Religious and Philosophical Conversion in the Ancient Mediterranean Traditions

# Ancient Philosophy & Religion



VOLUME 5

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/aphr*

# Religious and Philosophical Conversion in the Ancient Mediterranean Traditions

*Edited by*

Athanasios Despotis
Hermut Löhr


BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at https://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021051177

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2542-3576
ISBN 978-90-04-50176-8 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-50177-5 (e-book)



This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

# Contents

# Tables and Figures

## Tables



## Figures

# Contributors

*Carl Johan Berglund*
Dr., Director of Studies, Stockholm School of Theology at University College Stockholm / Postdoctoral Researcher at Åbo Akademi University, Turku

*Pierre-Yves Brandt*
Professor, Faculty of Theology and Sciences of Religions, University of Lausanne

*Stephen J. Chester*
Lord and Lady Coggan Professor of New Testament, Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto

*Phillip A. Davis*
Dr., Research Associate, Protestant Theological Faculty, University of Bonn

*Athanasios Despotis*
apl. Professor, Protestant Theological Faculty, University of Bonn, Research Associate at the University of Bern and the University of Pretoria

*Sergi Grau*
Dr., Lecturer of Ancient Greek Philology at the University of Barcelona, Research Associate at the Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica (ICAC)

*Anna Lucia Furlan*
PhD Candidate, Department of Classics, King's College London

*Raul Heimann*
Dr., Lecturer, Institute of Philosophy, Freie Universität Berlin

*Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui*
Professor, Department of Classical Philology, Complutense University of Madrid

*Hermut Löhr*
Professor, Protestant Theological Faculty, University of Bonn

*Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer*
Professor, Chair of the Institute of Protestant Theology, Technical University Dortmund

*Sharon Padilla*
PhD Candidate, Faculty of Catholic Theology, University of Bonn

*Rikard Roitto*
Dr., Lecturer at Stockholm School of Theology, University College Stockholm

*Matthew Nantlais Williams*
PhD Candidate, Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University

*Francesco Zanella*
Dr. habil, Lecturer, Franz Joseph Dölger-Institut zur Erforschung der Spätantike (Bonn) / Institut für Jüdische Philosophie und Religion (Hamburg)

# Introduction

*Athanasios Despotis*

Research on religious conversion or spiritual transformation is necessarily interdisciplinary, and the interest in this field is growing. Conversion is a topic that today is also being explored both in the humanities as well as in empirical disciplines. In view of this new field of research, this volume includes papers that have been almost all presented at the *Conference on Religious and Philosophical Conversion in Ancient Mediterranean Traditions* that took place at the University of Bonn in September 2018. This meeting would not have been possible without the financial support of the Rectorate of the University of Bonn as well as Brill Publisher, the Erzbistum Köln, the Evangelische Kirche in Rheinland, the Greek Orthodox Metropolis in Germany and the Verein "Freunde der Evangelisch-Theologischen Fakultät" in Bonn. Distinguished speakers from around the world provided new insights into the experience of conversion in the ancient Mediterranean, with a particular focus on Judaism, early Christianity and the philosophical traditions.

## 1 A Working Definition of Conversion

There is so far no undisputed definition of "conversion," but rather each scholar emphasizes a particular aspect of the process of religious[1] or philosophical conversion.[2] Conversion or spiritual transformation can be defined as a phenomenon with a variety of social, narrative and psychological aspects. Ancient conversion narratives are mainly biographical reconstructions provoked by the entry into a religious community or philosophical school and the ensuing social, cognitive and psychological processes.[3] The same patterns can be applied when one experiences restoration or intensification of the relationship to the tradition to which one had a previous affiliation.[4] However,

1 The use of the term "religious/religion" is not intended to project the modern understanding of religion on the ancient world. Rather, the term is used here to explore ancient traditions concerning man's dealings with divine or superhuman instances. On the debate about the concept of religion, see van Kooten 2010; Bergunder 2011; Nongbri 2013.

2 On the issue of a common definition, see Rambo and Farhadian 2014, 10f.

3 Cf. Köckert 2013, 205–212.

4 See Rambo 1993, 13.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004501775_002

human experiences cannot be adequately captured and conveyed in all their aspects by systematic generic terms. Taking this limitation into account, the term "conversion" is conventionally used to reconstruct ancient cultural discourses regarding inner transformation that occurred when people changed religious or philosophical affiliation or restored or intensified the relationship with a tradition to which they already belonged.

## 2 The State of Research

Despite the importance of the conversion concept for the study of antiquity and in particular the environment of the New Testament (hereafter NT), it is striking that no scientific conference has made possible a holistic approach to conversion in philosophical and religious traditions of the ancient Mediterranean. In contrast, the concepts of initiation and conversion baptism have already been the subject of major conferences.[5] A relevant workshop entitled "Confession and Conversion" took place in Heidelberg in July 1996, but its main focus was on the history of religion.[6] The international project entitled "About Turns: Conversion in Late Antiquity Christianity, Islam and Beyond" (2008 in Oxford), concentrated the discussion on the comparison of conversion concepts in early Christianity and Islam.[7] Another conference, which took place in Berlin in 2012, dealt solely with conversion in the Middle Ages and Early Modern times.[8] Closer to the research of ancient Mediterranean traditions was another project entitled "Transformation der religiösen Identität in der hellenisch-römischen Kultur in der Zeit von 100 bis 600 nach Christus," which culminated in a conference in 2012.[9] However, the *centre d'intérêt* was again on the period from the 2nd century CE onwards.

Furthermore, monographs surveying the concept are either already dated[10] or very general.[11] When particular aspects of ancient Mediterranean traditions are analyzed, current interdisciplinary conversion research is often not considered.[12] Some NT scholars who combine historical-critical exegesis with modern theories on conversion and are considered by many contributors of this

5 Moreau 1992; Hellholm and Popkes 2011.
6 The proceedings were published in Assmann and Ṣtroumsa 1999.
7 Papaconstantinou, McLynn, and Schwartz 2015.
8 See the proceedings in Weitbrecht, Röcke, and Bernuth 2016.
9 Bøgh 2014.
10 Nock 1933; Aubin 1963; MacMullen 1984.
11 Goodman 1994; Finn 1997; Sanders 2000; Peace 2001.
12 Representatively see, Morlan 2013; Divjanović 2015.

volume are the exception to the rule. In the 1980s, Beverly Roberts Gaventa[13] adopted from Richard Travisano[14] the socio-psychological distinction between "alternation" and "conversion" and added a third category, "transformation," to categorize the conversion-relevant reflections and concepts of the NT authors. However, Gaventa's approach has not found much resonance. Alan Segal also applied conclusions from sociological research to the interpretation of Paul's transformation by turning to faith in Christ.[15] In Segal's view, "conversion" must be identified with "resocialization"[16] and Paul may be described as "convert in the modern sense of the term."[17]

Two other essential contributions have illuminated aspects of conversion experience in the NT from an interdisciplinary perspective, namely Stephen Chester's dissertation *Conversion at Corinth* and Zeba Crook's thesis *Reconceptualising Conversion*. Chester interprets Paul's letters from the perspective of Anthony Giddens' "structuration theory,"[18] while Crook draws on socio-historical research on patron-client relationships.[19] According to Crook, the concepts of conversion in the NT and Hellenistic philosophical traditions must not be understood in psychological-individualistic categories, but within the framework of human "dyadic" relationships to the Divine and the world. Gerd Theißen finally has devoted a special issue of the journal *Evangelische Theologie* (2010) to interdisciplinary approaches to NT narratives regarding conversion.[20]

A striking development in the field of interdisciplinary conversion research has been the publication of *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, edited by Lewis Rambo and Charles Farhadian in 2014. This editorial summarizes the results of the long history of research on conversion in the humanities and many empirical disciplines and also takes a global perspective, as conversion experience is discussed from the perspectives of many diverse cultures. The editors treat conversion studies as an independent interdisciplinary field of research and provide a very intriguing insight: "By applying conversion research to historical conversion processes, new light can be shed on historical events. In addition, the rich, complex data of historical studies can critique,

13 Gaventa 1986.
14 Travisano 1970, 594–606.
15 Segal 1990.
16 Ibid., 74.
17 Ibid., 21.
18 Chester 2003.
19 Crook 2004.
20 Theißen 2010, 10–25. cf. Wolter 2010, 15–40.

embellish, and expand the horizons of various conversion theories."[21] This volume is dedicated to this idea.

## 3 The Main Points of Discussion

The aim of the project "Religious and Philosophical Conversion in Ancient Mediterranean Traditions" is to make an essential contribution that goes beyond the state of conversion research described above by providing fresh perspectives to the following thematic areas:

*1. Interdisciplinary conversion research*: The first two papers are devoted to interpretations of the conversion experience that result from the application of empirical studies. The contributions provide the reader with critical theoretical insights to challenge stereotypes regarding conversion experience both in ancient and modern contexts. Pierre-Yves Brandt's paper *Contemporary Theoretical Models of Conversion and Identity Transformation* considers conversion as a form of identity transformation. Within a given cultural environment, the convert tells his/her story based on standard narratives circulating in this environment. These narratives generally emphasize the unexpected and sudden character of conversion. The conversion does not result so much from the effort of the convert, but rather from a divine initiative or, at least, from the power of attraction held by the meaning-system to which the convert is choosing to adhere. Contemporary psychological models of conversion moderate this description by showing that it consists of an *a posteriori* reading that masks the long duration of the process. Brandt stresses the inevitable negotiation that the convert must carry out with the social environment until he/she receives the recognition of the identity transformation that he/she claims. For to speak of conversion presupposes an exclusive conception of religious affiliation. Depending on the case, the conversion emerges either from the preference of the individual to build his/her identity in an environment that does not impose it, or from constraints imposed on the person who has no other choice if he/she wishes to be admitted to the desired group.

Similarly, Rikard Roitto stresses in his contribution *Using Behavioural Sciences to Understand Early Christian Experiences of Conversion* that the typical once-now temporal scheme of conversion that meets us in many early Christian texts must to some extent be viewed more as a way to formulate present identity than as an accurate reiteration of actual events in the past. There-

21 Rambo and Farhadian 2014, 7.

fore, one important contribution of the cognitive sciences is to caution against overly confident psychological interpretations of historical texts. After arguing that we do not have the right kind of historical sources to explore the psychology of Christian conversion in the first century, Roitto suggests that a more fruitful line of inquiry for the NT era is to analyze the social experience of changing one's religious affiliation to Christian faith. Using Rambo's research on conversion and the Social Identity Approach as heuristic tools to understand first-century Christianity, the author suggests a new taxonomy that modifies the classical scheme of the variegated social experience of conversion to early Christian communities of faith: gentile tradition transition, Jewish tradition transition, intensification, institutional transition and addition.

2. *Conversion in ancient Judaism*: The study of the Hebrew Bible opens the historical research on conversion experiences in the ancient Mediterranean. Karl-Heinrich Ostmeyer's contribution *The Lost Daughter: A Philological Study on the Scroll of Ruth* describes the Moabite Ruth as a prototypical convert to Judaism. Her conversion is described as a return to Judah in the book of Ruth (1:22; 2:6). In the four chapters of the Ruth scroll, the Hebrew root שוב serves as a crucial term as it appears 15 times. According to biblical tradition, the Moabite Ruth could not return because of her background. The Hebrew text explains that מואב (Moab, i.e. the Moabites) and בני־עמון (the Ammonites) have no right to return to the congregation, i.e. to Israel (Dtn 23:4; Neh 13:1 etc.), due to the actions of their forefathers, i.e. incest (Gen 19:30–38), separation from Abram (Gen 13:8–11) and war crimes. The conversion of a Moabite and therefore the reintegration into God's covenant with Abraham requires an explanation. An author who wanted the Moabite to return to Judah had to give her some theological pass. This study asks about philological indications that shed light on how the author handled the problematic background of Ruth. Ostmeyer's new understanding of the proper names Ruth und Naomi offers a key. The return of the Moabites becomes possible due to the linguistic parallels drawn between the objects of their crimes and the names of the protagonists.

Furthermore, the question whether it is justified to speak of conversion *within* Judaism or Israel in descriptive language is answered in Hermut Löhr's study *Conversion within Israel? An Essay on Old and New in Second Temple Judaism, and on Paul the Convert According to Phil 3:2–4:1*. Löhr discusses both methodological issues regarding conversion research in antiquity as well as the formation of the following Jewish groups: the Ασιδαῖοι, the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the movement of John the Baptist. The author focuses on the application of typical conversion terms, group names, entrance rituals and conditions in sources regarding these groups and, subsequently, analyzes

Paul's reflections in Phil 3. Löhr's thesis is that against the backdrop of Second Temple Judaism, Paul does not intend to establish a new group within Judaism but he invites his readers to an ongoing transformation process. Accordingly, historical reconstructions of Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity cannot refer to conversion as a neutral descriptive term but must rather focus on the language used in the source material.

Texts from Hellenistic Judaism attest to the fascinating cultural blend in which Paul grew up and echo Jewish traditions that were not isolated from ancient Greek philosophical discourses on self-transformation. Anna Furlan's contribution *Strategies of Conversion in the Jewish-Orphic Hieros Logos: A Cognitive Approach* analyzes strategies of conversion that emerge from a poem composed in Hellenistic Judaism around the 2nd century BCE in Alexandria of Egypt. The lost original text appears to be a Jewish imitation of an Orphic *Hieros Logos* where the legendary singer Orpheus himself professes conversion to the one God. The Hellenistic Jewish author aims to show how the belief in one single God also belonged to the Greek tradition. Furlan focuses on several rhetorical strategies in the text: these include quotations of many mystic Orphic *formulae* as well as terms derived from various Greek sources. Furlan also adopts a cognitive approach to distinguish between intuitive and reflective beliefs, the first being beliefs that the individual is not consciously aware that he/she holds, but which underlie other beliefs and actions, while the second are those worshippers consciously hold and may reflect on. These forms of belief are based on a group of cognitive systems shared by all human minds that determine the success and plausibility of certain religious beliefs and were used by the author in order to convert the pagan audience. Thus it becomes evident that there is a long tradition of constructive interaction between Jewish and Greek traditions rooted in the 2nd century BCE.

Finally, Francesco Zanella's paper *"Making t$^{e}$šuḇā"* (לעשות תשובה): *"(Re-) Turning" in Tannaitic Literature* deals with the concept of תשובה (*tešuḇā*, "[re]turning," "repentance") in Tannaitic literature, the earliest layer of rabbinic sources. It describes the Tannaitic notion of תשובה from a philological point of view, thereby analysing the occurrences of the term in the texts and trying to find an answer to the following questions: What does תשובה mean? Does this term refer to a sort of "conversion" or, rather, to a form of "repentance?" Does the concept of תשובה imply a spiritual transformation? If so, to what extent? After a preliminary note on the distribution of תשובה in Ancient Hebrew sources and its semantics, the paper analyzes the different uses of תשובה, in order – if possible – to draw a consistent picture of the concept denoted by the term. Zanella shows that the concept of תשובה *t$^{e}$šuḇā* in

Tanaitic literature is a novelty in comparison to earlier Jewish-Biblical traditions, for it refers to an introspective autobiographical reconstruction.[22]

*3. Conversion in Philosophical Traditions*: Since the publication of Arthur Darby Nock's pioneering work on conversion in antiquity (1933), the process of philosophical conversion in the Hellenistic world has often been analyzed. The descriptions of philosophical conversion, however, are often inaccurate. For scholars often refer to conversion-relevant terms and narratives in an undifferentiated way, while the cosmological and anthropological backgrounds of the relevant reflections are neglected. Therefore, the paper, by Sharon Padilla, *The Awake and Sober Way of Life: A Key Motif in the Stoic Conversion*, examines the usage of the waking and sobering up motifs against the backdrop of Ancient and Roman Stoicism (especially in Seneca's Letters, Epictetus' *Discourses*, and Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*), and tracks its meaning and function in the context of conversion rhetoric. Padilla analyzes both the prehistory of this motif as well as the physical, social, cosmological and moral background of the Stoic exhortations to "wake and sober up from sleep and drunkenness". The Stoic notion of conversion derives from a medico-philosophical understanding of philosophy as a way of healing pathological conditions of the mind. Insofar as drunkenness and sleep are results of psychological weakness in the soul of the non-philosophers, the Stoic sage as awake and sober embodies the opposite conditions. In order to achieve the Stoic ideal one needs a physical regimen of sleeping and drinking habits, ongoing cognitive alertness and an awareness of oneself that leads to a restoration of the order of Nature.

The discussion regarding concepts of philosophical conversion moves from the Stoa to Middle Platonism. The next contribution of Athanasios Despotis entitled *Philosophical Conversion in Plutarch's Moralia and the Cultural Discourses in the Ancient Mediterranean* demonstrates that Plutarch participates in a broader cultural dialogue regarding conversion in the early Roman imperial period by offering a holistic approach to this issue. Plutarch reflects not only on moral progress but deals with deep cosmological and anthropological questions that are crucial for understanding the potential of both the universe and human beings to change and restore their initial harmony. In his reflections, Plutarch reinterprets Platonic theories regarding the nature of the soul and combines elements of Aristotelian ethics. He also tries to challenge Chrysippean approaches to philosophical conversion, yet, he also adopts Stoic concepts. Furthermore, this paper shows that it is too simplistic to differentiate between philosophical and biblical or Christian μετάνοια. For, though the

22 Cf. Lambert 2015.

representatives of the traditions mentioned above may have some particular preferences regarding the relevant terms, they adopt the main idea that humans need a restoration of their initial harmony that results from both divine agency and self-reflection.

The third contribution, by Sergi Grau, *Conversion to Philosophy in Diogenes Laertius: Forms and Functions* offers a typological classification of the various forms of conversion to philosophy as they appear in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, demonstrating that this was a recurrent and well-developed theme in the biographies, with little variation between schools. These conversions also functioned as a means of conferring social legitimacy to the philosophers. Grau's analysis sheds light on how the ancient Greeks perceived their philosophers, who differed from other cultural agents such as poets, and from other characters traditionally established in the collective imagination, such as heroes. This paper also highlights the similarities and differences between the conversions of ancient Greek philosophers and the Christian saints.

4. *Conversion in the New Testament*: The contributors of this editorial participate in an open dialogue and express doubts that also refer to the very core idea of this project. Phillip Davis' study *Is There Conversion in the Synoptic Gospels?* challenges the use of the term "conversion" in scholarship because it allegedly does not offer an appropriate lens through which to understand the lexemes typically associated with it as they are employed in the Synoptics. Whereas those using the term conversion mostly proceed from an etic perspective to ancient texts, this paper examines the Synoptic gospels from an emic perspective. Davis intends to demonstrate the variety of meanings of the terms μετάνοια and ἐπιστροφή in the Synoptics and thus to show the limits of the conversion terminology. Thus, he emphasizes that is of great importance to agree upon criteria determining what counts as a conversion and offer convincing reasons why such a challenging term is the most appropriate descriptor.

However, Raul Heimann shows in the next chapter, *Metanoia in the Sermon on the Mount – A Philosophical Approach*, that conversion can conventionally be used as a technical term to compare biblical and philosophical traditions regarding μετάνοια (an existential and social re-orientation). The Matthean Sermon on the Mount covers all those aspects of human life where, according to current research on conversion, μετάνοια occurs: the social, religious and psychological. The μετάνοια required by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is described as an existential process that gradually and logically passes through the essential dimensions of human life from the "outside" to the "inside". Beginning with social practices, followers of Jesus should relate all levels and

dimensions of their life to the measure of God up to the last point: the insight into man's dependence on the rule of God. Thus, conversion means, not to make Jesus' μετάνοια an object of faith or science, but to internalize it.

A third contribution, *Religious and Philosophical Conversion in Paul and John*, by Athanasios Despotis compares Paul with John against developments in the ancient Mediterranean regarding the idea of human transformation by adopting a religious-philosophical tradition. This paper proves that many Hellenistic individuals would have agreed with Paul and John's exhortations to turn to the true God or to know the truth. Thus, there are many overlaps in terms of concepts and motifs between Paul, John and the Greco-Roman philosophers, yet it is unlikely that in their use of these terms the NT authors meant just what the philosophers meant. Their appropriation of popular philosophical concepts reflects a process of cultural hybridization. Paul and John's ideas of conversion are amalgams of religious and philosophical, Hellenistic and biblical concepts. Both understand conversion not only as a ritual, cognitive or moral change but also as an ongoing process that relates to the whole human existence and will be accomplished at the final resurrection.

Furthermore, the study *'Consider yourselves dead'* (*Rom 6:11*)*: Biographical Reconstruction, Conversion, and the Death of the Self in Romans* by Stephen J. Chester analyzes Paul's complicated motif of death in the description of conversion in Rom 6. Chester argues that a great variety of ancient traditions apply the metaphorical notions of death and rebirth to conversion narratives. However, in Rom 6–8, although believers have been crucified with Christ in baptism and walk in newness of life, the death of the self that is involved continues as a present reality (a rather distinct view in the ancient Mediterranean). Believers are instructed to embrace the death of the self as a continuing, permanent, and positive aspect of their existence in Christ. Such reckoning of the self as dead to sin constitutes for Paul the appropriate human response to the divine reckoning involved in justification from sin (6:7). For believers to reckon themselves dead to sin is an ongoing act of faith that springs from their justification and baptism and gives expression to them as continuously present realities.

Almsgiving makes up an essential part of the moral instruction of the NT. Thus, Matthew Williams surveys the still unexplored relationship between conversion experience and financial ethics in his paper *What Was the Relationship between Almsgiving and Conversion for the New Testament Authors*? According to Williams, it is in the Gospels and especially in Luke-Acts where a clear positing of almsgiving is attested as an integral aspect of conversion. Turning to Christ is linked to the radical transformation of socio-economic ethics. Given that each NT author can articulate different connections between

almsgiving and conversion, Williams organizes the relevant material into four categories and summarizes their theological relevance in six points, i.e. the Christological, soteriological, eschatological, moral, and missiological. William shows that reflections regarding giving material aid to those in need are key to NT conversion concepts and thus cannot be dismissed as a marginal issue. Williams also stresses the deep relationships between beliefs and behavior in early Christianity. For NT authors, it is of little importance whether faith precedes behavior or *vice versa*; much more significant is the fact that "belief" can never be abstracted from "behavior" in this or any other area. Thus, Christian conversion ideas, according to almost all NT authors, involve one's responsibility towards those in poverty.

*5. Conversion in Mystery Cults and Late Antiquity*: The last part of this collection deals with research on the conversion ideas that occur in mystery cults as well as alternative Christian traditions of late antiquity. Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui's study *Back to a Classic Debate: Conversion and Salvation in Ancient Mystery Cults?* examines whether in ancient mystery cults there was a general phenomenon that deserves the name of conversion. Herrero de Jáuregui draws on the distinction between conversion and initiation, the former indicating a kind of complete and permanent renunciation in favour of a "doctrinal truth," the latter referring to purification processes. Mystery cults are at least missing one crucial element that is always present in philosophical schools and in Christianity: a "doctrinal truth" differentiating one tradition from other ones, which is crucial for constructing conversion narratives. Thus, in a ritual-based religiosity, the emphasis is not in conversion to higher knowledge, but in initiation to an embodied experience. However, it does not follow that we cannot find in interpretations of ancient mysteries notions of conversion. Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* witness how a middle-Platonist understood his participation in the Isis cult in the imperial period as conversion. But it is very dubious that these reflections had any paradigmatic value for later Isiac readers. Similarly, there are some paradigmatic conversion narratives and concepts in early Christianity, but we cannot postulate that all Christians experienced their affiliation to Christian communities in the same manner. Herrero de Jáuregui concludes his survey by commenting on texts of Origen that demonstrate the affinities of the conversion notion in ancient philosophical schools and Christian communities and the crucial importance of the differentiation between the concepts of conversion and initiation for a better understanding of the ancient world.

The final contribution in this volume challenges the common view that conversion does not occur in the Gnostic authors because they represent a kind of a soteriological determinism. Carl Johan Berglund's paper *The Sychar*

*Story as a Standard Conversion Narrative in Heracleon's* hypomnēmata delivers a survey of the scholarly research on ancient "Gnosis" and conversion and analyzes the formulas used by Origen to attribute soteriological determinism to Heracleon's exegesis of John 4. Berglund argues that Origen not only presents verbatim quotations and summaries from Heracleon's writing, but also interpretative paraphrases and mere assertions, in which Heracleon's views are mixed with those of Origen's contemporary opponents. The view that the woman from Sychar is predestined for conversion seems not to be an exegetical insight of the so-called gnostic Heracleon but rather part of Origen's heresiological framing, a projection of his theology onto an earlier author. On the contrary, Heracleon's view seems to be that conversion is a deliberate change of beliefs, typically preceded by a process of interaction with Christian believers who may act as witnesses and spiritual guides to the potential converts.

All in all, the contributions described above intend to offer new insights into various perspectives of the conversion experience in the ancient Mediterranean traditions. The authors of this volume are aware of the terminological difficulties regarding conversion. However, almost all of them are confident that the study of conversion or spiritual transformation in antiquity is of great importance due to three reasons. First, it shows the dynamic interaction between various ancient traditions. Second, it demonstrates the close relationship between religion and philosophy in the early imperial era. Third, it reflects an anthropological optimism for most ancient thinkers who reflect on conversion believe that humans can experience a moral transformation.

## Bibliography

Assmann, Jan, and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds. 1999. *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*. Numen Book Series 83. Leiden: Brill.

Aubin, Paul. 1963. *Le problème de la 'conversion': Étude sur un terme commun à l'Hellénisme et au Christianisme des trois premiers siècles*. Théologie historique 1. Paris: Beauchèsne.

Bergunder, Michael. 2011. "Was ist Religion? Kulturwissenschaftliche Überlegungen zum Gegenstand der Religionswissenschaft." Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft 19: 3–55.

Bøgh, Birgitte Secher, ed. 2014. *Conversion and Initiation in Antiquity: Shifting Identities – Creating Change*. Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 16. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Chester, Stephen J. 2003. *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church*. London: T&T Clark.

Crook, Zeba A. 2004. *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 130. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Despotis, Athanasios. 2021. *Bekehrungserfahrung und Bekehrungserinnerung bei Paulus und Johannes*. Biblische Zeitschrift Supplements 2. Paderbon: Brill; Schöningh.

Divjanović, Kristin. 2015. *Paulus als Philosoph: Das Ethos des Apostels vor dem Hintergrund antiker Populärphilosophie*. Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 58. Münster.

Finn, Thomas Macy. 1997. *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity*. New York, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.

Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. 1986. *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*. Overtures to Biblical Theology 20. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Goodman, Martin. 1994. *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Hellholm, David, and Wiard Popkes, eds. 2011. *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 176/I–III. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Köckert, Charlotte. 2013. "The Rhetoric of Conversion in Ancient Philosophy and Christianity." In Studia Patristica Vol. 62, edited by Markus Vinzent, 205–12. Leuven: Peeters.

Lambert, David A. 2015. *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

MacMullen, Ramsay. 1984. *Christianizing the Roman Empire* (*A.D. 100–400*). New Haven: Yale University Press.

Moreau, Alain. 1992. *L'Initiation: Actes du colloque international de Montpellier, 11–14 avril 1991*. 2 vols. Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry.

Morlan, David S. 2013. *Conversion in Luke and Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Exploration*. Library of New Testament Studies 464. London: Bloomsbury.

Nock, Arthur Darby. 1933. *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nongbri, Brent. 2013. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.

Papaconstantinou, Arietta, Neil B. McLynn, and Daniel L. Schwartz, eds. 2015. *Conversion in Late Antiquity: Christianity, Islam, and Beyond: Papers from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Sawyer Seminar, University of Oxford, 2009–2010*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Peace, Richard. 2001. *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Rambo, Lewis. 1993. *Understanding Religious Conversion:* Yale University Press.

Rambo, Lewis, and Charles Farhadian. 2014. "Introduction." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, edited by Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, 1–23. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sanders, Jack T. 2000. *Charisma, Converts, Competitors: Societal and Sociological Factors in the Success of Early Christianity*. London: SCM Press.

Segal, Alan F. 1990. *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee:* Yale University Press.

Theißen, Gerd. 2010. "Die Bekehrung des Paulus und seine Entwicklung vom Fundamentalisten zum Universalisten." Evangelische Theologie 70: 10–25.

Travisano, Richard. 1970. "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations." In *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, edited by Gregory P. Stone and Harvey A. Farberman, 594–606. Waltham, MA: Xerox College Publ.

van Kooten, George. 2010. "Is Early Christianity a Religion or a Philosophy? Reflections on the Importance of 'Knowledge' and 'Truth' in the Letters of Paul and Peter." In *Myths, Martyrs, and Modernity: Studies in the History of Religions in Honour of Jan N. Bremmer*, edited by Jan N. Bremmer, Jitse H. F. Dijkstra, Justin E. A. Kroesen, and Y. Kuiper, 393–408. Numen Book Series 127. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Weitbrecht, Julia, Werner Röcke, and Ruth von Bernuth, eds. 2016. *Zwischen Ereignis und Erzählung: Konversion als Medium der Selbstbeschreibung in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*. Transformationen der Antike 39. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Wolter, Michael. 2010. "Die Entwicklung des paulinischen Christentums von einer Bekehrungsreligion zu einer Traditionsreligion." Early Christianity 1:15–40.

# PART 1

## *Interdisciplinary Conversion Research*

∴

# Contemporary Models of Conversion and Identity Transformation

*Pierre-Yves Brandt*

## 1 Introduction

Conversion terminology is one way, among many, to describe or explain identity transformation. When we read conversion narratives, we find that they generally describe how unexpected the experience was for the convert; the initiative came from outside and the convert could only acknowledge that he/she was the lucky beneficiary of the gracious will of a divine agent. This model of conversion, common in religious texts of antiquity, interprets conversion as election: A god has chosen a specific human and decided to transform his/her identity. The conversion narrative serves both to testify about how the transformation occurred, and to justify why – at a particular point of his/her life – the convert radically modified his/her behaviour. This traditional understanding of conversion blurs the active role the convert plays in negotiating the definition of his/her identity with the social environment. This process of negotiation may begin well before his/her conversion experience and it continues until such a transformation is both socially accepted in the cultural context and psychologically assumed by the convert. Although the traditional description of conversion catches the theological goal of demonstrating that human life is completely dependent on god's will, it does not help us to understand what is going on at the social and psychological levels. It is this latter understanding, however, that is crucial for people who are in contact with converts (here understood as people who declare that they have converted) and for those who are studying the social and psychological impact of conversion (both on the converts, themselves, and on those who are in contact with them). That is why the goal of this project is to present contemporary models of conversion inspired by creativity theory, social and motivational psychology, and the theory of narrative identity construction. It sheds light on the process of identity transformation, the pressures of the social context, the motivations for converting, and the active role of the convert.

 | DOI:10.1163/9789004501775_003

## 2 Preliminary Methodological Considerations

Before presenting models of conversion that have been developed in contemporary social sciences and psychology, let us begin with a preliminary *methodological* consideration: We have no access to conversion (our own or that of others) apart from self-reports. It is not possible to say that a person has converted based solely on variations in cerebral or psychophysiological activity, or on behavioural indices collected by an external observer. Certainly, it is possible that after being converted, a person better regulates his emotions and is less stressed. This change may be objectified through brain imaging, EEG, or the measurement of cortisol. But the same signs of relaxation could be due to causes other than a conversion. Similarly, the fact that a person suddenly begins to frequent a religious community is not guaranteed to be the result of a conversion: He/she may go there to accompany a friend who can no longer go alone, because he/she has signed a concierge contract for the premises of this community, or simply to find a little company. A hypothesis of conversion, based on observations, can be corroborated *only* by an acknowledgement of conversion provided by the convert him/herself (self-report). Such reports often take the form of a narrative.

Because the self-narrative is the only means of verifying the conversion experience, researchers wishing to study conversion must seek to understand the factors that determine the production of conversion narratives. From a psychological point of view, we can discern two types of factors: *inner* factors and *outer* factors. *Inner* factors result from what has been internalized by the convert throughout his/her life course. They explain the personal motivations to convert. *Outer* factors are the incentives and constraints of the social environment that motivate him/her to convert. Distinguishing these two categories of factors and their interactions helps to describe the conditions under which conversion narratives are produced.

## 3 Defining Conversion

As stated, my aim is to present contemporary models of conversion from a psychological and social-science perspective, but what do we mean by "conversion"? From an etymological point of view, Pierre Hadot (1996) shows that the term conversion is derived from the Latin word *conversio*. In Latin, it served to translate two Greek terms of different meanings:

– *epistrophè* which means "change of orientation" implying a return (return to the origin, return to oneself; see the root *shûv* in Hebrew)

– *metanoia* which means "change of thought" implying the idea of a mutation, a rebirth.[1]

This means that in English, as in Latin, the same word has two main meanings that are in tension: on one hand, conversion is understood as fidelity, on the other hand it is understood as rupture.

The use of the term conversion by contemporary social science has not maintained this tension, however, and most often favours the second meaning. The first meaning, which is closer to the idea of repentance, is instead constructed as a process of guilt management. Contemporary models built by social scientists retain only the meaning of rupture for the word conversion. That is why, in this contribution, I will focus on conversion only in the sense of rupture, in the sense of shifting one's adherence to a different system of norms, or even to another worldview.

Lewis R. Rambo identifies five separate types of identity transformation that fall within his definition of religious conversion (1993, 12–14, 38–40):

– *tradition transition* (from one major religious tradition to another; e.g. from Christian to Muslim),
– *institutional transition* (from one faith community to another *within* a major religious tradition; e.g. from Lutheran to Orthodox within Christianity),
– *affiliation* (from no religious involvement to full involvement with a particular religious group or movement),
– *intensification* (or revitalization of interest and participation in a person's existing religious tradition: religious involvement takes a central place in the person's life),
– *apostasy* or *defection* (from a person's existing religious tradition to no religious involvement).

Four of these types (tradition transitions, institutional transitions, affiliation, and apostasy or defection) can be identified by sociological surveys that ask participants to supply their religious affiliation. Surveys based solely on self-declaration of affiliation would not detect the type of conversion Rambo identifies as intensification and, as a consequence, would underestimate the proportion of conversions occurring within a given population.

From a psycho-sociological point of view based on these definitions, I will therefore consider conversion as a kind of identity transformation resulting from *inner* and/or *outer* factors. By referring to different contemporary models

1 For more details on the different meanings of these two Greek terms, see Davis' contribution *Is There Conversion in the Synoptic Gospels?*, Despotis' contribution *Religious and Philosophical Conversion in Paul and John*, and Heimann's contribution *Metanoia in the Sermon on the Mount – a Philosophical Approach* in this volume.

of conversion, I will endeavour to understand the factors that determine the production of conversion narratives.

## 4 Conversion as Identity Transformation

Because I am looking at conversion as a form of identity transformation, it is necessary first to define identity transformation, acknowledge its social and psychological functions, and show that conversion is only one possible process of identity transformation among a variety of others. A brief comparison with other processes will help to specify under what conditions the term "conversion" is the most appropriate means of describing the mode of an identity transformation.

### 4.1 *Identity Transformation Described*

Identity transformations can be described through a variety of processes including:

- maturation
- education and exams
- election vs degradation ceremonies
- "coming out", conversion, labelling…

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a good illustration of the maturation process. It can be described as a psychosomatic transformation framed by cultural interpretation systems. G. Stanley Hall (1904) strongly emphasized the endogenous origin of the process of adolescence. However, to be effective, this identity transformation requires a collective recognition without which it could not lead to a change in social status. This process is sometimes formalised by a succession of stages, where the transitions between stages are ritualised by "rites of passage". Education and exams are also processes resulting in identity transformation as the educational process can be considered as an initiation completed by the ritual of examinations. Consequently, obtaining a degree modifies the social status of an individual. Identity can also be modified by a collective process of labelling (Schur 1971) that result in qualification or disqualification. Disqualification processes, such as degradation ceremonies (Garfinkel 1956), lower the social status; qualification processes, such as election activities, elevate it. Among the processes of identity transformation, we can also mention "coming out" or conversion as they occur in their various forms.

From this brief overview of the variety of modes of identity transformation, we recognize that such a transformation does not only occur in the

mode of conversion, even when the transformation happens with the support of resources provided by religious or spiritual traditions. I have detailed elsewhere how identity can be built using resources provided by religious or spiritual traditions (Brandt 2019). I have categorized these resources into five dimensions: attachment to a spiritual figure, community, worldview, roles, and ethical rules.

I will describe two examples here: attachment (e.g. a person who gains confidence in life by mobilizing a bond of attachment with a spiritual figure), and roles (e.g. a person who progresses in his/her life by identifying with a model provided by a religious tradition). In both cases the identity of the person transforms without what we would describe as conversion, according to our definition above. So, it is clear that conversion is only one possible form of identity transformation, even when spiritual and religious resources are at work in the process. It is therefore all the more important to understand what conditions justify the use of the term *conversion*.

### 4.2 *Identity Transformation Is the Result of Negotiation*

According to the socio-cultural context, an identity transformation results from an initiative taken either by the individual (or group) whose identity is transformed or by a social authority on which this entity depends. In contemporary Western societies, an individual can take the initiative to ask societal authorities to change the definition of the identity assigned to him/her. An emblematic example is the case of transsexuals who declare that they do not identify with their socially attributed sexual identity and who demand that society adopt their point of view. In ancient times, for the societies we know, the initiative leading to the redefinition of the identity of an individual could not be taken by the individual himself, at least not officially. The redefinition of the identity of an individual (or group) depended on the initiative of an authority with a higher social status than that of the individual (or group) seeking the redefinition. That is, only an authority with higher social status than that of the entity seeking the redefinition of identity could actually initiate the redefinition. The process of adoption in the Roman world serves as a good example of this. Social ascension was possible for a slave or low-status individual through the process adoption by a Roman citizen. The initiative had to come from the citizen doing the adopting; it was not conceivable that a slave would publicly announce that he was looking for a free man who was willing to adopt him.

The impossibility of redefining one's own identity by oneself fits well into the model of *dyadic personality* developed by Malina and Neyrey (1991) in order to account for the conception of individual identity in the first cen-

tury of our era. The Malina and Neyrey model, however, underestimates the relational asymmetry that is necessary to redefine identity: The entity that redefines identity upward or downward must have a higher status than the individual (or group) whose identity is redefined (Brandt 2002). Looking at the transformation of Jesus' identity, for example, the idea of relational asymmetry serves not only to explain why Jesus did not want his followers or the demons to identify him, publicly, as the Son of God (Brandt 2002), but also extends the theological import of the centurion's witness. Because Jesus was their master, his disciples had a social status inferior to his; and because the demons are inferior to the Son of God, they have a spiritual status lower than his. At the heavenly-spiritual level, the only legitimate authority able to redefine the identity of Jesus and call Him "Son of God" was God, Himself. That is why it is the voice of God that gives Jesus his new identity at the beginning of the Gospel of Mark (1:9–11), and later reveals that identity to the disciples when Jesus is transfigured on the mountain (Mark 9:2–9). It is also why Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem, for it was the High Priest who possessed the highest socio-spiritual authority on earth and who, as such, represented God on earth and was legitimately able to publicly proclaim Jesus to be the Son of God. Therefore, the fact that the only person with a status of authority who did proclaim the divinity of Jesus was a Roman soldier, a centurion who represented political power, is a way of showing that the Temple and its priest are no longer considered legitimate. This is a more convincing explanation than the Messianic Secret Theory (Wrede 1901).

These examples show that our identities exist at the crossroads between the identity that has been attributed to us by others (objective identity) and the identity we attribute to ourselves (subjective identity). A concordance between objective and subjective identity is synonymous with well-being; a discordance between these two identities will generate discomfort (Brandt, 1997). From these considerations, I conclude that individual (or group) identity results from a construction. Objective identity develops first because it is attributed to an individual by the social environment before the individual is able to express any choice about it. Subjective identity consists of a lifelong process of construction. As long as an individual is alive, he/she changes and feels the need, at certain stages of life, to redefine his/her identity. This may lead an individual (or group) to ask the social authorities to change the identity declared and recorded as the objective identity of that individual (or group). However, the obligation to change the declared identity of an individual can also be triggered by social authorities (e.g., when becoming an adult, when retiring, etc.).

Thus, an identity transformation can be prescribed from outside or it can be claimed by the individual (or group), for itself. The consequent adjustment

between subjective identity and objective identity does not necessarily lead to an immediate state of concord between the two. In fact, the search for concord between subjective identity and objective identity can trigger a more or less long process of negotiation. In this sense, the whole Gospel according to Mark can be read as a narrative of the negotiation process between Jesus and his social environment in order to lead, if possible, to a convergent redefinition of his identity (Brandt 2002). Conversion, then, as any identity transformation, requires a process of negotiation. In this respect, the transactional models of conversion reflect the negotiation process and are particularly useful in ascertaining which party initiates the transformation.

## 5 Transactional Models of Conversion

Religious conversion is an identity transformation resulting in particular from a change in the way of being affiliated with a particular religious system or spiritual tradition (Rambo 1993). What I intend here by *religious system* or *spiritual tradition* should not be limited to the meaning given to the term *religion* in the modern period. As Hadot (1996) has clearly pointed out, in the ancient world, philosophical schools operated as spiritual traditions, in that belonging to them meant adopting their proposed global vision of the world and of humanity. To adhere to a particular philosophical school implied the adoption of a particular *praxis* and *ethos*, implemented daily by exercises, which, like the examination of conscience among the Stoics, can be qualified as *spiritual exercises*.

However, as noted above, the adoption of new religious or spiritual practices, or the adherence to new religious or spiritual conceptions, does not necessarily lead to conversion. To speak of conversion, it is necessary that the acceptance of novelty be accompanied by a rejection of the old. In this case, if the convert(s) wants to obtain the social recognition of his/her/their conversion, a negotiation process will be inevitable. As a result, the two partners (the convert or the group of converts on the one hand, the people with whom the negotiation is conducted in the social context on the other hand) redefine the identity of the convert(s) in a *convergent* or *divergent* manner. To specify the conditions under which such a transaction takes place, we first must ask: In which cases is conversion required?

### 5.1 *Conversion Is Required when (Religious) Affiliation Is Understood as Exclusive*

Contemporary Western societies present themselves as religiously pluralistic: Religious affiliation is not mentioned on the passport, it is not necessary to

adhere to a single vision of the world to accede to citizenship, it is not even obligatory to declare one's religious affiliation, etc. In the same vein, and for most of the religious and spiritual currents present in these societies, access to *religious goods* such as rites, teachings, etc. (Weber 1920/1978) is generally not restricted to members (e.g., reference texts are publicly available, religious affiliation does not limit participation in rites, etc.)[2] Therefore, it is not necessary to convert to have access to most of the religious goods available in the social environment. Conversion becomes obligatory only when a religious group requires exclusive affiliation to that group in order to gain access to the religious goods it provides. For example, if an individual wants to be considered a Muslim by the various currents of orthodox Islam, he/she must renounce his/her former religious affiliation. Most evangelical denominations also require this sort of renunciation by an individual seeking full church membership. A comparative approach thus makes it possible to contrast exclusive conceptions of religious affiliation with inclusive ones. For instance, in Malta between the 16th and the 18th century, being Catholic gave access to social privileges denied to others, and for this reason some Jews chose to convert and become Catholics (Azzopardi-Ljubibratic 2018). This serves as an example of the exclusive conception of religious affiliation. Conversely, India advocates an inclusive approach to religious affiliation and does not promote conversion. "To seek to convert others to a particular faith, even to one of Hinduism's many creedal communities, is seen to deny that each community and person has their own *dharma*, or law of growth. To claim one's own way as the only right way is seen as spiritual arrogance of the highest order." (Hiebert 1992, 13). This explains why, as Catherine Clémentin-Ojha (2009) notes, Indian society has been very tolerant to the emergence of Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism. These religious traditions did not seek the destruction of the caste system. In the same way, the inclusive conception of Indian society easily accommodates the individual who chooses to leave worldly life to become a *sadhu*, or the individual who chooses to become the disciple of a guru. While the choice to become a *sadhu* or to join a guru express a radical renunciation of an earlier form of life, they are considered as possible individual paths within the socio-cosmic order (*dharma*) conveyed in the caste system. Thus, various doctrinal systems have emerged in India without fundamentally endangering this order. When the Indian culture was confronted with Christianity and Islam, however, things went quite differently. Problems arose when

2 That is to say, although in theory access to rites may be limited by affiliation, in practice no one is checking the participants' membership certificates.

the exclusivist pretentions of Christianity and Islam encountered the essentially inclusive Indian society (Hiebert 1992, 15). Both Christianity and Islam required conversion of new members that resulted in the renunciation and disqualification of other religious traditions. In India, this was been perceived as a form of religious colonialism. Given the Hinduist worldview, "Western definitions of 'conversion' are rejected" (Hiebert 1992, 12).

In summary, an exclusive conception of religious affiliation requires conversion; an inclusive conception does not. Exclusive affiliation may be considered necessary by the group to which one adheres. If so, initiation into that group may be accompanied by a rite that marks both the rupture of any previous religious associations and the integration of the individual into full membership within the group. Yet, the experience of shifting religious adherence may also be considered a conversion by the convert him/herself, regardless of what the group requires. In other words, even if the group with whom one decides to affiliate does not require the exclusivity of renunciation or mark the experience by a ritual of belonging, the individual may choose to identify this passage of identity transition as a conversion. Following this definition of conversion, we do not agree to add, as Roitto (contribution in this volume) suggests, the category "addition" to the five types of conversion listed by Rambo. We do not dispute that there may have been Christians with multiple cultic identities, but we will not say that they converted if the transformation was not characterized by any doctrinal or social rupture. Of course, these Christians went through a transformation of their identity. However, we propose to speak of conversion in the proper sense of the term only if it results in exclusive belonging.

### 5.2 *The Role of the Convert: Active or Passive*

Conversion is an identity transformation that can be initiated either by the convert or by the authorities in the group to which the convert adheres. The comparative study of conversion shows that, depending on the socio-cultural context, either the convert or the spiritual authorities of the group can initiate the experience. That is why the study of conversion should be accompanied by questions sensitive to the cultural background. For instance:

- In the specific context, who is initiating the redefinition of the identity of the individual(s) in question?
- Who has the right to open the process of renegotiating the identity definition of the individual(s)?
- Must the convert be passive, or can he/she be active?

A convert has an active role if he/she can actively take initiatives in favour of a redefinition of his/her identity; he/she will be limited to a passive role

if such initiatives are strictly the prerogatives of spiritual authorities who are empowered by the group for this function within the cultural context.

A good example of this can be seen in the way Mark's gospel describes the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. The outbreak of Jesus' public ministry does not find its origin in an autonomous decision of Jesus; it begins with a heavenly declaration that redefines the identity of Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1: 9–11). Consequently, Jesus cannot continue to behave as he did before; instead, he must manifest himself as the Son of God (Brandt 2002). Likewise, Paul does not describe his conversion as the result of his own decision, he describes it as an act of God's initiative (Gal 1:15).

From a psychological point of view, the passive vs. active roles of the convert in conversion can be operationalized as an opposition: outer vs. inner motion, heteronomy vs. autonomy, or external vs. internal locus of control (Rotter 1966; Snow & Machalek 1983, 269–272). The convert has a passive role if he/she is described as being moved by forces coming from outside. This is the case when an individual claims to be possessed by a demon. In the similar way, a convert may claim to have been unable to resist the force of attraction generated by a spiritual master or divinity. In such a case, conversion was not an autonomous decision, but was an instance of subordination to a dominant entity who actively exercised power over the convert. The passive convert may subjectively experience conversion as the result of being under the influence of an external locus of control. This is in line with what Fiori, Hays, and Meador (2004, 393) note when they observe that many researchers "equate external control with dependence on fate or God". However, these same authors also note that some studies show that things are not so simple and that the belief that everything depends on God can be combined with the belief in the possibility of active collaboration with God. In this case, God is described as acting as a mediator and providing the convert with personal control.

Richardson (1985), in his study on conversion, distinguishes passive vs. active to contrast Pauline vs. New religious movements (NRM) conversion. He describes the Pauline paradigm as "the old conversion paradigm". Its conceptualization derives from the culture of which it is a part. He explains that the experience "has been perceived to be sudden, dramatic, and emotional … inexplicable in any terms except those that included an active agent" identified as "an omnipotent agent" (Richardson 1985, 165). In opposition to this old paradigm he sets "the new paradigm" promoted by "a more humanistic perspective" in social and behavioural sciences "that allowed for an acting and conscious agent" (Richardson 1985, 167). Conversion to NRMs fits much more with the new paradigm than with the old one. Hetty Zock (2006) summarizes the principal features of these two paradigms in a table and suggests they be

TABLE 1 Paradigms in psychological conversion research after Zock (2006)

| **The passive (Pauline) paradigm** | **The active paradigm** | **The biographical-narrative paradigm** |
|---|---|---|
| (Richardson 1985) | (Richardson 1985) | (Zock 2006) |
| Passive, deterministic | Active, volitional | Active, volitional |
| Individual | Social | Socio-cultural |
| Emotional | Rational | Emotional and rational |
| Static | Dynamic | Dynamic |
| Radical, once-and-for-all | Conversion career | Lifelong process |
| Belief precedes behaviour | Behaviour precedes belief | Interaction between belief and behaviour |

considered as paradigms in psychological conversion research (see Table 1). She also suggests the addition of a third paradigm, "the biographical-narrative paradigm", which is "an elaboration of the active interindividual paradigm" (Zock 2006, 55). In this paradigm, the convert is "using the conversion model of a religious group as an integrating element" for his/her "identity construction" (Zock 2006, 55).

In Richardson's vision, the emergence of the active paradigm of conversion results from a shift from an old religious understanding of conversion, based on the narratives of Paul's conversion, to a new understanding of conversion, based on social-scientific research. In fact, this description fails to take into account that the shift from the Pauline (old paradigm) to the contemporary NRM understanding of conversion (new paradigm) corresponds principally to a *theological shift*. The understanding of how religious identity can transform (and be transformed) is dependent on the representation of God and the role attributed to human beings in their relationship to God. Therefore, Richardson's model is elaborated on a distinction between *theological* paradigms of conversion rather than between *psychological* paradigms.

Why, then does Paul attribute all the responsibility for his conversion to the divine initiative? According to our transactional model of conversion, the goal – for the convert as well as for the group in which the convert enters – is that at the end of the renegotiation, the objective and subjective identities of the convert match together. To achieve this goal, Paul had to prove – to the people he was persecuting and to himself – that his conversion was real. In the cultural context of his time he could not just say: "I have decided to become a disciple of Jesus". For theological reasons, he had to present himself as com-

pletely passive regarding the initiation of his transformation into a disciple of Christ, as if to say: "God has done everything". However, this does not prevent, as Despotis (contribution in this volume) clearly shows, that Paul claims active collaboration in responding to God's call.

## 6 Conversion and Time: Sudden or Gradual?

At the end of the 19th century, both W. James and the Clark School (Hall, Leuba, and Starbuck) contrasted sudden conversion with progressive conversion (Brandt 2009). But in a sense, both have been understood as subcategories of the passive model of conversion. Progressive conversion was understood as the result of maturation, under the pressure of endogenous processes. According to Hall, not converting was a sign of immaturity. Conversion was not the result of an initiative taken by the convert, but rather it was an active adherence to what it means to grow and become an adult. According to James, sudden conversion was understood as the brutal emergence, from the subconscious to the conscious, of a more integrative construction of the ego that had been delayed and maintained in the subconscious until that particular moment. Here also, the individual does not have the initiative. He/she can only passively identify with a new self-understanding that frees him/her from an internal tension between the conscious and the subconscious part of his/her psychic life. These theorizations lead us to understand that, on the psychological level, conversion is not instantaneous, but is the consequence of a process that is, for some people, more progressive and similar to a maturation, and for other people more similar to a quantum change. Nevertheless, these descriptions of conversion by James, as well as those by the Clark School, completely underestimate the role of the cultural context. The data upon which these descriptions are based was collected in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries in the context of North-American revivalism. The vast majority of sample participants in these studies belonged to Protestant denominations, and it was impossible to become a full member of these communities unless one claimed conversion. Conversion in these cases was not the result of a personal initiative; on the contrary, it was the only appropriate answer to the pressure of the cultural environment if one wanted to find one's place there. In this context, the passive paradigm of Richardson was the norm. However, the influence of the cultural context was completely obscured and occulted, and the only agent to whom the initiative leading to the conversion was attributed was God himself. That does not mean that the convert was completely passive, but his/her activity was also occulted and undervalued. From the moment

we begin to consider the activity of the convert, conversion can no longer be modelled as a momentary event, but must be considered as a longer temporal process. This is what theories of creativity can help to highlight.

### 6.1 *Conversion as a Creative Process: The Perspective of the Theory of Creativity*

The opposition between sudden event and process has also been thematised by the psychology of creativity; that is, a scientific discovery can be subjectively experienced by a researcher as a sudden insight although it is actually embedded in a process that has lasted for years. Can conversion, like scientific discovery, be described as a creative process?

Not all psychological theories of creativity consider scientific discoveries as processes. On the contrary! Based on his studies of apes, Wolfgang Köhler, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology, described innovation, including scientific discovery, as the result of sudden intuition or insight (Köhler 1925). Archimedes' discovery of the physical law of buoyancy, as narrated in a 3rd century BC text attributed to Vitruvius, serves as a paradigm to illustrate this view of scientific insight. According to the narrative, Archimedes, just as he was entering his bath, had the sudden flash of insight that the volume of a body immersed in water is equal to the volume of the displaced water. He is said to have run out into the street, naked, shouting *eureka* ("I have found"). In Gestalt psychology, characteristic features of such experiences, called "aha experiences" or "*eureka* experiences", are reconstructed from narratives. According to this characterization, experiencing the phenomenon of innovation is rare (a "big and unique insight") and of very short duration (a few milliseconds) (Gruber 1981). The French mathematician Henri Poincaré (1920) stresses the same characteristic features in the narratives of his mathematical discoveries. These features parallel those of the common description of a (Pauline) religious conversion (see Table 2). We could add to this discussion of "aha experiences" that, in the same way a passive role is attributed to the convert in the common description of conversion, a passive role is also attributed to the human being in the phenomenon of innovation. This was especially the case in the ancient understanding of how innovation occurred in the arts and sciences: It was understood to be the result of divine inspiration. Human beings who produced innovations or discovered new techniques were understood to be elected by gods as beneficiaries of their inspiration. Such an understanding of the origins of new ideas or theories totally obscures human creativity.

Arthur Koestler, in his 1964 work on creativity, discusses this complete undervaluation of human activity in the process of creation. He explains

Archimedes' discovery as drawing a connection between of two previously acquired, but hitherto unconnected, competences. Competences can be expressed with all kinds of variations, the set of all of these variations constituting what Koestler calls a matrix. In the case of Archimedes, the two matrices of competences are:

– M1: All the geometric knowledge of Archimedes
– M2: All associations related to bath activity.

Koestler notes, "The essential point is, that at the critical moment *both* matrices M1 and M2 were simultaneously active in Archimedes' mind – though presumably on different levels of awareness." (Koestler 1964, 107). He later adds, "If the subject is ripe, the putting together can occur in a single flash." (Koestler 1964, 589). But this can only happen if the two matrices are sufficiently flexible, that is, they have each been activated in various situations and are part of the individual's repertoire.

This idea of highlighting the active role of the individual in scientific discovery can be transposed onto the description of Pauline conversion. From a theological perspective, Paul appears passive and his conversion looks like a sudden event. From a psychological perspective, however, Paul seems actively involved. At the moment of his illumination, he was traveling in his role as a persecutor of Jesus' disciples, and he is also cognitively concerned about the Jesus' preaching; it does not leave him indifferent or quiet. He tries to fight it.

Nevertheless, active involvement in scientific discovery or in conversion is not limited to the turning point, a moment of insight, as Howard Gruber demonstrates in the case of the transition from an old scientific paradigm to a new one. In his book *Darwin on man* (1974), he confronts Darwin's own post-reconstruction of the discovery of the theory of natural selection with an accurate analyses of Darwin's notebooks. Darwin, in his autobiography, locates October 1838 as the sudden emergence ("it at once struck me") of the idea of the struggle for survival and natural selection (Gruber 1974, 172). He remembers that the insight came while he was reading the book, *On Population*, by Malthus. Gruber finds the mention of this reading in Darwin's notebooks: it was on the 28th of September 1838. However, there is no evidence that Darwin is aware, on that day, that he has found the foundation of his new theory. The next day he writes about the sexual behaviour of baboons, as if he had not discovered anything new the day before. It takes five to six weeks for Darwin to pick up his thoughts on natural selection again. What is striking about Darwin's autobiographical narrative is the fact that the idea of natural selection seems to appear as a sudden intuition, marking a break from the previous period and opening up a new period of theoretical elaboration. However, Gruber's careful study of the notebooks from the years 1837–1839 shows that it

is simply not so. The idea that seemed so essential on September 28, 1838, according to what Darwin's later account says, was in fact formulated in several ways as early as the summer of 1837, although the importance of the idea to the whole of the theoretical edifice did not become apparent to him at that time. Further, Darwin's writings in the days that followed September 28 show concerns that are heterogeneous with respect to the idea of natural selection. At the moment of its occurrence, the intuition of September 28 was anything but a thunderclap in a sky that did not expect it. The idea had emerged several times and was each time forgotten until the conceptual system was ready to integrate it and recognize its role as the centrepiece of a larger theory. These observations call into question the instantaneous nature of the discovery.

This is why Gruber describes Darwin's discovery of the theory of evolution as a process of creation that, based on many insights comparable to the one of September 28, 1938, took place over a period of months. Creativity consists in a process organized into several distinct enterprises, resulting from the intense activity of the individual over a long period of time. Much of this activity has nothing to do with waiting until a good idea finally emerges; indeed, time is much more actively spent in sorting out large amounts of heterogeneous ideas until those that are inadequate are eliminated and the useful ideas are organized into a coherent system, and the individual becomes conscious of them.

In the same way, conversion can be described as a creative process. In persecuting Jesus' disciples, Paul was trying to solve the problem posed by Jesus to Judaism. He had not, however, just begun his active involvement in the persecution of Christians on the day he was on the way to Damascus. Several years before, he had already chosen that path. He had been present during the stoning of Stephen, and although he was too young to participate with the others in the act of stoning (Acts 7: 58, 8:1), he did watch over the clothes of those who actually cast the stones. This episode proves that the young Paul was already concerned by the "movement of Jesus"; for years afterward he was preoccupied with persecuting it. Similarly, many years passed after his "turnaround" on the road to Damascus before Paul was ready to have a public ministry among the disciples. For these reasons, conversion must be understood as a long process leading to a creative synthesis. It implies that in the worldview of the future convert, a crisis emerges at a point upstream that results, further downstream, in a complete remapping of the convert's convictional world (Donaldson 1997).

### 6.2 *Conversion as a Lengthy Process: The Perspective of Time*

The question of passivity vs. activity is also linked to the question of time: How long does it take to convert? In fact, as shown above, conversion does take

TABLE 2 Characteristic features of instantaneous and processual conversion compared to three interpretations of scientific discovery

| Model | Common (Pauline) religious conversion | "Aha/ eurêka experiences" | Discovery | Creative process | Religious conversion as creative process |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source | Antiquity | Gestalt psychology (Gruber 1981) | (Koestler 1964) | (Gruber 1981) | |
| Relation to the Past | Break / departure from the past | Break / departure from the past | Break / departure from the past | Integration of past experiences | Creative synthesis |
| Duration of Experience | Instantaneous | Instantaneous | Instantaneous | Months to years | Multiple years |
| Nature of Experience | Unique, exceptional event | Rare phenomenon, "Big and unique insight" | Unique flash, when the individual is ready for the solution | Many insights over a long period of time | Series of stages, may include a period of moratorium |
| Predictability | Unexpected, unpredictable | Unexpected, unpredictable | Unpredictable | Unpredictable | Unexpected for the convert / unpredictable for the observer |
| Role of Individual | Passive | Passive | Active at the critical moment | Intense activity | Active |

time. Conversion does not happen in the lives of people who are not moved by an existential quest. The quest is the consequence of a crisis. As Roitto describes it also in this volume, it finds an answer through an encounter that opens interactions with a new worldview and a new way of life. This process of conversion has been explored in detail by Rambo (1993), who breaks it down

into seven stages: (initial) context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, consequences. The study of conversion narratives using this model makes it possible to restore the importance of a (sometimes very long) hidden preparation period before the beginning of an official renegotiation of the convert's identity. It also helps to do justice to the time needed to incorporate novelty into a reorganised worldview and a (sometimes heavily reshaped) network of interpersonal relationships. As such, Anne Sofie Roald (2012) describes several stages in the process that follows the conversion. Her considerations are elaborated from the case study of a conversion to Islam, but this observation can very well be transposed to conversion to other religious traditions. One can read with interest what two authors of this volume describe about conversion as a process, one according to Paul (see Despotis' contribution in this volume), the other according to Heracleon (see Berglund's contribution in this volume).

## 7 Psychosocial and Motivational Models of Conversion

Using psychological and social science approaches, we have highlighted the active role of the convert and the duration of the conversion. A global reorganisation of a person's worldview and self-understanding cannot happen instantly. One's awareness that a transformation of perspective is about to happen can be subjectively experienced as sudden, and it can be culturally theorized as such. However, it cannot be realized psychologically and psychosocially as an instantaneous event. The psychological underpinnings that underlie this process imply an active involvement of the individual for a longer period of time.

I have concentrated thus far on establishing conversion as a process, without seeking to explain why conversion is occurring: Why follow the path of conversion? I turn now to the field of motivational psychology in order to answer this important question. Here, the aim is not only to examine how conversion is thematised by the religious context, but also to explore the psychological motivations for conversion.

Looking back, once again, at the first psychological studies on conversion conducted in the late 19th century by W. James and by the Clark School, the data analysed by these scholars had been collected mainly in the setting of revivalism. In this context, conversion was the condition for becoming a full member of the community; so it is therefore not surprising that most conversions occurred during adolescence. The motivations for conversion were clear: It was necessary to convert to avoid social exclusion and to reduce subsequent

emotional discomfort. In fact, to convert in these conditions was not a choice, but the result of the pressure of the socio-cultural context. Conversion served the function of social integration. It was an identity transformation process that was irreversible, and it had its counterpart (in more liberal contexts) in the rite of confirmation. Conversion, as understood in the revivalist context, as well as the rite of confirmation, constitute socio-religious accompaniments to the transition from childhood to adulthood. Nevertheless, Hall (1904) completely occulted these psychosocial motivations to convert, and claimed an average age of conversion (16 for girls, 17 for boys), as if it was an universal psychological invariant.

For a more accurate picture, it is worthwhile to take a look at Ali Köse's studies on British-born adult converts to Islam (Köse 1996; Köse and Loewenthal 2000). The average age for conversion in this sample was 29 years. An analysis of the paths of these converts shows that the process spanned many years, and included what Erik Erikson (1968) calls a "period of moratorium", that is, a period of time when the person suspends any decision regarding his or her religious affiliation (see also Erik and Joan Erikson, 1998). The stages of this part of the conversion process can be described using the Rambo's (1993) model. Following a progressive defection from Christian institutions in the second half of childhood (context), the person no longer considers himself/herself a Christian, but at the same time hesitates to declare that he/she is no longer Christian (religious identity crisis). As a result, the adolescent or young adult decides not to make a decision (postponement of decision-making). This period of "in between" can last for years and is a way to give time to the process of decision-making (more or less an active quest). At some point, the decision-making process is impelled by an encounter with a Muslim; the encounter opens a period of interactions with Muslims and, if productive, ends with involvement in a Muslim community. But why does progressive adherence to a Muslim worldview and increased participation in Muslim activities lead to conversion? Why can this integration not take place without conversion?

This is because Islam has, as a matter of principle, an exclusive understanding of religious affiliation that, as we explained earlier, requires conversion to gain full access to collective religious practice. It is not possible, for instance, to become a Muslim and to remain at the same time a committed, active Christian. For that reason, conversion occurs when the convert decides to integrate into the Muslim community. Why, then, do British-born adults, attracted by Islam, convert? What are their motivations? Among other reasons, one important motivation is that through the process of conversion, they gain social integration and resolve the emotional discomfort resulting from the feeling of

not being fully included. This is not a completely free choice, but rather, it is the result of the pressure of the cultural context: You must choose between your previous religious affiliation and your desire to become a Muslim. Conversion has the function of identity transformation and social integration. As a process of transformation, it can be described as a rite of initiation and integration.

As we have already said, the obligation to convert in the revivalist context of the early 20th century or in the context of Islam contrasts with the non-necessity to convert that is generally widespread in contemporary Western societies. In these societies, characterized by religious pluralism, religiosity has two faces: On one side, it remains traditional for many people who affiliate with one particular faith or denomination; but on the other side, it has become more of an "à la carte" situation, where people pick and choose the aspects they wish to incorporate into their individual religious practice (Campiche 2004). The individualization and privatization of religion goes hand in hand with religious affiliations that are becoming increasingly porous, fluid, and unstable. In the main historical religious denominations, access to religious goods, such as rites, spiritual care, retreats, places and buildings, is often no longer linked to an obligation to convert.

To summarize: Expressed in the terms of the transactional model, conversion can be motivated by the search to avoid exclusion. As such, it responds to the pressure of a social environment that requires conversion (including forced conversions). Here, the subjective identity adjusts to the objective identity that has been reshaped by the religious environment. This does not prevent cases of conversion from occurring in environments that do not require them. Religious authorities in churches that do not require conversion in order to gain full access to religious goods nevertheless, may receive requests from people who ask the community to recognize their conversion to the Christian faith. In this case, the convert initiates the request. It is a response to an inner need for psychic coherence. Here, objective identity adjusts to the subjective identity that has been reshaped by the convert. In both cases, conversion, as a transaction, pursues the goal of matching subjective identity with objective identity.[3]

3 Nevertheless, this does not exclude the coexistence of a subjective, undeclared, hidden identity. That is to say, even when there is perfect concord between subjective and objective identity, an individual who presents him/herself publicly as a convert may also possess a different identity that is tacitly held, or of which the individual is only partially cognizant.

## 8 Conversion: A Cultural Construct Generally Transmitted in the Form of Narratives

To model the conversion as a transaction, the partners in the transaction must have a common understanding of the criteria for talking about conversion. These criteria are expressed in narratives available in the culture. For example, in Christian contexts, the narratives of Paul's conversion are used as references to aid in defining the paradigm of conversion. Certain characteristic features can be deduced from these narratives and push some Christian groups to limit "real" conversion to an instantaneous event. That is why some evangelical denominations require their members to provide the date and time of their conversion. Those who are not able to provide this information are not considered true Christians. However, other Christian denominations broaden the definition of conversion to more progressive processes. This shows that the paradigm of sudden conversion is not universal. Moreover, the paradigm of conversion itself is not universal; not all religious traditions require conversion in order to consider someone a full member. Many Christian denominations present in our Western contemporary societies deal with church membership without resorting to the concept of conversion. Also, as noted above, many Indian traditions represent religious systems in which the concept of conversion is totally absent.

The use of the concept of conversion is required when the construction of religious identity is mediated by exclusivity. As soon as the religious system allows access to their religious goods without requiring exclusive membership, then conversion, understood as identity transformation, is no longer useful for expressing religious identity. Belonging to an inclusive tradition makes it possible to integrate aspects of other traditions without being obliged to withdraw from the inclusive tradition. The conversion request will only appear if the new tradition requires it, that is to say, if the new tradition is exclusive in nature. If this is the case, then the religious authorities of the new (exclusive) tradition compel incoming members to relinquish their inclusive tradition if they wish to integrate and continue their participation in the new (exclusive) tradition. All these considerations show that conversion is a cultural construct. Its definition and mode of operation to transform religious identity varies from one cultural context to another.

Conversion, as a cultural construct, is often reported in the form of narratives. One of the main roles of these narratives is to culturally represent and transmit religion's contribution to the construction of identity. This is why conversion, in societies and religious groups where conversion provides a means of defining (personal) identity, is collectively recorded in *standard nar-*

*ratives*. These standard narratives have a paradigmatic function. They serve as a reference, as a standard for comparison, to aid in determining cases qualify as conversion. They also serve as role models to which future converts can aspire.

### 8.1 *Self-Narratives Conform to the Pattern of Standard Narratives*

Applied to conversion, the transactional model of identity transformation assumes that the convert (or the group of converts) is able to produce a self-narrative of conversion that is congruent with the standard narrative that is collectively recognized as having a normative function and value. In order for his/her conversion to be recognized, the convert must produce a self-narrative that conforms to the standard narrative. A renegotiation of identity is linked to the ability to use standard narratives for shaping self-narration (Brandt, Jesus, and Roman 2017). That is why taking notice of these standard narratives is essential for new or future converts. Building one's new identity proceeds from identification with these collective models.

## 9 Additional Concluding Notes on the Presentation of Conversion in Ancient Texts

It seems useful to add some complementary remarks that take into account that this chapter is part of a book devoted to religious and philosophical conversion in various contexts, but mainly in the context of antiquity. Above all, several authors of this volume have noted variations in conversion terminology. It is inevitable. This is a consequence of the fact that conversion is a cultural construct. In such varied cultural and sub-cultural contexts, conversion will not be defined in exactly the same way each time. The variations in terminology relating to conversion are therefore the expression of debates between different conceptions of conversion, different ways of shaping it. A recurring preoccupation expressed in these debates concerns the possibility – or not – of being *really* transformed. Is it really possible to change? Is conversion an unreachable dream or is it a transformation that can really be experienced? I suggest that through reading the ancient texts we have access to information on this topic that can help us to answer this question.

From this perspective, there appears to be a tension between texts that describe conversion as a unique event and those that present it as a repeatable event. One could understand this tension as the reflection of concrete experiences. Following a conversion initially considered to be instantaneous, one would find evidence that a profound and complete transfor-

mation is not realized overnight. To be really transformed takes time, so much time, in fact, that a human life may not be long enough to completely quit an old way of life (Rom 7:13–25) and old habits (see also Eph 4:17–24 and Col 3:5–11 about "the old man"). If this is the case, is conversion really possible (see Despotis' contribution in this volume)? In this debate, we also recognize that many texts referring to conversion accept that a partial conversion may precede a complete conversion. Accepting this possibility opens up a reflection on the conditions for a complete transformation. Therefore, a lifelong conversion could then be understood as a single process composed of several successive steps, also called conversion (*pars pro toto*). As far as this aspect of timing is concerned, one would find, in the texts, traces of a tension between a conception of conversion understood as a lifelong process (hence a single process, which is a process of maturation) as opposed to a conception of conversion as a period of time after which you can say that conversion has been fully achieved.

Let us now return to the opposition between the passive and active role of the convert. This is mainly thematised in ancient texts from a theological point of view, rather than from a psychological point of view. Is the initiative is on the side of God? If one thinks that the initiative is on the side of God, then how can one explain a conversion that is neither unique nor complete to be anything other than a failure of God, a manifestation of the impotence of God? This kind of thinking makes it necessary to reflect on the role of the convert in the process of conversion; it emphasizes the importance of the way he/she is engaged, involved, and active. In undertaking this reflection, we must never forget that the texts and/or data we analyse (and the terminology employed therein) are embedded in negotiations between authorities trying to prescribe conversion and people seeking recognition of their own conversion through those same authorities.

Briefly let us revisit the question of the exclusive dimension of conversion as identity transformation. The process of conversion cannot be described only as an addition of new aspects to one's life (adding new knowledge, practices, affiliations), but requires renunciation, the removal of certain aspects that have previously shaped one's life (renouncing old knowledge, practices, affiliations). This is why, contrary to what Roitto suggests (contribution in this volume), I propose that we not use the term *conversion* when the process of identity transformation is purely accumulative. Beyond the diversity of conceptions of conversion that are expressed in the literature, we must at least, to be able to speak intelligibly of conversion, highlight the act of renunciation that marks the point of departure from the general process of religious

identity transformation and specifies the intended goal. Therefore, I propose to defend the idea that a common minimum criterion between these different conceptions – that which justifies use of the term *conversion* – is the expression of a form of exclusivity, resulting in the relinquishment or renunciation of something previously held.

## 10 Finally, Remember...

To conclude in a synthetic way, let us recall some main points of this presentation. Let's start with a gentle warning about what is called "psychological" when analysing ancient texts. There is always the risk of projecting onto the ancient texts an anthropology that underlies the psychological theories of today. The ancient representations of the psychic life available to people of that time were not those of an autonomous inner life. Moreover, identity and psychic life are not understood in all cultures as characterizing the individual. In many cultures, the basic unit is not the individual, but the group. It is important to acknowledge this, and to note that many of the findings of this project are relevant both at the individual level and at the group level.

Let me continue by stressing that I have insisted that conversion – even when it is experienced as instantaneous – is supported by a long psychological process. One's vision of the world cannot be changed overnight without preparation and integration processes. The preparation process occurs upstream from the decision point; the integration process occurs downstream from the decision point. For theological and philosophical reasons, however, this processual dimension of conversion can be concealed in favour of an instantaneous event of divine intervention. This is easily accomplished if the active role of the convert is more or less obscured, left in the shadows, in order to highlight that it was God who had the initiative.

I have also emphasized the fact that the study of conversion is conditioned to the production of narratives. This is true not only for the study of conversion in antiquity, but in a more general way; access to the intimate experience of conversion is mediated by the production of a self-narrative. We have also seen that the production of a self-narrative (of conversion) is conditioned by the standard narratives available in the cultural environment. These are the narrative matrices from which one must shape his/her own self-narrative in order to obtain the sanction of others. This does not mean, however, that we cannot study conversion in ancient texts from a "psychological" point of view. Of course, we do not have access to intimate or even individual experiences, but we do have access to social representations of psychological processes.

Finally, the need for authenticating conversion to renegotiate religious identity depends on the structure of the religious system into which one wishes to integrate. If it is structured such that it requires exclusive affiliation, proof of conversion will be necessary. Yet it is also true that the need to reorganize one's own identity in the mode of conversion depends on one's own conception of affiliation (religious and/or philosophical) as exclusive. That is to say, proof of conversion may be required by the socio-cultural environment, but it is also possible that a convert may wish to produce proof of conversion in an environment that would not necessarily require it.

## Bibliography

Azzopardi-Ljubibratic, S. 2018. Conversions religieuses des juifs à Malte (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles): une approche comparée du marranisme. Ph.D. diss., University of Lausanne.

Brandt, P.-Y. 1997. Identité subjective, identité objective: L'importance du nom, *Archives de Psychologie* 65:187–209.

Brandt, P.-Y. 2002. L'identité de Jésus et l'identité de son disciple: Le récit de la transfiguration comme clef de lecture de l'Evangile de Marc (NTOA 50). Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Brandt, P.-Y. 2005. La conversion religieuse, un processus créatif. *Archives de psychologie* 71:131–154.

Brandt, P.-Y. 2007. Die Bildung einer neuen Identität. Bekehrung und Berufung im Licht der göttlichen Inspiration. In *Erkennen und Erleben. Beiträge zur psychologischen Erforschung des frühen Christentums*, edited by G. Theissen and P. von Gemünden, 57–72. Gütersloh: Güterloher Verlagshaus.

Brandt, P.-Y. 2010. Quand l'inspiration divine occulte la créativité humaine: Éclairages antiques et modernes sur la conversion de Paul. *Études de Lettres* 1–2 (n° 285):81–98.

Brandt, P.-Y. 2019. Religious and spiritual aspects in the construction of identity modelized as a constellation. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 53:138–157.

Brandt, P.-Y., and C.-A. Fournier (Eds). 2009. *La conversion religieuse: Analyses psychologiques, anthropologiques et sociologiques*. Psychologie et spiritualité 2. Geneva: Labor et Fides.

Brandt, P.-Y., P. Jesus, and P. Roman (Eds). 2017. *Récit de soi et narrativité dans la construction de l'identité religieuse*. Paris: Editions des archives contemporaines.

Campiche, R. 2004. Les deux visages de la religion: Fascination et enchantement. Geneva: Labor et Fides.

Clémentin-Ojha, C. 2009. La conversion, une pratique étrangère à l'hindouisme? In *La conversion religieuse. Analyses psychologiques, anthropologiques et sociologiques*, edited by P.-Y. Brandt and C.-A. Fournier, 201–216. Geneva: Labor et Fides.

Donaldson, T. L. 1997. Paul and the Gentile; Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Erikson, E. H. 1968. *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Norton.

Erikson, E. H., and Erikson, J. M. 1998. *The life cycle completed: Extended version*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Fiori, K. L., Hays, J. C., and Meador, K. G. 2004. Spiritual Turning Points and Perceived Control Over the Life Course. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 59:391–420.

Garfinkel, H. 1956. Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies. *American Journal of Sociology* 61:420–424.

Gruber, H. E. 1974. Darwin on Man: A Psychological Study of Scientific Creativity. London: Wildwood.

Gruber, H. E. 1981. On the Relation Between "Aha Experiences" and the Construction of Ideas. *History of Science* 19:41–59.

Hadot, P. 1996. Conversion. In *Encyclopaedia Universalis. Corpus 6*, 497–499. Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis.

Hall, G. S. 1904. Adolescence, Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education. New York: D. Appleton.

Hiebert, P. G. 1992. Conversion in Hinduism and Buddhism. In *Handbook of religious conversion* edited by H. N. Malony and S. Southard, 9–21. Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press.

James, W. 1902. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Longman, Green & Co.

Koestler, A. 1964. *The Act of Creation*, London: Hutchinson.

Köhler, W. 1925. *The Mentality of Apes*. Oxford: Harcourt, Brace.

Köse, A. 1996. Religious Conversion: Is It an Adolescent Phenomenon? The Case of Native British Converts to Islam. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 6:253–262.

Köse, A., and K. M. Loewenthal. 2000. Conversion Motifs Among British Converts to Islam. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 10:101–110.

Lienhard, M. 1991. *Martin Luther: un temps, une vie, un message*. Geneva: Labor et Fides. (4th ed.).

Malina, B., and J. Neyrey. 1991. First Century Personality: Dyadic, and Not Individual. In *The social world of Luke-Acts: Models for interpretation* edited by J. Neyrey, 67–96. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

Paloutzian, R. F., J. T. Richardson, and L. R. Rambo. 1999. Religious conversion and personality change. *Journal of Personality* 67:1047–1079.

Poincaré, Henri 1920. *Science et méthode*. Paris: Flammarion.

Rambo, L. R. 1993. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Richardson, J. T. 1985. The active vs passive convert: Paradigm conflict in conversion/recruitment research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24:163–179.

Roald, A. S. (2012). The Conversion Process in Stages: New Muslims in the Twenty-First Century. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23:347–362.

Rotter, J. (1966). Generalized Expectancies for Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 80:1–28.

Schur, E. M. 1971. Labeling deviant behavior: Its sociological implications. New York: Harper & Row.

Snow, D. A. and Machalek, R. 1983. The convert as a social type. *Sociological Theory* 1:59–289.

Weber, M. 1920/1978. *Economy and Society. an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wrede, W. 1901. Das Messiasgeheimnis in de Evangelien: zugleich ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des Markusevangelium. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Zock, H. 2006. Paradigms in Psychological Conversion Research. Between Social Science and Literary Analysis. In *Paradigms, poetics, and politics of conversion* edited by J. N. Bremmer, W. J. van Bekkum, and A. L. Molendijk, 41–58. Leuven: Peeters.