

This thinksheet's concern: *To display the fullbodiedness of biblical conversion in contrast to "conversion" as (1) a dirty word, avoided by liberals and secularists and (2) a magical word, adored by conversionists and revivalists.*

1. Biblically, conversion never breaks its tether to the physical act of "turning," which is the Hebrew (*t^eshuva*) and Latin (*conversio*) for the total-human reality signaled by the term. We are self-determining creatures, and conversion is the self determining--punctiliarly, iteratively, and linearly--to turn its all toward God (a spiritual heliotropism).

2. Consequently, the aspects (or dimensions) of conversion are curvilinear to those of humanity itself. We feelthink ("heart"), reason ("mind"), and decide-act on the basis of a moral sense entailing duties derivative from (a) what we perceive as ultimate values and (b) our continuous calculation of consequences to ourselves, others, the earth, the human and divine future. Any conversion is fragmentary and inadequate which leaves one or more of these three elements out.

3. Since, in the light of the two points above, conversion is the total self totally in action toward God, it is life-long--a process, though punctuated by events. An analogy: a profile of a mountain range, only perhaps with one mountain decidedly higher than the others. An analogy for "conversion event(s)": a lightning flash, the dramatic flow of electricity from sky to ground, an explosion resulting from the fact that air, being a poor conductor, impedes the flow until the building up of the charge exceeds the air's resistance: a dramatic-emotional "conversion" occurs at the moment the self ceases to resist God's inbreaking.

4. Types of conversion are curvilinear with types of personality, though other factors are also of force: environment, early training, "how you took it" in life's prior crises, present human relations, value-commitments, one's personal history of pride, shame, guilt, goodness. Of course dramatic experience makes for better storytelling and for deeper-driven pegs to hang things on, but it's overrated by conversionist and revivalist and charismatic orators. The higher drama may be (a) hoked-up emotionalism and/or (b) due to the person's being a greater, more God-resisting sinner (to stay with the lightning analogy): "by their fruits," says our Lord, and there's no evidence of superior Christian living coming forth from dramatic conversion--or inferior: the type of conversion is independent of the quality of life attendant thereon.

5. Favoring pressure for dramatic conversion is the fact that a radical new direction (total "turning") normally is preceded by a decisive STOP/LOOK/LISTEN (to use the Ralph R. Upton 1917 railroad-crossing sign). (See works on psychology of conversion, esp. that of Robt. Ferm, a close friend of mine, who for many years was Billy Graham's one-person thinktank.) But what is even more normal, in the sense of usual, is a series of nonradical, small-step shifts of direction in attitude-feelings, behavior, ideas and ideals, all having a radical cumulative effect but not necessarily resulting in an emotional upheaval of dramatic proportion.

6. Jesus' perpetual turning to God with his whole being and hoping is the model for Christian conversion. While Jn. Baptist was appealing chiefly for moral conversion, and much of Paul's writing deals with intellectual conversion, Jesus accented religious conversion--or, better, these three aspects of conversion as one event-process-event conversion. The central energy and intending is what in Hebrew is called *shir hamaalot*, religion-life as a "song of ascents," a steady, unrelenting, exultant self-directing of our spirits to the divine Spirit, making our lives into living prayer with (Sam.S. Cohon) "higher planes of feeling, thinking and doing, and enriching our lives with a new quality." Prayer expresses our love for God, who in our religious conversion convinced us of his love for us.

7. Evangelism is conversion acting through one's mouth. One is/is being converted only to the extent that one lives/verbalizes the event/process "that all the world may know."