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Annotated Bibliography and some Integrating Observations on Conversion Including a brief New Testament Study

Jeffrey Anderson

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_andersonj@csl.edu

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Jeffrey O. Anderson
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Professor Repp

Annotated Bibliography

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Some Integrating Observations

On Conversion

Including a brief

New Testament Study

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Research Paper
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Allison, Joel, "Religious Conversion: Regression and Progression in an Adolescent Experience," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 1969.

A study of the dramatic, sudden religious conversion of an adolescent male divinity student. The experience altered the subject's perception of his father as weak and ineffective and incorporated in his mind a strong, clear-valued, firm paternal figure. The event aided in the subject's individuation and in his break with the maternal figure.

Andreasen, Jacob, Lutherans and Conversion. Minneapolis: T.S. Denison, 1955.

This is not truly an inductive scientific study. Rather Andreasen makes theological assertions about conversion and then uses examples from his survey to show that his assertions parallel reality. He also accepts all the statements of the interviewed individuals as theologically and factually accurate. This shows up especially where people said that they did or did not have salvation. He accepted this judgment as the real state of affairs.

For Andreasen the essential elements in conversion are repentance and faith which are produced by the Holy Spirit through the Word. He says that conversion is not emotional (and yet later he uses people's emotional experiences as evidence for conversion), although emotions may accompany it. The evidences of conversion are love for God and His Word, a desire to do his will, the power to obey him, and delight in this obedience. For all his use of Lutheran language the change he is seeking is a moral change with emotional underpinnings. He does not mention how God views the person before or after conversion, or how Jesus is a part of the change that takes place.

Andreasen typifies those writers who try to maintain Biblical or traditional phraseology and doctrine but who then have severe difficulties when they try to connect this with reality, which they usually try to find in a person's experience.

Barclay, William, Turning to God. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964.

Barclay uses conversion experiences in Acts as the basis for his study. He writes in opposition to the emotionalism and meaninglessness of the conversions of revival crusades. He holds that conversion must not be just between man and God, but between man and Church. Conversion must therefore include: 1. education, 2. a conscious decision, and 3. action.

Barclay admits that a radical conversion experience comes to some people, but feels that for most people it is not available because they have been brought up in the church. The problem of bland Christianity exists a) because of misconception about the personal relationship to God without a sense of responsibility to society, b) because the decision to join a church is too easy. Barclay feels that there should be requirements to meet, as the early church had, before a person could join the church, to ensure the responsibility of his decision.

Barclay suggests that conversion will help the church when we get away from emotionalism and take "intellectual evangelism" seriously. He shows how the preaching in Acts was Gospel-rich, intellectual, and demanding.

Bartling, Walter J., "The Congregation of Christ--a charismatic body: an exegetical study of I Corinthians 12," CTM, Vol. XL, No. 2, (1969).

For Paul every congregation is a charismatic community, a body shaped and informed by the Spirit of Christ and His gifts. One therefore need not strive for ecstatic events to experience charisma, but merely for the grace which God gives in the Word of the Cross.

Bertocci, Peter A., Religion as Creative Insecurity. New York: Association Press, 1958.

A philosophical discussion of religion as a destiny-connected relationship to a Being. Man is faced with "regularities" (i.e. limitations, laws) within which he must function. As man recognizes these binding regularities he feels insecure. Creativity is the ability to see the whole picture well enough to be able to accept the regularities and to find openings through the regularities to freely express forgiving love, the mature response to "regular" suffering and imperfection.

Brandon, Owen, The Battle for the Soul: Aspects of Religious Conversion. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959.

Brandon claims that his book is a practical approach to conversion as opposed to Routley's theological study and Sargant's psychological study. He holds that conversion is a necessary part of the mature Christian life. It is a man's response to particular religious stimuli. But when Brandon speaks of the stages of religious development he says that at the first stage, when an individual turns and makes a committal, that is his conversion. He is also unclear about the relationship of Baptism or regeneration, the externally imposed action of God or church, and conversion, the individual's act.

Freud, Sigmund, Totem and Taboo. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1962.

Freud claims that there are some instructive points of comparison between the mental lives of savages and neurotics because in the savage we have a well-preserved picture of an early stage of our own development.

Totems, usually totem animals, are the living symbols of obsessional prohibitions, i.e. taboos. The taboo is a primeval prohibition forcibly imposed from outside, and directed against the most powerful longings to which human beings are subject. To Freud the basic taboo is the taboo against man's incest longings. In modern man this longing is repressed into the unconscious therefore leading to neuroses, but in savages it is still felt as a conscious threat and so ritual structures (totems) are used to avoid it. In these rites the totem animal (the father figure), which ordinarily cannot be injured or killed, is ritually killed and in this way the frustration toward the father figure, the prohibitor of incest, is acceptably expressed.

By deduction from Freud conversion could be viewed as a means of killing the oppressive father, the church, which prohibits a warm, close, emotional experience with God. This killing of the father figure is done in conversion by citing a higher authority than the Church, namely, the personal revelation of God himself. When the father figure, the church, has been killed the individual has the power to live a meaningful, self-determined, free life as he sees his relationship to God leading him.

Gerlach, Luther P. and Virginia H. Hine, "Five Factors Crucial to the Growth and Spread of a Modern Religious Movement," Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. VII, No. 1, (1968).

The authors discovered that the Pentecostal sect does not grow out of social or emotional maladjustment, but that rather there are five sociological factors which produce the growing power of the movement. They are: 1. an an-cephalous organizational structure, 2. recruitment along the lines of pre-existing socially significant relationships, 3. a commitment-generating act or experience, 4. a simple ideology giving a personal sense of contact with destiny and divinity, 5. the perception of real or imagined opposition. The study is based on an extensive western hemisphere collection of data.

Gordon, Albert I., The Nature of Conversion: a Study of Forty-five Men and Women who Changed their Religion. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

Gordon distinguishes inner conversion (a personal change of world view or values) from ecclesiastical conversion (a conscious move from one religion to another). His study centers on ecclesiastical conversion as a phenomena that is of concern to pastors and churches. He wants to see why persons leave one church and go to another. It is not primarily a psychological study. Hence he gives a more general, and very helpful, definition of conversion, not as a turning from sin and a striving for righteousness, but as an adjustment to one's place in life, especially in his relationships to family, friends, and acquaintances.

As with other forms of conversion, Gordon finds that in ecclesiastical conversion the usual process of change is not sudden, although for some the change is dramatic and instantaneous. The large selection of biographical interviews which he includes shows that there is usually a long period of incubation before the actual change or conversion.

Harris, Thomas Anthony, I'm OK, You're OK. New York: Harper and Row, 1969.

This popular, but sophisticated, treatment of transactional analysis devotes a section to religious phenomena. But first we must look briefly at transactional analysis. Transactions are individual pieces of interaction between two people (e.g. a word and a response, a question and an answer, an action, and a reaction). These transactions are then analyzed to find out which part of the person's composite character is functioning in the particular transaction. The three divisions of each person's character are Parent, Adult and Child. The Parent and Child have some correspondence to the individual's own past experience of parents and childhood. Parent and Child are also largely unconscious. The Adult is the mature element of personality. It is the decision-maker. It looks for facts. It is able to choose to be unselfish.

With these tools of analysis Harris finds two types of religious (conversion) experience. They are both an experience of transcendence, of that which is more than myself, that which has been called God. The first type achieves this experience by means of a unique combination of Child (a feeling of intimacy) and Adult (a reflection on ultimacy) with the total exclusion of the Parent. The Parent is blocked out because joy or ecstasy cannot be experienced in the presence of the original rejections and restrictions of the Parent. The natural Child may then awaken to its own worth and beauty as part

of God's creation. This religious experience is the total escape from judgment and the feeling of acceptance without condition.

The second type of conversion has the same freeing effect, but it is achieved by a total adaptation to or submission to the Parent. "I will give up my wicked ways and be exactly what you (the Parent, church etc.) want me to be." In this type of conversion the Adult does not function, and the Parent, since it is not blocked out, continues to condemn the Child as soon as his conformity lapses. This type of conversion leads to constant backsliding and need for reconversion.

Herr, Vincent V., Religious Psychology. Staten Island, New York: Alba House, 1964.

This is a Roman Catholic view which aims at understanding the religious development of man as expressed in various attachments to an absolute. In his discription, conversion remains on a conscious level and is largely a response to guilt. Conversion involves a real admission of fault, and a desire to change the direction of one's life in the interest of bringing order into the whole.

As such, conversion is one of the steps on the road to religious maturity. Herr has a high view of human potential. He spells out the steps involved in changing one's life as if all one must do is know the right steps to follow them. These steps carry a person on by a "systematic series of satisfactions" until the ultimate goal is reached.

Faith is a helpful tool for conversion because by faith and prayerful meditation man can predispose himself toward receiving divine help. Conversion is a moral change resulting in an ordered life which is the prerequisite of movement on towards higher religious life: penance, prayer, worship and vows.

James, William, The Varieties of Religious Experience. London: Longmans, Green, (1902) 1925.

An early classic on conversion. 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 person previously divided and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy becomes unified and consciously right, superior, and happy because of his firmer hold on religious reality.

For James there were two kinds of people, the healthy minded who were once born, and the sick souls who needed to be twice born. He felt that the second group, if they achieved conversion, gained a deeper more satisfying experience of reality than the first. James' account is too general to be helpful any more, but he recognized the integrating function of conversion for personality.

Johnson, Paul E., Psychology of Religion. New York: Abingdon Press, 1959.

A survey of the psychology of religion. It is accurate but without depth.

Jones, E. Stanley, Conversion. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1959.

Jones claims that the social, political, religious, economic mess of man shows that what he needs is conversion. Whether men are in or without the churches conversion is God's answer to their need. From Jesus ("You must be born again") we learn the necessity of conversion also.

In a life of conversion (change), Christian conversion stands out because it is birth by the Spirit. The result is reconciliation with the universe, a God-centered life, and finding Christ in everything. The effects are health, making sense of life, security, certainty and assurance. In all this he does not explain how the Spirit accomplishes the conversion or how Christ plays into the picture.

Jung, Carl G., The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. Tr. R.F.C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959.

_____, Memories, Dreams and Reflections. Aniela Jaffe (ed.), tr. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Vintage Books, 1963.

_____, Psychology and Religion: West and East. Tr. R.F.C. Hull. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958.

_____, The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche. Tr. R.F.C. Hull. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960.

_____, Symbols of Transformation. Tr. R.F.C. Hull. New York, Pantheon Books, 1956.

Jung considers religion an essential part of reality. Just because some religious ideas are not connected to facts is not evidence that these ideas do not exist. The ideas of religion, whether factual or imagined, revealed or projected, are part of human reality and are necessary for human health. By observation Jung finds an archetypal image of God in the mind of man, and that real image of God is the religious reality he deals with in his work. He says that of all the patients over 35 years of age that he dealt with, there has not been one whose problem did not center on finding a valid religious outlook on life.

Religion has always served the function of giving its adherents a defense against the unexpected and unknown. It gives man solidity and meaning. As long as the church's authority remained unchallenged her ritual and dogma were the symbol and expression of meaningful existence. Two events changed this. Protestantism challenged the church's unique connection with God, and science challenged her connection with reality by putting in place of the certainty of faith, the uncertainty of knowledge. The result was that the conscious mind found itself isolated in a world of psychic variables with no roots or connecting relationships.

When organized religion's interpretive authority is no longer fully accepted the door opens for personal experience. Religious experience is absolute. It is indisputable. No matter what others think of it, the one who possesses it has the greatest of treasures.

Since the dawn of mankind there has been a struggle between religion and private experience. Religion has played two roles. It has protected society from the whims of an individual's experience, and it has protected individuals from the threatening ambiguity of their own unconscious, out of which their religious experiences grow.

For Jung conversion follows the archetypal pattern of rebirth. These rebirth themes are seen among all people of all times. By various rituals or dreams

a person may be led to experience a transcendence of life, or by identification with a group or hero figure or some inner experience of enlargement a person may achieve a subjective transformation. Since the personality seldom is in the beginning what it will be later on the possibility exists for enlarging it. This enlargement is part of the process of individuation which grows out of the unconscious as it integrates itself with the conscious self.

Whenever a complex which has been, by origin or force, part of the unconscious becomes conscious, for example through conversion or through psychotherapy, that person experiences an increase of power. Because the ego is unconscious of these complexes they always appear first as having an external origin (in dreams--as other people; in visions--as God; in insanity--as voices surrounding the person).

Paul on the way to Damascus was suddenly confronted by Christ. True though it may be that this Christ would hardly have been possible without the historical Jesus, the apparition of Christ came to St. Paul not from the historical Jesus but from the depths of his own unconscious.

Jung emphasizes that prior to a conversion the new "faith" or new way of life has already existed in the unconscious. It was placed there and held there by repression. While it was in the unconscious it was incubating and organizing itself so that when it finally broke into consciousness, by permission or because the repression could no longer contain it, it was a fully developed complex able to lead into a whole new way of life.

Jung also sees such forces operating on more than an individual level, such that a new concept or style of life grows in the collective unconscious and at a particular point in history bursts out as an entirely new perspective or direction in civilization.

Leary, Timothy, "The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation," Dialogue, Vol. 3, 1964.

Leary proposes that the ecstatically religious aspects of a psychedelic experience are an inside view of the same processes which bio-chemists and neurologists measure. He holds that in this way the scientific search and the religious experience come up with the same data because they are both based on the same God-created molecules.

Leary does not show why he can call an aspect of the psychedelic experience "religious." His data suggests only that there may be a correspondence between neurological and psychological data. He does not support his substitution of "religious" for "psychological." It is significant, however, that he understands the psychedelic experience as being a data-loaded experience and not just a random firing of flashing lights.

Lench, Rodney, A Missouri Synod Lutheran Pastor is Baptized in the Holy Spirit. Selma, California: Wilkins Printing and Publishing, 1969.

Lench maintains a Lutheran view of conversion and faith, but he says that there is a baptism of the Holy Spirit available to believers beyond conversion. This special gift does not make a person more saved or more righteous, but it gives freedom, power, joy, etc. He insists that those who do not have this gift are in no way inferior in God's eyes, but that they are truly missing something wonderful.

Loewen, Jacob A., "Socialization and Conversion in the Ongoing Church," Practical Anthropology, Vol. XVI, January, 1969.

Loewen notes that crisis conversion, which is often inevitable, leads to instability of commitment. In response to this he proposes the establishment of conversion as a socially demanded part of socialization into the church. Such an institution in the church would be similar to initiation rites of many cultures and would provide a considerable stabilizing force, by allowing creative expression but using it as a channel toward on-going structured participation.

Maves, Paul B., "Conversion: A Behavioral Category," Review of Religious Research, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1963.

The author takes a quick trip through several prominent writers on conversion and concludes that conversion is a category of behavioral science. To parallel it with the new life in Christ is a mistake. Conversion is not an exclusively religious category and certainly not an exclusively Christian one. It has been borrowed by religion, and therefore it should be studied by behavioral scientists.

Nock, Arthur D., Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952.

Nock defines conversion as the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning away from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new right.

Nock distinguishes conversion from adhesion. Judaism and Christianity demand not just a new rite, but renunciation and a new start--conversion. Other religions merely satisfy some need or longing--adhesion. Conversion, therefore, is possible only when a prophetic type of religion--one that demands exclusiveness, renunciation, surrender, a new start--has emerged.

Other religions could have conversion only after the prophetic spirit of Christianity or Judaism had penetrated into the general mentality. He documents his study historically with conversions of the first four centuries.

He emphasizes the conscious, decisive nature of the renunciation and conversion and claims there was little interest in introspective analysis, although we note Augustine's preoccupation with his subjective state.

Norbeck, Edward, Religion in Primitive Society. New York: Harper and Row, 1961.

An anthropologist. His contribution to a study of conversion is to point out conversion practices and ecstatic phenomena within primitive cultures. He documents the wide-spread occurrence of glossolalia. He develops the thesis that psychic phenomena express a human need for spontaneous experiences and that the form of these experiences is culturally regulated.

Routley, Erik, The Gift of Conversion. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958.

Routley analyzes the classical conversion experiences and says that Paul turned from error to truth, Augustine from license to purity, and that Wesley received assurance. He claims that since the time of the reformation conversion has grown out of dissatisfaction with the attempt to find God and has

been a personal appropriation of the meaning of the truth of the doctrine of justification by grace. Routley notes that the common element in the three classical conversions was the ensuing sense of freedom. In conversion the anxiety about wrongs is gone because Christ shows the anxiety of being, i.e. confusion and insecurity and all the vices which grow out of them, to be groundless.

As his title indicates, Routley sees conversion as coming from outside the individual. He gives his own paradigm of conversion in his experience of mathematics where in an instant he changed from hating mathematics and wanting to escape, to a sense of freedom within mathematics. He says that the change came from outside, that suddenly the law was not making such existential demands of him. He fails to consider that perhaps he had changed and merely felt free because now he was willing to work within the laws of mathematics.

Sargent, William, Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brain-Washing. London: Heinemann, 1957.

This book is included here because of its relation to the topic. It was not read for this study.

Spinks, G. Stephen, Psychology and Religion. London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1963.

Spinks gives summaries of various facets and phases of religious development, including Freud and Jung. Religion is for him a confrontation with a divine Thou, but it is a confrontation in terms of human experience. The reality of religion depends upon its effect on the human subject, and can no longer be spoken of in terms of "truth" or "falsity." He says, "Those who out of their experience of the Divine are able to lighten the burden of humanity by the achievement of a spiritual bouyancy that helps others to shed the obsessions of egocentricity, may be judged to have had genuine experiences of the Ineffable, whatever the means employed" (p. 173).

Starbuck, Edwin Diller, The Psychology of Religion. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899.

This is the first full-length book on the psychology of religion and the grandfather of conversion studies. Starbuck obtained a mass of personal biographies (he felt questionnaires were too suggestive) of American protestants who had experienced "conversion." He developed the view that conversion is a crisis of mind leading from former conflicting beliefs to a new style of life. Conversion is a perfectly normal psychological crisis, marking the transition from the child's world to the wider world of youth, or from that of youth to that of maturity. The crisis is only emphasized, abridged or regulated by evangelical machinery.

"Conversion is a distinctly adolescent phenomena" is his much misunderstood phrase. He has a biological definition of adolescence, but he does not claim that conversions occur only in adolescence. Adolescence is rather the statistical focus of conversion. He points to the precise years of conversion preponderance: age 13 or 16 for females and age 17 for males. Conversion grows out of depression, pensive sadness, sense of sin, restless anxiety

or uncertainty which can be found in people of many ages.

Starbuck wavers between making the trigger of conversion external (with most religious writers: God breaking into one's life, or grasping a new style of life) or internal (with most later psychology: the breaking into consciousness of factors already latent within the unconscious). He does opt more frequently for the latter (a significant step for his era).

Thouless, Robert H., The Psychology of Religion. Cambridge: The University Press, 1961.

Thouless defines religion as a felt, practical relationship with what is believed in as a superhuman being or beings. Religion, or the religious sentiment, is seen in man in a range of religious emotions, chief of which is reverence. Conversion is a growing system of emotional dispositions, kept unconscious by a resistance, which finally overthrows that resistance and establishes itself in a dominant position in the conscious life. This is a more sophisticated version of the common experience of having unconscious incubation lead to the mental solution of a daily problem.

Thouless finds inner differences between the adolescent conversion and mystical conversion (although his definition of adolescent is still biological and not psychological). Both are the sublimation of the libido into religious channels. In adolescence the primary conflict is caused by the repression of the growing sex instinct which in most cultures is not allowed to find satisfaction in a real love object. The conversion then is simply the sudden solution of this conflict, at least temporarily, by sublimation of the repressed love instinct into religious channels. In mystical conversion it is not only that part of the libido specialized in the sex-instinct that is sublimated, but the whole (or at least a greater part) of the libido employed in the activities and affections of this-world life.

Thouless insists that the reality of conversion does not prove the reality of God; neither does a scientific explanation of conversion deny the reality of God. Thouless' emphasis on the emotions involved in the religious experience are helpful in understanding the individual's perception of his experience, but they are not helpful in understanding what is actually happening in the experience.

Van Gennep, Arnold, The Rites of Passage. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960.

Regeneration, according to Van Gennep, is a law of life. As the energy which is found in any system gradually becomes spent, it must be renewed. Rites of passage are such renewal ceremonies where new birth and hence a whole new phase of life begin. Associated with such rites are many ecstatic phenomena which often symbolize the death and rebirth or the utter new-ness of the new phase of life. These phenomena are not unlike conversion phenomena.

Wainwright, Geoffrey, Christian Initiation. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969.

An historical study, with an ecumenical view, of the methods, principally Baptism, of initiation to the Christian community. He offers a helpful paralleling of the arguments, pro and con, for infant baptism.

White, Ernest, Christian Life and the Unconscious. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1955.

Conversion is a mental conflict growing out of sin, fear or need. The conflict grows to an emotional crisis and then resolves itself in a surrender to God. White does not indicate what the two things in conflict are, nor which of them is finally surrendered, nor what the relationship to God was before the conversion.

White believes that religion is beyond psychotherapy, but he does not specify positively what that means. He says that psychotherapy does not create saints nor satisfy the deeper spiritual needs, but he does not clarify what the deeper spiritual needs are.

Some Integrating Observations

On Conversion

Including a brief
New Testament Study

The diversity of views on conversion and the conflict within talk about conversion leads us to believe that the vital question remains unanswered: What is conversion? Conversion is a functional word in most people's religious vocabulary, but it has a host of meanings, and many who use the term are not able to clarify their meaning. Our analysis of material on conversion--psychological, religious, and New Testament--has led to several conclusions and integrating statements. They are spelled out under their various headings below.

The Experience of Conversion.

The verb convert means to turn. This parallels the Biblical words **ἔστρεψω** and **ἐπέστρεψα**, both of which also mean turn. In religious talk about conversion the turn involved is a change in belief and a change in action. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1959) focuses our attention on "the experience associated with and involving a definite and decisive adoption of religion."

This is a broad category of experience. It involves the celebrants of a primitive religion who are initiating the novitiates into full religious participation. It covers the hundreds and thousands of people who answer the altar call at revival worship. It includes people, already religious, who at a certain time experience a profound deepening of their religious life and understanding. It speaks of unbelievers who step into the circle of faith. It even includes adherents of one religion who renounce that religion for a new faith.

But keep in mind that conversion is not just adopting a new, or deeper religion. It is also the experience that accompanies the change. The change of church membership or claims about a new kind of joy and freedom are really only symbols of a change which has taken place within the individual. The principal turning of conversion goes on deep inside a person. It involves his identity, goals, motivations, emotions and world view. Above all it involves a new picture of and response to God. This is religious conversion.

We will use this sketch of conversion as a point of comparison to reflect the differences of several understandings of conversion.

A. The viewpoint of the psychology of religion.

From the first, the psychology of religion had little difficulty defining and explaining conversion. Through the years psychology has not quarreled much about conversion. Starbuck, the grandfather of conversion studies, and William James, who wrote just a few years later, are still quoted and reviewed by modern writers on conversion who basically agree with them.

Starbuck claimed conversion as fair game for psychological study by arguing that it is a perfectly normal psychological crisis. He looked at the psychological change involved in conversion and related it to the preceding and following emotional situations. Starbuck documented the frustration and depression which led up to the crisis of conversion and interpreted the change as a more successful and appropriate organizing of the personality.

This differed from the religious view which generally held that in conversion God was breaking into the subject's reality in a particular and dramatic form and causing the great change in emotional outlook.

Later psychologists, among them Carl Jung, Robert Thouless and Thomas Harris, reinforced psychology's hold on the religious phenomena of conversion as far as it involved the dramatic alteration in personality from sinful to obedient or from average to radically committed. These men not only saw the change of conversion as psychological in nature, but more and more proved to be able to explain how the change happened and why. This became possible as the human unconscious became known and understood by Freud, Jung and their descendants. Robert Thouless, therefore, has little difficulty defining conversion as "a growing system of emotional dispositions, kept unconscious by a resistance [repression], which finally overthrows that resistance [often with accompanying visions or ecstatic experiences] and establishes itself in a dominant position in the conscious life" (p. 191). Psychology also gained the ability to explain the accompanying ecstatic experiences. Here they had the help of anthropology which supplied parallels to such experiences from pagan and primitive societies, suggesting that the ecstatic experience did not validate divine action as much as indicate human tendencies and capabilities.

Religion reacted to the threatening onslaught of secularizing data by denying (ignoring) psychology. Psychology responded by reminding theologians that a scientific explanation of the conversion phenomena did not deny God, but only indicated that if they wanted God to be the agent of conversion they would have to see him acting through natural means, as they had found a couple centuries earlier he acted in controlling the planets, or more recently, in controlling biological happenings.

Psychology deals with conversion in so far as conversion is experienced or felt. It explains and interprets conversion without the presupposition or denial of God. Therefore, while psychology treats the altered feeling (freedom, warmth, joy) or the changed perception which the subject has toward God, psychology does not say how God views the individual or what the subject's theological state really is.

Psychologically conversion is brought about by religious ideas and personal experiences which for some reason are strongly repressed. The repression not only leads to severe inner conflict, but also denies to the subject's conscious existence part of what his experience wants to make him. The result is dissatisfaction with life, self and religion; depression; sense of worthlessness; incompleteness. The inner conflict brought about by repression continues to intensify until permission is given to let loose, or until it grows too powerful to repress. During the repression the unconscious mind is integrating the repressed conflict into the totality of the subject's existence. Then it breaks loose. Since it comes from the unconscious it has the appearance to the conscious mind of coming from outside the person. It comes as a vision, a voice, a divine revelation, an experience with God, and in other ways. When the crisis, small or great, passes there is a strange, utterly new sense of peace: peace with God, man, self, and universe. This occurs because all the subject's data on God, man, self, and universe, organized by the unconscious, has taken over the subject as a unified complex. His personality has undergone a change. The new orientation brings with it vigor and confidence. He is a new man.

B. The viewpoint of religious writers.

Religious writing which deals with the experience of conversion is not as unified as the psychological interpretations. The men we will

concentrate on are Barclay, Brandon, Routley and Lench. These men regard conversion (Lench calls the process "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" to reserve the term conversion for the initial coming to faith) as a spiritual affair. Generally it occurs within people who are already believers in God on a lesser level.

The religious writers often note that conversion can occur over a long period with no dramatic mile stones. However, they deal mostly with the dramatic alteration of personality called conversion. Their description of the change does not differ much from Starbuck's or other psychologists. The subject changes from anxiety about wrongs to peace. He moves from a life of fear, guilt and insecurity to one of security and boldness. He turns from unfulfilled ideals to acceptance of limitations, to energy, and to willingness to do better.

The writers have different factors at the heart of the change. These key factors range from natural to supernatural. Lench says that God comes directly into the subject's body and that one can feel God's power pulsing and his love flowing in. Barclay speaks vaguely of a "changing power" which causes a moral change. He suggests that this power comes by adequate preaching, preaching which utilizes the elements of early Christian sermons including the element of demand and threat. Routley understands that Christ shows the "anxiety of being" to be groundless, and "assurance" or "courage to be" grows out of this conviction. Brandon argues that the change is part of a normal life process; conditioning (by society, church, etc.), response of the individual, integration into a mature group member. Evangelism can hasten and direct this process in a normal psychological way and, therefore, must be undertaken with integrity and not just for the evangelist's fame.

The writers who attempt to take traditional doctrine or the New Testament seriously (Andreasen, Barclay, Lench) have difficulty in reconciling the normal psychological experience of conversion and their conviction of God's definitive role in conversion. They resolve the tension by ignoring or denying the psychological understanding of conversion and propose various forms of supernatural intervention.

C. The viewpoint of the New Testament.

The conversion events in the New Testament, particularly in Acts, show a great similarity with the experiences described by contemporary

writers. But there is a different emphasis. Contemporary religious writers tend to start with the conversion experience and to dwell on the personal aspects of the experience. The New Testament talk starts prior to the experience, mentions the experience, and then moves on to talk about the post-experience activities.

The Book of Acts uses the words ἐπιστρέφω (turn) and μετάνοεω (repent) as the nearest parallels to our word convert. ἐπιστρέφω and μετάνοεω are both used by the LXX to translate the Old Testament term נָחַם. In Acts neither ἐπιστρέφω nor μετάνοεω are used to refer to the conversion experience. Acts uses instead the phrases "received the Holy Spirit" and "filled with the Holy Spirit" to refer to the conversion experience. Luke does not mention more than five ecstatic conversion experiences, but he does speak of manifestations of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues or speaking out. Luke also does not mention the personal feelings of the subject, but several times he refers to the feeling of the community as joy (Acts 8:8, 13:52, 15:3) or comfort (9:31). Luke does not focus on the conversion experiences. Instead he uses phrases such as, "the Word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily," as the highlights of his description of the activity of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6:7, 12:24, 13:49, 19:20).

The foil against which Luke is writing is the Old Testament Prophets and their discussion of נָחַם (turning). Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are pessimistic about Israel's chances of avoiding judgment by conversion (turning back to God). They preach the message of repentance, but they are quite sure Israel isn't able to turn back to God. Hosea says, "Their deeds will not allow them to turn back to God" (Hosea 5:4). Judgment is inevitable. Luke argues that in the age of the Holy Spirit the Word of the Lord is fighting against the same odds the prophets spoke of, but now the Word is prevailing. Jeremiah in dismay had said of Israel, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jer. 13:23). Luke records the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch as an allusion to Jeremiah's prophecy and as evidence that things were different now that the new era had arrived.

The New Testament not only de-emphasizes the personal experiences in conversion, it also starts its discussion at a more basic level. The predicament in which the New Testament finds man is not just evil or dis-oriented or depressed, but dead (Eph. 1), that is, living without any of the

Love which God gives. Natural man is under the guidance of his flesh (Rom. 7-8). Therefore, as long as the flesh is tugging backwards and dragging at man's heels (including the believer's) conversion is needed.

D. Three Theses on New Testament Conversion.

1. The New Testament assumes that receiving the Holy Spirit is a supernatural event accompanying the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Acts 10 explains how the Holy Spirit came to the group to whom Peter was preaching and that these people then spoke in tongues and extolled God. This instance is particularly significant because those who heard the proclamation were Gentiles. Therefore, the dramatic experience was not only a sign of the Gospel's verity to the group of Gentiles, but the apostles regarded it as God's signal to them that he wanted the Gentiles included in the Church (Acts 11:17).

The signs accompanying the receiving of the Holy Spirit are on a par with the miracles in the book of Acts. In Acts 19 an evil spirit turned on the sons of Sceva who were trying to exploit the name of the Lord Jesus. The result was that "fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled." When Peter and John healed the lame man the people "were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him" (Acts 3:10). The dramatic receiving of the Holy Spirit is one of the many "great wonders and signs" (Acts 6:8) which Luke uses to show that the era of the Holy Spirit has begun.

2. According to the New Testament, coming to faith or receiving the Holy Spirit is not always accompanied by supernatural signs, and when it is, these signs are not normative.

Acts 2 tells about the first group of converts, 3,000 of them. When they received the Holy Spirit and were baptized they did not show supernatural reactions. Rather Luke says, "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers," (2:42) and the apostles did "many wonders and signs" (2:43). Being "full of the Spirit" was also one of the qualifications of the seven men who were to care for the physical needs of the community (Acts 6). Peter's preaching (Acts 4:8) was also the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Acts also speaks of coming to faith in language other than "receiving the Holy Spirit," such as, "receiving the Word of God," "repenting," "turning," "believing," and "receiving forgiveness" (Acts 8:14, 9:35, 19:2, 26:18). These occasions do not exhibit an ecstatic experience. In fact, in all of Acts there are only five instances where being filled with the Holy Ghost led to a dramatic conversion.

The apostles in Acts do not use the dramatic experiences of conversion as means to persuade people to accept the message they are preaching. The experiences are rather a sign that the Gospel is at work. Luke, as he relates the events, relies on the signs much more heavily as reasons for accepting the Gospel.

Paul in I Corinthians sets the main limits on the ecstatic aspects of faith and conversion. He reminds the Corinthians that ecstatic experiences were also part of their pagan past (12:2). He reminds them that one test of their supernatural experiences was whether they pointed to Jesus as Lord (12:3).

Paul, in contrast to Acts, argues that the uniqueness of a spiritual phenomena does not assert its divine origin, but that the way it functions shows it to be divine or not. In I Corinthians 13 and 14 Paul argues that the most significant functions, those that show the greatest connection with the Holy Spirit, are speaking out about the Lord Jesus and helping out (serving, ch. 7) the weaker members. Paul bases this argument on the principle that the core of the Gospel is speaking the Word of the Cross (I Cor. 1-2). Preaching the Word of the Cross, he says, is even more important than the ecstatic baptism (1:17).

3. Receiving the Holy Spirit dramatically and with ecstatic signs does not signify the fullness of the Kingdom of God because a) the Law still warns and condemns, and because b) the Gospel must still be spoken.

The Law was still at work even in the charismatic community. Despite the fact that the Corinthians were "not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1:7) they were still torn by fighting and divisions. They had tasted peace, but they were still puffed up and superior, divided and suffering. The Church in Acts had the same struggles of law-bound existence. Paul and Barnabas, set apart by the Holy Spirit (13:2), had such a "sharp contention, so that they separated from each other" (15:39). Paul sharply rebukes the Corinthians for supposing that just because they had the gifts of the Holy

Spirit they were already on the other side of the resurrection. He says that he himself is not outside the law, but under the law of Christ (I Cor. 9:21). In Romans, Spirit-converted Paul also argues that even in his new state, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rom. 7:19).

The Spirit-born man is not only still under the Law, but for that very reason still has need of the Gospel to continue to build him up. In all his epistles (except Galatians) Paul addresses the congregations as saints or as those who received the Holy Spirit. Then he goes on to remind them of the Gospel. He often reproclaims the whole saving history behind their conversion and then goes on to cajole them into living up to their name as Called Ones. Paul understood that to bring about the kind of living the new era implied required the constant preaching of the Gospel. In his epistles, therefore, we do not find an emphasis on receiving the Holy Spirit, but rather an emphasis on edifying. The spiritual men have to be building each other up with the same speaking out (*προφητεία*) that first brought them into the Spirit-filled community (I Cor. 14:5,12).

E. Present day charismatic conversion experiences.

Today dramatic, ecstatic evidences of the Holy Spirit are reappearing and gaining attention. Sociology and psychology can give reasons why this renewal is occurring. One could say, for example, that in a society where the division between sacred and secular caused the sacred to disappear or that in the churches where the sacred has become emotionally meaningless a new rite is developing whereby one can again fill his spiritual needs by calling himself sacred, i.e. called apart by God in a sacred experience. Such explanations have put charismatic groups on the defensive. When defending their experience to other Christians charismatics' arguments encounter two particular pitfalls.

1. Charismatics are confronted with questions about their uniqueness which lead both parties to overlook the elements they have in common with the rest of christendom--prayer, Scripture reading, singing, fellowship, mutual help, proclamation, mission--and tend to focus the conversation on the ecstatic experiential elements, which are then unduly emphasized as focal or even as necessary. This is the constant danger of a new group searching for its identity. Charismatic worship proves to be a much richer practice than a discussion of charismatic gifts would lead one to expect.

2. There is a tendency to interpret theology in the light of the ecstatic experience, rather than the experience in the light of a wider New Testament theology. Such an emphasis grows out of the nature of the experience. An ecstatic conversion experience almost forces a normal, struggling human being to say, "Something that good must be Gospel!" Paul joins modern anthropologists in reminding us that pagan religion can also be experientially "good," but that is the kind of good feeling or good change of personality that can happen under the law of human psychology. Such an enticing equation of "Gospel" with "good experience" uses the experience of a man to interpret what the Gospel is, rather than using the Gospel to determine which human experiences will be called good, no matter how good they feel. Valuing the Gospel by experience leads to a lower regard for Christianity which is without the ecstatic experience. Thus we hear references to the "full Gospel" or to a "higher" revelation.

We would observe, however, that present charismatics (especially when not under attack) are attempting to avoid the old criticisms: divisiveness, denial of justification by grace alone, despising those without the ecstatic gifts. But despite the attempts, these two tendencies above remain.

F. Two personal reflections.

The New Testament does not preclude psychological explanations of conversion, nor does it allow a psychological explanation to rob an experience of its Gospel relatedness. Paul's arguments are the constant reminder that the function of the experience is determinative. If it promotes the Cross of Christ and edifies the Church it is of the Holy Spirit no matter how mundane its appearance. If it fractures the body by despising other members (not just that "It is divisive." Christ claims to be divisive, too. Matt. 10:34ff.) or if it curses Jesus then it is of human design no matter how supernatural it looks.

I regard many of the present charismatic experiences as phenomena that are psychologically explainable, but none-the-less theological experiences in which the Holy Spirit is at work building up his people and his Church. The methods just are more natural than they appear in New Testament days. The determinative element is not the nature of the experience or the specific stimulus (laying on of hands, meditation, prayer, etc.) of onset, but rather that it grows out of a prior confrontation with the Word of the Cross and functions as a perpetuation of that good news by speaking out about the crucified Christ and doing his edifying work in the Church.