

# **Conversion: A Biblical Answer to the Secular Challenges.**

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chapter one  
Introduction

Christian conversion in recent years has occupied the thinking of theologians, and church leaders, psychologists, missionaries and evangelists, philosophers and historians, clergy and laity alike. Apaches have varied, depending on the academic and professional orientation or on the theological and religious persuasion of the respective writers.

The paper is designed to present conversion in the context of Scripture, yet relatively with the new discipline known as *ethno-theology* – socio-cultural anthropology.

**1.1. Purpose of the STUDY: -**

So the following are the two fold sole objectives of the study:

- To make aware the proper understanding of the Biblical Conversion in context to secular, religious, and social context and ideas about the conversion
- To defend Christian faith in answering the oppositions and objections regarding Conversion within and by Christianity.

**1.2. METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE of the STUDY: -**

Biblical approaches with theological arguments along with the contemporary discipline known as socio-cultural anthropology views, has been applied in the entire paper with simple evaluation and answering to the objection d and oppositions.

The theme and center point of the Paper will be supported with both secular and Scriptural and references and quotations, which consist of four chapters with subheadings and titles, which includes introduction and conclusion.

The chapter following the introduction section will have information within the Bible and outside of the Bible, leading to the proper knowledge of Conversion in Christianity. Conversion according to the Bile is needed with its true nature and qualities.

The next part of the Paper will defend Christian Conversion Scriptural reasoning to the challenges and oppositions to the Christian Conversion. It also consists of information of the Conversion and its temperament in relating it to the field of psychology.

The final section of the thesis is designed specially to lead the subject theologically and ethnologically in order to prove that Christian Conversion is not against culture or within the culture or according to the culture but according to the culture which is relevant to every culture. It solely focus to say that God is God of every culture and had His own ways of dealing and approaching with each culture of this entire world.

**1.3. The statement of the Study**

*" Conversion in the Bible is never forceful act or religious ritual of the Christianity. Christian can never be religion of force. If there is conversion to and by Christianity in its true sense it is not a conversion but changes in Christ Jesus. Conversion is not changes of religion but becoming New*

*Creation by the Holy Spirit of God. Biblical conversion is ethical in its essence and example in the society."*

The entire study revolves around this above sole hypothesis and it is needed God's guidance to know and understand the subject as we proceed further. May God open our eyes to see the truth.

## **CHAPTER TWO Definition and Meaning of the Conversion**

### **2.1. Necessity of Conversion**

Since the word "Conversion" has many connotations in Indian it is important for us to clearly define our usage here. We reject the limitation of term to a change from one religion or ideology to another such as from Hinduism to Buddhism or Christianity, or from Romanism to Protestantism, or from Capitalism to Communism. We affirm that Christian conversion is far more than a transfer from one religious community to another.

As Evangelical we must assert first, our conviction that Conversion is primarily the work of God in the human soul and not merely a human emotional or intellectual change.

We should not be afraid of the "mystical" when speaking of this God ward aspect of conversion. Any work of God is certain to defy reason and many critics say "mystical" when they really mean "spiritual". The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14). We need not to be afraid of such criticisms, but take our place with Jonathan Edwards of whom Dr. Ganstad wrote, "He was a mystic in an accepted sense of the work, for he was one of a company of who believed themselves to have had an experience of God, and from whom that experience comes is the most absolute, certain and joyful source of knowledge and basis for behaviour." In other words, our Christian mysticism has a basis in the fact of Christian experience, which is evidenced by a transformed life, in contrast to non-Christian mysticism, which becomes a goal in itself.

Further, we must affirm that conversion, as an experience of a relationship with God through the Holy Spirit, affects the total personality. If we think of this in its threefold dimension of will, mind and emotion we completely new center of activity in Christ. The mind, in becoming aware of this new relationship awakes to a new sense of values the true nature of sin, the demands of the Gospel – and it also develops a new confidence in the Scriptures, the sacraments and the church as they mediate to the soul this new awareness. The emotions, gripped in the remorse of guilt are released into "peace with God, joy in the Holy Ghost, and the love of God is shed abroad."

### **2.2. NATURE OF CONVERSION**

**Human Response in Conversion** Our discussion will be restricted to a theological understanding since the psychology of conversion is being dealt with in a separate paper. In the proclamation of the Gospel appeal is made to repent and to believe. Jesus began his preaching of the kingdom with the call to "repent and believe the Gospel" (Mark. 1:15). Paul witnessed to the Ephesian elders "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts. 20:21). Repentance and Faith are the two essential aspects of turning or "converting". They enjoined together.

#### **1. Repentance from Sin**

Repentance in the New Testament expresses a turning of the whole personality from sin. Repentance involves grief and sorrow for sin "For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation" (II Cor. 7:10). This includes sorrow for actual sins and for "sin" as rebellion against God. Repentance involves a speaks of repentance as the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). Furthermore, repentance must result in an activity of the will which turns not only from sin but also to God (Acts 26:20). David's repentance as recorded in Psalm 51 includes rationally, emotional and volitional elements. It is repentance of the whole man. Scripture teaches that repentance is essential to salvation.

Our Lord began His ministry with the message of repentance (Mark. 1:15) and He ended it with the commission that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations" (Lk. 24:47). The sermons of Peter and Paul as recorded in the Acts all end with the appeal to repent (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30; 10:21). Repentance is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and the gaining of eternal life. It is an essential aspect of turning of conversion. However, Scripture makes it clear that repentance is not a meritorious work.

*"we are not saved for repenting rendered to God but a condition of heart necessary before we can believe in salvation."*

## **2. Faith in Jesus Christ**

Faith is turning towards God. In the Old Testament the idea of faith is frequently expressed by verbs such as "believe", "trust", "hope". All express a right attitude to God. The Psalms constantly appeal for this reliance upon God, while Abraham, who "believe the Lord; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6), is the pattern of faith for the New Testament. Leon Morries defines faith as

*"the attitude whereby a man abandons all reliance in his own efforts to obtain salvation, be they deeds of piety, of ethical goodness, or anything else. It is the attitude of complete trust in Christ, of reliance on Him alone for all that salvation means."*

Faith is an act of the whole personality. It is a settled conviction of the mind that the Gospel is true (John 5:24; Rom. 10:14, 17; Heb. 11:16). But faith is more than knowledge for even the devils believe, says James (2:19). Faith is trust in a person, Saving faith is trust in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Faith, like repentance, is essential to turning and to salvation, but it is not a form of good works. Faith is but the empty hand out stretched to receive the grace of God in forgiveness. Whether we think in terms of justification or conversion, faith is the channel or instrument, not the ground, of salvation. A man is never justification or conversion, faith is the channel or instrument, not the ground, of salvation. A man is never justified on account of faith but by through faith (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:8). Faith is a gift of God. This is the meaning here and elsewhere in the N.T. As Griffith Thomas has said,

*"We are not justified by belief in Christ but by Christ in whom we believe."*

We conclude that in conversion, repentance and faith are inseparably bound together. They constitute the turning that is necessary if man is to receive the free gift of salvation. God alone can say when this turning is sufficient or complete. It may be sudden or gradual. The conversion experience of Augustine, Wesley or Sadhu Sunder Singh, or, shall we say, a child brought up in a godly Christian home, may vary considerably. Though there can be no rigid pattern for the

human response in conversion, yet from the point of view of theological understanding, the transcendent act of God in justification and new-birth will always be the same.

In the final analysis conversion is an act of God, but at the same time it is possible in most cases to see the path along which the soul has been led to the point of decision. The Holy Spirit leads us in devious ways to bring us to Christ and if we can understand something of the psychological factors that are at work in our lives at a given time we may better understand the Spirit's wooing.

Six factors as creating the conditions favorable to conversion:

The presence of general religious tendencies either from heredity, family life or early impressions.

A habitual tendency of the intellect to absolute convictions – an intellectual dissatisfaction with anything less than an ideal unity.

A tendency of the individual spontaneously to fix the attention beyond and above the realities of the senses a sense of God and other-worldliness.

A richness of affective potential or psychic energy held in suspension by the individual – an unsatisfied emotion.

The tendency of the individual to transfer, his chief interests to questions of origin, purpose, destiny etc. an enquiring mind. The recurrence of painful experiences. These can perhaps be summed up by saying that conversions are commonest in three groups of people (these can easily overlap): Those with hereditary or family background; Those with dissatisfied personalities; Those undergoing times of stress.

Under the family influences we should also include the impact of the conversion of a close member of a family. It is here that Dr. McGavran's teaching of the Church growing along the lines of natural expansion is so apt. Obviously the conversion of a husband will have a marked influence on a wife and vice-versa. The nature line of evangelism flows into the family and through the family unit to the relative and friends. We have surely been very slow to extend Christ's kingdom through the family system of India.

The area of stress is also of great importance for adult conversion. We have noted already that the commonest age for conversion is the period of adolescence. Psychologists would affirm that this period between the ages of 12 to 25 is the time when the greatest changes take place in the human personality. It is no wonder therefore that these young people are specially open to the claims of Christ and can be readily led to Him.

Time and again life's values and philosophies are being shaken, tested by circumstances and sometimes shattered by painful experiences. Times of stress and sorrow are common to all and will turn many from being self-satisfied, smug personalities into dissatisfied, disillusioned souls. They will seek either to end it all or an escape by running away from their lives. It is then that they are especially open to the claims of the Gospel, and the careful soul-winner will be constantly alert for these times of disillusionment in those he seeks to win and press home the claims of the Saviour. All these present ideal opportunities which should be used for the Lord. This is equally true of both the nominally Christian and non-Christian environment.

### **3. The Psychological Nature of Conversion**

It has been suggested that conversion is purely an emotional experience whipped up by the conversion psychological approach of the preacher with an over-emphasis on guilt, leading the

sinner into a state of despair. Then, while he is thoroughly depressed by his sins he is psychologically charged with the possibility of forgiveness. This, in itself, is said to give emotional release, which is called conversion. While this may be the course of events in some individuals, it is the purpose of this paper to show that such is a parody of the genuine experience of Christian conversion. A careful psychological analysis of the steps leading to Christian conversion will show it to be a revolution of the whole personality in its new relationship to Christ wrought by the Spirit; and, far from this being an abnormal phenomenon, Christian psychology has shown it to be not only normal but necessary to the well-being of the individual.

In Christian conversion there is a turning from sin to Christ, hence a study of the psychology of sin is basic to the psychology of conversion. "Moral evil is not a Christian invention, but a human fact" and yet it is in our understanding of sin that we are fundamentally in conflict with the non-Christian faiths. Hinduism, for example, has little or no sense of moral evil. The gods themselves practice all kinds of sin but supernaturally avoid the normal consequences. According to the Puranas, sin is not sin unless one is caught, and, in general, any idea of the gods by failure to perform the proper sacrifices in the correct manner. Philosophically the Hindu sees sin as pure illusion that is part of our ignorance which separates us from Brahman. Thus while a Hindu will confess daily that he is a sinner from his birth, salvation for him is not deliverance from sin but from the bonds of karma and samsara.

Thus, our primary task in preaching the Gospel in a non-Christian setting is to arouse a sense of sin. The ethical implications of conversion must be clear from the first and we must not be satisfied with any kind of conversion which is not based in a deep conviction of sin leading to a definite turning from sin to righteousness. On the other hand we must beware of the other extreme that far in excess to that described in Scripture. We must preach against sin for what it is rebellion against God, and then we must leave the Holy Spirit to do His own work of conviction in the hearts of the hearers.

Sin as rebellion against God is an alienation from the central Source of goodness and truth. In the individual this alienation produces acute distress the prickings of conscience, which we commonly call guilt. We see here a distinction between what may be called the God-given innate conscience and the acquired social conscience developed in man through his environment. We believe that while this latter can be influenced by social pressures, that there is placed within the hearts of all men by the Holy Spirit an innate sense of right and wrong and of an impending judgment (John 16:8-11).

Unfortunately the Christian Church has long been divided over the meaning of free will in relation to conversion. Can a man repent and turn to God unaided? Is he not entirely dependent on the prior grace of God? Much of the argument however, would seem to be academic and we cannot but believe that the grace of God is readily available to all who will turn to Him. In practice we preach a universal Savior and preach to all men recognizing this to be our Lord's commission, for all have sinned and it is not His will that any should perish.

In conversion there is a turning from sin to God and thus we may divide the experience into the human act of repentance and the Divine act of forgiveness and new birth.

"He that converteth his sin shall not prosper, but he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin shall find mercy." The Gospel Call to repentance is thus as sound as ever. The first step towards deliverance from sin must always be a frank and sincere confession of our sins to God. Repentance is a change of mind and attitude toward sin and this is always demonstrated in a willingness to offend and where necessary to make restitution. This is a sound psychological principle as well as the necessary prerequisite to genuine spiritual conversion. Failure in our preaching at this point is to fail to lead to true spiritual healing of the sin sick soul.

But conversion does not end in repentance. Forgiveness is an act of God and it is this claim to the Divine insurgence in Christian conversion that makes Christian experience unique. It is more than an intellectual acceptance of a promise that if we confess, God will forgive. Rather, it is the result of the Divine act of reconciliation whereby the guilt of man's sin is cancelled through the atonement of Christ and the inward discord between the soul and God is resolved as God takes over and becomes the new centre of the surrendered soul. This leads to a new relationship with God, an overturning of old values and a reorganization of the life around the will of God, a veritable new creation.

### **2.3. Biblical Perspective of the Conversion**

#### **1. Under the Old Covenant**

The general emphasis under the Old Covenant was a demand for righteous conduct of the nation. Individual renewal was emphasised only within the context of the covenant community. The direct operation of God is seen in the great periods of Israel's history; the exodus and wilderness wanderings, the deliverance from apostasy in the days of Elijah and in the day of the prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and those of the post-exilic period. The Book of Psalms is rich in its emphasis on the covenant mercy of the Lord. God "repenting" indicates a change in the divine intention towards a people or an individual with a view to their redemption.

It is used for a restoration or return to relationship formerly enjoyed. It denotes a renewal of the promise to keep the covenant, e.g. Joshua 24:25; 2 Kings 11:17; 2 Chron. 34:31. A real change of heart and sincerity in returning to the Lord must accompany this turning. It is to be noted that the conversion of the Gentiles is rarely the subject of discussion in the Old Testament. Jonah 3:8-10 is the best example. Salvation outside the covenant with Israel is not clearly revealed in the Old Testament.

#### **2. Under the New Testament**

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews shows that the New Covenant mediated by Jesus Christ is a better covenant because it is enacted on better promises (8:6). The writer quotes at length from Jeremiah 31:31-34 to show that though the new covenant is not new in regard to its substance, ("I will be to them a God they shall be to me a people"), it is new in its meaning and in its power of fulfillment. These better promises are three folds:-

- i. I will put my laws into their mind.
- ii. All shall know me.
- iii. Their sins will I remember no more.

This is a promise of conversion for in conversion a new relationship with God takes place in which will three factors are found; God implants his law in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, knowledge of God becomes a matter of personal experience, and our sins are blotted out through the shed blood of Christ.

Conversion under the new covenant becomes individual and personal though the idea of the covenant community is not lost. A significant factor in an understanding of the doctrine of Conversion in the New Testament is the diversity of language and symbolism used to describe this divine action in sinful and estranged man. We may note some of the main symbols used. Next Birth Our Lord, gives us a clear insight into the nature of conversion in his discourse with Nicodemus, the teacher who came to him for further instruction in spiritual truth. Jesus repeated the affirmation that Nicodemus must be born again. In this brief record Jesus repeatedly stressed

that Nicodemus must be born by an act of God the Holy Spirit. The comparing of the work of the Holy Spirit to the movement of the wind not only emphasized the sovereignty of God's action but also the element of mystery that is attached to New Birth. Jesus then made it clear that the experience of New Birth is essential to belonging to the Kingdom of God.

### **Adoption**

This is a distinctly concept to illustrate a new relationship of grace between God and Man. The adoption of a slave by a master as his son was a common feature of Roman life. In Gal. 4:1-7 Paul uses the term to stress the changed status of relationship. Though men are potentially sons and heirs (v. 1,3) actually they are slaves "to the elemental spirits of the universe" (V.3). Through Christ's redeeming work they are adopted as sons (v. 5,7) and as a result cry "abba Father", the prerogative of a member of the family. Again, Paul uses the term in Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4, and Eph. 1:9.

Though the term "adoption" is distinctly Pauline it implies a relationship of grace comparable to the Johannine term "born of God."

### **Creation**

Paul sometimes uses the image of creation to explain the work of God in believing man. He uses it both for the initial act of renewal and the resultant process. Both aspects are seen in II Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15. The man who is in Christ is a new creation or creature (kaine ktisis). Paul in his doctrine of the creation of the physical universe emphasises the sovereign and transcendent action of the Triune god and it can be assumed that he makes a similar emphasis in the idea of spiritual re-creation.

## chapter three Conversion in Secular Perspective

### **3.1. Objections to Conversion**

Throughout the world, and especially in India, there is strong opposition to Christian conversion. These forces to resistance include:

#### **I. Hindu Intolerance**

Although Hinduism has no uniform system of belief, the dominant view of Hindu philosophy is that there is no place in India for evangelism and conversion. Both are unnecessary and even harmful as they result from a failure to understand the true meaning of religion. According to the Hindu doctrine of monism and non-duality, ultimate reality is one and essentially un-know-able, hence all religions are finite expressions of the Infinite and therefore contain only partial knowledge of the truth. None can claim exclusive knowledge on this basis. Hindu philosophy appeals for religious tolerance, but is antagonistic for freedom to conversion, for conversion implies that truth is found in one religion but not in another.

In the philosophy of the Vedanta conversion is self-purification and self-realization. It is the realization of the essential unity of the empirical self and the Universal self. When educated Hindus use: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30) to support their doctrine of identity we share the concern of Bishop Appasamy that

*"the whole spirit and genius of Christianity is against such a monistic interpretation."*

## **2. Western Secularism.**

Secularism is no armchair philosophy of a few, but a way of life. It is a way of life in which God is believed to be irrelevant to the concern of modern society. Secularism then marks the end of traditional theism; God is dead.

Secularism therefore, is a substitute for religious faith. It is a denial of the need for conversion. Secularism, which is largely the product of Western science, dominates the thinking of our College students and industrialized society.

The advocates of Radical Christianity hope their message will appeal to modern secular man who has rejected orthodox Christianity. In this new Gospel in which transcendent God becomes the "ground of all being" and Christ is reduced to the "man for others" theology becomes anthropology and conversion a relic of an outdated supernatural theism.

Radical Christianity shifts the emphasis on evangelism from conversion to concern, from converting men to serving them.

New emphasis has its roots in the old liberalism of Schleiermacher, the father of liberal theology, and in the Psychology of Religion movement. To Schleiermacher conversion was the awakening of the inherent consciousness of the divine in man. Conversion as an encounter between the transcendent God and the soul of man found no place in his system.

A survey of the usage of the terms "conversion" and "regeneration" both in the New Testament and in Church history is necessary for our understanding of the doctrine of conversion.

## **3. Use in the New Testament**

In the King James Version the words "convert" or "conversion" occur only 9 times. Four of these passages are quotations from Isaiah 6: 9, 10 and are translated "should be converted." (Matt. 13:15; Mk. 4:12; Jn. 12:40; Acts. 28:27). Two are found in James 5:19, 20 where the writer speaks of the importance of the man who converts the sinner. The remaining three passages are "Except you be converted" (Matt. 18:3) our Lord's word to Peter "When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren" (Lk. 22:32) and when Paul and Silas declared the conversion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:3). In only one case (Acts 15:3) has the word "conversion" been retained in almost all-modern translations. In all other examples the word to convert or be converted has been translated as turn or return. For example Matthew 18:3 "except you be converted" becomes turn (RV, RSV, Moffat, Weymouth), turn round (NEB), change your whole outlook. Thus we may concur with Dr. Packer's conclusion that

"the A.V.'s habit of rendering the active verb 'turn' by the interpreted passive, 'be converted' through bad translation is good biblical theology.

The R.C. view is that the remission of sin, original and actual, takes place in baptism, which is normally administered in infancy. Nothing further is required for salvation after baptism except the forgiveness of mortal sins, which is effected by the sacrament of penance. In Reformation theology there is surprisingly little use made of the term conversion. Baillie is of the opinion that Luther identifies conversion with confession and absolution following post-baptismal sin.

Luther does not use the term "conversion" for the single unrepeatable event as in the modern Evangelical usage.

It is significant that John Wesley does not use the term conversion in his Volume Wesley does not use the term conversion in his Volume of Sermons on Several Occasions. He says conversion is "a term which I rarely use because it rarely occurs in the New Testament." The current evangelical use of the word "conversion" is of comparatively recent development, it contains a very real Biblical doctrine which is the heritage of evangelical theology and practice. The use of the noun "regeneration" in the New Testament and in the Church has a history parallel to that of "conversion". Only a brief survey will be given here. In view of the limited usage of the term "regeneration" in the New Testament it is not surprising that the term has been interpreted in widely different ways in the history of the Church. The Reformers Luther and Calvin, used the term "regeneration" in a very loose sense. They used it for the whole process of salvation including sanctification.

For Luther the heart of the Gospel was Justification and for Calvin the Effectual Cal. Reformation theology tended to put justification and election with their stress on grace and forgiveness of sin to the fore and to loosely append to them the ideas of regeneration and new-birth. The Reformers saw clearly the distinction between justification and sanctification but they failed to see as clearly the importance to regeneration, new birth, and the experience of conversion.

### **3.2. Contrast of non-Christian Conversions.**

Psychologists will often point to the similarities of non-Christian conversions to those of the Christian faith to show that all religions are the same and to thus disprove the unique claims of the Christian faith. Since all religions however, are a search of man's personality for the Divine, it is natural that all so-called religious experiences will have certain aspects in common. This does not contradict the truth of Christian experience but only shows some common elements in the search for truth and its realization.

For example: all religions emphasize the need of a full surrender of the worshipper to the object of devotion. Ramakrishna, for instance, came to realize that he could ever know his ideal-oneness with the Mother goddess Kali, unless he gave up "the love of his little self." He affirmed that the "sense of I in us is the greatest obstacle to the path of God-vision as it covers the truth." There are also the parallel appeals in all religious experience to the various aspects of human personality. Many religions emphasize the emotional experience as shown in the Bhakti movement within Hinduism. Chaitanya is said to have had a heightened spiritual experience as "he sang and chanted Krishna's name for hours together till he became delirious with Bhakti." Through this means he was able to win many converts from every class of society. Buddhism on the other hand has a strong intellectual appeal and seeks to unify the seeker around a 'Rule of Life' which leads to enlightenment. All such experiences may lead to the unifying of the personality around a new centre and so they can be described as forms of conversion. For many the experience becomes a mystical goal in itself and removes the convert from the every-day world to become one with the deity. This can lead to the deification of the convert so that he in turn becomes an object of veneration and worship. There is little or no ethical change in the life of the so called convert. There is rather a sense of achievement instead of a realization of a transforming grace received.

It is interesting to note that the shortcomings of the non-Christian conversions are equally those of what we may describe as sub-Christian conversions. They are all human in effort and not recipient of Divine invasion. Our greatest problem in India today is the nominal Christian. He may never have been truly converted at all, or, has become satisfied with some emotional or intellectual experience, which lacks the transforming grace of God.

### **3.3. Temperament and Conversion**

It is often said that a person who is converted is only so influenced because he is of a religious temperament. A carefully analysis of the experience of conversion will show that all kinds of temperament can be influenced for Christ and the so called religious temperament can be influenced for Christ and the so called religious temperament is really non-existent. A study of the personality traits of the apostolic band will readily illustrate this. However, our temperaments may easily influence the manifestations of conversion in our lives. Most of us are mixtures of all three temperaments, but some would seem to have basically only one form. They are described as:

Viscerotonic – usually associated with breadth of body, heavy weight and fatness. Personality traits of amiability, tolerance, slowness to anger, love of company love of comfort and luxury. This type, inclines to sacramentalism, elaborate rituals and magnificent architecture. Somatotonic – found with a strong, muscular body, active athletic physique. Personality traits of courage, love of danger, indifference to pain, ruthless and strongly extrovert. This is "martyr" material, keen to make converts dogmatic, insistent on ethics rather than rituals. The spiritual experience in such temperaments is invariably climatic and often dramatic. They throw themselves into their newfound faith with a vigor that parallels their physique. Cerebrotonic-often highly nervous in type. Long, thin bodies, scholarly and recluse. Serious in temperament, tend to avoid company, emotionally restrained, love solitude but avoid open spaces. Strongly introvert.

For such people faith is of serious concern. They are self-analytical and critical so conversion is only rarely a conclusive experience but often more mystical. They avoid rituals as hindrances to true worship. They prefer to worship in a building devoid of adornment. They major on personal devotion and may readily accept a life of voluntary poverty.

The heterogeneousness of the Church is our strength and attempts at uniformity in any area of Christian life will only close the door to certain-temperaments that the Lord still calls His own. On the other hand Christ is eternally the same and we are called to preach Him. True spiritual conversion is an experience of Him and we are not to be the judge of the Spirit who makes Himself manifest to different temperaments that the Lord still calls His own. On the other hand Christ is eternally the same and we are called to preach Him. True spiritual conversion is an experience of Him and we are not to be the judge of the Spirit who makes Himself manifest to different temperaments in different ways. Perhaps it should be a cause for our rejoicing that our commission is only to preach and it is the Lord who deals with the complexities of our human nature and remolds us in His own image.

#### chapter four Theological Reflection and Evaluation

The theologian approaches the subject of conversion from the Theocentric perspective and insists that, in order to be rightly understood, man must be seen in the light of the god revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. The cultural anthropologist approaches the subject of conversion from an anthropological perspective, insisting that man is the beginning, the center and the end of his subject.

Through I am here concerned with the theological question of conversion, but not without giving consideration of ethnological principles at work, I shall, however avoid such theological issues as divine grace, human freedom, election & predestination, etc. My concern here is to deal more with the existential than the theoretical aspects of conversion.

It is imperative to bear in mind that God deals with people at the level of their existence; within their own culture God provides points of contact for reconciliation and conversion.

#### 4.1. Conversion as Divine and Human Interaction : justification.

There is one other concept that merits attention for understanding conversion. Because of its importance, it deserves separate treatment. It is the concept conveyed by the English word "justification". This concept is closely linked to the previous one, mentioned in chapter one, namely 'faith', and together they form the core of the Pauline theology of 'Justification by faith'. (Rom. 8) A key passage for our consideration is Rom.4: 25 – 4:1. The issue is justification by faith. The one is God's part: *justification*, the other man's: *faith*. In these two clauses Paul sums up the almost mysterious relationship of the believing convert who enters into contact with Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Mediator (Rom.4: 25).

The great New Testament scholar, Adolf Schlatter, has very beautifully presented the relationship between God and us through Christ. Through Christ, he says, God has made of us what we could not be by ourselves.

*" Through Christ God manifests to us two things: our call and our justification, our death and our life. As we behold the cross of Christ, we view ourselves as transgressors; because it was on our behalf that we behold the resurrection of Christ, we must view ourselves as justified; because it was on our behalf that God raised the Prince of Life from the dead."*

Over the shedding of the blood of *the dying Christ* on the cross, God pronounced justification in favor of guilty humanity and thus their condemnation brought Him to the Cross; over *the risen Christ* God pronounced Christ's resurrection so that we might be justified and brought to life. Romans. 5:1 describes the transition from non-faith to faith, from not being justified to being justified. The result of this dual action : human faith on God's offer of Salvation and Divine acceptance and sealing – is peace between the two parties. The experience of justification is of God's part - and of faith is our part is, I propose, the very moment when conversion has taken place and sanctification has begun. The convert has become the Child of God, the way of sonship under the Fatherhood of God; the way of discipleship under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the way of body life in fellowship under the Christ's headship; the way of growth and sanctification under the Holy Spirit's tutorship, and the way of witness and serving under the Spirit's leadership.

We use conversion here in the modern evangelical sense of that work of Divine grace whereby the condemned sinner becomes a child of God and is given a new standing in the presence of God, and the Divine work of inward spiritual renewal begun. Evangelicals believe that in the Bible a clear distinction is drawn between those who are converted and those who are not; those saved and those unsaved; those who live in darkness and those who live in the light.

Conversion is both a miracle of Divine grace, the act of the triune God, and a radical change of attitude and outlook involving the whole personality. It is a turning from a man-centered worldview of Existence to a God centered worldview of Eternity. It does not involve an organic change in the personality but a new centre of control. Every part of the personality is directed towards God. Conversion as an act in time brings the dimension of eternity into life. We must now examine both the characteristics of the Divine act and the nature of the human response.

#### 4.2. Conversion as the restoration of the RELATIONSHIP: reconciliation

According to Paul, reconciliation of the holy, saving God with sinful, separated humanity is Christ's offer to all people (Rom.1:16; Eph.2: 13 – 16). Reconciliation means the removal of an existing barrier between two parties at enmity or war. In the context of this study, the barrier is sin. In its manifold forms and functions. Sin not only alienated and bars persons from God their

maker, but also from others, their brothers and sisters. Sin also separates and fences off one ethnic group from another (Eph. 2: 11 – 22)

In Christ, the authentic peace child, God not only justifies the individual in isolation, He also reconciles the estranged to Himself and to others in relationships. What has taken place in the transaction on the Cross is that God has provisionally forgiven the sin of the sinner. He pardoned his guilt; He has withdrawn the punitive verdict.

The desired response to the appeal is, in fact, a conversion experience, a turning in repentance to God while turning in forgiveness to the repentant one. The meeting point of reconciliation, the point when the person – regardless of his religious or cultural status – becomes a new person in Christ. This does not mean he becomes new in the point of time, but new point of quality. Thus when a person is converted to God, it doesn't mean that Jesus Christ

*" Makes all the Jews into gentiles or all the Gentiles into Jews; He produces a new kind of person out of both, although they remain Gentiles and Jews"*

What is significant in terms of individual or personal conversion is that both Jew and Gentile are new people in Christ, comprising the one new covenant people of God (2 Corinthians 5: 17 ; 1 Peter. 2 : 9 – 10). Jesus has removed the barriers between God and humanity and the fences between different people.

*" He abolished all religions that is founded on rules and regulations, and brought to man a religion whose foundation is love"*

The matter of reconciliation in Ephesians 2: 16 is again it is explained by William Barclay,

*The word Paul uses (apokatallassein) is the word, which is used of bringing together friends who have been estranged. The work of Jesus is to show all man that God is their friend, that they must be friend with each other. Reconciliation with God involves and necessitates reconciliation with man.*

#### **4.3. conversion Is NOT de - culturization / acculturation**

Conversion should not deculturize a convert. For every culture is good to herself and is not superior or better to another. Thus everything in the cultural context must come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is applied to every culture.

Culture, in its outset, is a matter of the whole community and the society. There is no culture based on any single individual. It takes the whole of the community, whereas,

*'Conversion is integrals part of the Great Renewal which God begins in an individual which will be brought to a triumphant climax when Christ comes in His Glory'.*

Thus conversion is not an adoption of a new religion culture or lifestyle but

*'... a gradual change in which a person life is redirected...It does not imply a complete understanding of the new faith, but undertake and makes the*

*beginning of it. This beginning, which may have resulted from conditioning over a long period of times, initiates a process of transformation, spiritual growth.*

it is clear in the scripture that God did not begin biblical religion or culture by creating Israel out of nothing at the first dawn of life on planet earth (Ezek. 16:3). God intently allowed the human culture and lifestyle to be established. It was then, after the world and the human race had already existed for thousands and perhaps millions of year, God chosen Israel.

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself was born and brought up in the same culture; and He respected and obeyed it. He was a born Jew from the tribe of Judah. He neither, asked any one to change the culture, where as He said to Nicodemus ' you must be born again', and to the Sadducees and Pharisees, to repent. And to be separated by God, the first man to be called by God from this culture is Abraham. But Scripture is clear in telling that he was told to leave the land, family, etc and not the culture.

*"...he worshiped (God) at Canaanite shrines (Gen. 12:6,8), followed customs (Gen. 15: 1 – 6), purchased burial place plot (Gen.23), and also settled into stage. Nevertheless he was challenged to forbid the commit sexual practice and idol worship."*

### **Conclusion**

As evangelical we would claim the uniqueness of the Christian experience of salvation. True Christian conversion is to be differentiated from any other form of religious conversion either sub-Christian or non-Christian. This is our heritage in the Gospel and our solemn responsibility to proclaim.

Recognizing that adolescence is a common age for conversion we must constantly emphasize the importance of Christian teaching and evangelism in our Sunday Schools and among the young people.

Adolescence, however, is seen as only one form of the many strains and stresses of life. As evangelists therefore we must commit ourselves to be always available to souls in distress. While we preach One Savior we must beware of trying to make one mould into which all experiences of conversion must conform. There are different personality types and many facets to the expression of the Christian Faith. We must be tolerant of all as we see the fruit of the Spirit manifested in the transformed life.

Let us rejoice that amid the complexities of human nature and personality, God the Holy Spirit is at work, delivering from the bondages of sin, converting and molding into the Divine image.