too Small*, 121-123.

[45] Paul Tillich, *What is Religion?,* translated, edited, and introduction by James Luther Adams (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

[46] Tillich, 76.

[47] Tillich, 76.

religious act, considered to be somewhat similar to conversion, was humanly initiated, he did not suggest that it was an event, a process, an experience, or a progression.

John L. Nuelsen

John Nuelson was a Methodist bishop who wrote widely on Methodism and biblical criticism. In his article "Regeneration," published in 1929, Nuelson moved from the culmination of all things and the turning of Israel to God under the Messiah, to the personal application found in the teaching and conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus as well as in the apostolic teaching of the "darkened understanding and ignorance of natural man" being "placed in contradistinction to the enlightenment of the new life."[48] Because of his concern for a dynamic personal change, he went on to write:

> Regeneration implies not merely an addition of certain gifts or graces, a strengthening of certain innate good qualities, but a radical change, which revolutionizes our whole being, contradicts and overcomes our old fallen nature, and places our spiritual center of gravity wholly outside of our own powers in the realm of God's causation." [49]

For Nuelsen, the consequence of conversion had become directly equated with an individual's regeneration.

John Murray

John Murray was a professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary. The resource of "Faith and Repentance" by Murray taken from his *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* and published in 1955 provides another side of the discussion. Murray suggested that "regeneration is the act of God and of God alone"

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[48] John L. Nuelsen, "Regeneration," 1929, reprinted in *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology*, Millard J .Erickson, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979) 106-108.

[49] Nuelsen, "Regeneration," 111.

while "faith is an activity on the part of the person and of him alone."[50] And, regarding

repentance he wrote:

> We must not think of [repentance] as consisting merely in a change of mind in general; it is very particular and concrete. And since it is a change of mind with reference to sin, it is a change of mind with reference to particular sins, sins in all the particularity and individuality which belong to our sins. It is very easy to speak of sin, to be very denunciatory respecting sin, and denunciatory regarding the particular sins of other people and yet not be penitent regarding our own particular sins. The test of repentance is the genuiness and resoluteness of our repentance in respect to or own sins, sins characterized by the aggravations which are peculiar in our own selves.[51]

By separating the act of God alone in regeneration from the act of the person

alone in faith and repentance, Murray regarded conversion as composed of two distinct

dynamics.

George W. Peters

In *Bibliotheca Sacra* in July 1961, George Peters, a professor of world missions at

Dallas Theological Seminary authored an article entitled "The Meaning of Conversion"

in which he described conversion as "essentially a turning to God and a turning away

from sin" with the two elements "usually expressed by the two Biblical terms of *faith* and

repentance."[52] Peters provided a major historical impression by relating that "the word

conversion and its related terms are a translation of the Hebrew verb *schub* which is

found approximately 1056 times in the Old Testament" and that "the word *schub* is used

in a variety of ways and in general carries the meaning of: turning, returning, turning

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[50] John Murray, "Faith and Repentance," from *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied*, 1955, reprinted in *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology*, Millard J .Erickson, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 69.

[51] Murray, "Faith and Repentance," 75.

[52] George W. Peters, *The Meaning of Conversion*, 1955, reprinted in *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology*, Millard J .Erickson, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 64.

away, restoring, converting, turning unto, etc."[53] Peters also suggested that "there is a possibility of false 'conversion,' conversions which are merely psychological, an escape from judgment rather than sin, or half-heartedness, or to false gods."[54] This could be significant when considering that at least religious conversion has been contemplated as the process by which people encounter that which they perceive as holy.

Millard Erickson

A more current contributor with a systematic approach has been Millard J. Erickson. In 1979, among his more than twenty books, Erickson edited a compilation entitled *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology* containing many of the earlier theological articles referred to above.[55] In it he provided a meaningful "Introduction" on the need for a system of theology and referred to conversion as "the first aspect of salvation" and that "conversion means, literally, a turning" since "Man in his natural condition is not oriented toward God in trust, love, commitment, and discipleship. Rather man in his sin displays rebellion and rejection and indifference."[56]

Erickson's most significant work has been a 1985 three-volume production entitled *Christian Theology*, compiled later into one volume in its second edition.[57] As part of conversion in his theological system, he began by emphasizing that "without the work of the Holy Spirit, there can be no conversion." Erickson advocated that this was

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[53] Peters, *The Meaning of Conversion*, 62.

[54] Peters, 63.

[55] Millard J .Erickson, ed., *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979).

[56] Erickson, "Editor's Introduction," *The New Life: Readings in Christian Theology*, 17.

[57] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998).

the reality because "Jesus spoke especially of repentance, and specifically of conviction of sin, which is the prerequisite of repentance" and quoted Jesus from John 16:8-11, "When he [the Counselor] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."

In his section dealing with salvation, Erickson considered its "direction of movement" and asked, "Does God work by saving individuals which effects a personal transformation that proceeds outwards into society and changes the world; or does God work by altering the social environment and then uses these altered structures in changing individuals who are considered as not essentially perverted?" Erickson rejected the latter as a social gospel "proposing a sort of spiritual public health ministry" and advanced that:

> the opposite approach has been advocated by those segments of Christianity that emphasize conversion. They hold that human nature is radically corrupt. The evils of society result from the fact that it is composed of evil individuals. Only as these individuals are transformed is there any real hope of changing society. Altered individuals will eventually change society, not simply because the whole is composed of the sum of its parts, but also because supernaturally transformed individuals have the motivation to work for the change of the societal whole.[58]

But, Erickson also suggested that "sometimes the church has forgotten that there is variety in God's ways of working."[59] In reflecting on the carry-over from the days of the American frontier into the last century, he offered that a general pattern of strong preaching emphasizing the awfulness of sin, a vivid presentation of the death of Christ and its benefits, and a concluding emotional appeal to accept Christ, pressed hearers to make an immediate decision. As a result, "conversion came to be thought of as a crisis

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[58] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 905.

[59] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 947.

decision."[60] While Erickson acknowledged that frequently God does work with individuals in this way, he also indicated that "it is important not to insist that the individual or external factors of conversion be identical for everyone."[61] In Erickson's theological system, conversion has become totally interrelated with an individual's spiritual change.

Wayne Grudem

More recently, also with a systematic approach, has been a contribution by Wayne Grudem. As a professor of theology and biblical studies, Grudem completed his work on *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* in 1994. His production has been significant for this research in that in his theology, Grudem separated regeneration or the "secret act of God in which he imparts new spiritual life to us" from that of conversion or the "spiritual 'turning'" of an individual's responsive faith and repentance.[62] He considered the action of conversion as being activated by the individual as "our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of our sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation."[63] In Grudem's reformed theological framework, conversion was conveyed as the individual response to God's selective summons.

Stanley J. Grenz

Another prominent present-day contributor had been Stanley J. Grenz, the late Baptist theologian, ethicist, and professor. Grenz wrote many books before his untimely

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[60] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 947.

[61] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 947.

[62] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 699-708, 709-721, respectively.

[63] Grudem, 709.

death at age fifty-five, including in 1966 *A Primer on Postmodernism*. But, his most

significant and well-regarded work has been *Theology for the Community of God* in 1994,

a systematic volume for the church community in which he offered an extensive section

on conversion.[64] Grenz's approach was quite different from that of Grudem in that, like

Erickson, he again emphasized that the "dynamic of conversion" begins with the

Holy Spirit. Grenz proposed that "this transforming encounter with God lies at the

foundation of our Christian experience;" that the baptism of the Spirit, as a miracle that

occurs at conversion, is a finished and unaltered reality.[65]

Donald L Gelpi

As a Roman Catholic professor at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley,

Donald Gelpi has been the leading Catholic theologian regarding conversion. He was

particularly involved in the charismatic renewal of the last half of the twentieth century.

In 1976 he presented *Charism and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Conversion*.[66]

Gelpi based his theology of conversion on a model taken from Bernard Lonergan,

considered by many as the most significant Catholic theologian of the twentieth

century.[67] This conversion model was played out between the spiritual power of charisma

and the religious act of sacrament. It was made up of a matrix of transformations that

were interrelated and interdependent and with innumerable possible combinations

consisting of five potential stages of conversions: from religious, to affective, to

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[64] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 1994, Broadman & Holman Publishing. Reprint, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 433-440.

[65] Grenz, 405, 422, respectively.

[66] Donald L. Gelpi, *Charism and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Conversion* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

[67] Gelpi, "Foreword," ix.

intellectual, to personal moral, and then to sociopolitical. He concluded that "it is

necessary to replace the classic Protestant Pentecostal account of conversion and the

rhetoric it encourages with a more adequate theology of conversion."[68] For Gelpi,

conversion was seen as a spiritual activity that needed to be constantly repeated in order

for anyone to stay in a right relationship with God.

Some twenty years later, Gelpi wrote a more detailed conversion theology

appearing in *The Conversion Experience: A Reflective Process for RCIA Participants

and Others* based on his viewpoint of continuous conversion with community exercises

seeking to "engage every aspect of converted experience – the heart, the mind, the

conscience, institutional commitments, and faith,"[69] and that "these [spiritual] exercises

seek to introduce either initial or ongoing converts to a solid understanding of the

challenges and complexities of the conversion process."[70] For Gelpi, conversion as a

process of continuous spiritual change never seemed to be completed.

Robert J. Schreiter

A similar theological expression as that embraced by Gelpi regarding the need for

continual conversion had been held by Robert Schreiter. Coming out of Vatican Council

II, Schreiter was Dean of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, served as associate

professor of theology, and wrote several books regarding regeneration. In his 1977

resource, *Constructing Local Theologies,* Schreiter attempted to advance the discussion

between Catholic theology and the social sciences. He made numerous references to the

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[68] Gelpi, *Charism and Sacrament*, 56.

[69] Donald L. Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience: A Reflective Process for RCIA Participants and Others* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 1

[70] Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience*, 3.

cultural obstacles that must be overcome in the conversion process.[71] In this context, conversion for Schreiter was understood as the "liberating" or the turning of various peoples to Catholicism and to "liberation theology." Yet, as a continuing deep and complex development, and as his "gradual and concrete process," conversion for Schreiter was viewed as the normal process of the Christian life.[72] This view of conversion as a continuous and gradual turning had also been voiced by Emilie Griffin, a Catholic laity person and advertising executive, in which she communicated that this experience or process had been her personal journey to God.[73]

In a deeper context, Schreiter recognized conversion as needing local theologies in order for the communities to experience the divine presence and to work out the saving activity. He referred to these as the "popular religious forms of expression."[74] Schreiter established that this liberation theology or "popular religiosity" would replace individual devotional patterns and "form a new Christian community embodying the liberating power of the gospel and leaving the folk Christianity of the masses behind."[75] Conversion for Schreiter integrated the rejection of syncretism or the mixing of religious systems, the putting aside of all other religious systems, and the acceptance of the gospel change of single-mindedness in "ways, mind, and heart."[76]

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[71] Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Foreword by Edward Schillebeeckx (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

[72] Schreiter, 141.

[73] Emilie Griffin, *Turning: Reflections on the Experience of Conversion* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1982).

[74] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 122.

[75] Schreiter, 122.

[76] Schreiter, 144-151.

Conversion as a Psychological Process

Over the last few decades the academic study of conversion has dramatically expanded. While most of the resources investigated have come from within the general or theological area of religious conversion, a substantial amount has now been developed in the psychological area, particularly in the last third of the last century. Of principal importance uncovered concerning this research category appears to have been a desire to at least be more religious, with attempts to recognize possible potential stages of spiritual development.

William James

Conversion as a psychological process was initiated by William James, the American philosopher, psychologist, and physician referred to as the "father of American psychology." James wrote widely and particularly on the practical application of psychology between the time of Edwards and Lewis in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth.[77] His most important production regarding psychology and religion was in 1902 with the publication of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, often referred to as "*Varieties*."[78] James considered psychology and at least religion to be in perfect harmony with both admitting that "there are forces seemingly outside of the conscious individual that bring redemption to his life." But, he suggested that "psychology, defining these forces as 'subconscious,' and speaking of their effects as due to 'incubation,' or 'cerebration,' implies that they do not transcend the individual's

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[77] *Oxford Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., comp. by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 1989, 20 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press), 2002.

[78] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience (Varieties)*, 1902 in *The Complete Works of William James*, ser. ed. by Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskellis (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

personality; and herein she diverges from Christian theology, which insists that they are direct supernatural operations of the Deity."[79]

In *Varieties*, James demonstrated his pragmatism and his concern for functional psychology and addressed over twenty topics related to conversion: from conversion and sexuality, to conversion and the subconscious, to conversion and inhibition. His concern for conversion had been indicated earlier on in his writing with his reflections on numerous conversion cases; for example:

> The suddenness of her conversion shows well how native the sense of God's presence must be to certain minds. She relates that she was brought up in entire ignorance of Christian doctrine, but, when in Germany, after being talked to by Christian friends, she read the Bible and prayed, and finally the plan of salvation flashed upon her like a stream of light.[80]

This case narrative resulted in James' conclusion on the subject of conversion that "unpicturable beings are realized, and realized with an intensity almost like that of an hallucination;" that "they determine our vital attitude as decisively as the vital attitude of lovers is determined by the habitual senses" and that "they are as convincing to those that have them as any direct sensible experiences can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by logic ever are."[81]

For James, the definition of conversion was psychologically clear in that for him

> to be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy.[82]

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[79] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 174

[80] James, 63.

[81] James, 66.

[82] James, 157.

According to James, this unification of the personality, accepted as his perceived understanding of conversion, was necessary "whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about."[83]

<p style="text-align:center">George Albert Coe</p>

George Albert Coe, a theologian, scholar, and writer had continued this promotion of the psychological approach to religion and conversion.[84] Although he was considered to be a distinguished scholar in the field of religious education, particularly the psychological interpretation of religion, Coe appeared to have been strongly influenced by early psychologists. So, in1916, when Coe presented his first major work in his area of interest entitled *The Psychology of Religion*, he revealed the psychological influences not only of James, but also E. D. Starbuck who had written an article for the *American Journal of Psychology*, VIII in 1897 entitled, "A Study of Conversion."[85] As a result, Coe appeared to have been deeply concerned with conscience, morals, the mature mind, and self-realization, so that in reflecting on conversion he proposed:

> Self-realization within a social medium has now been established as one important phase of the religious experience. When this religious self-realization is intense, and is attained with some abruptness, the change is called conversion. The convert looks upon himself as having passed from a lower to a higher level, as having attained to real life, or as having come to himself, or a having 'found' God.[86]

This would seem to indicate that Coe placed conversion more as the psychological end rather than as a religious means.

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[83] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 157.

[84] Northwestern University Library, northwestern.edu, s.v. George A. Coe.

[85] George Albert Coe, *The Psychology of Religion*, ix, 1 (note 1), 10, 44, 47 (note), 56-57, 152, 153 (note), 154, 162, 171, 350.

[86] Coe, *The Psychology of Religion*, 152.

Sigmund Freud

A few years later as a reaction to religion and its relationship to psychology,

Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist and "father of psychoanalysis," regarded any

response or conversion to a monotheistic God as an illusion: something which he thought

necessary to restrain man's violent nature in the early stages of civilization, which at least

in his time, could be set aside for reason and science. Near the completion of his career in

1927, he wrote *The Future of an Illusion*.[87] In it Freud revealed that "when I say that

these things are all an illusion, I must define the meaning of the word. An illusion is not

the same thing as an error; nor is it necessarily an error."[88] Accordingly, regarding his

view of an illusion and reality he wrote:

> What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes.
> In this respect they come near to psychiatric delusions. But they differ from them,
> too, apart from the more complicated structure of delusions. Illusions need not
> necessarily be false – that is to say, unrealizable or in contradiction to reality….
> We can now repeat that all of them [religious doctrines] are illusions and
> insusceptible of proof. No one can be compelled to think them true, to believe in
> them.[89]

Freud seemed to imply that anything that was of a religious nature, especially

conversion, was simply a human desire rather than any scientific reality.

Raymond F. Paloutzian

With their extensive writing, the views of many academic scholars who more

recently have classified and advocated for conversion as a psychological process appear

to have been well-accepted in many religious circles. These have tried to describe

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[87] Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 1927, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961).

[88] Freud, 30.

[89] Freud, 31.

conversion more as a theory of a complete psychological process of personal and cultural change. Among them has been Raymond Paloutzian, a professor of psychology who had a special interest in social psychology and particularly in the psychology of religion. His has been a research emphasis on the forms of religious conversion. In addition to producing an introductory textbook on the psychology of religion in 1983, with its 2nd edition in 1996, and being the lead editor of two handbooks on the psychology of religion in 2005 and 2013 where he wrote the sections dealing with conversion, Paloutzian has also been the editor of the *Journal for the Psychology of Religion.* In his works, Paloutzian, rather than providing a definition of conversion, has attempted to describe a human psychological religious process. In his more recent handbook he offered the chapter entitled "Religious Conversion and Spiritual Transformation" and wrote: "Learning about the processes that mediate religious conversion and spiritual transformation is a goal central to the heart and soul of the discipline of psychology."[90]

Paloutzian described his research on conversion by submitting:

The finding that it is a person's purposes, goals, values, attitudes and beliefs, identity, and focus of ultimate concern that change, and not his or her core traits, means that what becomes different about a person who converts are those expressions of the new religion that reflect what the new religion means to him or her, not 'what the person is like' in some basic sense. Those aspects of the whole person through which conversion shows its effects are those that relate to whatever is transcendent to the person.[91]

And, believing that "religion is about meaning," he concluded that "the thing that undergoes transformation in a religious conversion is the person's meaning system."[92]

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[90] Raymond F. Paloutzian, "Religious Conversion and Spiritual Transformation: a Meaning-System Analysis," in *Handbook of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, Raymonf F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, eds. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2005), 331.

[91] Paloutzian, 332

[92] Paloutzian, 333.

Thus Paloutzian, who had been concerned with psychological equilibrium, came to regard conversion as a psychological process. He suggested that with its input pressures, its internal changes, and its outward expression, there is a process of spiritual transformation, so that "as people go through life they come to a point of equilibrium between the components of their meaning system" that remain in balance unless there is some pressure which would force it to change, such as a religious conversion.[93]

Lewis R. Rambo

Coming out of a background where his mother's church stressed "correct" knowledge and "right" behavior as essential while the emotional issues such as joy, peace, and blessedness were considered secondary, Lewis R. Rambo came to feel that such knowledge and actions were motivated by the emotional issues of fear, self-loathing, and insecurity; that the only thing that really seemed eternal was damnation rather than salvation; and that conversion was just what any faith group claimed it to be. Yet, he grew to believe that there is a hunger within every human being for the kind of meaningfulness associated with new life, new love, and new beginnings.

Although Rambo has accepted that "the definition of conversion remains a vexing problem," he has suggested that the study of conversion, "once the almost exclusive preserve of psychologists and evangelicals" has expanded dramatically in the last few decades.[94] This also would seem to indicate that conversion has become something about which more and more academic researchers have an opinion.

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[93] Paloutzian, "Religious Conversion and Spiritual Transformation," 335-336.

[94] Lewis R. Rambo, "Anthropology and the Study of Conversion," in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 211-213.

Rambo's attention to conversion had begun nearly thirty years ago with his definition of conversion as a psychological process in some rather significant research sources. In a definitive article on "Conversion" in the 1987 edition of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Rambo first set out his stage model. He began by describing conversion as the "phenomena that are associated with personal and continual metamorphosis," that "conversion will be viewed as dynamic, multifaceted process of change," and that it "encompasses the social and cultural matrix that includes symbols, myths, rituals, worldviews, and institutions." [95]

Rambo did include in his definition the idea of transformation as "the process of change manifested through alteration in people's thoughts, feelings, and actions" and that this process is achieved through transcendence or "the encounter with the holy that, according to many religions, constitutes the source and goal of conversion."[96]

Later in 1992, Rambo authored two chapters in the *Handbook of Religious Conversion*: individually "The Psychology of Conversion"[97] as well as "The Phenomenology of Conversion" with Lawrence A. Reh.[98] In the former article, Rambo began by stating:

> Conversion has been an important topic in psychology since the inception of the discipline in the late nineteenth century. William James, Edwin Starbuck, G. Stanley Hall, and other early figures were fascinated by the phenomenon of religious change. Because the most prevalent and obvious form of conversion at the time was the apparently sudden conversion which occurred at revival

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[95] Lewis R. Rambo, "Conversion," in vol. 4 of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 73-79, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), 73.

[96] Rambo, "Conversion," in vol. 4 of *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, 74.

[97] Rambo, "The Psychology of Conversion," in *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, eds. H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1992), 159-177.

[98] Rambo and Lawrence A. Reh, "The Phenomenology of Conversion," in *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, 229-258.

meetings, those early studies focused primarily on conversion as a dramatic, radical change, usually involving adolescents or young adult.[99]

Rambo has recognized that at least a religious conversion does offer some optimism and that such a possibility could provide a reality of hope for millions of people. So, believing that the innate personal needs for explanation and renewal are universal, Rambo has been determined to find out why and how people convert.

Based on his conversations, readings, debates, conferences, and other activities provided by a community of scholars devoted to the study of conversion or religious change, Rambo decided to draw on the academic insights from the secular fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, as well as religion to understand conversion. He came to believe that conversion is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientation. As a result, he came up with a creative model of conversion as a psychological process in his major work *Understanding Religious Conversion*, published just a little over twenty years ago.[100] His conversion model was made up of seven systemic and matrix stages. The first was *context* or "the integration of both the superstructure and the infrastructure of conversion" including the social, cultural, religious, and personal dimensions.[101] The second stage was some form of religious, political, psychological, or cultural *crisis*.[102] The third matrix stage was *quest* or "the assumption that people seek to maximize

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[99] Rambo, "The Psychology of Conversion," 159.

[100] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

[101] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 20.

[102] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 44.

meaning and purpose in life, to erase ignorance, and to resolve inconsistency."[103] The

fourth was the *encounter* between the "advocate and the potential convert."[104] The fifth

stage was the *interaction* in which "the potential convert either chooses to continue the

contact and become more involved, or the advocate works to sustain the interaction in

order to extend the possibility of persuading the person to convert."[105] The sixth was

commitment, "the fulcrum of the change process" in which "a specific turning point or

decision is often required and/or experienced, and this commitment decision is often

dramatized and commemorated."[106] Rambo's final stage of conversion was "the

consequences which are complex and multifaceted, in both their study and explication"

and "are determined in part by the nature, intensity, and duration of the conversion and

the response to conversion in a person's or group's context."[107] His model appeared to try

to include everything: culture, society, the person, religion, and history with its various

types of apostasy or defection, affiliation, intensification, institutional transitions, and

personal transition.

In the second edition of *The Encyclopedia of Religion* in 2005, Rambo with

assistance by Charles E. Farhadian, updated the definition by making "Conversion" more

inclusive. It appeared this was because Rambo submitted to the fact that "the nature and

definition of conversion had elicited enormous controversy," and that with its complexity

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[103] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 56.

[104] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 66.

[105] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 102.

[106] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 124.

[107] Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 142, 144-145, respectively.

and transcendent mystery a "scholarly consensus has yet to be achieved."[108] He equated conversion with the "enlightenment" of the ancient Indian converts to Buddhism and suggested that "it is important…to note that Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam have been traditionally identified as conversionist (or missionary) movements."[109]

In addition to his editorship of the periodical *Pastoral Psychology*, Rambo has written numerous other articles on the psychology of religion and of conversion. Usually this has been done with a co-author such as the "Converting: Stages of Religious Change," also with Charles F. Farhadian.[110]

More recently Rambo has offered "Conversion Studies, Pastoral Counseling, and Cultural Studies: Embracing a New Paradigm" in the on-line *Ex auditu* in which he discussed global studies relating to religious conversion since "how people change (indeed, how people are transformed) has become a topic of extensive debate and research."[111]

As a response to Rambo's article in that same creation of *Ex auditu*, Phillis Isabella Sheppard, a womanist, practical theologian, psychoanalyst, and psychotherapist reacted to conversion by wondering how the developing conversion studies relate to the *imago Dei* or how "humanity's embodiment of being created in God's image is most

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[108] Lewis R. Rambo, "Conversion," in vol. 2 of *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* 2nd ed., 1969-1974, ser. ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 1969.

[109] Rambo, "Conversion," in vol. 2 of *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* 2nd ed., 1969.

[110] Lewis R. Rambo and Charles F. Farhadian, "Converting: Stages of Religious Change," in *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, edited by Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant (New York: Cassell, 1999), 23-34.

[111] Lewis R. Rambo, "Conversion Studies, Pastoral Counseling, and Cultural Studies: Embracing a New Paradigm," 1-16 of *Ex auditu* 25 (2009): 1.

fully realized."[112] While she suggested that conversion studies could be helpful in pastoral counseling in the twenty-first century, she questioned the aim of such studies. And although she supported the "re-engagement" in the phenomenon of conversion with its inclusiveness of various perspectives, theories, and religions, she questioned the impact that "a gendered, or a Feminist or Womanist" might have in reading about conversion.[113] Her question seems to have been: Is conversion something that is necessary and available to all people?

Possibly because of wanting a broader audience or because of receiving few other challenging or negative comments on his electronic journal article, Rambo reprinted his original article without comment the following year in *Pastoral Psychology* as a promotion of his new paradigm.[114]

In the last decade Rambo has continued to advocate conversion to be a psychological process. His most recent efforts include "Psychology of Conversion and Spiritual Transformation" with Steven C. Bauman in *Pastoral Psychology*,[115] and "Psychology of Religion: Toward a Multidisciplinary Paradigm" with Haar Farris and Matthew S. also in *Pastoral Psychology*.[116] While there have been many others during the last few decades that have done research on psychology and religion with a

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[112] Phillis Isabella Sheppard, "Response to Rambo," 17-21 of *Ex auditu* 25 (2009): 17.

[113] Sheppard, 21.

[114] Lewis R. Rambo, "Conversion Studies, Pastoral Counseling, and Cultural Studies: Embracing a New Paradigm," reprint, *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 4 (August 2010): 433-445.

[115] Lewis R. Rambo and Steven C. Bauman, "Psychology of Conversion and Spiritual Transformation," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, nos. 5-6 (December 2012): 879-894.

[116] Lewis R. Rambo, Haar Farris, and Matthew S., "Psychology of Religion: Toward a Multidisciplinary Paradigm," *Pastoral Psychology* 61, nos. 5-6 (December 2012): 711-720.

particular concern for conversion, probably the greatest scholarly influence has been that of Lewis R. Rambo.

Conversion as a Sociological Experience

Among the considerable amount of scholarly materials that have reflected on conversion in the field of sociology over at least the last couple of decades, a substantial quantity have portrayed conversion as a sociological experience. Not all of these resources consider sociology as the final solution to the problem of mankind's divine alienation, but there are many that have considered the resulting revolutionary or economic social changes in individuals and societies as being equated with at least some form of religious conversion.

Serge Moscovici

A significant amount of sociological researchers on conversion have been from those with a background of social psychology. More often their research has focused on groups, individuals within groups, and individuals changing groups. One of the more thought-proving of the recent sources in this literary category has been that of Serge Moscovici, a Jewish social psychologist. It is said that he suffered the effects of anti-Semitism after being expelled in 1938 from a Bucharest high school and later being interned in a construction labor camp until 1944. This no doubt gave rise to his work chiefly in group social psychology with a special interest in behavioral change. In 1980, as a professor at Ecole de Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris, Moscovici initiated his assumptions of social psychology and conversion with "Toward a Theory of Conversion Behavior." As he looked at the behavioral results, he proposed there must be

either an individual conversion with social change or else social compliance.[117] As a

result, Moscovici proposed four assumptions regarding individual and group change or

conversion: minorities and majorities always exert influence, these influences create a

personal conflict or group dissonance or divergence, the direction of the conflict will be

different depending on the majority or minority influence, and the resolution of the

conflict follows a public or private path of least resistance in order to achieve individual

conversion behavior or a social compliant behavior.[118] Out of this perspective, Moscovici

suggested that "what the minority does is bad, because there are few who do it."[119] Yet,

because of his research regarding the effects of the minority influence, particularly that a

small group can have on a larger one, it is of significance for this study for those who

have experienced conversion that he predicted "conversion is produced by a minority's

consistent behavior."[120]

In referencing the 1977 work of P. G. Zimbardo, B. E. Ebbesen, and C. Maslach

entitled *Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior*"[121] Moscovici acknowledged an

experience view of conversion by quoting from their work: "conversion is a change

process in which a person gives up one ordered view of the world and one philosophical

perspective for another (p. 182)." Moscovici interestingly concluded that "minorities are

more influential than majorities in the usual sense of the term, since they produce more

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[117] Serge Moscovici, "Toward a Theory of Conversion Behavior," in vol. 13 of *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. by Leonard Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1980), 209-239.

[118] Moscovici, "Toward a Theory of Conversion Behavior," 209-217.

[119] Moscovici, 210.

[120] Moscovici, 217.

[121] Moscovici, 231.

genuine change."[122] Yet, as a sociologist, he was more concerned with the resulting

behavior rather than the actual fact of conversion.

John Lofland

One of the more noteworthy scholars in this sociological experience formation

has been American John Lofland. Although he was known for his decades of studies

regarding the peace movement in the United States and Europe, because of his early

writings and career he has also been considered an important researcher on the

experience of religious conversion. In 1965, he initiated an article on religious conversion

which was a critique of the Unification Church of Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

By teaming up with Rodney Stark, a fellow Berkeley advanced sociology student,

Lofland set out to delineate a model of the conversion process or perspective, particularly

that phenomenon "through which a group of people came to see the world in terms set by

the doctrines of one such obscure and devalued perspective."[123] Their sociological model

of conversion, based on their Unification Church assessment, still has some practical

conversion approach application with its suggested turning point for an individual, an

entrance into a group with strong affective bonds, and the detachment from things outside

the group. [124] A key question regarding conversion which was considered:

> How does one determine when a person has 'really' taken up a different
> perspective? The most obvious evidence, of course, is his own declaration that he
> has done so. This frequently takes the form of a tale of regeneration, about 'how

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[122] Moscovici, 237.

[123] John Lofland and Rodney Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociology Review* 30, no. 8 (December 1965): 862.

[124] Lofland and Stark, 862-875.

terrible life was before and how wonderful it is now.' But verbal claims are easily made and simple to falsify.[125]

To avoid this dilemma the suggestion was made that there should be two classes or degrees of conversion: "*verbal converts* who profess belief and were accepted by core members as sincere, but took no active role, and *total converts* who exhibited their commitment through deeds as well as words."[126]

In 1965, a year after receiving his advanced degree, Lofland completed his first book concerning religious conversion which was based on his explorations within the Unification Church, or as he declared, this "doomsday cult." He came to consider conversion by those joining and leaving to be some form of sociological experience.

With the assistance of his wife, Lyn H. Lofland, he completed his second major work relating to conversion only four years later in 1969.[127] In this research volume, although the actual word *conversion* was not used, the Loflands did consider the prospect of a "deviant behavior," a type of social conflict, faced by what he referred to as the "Actors," who then change their general perspective for coding reality so as to find their social identity.[128] And he added that "those who would attempt to escalate an Actor to a category of a general perspective other than his own face a massive task."[129] Lofland's work continuously attempted to place conversion within a human sociological experience perspective.

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[125] Lofland and Stark, 863-864.

[126] Lofland and Stark, "Becoming a World-Saver," 864.

[127] John Lofland, *Deviance and Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969).

[128] Lofland, 195.

[129] Lofland, 195.

Rodney Stark

Basically because of his work with Lofland, the other American sociologist who had given impetus to religious conversion as being a sociological experience has been Rodney Stark. Although he grew up as a Lutheran in Jamestown, North Dakota, Stark did not consider himself to be an atheist though he did not claim or believe in faith. Over the years, since his initial days of graduate work at Berkeley in his mid-career, Stark had been occupied with the development of the theory of religious economy in which those who are involved in religion, certainly including conversion, seemed to be caught up in a religious involvement of rewards and compensators. Following his literary production with Lofland and while still at Berkeley, Stark also teamed up with William Sims Bainbridge in 1985 in a work entitled *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* which furthered the groundwork for this sociological experience category.[130] Again, as sociologists researching conversion, Stark and Bainbridge were deeply concerned with the behavior rather than any activity of conversion.

Stark's own major work in 1996 was entitled *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*.[131] In it he began by asking the question: "How did a tiny and obscure messianic movement from the edge of the Roman empire dislodge classical paganism and become the dominant faith of Western civilization?"[132] In historical reconstruction, Stark was impressed with the rise of Christianity, particularly in the third century. He compared it to what he and Lofland had observed about the

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[130] Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge. *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

[131] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[132] Stark, 3.

Unification Church and suggested that "conversion is not about seeking or embracing an

ideology, it is about one's religious behavior into alignment with that of friends and

family members."[133] This emphasis on social behavior seems almost the opposite of what

other researchers on conversion have expressed.

As recently as 2000, this time in collaboration with Roger Finke, Stark produced

Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion.[134] In these sociological writings,

conversion had been broadly regarded as "shifts across religious traditions" or as "'long-

distance' shifts in religious allegiance, involving a shift across [religious] traditions"

differentiated from a reaffiliation or shift within the religious traditions where both

traditions have a positive association between an individual's religious involvement and

social class.[135] Conversion for Stark and Finke, as expressed in their book, was viewed

more philosophically as religious utilization and manipulation for rewards from

supernatural compensators.

William Sims Bainbridge

Prior to co-authoring *The Future of Religion* with Stark, William Sims

Bainbridge, another prominent American sociologist, had continued to push the

discussion of the sociology of religion with his "Formal Explanation of Religion: A

Progress Report," which was published in *Social Analysis* in 1984.[136] Bainbridge has

been most well-known for his work on the sociology of religion, rational choice, and

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[133] Stark, 16-17.

[134] Rodney Stark and Roger Finke. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

[135] Stark and Roger Finke, 114-115.

[136] William Sims Bainbridge, "Formal Explanation of Religion: A Progress Report," *Social Analysis* 45, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 145-158.

attempts to understand the religious cults, such as the Process Church which has been considered as being related to scientology. In 1992, Bainbridge detailed his sociological experience theories on religious conversion in his segment entitled "The Sociology of Conversion" within the larger edited work of Malony and Southard's sociological conversion manual.[137] He suggested that religious conversion can be explained by one of two alternative sociological theories. According to the "strain theory," individuals "join a religious order to satisfy conventional desires that unusual personal or collective deprivations have frustrated," while, on the other hand with the "social influence theory," individuals join a religion because "they have formed social attachments with persons who are already members of a social group and because their attachments to non-members are weak."[138]

Because of a 1983 article, "Religious Conversion and the Concept of Socialization" in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* by Theodore E. Long and Jeffrey K. Hadden, Bainbridge admitted that "despite their great differences, there is scientific evidence in favor of both of these theories" and that the best clarification was probably an informed combination of the two.[139] However, he submitted that "there is reason to doubt that people who convert are always, or even commonly, changed in an essential way."[140]

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[137] William Sims Bainbridge, "The Sociology of Conversion." In *Handbook of Religious Conversion*, edited by H. Newton Malony and Samuel Southard, 178-191. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1992.

[138] Bainbridge, 178.

[139] Bainbridge, 178.

[140] Bainbridge, 182.

John Finney

Another contributor to the application of sociology to conversion has been John

Finney, the Church of England Officer for the Decade of Evangelism in the 1970's.

Based on the research of others, he initiated the sociology of religious premises with "A

Theory of Religious Commitment" that was academically recognized when it was

published in the journal, *Sociological Analysis.*[141] His most recent work has been *Finding*

Faith Today: How Does It Happen? which was published in 1992.[142] This was in

response to a survey which was sent to 815 British "people who had made a 'public

profession of faith'" within the last year, "Roman Catholic, Afro-Caribbean, and New

Church (House Church)" participants, and Roman Catholics who had "completed the Rite

of Christian Initiation of Adults." Three hundred and sixty questionnaires were returned.

From this, Finney concluded that while "the possibility of 'sudden' conversion should not

be neglected," the "means of evangelism which do not rely so heavily upon the

communication of a verbal message are important."[143] He regarded conversion as a

"journey of faith" which should not be just because of an intellectual aim, but also

because of religious experiences such as charismatic happenings, dreams, and other

extraordinary sociological occurrences.[144] His description of a faith journey for

conversion took on a definite sociological perspective.

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[141] John Finney, "A Theory of Religious Commitment," *Sociological Analysis* 39, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 19-35.

[142] John Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* (Swindon, U.K.: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992).

[143] Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* 25.

[144] Finney, *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* 93-99.

C. Margaret Hall

Also prominent in this resource grouping has been the work of C. Margaret Hall in which she conveyed her concern for personal and social identity into the conversion equation with her presentation in 1996 of *Identity, Religion, and Values: Implications for Practitioners*.[145] Hall grew up in England and immigrated to the United States in1962. In her book pertaining to conversion she reiterated what she had apparently written in a journal article five years earlier:

> Identity empowerment theory is based on the premise that personal and social identities both derive from social sources and have social consequences. Religions can be thought of as critically important composites of values and ideals, which may become goals and objectives for individuals or groups who are working toward being effective moral agents in the complex interplay of society and history.[146]

Subsequently, Hall suggested that in order for individuals to maintain proper identities "which are strongly influenced by beliefs, an important fact to record in life histories is whether people's current religious beliefs derive from their families or from emotionally significant others," and that "people should at least be prepared to change religions if necessary."[147]

For Hall, conversion seemed to have been just so much religious ritual for assisting individuals in making their social fulfillment and finding their identity.[148] However, conversion appears to be more complex than just an important source for values, meaning, decision-making, and actions.

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[145] C. Margaret Hall, *Identity, Religion, and Values: Implications for Practitioners* (Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

[146] Hall, *Identity, Religion, and Values*,5.

[147] Hall,, 150.

[148] Hall, 162.

David A. Snow

Among numerous others involved in the discussion portraying conversion as a sociological experience, probably the most notable have been the sociological critiques and theories offered by David A. Snow. Snow had initiated his research with his colleagues Richard Machalek and Cynthia L. Phillips. Snow and Machalek attempted to conceptualize and develop an understanding of religious conversion sociologically, especially the experience of "new" religious movements. They envisioned that this could lead to an empirical investigation vis-à-vis the 1908 Cole Lecture by George Jackson at Vanderbilt University in which he had stressed resistance to any attempts to "standardize" conversion. [149] In a journal article a few years earlier, in critiquing the Lofland-Stark Conversion Model, Snow, this time with Cynthia Phillips, had suggested that there must be a state of acutely-felt social tension or frustration within an individual which develops into a predisposing condition in order for there to be any religious conversion. [150] Conversion, for Snow in particular, had appeared to be understood as some sort of a self-motivated encounter between individuals and their physical environment.

Scot McKnight

As a professor of biblical and theological studies, Scot McKnight had written numerous theological works and would normally be considered as part of the category characterizing conversion as a theological occurrence. However, although McKnight has

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[149] David A. Snow and Richard Machalek, "The Sociology of Conversion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 10 (1984): 167-190.

[150] David A. Snow and Cynthia L. Phillips, "The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: a Critical Assessment," *Social Problems* 27, no. 4 (April 1980): 430-447.

been deeply concerned with spiritual formation and Christian living, particularly in discussions about Jesus, he had expressly indicated that conversion is a sociological process or experience. This was even indicated by the subtitle of his major work on conversion.[151] His model of conversion has been based on an appreciation of all three contemporary patterns: that of the personal decision, the sociological, and the liturgical, based on the biographies or personal narratives of those who have claimed conversion.[152] But, his model has also been based on sociological experiences involving an "encounter to consequences" approach of "converting to Jesus."[153] In McKnight's version, Jesus has been presented as a spiritual advocate, who, having been sociologically encountered, then interacts with a potential convert.[154]

He closed his work with a challenge for any individual or any one group interested in attempting to understand conversion as a process or experience:

> The danger of religious experience is that it seems to bring a desire for conformity with it[,] but how one experiences the process need not be the same as how the next person will experience it.…Each of these [sociological influences] varies from person to person, so the experience of the process varies from person to person. What motives one might not motivate others. Each person has a motivation that drives, woos, or interests him or her in things religious, but once again, it is the same process.[155]

Based on McKnight's sociological perspective on conversion, his suggestion, that "when a group permits itself to fall into one orientation…it shuts itself off from the

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[151] Scot McKnight, *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

[152] McKnight, 1-25.

[153] McKnight, *Turning to Jesus*, 115.

[154] McKnight, 145-174.

[155] McKnight, 179-180.

fullness of human experience and from the mysterious ways of the Spirit", would seem noteworthy.[156] Yet, when the phenomenon of conversion is confined to just the sociological process or experience, as he advocated, it would appear that it may have lost much of the spiritual dynamic.

Conversion as an Anthropological Progression

There also have been many anthropological researchers, particularly social or cultural anthropologists, who have depicted conversion as being an anthropological progression. This developmental trend evokes the involvement of the sociological and even cultural and historical complexities encountered by an individual. The anthropological conversion drift has then been assumed to bring about a continuous advancement, expansion, or the building, not only of the individual, but more importantly of society.

Robert W. Hefner

One of the leading proponents in this anthropological category has been Robert Hefner, an American professor of anthropology, a director of an anthropological institute, and a director of a program on Islam, society, and world affairs. Hefner has been prolific as a writer. His most important contribution to this research on conversion has been his editorship in 1993 of *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*[157] which included his 42-page Part One, Chapter

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[156] McKnight, 181.

[157] Robert W. Hefner, ed. *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation (*Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

One "Introduction: World Building and the Rationality of Conversion."[158] Hefner here

suggested that "conversion assumes a variety of forms because it is influenced by a larger

interplay of identity, politics, and morality" which over time are more significant than

individual experience.[159] And, he concluded:

> It goes without saying that the promise is never fully realized. But the ideal
> survives. The very generality of its ethic allows this ideal [transcendence] to exert
> powerful influence on the most divine human affairs and provides living
> testimony to one of the most enduring responses to the challenges of identity and
> morality in our complex world.[160]

For Hefner, conversion to any world religion and Christianity in particular was

something that seemed to be repeated as part of the civilizing process that included the

origin of social relations and cultural meanings.

Joy Hendry

Joy Hendry, a professor of social anthropology at Oxford Brookes University and

another prominent social scientist and anthropologist, had written numerous articles and

books on social anthropology, particularly from a Japanese cultural perspective. Hendry

had been predominantly involved in the anthropological research of religion, science, and

the "external beyond self."[161] She appeared to be enthralled with the 1922 work of Sir

James Frazier "whose monumental twelve-volume work, *The Golden Bough*, addresses

just these issues," principally the contrast of magic that is conceptually identical with

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[158] Robert W. Hefner, "Introduction: World Building and the Rationality of Conversion," In *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*, edited by Robert W. Hefner (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 3-44.

[159] Hefner, "Introduction: World Building and the Rationality of Conversion," 4.

[160] Hefner, 35.

[161] Joy Hendry, *Other People's Worlds: An Introduction to Cultural and Social Anthropology* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

modern science, and religion with its theoretical belief in a power higher than man.[162]

And she stated in her introductory book to cultural and social anthropology that

> in practice, it seems that magic and religion persist, even in a world dominated by scientific thought, and the 'more intelligent', or 'thinking people', as Frazier would have them, are by no means excluded.[163]

Hendry had also been involved in researching the symbols or shared meanings

peculiar to a particular group and society within a culture---the broad ideas and

explanations of people being involved in the "world in which they live" within their place

in that social world. For Hendry in this context any direct characterization of conversion

had not been included, even as part of religion, because she proposed "some of the

theories and practices found around the world make the drawing up of a valid universal

definition a virtually impossible task."[164] Even in a larger context she would most likely

include conversion in cosmology along with people's broad ideas and explanations about

this world and their place in it, the creation of the world, the arrival of people into that

world, the notions of other worlds, and the "transcendental experiences in this world."[165]

Stephen D. Glazier

About the same time as Henry's work, Stephen Glazier, a professor of

anthropology at the University of Nebraska edited a handbook entitled the *Anthropology*

of Religion. In its "Introduction," Glazier began by suggesting that the study of religion

and anthropology, while continuing to be strong, had become "marginalized" in the field

of anthropology; that prior to his publication there were no guides dealing exclusively

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[162] Hendry, 116-117.

[163] Hendry, 118.

[164] Hendry, *Other People's Worlds*, 116.

[165] Hendry, 115.

with religion.[166] His relationship to conversion was evident by his including in the handbook a chapter by a more junior scholar, John A. Grim, an associate professor in the history of religions at Becknell University. In Grim's chapter "Rituals among Native North Americans" he referenced the round Ghost Dance of the Lakota people as a "transformative experience" which included a prediction of the return of the ancestral dead, an encounter which would purify the practitioner, and the resulting transformation of the intrusive mainstream America.[167] Certainly this is a change and turning, but it appears to be more concerned with the here-and-now than with any eternal divine relationship.

A more recent and direct contribution by Glazier has been his co-editorship with Andrew Buckser of *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*.[168] In the Preface the editors began by acknowledging that "religious conversion poses a powerful challenge to anthropological theories concerning the connection between culture and self."[169] Both Bucker and Glazier made chapter contributions, along with a dozen others, engaging the promotion of religious conversion in geographical and historical contexts. Noted examples have been that of Australian Diane Austin-Broos and Rebecca Sachs Norris.

Austin-Broos, who held the Radcliffe-Brown Chair in Anthropology at the University of Sydney, provided the initial chapter, "The Anthropology of Conversion: An

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[166] Stephen D, Glazier, ed., *Anthropology of Religion: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 1-5.

[167] John A. Grim, "Rituals among Native North Americans" in *Anthropology of Religion*, Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier, eds. (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003). 229-255.

[168] Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier, eds., *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

[169] Buckser and Glazier, eds., xi.

Introduction."[170] As the foreword to anthropological advancement, she suggested that at

least religious conversion is a form of robust cultural passage in a "turning from and to"

within historical dynamics and the changes in understanding regarding the individual's

world taken as a series of baby steps.[171] In her proposal, conversion has basically come to

be described as the religious process regarding the passage or advancement of the self

within their culture.

    The other noted example for the expression of religious conversion as

anthropological advancement within Glazier's text had been by Rebecca Norris who as

an assistant professor of religion at Merrimack College, questioned, "Converting to

What? Embodied Culture and the Adoption of New Beliefs."[172] She offered that

"conversion involves not just adopting a set of ideas but also converting to and from an

embodied worldview and identity"[173] and that those same qualities that enable culture to

become embodied "make it possible for converts, through verbal and physical practices

over time to profoundly transform their understanding and experience of adopted

traditions based in another culture."[174] This has also lead to conversion being expressed

as self or anthropological advancement and cultural progression.

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[170] Diane Austin-Broos, "The Anthropology of Conversion," in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 1-12.

[171] Austin-Broos, 1-7.

[172] Rebecca Sachs Norris, "Converting to What? Embodied Culture and the Adoption of New Beliefs," in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 171-181.

[173] Norris, 171.

[174] Norris, 180.

Glazier headed up his edited handbook's third section of "Conversion and Individual Experience" with a chapter, just prior to that of Norris's, regarding the narratives of "conversion" of various peoples in the Caribbean.[175] Based on his case studies of numerous conversion descriptions, he proposed a "social interactionist view of conversion" with a "convert" being realized by the amount of time spent with a particular group or what scholars of his day referred to as "the civilizing process."[176] Glazier seemed to have been especially interested in religious organizations, practices, and the longevity of the participants' experience---the engagement and disengagement. In considering the observable, he aired that conversion was a complex process which must allow for the perspective of the convert as well as the perspective of other advocates.

Fenella Cannell

One of the more recent anthropological and cultural resources relating to Christianity has been the work *The Anthropology of Christianity* edited by Fenella Cannell.[177] This source also included Cannell's "Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity" in which she indicated that religious conversion, especially as it relates to Christianity, is only a temporary step in anthropological advancement or cultural change.[178] Cannell was greatly interested in the role of Christianity and the vital anthropological relationships of social evolution, development, and modernity. She

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[175] Stephen D. Glazier, "'Limin' wid jah': Spiritual Baptists Who Become Rastafarians and Then Become Spiritual Baptists Again," in *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*, eds. Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 149-170.

[176] Glazier, "'Limin' wid jah': Spiritual Baptists Who Become Rastafarians and Then Become Spiritual Baptists Again,"152-155.

[177] Fenella Cannell, ed., *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[178] Fenella Cannell, "Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity," in *The Anthropology of Christianity*, edited by Fenella Cannell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-50.

indicated that of all the religions, Christianity, as a religion of transcendence, had been

the most challenging for anthropologist because of its theological framework. And, she

concluded regarding anthropological and Christian engagement:

> Anthropologist have in certain ways remembered the letter and forgotten this
> [the engaging] spirit of their mentors. This has tended to promote the inflexible
> attachment of the study of Christianity to a theory of modernity, and a
> downgrading of any serious engagement with what Christianity, in all of its
> historical particulars, might mean.[179]

Yet, as the book editor, Cannell approved of the contributors' considering wide

variations in the implication of what it means to be a Christian with their vastly different

understandings and assessments of conversion from ritual, to being forgotten, to its

eternal return within a culture.

Geert Hofstede

Closely related to the view of the designation of conversion as an anthropological

advancement are the assessment of those researchers who embraced that some form of

cultural progression generates conversion. Their premise here has been that if there is a

cultural change or organizational changes, then individual change or conversion will

follow. The main proponent of this sub-category had been Geert (Gerard Henrik)

Hofstede. Hofstede had been a Dutch social psychologist and professor of organizational

anthropology and international management. He had become well-known for his

pioneering research of cross-cultural groups and organizations. In his 2001 *Culture's*

Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across

Nations, first published as *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work*

Related Values, Hofstede raised a concern about the consequences that come from

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[179] Cannell, "Introduction: The Anthropology of Christianity," 45.

individual conversion as compared to traditional collective conversions.[180] He expressed

that the cultural change that has resulted in the conversion of individuals "affects both

people's mental programming [self-concept] as well as the structure and functioning of

many institutions aside from the family: educational, religious, political, and utilitarian."

This conversion, he expressed, is quite different from that of the "tradition-directed

person", who hardly thinks of himself or herself as an individual.[181] More recently,

Hofstede has republished *Cultures and Organization: Software of the Mind* as the second

edition and expanded version of his decade-earlier 1991 briefer cultural progression

work, this time with his son Gert Jan Hofstede.[182] Although the Hofstedes appear to be

more concerned with organizations and now less involved with any kind of religious

conversion, they have continued to push that the culture in which we have grown up, with

its unconscious values, has been what separates us in the areas of life.

Conversion as Globally Necessary and Accessible

There have been many other contributors, especially some anthropological and

cultural scholars, who regard conversion as needing to be based on a global approach

within their theological perspectives. They have considered conversion to be both

necessary and universally accessible.

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[180] Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*, second edition, first published as *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001).

[181] Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences*, 210.

[182] Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, second edition, first published by Geert Hofstede and the Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation (IRIC), University of Limburg, Maastricht (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

J. H. Bavinck

With *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* in 1960 translated from his 1954

Inleiding in de Zendings-wetenschap, Dutch pastor, missionary, and theological professor

J. H. (John Herman) Bavinck brought the concept of conversion into more of a global and

historical context.[183] Even though he was of the reformed tradition, Bavinck considered

the coming to God through Christ in conversion something that should be available for all

nations.[184] He was particularly impressed that the foundation for missions and the

conversion of the nations had its foundation in the Old Testament with this being "the

sole fruit of God's gracious concern."[185]

Based on *Poltiica Ecclesiastica* by Gisbertus Voetius (Gisbert Voet), the Dutch

reformed theologian of the seventeenth century, Bavinck also built his threefold aim for

his science of missions. Voetius had concluded that the aim of missions has a "purpose

which is threefold: the conversion of the heathen, the establishment of the church, and the

glorification and manifestation of divine grace."[186] Bavinck expanded upon this by his

consideration that:

> It must be emphasized, however, that these three purposes are not distinct and
> separate, but they are in fact three aspects of a single purpose of God: the coming
> and extension of the kingdom of God. The coming of the kingdom is concerned
> with God, with his greatness, with his honor and his grace. The coming of the
> kingdom includes the extension of the church over the whole earth. And the
> coming of the kingdom realizes itself in the conversion of sinners. These are not
> three separate purposes, but one great and exalted final purpose, that is disclosed
> to us in three blessings, of which the glorification of God is undoubtedly

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[183] J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, translated from *Inleiding in de Zendings-wetenschap* (Amsterdam: Kampen, 1954) by David Hugh Freeman (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960).

[184] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, 11-24.

[185] Bavinck, 20.

[186] Bavinck, 155.

foremost, the establishment of his church second, and the conversion of the heathen third.[187]

In his theology of salvation and conversion, Bavinck moved forward from the Old Testament regard for God's ushering in of a new world period or a new age, that the promise was to be fulfilled in the genuine conversion of Israel, that this condition could first be fulfilled in the Messiah, that the salvation of the nations is portrayed, and that salvation of the nations is always viewed as a "spontaneous coming."[188] He proceeded by expressing that conversion for the heathen was the "riddle of the gospels" in which the life of Jesus was against a background of the prophets portraying the coming of the Messiah "as a radical transformation of the world order marked on every side by the effusion of salvation."[189] And, Bavinck concluded his theology of conversion by looking at the "all-inclusive salvation" of the epistles "with the restored relationship of man to God, the reconciliation in Christ Jesus."[190]

Because of a concern for missions, Bavinck recognized that:

conversion of the heathen is in the last analysis a necessary element in the planting of the church. From the human point of view conversion is the complete abandoning of the old, the bondage of sin, and a surrender to Christ with one's whole heart and soul. The event itself is, naturally, infinitely greater and richer. It is to be 'delivered from the power of darkness' and it is to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13).[191]

For Bavinck, the concept of conversion was not something that could be enjoyed by an individual in solitude. Rather, he submitted that it was something in which an

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[187] Bavinck, 155-156.

[188] Bavinck, 19-23.

[189] Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* 29-36.

[190] Bavinck, 55-56.

[191] Bavinck, 159.

individual could participate only in unity with others. As a priority, he suggested that the emphasis therefore should be upon the calling of the community, the tribe, and a people to repentance.[192]

Paul G. Hiebert

By far the most prolific writer in this category of conversion as both globally essential and possible had been Paul Hiebert. During his later career as a distinguished professor of missions and anthropology, he wrote more than 150 articles encouraging a biblical worldview based on the affirmation of the Bible as God's special revelation and in the process of attempting to bring together anthropology, theology, and missions in a triologue.[193] In his early career, Hiebert had returned to India where he had grown up, so that his later articles and books, including those referenced in this study from 1978 to 2000, have a definite global perspective.

Hiebert, in his 1994 compilation work *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, responded to the question: Can a nonliterate peasant experience conversion after hearing the gospel only once? And he declared that the answer can only be "yes." He went on to explain that "if a person must be educated, have an extensive knowledge of the Bible, or live a good life, the good news is only for a few."[194] On the other hand, in a more restricted sense of culture, Hiebert pointed out two cultural or social factors that can weaken the conversion experience. These factors are children being raised as if inside the church and because of their formative years are not

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[192] Bavinck, 5, 159.

[193] Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missiological Research* 11: no. 3 (July 1987): 104-111.

[194] Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 107-108.

considered theologically as really lost, and the institutionalizing of conversion so that "young people are expected to experience conversion at certain times in their lives, at certain occasions, and in certain ways."[195]

Among his more significant research contributions, Hiebert also collaborated with his daughter, Eloise Hiebert Meneses to provide their missiological study of conversion and of worldview shifts in their *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies*.[196] In looking at both the narrower model of conversion in communities and the broader model of God's work throughout history, the authors had developed the sense of individual, message, and church "incarnational ministry" as being foremost the work of God. So, they had suggested that

> The goal of incarnational ministry is not that people understand the gospel. It is that they respond to God's invitation and are transformed by his power. They become new creatures through Christ and members of a new community, the church.[197]

Hiebert's continuous question was, "How can we determine if our theology and our cultural belief expressions 'line-up' with Jesus"?[198] As a result, his research has become most meaningful in this study of reflections on conversion because of his broader global understanding and perspective.

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[195] Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts*, 165-166.

[196] Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995);

[197] Hiebert and Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry*, 363-373.

[198] Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missiological Research* 11: no. 3 (July 1987): 104-111.

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier

In *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* the co-authors Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary Parrett have explored how cultural and ethnic diversity have affected spiritual formation. Conde-Frazier, who was an assistant professor of religious education, took the lead regarding the changing aspects of spiritual formation.[199] Within her solo chapter on "Prejudice and Conversion" she offered that the "radical aspects of the event of Paul's conversion," as well as in the case of Peter with the "conversion as a process of transformation until there is a conversion of his inner self," should create a focus on the need to "prepare people not only for an initial encounter with Jesus as Savior but also for an ongoing process of turning from sin to God." Conversion for her had then become "an ongoing journey into the mystery of the reign of God."[200] Influenced by Lewis R. Rambo, she acknowledged that the fourth of the four components, or the religious component within the "journey of conversion," to be "related to the influence of God."[201] From Conde-Frazier there had come the suggestion that the struggle with prejudice could be used in teaching about turning to God.

Hans Kasdorf

One of the best examples of a scholar describing conversion as globally necessary and accessible has been Mennonite Brethren missiologist and seminary professor Hans Kasdorf. Kasdorf was born in southern Russia but because of World War II was

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[199] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S., Steve Kang, and Gary Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2004).

[200] Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 112.

[201] Conde-Frazier, Kang, and Parrett, 113.

basically a global refugee and was not able to start his education until his later teens, and then in Brazil. Yet, during his lifetime he earned two doctorates and three masters degrees. While he wrote extensively, producing several books and over a hundred articles, his greatest contribution, at least for this study on conversion, has been *Christian Conversion in Context* which has gained credibility in that Kasdorf later served for five years as a missionary in Brazil.[202]

In this work, Kasdorf initiated a discussion on the necessity of conversion or the "*from* what *to* what, *from* whom *to* whom" based on the global problem of the state of sin with its haunting guilt, perpetual fear, agonizing shame, or any negative factor considered to be the major evil within a culture.[203] Sin, he expressed, should be

> seen as much in terms of its consequences---being that of separation or alienation from God the Creator and Redeemer---as in terms of the principal cause producing actual acts or steps leading to that state of alienation and to loss of meaning and identity.[204]

For Kasdorf, conversion "resolves the problem of alienation by reconciling man with God, regardless of what might be that cause of separation and alienation."[205]

Kasdorf provided an interesting case story of the multi-personal conversion of Papua tribes in the last century involving first a feast according to tribal custom for the 18,000 assembled, a ceremony of decision-making for the tribes led by their chiefs, the verbal and symbolic act of commitment, and then baptism one by one and not in mass. Kasdorf was particularly concerned about conversion as being personal, but not

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[202] Hans Kasdorf, *Christian Conversion in Context* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980).

[203] Kasdorf, 37-46.

[204] Kasdorf, 39.

[205] Kasdorf, 39.

individualistic, since it is experienced by individuals in a vertical relationship. Yet, he

stated it does affect the community because of its horizontal dimensions. [206]

James Davison Hunter

Within this decade, an academic although indirect study has been offered by

James Davison Hunter in his *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility*

of Christianity in the Late Modern World.[207] He has been immersed in the reality that

individual conversion can and does bring about positive cultural change.

Near the beginning of his book, Hunter quoted from an article by writer James

Boice, entitled "One Nation Under God" in which Boice argued that the conversion of

people's minds and hearts will give them right values so they can make right choices that

will in turn change the culture. Boice had also noted that:

> We need to be reminded that genuine conversion does make profound differences
> in a person's life. And it is just those persons the country needs. Laws change
> nothing. People do.[208]

However, Hunter conveyed that the evidence of history and sociology have

demonstrated that the results of conversion and the reflective values have been

insignificant as the means or the ends of world change. Hunter submits that cultural

change can only be achieved by a "faithful presence", embodying a sense of what Paul

wrote about to the Galatians (6:15) in the Bible as a "new creation."[209] Hunter's

perspective has been that just conversion will not "change the world."

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[206] Kasdorf, 99-105.

[207] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[208] Hunter , 10.

[209] Hunter, 95-96.

Ken and Elaine Jacobs

In a more novelistic resource, *These Words Changed Everything*, David Aeilts relays the narrative of J. Kenneth (Ken) and Elaine Jacobs who lived with the Chamula people in the most southern state of Chiapas, Mexico for more than thirty years.[210] Being spared despite seeing his buddies on both sides fall while they attempted to ascend the cliffs of Normandy during World War II, Ken understood that God must have a special purpose for his life. After being trained in linguistics, Ken and his wife Elaine were prepared to provide the "Word of God" for people groups that had never heard. A few years later they were given the opportunity to go to a people group in southern Mexico. Their work required that they live with the people in order to learn the language, customs, and culture since the people did not have a written language. Although the Jacobs were able to complete the New Testament a decade earlier, it was only in 2009, after more than three decades of hard work, that they were able to provide the Chamula people with the "Good New Words" as a written translation of the whole Bible in the Chamula language. The result has been that this has radically affected the lives of more than 150,000 Chamulas. And, more significantly, over 30,000 people, after hearing and reading God's words in Chamula, have seen their lives transformed and an eternal relationship established with their Creator.

Ken wrapped-up Aeilts' biographical narrative in writing "This Amazing Story: A Translator's Postscript" in which he concluded:

> We have finished that which was our original responsibility, the NEW TESTAMENT in the language of the Chamulas, and we were honored to be chosen to give the Chamulas the OLD TESTAMENT as well. Despite our limitations, God

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[210] David Aeilts, *These Words Changed Everything: Startling News that Rebuilt a Maya Worldview*. edited by Roger Peterson (Minneapolis, MN: Stem, 2009).

accomplished all this by orchestrating our circumstances, and by giving us a supporting cast.

What can we say? It is not hard to succeed when nobody will let you fail, not even God Himself.[211]

Ken and Elaine Jacobs have understood that it has been God who had provided the experience of conversion for all individuals and peoples, like the Chamulas, who are willing to listen and respond.

Literary Review Conclusions

Given all of the components in this particular overview of conversion, especially through the middle of the last century, the concept of conversion has changed and continues to change. The old adage, "If God seems far away, who moved?" would be comparable. So, in a review of the literature it has been especially important to comprehend what academicism has been saying about conversion, particularly over almost the last century and especially in the last five to six decades.

First, it has been revealed that the majority of theologians have regarded conversion as an occurrence or an event. This has been summarized by C. S. Lewis who penned

> the Next Step [for humanity] has already appeared. And it is really new. It is not a change from brainy men to brainier men: it is a change that goes off in a totally different direction---a change from being creatures of God to being sons of God.[212]

In this expression of a radical change, it does not appear to be any kind of process, progression, or even experience, but a dynamic event or occurrence.

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[211] Aeilts, *These Words Changed Everything*, postscript by Ken Jacobs, 186.

[212] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 220.

Second, many psychologists have been determined to continue to classify

conversion as a psychological process. The leading proponent, Lewis R. Rambo in

attempting to develop what he considered a holistic model had suggested that conversion

as a process is more about religious change rather than spiritual change because of its

consequences, and that

> Conversion is a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations…(a) conversion is a process over time, not a single event; (b) conversion is contextual and thereby influences and is influenced by a matrix of relationships, expectations, and situations, and (c) factors in the conversion process are multiple, interactive, and cumulative. There is no one cause for conversion, no one process, and no one simple consequence of that process.[213]

Because of its concern for just a religious change, this classification appears to be totally

entangled in the here-and-now, even though it would appear that conversion is about

something that is much more extensive and deeper.

Next, the portrayal of conversion as some form of sociological experience would

appear to be similar to that conveyed by secularist Everett M. Roger's benchmark,

Diffusion of Innovations involving a change agent, the decision and process of

innovation, and the resulting consequences.[214] But, in the case of conversion as a social

process, the phenomenon is more religious. This does give some understanding regarding

how conversion can appear to spread, even globally. However, it does not provide for any

divine dynamic. And, the experience appears to be limited to human involvement.

Fourth in the review of the literature, a complex conversion description

discovered has been that depicted by many anthropology scholars. Their consensus as

relayed by Buckser and Glazier has been:

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[213] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 5.

[214] Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2003).

> Conversion is rarely a sudden moment of insight or inspiration. It is a change both of individual consciousness and social belonging, of mental attitude and physical experience, whose unfolding depends on both the cultural setting and the distinct individuals who undergo conversion.[215]

In this conjecture, conversion appeared to be totally entwined with the changes in culture and within society.

And lastly, since so many other contributors, especially anthropological and cultural scholars have given their input regarding conversion as being both necessary and accessible based on their global and theological perspectives, the understanding of conversion as such has been straightforward.

Because the researcher has personally experienced the dynamic of conversion even at the early age of four, it has been thought provoking that the literature reviewed has shown that many theologians regard conversion as an occurrence or an event, many psychologists classify conversion as a psychological process, many sociologists define conversion as some form sociological experience, many anthropologists depict conversion as an anthropological and cultural progression, and other researchers continue to describe conversion as globally necessary and accessible. And, so it does appear that almost everyone has at least a literary opinion.

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[215] Andrew Buckser and Stephen D. Glazier, eds., *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), back cover.

CHAPTER THREE: THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF CONVERSION

Introduction

With everyone seeming to have their own definition of religious conversion,

particularly psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and even theologians, it would

seem appropriate that the researcher find the most authoritative resource providing the

best definition regarding the concept of conversion. Whether the eternal phenomenon is

called conversion or some other term such as transformation, metamorphosis, a dynamic

change, or a "complete 'right about turn'" as suggested by A. M. Hunter,[216] this concept,

as a human phenomenon, appears to have its grounding in the Bible made up of the Old

Testament or Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. In fact, G. A. (George Arthur)

Gaskell in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* in 1955 in defining "Conversion,"

had stated:

> The Bible is the drama of the conversion of the world, of the turning, or rather
> the return, of man to God. The sacred writings must, in the last resort, always
> determine and control our conception of the origin, growth, and nature of the
> spiritual life. Without them there would be no Christian conversion, for there
> could be no adequate knowledge of God as revealed by Christ Jesus. If we were
> able to trace the lineaments of the soul of a Christian, it is because we have in the
> Bible the gradually perfected norm of the new life.[217]

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[216] A. M. Hunter, *The Gospel According to John*, in The Cambridge Bible Commentary of the New English Bible, P. R. Ackroyd, A.R. C. Leaney, and J. W. Packer, gen. eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 37.

[217] G. A. Gaskell, "Conversion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* vol. IV (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 105.

All of the extensive biblical data investigated by the researcher seem to support conversion as an "event" whether it is described polemically as being "born again," "born from above," "born anew," or some other allegorical description. However, these too can become just "catch-phrases" rather than a reality. Certainly the gestation period may be difficult and the labor intense, but life can only come about when there is the unique activity of a live birth.

However, there are still some academics who contend that the Bible is not valid as a scholarly resource for today. In expounding on this, John McHugh comments that there are those who hold that the communications and recorded discourses of the biblical writers, such as that of John, are something the youngest of Jesus' disciples just made up; others who imply that John's exposition of faith as an example was just for his generation and based on a pre-Christian or even a Gnostic origin; and still others who embrace that religious emancipation comes through knowledge.[218] However, when it comes to any reflection on the concept of conversion, the question really becomes: Was the initiation of this concept just for people living two millennia, two centuries, or even two decades ago, or does it have contemporary and future implications?

God has provided the biblical resource as a written self-disclosure or an "unveiling"[219] with answers for the eternal problems faced by humankind. But, apart from this biblical resource, God has unfortunately been perceived by many as being "dead," although apparently even the Pharaoh of Egypt realized something much

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[218] John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, in The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, G. I Davis and G. N. Stanton, gen. eds. (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009), 257.

[219] James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 43.

different when he gave Joseph, at the time of Joseph's assignment as administrator over all of Egypt, the new name of Zaphenath-Paneah which has been translated as "God speaks and he is alive" (Gen. 41:41-45, spec. v. 45).[220] God has been attempting to have communication and communion with humankind ever since the initiation of his time-bound creation of the cosmos. One way in which God has done this has been through his general revelation of majesty, glory, and even his other invisible qualities such as love, joy, peace, judgment, mercy, and grace expressed throughout all creation so as to provide accessible resources for the human race.[221]

The Bible infers that the written words, including those of the prophets as well as those written in the New Testament, were not of the writer's own imaginings or origination, but were the wisdom of God.[222] John Kelly suggested that while that inference is implicit it is definitely clear that "a correct understanding of scripture depends upon the aid of the Spirit."[223] More directly, Kevin Vanhoozer offered that this final written revelation, as God's solely written authority, can only be accepted by each individual "in the power of the [Holy] Spirit."[224]

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[220] Although the meaning of Joseph's Egyptian name is uncertain, the most widely accepted translation is that advanced by G. Steindorff in *Zeitschrift fur agytische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 27 [1887]:41-41 and 30 [1892], 50-51, s.v. "Zaphenath-Paneah" in *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, Q-Z, Merrill C. Tenney, gen. ed., Moises Silva, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

[221] John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans, Volume I*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1959), 38 from E. H. Gifford, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (London, 1886) on Romans 1:20. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical references are based on *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV),* International Bible Society, 1973, 1978, 1984 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

[222] Acts 1:16; 28:25; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 14:37; Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Thess. 1:5, 4:15; Heb. 1:1-2. See 2 Pet. 1:20-21; 3:15-16. See Jesus' word in Matt. 15:4-6; 22:29-32; Luke 10:16; John 12:48-50; 16:13-15.

[223] John Norman Davidson Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, Henry Chadwick, gen. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, Publisher, 1969), 325.

[224] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 115.

Based on the perspective of the researcher, the Bible is open to deductive contextualization or a cultural understanding. Yet, it does not appear that it should be open to or even subject to an inductive academic or culturally-based interpretation. The researcher affirms that the Bible is the record of what God wants to communicate to humankind today and is valid as the primary resource for this reflective study regarding conversion. It describes not only the Creator's activity, but more importantly, God's final written revelation of himself regarding his reconciliatory work initiated even before the beginning of time (Isa. 28:16; Matt. 23:35, 25:34; John 17:24; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 12:8). As such, it should be taken most specifically as an authoritative resource from God in helping in any reflections regarding conversion and in the rediscovery of its never-ending significance because of a restored relationship with God.

Conversion as Described in the Bible

Throughout the Bible the concept of conversion appears well over a thousand times in a generic sense, and around a hundred-and-twenty times in the more specific sense regarding individuals or the people returning to the living God.[225] It ought to be somewhat thought-provoking that in spite of all the somewhat present eagerness concerning the idea of conversion in secular as well as theological settings, the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible do not appear to contain such a direct word. Yet, at the same time,

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[225] *New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew –English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 354-355; *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New* Testament, rev. ed. prepared by Barclay M. Newman (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft [United Bible Societies], 2010), 72, 170; and *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed., comp. by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 1843, rev. and aug. by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, 1968, reprint (Oxford: Oxford Claredon Press,1985), 1654; and Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, abr. ed.*, f*ormerly *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 200, 542.

the concept of conversion is highly distinctive in the Bible, and it looks as if in their contexts, the words used for conversion, repentance and penitence appear to be closely linked.[226] And, the need for a restored relationship with God through a provision of an intercessor or mediator begins at the time of Job (Job 16:18-21; cf. 19:21-27, 33:23-26) in the Old Testament and culminates in the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24).

<div align="center">Biblical Usage of the Word 'Conversion'</div>

Beginning around 1540, the secularly translated English noun *conversion*, from the Latin *conuersion*, came to mean a "turning in position, direction, destination;" in 1840, a "change in character, nature, form or function;" and in 1856, a "substitution of or exchange for something else."[227] The definitions which had related to finding the converse in mathematics and logic, associated or related words, such as the noun *convert* which denotes that which is converted or which has experienced a dramatic change, and the verbs *convert* and *converted* so as to change or be changed from one function to another, all basically started their entry into English usage around 1557. The utilization of this English word-group has now come to be used in numerous secular fields such as debate or speech, law, medicine, theology, the military, and even nuclear technology, as well as in combination with other words, particularly in psychiatry.[228]

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[226] Colin Brown, gen. ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* contributions from German by Fritz Laubach, 1971 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 1:353.

[227] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. s.v. "Conversion." (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 870-872.

[228] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 870-872.

The early usage of this English word *conversion* in a biblical sense is identified with John Wycliffe, an English philosopher, theologian, translator, reformer, and Oxford University teacher.[229] In 1382, almost two centuries earlier than the word *conversion* actually began its entrance into English, Wycliffe had attempted a direct translation of the Bible into the language of the people of his day, in that case English, from St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate of the 4th century. This has now become known as *Wycliffe's Bible*. Wycliffe, whose name then was spelled Wyclif, translated Jeremiah 33:7 as: "And y shal turne the turning of Juda." Shortly after his death this verse reverted in 1388 back to the original Latin tradition as "conuerte the conuersion of Juda."[230] As a result, the groundwork for the use of the word *conversion* to designate the concept of spiritual change and religious turning appears to have been set. It is noteworthy then that the English word *conversion* and the other related words referred to earlier became so markedly employed in the King James Version or Authorized Version offered in 1611 (KJV). This appears to have been the case particularly in the New Testament where it was used ten times.[231] But it seems to also have been vividly used in the translation of the Old Testament as well, being used five times, especially in Isaiah.[232] Possibly this was because in much of the KJV these words had been taken from the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.[233] Many of the words that have been used extensively in

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[229] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Wycliffe, John."

[230] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Wycliffe, John" and *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Conversion," 870.

[231] James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 1890, 21st prntg. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 218.

[232] Strong, 218.

[233] Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1:353-357.

the translation of the Old Testament, particularly those which seem to have a specific

theological meaning, are from the Greek word-groups meaning to "turn," "turn around,"

"turn to," "turn back," "turn oneself," "transform," "return," "change," and

"conversion."[234] However, in each case in the KJV the concept of conversion appears to

be that which proceeds from God.

Into this translation quandary regarding the word *conversion* has come the

discovery almost three-quarters of a century ago of the Dead Sea Scrolls not far from

where John the Baptizer had made his proclamations. As early as 1964, according to

Bethel professors, the late Walter W. Wessel and now the late Ronald Youngblood, these

had made even more ancient Hebrew manuscripts of the Scriptures available for a more

accurate translation.[235] As a result of this breakthrough, both Wessel and Youngblood

were not only part of the translation team, but also commentary editors of the New

International Version (NIV) of the Bible. This has been the version referenced in this

research thesis where the renderings regarding the concept of conversion have been with

English words such as "turning," "reviving," "change," "turned back," "turn to," and

"bring…back" (1 Kings 18:37; Ps. 19:7; Matt. 18:3; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19; James 5:19).

Although the concept of conversion remains undaunted, because of the apparent

etiological confusion and the disassociated meanings of the English word, *conversion*

now has had to be completely re-translated in most of the more recent biblical versions.

It is noteworthy that biblically the related noun or a "convert" has only been used

in reference to the exclusion of a particular believer during the selection process for

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[234] These Greek word-groups revolve around *epistropho* (*strepho*), *metanoeo, and metamelomai* which will be discussed later.

[235] Walter W. Wessel, (lecture, Bethel College, St. Paul, MN, Spring 1964) and Ronald Youngblood, (lecture, Bethel Theological Seminary, St, Paul, MN, Fall 1965), respectively.

spiritual leaders. In the specific case, Paul wrote what may have become a circular letter

to the local urban gathering of God's people, the local church in the once-prominent city

of Ephesus then led by Timothy (1 Tim. 3:6). Paul related that in the consideration for

spiritual leadership, such a person should not be a new *convert* or someone who had

recently turned from following the pressures of the cultural or more importantly of the

worldly kingdom. Instead of using the word to describe someone who has changed

religious forms, it directly indicates an individual who has recently changed in their

eternal relationship with God.

The reason why the New International Version or NIV has so often been

referenced in this reflection on conversion has been because of the understanding of the

translation committee. Since early in the twentieth century, biblical scholars such as J. B.

Phillips have recognized the need, especially among younger and unchurched people, for

a newer translation because of the difficulty with the translation and English of the more-

than-four hundred-year-old Authorized or King James Version (KJV). This was

exemplified by Matthew 27:44 when the robbers that were crucified with Jesus "cast the

same in his teeth" while the Greek word simply refers to verbal abuse.[236] Also, the

psalmist's songs were translated in the KJV as "the law of the LORD is perfect,

converting the soul" (Ps. 19:7) and as "and sinners shall be *converted* unto thee" (Ps.

51:13).[237] In the NIV these now have been translated as "the law of the LORD is perfect,

reviving the soul" and as "and sinners will *turn back* to you." In contemporary English

these Hebrew passages have been translated as "the teaching of the LORD is perfect,

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[236] J. B. Phillips, Preface to *The New Testament in Modern English* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1958), ix.

[237] *The Holy Bible, Authorized (King James) Version*, KJV, 1611 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945).

renewing life," and "that sinners may *return* to you."[238] These renderings appear to have

been attempts to remove the confusion regarding the meaning of the concept of

conversion. But while the word *conversion* and related words may seem to be religious

words and probably even theological words, any terms that are used still appear to fall far

short of describing the reality of a complete spiritual change with its eternal expressions.

Conversion in the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament

Many Old Testament versions of the Hebrew Bible have now broadly translated

the original words for the conversion as "revive," "turn back," "redeem," "turn," and

"brought" (Ps. 19:7; Isa. 1:27, 6:10). However, the concept of conversion can also be

understood in the Old Testament when translated as "being given a new name" (Isa.

62:2), or when translated as "being made a new creation," "being regenerated or re-

created or made anew," or having "a new heart and a new spirit," with the latter also

reiterated in the New Testament (Ezek. 11:19, 18:31, 36:26; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

In the Old Testament, there are two Hebrew verbs relating directly to conversion:

shuwb and *haphak*. These have been used in five different passages; two in the Psalms

(Ps. 19:7; 51:13) and three in Isaiah (Isa. 1:27; 6:10; 60:5).[239] In the context, this concept

of conversion in the Old Testament calls for the behavioral process of God's people or

Zion to corporately "turn back," "turned to," "respond to," return," and "wash" (Ps.

51:13, 78:34; Prov. 1:23; Jer. 31:18). In some cases it refers to the activity of God in

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[238] Ps. I, 19:*8*, *Biblia Hebraica*, 990 and *Tanakh,* 1126; Ps. I, 51:*15*, 1019 and 1166, respectively and James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* including the *New Strong's Concise Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, 1996), 234, and 35 and 138, respectively.

[239] *Biblia Hebraica*, ed. and comp. by Rud. Kittel and P. Kahle, 1937 (New York [Stuttgart]: American Bible Society [Wurttembergische Bibelanstalt], 1961); and *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

"turning their hearts back again," and to "restore" (1 Kings 18:37; Ps. 51:12, 80:3, Jer. 31:18; Lam. 5:21; Nah. 2:2). And still in another passage it relates to the response to God's word as "reviving the soul" (Ps. 19:7). As such, these ideas seem to encompass a progressing theme throughout the Hebrew Bible.[240] God appears to be continuously calling people to himself for a positive response to him and his work "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). The action of an implied event in a transformed relationship with God has been echoed even in his final response of understanding by venerable Job (Job 42:5) and has been powerfully illustrated in the lives of three other of the main personalities in the Old Testament: Moses, David, and Isaiah.

Moses

In the life of Moses there is exhibited a prince, a fugitive, and a prophet.[241] In order to bring Moses to the place where he could be a man of God, a servant of Jehovah, and in fellowship with and everlastingly related to God, it appears that Jehovah God needed to provide for him a few sociological dramatic changes. The first of these was when he was a prince. Moses had escaped being killed at his birth. Because of his parents' faith (Heb. 11:23), in that they were being "sure of what is hoped for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1), he was miraculously adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:1-10). And according to the New Testament, among those who had experienced conversion in Jerusalem in the early first century, Stephen had declared in front of the Sanhedrin just before he was stoned to death that Moses "was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action" (Acts 7:22; cf. Act 6:11-7:60).

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[240] William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Global Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 761.

[241] Dewey M. Beegle, *Moses, the Servant of Yahweh*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 1:353-357.

These sociological influences upon Moses were afforded by his parents and his adoptive parent. Another series of sociological impacts occurred during his early mid-life, when at the age of forty (Acts 7:23), he "went out to where his own people," his larger family, was under "hard labor" (Exod. 2:11). This lead to his accepting a new sense of personal identity in that "he chose to be mistreated along with the people of God" (Heb. 11:25) and "because he was looking ahead to his reward" (Heb. 11:26). As a fugitive, after murdering an Egyptian who was beating one of his own people, and needing to escape from Pharaoh, Moses fled to Midian where he experienced over the next forty years (Acts 7:30) a drastic change in his social status, including his marriage and the birth of two sons (Exod. 2:15-22; Acts 7:29). Scripture indicates that he felt as if he had "become an alien in a foreign land" (Exod. 2:22). Yet God, out of his concern for his people, needed a leader. Even as a shepherd during those earlier years, Moses may have been influenced in his spiritual journey by his father-in-law who was a priest of Midian (Exod.2:16-22, 18:3-4). So when God called him from out of a flaming bush that was not consumed, Moses was ready to go and be the spokesman for the "I AM" and a leader for God's people symbolized by the shepherd's staff of God in his hand (Exod. 3:1-4:20).

The scriptures do not directly indicate if the God-event of conversion for Moses occurred at the time God appeared to him near the desert bush or at a later time before leaving Egypt. But the resulting words, songs, and the possible psalms of Moses do indicate that God had provided a change in his destiny. Moses could now proclaim that "the LORD…has become my salvation" and that God will guide the people he has *redeemed* [italics mine] from *all nations* [italics mine] to his "holy dwelling" (Exod. 15:1-18; Rev. 15:3-4). Yet George W. Coats comments that:

Moses remains a man, the man of God, the servant of God, but nevertheless a human being. It is this context [the Moses tradition], then, that the complementary relationship between heroic man and the man of God who serves the mighty acts of God for the redemption of the people emerges with its strongest force. Moses is not simply an instrument in the hands of God. But he is also not the redeemer who initiates the salvation of the people. He fights for his people. But he does not make them his people. They remain the people of God.[242]

Understanding his strength as a redeemed individual (Ex. 6:6-7), Moses also appears to have understood his role in the early work of God with the lifting up of a bronze snake on a pole so that people could live (Num. 21:4-9; cf. John 3: 14-15). And, while the people were wandering in the wilderness, the command through him was once again given to remember the symbolism of the Passover (Num. 9:1-3). From the researcher's perspective, it seems that Moses had experienced the concept of conversion and that there was a longing on his part that everyone would be able to experience the prospect of praising God; that "all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them" (Num. 11:29).

David

It appears that David, considered by most as the greatest leader of Israel, also knew the significance of this concept that brings about a ceaseless divine relational change---of being redeemed (Ps. 71:23). It is again difficult to assess the dramatic time of God's work in his life, but his poetic psalms or prayer songs, such as his acknowledgement of "when I consider the heaven and the work of your fingers" (Ps. 8:3) and his declaration that "the LORD is my shepherd" (Ps. 23:1), may indicate that David's initial encounter with and response to God could have come at an early age, even as a shepherd boy. At least, these expressions reflect David's spiritual understanding during

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[242] George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, in Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT), Supplement Series 57 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 41.

his early childhood and youth. David's response may have come somewhat later as

indicated historically by his expressing to God that "you have put a new song in my

mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (Ps. 40:3). However, it had occurred before or at the

time he was anointed to be the leader when he was empowered by the Spirit (1 Sam.

16:13). God allowed amazing victories for David over his own and his people's enemies.

Yet, the conversion event in David's life seems to have been unique and unlike that of

Paul or even of the prophet Isaiah that will be discussed later. David's event appears to

have been more like that encountered by the researcher in that there was no quick change,

but a resulting lifetime of transformation and dependence on God. Whether it was after or

before the event of his conversion, God used psychological processes to preserve David.

Throughout his life-journey of victories, defeats, challenges, fears, anxieties, and most

importantly sinfulness, God seems to have been David's "strength," "rock," "fortress,"

and "deliverer" (Ps. 18:1; 2 Sam. 22:2).[243] Paul, on his first innovative journey in Antioch

of Pisidia, had declared in the synagogue that God testified that David had been found to

be "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22; cf. 1 Sam. 13:14; cf. Jer. 3:15 and Isa.

44:28). And, it would also appear that the life of David of Bethlehem marked an

important element in the messianic unfolding of God's plan of redemption.[244] Or, as

Marti Steussy summarizes: "When hope turns to God's future intervention, 'David'

becomes the promised messianic king (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah) or paradigm for a

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[243] John Peter Lange, *The Psalter, First Book, Psalms I-XLI* in Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, vol. 9, Philip Schaff, trans. from German, ed., with addns.(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 140.

[244] Arthur W. Pink, *The Life of David*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 5.

redeemed people (Isa. 55)."[245] Yet the Bible never seems to deny or downplay David's

humanity in that it reveals that David realized his sinfulness, but it also recognized that

the God of justice and compassion could and would provide for this leader's restoration.

This activity was particularly demonstrated by David's declaration that "the LORD has

heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer" (Ps. 6:9) and:

> Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.
> Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back [experience
> conversion] to you.[246]

God seems to have kept David humble in spite of his tremendous successes. In

over half of the seventy-two psalms attributed to David, thirty-eight are prayers of

lament.[247] On the other hand, because of David's special relationship with God, he

provided twenty-one prayers of thanks, trust, praise, and wisdom.[248] David's

"conversion" is particularly demonstrated by his opening of Psalm 63:

> O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you,
> my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

David also appears to have been especially concerned about the establishment of

an eternal relationship with God by those who would be ruling over, [or leaders for], the

people. So, in his final wisdom saying, as "the man exalted by the Most High," David

expressed that when one rules from the perspective of righteousness with an intense

awareness of the awesomeness of God, one can then bring "the light of the morning" (2

Sam. 23:1-4). Kyle McCarter suggests that this can also be considered as a morning that

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[245] Marti J. Steussy, *David: Biblical Portraits of Power* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 193.

[246] Ps. 51:12-13.

[247] Steussy, *David: Biblical Portraits of Power*, 165.

[248] Steussy, 166.

is too bright for clouds.[249] It seems that it was because of his relationship to God that David realized that he who would rule properly must also be able to serve God properly.[250]

There are two divine pronouncements in the Hebrew Bible, referred to earlier, directly relating to this concept of conversion and recorded by the psalmist with both ascribed to David. The first begins with a cosmological declaration before describing the change of a revived soul that can occur in the acceptance of the Lord's pronouncements as trustworthy, in the transformation from being simple to being wise, and in the receiving of joy, light, and righteousness (Ps. 19:1-9). The second extensive passage appears to be a prayer of repentance and then a commitment in a faith of trusting and obeying (Ps. 51:1-13). These certainly seem to be a response to God and appear to indicate that David's conversion had happened or was about to happen.

Isaiah

Isaiah began his prophesy by describing the conversion concept as a God-given impulse of "justice" and "righteousness" different from the usual seemingly routine social "justice and righteousness" of the other prophets.[251] Joseph Blenkinsopp suggests that with Isaiah "there are indeed some striking parallels with the Song of Moses."[252] Isaiah declared that for those individuals who would be considered as redeemed and as

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[249] P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* in The Anchor Bible 9 (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 476-478. 483.

[250] John Peter Lange, *Psalms, The Psalter, First Book, Psalms I-XLI* in Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 91.

[251] Blenkinsopp, Joseph, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* in The Anchor Bible 19, William F. Albright and David N. Freedman, gen. eds. (New York: Doubleday, 2000).

[252] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* in The Anchor Bible 19, 181.

part of God's people, there should be a turning from evil to the LORD Almighty in righteousness; from judgment to vindication and salvation in justice (Isa. 1:27).[253] This theme was also later repeated by other prophets such as Jeremiah and Malachi (Jer. 18:8, 33:7; and Mal. 3:7). In addition to this initial passage by Isaiah there are two other affirmations by the prophet regarding the concept of conversion.

In the most notable and extended passage (Isa. 6:1-13) the prophet explains, early on in his unique vision, the divine self-manifesting glory of God similar to that given to Moses in the desert of Horeb (Exod. 3:5-6). And, this glory of God had also been expressed at the very beginning of their covenant relationship while again in that desert near Sinai (Exod. 24:16-17) so that the people of Israel could then declare his glory among the nations (Ps. 96:3).[254] Isaiah may have been challenged being confronted by: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips?" (Ps. 50:16).[255] For Isaiah, this was the time for understanding his true predicament before God, to react in repentance, and to be healed. It was after his real forgiveness and transformation that Isaiah was able to respond to and receive his divine commissioning.[256] He was then able to hear and reply to the voice of the Lord: "'Whom shall I send? And who will go for *us*?' [italics mine] And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' He said, 'Go and tell this people…'" Until this voluntary response to God's revelation of himself, it seems that

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[253] Gene M. Tucker, *Isaiah 1-39* in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 6 ((Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 62-64.

[254] A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters 1-39* in The Cambridge Bible Commentary, vol. 19, P. R. Ackroyd, A. R. C. Leaney, J. W. Packer, gen. eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 59.

[255] Robert Louis Wilken, *Isaiah*, in The Church's Bible, Robert Louis Wilken, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 71.

[256] John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah, Volume 1* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 71-72.

Isaiah also could have been just another "righteousness and justice" prophet with an inaugural vocational call.[257] John Hayes and Stuart Irvine offer that "the experience of Isaiah 6 marked a shift in Isaiah's ministry."[258] The prophet concludes this first dialogue with God by using one vivid Hebrew word in God's declaration most often translated as "turn" (Isa. 6:10).[259] The entire context of Isaiah's vision seems to be related to his experience of conversion and the hope of the conversion of "this" people. The experience of Isaiah by definition may have been less of a dream and more about the power of discernment[260] and seems to indicate that God's mission in the "day of the LORD" (Isa. 2:6-22) has been delayed in being fulfilled: people can still have the opportunity to "see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" (Isa. 6:10). A.S. Herbert has interestingly suggested that even when the prophet Isaiah repeated the question of the "how long" from Psalm 74:10, "the intolerable answer appears to be the same: 'Until everything is lost'"[261]

The other passage, near the end of Isaiah's lengthy prophesy (Isa. 60:1-22), seems to be a proclamation of Zion's glory with the impending coming of the Messiah. Here Isaiah used a rather obscure alternate word translated as "brought" in a hypothesis of good news announced to all of Zion in its glory (Isa. 60:5).[262]

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[257] John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, the Eighth-century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983), 109.

[258] Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah, the Eighth-century Prophet*, 109.

[259] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 187-188.

[260] *Webster's Ninth e;New Collegiate Dictionary,* s.v. vision (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Publishers, 1983).

[261] A. S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 60.

[262] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* in The Anchor Bible 19B (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 204-208.

Isaiah's special word regarding conversion used two times was translated early on as "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and her *converts* with righteousness;" and as "understand with their hearts, and *convert*, and be healed" (Isa. 1:27; 6:10)[263] In the NIV Bible these phrases have been translated as "Zion will be redeemed with justice, her *penitent ones* [emphasis mine] with righteousness" and as "understand with their hearts, and *turn* [emphasis mine] and be healed." In the contemporary translation of the Hebrew text the phrases are "Zion shall be saved in the judgment; Her *repentant* [emphasis mine] ones, in the tribulation," and "grasp with its [people's] mind, and repent and *save* [emphasis mine; resource note: *heal*] itself."[264]

Isaiah's other reference to this concept has been translated in the KJV as "the abundance of the sea shall be *converted* unto thee." In the NIV the translation is "the wealth on the seas will be *brought* to you," and in the present-day Hebrew translation as "the wealth of the sea [noted: coastlands] shall *pass on* to you."[265]

There are numerous other references to the idea of a change in the relationship to God in the Hebrew Bible, but the examples provided by the lives of an obvious leader, a prominent king, and a forward-looking prophet should provide ample support for the importance of the concept of conversion in the Old Testament. The writings of these three seem to indicate a similar and recurring spiritual hypothesis: individuals and people must change, turn back, and return in order to have an endless relationship with God.

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[263] *The Holy Bible,* KJV.

[264] *Tanakh,* 618 and 630, respectively.

[265] *The Holy Bible,* KJV and *Tanakh,* 746.

The Biblical Bridge

The deep concern for a change in the relationship with God became the bridging message from the Old Testament to the New Testament heralded by John the Baptizer in the wilderness. It may have been more than four and a half centuries since the last prophet of the Old Testament era, yet the dress and personal habits of this John were symbolic of the prophet Elijah.[266] His proclamation seems to have been an urgent preparatory "cry" for individuals to avoid being deceived by their religious heritage. Instead, he vigorously encouraged them to repent and to seek forgiveness "for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:1-3) ---a theme picked up by Jesus as he began his ministry proclamations (Matt. 4:17).

The response to his bridging cry initially was enthusiastically heeded by many individuals (Matt. 3:5; Mark 1:5). Religious seekers were realizing that here was the chance to turn or change and confess their sins in repentance and to demonstrate their penitence in preparation for the action of God. It appears that John the Baptizer could support his declarations of repentance and the remission of sins because he too seemed to have understood the concept of conversion; that his was the preparatory time for the coming of the Messiah as foretold by the psalmist and by Isaiah when all humankind would see God's salvation with the possibility of full forgiveness (Ps. 98:2; Isa. 40:3-5, 42:16, 52:10). In the contemporary Jewish thinking, the place of repentance was a necessary preliminary to the Messianic Age.[267] Although John the Baptizer denied being the Prophet or the Messiah, he continued his announcement as "the man of humility, who

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[266] W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* in The Anchor Bible, vol. 26 (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 25.

[267] Albright and C. S. Mann, 25.

aimed only to prepare the way" [268] because he knew that "after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry" (Matt. 3:11; cf. Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27). So when Jesus stood among them, the one they did not yet know (John 1:26), it was natural for John to prophetically introduce them to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29-34).[269] It appears that because of religious conflict this opportunity for change with the potential for the dynamic of conversion unfortunately soon appears to have lost its momentum (Matt. 3:5-10).

Conversion in the New Testament

Conversion has been generally described as essential according to the very opening of each of the Gospels in the New Testament (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:2-8; Luke 3:1-18; John 1:19-31). Other selected New Testament biblical references, many with possible indirect connections to the Old Testament, describe the idea of "conversion" powerfully as "being drawn near or coming close to God" (Heb. 10:22), "being persuaded" (Acts 18:4; 2 Cor. 5:11), "having newness of life or a new way" (Acts 5:20; Rom.6:4; Heb. 10:20), "given a new birth" (1 Pet. 1:3), "having died to sin, but alive to God" (Rom. 6:11, 23; Eph. 2:5), "having received the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38, 8:17, 10:47; Rom. 8:15), and according to Peter "having received the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43). Two phrases in particular seem to have a direct connection to the Old Testament. These are the phrases "coming out of darkness into light" (2 Sam. 22:29; Ps. 18:28, 27:1; Isa. 2:5, 5:20, 42:16, 58:10, 61:1; Mic. 7:8; Matt. 4:16 from Isa. 9:2; John

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[268] John Peter Lange, *Mark* in Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, vol. 16, Philip Schaff, trans. from German, ed., with addns.(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 140.

[269] Raymond E. Brown, *John (I-XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* in The Anchor Bible, vol. 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 45-67.

1:5, 3:19; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 21:23, 22:5) and "being saved" or "being delivered" (Isa. 25:9; Joel 2:32; John 10:9; Acts 2:21 obtained from Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13; 1 Cor. 10:33; Eph. 2: 5, 8). The Jewish leaders Paul and Barnabas, while traveling throughout the Jewish world, told how non-Jews had also been "converted" in their response to the unmerited love and revelation of God in Jesus (Acts 15:3 based on Ps. 19:7, 51:13).

Within ten passages of the New Testament there are three direct word-groups for the concept of conversion.[270] In these ten times the Greek word-group *epistropho* or the shorter *strepho* have been utilized five times in the Gospels, three times in Acts, and twice within one passage in the letter of James.[271] These words are generally in the aorist Greek tense which denotes a single occurrence without any reference to completeness, length, or repetition. They are also generally in the active voice indicating that the subject is being acted upon by the verb action expressed. According to Colin Brown, a well-qualified Koine Greek scholar, they "refer to a man's conversion" which "presupposes and includes a complete change under the influence of the Holy Spirit."[272] In the New Testament this Greek word *epistropho* or the shorter *strepho* is also closely aligned with two other Greek word-groups: *metanoeo* which can be translated "change one's mind," "repent," "be converted," and even "conversion;" and *metamelomai* which expresses "the

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[270] *Greek New Testament,* 4th rev ed., ed. by Barbara Aland. Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martin, and Bruce Metzger (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft [United Bible Societies], 2010).

[271] *Greek New Testament,* 4th rev. ed., ed. by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martin, and Bruce Metzger.

[272] Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 354; *Greek-English Lexicon*, comp. by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, 1843, rev. and aug. by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, 1,114; and Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 367.

feeling of repentance for error, debt, failure and sin, and so looks back," but it does not necessarily cause a man to turn to God.[273]

It is most significant when contemplating conversion, that in four of the five usages of these root words in the Gospels, they were employed by Jesus. The fifth was used by John in a paraphrase of what Jesus had cited from the prophet Isaiah (John 12:40).[274] In addition, there are two other instances in the New Testament in which the root words referred to the prophecy of Isaiah: one was when the restored and now useful Peter spoke to the onlookers after a crippled beggar was healed (Acts 3:19); the other was when Paul, while incarcerated in Rome, spoke to the local Jews (Acts 28:27) .[275] An eighth usage, was when Paul and Barnabas relayed to the Council held in Jerusalem how the Gentiles or non-Jews from other areas like Phoenicia and Samaria had experienced this phenomenon of conversion (Acts: 15:3).[276] And finally, the last two of the ten translative usages are in one passage by James in which there was an encouragement to help others find their way (James 5:19-20).[277]

Declarations of Jesus Relating to Conversion

The researcher has found the biblical data to be vital for a clearer understanding of what Jesus had to say about conversion. Since the Bible affirms that Jesus was the son of David, the declared Lamb of God, the Son of God or from God, and the perfect Son of

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[273] Colin Brown, ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, F. Laubach, J. Goetzmann, and U. Becker, 353-361.

[274] James Strong, *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* including the *New Strong's Concise* Dictionary, 234.

[275] Strong, 234.

[276] Strong, 234.

[277] Strong, 234.

Man, his statements should be considered authoritative. Jesus always exposed

humankind's incompetence in being without spiritual eyes, ears, and hearts resulting in

the lack of the ability to see, hear from, or respond to God. His insight into authentic

conversion is absolutely clear as shown when his followers religiously wanted to know

who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven and Jesus had placed a child among them

and declared "unless you *change* [inwardly] and become like little children, you will

never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3; cf. John 1:12). Even for a future leader

like Peter, Jesus had stated that although Satan had asked to "sift him as wheat," when he

had *turned back* [italics mine] he was to strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:32). It is also

important to note in the biblical data that when Jesus had been confronted by some of the

religious leaders as to why he associated with "sinners" such as tax collectors, Jesus had

declared that it is not the healthy, but the sick that need a doctor, and then went on to

announce that he had come here to invite outsiders, not insiders to a changed life of

mercy rather than sacrifice---changed inside toward God and outside toward

others. (Matt. 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:30-31). So, it is noteworthy then that it was

just after Jesus' parabolic presentation of a farmer scattering seed resulting in crops that

are good for little or nothing, or productive, that he referred to conversion as part of the

prophet Isaiah's messianic promise of potential healing (Matt. 13:3-15). It does appear

from the scriptural data that God should be considered as the only true Source for any

conversion.

Jesus also gave some striking statements concerning the provisions for conversion

and his being the source for authentic being, as recorded by John. These are the one

indirect and seven direct regenerative "I am" proclamations which seem to echo the name

or authoritative "I AM" given for God to Moses by Jehovah at the flaming bush that was

not consumed (Exod. 3:13-14).

Early in his ministry the biblical record shows that Jesus' one indirect

proclamation began his self-disclosure and the need to come to him. This reality was

evidenced by Mary as she sang that that she was blessed and her spirit rejoiced in God

her Savior as she envisioned the birth of the Messiah (Luke 1:46-49). And, it was picked

up by Paul in writing to the young believer Timothy. Paul instructed him that he should

be praying for "all those in authority" so that we may live peaceful and quiet lives which

pleases God our Savior in that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a

knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the

man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men---the testimony given in its

proper time" (1 Tim. 2:1-6). Subsequently, Jesus needed to travel through a foreign area,

more divinely-appointed than geographical. This resulted in the breaking down of all

religious, racial, and social barriers. Being humanly thirsty, he sought a drink of water

from an apparently ostracized woman who knew her ultimate need in being spiritually

thirsty. Jesus, contextually, but indirectly, indicated to her that "*I Am the Living Water*"

[emphasis and italics mine] (John 4:13). Apparently, at first she did not understand, and

Gerald Borchert comments that "at the heart of human misunderstanding about Jesus is

the question of recognizing his origin."[278] So, additionally and more directly being in this

seemingly irrelevant and less politically charged area of Samaria where she still grasped

the significance of the coming Messiah, Jesus was able to declare that "I who speak to

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[278] Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11,* in The New American Commentary, vol. 25A, E. Ray
Clendenen, gen. ed. (no location USA: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 204.

you am he", the "Anointed One," indicating that anyone who would come to him would never need to be spiritually thirsty or despairing (John 4:25-26; cf. 7:37-38).[279]

The first of the seven direct "I am" acknowledgements of Jesus began shortly after physically feeding a throng numbered at five thousand. Jesus had then declared *"I Am the Bread of Life,"* signifying that he, the bread of God, had come down to earth in order to satisfy the spiritual hunger of each human being (John 6:32-35). Leon Morris had proposed that the "bread" Jesus gives comes continuously as a gift from God and is not an earthly temporary manna like that provided through Moses.[280]

After sensing the spiritual darkness of those who should be religious leaders although they did not comprehend that God "condemns the sin and saves the sinner,"[281]and again just prior to restoring sight for a blind man, Jesus declared *"I Am the Light of the World;"* no one needs to continue stumbling in darkness (John 8:12 and 9:5). This further declaration was preceded by the stated fact that "the remorseless passage of time removes the present opportunity."[282]

When among the shepherd and his flock, where each sheep, although knowing the voice of the shepherd, still needed the security provided by the inside of the shelter-cave and protection from the outside, Jesus declared *"I Am the Gate"* or door through which each sheep may enter; that "whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:7-10). Gerald Borchert had submitted that it is Jesus who provides safety or security at the

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[279] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed. in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gordon D. Fee, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 324.

[280] Morris, 322.

[281] John Peter Lange, *John,* in Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, vol. 17, Philip Schaff, trans. from German, ed., with addns.(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958, 267.

[282] Morris, 426.

entrance to the sheepfold.[283] The sheep listen for and follow the good shepherd because they know his voice (Ps. 29:3-4, 95:6-9; John 10:1-5). Jesus appears willing to provide for all those who can respond to his voice and his provisions.

Jesus also asserted that *"I Am the Good Shepherd,"* not a hired hand, but a good shepherd-owner willing to "lay down my life for the sheep" because he knows his sheep (John 10:14). Jesus claimed to be that ideal and promised shepherd of his people as promised through the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 34:23; 37:24).[284] His delivery on conversion appears to be that of fulfilling the required sacrifice to bring life for the sheep.[285]

Prior to raising his friend Lazarus from a premature death, Jesus declared especially for an unsuspecting Martha who seemingly had misunderstood his real power:[286] *"I Am the Resurrection and the Life,"* and thus indicated through his further explanation and application that whoever would put their complete trust and faith in him would have life now and life for eternity (John 11:25-27). Gerald Borchert again comments that

> resurrection and life were two related dimensions of Jesus' proclamation. Jesus clearly possesses the power of the resurrection so that the one who believes in Jesus, even though he were to die, will experience that power of the resurrection ("will live," 11:25) in their dead bodies.[287]

When Jesus had finished confronting his disciples about their eternal destiny and his eternal provision prior to his earthly departure, it appears, at least to the researcher,

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[283] Borchert, *John 1-11,* in The New American Commentary, vol. 25A, 332.

[284] Lange, *John,* 321.

[285] Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (ii-xii): Introduction, Translation and Notes* in The Anchor Bible 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 395

[286] Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 488.

[287] Borchert, *John 1-11,* 356.

that it was then that he declared an *imago Dei* trilogy: *"I Am the Way"* and the only way

to God as the Heavenly Father which responds to an individual's will; *"I Am the Truth,"*

which answers those seeking intellectually after "what is truth;?" and *"I Am the Life,"*

which replies to all those who are emotively concerned about this life and life eternal

(John 14:6). Or, as Leon Morris suggests, Jesus detailed here "the triple expression

emphasizing the many-sidedness of the saving work."[288]

Lastly, Jesus, in using a mental recollection of a figure from the Old

Testament (Isa. 5:1; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 15:2; 19:10; Ps. 80:8),[289] declared *"I Am the True*

Vine." His accepted icon appears to be not just a nationalistic symbol or some kind of

governmental authority, but the source for all those who are connected and trusting in

him for their spiritual sustenance (John 15:1-5). This also indicates that in being

separated from Jesus any spiritual achievement appears to be impossible, but the

complementary truth present for the one who has experienced God's event of conversion

is that "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

When these statements of Jesus are comprehended in the light of the conversion

context, they also seem to indicate that there are various ways in which people come to

Jesus to find their eternal sustenance. According to Leon Morris, Jesus "employed the

simplest terms, with sublimest significance."[290] All of these unique proclamations by

Jesus were recorded as being just after Jesus' special encounter with a prominent

religious leader which led to the eternal assertion by John that "whoever believes the Son

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[288] Morris, *The Gospel According to John,* 569-570.

[289] Lange, *John,* 461.

[290] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed. in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gordon D. Fee, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), Cited in Note 97 as from G. C. Morgan, 323.

has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him" (John 3:36).

Two of the Greek root words referring to conversion, mentioned earlier, as those used by Jesus are in parallel sections in the gospels (Matt.13:13-15, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, and John 12:40 from Isa. 1:27 with the converse in Isa. 6:9-10). With these Jesus referred to the revelation that God had given to Isaiah at Isaiah's commissioning. By his reinterpretation of that which appears from a human view to be sarcasm and an apparent condemning nature, Jesus showed humankind's transcendent incompetence by being without spiritual eyes, ears, and hearts and as a result without the natural ability to see, hear from, or respond to God. It was because of this seeming hopelessness for any conversion or dynamic spiritual change that Jesus revealed why it was necessary for him to speak in parables (Matt.13:10-15 and Mark 4:10-12).[291]

A third usage was when his followers wanted to know who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus placed a child among them and declared "unless you *change* [inwardly, emphasis mine] and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven;" (Matt. 18:3).

Jesus used the fourth Greek root when a dispute at the Last Supper arose again among the Twelve as to which of them was the greatest. Jesus directed his attention specifically to one individual still often referred to as Simon, telling him that although Satan had asked to "sift him as wheat," he had prayed to the Father so that "when you have *turned back* strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:24-32). This was followed almost immediately with the use by Jesus of Peter's re-identified name, which had become his

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[291] John Peter Lange, *Matthew,* in Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, vol. 15, Philip Schaff, trans. from German, ed., with addns.(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958., 239-240.

authentically, only because of his earlier realization and confession (Matt. 16:13-16, Mark 8:27-29, Luke 9:18-20). Jesus then continued by the foretelling of this enthusiastic, but then ignorant, leader's denial (Matt. 26:31-34, Mark 14:27-31, Luke 22:31-34, John 13:37-38).

Biblical Conclusions

The declarations of the prophets, John the Baptizer, and Jesus provide some vivid insight regarding the need and the event of conversion. At the least, they signify that Jesus, as the only Son and "Sent One," knew his place regarding God's eternal promises; that the event of conversion brings about a dynamic change. When calling his special followers, Jesus saw a hated Jewish **t**raitor and Roman tax collector by the name of Levi at his tax booth. As soon as Levi, also called Matthew, had responded to Jesus by leaving everything and "following" Jesus, he prepared a great banquet at his home for Jesus and invited all of his disreputable friends, including his fellow tax collectors. It was then that the outwardly offended religious leaders and religious scholars questioned Jesus' followers as to why they all were guests at dinner with the crooks and "sinners." Jesus, on overhearing, responded: "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting outsiders, not insiders – an invitation to a changed life; changed inside and out."[292] This does indicate that a continuous call to a provision has been given for each one; an invitation and an opportunity for an endless spiritual change with its divine reconciliation. Although the focal point of God's written revelation is the Scripture, God's full self-disclosure is ultimately found exclusively in the Christ.[293] It appears then

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[292] Luke 5:31, *The Message*: *The New Testament in Contemporary Language*, comp. by Eugene Peterson (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing, 1993), 115.

that the data of Scripture affirms that Jesus as the Messiah or the Christ is the only real

Source for any change that can result in a restoration of harmony with God the Creator,

Sustainer, and Redeemer (cf. Job 19:23-27).

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[293] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1/1:119.

CHAPTER FOUR: FIELD RESEARCH FOUNDATION AND DESCRIPTION

Introduction on the Field Research

In an attempt to rediscover or validate conversion, it has been necessary to discover an adequate procedure for the advancement of the study. The activity needed to provide not just another definition, although that is important, but a method for coming to a possible academic understanding of conversion particularly in how conversion brings about a permanent change in individuals and people groups. Currently, with almost everyone in academia having an opinion, it would appear that the English word "conversion" has run the ethnological, ethological, etiological, and etymological gamut. Another concern regarding the research has been an attempt to make sure that what has been defined and how it has been described are both universally understood. The research conclusions should not be culturally impeded but rather applicable to peoples within the entire global context. A fallacy of the study would be to analyze this phenomenon of conversion in such a way that the results would not be useful throughout the world.

Nature of the Research Design

Research Method

The major approach used in the study has been qualitative research in order to dig deeper for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. As a research method, it has been based upon the researcher's interest in a dynamic and permanent change not only available for an individual, but also for that potential change within a society in

every part of the globe. The research method has been described by Denzin and Lincoln

as a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world."[294] This method, also

described by John Creswell, has begun with "assumptions and the use of interpretative /

theoretical frameworks that inform the study" so as to involve a research problem that

does address "the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social human problem."[295] It

has been

a procedure of research that has flowed out of studied and stated philosophical

assumptions, and in this case spiritual assumptions. It has been processes through an

interpretative lens based on the researcher's personal perspective, and then onto

procedures that involved the human conversion problem.

In addition to an extensive investigation of the related literary sources for data on

the subject, the researcher has developed what Creswell described as "a complex

description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a

call for change."[296]

The researcher has also repeatedly used the "component identification" method of

Creswell, or "an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a

natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is

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[294] N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2011), 1-19, cited in John W. Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013), 43.

[295] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013), 44.

[296] Creswell, 44.

both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes."[297] This format has provided a means for validity for the entire research project.

Methodology

The basic research methodology utilized has been what Lessem and Schieffer have referred to as "phenomenological research."[298] This type of methodology or phenomenology gives "weight to the subjective experiences as the source of all knowledge" in relation to that which is perceived as the objective phenomena, in this case conversion.[299] This methodology has also been described by Leedy and Ormrod as research into "a person's perspective of the meaning of an event."[300] In this methodology, the researcher has used a subjective process as the resource.[301] This has been because "*'phenomenology' returns to the taken-for-granted realm of subjective experience, not to explain it but simply to pay attention to its rhythms and textures*" [emphasis by the resource].[302]

Research Tools

The primary tool employed has been the anonymous information guide responded to by a sampling of individuals rooted within large-group settings in five carefully selected global venues. Coupled with this tool has been an indirect research tool utilizing

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[297] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 44.

[298] Ronnie Lessem and Alexander Schieffer, *Integral Research and Innovation: Transforming Enterprise and Society* (Farham, Surrey, England: Gower, 2010), 103-126,

[299] Lessem and Schieffer, 105.

[300] Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2010), 141.

[301] Lessem and Schieffer, 106.

[302] Lessem and Schieffer, 110.

narratives or oral history.[303] The response data and narratives have been conveyed to the

researcher electronically with the assistance of informally-interviewed survey

administrators. The data has then been processed by the researcher. A more limited tool

has been the use of additional general historical research.[304]

Use of an Anonymous Survey (Questionnaire)

As a means of verifying or disproving what the researcher has found in secular

literature, theological literature, biblical literature, and the Bible, the researcher has relied

upon the device of an individual survey. This instrument has been referred to as a

"Personal Information Guide" or PIG. It was created as an anonymous questionnaire for

use in a global context. Initially it was prepared in English and later translated into

Spanish and also Bulgarian (Appendixes A, B, and C). These limited personal survey

questionnaires, while having had a large-group emphasis, have made it possible for

individual responses and the collection of data in the people's natural environment. For

the most part, the data from the anonymous individuals has been conveyed to the

researcher electronically. The researcher has then been able to analyze the data with

inductive empathetic understanding and deductive introspection so as to be able to

establish the various patterns or themes.

Placement of the Surveys

So as to provide a global perspective, the researcher has chosen the placement of

the surveys in five carefully selected and personally significant global locations with

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[303] Molly Andrews, Corinne Squires, and Maria Tamboukou, eds., *Doing Narrative Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008), 1-3.

[304] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 164-167,

noteworthy diverse histories and cultures. These five settings have covered all four social

innovation paths for integral research, with two being in the Southern path, but on

different continents.[305] They have also covered the four epistemological foundations; the

"four worlds" or the four different innovation polarities.[306] In this way the researcher has

attempted to determine if a similarity or pattern for conversion, if any, can be determined

and understood consistently in all cultural milieux. Limited historical information has

also been necessary in order to provide for cultural understanding and to set the context

for the field research.

Geographically, these "four worlds" have been found in the North, designated

philosophically as having a Rationalistic description with a social path focused on Reason

and organizationally Navigating with the "self" engulfed by Knowing; the East, defined

as having a Holism label with a path of Renewal and organizationally Emerging with the

"self" immersed in Becoming; the South, termed as having a Humanism designation with

a Relational path and organizationally Grounding with historical foundations and the

"self" submerged in Being; and the West, labeled as having a Pragmatism title with a

path of Realisation and organizationally as Effecting or seeking results with "self"

consumed by Doing.[307]

The North - Bulgaria

For information from the North the researcher has delegated Bulgaria, a southern

Eastern European country the size of Tennessee with a relatively stable population of

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[305] Lessem and Schieffer, *Integral Research and Innovation*, 31-55.

[306] Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues,* 19-103.

[307] Lessem and Schieffer, 31, 34.

close to seven-and-half million. Located on the western shores of the Black Sea, it shares

borders with Romania (north), Serbia and Macedonia (west), and Greece and Turkey

(south). Since it is located close to the Turkish Straits, key land routes between Europe,

the Middle East, and Asia pass through the area.

Historically, until this last quarter-century, Bulgaria has been under the control of

others. In the late 7th century, the Bulgars, a Central Asian Turkic tribe merged with the

local Slavic inhabitants to form the first Bulgarian state. In the succeeding centuries,

Bulgaria struggled with the Byzantine Empire for a place in the Balkans. By the end of

the 14th century the country was overrun by the Ottoman Turks. More recently,

particularly in the last century or so, Bulgaria has been involved with seeking more

Balkan territory. However, it lost in the First Balkan War with Turkey (1912-1913); lost

its aspirations again when it joined Germany in World War I; came under the sphere of

the Soviet Union when it fought on the side of Nazis in World War II and switched sides

when Russia declared war against it in 1944; and became a one-party People's Republic

in 1946. Its Socialist domination ended in 1990 when from its capital in Sofia, it held its

first multiparty election and began as the Republic of Bulgaria in a process of moving

toward political democracy and a market economy needing to combat inflation,

unemployment, corruption, and crime. Bulgaria joined NATO (2004) and the EU (2007).

It has been assisted by the European Regional Development Fund and still feels the

tension between Europe and Russia.[308]

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[308] Infoplease, "Bulgaria," http://www.infoplease.com/country/bulgaria.html; The World Factbook, Central Intelligence Agency, "Bulgaria," https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/ geos/bu.html; Official Tourism Portal of Bulgaria, http://bulgariatravel.org/en/; New World Encyclopedia, "Bulgaria," http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bulgaria; Wikitravel, "Bulgarian Travel Guide," http;//wikitravel.org/en/Bulgaria; Wikipedia, "Bulgaria," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgaria (accessed December 19, 2013).

The East - Thailand

For information from the East "world", the researcher has designated an ethnic or people group within Thailand. At the center of the Indochina peninsula of Southeast Asia, Thailand is a country that was once referred to as Siam, meaning "dark" or "brown" in Sanskrit. It is bordered on the northeast and east by Myanmar (Burma), on the northwest and west by Laos, and on the southwest by Cambodia. It is the fifty-first largest country in area and the twentieth most populous with around sixty-four million people.

The people group allocated for this research has been the Lahu people, more specifically the Black Lahu or one of the four Lahu tribes identified by dress color. The Lahu people or those who speak the Lahu language are one of fifty-six recognized Chinese ethnic groups. There are over one million Lahu people scattered basically throughout the Yunnan Province of China, southeastern Myanmar, and Chiang Rai, the northernmost province of Thailand. Chiang Rai province is bounded on the north by the Mekong River with its crossing bridge to Myanmar's Shan State and then on to Laos and China in the "Golden Triangle" at Mae Sai. While the majority of Lahu live in China, a few thousand have even settled in Laos, Vietnam, and the United States. However, there are now more than twenty-five thousand and probably closer to one-hundred thousand Lahu who live within Thailand, scattered in villages like colored jelly beans among the four other main mountain groups which together are categorized politically as hill tribes or internationally as the "Hilltribes of Thailand." The majority of older adult Lahu who now live in Thailand fled as refugees from Laos because of the fear of retribution when

the Pathet Lao took over in 1975, and their families have now become economically more stable.[309]

<p align="center">*The South – Ghana and Guatemala*</p>

For responses from the South the researcher has assigned Guatemala, the northernmost country in Central America; and Ghana in West Africa on the central coast of the Gulf of Guinea. While both of these venues are regarded as being in the South "world," they are on two totally different continents.

Ghana

The Republic of Ghana is a constitutional democracy with about twenty-five million people. The name Ghana or "Warrior King," is a reflection upon the ancient Empire of Ghana that once extended throughout much of western Africa. It is located on the Atlantic's Gulf of Guinea with notable sandy beaches and good harbors on the "underbelly" of West Africa, just a few degrees north of the Equator. With its tropical rain forest belt, heavily forested hills and many rivers and streams along the coast, and in low bush, park-like savannah and grassy plains in the north, Ghana borders Cote d'Ivoire or the Ivory Coast (west), Burkina Faso (north) and Togo (east). By the late thirteenth century the region had become inhabited by a number of often-warring ancient kingdoms. After the arrival of the Portuguese in 1470, trade began to flourish with the European states, such as with the Dutch in the sixteenth century. For almost four hundred years one of the chief exports of the region was human slaves to the New World, overshadowing even the trade for gold and cocoa. More than six million people were shipped through

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[309] Wikipedia, "Thailand," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thailand; Wikipedia, "Lahu people," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lahu_people; Thailand online, "The Hilltribes of Thailand, Lahu," http://www.thailine.com/thailand/english/hill-e/lahu-e.hhis provisiontm; Wikipedia, "Chiang Rai Province," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaing_Rai_Province (accessed December 20, 2013).

Ghana to plantations in the Americas. Many millions more died from their overland march to the coastal forts or slave castles---castles that contained chapels for the governors and guards---or during their imprisonment as well as on the ships crossing the Atlantic. This kind of trade was finally stopped when the British gained the dominant position in 1874 and established a colony known as the Gold Coast. In 1956 by referendum, British Togoland, an adjoining former German colony was incorporated into the Gold Coast British colony. Ghana was created as an independent country in 1957, the first sub-Saharan nation to do so. By a plebiscite, Ghana became the first "black star" republic on July 1, 1960. In an exemplary gesture of reconciliation, Ghana, on the fiftieth year of its independence in 2007, offered an apology to slave descendants for the role of the slave catchers and invited them to reconnect with their ancestors' homeland. The former area which had been British Togoland is now one of ten political regions of Ghana known as the Volta Region. This region includes Lake Volta, the largest global man-made lake by surface area and the home of one of the largest hydroelectric dams completed in 1965. Well-endowed with natural resources such as cocoa, gold, oil, and natural gas, Ghana has twice the per capita output of the poorer countries in West Africa, with ten percent or about one billion dollars per year in foreign aid coming from the United States. Since 2006, in its drive to open markets and secure supplies, China has also been promising aid for development projects.

The focus for the data for the study has been in the east or the Volta Region with a population of close to two million people. This region has had some influence from the West, particularly the area around and east of the capital of Accra. Since Ghana was once

a British colony, English is taught in school and is now spoken by most of the people in this area.[310]

Guatemala

The Republic of Guatemala or "forested-land," as somewhat of a geological contrast from Ghana, is a relatively small mountainous country about the size of Tennessee at the top of Central America. Within its population of over thirteen million, it has more than twenty-one different groupings of people. These range in size from several million Spanish-speaking Ladinos or Mestizos who are a mixture of European or African and Mayan heritage, to Maya minorities of over a million down to less than twenty thousand. Geologically, the region sits on top of the "Ring of Fire" having more than one hundred volcanoes---many considered Mayan gods---one over fourteen thousand feet above sea level. More than two dozen are considered major, including two that are "venting" as well as El Fuego which continues to cause wide-spread ash havoc. Other natural disasters are common in the region with the first colonial capital, Iximche, established on July 25, 1524, decimated by an earthquake in 1527; its second colonial capital, Cludad Vieja, established on November 22, 1527, ruined by a flood in 1542; the third capital in the city of Antigua and the center of the Viceroyalty of New Spain, established on March 10, 1543, destroyed by two earthquakes, with the last in 1773; and the forth capital, now in Guatemala City, established on January 2, 1776, now with a population over five million, continuing to experience numerous violent shakings with the most recent major earthquake in 1974. Because the area is also buffeted by tropical

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[310] New World Encyclopedia, "Ghana," http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ghana; Infoplease, "Ghana," http://www.infoplease.com/country/ghana.html; Africa.com, "Ghana," http://www.africa.com/ghana; Wikipedia, "Ghana." http://en.wilekipedia.org/wki/Ghana; and Wikitravel, "Ghana," http://wikitravel.org/en/Ghana (accessed December 21, 2013).

prevailing westerly winds circling from off the Atlantic, many severe storms pass over the region. Historically, before the Spanish colonial days, this region and that of a large portion of southern Mexico were inhabited by the Maya. Although these people at that time had no metal, they used flint, obsidian, and granite to build enormous Mayan cities. These cities included I-shaped ball courts up to the size of a football field that had bleachers for spectators. In the "win-or-else" game, the winning team of three members was offered as the ultimate sacrifice to their gods, particularly Mother Earth. The Maya also built monuments like pyramids or human-made mountains, held together by heated limestone mortar, in order to become closer to their gods. It seems almost impossible to imagine how in just a few centuries this civilization would become hidden under a tangled carpet of jungle vegetation, or as the Maya would question, "Why the serpent turned?" Whatever the reason, by the later thirteenth century, the only place where the Maya were thriving was in the northern part of the Yucatan peninsula. By the beginning of the sixteen century, almost all the Mayan cities were quiet and empty except for those in the northern area, which continued to prosper until the arrival of the Spaniards. With the fall to the Spanish in 1697 of the last Mayan city near Lake Peten Itza, now in Belize, the Maya had no choice but to accept not only "Christianity," but the rule of the Spanish as their slaves. With that they also ostensibly gave up most of their own culture and customs. The remnants of the remaining Mayan cities were quickly overgrown by the rain forest and not rediscovered by the Western world for almost a century and a half. So it seems that, not unlike many other areas, the region of the Maya has been constantly bombarded by foreign peoples seeking dominance.

For the data from this venue, the information has come from the people of the highlands area around the globally significant Lake Atitlan who are mostly of Maya descent. They are from two of the nineteen Amerindian ethnic groups in Guatemala: the Kaqchikel on the north and east sides of the volcanic lake; and the Tz'utuhil people on the south and west sides. For more than thirty years or until December 31, 1996, the later was the center of the civil war between the government and leftist rebels. As with so many global cultures, poverty or the apparent lack of the usual or acceptable amounts of resources such as money or material possessions, has permeated the highland Maya, so that poverty should be considered to be extreme with the considered annual income per person of less than $500. Living conditions have improved significantly since the researcher's first contact with these people in 1995 and the end of the war. In addition to poverty, the people suffer from inadequate shelter and constantly must be on the alert for natural disasters, often experiencing many months of torrential rains, the possibility of mudslides, and even hurricanes. In 2005 hurricane Stan dumped as much as twenty inches of rain in just a few hours across the country and was most devastating for the highland Maya with the loss of several hundred lives due to mudslides. Because of globalization and communications the resulting cultural changes are occurring quickly in this region. Where, just forty years ago, everyone wore the traditional dress which indicated their village of residence, now only a few, and mostly women, dress in non-western clothing. Much of the leadership, predominately men, are literate in Spanish and many also speak some English. Many of the businesses have satellite dishes and access to the Internet. Along with the multi-national food and medication corporations that have come to Guatemala, there are many German and other European tourists coming to

experience the "lake among the volcanos," sometimes referred to as the "eighth wonder of the natural world." The result for the people of this region has been a perceived rapid loss of their cultural identity.[311]

The West – Minnesota, United States

For data from the West the researcher has appointed the United States, currently referred to globally as America and located in the center of North America. More specifically, the information gathered has been from the metropolitan area of the high-tech manufacturing and product development center of the Twin Cities in the far north central state of Minnesota. St. Paul is the state capital and Minneapolis is the site of the ninth Federal Reserve or U.S. banking district.

Conclusions on the Research

The qualitative research method and the methodology of phenomenological research appear to have been adequate for investigating and answering the research problem. Although the approach may not have been exclusively an empirical model of research, it has been scientific and valid for exploring the problem. And, even though the major research approach has been qualitative and phenomenological, there has been the need to use other research methods. By placing the surveys in all of the epistemological "four world" venues and obtaining and comparing the data from each, the researcher has

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[311] Infoplease, "Guatemala," http://www.infoplease.com/country/guatemala.html; New World Encyclopedia, "Guatemala," http://www.newworld encyclopedia.org/entry/Guatemala (accessed December 21, 2013) with corrections and additions by Sergio Gonzalas, Certified National Tour Guide, Antigua, Guatemala, March 1, 2015; Ruth Karen, *The Land and People of Central America*, Portraits of the Nations Series, rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1972), Tamra Orr, *The Maya* (New York: Watts Library, 2005); and Thomas L. Pearcy, *The History of Central America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006); and the U.S. Department of State, "Diplomacy in Action, Guatemala." http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2045.httm (accessed June 2, 2012).

been able to use the resulting information to verify or disprove the results of the literary

search regarding conversion.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE FIELD RESEARCH

Introduction to the Field Research

While the over-all study has included an analysis of the data from the Bible and from numerous secular, biblical, and theological resources, the field research has been a significant part of the study in that it has given strength to the findings in the literary and biblical research resources. The field research has involved obtaining and analyzing data on why and how people who claim to have had an eternal change have come to that place within the context of numerous world settings. From the researcher's decades of experience has come the realization that regardless of their personal psychological, sociological, anthropological, and cultural environmental situation, the participants outside of the West, or not educated in the West, would have understood conversion as being their personal spiritual change. So the purpose for the data has been primarily to convey the importance of the different kinds of influences behind conversion and the strength of those influences in some unique global locations. The data was carefully obtained by theologically-trained evangelical administrators in each of the locations who have had the same perspective on conversion as the researcher. These administrators have identified individuals who were willing to be participants in revealing how or why they came to the place of conversion.

Findings from an Anonymous Survey

Field Research Tool

The field survey involved a document referenced as the "Personal Information Guide" (PIG). This PIG was translated from English into Bulgarian and Spanish (Appendices A, B, and C). It was created with thirty-five statements and one open "other." These statements were assembled from the corresponding literature relating to one of the categories of the research study and designed by the researcher to fit into the categories of the discussion. For each of seven categories there were five randomly placed declarative statements. The participants were asked to pick out the three declarations from among the thirty-six that best described primarily "how you have come into spiritual and eternal reconciliation with God the Creator through Jesus?" or secondarily "what or who may have influenced or assisted you to arrive at your conversion experience?" In this way an anonymous willing respondent could effectively describe how and why he or she had come to the place of conversion, or had been "converted." The word "conversion," used in the directive, was not used in any of the thirty-six statements. As a result, the inseparable academic questions of the "how" could also be considered as the "why". There was also an opportunity given for the participants to also comment in writing about their own conversion understanding.

The first of the categories included statements that correlated with a general and more philosophical characterization or designation. On the PIG this category related to the following researched statements:

1) The best religious choice (APPENDIX A, Statement Code 13);
2) A desire to be more religious (Statement Code 22);
3) The Bible (23):
4) A church's worship (25); and

5) A desire to be a better person (33).

The second category included researched statements which had described the how

and why of conversion as a psychological process and subsequently on the PIG correlated

with:

1) A physical, emotional, or mental crisis (APPENDIX A, Statement Code 8);
2) The death or loss of a loved one (Statement Code 10);
3) A desire to be free of guilt and shame (17);
4) A sense of insecurity or fear (24); and
5) An emotional experience (31).

A third category of declarative statements related to the consideration of

conversion as a sociological advancement. These linked research statements were spelled

out on the PIG by:

1) Your parent or parents (APPENDIX A, Statement Code 3);
2) A change in your social status such as marriage (Statement Code 7);
3) A new sense of personal identity (16);
4) Your relatives or larger family (20); and
5) The influence of a friend (29).

Another category of statements had associated conversion with an anthropological

experience. On the PIG these were associated with:

1) Something in the history of your people group (APPENDIX A, Statement Code
    2);
2) A time of solitude or prayer (Statement Code 4);
3) A dream or image (12);
4) A new appreciation of the cosmos (28); and
5) A developing need to know God (32).

Still another category of statements had come from labeling conversion as a

cultural progression and were expressed on the PIG by:

1) Religious rituals and ceremonies (APPENDIX A, Statement Code 5);
2) A change in your moral behavior or conduct (Statement Code 9);
3) A religious tradition (18);
4) Your village or community (27); and
5) What you have been taught (30).

The sixth category shared the concerns of more personal and influential statements that had termed conversion as a result of a theological occurrence. On the Personal Information Guide these statements were:

1) A church's teaching (APPENDIX A, Statement Code 1);
2) An evangelistic or revival meeting (Statement Code 6);
3) An evangelist (19);
4) The doctrine of the church (20); and
5) a pastor and their preaching (26).

The last category encompassed statements which have regarded conversion as a complex blend or combination of all or some of the other factors. These were coupled together by statements on the PIG of:

1) A commitment to a group of faith (APPENDIX A, Statement Code 11);
2) A concern for better personal values (Statement Code 14);
3) A desire to be closer to God (15);
4) An evolving search for truth (34); and
5) A search for happiness (35).

Obtaining the Data from the Surveys

The placement of the surveys globally within the five venues of Bulgaria, Thailand, Ghana, Guatemala, and the United States has resulted in data coming from 184 total respondents. The raw data from the anonymous surveys can be found in Figure 1 on the next page. Most of the additional remarks by the majority of individual participants who wanted to comment on their personal conversions can be found in Appendix D.

In order to complete a valid global inquiry into this subject, a comparison of the data from each of the four epistemological worlds has also been necessary. Of the 184 respondents, 20 or 10.9 percent were from Bulgaria using the Bulgarian language; 47 or 25.5 percent were from the Lahu in Thailand using English; 26 or 14.1 percent were from

Category	Code	Influence	Bulgaria	Thailand	Ghana	Guatemala	United States	Total
General	1	The best religious choice	1	0	1	5	0	7
	2	A desire to be more religious	5	2	0	0	6	3
	3	The Bible	1	11	9	9	4	34
	4	A church's worship	7	11	1	6	0	25
	5	A desire to be a better person	4	0	3	7	3	17
		Total	18	24	14	27	13	86
Psychological	6	A physical, emotional, or mental crisis	4	3	1	3	4	15
	7	The death or lose of a loved one	1	0	1	1	0	3
	8	A desire to be free of guilt and shame	2	1	1	4	3	11
	9	A sense of insecurity or fear	1	3	0	0	1	5
	10	An emotional experience	2	1	1	1	5	10
		Total	10	8	4	9	13	44
Sociological	11	Your parent or parents	1	25	5	26	14	71
	12	A change in your social status such as marriage	1	1	0	0	2	4
	13	A new sense of personal identity	0	3	0	1	2	6
	14	Your relatives or larger family	0	10	0	4	8	22
	15	The influence of a friend	0	6	3	0	10	19
		Total	2	45	8	31	36	122
Anthropological	16	Something in the history of your people group	1	1	1	0	1	4
	17	A time of solitude or prayer	4	2	1	1	2	10
	18	A dream or image	0	0	3	1	0	4
	19	A new appreciation of the cosmos	0	0	0	0	1	1
	20	A developing need to know God	4	8	4	11	3	30
		Total	9	11	9	13	7	49
Cultural	21	Religious rituals and ceremonies	1	0	0	0	0	1
	22	A change in your moral behavior or conduct	1	1	0	2	1	5
	23	A religious tradition	0	1	1	0	0	2
	24	Your village or community	0	4	0	0	0	4
	25	What you have been taught	0	1	0	0	5	6
		Total	2	7	1	2	6	18
Theological	26	A church's teachings	0	4	7	8	9	28
	27	An evangelistic or revival meeting	1	9	9	2	8	29
	28	An evangelist	7	3	4	4	0	18
	29	The doctrine of the church	8	0	2	1	0	11
	30	A pastor and their preaching	1	1	3	3	3	11
		Total	17	17	25	18	20	97
Blend	31	A commitment to a group of faith	3	8	0	1	4	16
	32	A concern for better personal values	0	1	3	2	3	9
	33	A desire to be closer to God	2	10	13	11	6	42
	34	An evolving search for truth	4	1	1	5	3	14
	35	A search for happiness	1	1	1	1	0	4
		Total	10	21	18	20	16	85
	36	Other (see Appendix E)	5	3	0	1	6	15
		Number of Respondents	20	47	26	49	42	184

Figure 1. Research Field Data

Ghana using English; 49 or 26.6 percent were from the Tz'utuhil and Kaqchikel of

Guatemala using Spanish; and 42 or 22.8 percent were from Minneapolis and St. Paul,

Minnesota in the United States. The percentages in the analysis do not always equal 100

percent due to rounding. The 184 total respondents provided 516 responses or an average

of 2.8 responses per participant. Some of the participants gave one or two more and some

less than three responses.

<p align="center">*Decoding the Survey Information*</p>

North - Bulgaria

The data from the North, which in the case of this research has come from

Bulgaria, has revealed that there were 73 responses or 14.1 percent of the total coming

from the 20 participants. Leading the replies were 18 or 24.7 percent of the total

Bulgarian responses from the General category and 17 or 23.3 percent in the Theological

category. The General category contained statements such as "The best religious choice"

and "A desire to be a better person," while the Theological category had statements such

as "The doctrine of the church" and "An evangelist." The statements in the categories of

Sociological and Cultural had only two responses or 2.7 percent each and appeared to be

the least important.

East - Lahu in Thailand

The information from the East, or in the case of the research study from the Lahu

people in Thailand, found that there were 126 replies or 24.4 percent of the total from 47

participants. From this location, the category of Sociological at 45 or 35.7 percent of the

Lahus' responses received the strongest support, particularly with the statements such as

"Your parent or parents" and "Your relatives or larger family". The statements in the

Cultural categories for examples "Your village or community" provided only seven answers or 5.6 percent of their total.

South - Ghana

The report out of the South, first of all from Ghana, disclosed that there were 79 responses or 15.5 percent of the total. From the 26 participants the categories of Theological and Blend received the strongest support. The Theological statements such as "An evangelical or revival meeting" and "A church's teachings," had 25 or 31.6 percent of their total responses. The statements of Blend, such as "A desire to be closer to God" had 18 or 22.8 percent. Out of the 79 total replies, the statements in the Cultural category only had one reaction or 1.3 percent and that was to the statement of "A religious tradition."

South – Amerindian (Maya) in Guatemala

The other information from the South, which was obtained from the Tz'utuhil and Kaqchikel in Guatemala, had "unearthed" 121 responses or 23.4 percent of the total from the 49 participants. Among these peoples the categories of Sociological for example "Your parent or parents," of General such as "The Bible," of Theological such as "A church's teaching," and of Blend such as "A desire to be closer to God" all seemed to be equally significant with 31 responses or 25.6 percent, 27 or 22.3 percent, 20 or 16.5 percent, and 18 or 14.9 percent, respectively. In this venue, it has been particularly noteworthy that once again only two responses to the statements from the category of Cultural or 1.7 percent seemed to make that factor almost non-existent.

South – Cumulative

Combining the information from the two places in the South has shown that there have been 200 responses or 38.9 of the total coming from 75 respondents or 40.7 percent of all participants. There appeared to be almost no interest in the Cultural category with only three replies or 1.5 percent. However, there was an apparent difference between the two settings with Ghana having a strong reaction in the Theological area and the Amerindians of Guatemala having a strong response in the Sociological sphere.

West - Minneapolis / St. Paul, Minnesota, USA

The data from the West or from the Minneapolis / St. Paul, Minnesota area of the United States of America provided 117 responses or 22.7 percent of the total from 42 participants. In this case the Sociological category with 36 answers or 30.2 percent of their total provided a strong showing in the reaction to the statements for example of "Your parent or parents" and "The influence of a friend." The category of Anthropological with seven responses or 6.0 percent and the category of Cultural with six responses or 5.1 percent showed only slight reaction.

<div align="center">

Prospective Regarding the Findings

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The number of survey response participants in each of the locations could be expanded almost infinitely since the number of potential contributors globally might number in the hundreds of millions. From a scientific perspective, the number of respondents may be less significant than the questionnaire placements. By using careful administration, this anonymous survey placed in the four worlds envisioning the four paths of social innovation, has provided enough data to offer some appropriate academic conclusions. As a result, the researcher has exposed the fact that the results, when

compared among the five venues, show that conversion or spiritual transformation has transpired no matter what may have been the psychological, anthropological, sociological, cultural, theological, or combination environment of the respondents.

That conversion, as an important positive and constructive life-change, had occurred, with the same result for everyone, was especially evident in the participants' additional personally-written declarations concerning their own conversion. For those not able to write in English their statements have been translated. A Bulgarian male realizing conversion at age nineteen wrote:

> I knew almost nothing about salvation before starting to attend youth events in an evangelical church. I learned the most important thing, that I need forgiveness of my sins, which weren't few in number. After about a year I gave my life to the Lord Jesus Christ and he changed my thinking, my values and my reason for life.

> A Bulgarian woman wrote about her change at age twenty-five:

> Before my conversion I saw myself as a walking dead. My life had no meaning or purpose, so I felt that I had no value and lived with the feeling of emptiness, barrenness and hopelessness. The greatest change in me after my conversion was joy. From a person who never smiled, I became a person who rejoices in every situation.

> A potential spiritual leader in Ghana wrote about his conversion at age fifteen:

> The joy of coming to Christ is always fresh in me since my conversion. My life is change and different is always to be close to my lord and Savior Jesus worship and serve Him only.

> Another Ghanaian man wrote about his freedom from spiritism with his dramatic

conversion at age eighteen:

> Freedom is real. I experienced freedom after my conversion. I'm free from the fear of wizards, malams, and things like that. After my conversion my family is protected from death which occurred every year. (Christianity isn't a mere religion but a way of life.).

From a Guatemalan woman, probably from among the Tz'utuhil people, had

come her written statement concerning her conversion at age twelve:

> Well they asked me through the pastor if I wanted to accept Jesus in my heart as my only Savior and I said okay because he is who changed my life and I gave over to him all my heart.

A Guatemalan man, also probably Tz'utuhil but possibly Kaqchikel, whose

change came at age thirteen wrote:

> Thanks to God for the testimony of my mother that has been an example of love toward God and his Son. (I am thankful to God for saving my life, forgiving my sins, and making me a new man.

A Lahu man from northern Thailand wrote about his change at age eighteen:

> I have a new hope in my life and I have found that God is the one who created me. (There are many things in the world that cannot be proved by science, i.e. the origin of the earth or universe. Even our body has every system working amazingly, if you study biochemistry.)

Another Lahu man realizing conversion at age twenty-three wrote:

> God spoke to my heart while laying in bed, it's now or never God, got out of bed and went to the farm house kitchen and surrendered my life to Christ, and the journey began!

A woman from the Minneapolis/St. Paul area of Minnesota wrote about her

conversion at the age of fourteen:

> A friend invited me to youth group and its activities. Then I heard the gospel. I became a believer at a Youth for Christ rally. (I was the 1st person in my extended family to become a believer. Many have followed the Lord now.

And, a Minnesota man from the metropolitan area whose change came at age

twenty wrote:

> God met me at a specific point of the steps I had taken made me afraid, and I realized that in my own efforts I can't be good. I didn't see the reason for living and sought God's help. I didn't waned. He used people who were genuine and believed in Jesus. These people then helped me grow in my new relationship with the Lord.

It is noteworthy that the information obtained does indicate that the factors behind an individual or people group coming to a place where conversion could take place had come from at least one of the academic perspectives and were similar to the influences experienced by others within their venue. The data from the questionnaires also indicates that conversion does not take place just because of a singular occurrence, process, experience, or progression that becomes formed within a person or a group. Nor has it been because of some factor or factors peculiar to a setting or because of some form of human pressure or even human effort, such as that offered through psychology, for example. Rather, from their written statements, conversion appeared to have been understood as something that has come from the outside of human capability and appeared to have been envisioned as a divine encounter.

Analysis and Conclusion

The outside dynamic for conversion has been shown to be coming through all the different academic perspectives and with varying intensity in each of the global venues. Generally, it is strongest from one or two academic directions, with one or two being relatively insignificant.

Globally, it appears to be progressing from all routes and with a variety of places with the Sociological category being the strongest; General, Theological, and Blend being quite significant; Psychological and Anthropological being substantially less, and Cultural, possibly because of globalization, being quite low.

The data has conveyed the importance of the different kinds of factors behind conversion and the strength of those influences in a few unique global locations. As a result, the data should provide a better understanding of conversion,

particularly for global contextual ministry. It should also assist in sensing the factors

that may produce opportunities for conversion in at least these five surveyed

distinct global venues.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

Introduction

The research problem this project addresses has been a reflection on how individuals have comprehended conversion and have realized and are realizing a permanent holistic change. This is a change believed by millions to have allowed them to come into not only a spiritual, but a more certain eternal reconciliation with God the Creator. This is a reconciliation that can only be accomplished through Jesus, described as the "Anointed One" or "Sent One" from God, or the Messiah of the Hebrew Bible and the Christ of the New Testament. As such, the research problem has become an attempt to find a way to express and confirm the original essence of conversion.

In response to this problem, with a deliberation of the academic factors and the divine dynamic of conversion, the researcher has reviewed the relevant intellectual literature relating to what has been described as conversion, as well as any other trends considered as being conversion. Next, the researcher has significantly explored the concept of divine reconciliation in its original biblical characterization. Then the researcher has compared the academic literature with the biblical concept. To confirm the findings, the researcher has developed an anonymous personal information guide which has been administered in five venues by key change agents so as to explore the academic why and how individuals and peoples have experienced conversion within a broad global scope, but limited global context. Lastly, the researcher has developed a model for what

can lead to conversion as evidenced in all global contexts in order to assist and encourage global partners in becoming more effective.

Discoveries from the Reviewed Literature

An Overall Analysis

The concept of human conversion presents a challenge in our postmodern world since people are willing to accept conversion in a context with just about anything recognized as being relevant for others. Because of its subjectivity, it may be impossible now for the concept of conversion to be acknowledged, even though the results are objectively evidenced. It has been significant for the researcher to discover that prior to the time of Joseph Alleine in the seventeenth century, no written discrepancy regarding conversion or of the need for a turning back to God, could be found. At least in a Protestant context in the West, prior to the spontaneous global expansion, an individual had either undergone conversion and was considered as being converted, or had not realized the opportunity and was deemed to be unconverted. But, during just a little more than the last hundred years, particularly in the first and last thirds of the twentieth century, there has been considerable academic research and writing on the general subject of conversion. Also, because of the academic diversity, the concept of conversion has been forced to change and to continue to change. This has produced a great deal of academic confusion because of the considerable differences of opinion, not just theologically but, mainly secularly as demonstrated by the various academic statements.

Conclusions from the Literature Review

The various academic disciplinary perspectives on conversion may be beneficial. Yet, while these works may describe various observable human changes, they cannot fulfill, or to tap the word used rather tellingly by Lewis R. Rambo, they cannot "mediate"[312] in any way the bringing of anyone into an eternal relationship with a gracious but judging God willing to provide for restored fellowship through conversion. Nor can the academic disciplines produce the transformation of the total person provided only through the power of God. Even if conversion is reduced to a series of human religious steps it does not provide the whole truth. These human factors can only serve as a vehicle or as a means for an individual's religious growth. The literature has shown that religious seekers do change in their understandings. And, seekers after truth do change in their worldview as they allow themselves to be drawn by the power of God, especially when that change has been observed from a viewpoint of one or more of the academic disciplines.

When intellectually categorized, there have been many complexities in trying to describe all the academic "whys" and "hows" culminating in conversion. It may be impossible to rationally describe what has transpired, except that it is known only by God's Spirit. However, the literature has shown that the "Adequate" and "Focused God"[313] out of love and grace, desires to continue to draw all people to himself through Jesus; to seek out all "seekers." While various individuals may have similar journeys to conversion in a particular cultural or epistemological milieu, that excursion is still unique for each one. However, the literature implies that a focus on any diminutive and

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[312] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion,* xii.

[313] J. B. Phillips, *Your God is Too Small* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1961), 63-81.

debatable course of the journey is especially dangerous for anyone truly seeking for God's event. The danger is that when there is an emphasis on the wind or spiritual development, an individual can become more concerned with the "How am I doing?" on the "stage of my religious life" and lose out on Reality.

The time-frame leading up to conversion can be accepted as a divine process marked by gradual changes leading toward a specific conclusion. That spiritual process can involve a few seconds to almost a lifetime of seeking. However, any "time" must be considered minuscule in light of eternity. The dynamic may start in the life of a young child. For the researcher this was at the age of four. Or, it may begin as late as the "twelfth hour" of natural life. Greenham has supported this with his generic definition that "the word 'process' indicates all conversions take some time, although this is not an indefinite time."[314]

However the psychological process, the sociological experience, the anthropological advancement, the cultural progression, or the theological occurrence that many recent academics have conveyed regarding religious conversion is quite different. It does not or may not lead to any kind of an "event," a final occasion, or a result. In fact, Rambo has refuted it as being an event by stating: "my choice of the word *process* over *event* is a deliberate decision resulting from my personal interpretation that, contrary to popular mythology, conversion is very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant, wholesale transformation that is now and forever.[315] The researcher has been able to understand that

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[314] Ant Greenham, "A Study of Palestinian Muslim Conversions to Christ," from his dissertation "Muslim Conversions to Christ: An Investigation of Palestinian Converts Living in the Holy Land," Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, December 2004, expanded to a 322-page same title text, January, 2011, *St. Francis Magazine* 6, no. 1 (February 2010): 116

[315] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 1.

the "how" process may seem to be vital in human reasoning, but it is doubtful that these factors have any importance to God in the provision of the dynamic of conversion.

Discoveries from the Biblical Review and Exegesis

An Overall Review

The declarations of the prophets, John the Baptizer, and Jesus provide some vivid insight regarding the necessity for a conversion. They demonstrate how Jesus, as the only Son and "Sent One," knew his place in providing for God's eternal promise; a conversion brought about by a dynamic change. When calling his special followers, Jesus saw a hated Jewish traitor, a Roman tax collector. As soon as Levi, also called Matthew, had responded to Jesus by leaving everything to "follow" Jesus he had prepared a great banquet at his home for Jesus and invited all of his disreputable friends, his fellow tax collectors. It was then that the outwardly offended religious leaders and scholars questioned Jesus' followers as to why they all were guests at dinner with the crooks and "sinners." Jesus on overhearing had responded: "Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm here inviting outsiders, not insiders – an invitation to a changed life; changed inside and out." [316] The biblical record presents a continuous call to a gift given for each one; an invitation and an opportunity for an endless spiritual change and divine reconciliation. Although the point of God's written revelation has been the Scripture, God's full self-disclosure ultimately is found exclusively in the Christ. [317] The Scriptures make known that Jesus, the Messiah or the Christ is the only source for any change that can culminate in a restored relationship of harmony with God.

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[316] Luke 5:31, *The Message*: *The New Testament in Contemporary Language*, comp. by Eugene Peterson (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing, 1993), 115.

[317] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 1/1:119.

One of the greatest challenges in developing the research has been the

responsibility as a researcher for a conservative exegesis of the biblical texts. When

looking for truth there can be no better place to start than with the resource of God's

Word. Because of the nature of the research problem, the Bible has been used as the

groundwork upon which all other resources have been judged. Whether it is called

conversion or some other linguistic name such as a transformation or a metamorphosis,

considered just a dramatic change, or offered as a theme of a "complete 'right about

turn'" as suggested by A. M. Hunter,[318] conversion has had its grounding in the

Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The recorded discourses of the

writers such as John the youngest of Jesus' disciples, are not something made up. John's

exposition of faith was not just for his generation or based on pre-Christian Gnostic

origin in which emancipation comes through knowledge.[319] As the record of what God

wants to communicate to humankind, the Bible has provided a resource from God given

most specifically to help in the discovery or the rediscovery of conversion. And, this

communication exhibits conversion as a tangible idea to be deliberated in a theological

context, an emotive context, and a volitional context, all corresponding to the aspects that

make up an individual's restored being in the "image of God." This holistic approach

relates to a parable by Jesus, reported in all the synoptic gospels, of a farmer sowing seed

in which only when all the conditions were favorable could there be the reality of a

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[318] A. M. Hunter, *The Gospel According to John*, in The Cambridge Bible Commentary of the New English Bible, P. R. Ackroyd, A.R. C. Leaney, and J. W. Packer, gen. eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 37.

[319] John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, in The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, G. I Davis and G. N. Stanton, gen. eds. (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009), 257.

harvest.[320] It should be noted that at the end, again reported in all synoptic gospels, Jesus declared to anyone seeking: "He who has ears (to hear), let him hear."

In investigating conversion in the context of what Jesus stated, the Bible points out that people wanted to change in order to be righteous or "right with God." They even wanted insight from this seeming prophet, Jesus from Nazareth, as to the greatest commandment; to have at least an intellectual understanding of how they could be right with God. They thought if there was something they could do to fulfill that mandate's responsibilities, then all the rest of the Law would be inferior and easily manageable. But Jesus "threw them a curve" by suggesting love, as elaborated on later by Paul (1 Cor. 13:13), the loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 19:16-22, 22:38; Mark 10:17-23, 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-37, 18:18-30). Any honest and sincere person would realize this was humanly impossible. The Bible has been clear regarding the need not only of a personal change, but of a total transformation, a regeneration. Jesus had come to fulfill all the Law and the Prophets. He offered conversion as a new relationship with God and with others through himself. Or, as Jesus declared, "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Conclusions from the Theological-Biblical Review

The biblical data regarding the concept of conversion in the Old Testament has been surprisingly clear, especially as presented for a people group like the Jews. It has indicated that for the nation or for those who would be God's people the requirement has been there to corporately turn around, return, bring back, restore, to turn back, but more specifically the sense of the people returning to the living God. The biblical data

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[320] Matt. 13:3-9; Mark 4:2-9; Luke 8:4-8.

encompasses this progressive theme throughout the entire Hebrew Bible. From the time of Job, to the people wandering in the wilderness, to the personal reflections of the leader David with a cosmological declaration of a revived soul and a prayer of repentant commitment in faith, to the affirmations by the prophet Isaiah, there has been the constant reminder of the necessity for a change through repentance and restoration in the people's relationship with the Creator God the Almighty.

The biblical data also supports this concern for conversion in the bridge from the Hebrew or Old to the New Testament. The message heralded by John the Baptizer contains his urgent preparatory cry, in this case for individuals, not to be deceived by their religious heritage, but to repent and seek God's forgiveness.

Conversion seems to be critical for everyone from the very opening of each of the gospels within the New Testament to those who have come to Mount Zion to make up the New Jerusalem as indicated in the closing of Revelation. In between are almost unlimited statements about and references to conversion, with numerous examples throughout the beginning history of the Church in the book of The Acts of the Apostles.

Discoveries from the Field Research

An Overall Analysis

One of the more interesting aspects of this study has been the involvement of people in numerous global contexts who have been able to straightforwardly communicate why or how conversion has transpired in their own personal lives. Their additional anonymous comments in association with the field research have indicated some reasons why they have experienced conversion as a life essential. A survey questionnaire was given to those individuals whom the field administrators

believed to be people that had undergone conversion based on the biblical foundation. The questions related to the seven academic external factors investigated in this research of why or how that person believed they had come into spiritual and eternal reconciliation with God the Creator through Jesus.

Field Research Conclusions

God's Spirit has been blowing from different directions and with different velocities in each of the global venues. Generally, it has been strongest from one or two directions and with one or two that are insignificant. Globally, the responses have been from all academic directions and with various speeds with Sociological being the strongest at 122 or 23.6 percent, Theological at 97 or 18.8 percent, General at 86 or 16.7 percent, and Blend at 85 or 16.5 percent being quite brisk; Anthropological at 49 or 9.5 percent and Psychological at 44 or 8.5 percent being considerably less; and Cultural at 18 or 3.5 percent, again possibly because of globalization, being quite low. The research should be able to provide a better understanding for ministry and for continued opportunities for conversion in at least the researched venues.

It is important from this study to note that only a small minority indicated coming to the place of conversion because of psychological reasons: a physical, emotional, or mental crisis, the death or loss of a loved one, a desire to be free of guilt and shame, a sense of insecurity or fear, or an emotional experience. The psychological responses were found mainly in the West. Most of the respondents in each of the "four worlds" revealed coming because of sociological reasons, such as your parent or parents, a change in your social status such as marriage, a new sense of personal identity, your relatives or larger family, or the influence of a friend. Most of the remainder of the respondents indicated

their coming was because of many other reasons with "the Bible" being prominent. A few indicated that their conversion for their eternal relationship with God was because of a variety of reasons; a blend or combination.

Project Conclusions

Overall Findings of the Study

In this study the research problem has been a reflection on the influences or the factors and the dynamic involved in conversion as uniformly comprehended by individuals within the global context. Conversion has been perceived as a permanent holistic change brought on by the dynamic of a spiritual change event. When there has been a comparison of the related literature on conversion with the Scripture and the global field data, the results have provided more of an answer as what conversion as expressed in the last century is not, even though the same English word has been utilized.

Features of the Project Design

Strengths of the Design

The most important strength of the design has been the opportunity to evaluate a far-reaching spectrum of ideas in the discussion of conversion, especially literature relating to a religious-type conversion, which may or may not be comparable to a conversion providing an eternal transformation or change. This has provided the occasion to involve people in numerous global contexts, who know the significance of their conversion, in being able to communicate the academic why or how this has transpired in their own personal lives. The purpose of this within the

design has been for the development of a broader perspective which could then provide a more comprehensive understanding of conversion when considered in conjunction with the exegesis of the biblical texts.

Another asset of the project's design has been a chance to provide encouragement for the Church with a refreshed perspective on conversion; the very essence for its existence, since it is neither a spiritual club nor a social organization. The Church, as the spiritual Body of Jesus the Christ, is always only one spiritual generation away from extinction. As a result, the addition or inclusion of new "converts" is mandatory whether they are from another religion or from among those who previously had been content in their own self-sufficiency (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 2:7-12, 37-39). These will be those receiving God's grace as a free gift offered through conversion. Through the development of a more practical model for global involvement based on the research findings, many global partners who have been struggling to find the appropriate strategy for ministry may find some solace.

And lastly, a benefit of the design, at least for the researcher, has been the academic challenge of the research itself. This has allowed the researcher with extensive, but still quite limited global experience and much more secular and extensive life experience, to be able to reflect on the problem from a unique academic and global perspective in the analysis of the data and in an attempt for a solution to the research problem.

Weaknesses of the Design

Of course there are also weaknesses in this project design. With all of the literature tendered on the subject up until the last couple of decades, it could be possible to "get lost in the literary woods." The literary resources reviewed have come from theologians, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, generalist, and others, all sharing an opinion from their particular academic perspective. Since the term "conversion," or at least religious conversion, has emoted a response that seems to be peculiar for just about everyone has an opinion, the researcher has had to limit the scope to the historical definition and ascribe the literature, somewhat arbitrarily, into one of the various academic response categories. It has been challenging to separate out that which is imperative, that which is significant and challenging, that which expresses a great deal of knowledge, and that which advances limited or very little involvement in the overall discussion.

Another weakness of the design and greatest challenge for the researcher has been utilizing a limited scope for a comprehensible definition of conversion so that it can be thought of as being appropriate for an academic discussion. This presentation needed an almost impossible definition or a finite comprehension of an infinite and eternal event. There may be many who may differ with the ultimate definition provided in the report, but they should not be able to disagree with its biblical foundation.

Still another obvious weakness of the project design has been the limited scope of field research and with the attempt to obtain the field data through competence administrative leaders. Often these field administrators have been so

overwhelmed by their own life challenges that they may have become dazed by

taking on another venture. Although they may have a global passion about the

subject of the research, their initiative may be more constrained than that of the

researcher. Possibly a more adequate way to gather the field data would have been

to personally administer the anonymous surveys. But, since the research was not

just in one venue, gathering the data personally would possibly have had to be done

in a timeframe of up to five years. With the extensive settings and with the

possibility of a need for a sampling from a larger base, this could have taken more

time than would be considered productive. Yet it should be noted that the

researcher has visited and had personal involvement in all of the researched venues,

except Bulgaria.

This does lead to a final expressed weakness of the project design; that of

obtaining sufficient literary, biblical, and field data to give the project credibility.

With all of the necessary literature research and biblical exegesis, the scope of the

field research has been limited to only five representative global venues. However,

the statements used in the inquiry should have been understood in the same way by

all participants. It would appear that this anonymous inquiry given to the over one-

hundred and eighty respondents, almost equally distributed among the five venues,

has provided the same or at least similar results whether the data had been coming

from additional venues in each of the "four worlds," or from more participants in

each of the venues.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER

Introduction

Personal Considerations on the Study

Because this has been basically theological research, the researcher has been cognizant that the literature reviewed has indicated that many psychologists classify conversion as a psychological process; many sociologists define conversion as some form sociological experience; many anthropologists depict conversion as an anthropological and cultural progression; many theologians regard conversion as an occurrence or an event; and other researchers continue to describe conversion as globally necessary and accessible. The historical definition of conversion has now been so transposed that just about everyone has an opinion of what constitutes conversion. From the researcher's perspective, a change that can make an eternal difference can only be accomplished through Jesus, the promised Messiah somewhat concealed throughout the Hebrew Bible. However, he is totally available as the Christ to provide conversion as revealed in the New Testament.

No matter how intense may be the effort, as contextual researchers, like other academic researchers, there may a concern with only one factor, or possibly a few factors leading to a conversion. The research can become so embroiled in an attempt to find the why or how of conversion based on a personal viewpoint or get caught-up in the emphasis of only one of the three aspects of existence and miss the divine dynamic of conversion. Intellectualism is not enough; there eventually appears to be only emptiness.

Emotionalism can have a great beginning but eventually seems to fade or wither. Volitionalism or the dependence on the will can become corrupted. Only when all three aspects of being are unified with the opportunity for becoming "a new creation" in the event of conversion can there be personal holistic restoration of "the image of God."

The academic factors may be tools used by God to bring an individual to the place of conversion. For example, a movement toward conversion through doctrine has been important for many as indicated by the field research data. This is particularly true in Bulgaria and Ghana, and has some importance in bringing people to the place of conversion in Thailand and the United States (Appendices D). However, doctrine can only be a tool that has not been shown to produce conversion. Even a theological occasion or encounter appears to be insufficient in bringing about a provision to overcome the divine estrangement. The researcher has some difficulty with a theology pondering conversion as something that needs to be continuous or repetitive. It does not seem logical that anyone needs to be constantly reborn, continuously made anew, or even repetitively born from above. Conversion should not be considered as something that constantly nails Jesus to the cross. Rather, it must result in an endless proclamation that he has risen.

Jesus' Special Encounter with Nicodemus

In the "good news" account of the potential for conversion recorded by the disciple John (John 2:23-3:21), Charles Erdman suggested that there is a narrative of "unfailing charm...but also a deep undertone of pathos and sadness."[321] While Jesus was

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[321] Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of John: An Exposition,* based on the work of F. M. Braselman, 1916 (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1944), 35.

in Jerusalem for the required celebration of Passover, he was surrounded by many ordinary people who observed his miraculous signs and considered him to be a conceivable prophet. One night a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus sought out Jesus. He may have had a more global perspective since like many Jews at the time his name was possibly Greek.[322] Nicodemus was part of the aristocracy of Jerusalem, a man of high reputation, influence, and power, and he may have been wealthy. As William Barclay submitted, being one of the six thousand Pharisees, it would have been contemplated that Nicodemus was one of the best people in the whole country.[323] Not only that, but Nicodemus was even a ruler of the Jews as one of the inner-brotherhood and special members of the Sanhedrin, the revered seventy-member supreme court which along with the high priest had jurisdiction over every Jew in the world.[324] It was amazing that he should come to Jesus at all. He was certainly a learned and pious man and he would have had at least a conscientious change so that he was different religiously from the common people. Nicodemus could have come because he believed he could learn something from this new teacher.[325] He could have come as a secret spy, a cautious inquirer, a timid defender, or a secret follower searching for a possible answer.[326] He may have come in full sincerity, seeking like a rich young ruler how to inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17), or like a teacher trying to determine the greatest commandment (Mark

[322] Marcus Dods, *The Gospel of St. John*, vol. one, pt. II of *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, edited by W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1961), 711.

[323] William Barclay, *The Gospel of John (Volume One, Chapters I-VII of The Daily Study Bible)*, 1955, rep. (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrews Press, 1958), 108

[324] Barclay, 111.

[325] Roger L. Fredrikson, *John*, in *The Communicator's Commentary*, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, gen. ed. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 80..

[326] Erdman, *The Gospel of John: An Exposition*, 35.

12:28).[327] He fortunately does not seem to have come as being religiously self-sufficient with pedantry in his words. He could have come because of what he had seen of Jesus' miraculous ministry and was impressed by the prophetic "signs."[328] He may have come as a seeker of common religious ground. He may have been coming for himself or as a representative for a special group in the Sanhedrin, as may be suggested by his sincere greeting that "we know you are a teacher who has come from God" (vs. 2).[329] Nicodemus' motive seems ambiguous, but the researcher suspects that more likely he was coming because he could at least use the excuse that the Sanhedrin had the responsibility of dealing with anyone suspected of being a false prophet.[330] The researcher also thinks that with all the gossip and other signs, Nicodemus came to Jesus because he was uneasy and wanted to find out more from this new teacher so as to be able to enter into a seeker's dialogue. Marcus Dods suggested that: "When a man says, I will see for myself what Jesus is, not influenced by what other men say; before I sleep I will settle this matter, the result is fairly certain to be good."[331]

To consider his coming at night as a symbol of "out of darkness to light" is stretching it just a bit.[332] Many other theories as to why he came at night have been

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[327] R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*, in Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 1960, reprint (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 66.

[328] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., in The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gordon D. Fee, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995),186.

[329] Willard M. Swartley, *John*, in *Believers Church Bible Commentary*, Douglas B. Miller and Loren L. Johns, ed. (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2013), 104.

[330] Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 111.

[331] Dods, *The Gospel of St. John*, 712.

proposed, but it was most likely because the rabbis had declared that the best time to

study was at night when a man was undisturbed.[333] Wilbert Howard and Arthur Gossip

have offered that an explanation by a Hebrew midrash on text of Deuteronomy18:19,

written before the time of the prophets, prescribed that "if a prophet who begins to

prophesy (i.e. who is still unaccredited) gives a sign and miracle, he is to be listened to,

otherwise he is not to be heeded."[334]

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus may have initially felt no need for any kind of change,

let alone spiritual conversion, even though he should have known the scriptures. He may

have thought that he was already in God's kingdom. The wordplay conversation of Jesus

with Nicodemus that begins "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"

(ver. 3) seems rather abrupt. However, the researcher concurs with the analysis of John

McHugh and also of Herschel Hobbs that this is possibly an abridged commentary with

an explanation of something that was said before.[335]

Being "born again," a theological catchphrase based on the Greek word *anothen*,

could have several other meanings such as "beginning, completely and radically;" "for an

additional time;" "born from above" or "born from God."[336] It can also mean "born

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[332] Raymond E. Brown, *John (I-XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, in *The Anchor Bible* 29, William F. Albright and David N. Freedman, gen. eds. (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 130.

[345] Brown, 112.

[334] Wilbert F. Howard, and Arthur John Gossip, *The Gospel According to St. John*. Vol. VIII of *The Interpreter's Bible in Twelve Volumes*, George A. Buttrick, com. ed., Walter R. Bowie, exp. ed., and John Knox, intro. and exeg. ed. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury; Nashville: TN: Parthenon Press, 1952), 503.

[335] John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, in *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament*, G. I Davis and G. N. Stanton, gen. eds. (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009), 224; and Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), 77.

[336] Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, 13-114.

anew," "born of God," "begotten from above," and "begotten of God."[337] The research

has identified that all of these, along with the terms "rebirth" and "re-creation," have been

further grounded in the writings of the New Testament.

While it is impossible to get all of the meanings of Greek *anothen* into an English

word or phrase, it is also important not to play with semantics. Yet, it does not appear that

any Aramaic or Hebrew word or phrase would allow such a variety of meanings.[338] The

researcher concurs with Gail O'Day and Susan Hylen in their statement that the "born

again" or "born from above" phrase unfortunately "does not catch the richness of what

Jesus is saying," and that while the phrase tends to be a label, it should be considered "a

metaphor, a rich, multilayered expression that puts into words what really is beyond

words."[339]

Although it may make little difference, academically, if the phrase is translated

"born again," or "born from above," the former, according to Roger Fredrikson, seems

more "fresh and alive with meaning – another chance, starting over, new life."[340] John

McHugh advocates that since Nicodemus appeared to have accepted Jesus' authority over

what were considered dramatic religious signs, the translation of being born "again" has

been "preferred by modern exegetes."[341] Nicodemus could not have been naïve, and yet

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[337] Howard and Gossip, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 503.

[338] Gerald L. Borchart, *John 1-11*, vol. 25A of *The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen, gen. ed. (U.S.A. [no city designation]: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 173.

[339] Gail R. O'Day, and Susan E. Hylen, *John*, in *Westminster Bible Companion, (NRSV)*, Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 43.

[340] Roger L. Fredrikson, *John*, in *The Communicator's Commentary*, Lloyd J. Ogilvie, gen. ed. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 80-81.

[341] McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1-4*, 225.

his questioning response to a re-entry into his mother's womb indicates that he was *thinking* [italics mine] of an event, of a repeated physical birth.

Jesus annoyance with Nicodemus seems to be because he had to repeat and explain that "no one [not even Nicodemus] can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (ver. 5). While "born of water" may refer to physical birth, the researcher agrees with Erdman that Jesus was more likely referring to a progressive final two-part dynamic with the first part "born of water" referring to washing and repentance symbolized by the call of John the Baptizer's baptisms in preparation for the coming kingdom of God. [342] Jesus seemed to have indicated that rather than becoming engrossed with all of his social works, there had to be repentance, confession, pardon, and purification from sin before one could enter God's kingdom and presence.[343] Nicodemus should have recognized in Jesus' declaration the "born of water" message and action of John the Baptizer in preparing "the way for the LORD." John the Baptizer's activity had been predicted by Isaiah and repeated as God's memo by the prophet Malachi (Matt.3:3; cf. Isa.40:3 and Mal. 3:1).[344] The additional imperative of "born of the Spirit" given by Jesus then certainly refers to the last part of God's regenerative dynamic.

Since at that time there probably was a breeze blowing, Jesus contextually used it as a picture for what he was trying to communicate to Nicodemus by using another play on words in that wind and spirit come from the same Greek word, *pneuma*.[345] The

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[342] Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of John: An Exposition*, 35-36.

[343] Erdman, 35.

[344] Erdman, 36.

[345] Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1968), 81.

researcher considers that by his contextualization and by giving another teaching parable (cf. Luke 8:10), Jesus used this particular word to again explain something much deeper concerning the dynamic of conversion. Nicodemus should have been able to understand that the Spirit by its "wind" does work through various human or scientific resource factors whether they are now deemed to be general, psychological, sociological, anthropological, cultural, theological, or a combination so as to bring about an opportunity for conversion.

It is encouragingly supposed by the researcher that this encounter with Jesus was the beginning of Nicodemus' faith journey. It was probably so momentous that Nicodemus later relayed the information to the disciple John as a part of the highlight of his conversion "faith story." That Nicodemus knew of his conversion may be evidenced by his "common ground" connection with Jesus when he argued among his peers for the fair treatment of Jesus if he were to be arrested by the temple guard and tried (John 7:50-52). And even later, when in his preparation of the body of Jesus for burial along with Joseph of Arimathea, he demonstrated a sense of love when he brought about seventy-five pounds of entombment spices (John 19: 38-42) and was willing to be declared "ceremonially unclean" for seven days (cf. Num.19:11). Nicodemus may have humbly realized that his conversion and possibly even his attempted seeking were not about himself, since as R. V. G. Tasker convincingly related: "To be born again, and to be willing to receive ungrudgingly the gifts God offers, involves the abandonment of every

attempt to become righteous by anything man may do for himself, and the willing acceptance of the free gift of grace."[346]

The researcher believes that Nicodemus definitely had a "born again" encounter completing his conversion which changed his life forever. At least he began to demonstrate that Love which only Jesus could provide.

Wind and Spirit

In the analysis of the biblical gospel record given through John of Nicodemus seeking Jesus there is a dimension of conversion that could easily be missed. The researcher has found this reflection on conversion significant enough to encourage going on this research-and-report expedition. This dimension of conversion is found in that first dialogue of Jesus regarding God's eternal provision for Nicodemus and for anyone else in being able to experience being born of the Spirit. Because the researcher believes that every word of Scripture is significant, especially every word spoken by Jesus, he has deliberated the written record of

> The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.[347]

During their conversation that night a gentle breeze may have been rustling the leaves on the olive trees. Nicodemus, believing or at least expressing that Jesus was a prophet "come from God" should have been able to identify the Source producing any

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[346] R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary*. In *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, 1960, Reprint (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 67.

[347] John 3:8.

kind of physical and spiritual wind. So Jesus, with the translated *pneuma*, used this play on words for both the physical wind and the Spirit.

The researcher believes that by using this analogy, Jesus was referring to the factors or individual's "whys." In this case the wind from various directions and speeds would have exhibited the potential for Nicodemus' conversion. This would be comparable to the gestation period before a new birth, with the wind blowing wherever it wants to go. And it could be compared with all of the academic inquiry which too often does not give credit to the Source for any kind of conversion, but instead confers the academic work as being that cause for the wind.

Because of being a natural science undergraduate, the researcher has investigated the wind's current descriptions. While the wind is regarded as a movement of air it is absolutely necessary to consider its speed, its altitude, its density, and its direction in degrees, minutes, and seconds for security, weather forecasting, and travel. With all the various combinations of its characteristics, the outburst of the wind on any one point on the globe is almost infinite.[348] In applying Jesus' analogy, there should not be any wonder regarding the uniqueness of the "why" for each one's coming through the spiritual gestation period to a new birth conversion.

The analogy of the power of the Spirit and the wind is even more significant in that in 1934 for example, the Mount Washington Observatory in New Hampshire recorded the highest wind speed in the world with a gust at two-hundred-and-thirty-one

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[348] United States Weather Bureau, *Weather Forecasting* (Washington, DC: U.S. Weather Bureau [government printing], 1962); and Franklin Cole, *An Introduction to Meteorology,* 2nd ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975).

miles per hour on a ridge in that state park.[349] Although that record is now debatable with

the recent typhoons, it does indicate that the wind can be almost obliterating. Paul, with

his conversion must have experienced such a tremendous "northeaster" blast. On the

other hand, it is possible that Timothy and many others personally known by the

researcher, including a mother-in-law, have been brought in on such a very gentle and

normal southwestern breeze that they may have forgotten its early-life impact.

Making a Difference

Some contributors have made an input on understanding conversion based on

their global approach within their theological view. By far the most prolific writer with

such a perspective has been Paul G. Hiebert. He, along with others at various times, have

been able to grasp the significance of a conversion in the context of the diversification of

peoples throughout the globe. In this same vein, probably the best and most recent source

from an academic perspective is that of James Davidson Hunter who has assisted in

facing the realization that even in the midst of global tragedies, God is at work. As

referenced earlier, there are also several others who have provided literary data indicating

that even with the impact of globalization, there is still one worldwide change that is vital

for an eternal relationship with God.

The question that should be raised is, "can a research project like this make any

difference in the world and in the Church's global responsibility?" Optimistically, the

answer is affirmative. In the researcher's global travels it has been observed that in some

ministry venues where there apparently has been little organization, limited leadership,

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[349] Mount Washington Observatory (MWOBS), "The Story of the World Record Wind," http://www.mountwashington.org/about/visitor/recordwind.php. (accessed October 21, 2013).

and effort, God has been able to work in marvelous ways, while in others where there has been a great deal of organization, almost unlimited leadership, and extensive effort, nothing or very little has happened as far as the growth or even stability of the national church. The goal of this research has been to specifically assist the Church in being more effective in its global responsibility of providing opportunities for all peoples to experience conversion. Where God seems to be working and adding to the number of believers, national believers are confident in the provisions and power of God. Another cause for effectiveness may be that those leaders who are experiencing victories have, although unknowingly, had a good perception of the psychology, sociology, anthropology, and culture of their own people. When God's wind by the Spirit is blowing in one particular academic direction they are quick to recognize its potential effects and plan their strategies for a "tipping point" accordingly. On the other hand, perhaps in those areas where witness centers seem rather spiritually defeated, the leaders may not have an understanding of these academic factors that bring people to a place for conversion or they may be attempting to use these human factors to produce conversions.

God at work

From the observations of the researcher, God is definitely at work today and has been at work in assisting even with this research project. God has not gone off and left the world to its own demise. A personal realization has been that God has caused many people in some instances to appear hungrier to know more about Jesus than they are even about food. The provisions of physical food is important in order to be a part of the fulfillment of God's work, but people ultimately want to enjoy Jesus, the Bread of Life and the "manna that came down from heaven" (John 6:32-40).

It is unfortunate that many of those who appear to be concerned about any kind of change or conversion with its numerous definitions could be considered as converters or "conversionists" who seem to be trying to make or produce conversions. Such an approach may offer little lasting reward (1 Cor.3:12-15). The researcher would like to consider himself to be a "conversioner" or someone who studies or enjoys the study of the reality of conversion. This is an activity that for God's glory the researcher wants to be able to continue for many years, or until Christ Jesus returns. Hopefully there are and will be many who are also willing to accept this label; that from among these active conversioners there will be more spiritual gynecologists, more spiritual obstetrician, and more spiritual pediatric nurses.

Possible Further Research Questions

Others may want to consider further researching this topic of conversion as revealed in the Scripture. There are at least three questions or problems that need solutions. Two of them involve discipleship and commitment, while the third relates more to missions.

The first questions is: Of those who profess a religious commitment in each of the world's four innovation paths and epistemological foundations, how many have only had a religious change compared to how many have had a conversion because of Jesus? This has nothing to do with numbers per se, but more with a feeling about God at work. This would involve more emotive and quantitative research rather than intellectual research.

A second question is: Can a conversion brought on by one factor, such as a sociological advancement, result in a stronger discipleship commitment than a conversion from some other or combination of factors, such as a psychological process or blend?

And, similarly: What may be the commitment difference between those who have been "blown in" by a "northeaster" as compared to those who have enjoyed being nudged along by a gentle wind out of the southwest? This research would certainly need to be qualitative.

And the third question is: Does conversion occur more frequently and on a deeper level because of the role of an outside, but local communicator, because of a global partner, or because of a national pastor? In this twenty-first century the Church needs to understand its role and apply its resources according to God's strategy for each "ripe-harvest" field (John 4:35-38).

Conclusion

There are so many complexities even in attempting to describe the unlimited "whys" of conversion, and there is the realization that it may be humanly impossible to describe the "how." But there is one thing that is certain from the research. God has unlimited resources including the academic disciplines. These can be and are being used by God to bring about a change in each individual; a change that initiates their being allowed in the end to become a part of his people.

This dramatic change or conversion is brought on by the interacting dynamic with three aspects. One aspect is that of God's initiative since the beginning of time and certainly since the creation and fall of humankind. This is the pursuit involved in seeking to restore each individual to fellowship with himself; an accomplishment made possible with his initial visit to planet Earth. God paid the price for this, not only in coming but through the sacrificial work and power of the Son. The biblical record indicates that from the beginning God has desired to re-create for himself his people. And, as Francis

Thompson's "hound of heaven,"[350] he pursues each one, preferring that not one be lost, but that all should be found (2 Pet. 3:9). God offers to all who can see, hear, and respond a continuous resounding universal call so that the second aspect is with humankind. Even though there is the reality of the eternally damaged "image of God" with which each individual has now been created, humankind by the power of the intellect, emotion, and will, can still seek. And this propensity for seeking is because of an endowed need for restoration and reconciliation with God Almighty the Creator. God has intended that those who do truly seek for him will find him (Matt. 7:7-8). And, God again, is central in the third aspect. However, in this case God is culminating the activity by bringing about that spiritual birth for each one. With this the new believers can be considered as born anew, born from above, and born again; a dynamic of regeneration. It is a birth by the Holy Spirit. In this holistic conversion event, God has made and is making, the ultimate delivery from bondage of his people so that they can finally be free at last. Those who have experienced his freeing grace will never be the same for all eternity.

The God-humankind-God tri-aspect or dynamic culminating in conversion provides for a change that can make a world of difference, not only within an individual, but also in families, in neighborhood, in communities, in states, in nations, and even in the world. While it is not complex, it still is difficult to fathom; a positive and eternal change that may not be explainable by any academic approach.

For anyone interested in the divinely-provided change event of conversion, it is most important not to get distracted by the speed, the direction, the altitude, or even the sound produced by the wind, but most essentially to consider the previously unknown

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[350] "The Hound of Heaven," poem by Francis Thompson, The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse, ed. by D. H. S. Nicholson and A. H. E. Lee, 1917, www.Bartleby.com 236/239 (accessed January 24, 2014.

Source of the wind with a demonstration of divine forgiveness and Love. Regrettably, as

we grow older the most dangerous word becomes *inertia* or the "resistance to motion,

action or change."[351] These then are the reflections on individual and group conversion;

on the personal change that can be brought on by the dynamic of the God-event.

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[351] Marilyn Anne Pate, "The Most Dangerous Word in Retirement? Inertia," with editor's note in *The Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2015, R6.

APPENDIX A

ENGLISH PERSONAL INFORMATION GUIDE

PERSONAL INFORMATION GUIDE
FOR
HOW **YOU** HAVE COME INTO SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL
RECONCILIATION WITH GOD THE CREATOR THROUGH **JESUS**

1. Your age when you came into this new life relationship _____?
    Age now_____?   Male_____ Female_____

2. What or who may have influenced or assisted you to arrive at your conversion experience?
    (*check only up to three*)

____A church's teachings	____An evangelist
____Something in the history of your people group	____Your relatives or larger family
____Your parent or parents	____The doctrine of the church
____A time of solitude or prayer	____A desire to be more religious
____Religious rituals and ceremonies	____The Bible
____An evangelistic or revival meeting	____A sense of insecurity or fear
____A change in your social status such as marriage	____A church's worship
____A physical, emotional, or mental crisis	____A pastor and their preaching
____A change in your moral behavior or conduct	____Your village or community
____The death or loss of a loved one	____ A new appreciation of the cosmos
____A commitment to a group of faith	____The influence of a friend
____A dream or image	____What you have been taught
____The best religious choice	____An emotional experience
____A concern for better personal values	____A developing need to know God
____A desire to be closer to God	____A desire to be a better person
____A new sense of personal identity	____An evolving search for truth
____A desire to be free of guilt and shame	____A search for happiness
____A religious tradition	____Other (*comment below*)

3. Write a couple of sentences about your new life *conversion* experience.
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4. Any additional comments.
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APPENDIX B

BULARIAN PERSONAL INFORMATION GUIDE

АНКЕТА
КАК ВСТЪПИХТЕ В ДУХОВНО И ВЕЧНО ПОМИРЕНИЕ С БОГА ЧРЕЗ ИСУС?

1. На каква възраст бяхте, когато встъпихте в тези взаимоотношения на нов живот на нов
   живот с
   Бога?_____?
   Възраст_____ ?   Мъж_____ Жена_____

2 . Кой или какво Ви повлия или спомогна, за да стигнете до вяра в Христос?
   (посочете само до три)
   ___Църковни учения   ___ Благовестител
   ___Нещо от историята на вашия народ   ___ Вашите близки или роднини
   ___Ваш родител или родители   ___ Учението на църквата
   ___Време на самота или молитва   ___ Желанието да бъдете по-религиозен
   ___Религиозни ритуали и церемонии   ___ Библията
   ___Евангелизаторски събития   ___ Чувството за несигурност или страх
   ___Промяна в социалния статус (напр. брак)   ___ Църковно поклонение
   ___Физическа, емоционална или психическа криза ___ Пастор и проповед
   ___Промяна в моралното поведение   ___ Вашето село или общност
   ___Смъртта или загубата на любим човек   ___ Ново виждане за космоса
   ___Обвързването с група вярващи хора   ___ Влиянието на приятел
   ___Сън или изображение   ___ Това, което са Ви учили
   ___Осъзнаването на най-добрия религиозен избор ___ Силно преживяване
   ___Стремежът към по-добри лични ценности   ___ Нарастващата нужда да познаете Бога
   ___Желанието да бъдете по-близо до Бога   ___Желание да бъдете по-добър човек
   ___Ново усещане за лична идентичност   ___ Нарастващо търсене на истината
   ___Желанието да бъдете свободен от вина и срам ___ Търсене на щастието
   ___Религиозна тради   ___ Друго (коментирайте по-долу)

3 . Опишете с няколко изречения преживяването си (преобразяване), когато повярвахте.
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4 . Допълнителни коментари.
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APPENDIX C

SPANISH PERSONAL INFORMATION GUIDE

Guía de Información Personal
preguntando
¿Cómo se convirtió entrando en reconciliación
con Dios por medio de Jesucristo?

1. Su edad cuando se convirtió Ud. _____ Edad ahora _____ Varón_____ Mujer_____

2. ¿Qué o quién le influyó o le ayudó llegar a conocer personalmente a Jesús? Favor de escoger poniendo un cheque enfrente de uno hasta tres razones.

___La enseñaza de la iglesia   ___Un evangelista
___Algo en la historia de su pueblo   ___Sus parientes
___Sus padres   ___Una doctrina de la iglesia
___Un tiempo de soldad o oración   ___Un deseo de ser mas religioso
___Rituales o ceremonias religiosos   ___La Biblia
___Una reunión evangélica   ___Un sentido de inseguridad o miedo
___Un cambio en su vida como casarse   ___Las alabanzas en la iglesia
___Un crisis emocional, físico   ___Su ciudad o comunidad
___La muerte o pérdida de un querido   ___Un aprecio nuevo de los cosmos
___Un compromiso con un grupo de fe   ___La influencia de un amigo
___Un sueño o imagen   ___Lo que había aprendido
___La mejor elección religiosa   ___Una experiencia emocional
___Preocupación con el valor de si mismo   ___Un deseo de conocer a Dios aún mas
___Un deseo de acercarse a Dios   ___Un deseo de ser una mejor persona
___Un sentido nuevo de si mismo   ___Una búsqueda de saber más de Dios
___Un deseo de librarse de culpabilidad   ___Una búsqueda de felicidad
___Una tradición religiosa   ___Otro (explique Ud. abajo)

3. Escriba Ud. unas oraciones acerca de su conversión.
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_____
_____

4. ¿Algo más?
_____
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Some say life is just a series of decisions. We make choices, We live and learn.
Now I'm standing at a crossroad, and I must choose which way to turn.
Down the one road lies all the world can offer. All its power, its wealth and fame.
Down the other just a Man with nail scars in His hands.
But there is mercy in His eyes, And there power in His name.

I choose Jesus. I choose Jesus. Without a solitary doubt I choose Jesus.
Not for miracles, but for loving me, Not for Bethlehem, but for Calvary,
Not for a day, but for eternity, I choose Jesus.

All my life I sailed the sea of reason. I was the captain of my soul.
There was no need for a savior. I could live life on my own.
Then I heard Him speak the language of compassion, words of healing for broken lives.
When they nailed Him to a tree His love included me.
Now He's calling me to follow and to leave the past behind.

I choose Jesus. I choose Jesus. Without a solitary doubt I choose Jesus.
Not for miracles, but for loving me, Not for Bethlehem, but for Calvary,
Not for a day, but for eternity, I choose Jesus. [repeat]
Jesus.