IN SEARCH OF A NEW LIFE:
CONVERSION MOTIVES
OF CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

by

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SUMMARY

The Muslim population in South Africa has its origins in the 17th Century when they were initially brought in as slaves or political exiles by the Dutch colonisers. Christian-Muslim relations have not always been good and especially the topic of 'conversion' has often caused conflict between the members of the two faiths. Additional problems such as the apartheid era has caused many Christians, especially Africans, to question their faith and turn their back on Christianity by converting to Islam. There are other areas which have caused conflict in the relations such as mistrust, misinformation and discrimination. In South Africa's religiously pluralistic society people convert from Christianity to Islam, and vice versa, from a variety of motives.

This study first discusses various Christian missiological debates on understandings of conversion and then surveys psychological approaches to the motivational structures of 'decision-making'. The heart of the study is the presentation and analysis of the conversion narratives of 20 converts (10 from Islam to Christianity and 10 from Christianity to Islam). These narratives are analysed in terms of five key conversion motives, as a result of which various patterns of conversion motives emerge.

In church practice and missiology, conversion is often understood only in one direction (towards Christianity) and with only one valid motive, namely a strictly religious one. This study reveals, however, that such a view is inadequate. Conversion should rather be understood as a two-way movement and based on combinations of various motives. This study concludes with the presentation of a holistic missiological understanding of conversion which applies more adequately to the South African context. This new understanding of conversion may help to promote better understanding and respect between faith communities.

KEY TERMS

Conversion; Christian-Muslim relations; Missiological understanding of conversion; Conversion narratives; Motivational theories; Conversion motives; South Africa.

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Declaration

I declare that: "IN SEARCH OF A NEW LIFE: CONVERISON MOTIVES OF CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature: ……………………………………………

Date: ……………………………

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28)[1].

"Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious … for God is with those who restrain themselves and those who do good" (Qur'an 16:125,128)[2].

This study is about weary and burdened human beings. As with the Jewish 'crowds' of Jesus' time, to whom his familiar words of invitation were initially addressed, so the masses of people today with different needs are searching to find a new life.

In similar fashion, Muhammad the prophet of Islam, invites people to follow the message of Islam. All people, Christians and Muslims alike, have needs and problems which cry for fulfilment. In this study, the concerns of their lives become ours. It shows, with some real life examples of South African contemporaries, how different persons both Christian and Muslim respond to their worries, needs and problems in different ways by embracing another faith.

Some people interviewed in this research grew up as Christians and later in life turned to Islam to find fulfilment and betterment. Others grew up as Muslims and later in life accepted Christ to find salvation and wholeness. As I listened to them tell their stories of their quest for a new life I became deeply aware of the various reasons people change their religion for.

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[1] Biblical references are taken from the New International Version (1978).
[2] Qur'anic references and numbering of *surahs* (verses) are based on the YUSUF ALI edition (1946).

It is my hope and prayer that this study will foster greater understanding for each other and thus contribute to better future relations of respect between Christians and Muslims. It is a call to empathise better with neighbours and fellow-travellers. As Christians, in our growing sensitivity towards people of other faiths, may new doors open for compassionate witness and for encouraging them to come to the Jesus who has promised to give them rest.

1.2 Background

This study focuses on conversion between Christian and Muslim communities in the pluralistic urban context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Whilst it is not the function of this thesis to present the details of the South African context and history so far as religion is concerned, a brief indication of the main points is necessary. This is done for two reasons:

1. An overall understanding of the historical religious background is necessary since it leads up to the next topic on the tensions between Christians and Muslims and the statement of the problem on which this thesis will focus.
2. The background information is necessary in order to understand the context in which the empirical findings of chapters five and six are presented. These chapters present the motives of conversion as evidenced in the interviews with Christian and Muslim converts.

1.2.1 General Religious Background

In South Africa religion has been and continues to be a significant social force.[3] Virtually the entire population professes some kind of faith and the country has a rich diversity of religions.[4] Some Christian groups, particularly among Whites, have greatly dominated the

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[3] See for instance the book by Prozesky and De Gruchy (1995), *Living Faiths in South Africa,* which gives a good summary of the full range of South Africa's faiths and their history.
[4] According to Prozesky and De Gruchy (1995), the following religions are the main players: African Traditional Religions, Christianity, African Independent Churches, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Chinese Religions, Buddhism, Jains and Parsees.

religious and political stage in the past. As a result Christianity has enjoyed vastly more attention from scholars and is therefore far more often heard of than other religions in South Africa. It is because of this one-sided information that Kritzinger (1991:228-229) calls on South African Christians to acquire a more balanced knowledge of the various religions:

> … most South African Christians are woefully ignorant of the religions, cultures and history of Africa. An essential dimension of decolonising the minds of (white and black) South Africans is to build a deep sense of being *Africans*, and acquire a detailed knowledge of broader African affairs. In this connection it is of prime importance that South African Christians develop a sound knowledge of African indigenous religions and Islam.

Islam came to South Africa directly as a result of political and economic factors. Indeed, it was colonisation that brought Islam to the Cape (Da Costa & Davids 1994:1-17[5], Vawda 1994:534, ICSA 1985:2) and later to other parts of South Africa.[6] While it is disputed whether there were Muslim slaves in the party of the first coloniser, Jan van Riebeeck, when he set foot at the Cape in 1652, six years later free Muslims from the Moluccan Islands are known to have arrived. They were called 'Mardyckers' and were employed as servants of the Dutch settlers and as mercenaries to protect the Dutch settlement against marauding indigenous groups (Esack 1997:21, Davids 1980:35, Cilliers 1997:94).

The Dutch policy to subjugate the Muslim population of the East Indies was also applied in the Cape. It was the Dutch governor Van Diemen who issued a proclamation which prohibited the public practice of Islam in the Cape as from 1657. This repressive policy was in force for nearly one and a half centuries (until 1804), when religious freedom was granted to all people. For this we must thank the Enlightenment (Prozesky & De Gruchy 1995:9, Cilliers 1997:11), which originated in Europe with the rise of a strong sense of human rights.

With regard to geography, an important factor is the division of South Africa into areas where rainfall is sufficient to sustain settled patterns of existence, chiefly in the eastern half of the country and in the south-west, and regions which are generally arid. Another instance

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[5] The first chapter of this book with the title 'The early Cape Muslims: Victims of European colonising activities in Asia and Africa' gives an excellent insight into this period of the African origin of the early Cape Muslims between 1652 -1818.

of geographical factors affecting the development of religion is the mineral wealth, employment opportunities and consequent rapid urbanisation of Gauteng[7], which partly accounts for the concentration of certain religious communities in that area, such as the largest Chinese and Jewish communities, as well as sizeable Hindu and Islamic communities.

Of greater contextual importance is the political and economic history of South Africa. The great migrations of people have dramatically changed the human texture of the region, together with the drama of conflict, conquest, resistance and liberation.

The previous more peaceful coexistence by South Africa's peoples ended with the steady increment of Europeans. It started with the Dutch in 1652 and followed from 1806 onwards by the British in sizeable numbers, as well as by smaller numbers of other Europeans. It is a process that has continued to the present day. In recent years an influx of people of European descent from formerly white-ruled areas of Southern and East Africa has added its quota to this process. The third movement, roughly contemporary with the one from Europe, brought people from Asia to South Africa.

The first contact of South Africa with Christianity (cf. Sanneh 1989:160) took place from 1652 onwards when Dutch coastal trading practices, with no interest in settling, led to a much more potent form of European interest in the area (Prozesky & De Gruchy 1995:5). These permanent settlers retained no geographical ties with Europe but their presence resulted in conflict with the Khoi, who had long been the established, though nomadic, people of the southwestern Cape.

Their flocks and existence depended on continued access to grazing. The conflict became even stronger with the mutual strangeness of the two cultures. These were differences in matters such as the concept of individual land ownership and the fatal ingredient of possession of firearms by the Europeans. Further additions of white settlers and the potent imperial interests of the British in the 19th century intensified and extended this basic reality of conflict to the entire subcontinent.

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[6] For a brief account about the spread of Islam in South Africa, see also Arnold (1974:350-352).

[7] This is the area around Johannesburg and Pretoria. Johannesburg being the biggest city of South Africa is often called the "city of gold" and the "financial power house" of South Africa. Since 1994, South Africa has been divided into nine provinces, one of them is 'Gauteng'. This area belonged to the former 'Transvaal'.

Therefore, developments such as imperialism and colonialism can be seen as extensions of the economic trend. This means that the story of religion in South Africa unfolds against a background not only of ruthless white settlement and conquest and the resistance provided by the black populations, but in addition of powerful international economic and political forces. These forces aimed primarily at enriching Europe and not necessarily bringing blessings to the people of Africa (Prozesky & De Gruchy 1995:7).

In conclusion we can say that the European impact on South Africa was neither in its origins nor subsequent development primarily motivated by religious conviction. Its interests were more of obtaining, if necessary by force, the conditions for a better life that would be African in location but European in culture. South Africa's white Christianity has managed to coexist with, and even cultivate, the politics of racist domination (Callinicos 1980:101) in contrast to the evident ethical teachings of the Bible.

It is often said that the origin of racist theories lies in the era of imperialism. Betts (1986:43), for instance, writes:

> In the African slave trade some of the deepest roots of racism grew, and in the African slave trade was provided one of the most outrageous examples of man's inhumanity to man.

Muslims were present at the Cape from very early in the Dutch period because of slavery and the exile of Islamic leaders from the East Indies.[8] The practice of Islam was then severely restricted which meant that Muslims were forbidden to hold private or public meetings under penalty of the so-called priest being put in chains (Davids 1978:10). The religious hostilities and intolerance of 17th century Europe were exported to South Africa and ensured that from the beginning the Christian faith would be a factor in separating its peoples and strengthening the politics of domination rather than equality, even in the ranks of Christians.

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[8] The work of Da Costa and Davids (1994), *Pages from Cape Muslim History,* focusing on the Muslims of the Cape, is probably the most significant in this regard.

This notion is highlighted, for instance, by Arnold (1974:351) when he reports that slave owners did not allow their slaves to be baptised. This led many slaves to look for an alternative religion and subsequently often became Muslims. Arnold reports an incident that when asked about the motive to become Muslim, the person answered that "some religion he must have, and he is not allowed to turn Christian".

In 1806 the rule of the Cape passed from Dutch to British hands. This opened the way for a steady influx of English-speaking Christians with their own individualistic divisions of denominations such as Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, etc. This increased rather than eased the divided mode of their religion, later contributing to a splitting of the ranks of black South Africans. The conversion of Blacks on a great scale added the dimension of religious disunity to the existing geographical, linguistic and political fractions. Prozesky and De Cruchy (1995:9) conclude the following about this time period:

> What was good for the soul of black South Africa, from a Christian point of view, appears therefore to have been a political disaster, though this judgement must be carefully balanced against the important positive, liberating resources black Christians have said they find in their faith…missionary Christianity in South Africa is clearly as important as it is controversial …

The three major waves of immigration, which have greatly changed and influenced the human face of South Africa in the past two centuries, are the African, European and Asian. The numbers of people from Asia were much smaller than those from Europe but the religious and cultural diversity was perhaps greater. From 1860 onwards, people from India arrived in Natal, firstly as workers for the sugar-cane plantations and secondly as independent migrants. These were mainly Muslims, Hindus and a smaller numbers of Buddhists. Many of them were merchants. The Muslims who settled in Natal were culturally distinct from the Islamic communities of the Western Cape, who had been in the country much earlier.

The European settlement was followed by the process of conquest, which reached a military climax in the British defeat of the Boer Republics in 1902 and a political climax in 1910

when the Union of South Africa was created. This created a state based on white political and economic control.[9] The 20th century was marked by the rise of the apartheid state and its recent demise through the ultimate success of the liberation struggle.

During the 1950's rigid apartheid laws were introduced by the South African government. The apartheid policy was supported by the Dutch Reformed Church which furnished it with its religious underpinnings by suggesting that Afrikaners were God's chosen people and that Non-Whites were a subservient species. Earlier studies explain this phenomenon in detail (Joyce 1990, Nolan 1988, Magubane 1990). In the Afrikaner's world view, apartheid and the church went hand in hand. This led many people in South Africa to seriously question the legitimacy of Christianity.

Apartheid ideology tried to justify and accommodate the dominant status quo "with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy" (The Kairos Document 1985:3). Muslims, Marxists and people of every political persuasion in the Third World denounced South Africa as "the racist Christian country" (Aeschliman 1986:83). They saw Jesus as the author of racism, not the One who died to break down the dividing wall between peoples.

There was, however, also tension *within* the religious communities of Christianity and Islam, as well as *within* Hinduism, Judaism and the African Traditional Religion (Esack 1997:8). This conflict, especially evident in the 1980's, was basically between the 'accommodationist' and 'liberatory' responses to apartheid.[10]

Another body was founded in 1984 which focused on interfaith solidarity in the struggle against apartheid: the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).[11] The organisation saw itself as conducting dialogue around practical matters such as justice and

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[9] The '1913 Land Act Law', for instance, was one of the most inhuman and ruthless laws enforced in South African history. It reserved less than 10% of the land for black ownership (Callinicos 1980:26).

[10] 'Accomodation theology' was basically supported by those who wanted to separate politics and religion. By being silent on political matters apartheid, however was indirectly supported. 'Liberation theology' is the process of praxis for comprehensive justice (Esack 1997:8, Moila 1991:35).

[11] What was founded in 1984 was the 'South African Chapter' of the WCRP (International). This is an interfaith organisation that exists since 1970. It was originally formed in Japan.

peace as well as sharing the conviction that doctrines divide but humanity unites (cf. Lubbe 1994:3-6).

During the time of the apartheid regime the population was basically divided into the 'racial' groups of Whites, Blacks, Coloureds and Asians.[12] Today, Muslims are drawn from all these major population groups (Salman 1982:38, Vawda 1994:535).[13] Gauteng today, the area of concern of this present study, with its biggest cities being Johannesburg and Pretoria, represents an enormous variety of people from different backgrounds. All the above mentioned population groups, with their cultures and religions, are found in Gauteng.

Religious affiliation is likely to remain high and may grow while religious diversity is sure to remain. Prozesky and De Gruchy (1995:237) give a list of 14 different Christian churches with their membership in 1980 and 1991. But there are many more churches and denominations in existence. According to the figures of the 1991 census, there is a total of 66.4% Christians and 1.1% Muslims in South Africa (Kritzinger 1993:2-4).

1.2.2 Background of Christian-Muslim Relations

From 1870 onwards a proliferation of Muslim institutions at the Cape occurred. The increased public visibility of Islam can be attributed to a decline in legislative restrictions to the public expression of non-Christian religions. Among the difficulties with which Muslims had to contend were official and social prejudice, combined with paternalism in matters of public policy. During that time, in Euro-Christian terms, Islam was viewed as a 'false religion'.

White colonial authorities and settlers reflected this common European mentality. Muslims at the Cape were the object of constant proselytising efforts. The low success rate in converting free Muslims and slaves to Christianity, and their gradual but noticeable upward

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[12] Such racially based descriptive nomenclature as 'Indian, Coloured, African, Black, White', are used in this study because they are unavoidable in the South African context. These terms are only used where necessary for the sake of distinction. However, such usage does not imply acceptance of the racist connotations of such terms.

[13] According to these statistics (1980), 1,21% of the population of South Africa are Muslims (12499 Blacks, 1158 Whites, 182090 Coloureds, 166177 Asians), (cf. ICSA 1985:1).

social mobility, evoked the contempt of colonial settlers and of Christians (cf. Arnold 1974:351).

In the colonialist's eyes, Muslims were seen as good slaves and skilful artisans, but were unpredictable and quick to 'run amok', which was a favourite phrase of derogation (Prozesky & De Gruchy 1995:135). Islam had the capability to cause 'mischief' among the 'simple and credulous negroes still halting between Christ and Islam', observed an anonymous writer.[14] Views like this describe the relationship between the Muslims and Christians as being tense. It indicates a desire to subject the Muslim underclasses to settler hegemony. The organised church, and particularly the Christian missionaries, played a leading role in this regard. Against such odds it cannot be denied that the achievements of Islam occurred in spite of colonialism.

At the end of the 19th century there were several instances of combined Muslim resistance against white colonial authority. These confrontations, mainly between the two communities of Muslims and Christians, emphasises the religious dimension of politics. For instance, Muslims refused to be vaccinated during the 1882 smallpox epidemic in Cape Town (Da Costa & Davids 1994:65, Prozesky & De Gruchy 1995:141). This was seen as a statement of protest against racial prejudice and social grievances. Apparently, the reason for refusal was a religious one since Muslim leaders explained that disease was an affliction imposed by the will of God. According to their interpretation of Islamic teaching, mortals could not interfere with divine predestination. Although disguised in religious language, statements such as that of a Muslim leader who declared that his religion was above the law conveyed a political message.[15] It is clear that the Muslims rejected what they saw as the opportunism of the white authorities, who were only concerned about poor sanitary conditions among the non-white community when white health was in danger. In normal situations the authorities ignored the abject living conditions of the Muslims in the city.

During 1886, in the cemetery riots (Davids 1980:62-84), Muslims again resorted to civil disobedience in protest against the Public Health Act of 1883. This act closed all cemeteries within the city. After failing to persuade the colonial authorities to open the cemeteries, on the eve of the enforcement of the proclamations some three thousand defiant Muslims

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[14] 'The Cape Malays', *Cape Monthly Magazine* (10 July 1861), p 358.

buried one of their dead in a prohibited cemetery.[16] As a result, this event led to the imposition of martial law for three days. The cemetery dispute starting with the Municipal inquiry in 1858 and ending with the establishment of the Observatory Cemetery in 1886 showed the coercive force of the Cape Muslims against the colonial authority. Despite their apparent internal disputes (Da Costa & Davids 1994:81-102), they were determined to show that they were not going to be dictated to by a non-Muslim authority as to how they should practise their religion.

There were many remarkable Muslim figures in the history of resistance against 'White Christian' oppression in South Africa. One name which needs to be mentioned in this context is Dr Abdullah Abdurahman (1872-1940) (Prozesky & De Cruchy 1995:142, Pahad 1986:17). He was in the forefront of what was later popularly referred to as 'the struggle' (Esack 1997:27).

The 1950's saw the rise of national independence movements in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Some influential personalities, like the Egyptian premier Gamal Abdul Nasser and Ahmad Sukarno of Indonesia, were role models for politically aware South African Muslim youth. During 1957 (Tayob 1995:83) the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) was founded in Cape Town. A year later, the Claremont Muslim Association (CMA) was founded by followers of *Imam*[17] Abdullah Haron[18]. These movements addressed political questions concerned with human rights and democracy.[19] Social issues affecting the poor and the aged were also high on the agenda. A historic meeting (Tayob 1995:86), for instance, was organised by Cape Town's youth organisations on the 7 May, 1961. It was attended by about 4000 Muslims representing various organisations such as the *ulamah*, mosque and mission schools, and welfare bodies. The meeting passed a set of resolutions called the 'Call of Islam'.

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[15] The famous expression "My Religion is superior to the Law" by Abdol Burns, appeared in the *Cape Times,* 1 August 1882.

[16] Abdol Burns was the leading Cape Town Muslim in this dispute (see also the high esteem he receives as described in the *Cape Argus* of 14 November 1885).

[17] Islamic terms which appear in this study in italics are explained in the glossary in the appendix.

[18] Imam Haron was a prominent figure in the Cape in the anti-apartheid struggle and is remembered today as a hero (Esack 1997:32,44, Parker 1985:46, Pahad 1986:17). He emphasised the violation of the Islamic teachings of social justice and racial equality in the emerging apartheid ideology. He was kept under close surveillance by the state and questioned several times. In May 1969 he was put to jail and five month later he was found dead in his cell (Tayob 1995:83-86).

An extract (Haron 1986:300) illustrates its position:

> For too long now have we been together with our fellow-sufferers, subjugated, suffered, humiliated by being regarded as inferior beings, deprived of our basic rights to earn, to learn and to worship freely to the Divine Rule of Allah.
> By proclamations under the Group Areas Act we are deprived of our homes and places of worship. Even if our sacred mosques are not removed but the fact (is) that we will be driven out of our settled homes, is an act of tyranny, a transgression of our fundamental rights which no true Muslim should allow to pass.

In addition, the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 provided an important motivation for global Islamic political discourse (Esack 1997:33). For those Muslim communities which are far away from the Muslim heartland, like those in South Africa, it was of great significance. Muslims found a point of endorsement for their religious and moral struggle, which coincided with the revolutionary zeal common at the time among liberation movements in South Africa (Prozesky & De Gruchy 1995:149).

The establishment of the tricameral constitution in 1984 and widespread repression during P.W.Botha's presidency, which was again generally seen by Muslims as the 'white Christian oppression period', provoked spontaneous political opposition.[20] One focus of opposition was the ANC-backed United Democratic Front (UDF), which successfully lobbied the religious sector, Muslims included (Esack 1997:6, 36; Pahad 1986). The De Klerk reforms in the 1990's and the unbanning of the liberation movements raised the expectation that South Africa would move towards a full democracy.

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[19] Esack (1997:44) gives two Qur'anic references (4:136, 5:8) in support of "exhortations to identify with the oppressed or to rise as God's witness-bearers for justice".

[20] Haroon Laher (1984:24-27), for instance, in his article *Revising Apartheid - the 'New Ideal' the Muslim Position* sharply condemns the new constitution (Act No. 110 of 1983) because it is not based on equality. See also Mushtak Parkers's article in *Arabia* (May 1985:42-51), 'Apartheid and the Muslims'. He says that "Botha's cosmetic 'reforms' have if anything worsened the situation … and makes a mockery of the brotherhood of man preached by all religions". Ebrahim Moosa in his article (May 1983:29) *Arabia The*

For the black underclasses whose wretched experience of life was backed by Christianity, the religion of Islam with its practice and teaching appeared to be an attractive alternative. It is no surprise therefore, that many Islamic organisations were formed which took advantage of the situation (Mahida 1993). Some of these organisations displayed a very aggressive attitude and propaganda against the Christian faith,[21] which further contributed negatively to Christian-Muslim relations. In one of its publications *The Light*, the 'Islamic Missionary Society'[22] (IMS) under the leadership of Laher (1964:12) (cf ICSA 1985:4) writes:

> The Black people of Africa have had their suspicions long ago regarding the Christian concept of the equality of man. Christian Churches must accept the full blame because they are responsible for their state of affairs.

Meer (1970:12) summarises the Muslim position when she states:

> … while Islam works for the dignity and the freedom of the human individual, apartheid works for the enslavement of man to the forces of prejudice and fear. It is in these fundamental respects that the two ideologies are in a state of conflict.

In terms of past involvement, it is clear that on the basis of the very principles of Islam, Muslims were opposed to apartheid.[23] In one of its issues in 1984, the Cape Town Newspaper *Muslim Views* records 17 points in which religious freedom is questioned. The general feeling among Muslims was that as long as they are not free racially, they are not free religiously. Lubbe (1986) outlines numerous areas of conflict in his article *Christians, Muslims and Liberation in South Africa*.

For instance, Lubbe (1986:32) accuses Christians of having "developed a certain attitude of arrogance. This attitude implies that Christians do not need Muslims … that they do not

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Islamic World Review, emphasis the same point when he says: "The Botha government's new 'reform' plans demand a united response from the apartheid-state Muslims".

[21] For example, the IPCI (see study by Jamal 1991) was formed in Durban in 1957 under the leadership of Ahmad Deedat.

[22] The IMS (see study by Maurer 1996) was founded in Johannesburg in 1958. In 1961 the IMS started its literature outreach in Soweto. See also 'Aims and Objectives' of the IMS (Mahida 1993:85).

[23] Muslims held numerous rallies to speak against apartheid. The *Muslim Views,* (1985:3) article: 'Apartheid must be destroyed', for instance reports about a rally held in Cape Town: "The Muslims of Cape Town have once again served notice that their struggle for justice, peace and equality is as strong now as it was 300 years ago when our forefathers arrived as slaves and led the struggle for freedom and liberation".

need to be aware of them, neither do they need to make room for them". This negative attitude was also displayed when the Dutch Reformed Church Synod passed a resolution which identified Islam as a threat to Christianity and pointed out that Islam was a "false religion and a great danger". This particular text of the resolution reads as follow:

> Synod … points out that Islam is a false religion which represents a serious threat to Christianity in South Africa, and the world (DRC 1986:683, translation by Kritzinger 1991:228).

Such resolutions as these further damaged the relations between the two faith communities and caused an outcry among Muslims in South Africa (Tayob 1995:162-163). What Emilio Castro (1976:365) says in general about deteriorating relations between Islam and Christianity, applies therefore to the South African situation as well:

> Islam and Christianity are missionary faiths;[24] among the adherents of both there is a desire to share the riches of the faith and the heritage with others. But it is notorious that, in the attempt to fulfil this missionary vocation, missionary activities of Christians among Muslims, and of Muslims among Christians, have sometimes led to grievances on both sides; both groups have long memories of past pressures to conform or more recent experiences of aggressive and insensitive proselytism.

1.2.3 Conversion as an Area of Conflict

Conversion between Christians and Muslims often causes conflict. There are many reports of tension as a result of conversion wherever these two faiths meet. Fisher (1973:32), for instance, reporting on conversion in black Africa, says that conversion was "likely to arouse scorn in traditional society". Since the beginning of the 19th Century there were some efforts of Christian missionary work among Muslims.

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[24] Murad (1986), for instance, maintains that the very purpose and duty of the whole Muslim *ummah* is to witness to all of humanity.

The witness of the churches to Muslims, however, was always rather weak and in general it can be said, that most Christians view this work as 'very difficult' and avoid becoming involved. Da Costa and Davids (1994:66) speak of "Opposition to Missionary Work … even the Christian missionary schools … could not break the Cape Muslim commitment to Islam". He continues saying that "it proved to be a complete failure" and gives the following quote from the Bishop of Cape Town in 1848 (Colonial Church Chronicles):

> Even Mahomedans (sic) appear to have been more zealous than we in the work of conversion. There are, I believe, 8000 recent converts to that false creed in southern Africa and the work is still going on. I grieve to add that I have been informed by many whose statements I cannot question, that the conversion even from Christianity to Mahometanism (sic) are by no means unknown in that colony (cf. Arnold 1974:352).

Only recently some Christian organisations have undertaken to systematically conduct missionary work among Muslims (Gilchrist 1997:104-107). Since the 1950's several Muslim organisations have undertaken missionary work *(da'wah)*[25] among African communities, with a growing rate of conversion (Esack 1997:43, Vawda 1994:534, ICSA 1985:16, Parker 1985:51). During this time, many Blacks from a Christian background accepted the Islamic faith, often because of political reasons.[26]

Also in *Imam* Haron's case, for instance, it was the conversion of African people to Islam which intensified the conflict between him and the state. This eventually led to his detention and his death in jail in 1969. Tayob (1995:86) gives the following report on this matter:

> He supported the Islamic missionary activity that took place in the townships. In particular, *Imam* Haron was slowly drawn into the lives of the newly-converted African Muslims around Cape Town … It was through these contacts that Haron was drawn more directly into the political struggle against the state. He first began by providing material assistance to victims of detention in state jails. Later, he became a safe conduit for passing information between anti-apartheid activists … The state then kept a close surveillance on his activities and questioned him several times …

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[25] There is no difference in meaning between '*da'wah*' ending with or without 'h', the only difference being the transliteration technique. In this work *da'wah* with an 'h' is used. The basic meaning is 'to call', 'to summon', 'to invite'. It refers to Islamic 'missionary activity'. For a survey of the term *da'wah* see Maurer (1996:6-13).

In 1986 the first mosque in Soweto was opened.[27] Since then many more people have converted to Islam, now not only because of political reasons but for various other motives. In many cases this has caused divisions and problems between family members and between the two religious communities.

Muslims who want to enquire about the Christian faith and the church are often treated suspiciously by Christians and are not welcomed. This is because many Christians have a stereotyped, misinformed view about Muslims being 'terrorists', 'opportunists', 'money greedy people whom one cannot trust' and the like. On the other hand, Christians who convert to become Muslims are often treated unjustly by their Christian friends and relatives. Their motives are seen as of 'worldly nature' rather than religious. Nevertheless, one has to admit, that such views are often fuelled by statements and attitudes made by Muslims themselves.[28]

However, very much the same can be said about the Muslim community. A Muslim who enquires about the Christian faith and wants to convert to Christianity is often treated badly, rejected, persecuted and viewed as a traitor to the Islamic cause.[29] Many Muslims propagate religious freedom but see it in practice only as a 'one way street'.[30] People have the freedom to accept Islam but there is no freedom to leave the fold of Islam. In Christian circles it is often said that it is relatively easy to become a Muslim but more difficult to leave Islam and become a Christian. It is indeed true that many Muslims can be found in South Africa who come from a Christian background whereas there are relatively few Muslims who have converted to Christianity (Van Der Merwe 1936:290)[31]. One of the main factors was that Christianity in South Africa was seen as the religion of those who did the enslaving and the colonising.

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[26] See also chapter six of this study.

[27] Mosque in Dhlamimi, Soweto. See article in 'SHAAN' magazine, September 1986, page 20 and article in Muslim Digest 1985, 35;12, pages 42-43, by Yusuf Nazeer: 'The Soweto Mosque: symbol of a divine destiny'.

[28] For example, Mr Yousuf Deedat from the IPCI, Durban is quoted to have said: "We are going to turn South Africa into a Muslim state. We have the money to do it" (Johannesburg, Sunday Times 22/10/95).

[29] The 'Law of Apostasy' in Islam is a very contentious issue in this respect. It will be dealt with in section 7.3.2 of this study.

[30] In this context Muslims often quote the Qur'an: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:256).

Already in 1838 the Reverend J.D. Saunders expressed this sentiment and the tension between the two faith communities (Worden 1985:32-33):

> The slaves, oppressed by their heavy yoke, excluded from partaking of the privileges and comforts of our holy religion, torn from their children, cruelly beaten, have in return no predeliction for our faith….there has been so long such a deep gulf of separation between the white and black man, that the black man has no desire to enter into the Christian Church, whose gates have been so long shut against him; he prefers joining with those who have been his friends in his distress, who invite, and encourage him to bring his children to the same school, to attend the same Mosque, and to look forward to meeting again in the same paradise.

Kritzinger (1980:90-91) calls this relation 'rivalry'. He states in his article 'Islam as rival of the Gospel in Africa':

> There are two aspect to the "rivalry" between Islam and Christianity in Africa: 1) competing for the allegiance of the remaining followers of African Traditional Religions (A.T.R); 2) winning converts from each other … This competition is therefore not so much a geographical issue any more, but is becoming a merely numerical one … There is very little possibility that this rivalry will cease since both Islam and Christianity are missionary faiths with truth claims that contradict each other at crucial points.[32]

This statement sounds rather pessimistic. However, Kritzinger (1980:91) balances this when he says that "Christians and Muslims do share many things in common and co-operation between them in areas of e.g. justice and development is possible".

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[31] Van der Merwe gives a brief account of Christian Missionary efforts among Muslims by different organisations and churches. He concludes by saying that " very few have accepted Christianity". The observation in 1936 of this trend has not changed to this day (cf. Knitter 1985:4).

[32] The central points of contradiction from the side of Muslims concern the Christian doctrines of Trintiy, Incarnation, Crucifixion, Atonement, and the trustworthiness of the Bible. The contentious issues from the side of Christians are the Muslim doctrines of the prophethood of Muhammad, the denial of the crucifixion, and the Pelagian view of sin.

The resurgence of Christian mission and Islamic *da'wah* organisations was another factor which caused tension in Christian-Muslim relations.[33] The prime aim of these organisations was to convert people to their own faith. This is in particular true of two organisations, namely of the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) in Durban and 'Jesus to the Muslims' in Benoni.

Established by Ahmad Deedat in 1957, the IPCI has become internationally famous for its aggressive criticism of Christianity and the Bible (Deedat 1993, Vawda 1994:540). This organisation also wanted to prevent Muslims from becoming Christians (Jamal 1991). The efforts by the IPCI had the support, though not always, of various other Muslim organisations (Tayob 1995:89). Esack (1997:218) states that there "is no record of Deedat or his organisation ever having pronounced a word against apartheid other than within the context of Muslim-Christian polemics; 'Christianity was responsible for it and Islam has all the answers'".

'Jesus to the Muslims' was founded in June 1975 in Benoni by John Gilchrist. Deedat and Gilchrist had a number of personal and public encounters. Some of these meetings were friendly in nature but a public debate in February 1975 ended in a court case (Gilchrist 1977:113). This and other events caused considerable amount of ill-feeling between the two religious communities. Gilchrist (1977:90,112), a Christian missionary from Benoni for instance, reports several incidents were he received letters with abusive language and on other occasions was threatened with physical assault.[34]

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[33] The 'Moslem Dawah Society of South Africa', for instance, has been founded in 1976 in Johannesburg by a group of Moslem converts (Joyce 1981).

[34] Gilchrist (1977:112) reports that in letters received by Muslims he was described among many other things as "a puny insignificant intellectual pygmy, a mischiefmaker, a rat, a pugnacious religious pugilist, a baked bean, a baboon and a fraud".

1.3 Need for and Significance of the Study

Today in South Africa religious pluralism is a fact no one can deny (Kauuova 1997).[35] During the colonial period the Christian religion enjoyed privileges in regard to education, public media and a partnership with the government. There was no denial that other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, etc. existed. However, these religions were only tolerated but not acknowledged. In 1994 the issue had taken a new direction with the dismantling of apartheid and the democratisation of South Africa. Now, the plurality of religious traditions are seen as the norm. It means that all religions are equal and have the same rights before the law of the country. The Constitution (1996:7,8,15) reads as follow in this respect:

> Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law…
>
> Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion …
>
> Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community -
>
> a) to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and
>
> b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.

Christianity in South Africa needs now to come to terms with the fact that all religions have equal rights. Or as Esack (1997:3) puts it; the "core of religious pluralism" is "this acceptance of the Other". Kauuova (1997:i) speaks of 'a challenge to the church':

> Religious pluralism has become a challenge to the Christian Church. Where the non-Christian religions previously had been purely seen as objects of mission and evangelism they are now "partners" in this whole activity. They are "share holders" in the public arena.

Kritzinger (1991:215) expressed the same challenge and need when he said in 1991 that "the reality of religious pluralism has not yet sufficiently dawned on most Christian theologians in South Africa". In this article, Kritzinger (1991:217) speaks of his approach

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[35] See also Knitter (1985:2-7) who speaks of religious pluralism as "a newly experienced reality" in the West.

as a "Christian theology of religions, since there are many other theologies". Kritzinger (1991:218) goes on by stating:

> Perhaps the clearest way in which a religious group reveals its theology of other religions (and of the world) is in its missionary activities … we must begin to view other religions also as *missionary* movements. The fact that Christian theologies of religions developed initially in Christian missionary circles often had the result that other faiths were viewed as "target groups" … What we now need to do in Christian missiology is also to analyse the *mission* of *other* religions, not in order to devise better strategies to "counter" them, but to be able to understand how and why they are growing.

The change in the history of South Africa since 1994 has therefore decreed that Islam, as a missionary movement, needs to be seen by the churches as an equal in every respect.[36] I agree with Lubbe (1986:33) when he states that "Christian theology will have to correct the image which many Christians have of Muslims". This implies as well that the churches need an adequate missiological understanding of conversion. This will help the churches to understand and respect Muslims better. It will also serve the need for understanding why there are Christians who convert to Islam and it will therefore give indications why Islam is growing. This adequate understanding will hopefully also contribute to better relations between the two faith communities in South Africa. The importance of acquiring this understanding is highlighted in what Kritzinger (1991:227) says:

> A Christian theology of religions that does not tackle these questions head-on, will quickly become irrelevant to the unfolding new society. Nicolson (1991:81) rightly says that if religious groups are unable to accept religious pluralism, they will be "irrelevant to the establishment of a democracy".

There is also the need to be self-critical, open minded and to see other religions from their angle. Often Christians fear, by accepting other religions as equal and entering into interfaith dialogue, that they have to give up their missionary zeal and that they will be no

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[36] In respect to dialogue too, Lubbe (1986:33) affirms that it can only take place 'between equals'.

longer 'true Christians'. I disagree with this sentiment and would like to emphasise what Kritzinger (1991:223)[37] said in this respect:

> This does not mean that the content of faith (the *fides quae* in scholastic terminology) is to be regarded as irrelevant in interfaith dialogue … Dialogue is an encounter of *commitments*, which are firmly (but not arrogantly) held by all the participants. This is therefore not a call to adopt a posture of theological relativism or to create a new "world religion", but to say farewell to arrogance in relation to people of other faiths.

Another need in the context of religious pluralism, especially in respect of conversion, is a 'code of missionary conduct'. Kritzinger (1991:224) reports from the dialogues of the WCRP-SA in 1988 that "religious liberty does include freedom of religious groups to propagate their faiths, but that a 'code of missionary conduct' should be drawn up jointly by religious communities". The compilation of such a document could contribute to better understanding and respect. It will, however, not be easy to find complete agreement on this difficult issue but it could improve people's understanding in seeing other religions as missionary movements, each with its own theology of religions.

Today few Christians anywhere in the world find themselves in a situation where coexistence with other religionists is not part and parcel of their daily life. Bosch (1991:483) argues that:

> The various models seem to leave no room for embracing the abiding paradox of asserting both ultimate commitment to one's own religion and genuine openness to another's, of constantly vacillating between certainty and doubt.

For Bosch both dialogue and mission can be understood only with the meeting of hearts rather than of minds. He proposes an honest seeking after dialogue.[38] This whole issue brings a Christian into a dilemma: "How do we maintain the tension between being both missionary and dialogical?" (Bosch 1991:488). Bosch (1991:483) observes that "we are dealing here with a mystery" and Christians therefore need to accept and appreciate this

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[37] Kritzinger's arguments are based on the two papers by the *World Conference on Religion and Peace* in South Africa (WCRP-SA 1988 and 1991). The WCRP-SA was established in 1984.
[38] For the practical application of his proposal on dialogue Bosch (1991:483-488) uses eight steps.

tension. The churches need to understand and accept the fact and tension that Christians are converting to Islam.[39]

This is a far better approach than, as the churches at present generally do, to ignore this affair. Le Mond (1993:4) confirms this when he says: "For years Christians have lived with the myth that theirs was the only religion actively seeking converts". There is therefore the need to do research of conversion and its motives not just as a 'one-way' but as a 'two-way' activity in order to analyse it in respect of common ground and differences.[40] This is in agreement to what Kritzinger (1991:225) said:

> It seems to me, then, that a "theology of apostasy" should be an integral part of a Christian theology of religions. This is in keeping with the change from a one-way to a two-way theology of religions, to which I have already referred: an adequate Christian theology of religions will understand Christianity not only as a missionary faith but also as a faith being addressed and challenged by the missions of other living religions.

The need to conduct more research on conversion has been recognised by scholars world wide. Schreuder and Oddie (1989:500), for instance, are convinced that "a considerable challenge has come to face scholars of religion concerned to deepen our understanding of 'conversion' in African and Asian society" (cf. Poston 1991:159). In the South African context there is, according to my findings, very little empirical research done on the topic of conversion and its motivations.[41] One of the reasons for the lack of it is that to conduct such empirical research as presented in this study would have been an almost impossible task before April 1994.[42]

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[39] Bosch (1991:489) states that salvation as traditionally understood does not offer a solution to the question of the relationship with other faiths. On the one hand, the proclamation of God's reign is at the very heart of the church's vocation in the world. On the other hand the Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are the least expected.

[40] Conn (1986:7) too, for instance, confirms this by reminding us that "the conversion door swings both ways".

[41] This has been confirmed not only by Christians leaders (e.g. John Gilchrist, interview 6/6/1998) but also from Muslims, e.g. Prof Y Dadoo, UNISA. He also admitted that very little is written by Muslims on the topic of conversion (interview on 2/2/1998).

[42] Mr M S Laher from the IMS told me quite frankly that he would never have given me any information if I would have approached him before 1994 (before the new era inaugurated by Presiden Nelson Mandela). It would have indeed been almost impossible to gather data because of the suspicion between Muslims and Christians during that time.

The situation in some parts of the world is however different. Robbings (1988:3) for instance, in looking at the sociology of the New Religious Movements (NRM) in the USA, says that "it seems clear that a disproportionate amount of the research on new religions has involved studies of processes of conversion and commitment". It is evident, that conversion has initiated much discussion and research since the 1970's. Robbins sees two basic factors for this increased interest in conversion:

1) The concern of the popular press and the media over the alleged employment by movements of 'brainwashing' methods for effecting 'forced conversions'.

2) The assumption, prevalent in a 'secular' society, that spiritual apotheosis is an unnatural and problematic phenomenon which entails esoteric processes (Robbins 1988:3).

Löffler (1967:258-259) sees the general interest in conversion and need for research as originating from the pressure of *contemporary events*. According to Löffler these 'attacks' come from three sides: "From a new self-understanding of men, from the new pluralistic religious world situation, and finally from secularising forces". The present study aims in particular to make a contribution in respect to the pluralistic religious situation, i.e. Christian-Muslim relations.

I conclude this section with a quote from Conn (1979:107) who, speaking from a Christian perspective, emphasises the need in general of research in this area of conversion motives when he says that

> the need for a fresh look at the understandings, motivations, and expectations Muslims in their diverse cultures bring to the encounter with the Christian and with Christ. What are they looking for, and why? These understandings and motivations differ widely from Muslim to Muslim and from area to area. Yet they have also many common elements that only informed research can identify.

1.4 Problem Statement

Mason (1996) gives in her book *Qualitative Researching*[43] some concrete guidelines in respect to the planning of a study (cf Mason & Bramble 1989:76-78). With regard to the research questions, Mason (1996:14-16) is of the opinion that:

> One of the main virtues of expressing whatever it is you want to research and explain as a puzzle is that it focuses your mind on *research questions* … and therefore their importance cannot be overstated … those questions to which you as researcher really want to know the answers, and in that sense they are the formal expression of your intellectual puzzle.

The intellectual puzzle of my thesis is as follow:

How can a deeper understanding of conversion motives contribute to a more adequate[44] missiological understanding of conversion?

In order to be able to formulate such an adequate missiological understanding of conversion, I propose the following empirical research questions:

1. **What are the motives of Muslims converting to Christianity?**
2. **What are the motives of Christians converting to Islam?**

These research questions form the platform on which my study is built and are the essence of my enquiry. It is my conviction, that these questions will be best answered by means of qualitative empirical research.[45]

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[43] This book gives excellent guidance on how qualitative research should be done: "systematically and rigorously conducted (not rigid or structured) … yet flexible and contextual" (Mason 1996:5). Mason gives some practical examples based on her own study (how inheritance is handled in 'ordinary families' in contemporary Britain).

[44] With the word 'adequate' I want to express that a 'missiological understanding of conversion' should be relevant, appropriate and suitable in a specific research context. I do not claim that it is the only method to be used universally.

[45] See methodology as outlined in chapter four of this study.

The 'problem' that I am researching in this study can best be portrayed by means of a diagram:

Diagram 1.1: Conversion to Christianity and Islam

Conversion to Christianity

Christian Communities

Christian-Muslim relations

Muslim Communities

Conversion to Islam
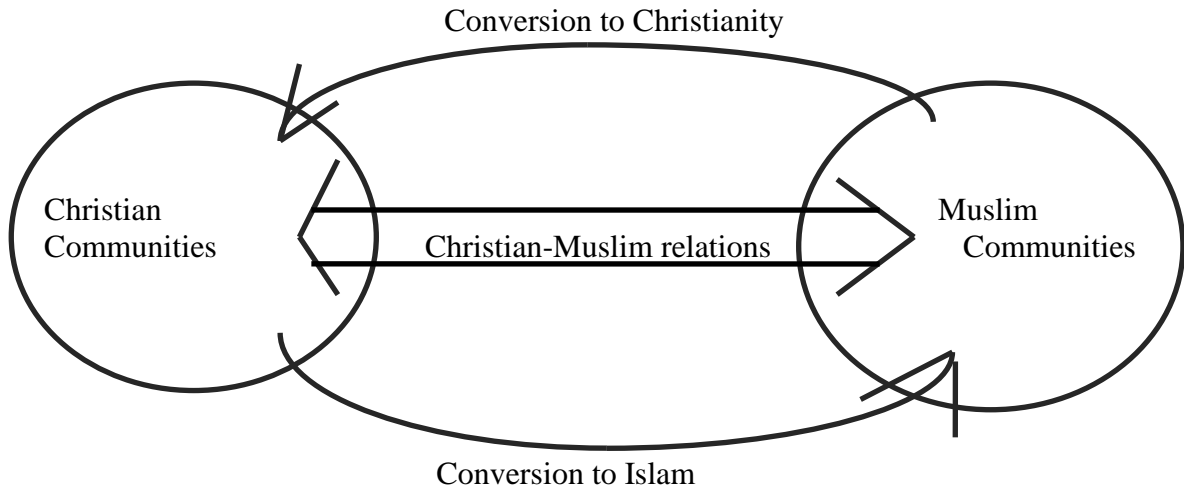
In South Africa, consisting of religiously pluralistic societies, we often find a Christian and Muslim community existing side by side. The relations between these two communities vary from society to society and depend on various factors. The diagram also shows that people choose to convert from Christian communities to Muslim communities and vice versa.

In respect to 'Christian-Muslim relations' the following can be said:

1. Christians and Muslims have a long history of conflict. Gilchrist (1977:64) observes that "Until the Reformation, Christians and Muslims usually met only on the battlefield", (cf. Cilliers 1997:192, Naudé 1978:5). Though the conflict today is no longer fought on a battlefield, relations between members of these two faiths in general cannot be described as being friendly and open.[46] Christians and Muslims have inherited

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[46] Islam divides the whole world into two parts: 1) the territory of Islam (*dar al-Islam)* and 2) the territory left over: the 'territory of war'(*dar al-harb)* is the land of unbelievers; enemy lands to be conquered. Tröger (1986:121) describes the attitude of Muslims towards people who do not confess Islam as "there is no real community with them, only sufferance, tolerance at best – a contractually ordered *peaceful* coexistence".

a legacy of negative relationships from the past. The general attitude between the two faiths were harmed by events such as the crusades[47] and colonialism.

2. The background as outlined above, shows that the specific history in South Africa has added to this already strained relationship. Attempts at conversion (from both sides) have often soured relationships even further.

3. Today, Christian and Muslim communities live side by side (cf. Knitter 1985:3). Since they live within the same society they share much in common in respect of religion, culture, social life, economics and politics. Due to this contact, there are believers from both religions that are attracted to convert from the one to the other. The very fact of people converting from one community to another has often further influenced the relationship negatively from time to time.

4. On the other hand, there are also positive aspects regarding respect and appreciation between the two communities. Many families have members belonging to both faiths where relationships seem to be friendly. At many workplaces Muslims and Christians have peaceful relationships. Often members of both faiths live peacefully side by side, belong to the same political party, are members of the same clubs, etc.

It becomes clear, that the conversion issue between Christians and Muslims is a factor which contributed negatively to the relationship between the members of these two faiths. The topic of conversion is therefore not addressed openly and honestly.

Inter-religious conversion is a very sensitive issue and often people avoid speaking about it altogether. It is true that to see a member of one's own faith changing to another religion is a painful experience for many people. For this reason converts are often isolated and even hated and persecuted. I have personally witnessed many converts suffering under these conditions simply because in practice people do not tolerate freedom of choice.

The following factors contribute to the problem of this tension (cf. Gilchrist 1977:89):

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[47] Often Muslims, even today in South Africa, remind Christians of what happened during the time of the crusades (AD 1071-1272) by indicating how 'evil' Christianity is. Browne (1933:144) said it in the following words: "One cannot help regarding the Crusades as the greatest tragedy in the history of Christianity, and the greatest set-back to the progress of Christ's kingdom on earth". This period of history (cf. Nutting 1964:170-180, Cilliers 1997:3-4) had indeed a profound and lasting negative effect on Christian-Muslim relations.

- Muslims and Christians have stereotyped negative ideas about each other and make little effort to correct this.
- There is often little understanding and respect for each other.[48] It often leads to ridiculing people of the other faith concerning certain religious practices (cf. Fisher 1973:32).
- Christians and Muslims accuse each other of using 'unethical' methods to win converts (Scantlebury 1996:257-267).
- Many Christians and Muslims cannot conceive that members of their own faith would convert to the other religion and therefore question the integrity of the motives of conversion.

The churches can contribute to better relations between Christians and Muslims and improve the situation of converts with better understanding and care by:

1. Becoming aware of and respecting the various motives of conversion as they exist and
2. … accepting a more holistic missiological understanding of conversion.

1.5 Purpose and Aim

The purpose of this study has already been partly indicated above. In summary, the following can be said:

Historically we have seen that there are many areas of tension and problems between Christians and Muslims in South Africa. It is not the purpose of this study just to find mistakes made in the past and to point fingers, but rather to find ways of improvement. It is of no benefit in just finding fault and accusing one another. This study also does not aim to show who has made bigger mistakes.

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[48] An example of 'misunderstanding' is displayed in the article of the Muslim Views (Aug-Sept 1987). Here M F Arnold and Mohamed Haroon examine some literature and activities of the Christian mission 'Life Challenge'.

There is, therefore, a need to find ways to improve the relationship between Muslims and Christians. This study aims to present a contribution to positively influence the relations between the believers of these two faith communities. As I have pointed out above, one of the factors which causes these tensions mentioned between Christians and Muslims is the issue of *conversion*. The present study aims to focus on this topic. The study aims to look therefore at conversion experiences of Christians and Muslims in both directions, i.e. why Christians convert to Islam and why Muslims convert to Christianity.

I am convinced that such a direct comparison and analysis of conversion experiences is possible, allowed and even necessary. This has been confirmed by scholars such as Fisher (1973:30) who said that "both faiths have been influenced by Africa, then it is reasonable to assume that there must be certain common elements of influence, allowing direct comparison between Muslim experience and Christian" (cf. Horton 1975:223).

Christians have a certain definition and understanding of conversion. The step taken in this study is to conduct research in respect of conversion and its motives and to analyse the findings.

Thus, the research aims to give a deeper and broader understanding of the following:

1. The various motives of conversion chosen by the converts.
2. Missiological understandings of conversion by the churches.

The purpose of the study is therefore to make a contribution to a relevant and adequate missiological understanding in respect to conversion and its motives in the present day South African context.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

The task of missiology, which is to reflect critically on the mission of the church, should constantly be critically examined. Luzbetak (1988:13) emphasises that the field of Missiology "calls for a definition that would be more compatible with the great variety of

understanding of mission throughout the history of the field, especially today…The definition must, among other things, not overlook the non-theological interdisciplinary aspects of missiology ".

According to Luzbetak (1988:14), the most important aspect is not so much human wisdom but rather what "*God* regards as genuine salvation activities and what *God* means by 'the Kingdom of God'. Theology is therefore the real acid test in mission and holds the place of honour among the disciplines involved". He emphasises that all other fields have a supportive nature and missiology "is unable to deal with its theological concerns without the aid of a variety of other disciplines, both theological and secular". Luzbetak also confirms that "Missiology is multidisciplinary in character and holistic in approach".[49]

Luzbetak (1988:14) further argues that missiology "is not a *mere conglomeration* of disciplines but a network of disciplines that systematically interact with one another." Because of this fact missiology should be regarded as a *field* rather than just a discipline.

It is for these reasons mentioned above that in my study I look at the field of missiology with the support of some psychological insights and practical knowledge[50] as found in the existing social environment. Only with these supportive disciplines can the scope of missiology be looked at in a broader sense. It becomes clear therefore that I am not suggesting that the churches should abandon their unique 'authentic Christian conversion'[51] definition but rather enlarge its missiological understanding.

An adequate missiological understanding can be obtained through the means and subsequent reflection of the following components:

- Existing understanding of conversion by Christians and the missiological debates on this topic (will be dealt with in chapter two of this study).

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[49] Luzbetak (1988:15) presents an interesting 'Flow Chart of Components and Forces in the Missiological Process'. This chart was originally developed by Anthropologist Alan P. Tippett.
[50] This knowledge could also be termed as 'practical mission experience' (Luzbetak 1988:14).
[51] See paragraph 2.6 of this study.

- Aspects of psychological understanding on decision-making in the conversion process (see chapter three).

- Empirical findings on the motives of conversion (see chapters five, six and seven).

The combined study and merger of these two fields, missiology and psychology, should now rather contribute to a broader understanding of conversion than remain separate entities. It is evident, that in recent years scholars have come to appreciate more the research done on conversion in different disciplines and seen it as a valuable contribution rather than as a dichotomy. Griffin (1980:31) confirms this by saying that "I have come to feel that psychology is no longer, if it ever was, an enemy of religion. Whoever expected a psychologist to deal with conversion in the manner of a theologian? To the extent that psychologists set about their work scientifically and honestly, they provide us with very good insight on conversion".

Religious definitions of conversion tend to interpret the process in light of the faith that is being developed (O'Rourke 1985:38). On the other hand, psychology attempts to understand *what* is happening and, therefore, often emphasises the *movement* and its *causes* rather than trying to understand its significance for faith. A psychological view of religious conversion is descriptive by nature as it is an attempt to understand the process of the change (cf. Gillespie 1991:122).

1.7 Delimitations

The following limitations apply to this study:

1. The historical background of South Africa, as described in paragraph 1.2. This has been discussed as this study focuses only on the social and political environment of South Africa as it affects its people in making decisions in their lives.

2. The two religions under discussion in this study are Christianity and Islam. There is no doubt that people from religions other than Christianity or Islam are converting to new religious convictions for various reasons. However, I find it necessary to limit the sphere of study to these two religions.

3. The area of research in Christian-Muslim relations is limited to the missiological topic of conversion and its motives. There are many more aspects on conversion such as the stages of its process, power encounter and identity formation which could be researched. However, it is not possible in a study such as this to explore all the aspects of conversion. Here, I have chosen to focus and analyse the motives of people for converting to a new religious community.

4. The empirical research focuses on the Gauteng area. To build friendship and trust with people of other faiths needs patience and much time. I know all of the converts personally and I have met many of them over a period of many years. It would have been impossible for me to travel extensively to other parts of South Africa to meet converts on a regular basis. Therefore my research is limited to Gauteng.

5. Converts who were interviewed had to qualify as follows: They are Muslims who came from a Christian background or Christians who came from an Islamic background. Although there are many people who convert to Christianity or Islam from various other backgrounds, only converts with the above qualifications were considered in this study and their conversion stories were analysed.

6. This thesis is done in the Department of Missiology, not Religious Studies. The study takes its stand within Christian theology. It is directed primarily to improve the witness of the Christian churches and to build better relations with Muslim communities.

7. The missiological topics and debates considered in chapter two are limited to those which have some relevance to this study as a whole. It is impossible to discuss all the themes in this field since the material available is very extensive.

8. The psychological aspects in chapter three of this study represent only one 'strand' of psychology. Only those theories which were found to contribute to the understanding of this study in a meaningful way are discussed.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

The definitions of terms used in this study which needed clarification are given below in the way they are understood.

Church: The body of people forming the Christian faith is generally referred to as the 'church'. When used with a capital 'C' it refers to a Christian congregation's name such as 'Methodist Church'. The plural 'churches' refers to many Christian denominations.

Conversion: Cusack (Olson 1996:15) brings to attention the terminological debate on the use of phrases such as 'religious transition', rather than 'conversion' or 'Christianisation'. Cusack is of the opinion that "to attempt to define any one exclusively from the other two is excessively pedantic and generally unhelpful". I tend to agree with this opinion with the exception that I totally avoid the term 'Christianisation' as a substitute for conversion in my study since I look at conversion not only towards Christianity but also to Islam.

In addition to 'conversion' and 'religious transition', I will also use the terms 'religious change' and 'transformation' (cf. Smith 1978:52). These terms will be used interchangeably in my study. Affiliated terms such as 'proselytise' will be explained in contrast to 'conversion' in the relevant section of this study (see 2.3).

In the past, traditional Islamic thought has not had a general word for the concept of conversion. What non-Muslims would call 'conversion to the Muslim faith' Muslims describe by such words as *islam* (surrender to God), and *ihtida'* (following right guidance). Conversely, what non-Muslims would call 'conversion from the Muslim faith' Muslims call *irtidad* (apostasy) (Woodberry 1992:22). However, in more recent times and in westernised countries, such as South Africa, Muslims have generally adopted a more neutral approach where conversion is seen as a 'change of religious affiliation'.

Convert: In this study a 'convert' is a person who has converted or changed the religion from Islam to Christianity (= Christian convert) or Christianity to Islam (= Muslim convert). In this context it is important to note that some Muslims, especially Africans who have changed religion from Christianity to Islam, do not want to be called 'converts' but prefer the term 'reverts' (cf. Maurer 1996:62). This term originates from certain Islamic teachers

and organisations (e.g. the IMS in Johannesburg) who propagate the notion that 'all people are by nature Muslims'.

Accordingly, all humans are in harmony with nature, otherwise they could not exist and since Islam is the religion in harmony with nature, all people are Muslims whether they know or accept it or not. Therefore, if a person embraces Islam the person then simply 'reverts', and not 'converts', to the original religion by acknowledging that he/she is and has always been a Muslim without knowing it (cf. Poston 1991:162). This teaching is also used to propagate Islam as 'being the natural religion' and to make it, so to say, easier for prospective converts to 'revert' or return to the 'original religion' of Islam. The IMS in Johannesburg, for instance, has used the supportive teaching from the book by Hamid (1989:142).

Although the term 'revert' is sometimes used by certain Muslims, the great majority of Christians and Muslims are using the term 'convert' when speaking of people who have changed their religion. In view of this I too use the term 'convert' throughout my study though occasionally, to alternate the wording, 'interviewee' or 'respondent' has also been used at applicable places.

Motif: According to Cowie (1989:807), a motif is a "decorative design or pattern" or a "theme or idea that is repeated and developed in a work of music or literature". There is some confusion in the use of the two words 'motif' and 'motive'. In Collins (1995:409), for instance, a motive is also described as a 'design' and at the same time as 'motivation'. There is, however, a difference between 'motif' and 'motive' although I would argue that a 'motif' could also be a 'motivation' for some action. In my study I prefer to use the term motive since it defines the aim more clearly and it is of more popular use (cf. Butselaar 1981). I will only use the term 'motif' where I refer to an author who specifically uses this terminology (see for instance 3.2.2).

Motive: Cowie (1989:808) defines 'motive' as "that which causes somebody to act in a particular way; reason". In German motive is translated as 'Beweggrund'. A similar term is also 'catalyst' which is defined as "a person or thing that causes a change". Some authors use the term catalyst to describe motivation (cf. Rambo 1993:48). The focal point of my

study is the motives of conversion; i.e. the things which causes a person to change his or her religion.

Narrative of a convert: A narrative is a spoken or written account of connected events in order of events (Cowie 1989:823). Rambo (1993:158-159) says that "these stories as they are retold orally and composed as autobiographies become the paradigms by which people interpret their own lives … conversion autobiographies stimulate imitation and provide reinforcement". The definition, difference and use of 'narrative' in contrast to 'story' and other similar terms have been discussed at length by different scholars (cf. Hauerwas & Jones 1989).

How people speak is unique in each situation, or as Crites (1989:65) says that the "way people speak … is to be sure always culturally particular; it bears the imprint of a time and a place. A people speaks a particular language, not the same as that spoken in another land nor quite the same as that spoken by their fathers, and each person adapts it with some originality to his own use". It is not the aim of this study to investigate whether or not the narratives told by converts are fully true or may contain some 'distortions'. This would be the purpose of another research. I simply accept the narratives as being told to me as being true.

Other words, like 'story'[52], 'account', 'record', 'report' or 'testimony' have been used interchangeably and in order to have some variety. These different expressions are used only in the context of 'conversion narratives' in my study and have always the same meaning as defined above.

1.9 Logical Sequence and Overview of the Chapters

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[52] Crites (1989:69) says that we sometimes apply the ambiguous term *myth* to 'story'. I do not imply this notion when I use the term 'story' in my study.

To begin with I comment about the title of this thesis. The first part: "IN SEARCH OF A NEW LIFE" originates from people who said that by searching for a better or new life they converted to another religion. C2[53] for instance said that he came to South Africa in order to find 'a better life'. In the cause of this search he converted from Islam to Christianity. Others were engaged in the same search and converted from Christianity to Islam. I have chosen the word 'new' since I believe it expresses the issue in a more holistic way (cf. Rambo 1993:42).

The second part of the title: "CONVERSION MOTIVES OF CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS" aims to express the focal point of this study. It focuses on the *conversion motives* of Christians and Muslims who are converting to Islam and Christianity respectively (see 1.7).

In chapter two the dominant missiological perspectives on Christian conversion and its motives are discussed. There I explain current views and debates. This sketches the missiological 'scene' to which this study aims to make a contribution. Chapter two, therefore represents the missiological framework of the study.

Chapter three deals with the broader theoretical framework of the study drawn from the social sciences. It is a more abstract chapter in which I present a psychological view point of conversion and its motives. Questions such as 'How and why do people make decisions?' are addressed in order to develop an interpretative framework for analysing and interpreting the data gathered in the interviews. The psychological insights gained contribute to a holistic missiological understanding of conversion.

The next part of the study, chapter four, explains my empirical research methodology. Here I describe the design of my research questions and the method of my empirical data gathering.

The chapters five to seven form the heart of my study. Here I present and analyse the results of my empirical investigation. Chapter five concentrates on the conversion narratives of ten people, C1 - C10, who have changed their religious background from Islam to Christianity. Chapter six, on the other hand, focuses on the conversion narratives told by 10 converts, M1 - M10, who changed from Christianity to Islam. The purpose of chapter seven is to bring together the findings of the two previous chapters and analyse the results under the themes of the six motives of conversion.

Chapter eight is the conclusion, in which I develop an adequate missiological understanding of conversion in conjunction with the views described in chapter two. It will use the framework presented in chapter three and be based on the empirical findings analysed in chapter five, six and seven. In other words, it aims to be a critical interaction between the theoretical framework and the data gathered. The implications are then presented as a suggestion for a new form of Christian praxis.

The bibliography follows on. At the end the appendices contain the list of abbreviations, the glossary of Islamic terms and some further copies of important documents. In addition, the appendices also include the transcripts of the recorded conversion narratives of all the 20 converts.

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[53] For the explanation of the code system used see sections 5.1 and 6.1.

CHAPTER 2

MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO CONVERSION

The purpose of this chapter is to outline current views and debates in missiological circles on Christian conversion in general and specifically on conversion motives. There is a great amount of literature written on this topic and it is impossible and unnecessary to discuss all aspects in this field. I have therefore isolated a few topics which I believe are relevant and related to my study. These topics are then discussed in the context of my empirical research and the conclusion presented in chapter eight.

2.1 Introduction

According to Luzbetak (1988:14) the nature of missiology is "a field that studies the expansion and growth of the mission of the church in all its dimensions - communal, sacramental, kerygmatic, diaconal, and institutional". Missiology is a study of the expansion of the church and most missiologists consider missiology to be basically theological in nature.[54]

Conversion is not only a classic missionary motive,[55] it warrants a place of honour in contemporary missiological discussions. Whether it is fashionable and opportune to pay attention to conversion today may be disputed. Pitfalls should be avoided as well as possible dangerous aspects of conversion, though this is true of every theological topic. My own interest in a new approach to the understanding of conversion was not initially inspired by current missiological discussions, but by the challenge of my own practical experience.

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[54] The pioneers of missiology, for instance, during the 18th century, Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Hirscher (1788-1865), regarded the study of mission as a form of pastoral theology.

[55] Voetius (1589-1676), for instance, regarded 'the conversion of the heathen' as the first goal of mission. The second is 'the planting of churches', and the third and highest 'the glory of God' (Verkuyl 1987:21,184, cf Saayman 1992:160, Bosch 1991:256).

Further, I discovered that conversion has increasingly become a field of research for social and cultural anthropology and for general history, whereas missiologists are often concerned with other matters. Today, an impressive amount of theological literature exists on the topic of conversion (Löffler 1967:252). Many authors use the foundational insight elaborated by Lonergan (1972) and others, who have shown how conversion occurs on various levels (Cronin 1987, Dulles 1981, Mueller 1984, Navone 1989, Rambo 1982; 1987; 1993, Tippett 1977). Other authors take a more biblical-theological approach to conversion (Beernaert 1987, Haqq 1983, Löffler 1975, McBrien 1981). Still others present the psycho-social perspective (Archer 1981, J. Smith 1994, P. Smith 1994, Stogre 1976).

Since the 1950s, in respect to missiological writings, it has been possible to distinguish between an *evangelical* and an *ecumenical* trend (Löffler 1967). The evangelical point of view has continued in its traditional eschatological understanding of mission and individual salvation whereas the ecumenical perspective has changed in reaction to social and political issues. For instance, notions like 'witness' were substituted with 'dialogue'. These trends can clearly be observed in South Africa. Bosch (1976:56) writes the following on this matter:

> … the West is ever more conscious of its faults, mistakes and shortcomings. Where the West did not realise this of its own accord, the Third World was only too ready to point it out … Western colonialism, civilisation and attitudes of superiority came under fire, as did 'Western Religion'. This resulted in the West, and Western Christian churches, adopting an apologetic attitude.

Today, the ecumenical viewpoint is being propagated chiefly in the circles of the World Council of Churches and the evangelical position either as a minority voice within the WCC or by groups who have withdrawn from the WCC or have never belonged to it. Bosch (1980:35) writes that "the ecumenical position reflects a serious attempt to overcome all the dualism of the previous view". It is not my intention to evaluate the two positions critically or to express preference.[56] A basic characteristic of the ecumenical position is its openness

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[56] Bosch (1980:221) speaks in this context of *creative tension.* He emphasises the we should approach one another with humility as well as listen and try to understand each other.

towards the world.[57] I attempt to overcome the dichotomy betwen 'ecumenical' and 'evangelical' by developing a more holistic theology of conversion.

My understanding is that the church is 'missionary' when she is able to welcome outsiders and moves actively into the world. The appropriate relationship between church and world is a matter of great importance. This study promotes this notion by looking in a new way at conversion.

2.2 Conversion as a Missiological Issue

The interest of theologians in conversion springs undoubtedly from the importance of the conversion theme in the Bible and the early history of the church (Morrison 1992:1-27).[58] It is important to survey the use of the concept conversion in recent Christian missiology.

Terms most often used in the Bible for the idea of conversion are *shubh* (Hebrew), *epi-* and *apostrephein* and *metanoein* (Greek) (Löffler 1968:156, Wells 1989:30-33). Other expressions covering the same idea but casting light on it from different angles are terms such as 'becoming a believer' (Acts 11:21) and 'open the eyes' (Acts 26:18). In one way Biblical conversion is typified in the story of Jonah's ministry at Nineveh. Jesus used it too as a type of his own ministry (Mt 12:38-41). A whole city was so wicked in its greatness that it was brought to the bar of the universal judge. God sends Jonah with the message of the overthrow of the city within forty days. Scripture reports that the people believed God, proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth. Under the numinous impact of the word of judgement, they became as nothing. In reality this was a self-imposed 'overthrow' in response to God's presence as experienced in the ministry of Jonah. Because a people turn collectively from wickedness and violence to God, he in his holy freedom turns from anger and judgement to pity and mercy. His turning is salvation; theirs is conversion and salvation (cf. Shank 1976:2).

On the basis of the New Testament, certain guidelines can be presented (cf. Barclay 1963):

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[57] See for instance the book by the East German theologian Müller (1961), *Von der Kirche zur Welt,* (cf. Nissiotis 1967:269).

[58] Burkhardt (1978:33), for instance, writes: "Bekehrung ist nicht nur *ein* Thema der Propheten Israels, sie ist *das* Thema schlechthin, das ihnen aufgetragen ist" (cf. Lacan 1978:75).

1. Conversion is a theocentric phenomenon. This fact is described with several biblical metaphors. One of these is the Kingdom of God. It is in the framework of this Kingdom that the call to conversion is issued (Mk 1:15). This Kingdom has come close in Jesus Christ (Mt 4:17), so close that it is now possible to enter it. It is this eschatological situation which makes conversion possible. God prepares and calls people to conversion (Acts 11:20; 16:14).

2. Conversion concerns the whole human being in his/her fundamental relation to God. It is not merely a change of moral judgement and attitude in regard to a particular object.

3. Conversion leads via a 'power encounter'[59] to the confession that Jesus is the Lord (*kyrios*)[60]. This means that the invitation and power of Jesus is a challenge to a person's other loyalties such as the power of money (Mt 6:24) or the power of family relationships (Mt 10:37).

4. Conversion together with baptism and becoming part of a Christian community form an inseparable unity (Acts 2:38, Gal 3:26-29, 1 Cor 12:13).[61] The close relationship of conversion and baptism underlines the fact that conversion is to be understood as a starting point for a new life in Christ rather than an end in itself.

5. Conversion is a positive and joyful event (Lk 15:7) and as such the aim of apostolic mission.

As a final synthesis of his study, Witherup (1994:107-110) offers fifteen statements which, I believe, remarkably characterise a biblical understanding of conversion (cf. Häring 1978:213-223). They are as follows:

> 1. Conversion is primarily an *act of God. 2.* Conversion entails an element of *mystery* (cf. Schreuder & Oddie 1989:518). 3. Conversion is related to a variety of other *biblical themes* (sin, forgiveness, repentance, salvation, baptism, justification, etc.).[62] 4. The root notion of conversion is *change* (turning from sin, death and darkness). 5. Conversion is directly related to the revelation of the *kingdom of God.* 6. Conversion is intimately tied to the person of Jesus Christ. 7. Conversion is *relational:* new relationship with God and other human beings. 8. Conversion is both *externally* and *internally* directed. 9. The Bible

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[59] See for instance Glasser (1979:133) who speaks of religious conversion in terms of 'power encounter'.
[60] "Jesus is Lord" was the oldest confession of faith among Christians (1 Cor 12:3, Rom 10:9).
[61] Cf. Triebel 1976:155,188.

indicates that there are different types of conversions: some are dramatic, but most appear to be a *process.* 10. Conversion requires *preparation.* 11. Conversion always leads to an experience of *newness.* 12. Conversion affects the *whole person.* 13. Conversion involves both *internal* (attitudinal) and *external* (behavioural) changes in life. 14. Conversion is also accompanied by concrete *symbolic gestures*. 15. One prominent effect of conversion is the urge to give *testimony* to others and consequently to evangelise.

Many of these declarations are controversial issues in missiological discussions and will be discussed in this chapter as they relate to my study.

The popular Christian understanding of conversion is basically rooted in a biblical perspective, which is 'a turning towards Jesus Christ' (cf. Kraft 1979a:333, Beernaert 1987:378). Therefore, in most Christian circles 'conversion' is mainly defined only in 'Christian terminology' and viewed as being an exclusive Christian action. Le Mond (1993:4) confirms this when he says: "Conversion is a word Christians often think of as exclusively their own". Erickson (1986:933) for instance, gives a typical doctrinal definition of Christian conversion:

> The first step of the Christian life is called conversion. It is the act of turning from one's sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith … Conversion is a single entity which has two distinguishable but inseparable aspects: repentance and faith.

Griffin (1980:127) emphasises as well the awareness of sin by saying that "there is no way around sin when it comes to Christian conversion". Although there are many variations of describing the Christian understanding of conversion, the above quote by Erickson makes it quite clear how it is basically understood: Moving towards Christ with the motive being of a religious nature. This definition of conversion is seen from an exclusively Christian perspective. Kasdorf (1980:111) expresses the same notion when he says "salvation is in Christ alone and without knowledge of Him there can be no conversion".

Many church denominations in South Africa have a written statement of faith, in which they state what they understand conversion to be. These statements, mainly based on

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[62] On the topic of 'Sin and Conversion' see Fuchs (1978:247-262).

biblical references and their interpretation, do not differ much from each other. A typical example is the one of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (1997a:5-6). It is interesting to note that in this booklet, *Know and Grow,* the first chapter, out of 27, deals with *conversion.* It says there:

- The word "conversion" comes from a Latin word meaning "to turn around" and refers to the change which happens in us when we consciously decide to remove "self" as the controlling force in our lives, and instead put God on the throne of our hearts. It is sometimes referred to as "new birth" and "regeneration". St Paul describes it as a miraculous work of grace in us: "if any person is in Christ they are a new creation" (2Cor 5:17).

- There is no pattern for how conversion happens. It happens in different ways and at different speeds in different people. For some it is sudden and dramatic (Acts 16:29-34); for others it happens quietly or over a long period of growth with no particular "moment" of conversion to remember (Jer 1:5). However it happens, it is a necessary process if we are to live a meaningful Christian life. There are three main elements in conversion.
  1. *It involves repentance*
  2. *Being born again.* (Jn 3:3, Mt 9:16-17)
  3. *Conversion is an ongoing process.*

In other descriptions, conversion is seen as involving a qualitative change in experience and in the level of commitment (cf. Heirich 1977:654, Tippett 1987:261). Some Protestant denominations, wishing to preserve the term 'conversion' for an *initial* 'conviction of sin and turning to Jesus', describe a second level of conversion, which they call 'sanctification'. This involves a dramatic, qualitative shift in understanding, commitment, and behaviour which in some groups occurs a while after the first 'conversion'. It typically involves speaking in unknown tongues and other practices akin to those found among Pentecostals.

Christian theology has a long heritage of interest in conversion. It is therefore no wonder that it is considered by some to be a purely Christian phenomenon. "On a narrow view", writes Robertson (1978:197), "the idea of conversion may well be confined to Christian-based conceptions of diffuse and profound change at the level of individuals *qua* individuals".

The idea of conversion, as it is presented in the Bible, has been understood in myriad ways during the history of the Christian church and missiology. As far as the community aspect of conversion is concerned, a great change in the understanding of conversion was caused by the fact that Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire in the year 380. Then, in a state 'church situation', conversion attained the meaning of a retreat into a deeper Christian spirituality and observing literally the exhortations of Jesus. Later, during the medieval period, this development went on and conversion was understood totally in relation to monastic life. Engelbert (1980:458) observes that the term *conversi* was reserved for people who were admitted to a monastery as adults, wheras those who had been given over to a monastery as children by their parents were called *oblati.* The inner process formerly covered by the term conversion was now described by the term *poenitentia* (penitance, repentance). Griffin (1980:129) emphasises that "it is well to remember that the Bible's word for conversion is repentance".

The Reformers were rather shy of using the word conversion. Parker (1969:74) notes that the index to the Erlangen edition of Luther's works gives only four instances of 'conversion' (*Bekehrung*), but a large number of instances of 'repentance' or 'penitence'. Luther is mainly concerned to bring out the fact that conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Repentance was for Luther a much more important concept than conversion. It is clear that Luther emphasised repentance as a life long process.

Wagner (1980:464) says that in Pietism and later on in related spiritual currents of Puritanism and Methodism, conversion was understood as a necessarily individualistic, instantaneous event, separated from baptism and also dissimilar from the life-long and daily process of penitence (cf. Brauer 1978). According to the Pietistic understanding of conversion this phenomenon was accompanied by certain specific experiences, so that it became possible and even necessary to state exactly when and where an individual's conversion had taken place. The idea also influenced the ecclesiology of Pietism considerably. People 'converted' in the Pietistic way wanted to form communities of true believers *(ecclesiolae)* and often developed ascetic attitudes toward the world which were similar to the monastic concept of conversion. An understanding like that of the early Pietists, therefore, left very little scope for social involvement.

The visible and tangible consequences of conversion experiences were very much emphasised in Pietistic proclamation, and as these consequences were considered to be measurable, active work in several fields for church renewal, education, diaconia and missionary outreach followed. Löffler (1967:254) confirms that this kind of conversion concept has lived very long in various revival movements in both Europe and the USA and it has also become the widest known through the Protestant Missionary Movement. It can be said, therefore, that it was precisely the very strong concern for the 'salvation of souls' which later pushed Pietists and evangelicals into social involvement (Bosch 1991:281). This involvement should not be understood to mean that the importance of conversion was relativised but rather that social ills were fought against because they hindered the conversion of the 'heathen'.

A different understanding of conversion is to be found in the Social Gospel movement. It gained prominence in the USA especially since the beginning of the 20th century. 'Social Gospellers' felt that all Christian mission efforts should be directed in fighting the social evils such as poverty, disease, ignorance, oppression, etc. However, the fallacy of this understanding was the idea that Western economy, culture and religion was superior to that of the people of the Third World. Niebuhr (in Kritzinger et al 1994:29) describes perfectly the central conversion conviction of the Social Gospel: "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross". Conversion was seen in the context of the goal of humanising the world by way of socio-political development projects. Within such a framework, the need for Christian conversion basically disappeared except if one understands the call to involvement in social justice as a call to conversion.

This short overview could in itself be an illustration of how the idea of conversion has been coloured by several 'contextual' factors. In the majority of situations in which Christians find themselves or in state church situations the idea of conversion seems to differ very much from situations in which Christians are a minority. The biblical idea of conversion is closer in situations in which the church is coming into being rather than in state church situations. It is certainly right to speak of 'various ideas of conversion', as well as of narrowed and misused ideas of the biblical concept of conversion, in the course of the

history of the church. Because of the confusion and uncertainty of what the meaning of conversion really is, this topic has been avoided in many Christian circles and in theological discussions in recent years. Hofmann (1968:1) confirms this when he says that in "recent years the word 'conversion' has been avoided in Catholic documents".

Syrjänen (1984:31) reflects on the question: "What is the specificity of Christian conversion?". According to Syrjänen the specificity of Christian conversion has been spelled out in various ways. The most natural course taken has been to stress the holistic nature of Christian conversion, i.e. that it consists of three basic Biblical elements which all have to be taken into account:

1) the object towards which one turns,
2) the object from which one turns away,
3) the act of turning itself (1 Thess1:9-10, Syrjänen 1984:26).

It can be concluded, therefore, that the most important factor in Christian conversion is the 'object' to which one turns, i.e. Jesus Christ (cf. Rahner 1978:204-206, Smith 1978:51). Löffler (1968:160) confirms this by stating that the uniqueness of Christian conversion is based on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ: "The only New Testament basis of conversion is the Christological one."

Although missionary theologians have usually been aware of the distinction between proclamation and conversion, some occasional misconceptions tend to occur. Mott (1910:231) says in this respect:

> … it is the Spirit of God who alone has power to convict men of sin. It is only when He convicts of sin and of dire need that the soul becomes willing to hear of Christ as a Saviour.

It is true that the Evangelical missionaries expected the Spirit of God to work in this way; but their own personal commission to evangelise was regarded first and foremost as a commission to proclaim the Gospel (Mt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). They were content to leave in God's hands the question of human response to that proclamation. The mainstream Evangelical missionary thought has never deviated from this conviction. God has acted in

Christ for the world's salvation, and it is the duty of the missionary - and indeed of every Christian - to make that fact known. By studying the *Isawa* people, Gilliland (1997:12) comes to the same conclusion, namely, who is ultimately responsible for the conversion of people:

> Planning for evangelism among the Isawa calls for long-term holistic commitment to them as people who live in a very special situation. This means Christians do not just sit with Isawa leaders on occasional visits to talk about religion. It probably means living as their neighbours and fostering relationships of love without demanding conversion as the price. Conversion is finally God's work.

Whether the person to whom the message is addressed in fact responds in faith to the offer is a factor entirely outside the missionary's control. The desire to impose such a control has often been expressly repudiated. As an example we may take the message of the Jerusalem Conference of the IMC (1928:484), which states expressly that

> … we would repudiate any symptoms of a religious imperialism that would desire to impose beliefs and practices on others in order to manage their souls in their supposed interests. We obey a God who respects our wills and we desire to respect those of others.

This however does not mean a lessening of the desire to evangelise[63] and call for conversion, as this is evident from another passage of the same Jerusalem message of the IMC (1928:486):

> We cannot live without Christ and we cannot bear to think of men living without Him. We cannot bear to be content to live in a world that is un-Christ-like … Christ is our motive and Christ is our end. We must give nothing less, and we can give nothing more.

The same Christocentric motive has been attested by Orchard (1964:90,80) who writes that

> … the purpose of mission is to proclaim and bear witness to the Christ-event in such a way that men may come to know the name of their Redeemer … Mission is essentially the act

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[63] Bosch (1991:409-420) discusses the definition of *evangelism* and lists 18 conditions. He emphasises that evangelism should never be defined in terms of results or success.

of pointing to Jesus Christ. It is testimony to something done. It is to point away from oneself – whether the 'self' is an individual or a group or an institution or a way of life – to Jesus Christ.

Since Vatican II, substantially the same position has been adopted by the Roman Catholic Church; since the act of faith is by its very nature a free act, missionaries can do no more – and may do no less – than to invite people to embrace the Christian faith of their own free will. Coercion must be rejected. There is ample Scriptural warrant for the essentially un-Christian nature of coercion: this is proselytism, not evangelization.[64]

Kroeger (1996a:371) sees conversion mainly in the light of the 'paschal paradigm'[65]. He is convinced that all "human life has a paschal configuration; its pattern continually moves through death to renewed life".

Conversion happens therefore through the 'paschal mystery' (cf. Pasquier 1978:198). Kroeger (1996a:371-372) is of the opinion that this view has consequences regarding the approach to conversion since the "redemptive grace of Christ is available for all who in their own way, and even without knowing, obey the law of the paschal mystery and take it as a guiding norm for their consciences and lives … moreover, in Christ, God does not necessarily save us *from* suffering, but *in* and *through* it". Kroeger (1996a:374) goes even further when he says that all "is filled with paschality" and therefore the "paschal mystery becomes the integrating focus of all mission and conversion. It is foundational because all life has a paschal paradigm - as exemplified in the brokenness of the world in which we live". Kroeger then identifies three interacting levels of authentic conversion of the paschal mystery: 1) centred in the person of the missionary, 2) a call to all persons of faith and goodwill to embrace a paschal perspective in their lives and consciences, 3) the invitation for people to join freely the paschal community of the Christian church.

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[64] The difference is that *proselytism* is understood as 'using some sort of pressure, threats or force to bring about conversion', whereas *evangelisation* according to the Bible is 'inviting people to the Christian faith' and leave it to them to make a choice out of free will without using coercive methods (cf. Bosch 1991:413-415). For further discussion on this subject see also paragraph 2.3 of this study.

[65] Kroeger (1996a:371) defines the 'paschal paradigm' as follow: "… people struggling to move through darkness to light, captivity to freedom, dryness to growth, alienation to union, suffering and brokenness to wholeness … falsehood to truth, apathy to responsibility, margination to participation, loneliness and isolation to universal communion, sin to grace".

Triebel (1976:135) makes the point that "Bekehrung ist nie ein isoliertes Geschehen sondern eine Entwicklung". O'Rourke (1985:33) confirms this when he says that the process of conversion involves time, change and growth. He identifies a number of different periods in the conversion process although these vary with each convert. Brandon (1964:30) differentiates between the following types of Christian conversion: 1) unconscious, 2) gradual, 3) by stages,[66] 4) sudden and 5) reconversion. Brandon (1964:54) also points to certain marks of conversion: self esteem is changed, new meaning and attaining a higher life.[67]

Saayman (1992) argues convincingly that conversion should no longer be regarded as the primary aim of Christian mission.[68] His understanding of conversion in mission praxis has rather the focus and the only aim "namely the glory and manifestation of God's grace" (Saayman 1992:171). When speaking about the Christian life, Saayman says that "if we incarnate it authentically in the midst of others, conversion (of ourselves as well as the others) may follow". For Saayman, conversion is thus a "never ending process, a continuous upward spiral of being transformed 'from glory to glory'". Saayman therefore emphasis the importance of the incarnational witness in the conversion process. He sees conversion in both ways, i.e. the agent and the recipient are engaged in the process of change.

All these aspects of conversion are important facets in the missiological discussion. However, I cannot dwell on all of these fascinating topics in detail in this study. Further on, I will discuss a few topics as they relate in a particular way to my study. The first topic is *conversion versus proselytism*. The second topic which I will discuss in more detail is on *individual, personal, transpersonal* conversion. The third theme will be *about conversion and culture*. I emphasise and outline these topics since I believe that a better understanding and acceptance will lead to more tolerance and respect for decisions made by converts (see also chapter five and six).

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[66] Brauer (1978:233), for instance, evaluates conversion experiences in 'Puritan' believers and discusses 7 stages. He is convinced that the structure of conversion is similar in both Puritanism and the first phases of Revivalism.

[67] For a discussion on gradual or sudden conversion see also Gillespie (1991:12-20).

[68] Saayman's (1992:160) starting point is the declaration of Voetius that mission "has as its primary aim the conversion of the Gentiles".

2.3 Conversion versus Proselytism

I address this topic as it is an important issue, not only in Christian missiology, but also in Christian-Muslim relations. Christians and Muslims have sometimes accused each other of using deceptive methods to win converts.[69] Emilio Castro notes in the Chambésy Dialogue Consultation (1982) that Christians and Muslims have "long memories of past pressures to conform or more recent experiences of aggressive and insensitive proselytism". On that consultation, for instance, Lamin Sanneh (1982:52-68) outlined the *Christian Experience of Islamic da'wah, with particular reference to Africa,* and two case studies were presented by Muhammad Rasjidi (1982:69-80): *The Role of Christian Missions, the Indonesian Experience* and Ali Muhsin Barwani (1982:80-89): *A Muslim Experience of Christian Mission in East Africa.* Both parties were outlining what they regarded as 'insensitive proselytism' practised by members of the other religion. It goes even further, since in the foreword of this book, Ahmad von Denffer (Chambésy Dialogue Consultation 1982:5) repeats the call to "Christian churches and religious organisations to suspend their misused *diakonia* activities in the world of Islam".

In studying this book, one cannot avoid noticing the trend that Muslims like to play down their own mistakes made in the past and highlight the Christians' 'wrongdoings'. For instance, after Cragg points to some occurrences where Christians have been wronged by Muslims, Ahmad von Denffer (Chambésy Dialogue Consultation 1982:98) replies: "Don't compare such isolated incidents of human weakness with the enormous exploitation of the Muslims by the Christian world, through education, medicine, aid, etc. – all of which have been used as conscious and deliberate instruments of missionary policy". It becomes clear, that such consultations are not helpful if one side or both parties are just making accusations and calls to suspend activities. Such a consultation should not have the aim to make calls to 'suspend' or 'stop' the other parties' activities but to understand and respect each other. It is therefore no surprise that even Ahmad von Deffer observes that despite this consultation in the early 1980's, Christian-Muslim relations did not improve but rather are "further away than in 1976" (1982:6).

From the above discussion about the consultation, it appears that Muslims and often Christians as well, regard any attempt and method by the other side to win converts as 'insensitive proselytism' and make the call to suspend any such action. In other words, the consultation seems to be dominated by criticism with the result that Christians and Muslims try to stop the other side from any mission or *da'wah* activity. Each side observes the other party carefully and condemns any action, including any humanitarian or social work as being 'insensitive proselytism'. It appears that both sides are suspicious and envious of each other. If this is the agenda of any party involved in an interfaith dialogue than surely it will not improve relations. However, one has to admit that such calls to suspend 'missionary activities' have also been made in Christian circles, e.g. between different denominations. I discuss this issue furhter on focusing on Christian missiology and will then draw my conclusion in respect to Christian-Muslim relations and my empirical reasearch (see chapter 8).

In the past 'proselytism' was often used with the general connotation of 'making converts'. It is still used by some communities, such as the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (Britsch 1979:23), but in ecumenical Christian parlance the word is now clearly understood to mean a perversion of true evangelism (Kerr 1996:12). The WCC (1971:11) describes proselytism as the

> … improper attitudes and behaviour in the practice of Christian witness. Proselytism embraces whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from external coercion in religious matters, or whatever, in the proclamation of the Gospel, does not conform to the ways God draws free men to himself in response to his calls to serve in spirit and in truth.

This document *Common Witness and Proselytism*[70] describes various actions that should be avoided, actions thus identified as proselytizing activities. Included is the condemnation of coercion, whether physical, moral or psychological, which would tend to deprive human beings of freedom of choice and full autonomy. Here the document points out that 'certain abuse of mass communications can have this effect'. Offers of aid, whether 'open or

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[69] Cf. Scantlebury (1996), see also 1.3 of this study.
[70] This document was produced by a Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches in May 1970 and was published in the *The Ecumunical Review,* January 1971.

disguised', given with the expectation that someone would receive them if he or she converts, are condemned. The offering of inducements, exploitation of weakness, the raising of suspicions about others, improper motivations linked to 'social, economic, or political pressure', and the use of 'unjust and uncharitable references' about other religious communities are also included in the broader definition of proselytism.

Horner (1981:304), observes that this action, *proselytism,* is popularly called 'sheep stealing'. He is primarily speaking about intra-Christian proselytism though he indicates that this can also possibly be said about people of other faiths like the Muslims.

Voulgarakis (1965:301), a Greek Orthodox lecturer at the University of Thessalonica, identified inter-confessional proselytism with theft:

> The conversion of men from one confession to another and the welcome they receive are not reprehensible, and are often accompanied by a flowering of faith; but the deliberate organisation and practice of proselytism, ostensible in the service of unity, constitutes a lack of faith in unity, and the whole operation is a distortion of love. Proselytism, as distinct from mission, is a proof of weakness, a church's attempt to gain self-assurance by using it for its own advantage, and in the final analysis, the product of egoism … If they examine themselves sincerely, those who practice proselytism will recognise that their feelings are akin to those of a thief. Proselytism over a long period not only does not bring the expected results, but also confirms its own falsity by creating open wounds in the relations between the confessions.

Proselytism was also termed by Robeck (1996:5) to be a 'corruption of witness,' and included such actions as cajolery, bribery, intimidation, placing an organisation's success before Christ's honour, comparing one's strengths with the weaknesses of others, bearing false witness against other churches, and the replacing of love for souls with self-aggrandising motives. Stott (1992:324) is convinced that "there is a broad measure of agreement among churches that 'proselytism' is a synonym for 'unworthy witness'".

The *Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms* (1984:189) gives the following distinction between a convert and a proselyte:

> **Convert, proselyte** are synonyms (in that) both denote a person who has embraced another creed, opinion, or doctrine than the one he has previously accepted or adhered to.
>
> **Convert** commonly implies a sincere and voluntary change of belief; it is, therefore the designation preferred by the church, that party or the school of thought of which such a person becomes a new member.
>
> **Proselyte** basically denotes a convert to another religion … In general use … the term may suggest less a reverent or convicted and voluntary embracing than a yielding to the persuasions and urgings of another, be it earnest missionary or zealot or someone with less praiseworthy motives … *Proselyte* is often the designation chosen by the members of a church for one formerly of their number who has been converted to another faith.

The whole issue is however not easy and is the subject of debate. Bosch (1991:414) emphasises: "Evangelism is not proselytism" and observes, that "only too often, evangelism has been used as means of reconquering lost ecclesiastical influence". Robeck (1996:7) concludes by saying that "definitions and application of the term 'proselytism' differ, depending upon who defines them and where they are applied". The most heated objections to proselytism arise when persons are understood to transfer their loyalty and membership from one religious community to another (cf. Bosch 1991:415-416). Are such persons *converts* or are they *proselytes*? Heideman (1996:11) notes three complaints about proselytism:

1) Christian churches charge each other of aggressive evangelism or churchmanship, which is then commonly described as 'sheep-stealing'.

2) In the Western world the objection has shifted from being a political/cultural issue to being a moral issue. Aggressive evangelism or public religious pressure began to be viewed as disruptive of peace and thereby bordering on immorality.

3) Objections are also raised by followers of non-Christian religions. Their objection often is particularly related to their fear of disruption of their cultures and personal relationships, with special force at the point when persons are baptised and are understood to change loyalty from their own to the Christian community.

Heideman (1996:11) continues by asking the question: "To what extent should conversion to Jesus Christ entail or require a change from one human community to another?" He is of the opinion:

> Conversion and baptism did not mean a change in human community or citizenship in the New Testament … those who are joined to Christ are not to cut themselves off from their own communities and families. On the contrary, they are to consider their baptism the beginning of a mission of solidarity with Christ and with others.

From the above discussion one can conclude that it is difficult or almost impossible to draw a clear line between 'conversion' and 'proselytism'. Every faith community which has a mission dimension, which include different Christian denominations as well as other religions such as Islam, has its own particular definition and understanding of 'winning converts' or 'increasing their members'.

These understandings will always be different and can therefore not be brought into harmony. Interfaith dialogue which is aiming to do this is doomed to failure and frustration. In my opinion, the aim of the different faith communities should not be to accuse each other and make calls to suspend what they see as 'indecent activities'. I would therefore refrain from restricting the 'conversion activities' of others (Saayman 1992:163)[71].

My suggestion is therefore, as I have already indicated above, to learn and listen to each other in order to understand and respect the others' teachings and in particular their conversion motives. Christians and Muslims should allow each other the freedom to conduct their particular mission or *da'wah* activities. In other words, dialogue should not aim to condemn, restrict and accuse each other but to know and learn from each other in order to create a better atmosphere. The only exception I would suggest to impose is that each party should agree and make every effort to refrain from using coercive force, especially of a physical nature, in any part of the conversion process. Prospective converts should have at all times the freedom to choose, to commit themselves but also to reject and

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[71] In this article Saayman argues that conversion should no longer be regarded as the primary motive of Christian mission. According to Saayman (1992:168-171) the only one aim should be "the glory and manifestation of God's grace". I agree with Saayman and would argue, that if Christians would apply this new understanding it would "make a fundamental difference to our mission praxis" and thus the tension between denominations on 'proselytism vs. conversion' would to a great extent disappear.

withdraw if they wish to do so. This then should be the emphasis on interfaith dialogue; to improve and ensure the free choice of prospective converts.

2.4 Individual – Personal – Group

I address this topic since it relates significantly to my study. Islam has a strong emphasis on the *ummah*[72], which is the name of the Muslim community (cf. Kateregga & Shenk 1981:48-53). This community is also known under the name 'Muslim brotherhood' and "is different from any other community" (1981:48). One special mark is that "the life of the individual member of the *ummah,* both private and public, is under God's legal command" (1981:48). It means that the *ummah* has significant power and influence on each individual Muslim. What then does this mean in respect to individual freedom of choice? Is it easy for a Muslim to change their religion or is there much pressure from the community against such a change? Some answers to these questions will be found in chapter five.

Related questions to this topic are: Are the decisions made by individual converts to change religion, driven by different motives, purely individualistic? Do these decisions affect the converts' contemporaries? If yes, in what ways? When people change religion, for whatever motives, do they always make a conscious personal religious commitment? Following on, I reflect on the missiological debate on this topic and then compare it with my empirical research (see chapter 5 and 6). The conclusion on this matter will be presented in section 8.1.2. Further on, I reflect on various related facets on this topic. In conclusion I will however focus mainly on aspects related to the motives of conversion.

There are at least three ideals of conversion that can be traced in 20th century religious debate (Sharpe 1969:224):

1) The ideal of individual conversion as a transaction between God and the soul, but which in Evangelical thought always leads to membership in a Christian community, a gathered church. This ideal could, and did, lead to a purely numerical evaluation of missionary success and failure.

2) The ideal of incorporation into the life of the church, viewed as the body of Christ and the fullest manifestation of Christ's life on earth; in theory, at least, this view involved the rejection of individualism.

3) The point at which secular theology has now arrived: The ideal of conversion to Christ apart from the organised church: conversion into a 'concerned community'.

The most widely known and familiar understanding comes out of 'Pietism' and the subsequent revival movements together with the Reformation. The theological emphasis is shifted to the personal affirmation in response to God's work and to the subjective assurance of salvation. Löffler (1967:254) observes that "we find now an understanding of conversion which focuses on a personal religious experience, and the element of individual decision".

Roman Catholic missionary theology since Vatican II has also begun to express itself in similar ways, and the concept of conversion is being similarly questioned, at least among the more radical theologians. On one level, the evaluation of missionary success in terms of converts – as an active ingredient in Roman Catholic as in Protestant missions – is now dismissed as practically meaningless. As Hillman (1966:58) points out,

> The dream of total populations becoming simultaneously and homogeneously Christian is now past. If we try to pursue this medieval ideal in the context of the modern world, we are going to distort completely the meaning of the Church's missionary and eschatological goals.

Scholars commonly speak of the conversion experience of a group of people as a "multi-individual decision", as Tippett (1971:123-124) has pointed out. Kasdorf (1980:116), however, prefers to describe a group decision for Christ as a 'multipersonal conversion'. He continues to say that "conversion is always personal … but never individualistic". His argument is that

> … when an overwhelming majority within a sociological unit of people or a communal society makes a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Redeemer and First Chief or Lord, each

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[72] Hughes (1885:654) says that the word *ummah* occurs about 40 times in the Qur'an.

person makes a personal commitment or covenant which touches every aspect of life as well as that of his fellowman.

Costas (1974:128) describes this issue as follow:

> The concept of multi-individual decisions gives a sociological orientation to the experience of conversion because it affirms that conversion, which depends on a personal act of faith in Christ, can take place in a group setting, where all the members of a given group (family, clan, tribe, or mutual interest group) participate in a similar experience with Christ after considering it together and deciding to turn to Christ at the same time.

Missionaries have demonstrated (e.g. McGavran 1955, Tippett 1971 and 1973, Vicedom 1962:123-128) that the church around the world, though only in certain types of contexts and cultures, grows most rapidly by multipersonal conversions in group movements rather than by individual conversions in isolation. Warneck wrote already in 1874 about group conversion as the legitimate goal of mission. He (Warneck 1874:41, 1902:243) supported his arguments with extensive biblical exegesis, a wealth of historical evidence and case studies. Although Warneck (1902:255) always stressed the importance of single, personal conversion, he maintained consistently that the ultimate goal of preaching the gospel message must be to bring *panta to ethne* (all ethnic groups or peoples) to Christ (Warneck 1902:257).

As the missionaries of Acts baptised whole families and founded house churches, so the missionaries of today should aim to bring whole families, groups, tribes, and peoples to Christ. "In essence the Christianization of entire peoples," says Warneck (1902:260), "is the same as the Christianization of families." Since the latter has been confirmed in the New Testament (Acts 10:2, 11:14, 16:15; 33, 18:8, 1Cor 1:16), there is no reason to believe that the former cannot be its theoretical as well as practical consequence. After all, the conversion of an ethnic unit is the conversion of merely extended families. He who seeks the conversion of individuals[73] only engages in a spiritual 'micro-enterprise', but he who helps entire families and peoples to submit to Christ as Saviour from sin and Lord of life engages in a 'macro-enterprise' for God (Warneck 1902:253-257). The emphasis on

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[73] Brandon (1964:33) points out that especially in western culture, Christian conversion tends to be seen only as an experience of the individual person.

quantitative group action in multipersonal conversion does not mean de-emphasis of *qualitative* personal conversion of individuals in that group. Individualism, egocentrism and ethnocentrism are characteristics of Western civilisation. Cusack (Olson 1996:14) expresses the same notion by saying that "the mass movement also reduces the likelihood of Westernisation, by preserving the social group identity".

In addition, "In group conversion," says Warnshuis (1973:17-18), "the individual is still as important as ever. Groups are influenced through individuals." As the Apostle Paul lived for the conversion and spiritual welfare of the individual, said Kähler (1893:174), so he laboured with confidence for the conversion of the world. Warnshuis' contention that the group is influenced through the individual confirms that of the German missiologists Warneck and Kähler. From a missiological perspective "the mistake occurs when the objective is only the individual who is separated from the group. Instead of separating him from the group, the individual should lead the way into the group" (Warnshuis 1973:18).

The dimension of quality in New Testament conversions seems to have found its most appropriate expression in the phenomenon of *koinonia* (fellowship).[74] Here the disciples demonstrated the test of quality in corporate quantitative action and response to God's will in the world for the building of his kingdom.

Kasdorf (1980:121) argues that "observations from case studies in group conversion help to substantiate the thesis that the qualitative results of quantitative multipersonal conversions can be as natural and as genuine – often more lasting because of their communal nature – as single individual conversions when the latter tend to happen in isolation". He summarises the following points:

> 1. The "Christian witness", as the advocate of change, must make deliberate efforts to direct the gospel message to the whole people, not only to individuals, as Keysser (1949:32f) and Vicedom (1962:124) have convincingly shown.

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[74] Lonergan's (1972) theology of Christian conversion has implications for four dimensions: 1) *Metanoia*: Conversion as human transformation, 2) *Kenosis*: Conversion as generous self -giving, 3) *Diakonia*: Conversion as serving others, 4) *Koinonia*: Conversion as friendship, communion, community. These represent four complementary dimensions of Christian conversion both as event and lifelong process (cf. Navone 1989).

2. The nature of motivation for deciding to accept the gospel has little or no effect on the quality of converts who make a collective move toward Christianity. This is corroborated by Pickett's (1933:152) scientific studies of multi-personal conversions in South India.

3. The level of actual conversion from paganism[75] to Christianity in the multipersonal group action of a communal society demands "encounter at some material locus of power at some specific point of time". Tippett (1971:169) refers to this as "a psychological moment or experience when the persons involved actually turn from the old god(s) to the new. There ought to be some ocular demonstration of this encounter, some specific act of faith".

4. Once the locus of power encounter has been fixed, a symbolic action by the chief on behalf of the group or by the whole group must take place - such as the burning of a fetish, the destruction of a grove, or the breaking of war spears - to indicate the change of loyalties from the old to the new way (cf. Keysser 1949:39).

5. Whenever a group is strong, the fixing of the locus of power "tends to become a reference point for other groups and individuals in a locality or within the social orbit" (Tippett 1971:169). When this happens, the Holy Spirit continues the work of renewal and regeneration and the church begins to grow both in *quantity* and in *quality.*

Kasdorf argues therefore that the quality of group conversions is as good as in individual conversions. One has however to bear in mind that the above statements by Kasdorf are only true of group conversions. If point two, for instance, would also apply to individual conversion then it would have serious implications for my study.

Barclay (1963:71) describes conversion in this context as the "end of individualism and the entry into fellowship". Although conversion is personal, it is not seen as individualistic. First the new convert shares in the life of the community of believers. Then, the life of the new convert becomes most meaningful when responsibilities are reciprocated, which means that the new convert shares in the corporate mission to witness for the gospel.

Spindler (1997:299) is convinced that an emphasis on the process of 'world-building'[76] leads us away from individual conversion and "may be used to bypass the vexed question of

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[75] A term, as Kasdorf uses it, like 'paganism' is more and more avoided by scholars in recent times because of its negative connotations. The term can be, if not clearly defined, misunderstood since it has different meanings (Cowie 1989:889). Terms like 'person from other religion', or 'atheist' are therefore preferred.

[76] 'World-building' in the context of religious conversion is understood in the following way: *Conversion* means access to a new global awareness which is above local custom or community. It amounts to what has

personal conversion". Spindler is concerned that many present missiologists in general display a great reluctance to deal with personal conversion because they see it as irrelevant in the face of global developments.

In support of his concern, Spindler quotes from Wilfred (1983:66) who said: "Conversion is nothing but turning to the action of God in history which works through human realities and participating in the revolution that God is effecting in favour of the poor". From this, Spindler (1997:299) concludes:

> We are so persuaded of the wrong of individualism and pietistic reduction, and so well instructed that non-Western cultures are not individualistic but community-oriented, by nature apt to solidarity and mutual love, that we can no longer believe that human beings are indeed individuals and should be approached as individuals.

In his argument against this view, Spindler emphasises the individuality of people by reminding us that each human being is "shaped and created individually, separated from their mothers at birth, and dying alone, each for himself or herself and is called to a living dialogue with God in Christ". Indeed, there are many references in the Bible which support the individuality of each person, such as Rom 14:12: "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God". Christian conversion has to do with the person of Jesus Christ and the call to individual conversion is central in the message of Jesus Christ.[77] Spindler (1997:300) gives further support for 'personal conversion' when he argues that "Jesus Christ is the new Adam,[78] the prototype of the new humanity intended by God and already on course in history". He says:

> The new Adam is personalised in Jesus and offered as a paradigm of personal existence to every human being. Personal conversion, in this line of theological understanding, amounts to the birth of the new Adam in the human individual. Jesus was a real person: in the same way, real persons enter into communion with Jesus, become one with Christ through the Holy Spirit, and put on Christ as a garment (Galatians 3:27).

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been called 'civilisation', where world religions, including Christianity and Islam, contribute to the education and social upliftment of humankind and making people into members of a single moral commonwealth.
[77] That Jesus calls individual people for 'conversion' is evident, for instance, in the calling of the disciples, e.g. Matthew 4:19 where Jesus said: "Come, follow me".
[78] Cf. Romans 5:12-21.

The same concern on the overemphasis of group conversion, as pointed out by Spindler above, is shared by Kritzinger et al (1994:30-34). They point out that the first proponent of the 'Christianising of a people' (Volkschristianisierung) was Karl Graul, founder of the Leipzig Mission Society, who was later supported by Keysser (1949) and Gutmann. In this approach individual conversion had no place and conversion was only seen in the form of a group decision.

Kritzinger et al (1994:30-34) cannot endorse this approach because of two reasons:

1) Membership of the Christian church and membership of a tribe or ethnic group becomes synonymous.
2) The concept of culture in terms of which indigenisation has to take place, is static and romanticised.

Spindler (1997:301) discusses yet another aspect of personal conversion which is in dispute among missiologists, viz. its ecclesial connotation. Spindler distinguishes between a maximalist and a minimalist position. The minimalist position affirms that "the minimum of ecclesial content is the affirmation of the category of the neighbour. Conversion to the Lord is in actual fact 'conversion to the neighbour'".

In explaining the maximalist position, Spindler quotes *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II (1990): "Conversion cannot be disconnected from baptism in a local church fully in communion with the church of Rome and its bishop, namely the pope". Spindler is aware, however, that this extreme position is not supported by all Roman Catholic missiologists. Nevertheless, the two extreme positions are indications of the wide variety of understandings of conversion which are held by missiologists.

Since the 1950's missiologists of the 'Church Growth Movement' have emphasised the importance of christianising collectivistic societies by means of group movements (Jonas 1996:84). McGavran (1981:272-292) emphasises that for individualistic westerners it is difficult to perceive conversion to Christianity as taking place by means of group movements. Conversion in the West is an extremely individualistic process and people become Christians without cutting their ties with others in the community. McGavran does

not dispute the theological assumption that salvation depends on the individual's faith in Christ. However, he questions the view that conversion is of a higher value when it occurs against the opinion of one's family.

In respect to the situation in South Africa, Jonas (1996:84) reports further that although "in South Africa the importance of collectivistic features in black societies where mission work was undertaken is recognised (cf Dierks 1983), there is little evidence of such an awareness in missionary praxis".[79] Jonas (1996:86) comes to the following conclusion:

> At present, the idea seems to prevail that indigenous structures have already disintegrated to such an extent that their influence has drastically declined and is dwindling. It seems to be anticipated that westernisation, individualism and their concomitant implication will in any case be the ultimate dominating pattern within the broad South African society and that the importance of collectivism in its traditional form is on the decline.

Though Christian missionaries 'pray and yearn' for mass conversions among Muslims it has happened, at least so far, relatively seldom. Christensen (1977:127) reports that "Indonesia and Malaya are probably the only two areas in the world where there has been any group-movement from Islam to Christianity".

In this section I have focused on individual/personal conversion. By discussing such a topic other closely related topics, such as group conversions, had to be included. Related terms of group conversion such as 'mass movement' or 'collective decisions' did also appear. I would emphasise that the focus of the research is on individual persons and that there was no trace of any group conversion to be found during this research project, i.e. in Christian-Muslim conversions. This seems to confirm Jonas' statement that collectivism is on the decline in South Africa (see above, Jonas 1996:86). Although conversions from Islam to Christianity during the apartheid era were rather seldom, because Muslims lived in their own closed society, individual conversions did happen occasionally (see chapter 1.2.3).

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[79] Jonas (1996:84-86) gives several reasons for this: Mission in South Africa has since its inception mainly been practised by people from a western individualistic background. Missionary organisations consistently emphasised individual conversion to Christianity. The opinion of missionaries was that mission could only prosper where indigenous structures had disintegrated (cf. Saayman 1991:31-33).

Since 1994, the post-apartheid era, people mix more readily and as a result individual conversions take place more often in both directions.

The more important aspect to concentrate opon regarding my study would then be the argument by Kasdorf (1980:116), that "conversion is always personal … but never individualistic". What he means by this is that a personal decision of change of religion of an individual touches and influences the lives of his/her contemporaries in some or another way. To what extent then are these influences to be experienced in praxis? Answers to this question will be found in the conversion stories in chapter five and six. In chapter eight I draw conclusions in the context of this discussion in this section and of the research analysis.

2.5 Conversion and Culture

The importance of this topic has been highlighted from various quarters. In general, Clause 10 of the 'Lausanne Covenant' recognises the need for Christians to be more culturally aware. In respect of Christian witness to Muslims there are many scholars who have urged the Christians to look at this issue more carefully and if necessary go 'new ways' (cf. Hiebert 1979:58-65, Parshall 1980:97-125).

Culture does play a role too in the context of this study. Löffler (1967:260) confirms that "conversion stories acknowledge the cultural and social factors which form part of the person's history and make up". To what extent it affects converts practically will be seen in chapters five and six. Limited space does not allow me to deal with this decisive topic in detail. Nevertheless, I highlight some missiological aspects in the context of conversion below and give the opinions of various scholars.

The Enlightenment era had a profound influence on Christian mission and consequently on conversion and culture.[80] Missionaries in general rejected the theory of evolution but otherwise absorbed much of the evolutionary 'Zeitgeist'. This led to the attitude of racial

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[80] Tubbs and Moss (1994:421), for instance, define 'culture' as follows: "Culture is a way of life developed and shared by a group of people and passed down from generation to generation" (cf. Hofstede 1980:25-28).

superiority which was equated with the sense of Western cultural superiority. The Enlightenment plan was, as a result, to educate and civilise the 'natives'. Shenk (1980:35) shares the following observation: "The 17th century New England Puritan missionaries largely set the course for modern missions. They defined their task as preaching the gospel so that Native Americans would be converted and receive personal salvation. The model by which they measured their converts was English Puritan civilisation".

The identification of the Christian message with Western civilisation alienated the gospel from other cultures. Another tragedy was, at that time, that missionaries saw little good in other people's cultures. That era can rightly be called the era of non-contextualisation. Pobee (1982:169) confirms this:

> The historical churches by and large implemented the doctrine of *tabula rasa,* i.e., the missionary doctrine that there is nothing in the non-Christian culture on which the Christian missionary can build and, therefore, every aspect of the traditional non-Christian culture had to be destroyed before Christianity could be built up.

Later in the post-enlightenment age, however, things changed. Missionaries were concerned with communicating the gospel to the people by living with them, learning their culture and often defended them against oppression by government and business people (cf. Sanneh 1989)[81]. In addition, it must be said that it was missionaries who honoured the people's dignity and helped them more than any other Westerners to preserve their cultural heritage. By acting in this manner, they accepted that the others were not 'primitive' but fully rational beings having their own autonomous cultures.

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[81] Sanneh (1989:29) differentiates between two kinds of mission: 'mission by diffusion' and 'mission by translation'. Mission by diffusion introduces a culture as an inseparable part of the message. It follows that the acceptance of the message requires a major transfer in cultural identity. This is the case, for instance, with Islam where mission happens by diffusion because of its law, the Arabic heritage in scripture and religion being inseparable from its message. On the other hand, mission by translation comes through the recipient's culture. As a result of this the culture of the message bearer has only a relative and not absolute character. According to Sanneh, translation produces cultural revitalisation. Sanneh identifies three steps in this process

Since the 1970s, discussion on inculturation[82] or contextualization in the field of missiology has been given priority (cf. Bosch 1991:447-457, Parshall 1980). One can observe a real mobilisation of missiologists of all persuasions such as Evangelicals, mainline Protestants or Catholics in this field.

While many mission scholars have become reluctant to address the problem of conversion to Christianity, historians and cultural anthropologists are increasingly devoting case studies and general theories to this question. They emphasise the social dimensions of conversion (cf. Spindler 1997). The importance of this subject is also demonstrated by the recent World Missionary Conference[83] with the topic 'The Gospel in Diverse Cultures'.

Scholars have also pointed out the importance of reflecting on the relation between conversion and culture in respect to the theological understanding of conversion.[84] How does a person who has undergone a biblically understood conversion identify with his/her own culture?[85] How will the convert's 'new being in Christ' relate to his or her culture (cf. 2 Cor 5:17)? Interestingly enough, it was about this very problem that the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatian Christians, concerning whose conversion he had been the 'midwife' (Gal 4:13, 19). His answer was that instead of being bound by the superimposed culture of the 'midwife' (in this case Judaism and its central cultural symbol, circumcision) one should live out the freedom which has been granted to a believer by Christ in conversion.

The implication of Paul's letter to the Galatians is that the main issue in conversion to Christ is freedom from all cultural compulsion, and that for a Christian it is impossible to place various cultures into any sort of hierarchy. For the 'new being in Christ' it is evidently

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of translation: the elevation of the vernacular, the concurrent elevation and questioning of culture, and the emergence of national pride (cf. Hofstede 1980:34-37).

[82] In his thesis, Bate (1993:263-287) gives a fascinating insight on this topic in chapter 10: *Inculturation as Key to the Theological Judgement.* He says about inculturation, that "its appearance can initially be linked to the attempt to find a model whereby the Church becomes part of the culture of a people" (Roest 1978:725).

[83] This conference was convened by the World Council of Churches and took place in Salvador Bahia, Brazil from 24 November - 3 December 1996.

[84] The importance of a missionary's need to know the cultural context of the people among whom he/she is working is expressed for instance by Freytag (1961:170-171).

[85] Hesselgrave (1981:393) points to three cultures, which need to be considered, in missionary communication: Missionary-, Bible-, and Respondent-Culture.

possible to live out his freedom in the framework of any culture. Stravers (1988:343) emphasises this notion when he says that "genuine conversion is not tied to any single cultural expression of the conversion process, but finds appropriate expression within the culture of the convert".

In this context, I find it appropriate to make a special reference of Muslims converting to Christianity. Can such a person, for instance, retain his or her culture and be called *Muslim Christian?*[86] On this issue, Kraft (1979b:122) posed a provocative question: "Can one be a Muslim-Christian in the same way that Jesus, Paul and many of their converts were Hebrew- Christians?". Many Christians would accept the idea of a Jew coming to Christ and remaining a Jew.

However, many Christians would reject the same notion being applied to Muslims. Kraft (1979b:119) himself commented: "How strange it sounds even to suggest the possibility of 'Muslim Christians' or 'Christian Muslim' to signify those who, while committing themselves to God through Christ simply remain *culturally* Muslim". In recent years, many missionaries have become acquainted with this new model and seen Muslim conversion in a different light (cf. Parshall 1980).

Another interesting comment on the issue of conversion and culture is given by Cragg (1981:194), when he writes:

> We are readily familiar with the term conversion and with the issue of its cultural context. Traditionally, it is the "newness" we emphasise, the break with the past which occurs in regeneration, leading to the transformation of the sinful self into the new man in Christ. But that dimension is only one side of the story. For conversion takes place within a personal "continuum". There is an ongoing identity within which conversion happens, for which we need the concept of "convertibility". The convertibility of man is a glorious conviction of Christian hope and mission. It is an important dimension of study. For it focuses our thought about culture realistically, laying emphasis on that which is going to be there still (like the fabric of a washed garment) when the meaning of Christ has taken hold of it.

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[86] This question was discussed at length in several papers presented at the 1978 Colorado Springs conference on Muslim Evangelism.

The concept of 'convertibility'[87] is an important and fascinating topic in missiology.[88] The possibility of humans being receptive to conversion is a prerequisite for Christian missionary work or, for that matter, any religion's mission endeavour. Kraft (1979a:344) calls this 'openness to Christian conversion' and he is of the opinion that "it is usually conditioned by the receptors' ability to relate the Gospel message to their felt needs. A perceptive advocate will be able to discover these felt needs and to present the Gospel in relation to them. An effective witness may also be able to help receptors discover needs of which they were previously unaware".

Luzbetak (1988:355) emphasises this notion when he says the following about felt-needs: "We have been stressing throughout how *felt-needs were a most basic factor in directing culture change ...* it is impossible for the Church to 'sell' its 'foreign wares' except in terms of felt-needs … In addition, *emotions,* especially fear, prejudice, and bias, have much to say in the process of change and conversion" (cf. Tippett 1987:186). Loewen (1967:53) is convinced that convertibility, or the willingness to change religion, depends on "how well the present religion meets the daily needs. Because religion is so thoroughly integrated into the total fabric of life, there will be motivation for change only when a system frustrates an individual or a whole society at some rather crucial point". However, we can not predict for sure who will convert in certain situations since every person chooses differently (Wells 1989:65). Under the topic of *Personality Differences*, Gillespie (1991:109) asks and discusses the question: "Is there one kind of personality which is more likely to be converted?" Gillespie realises that research is limited and answers to this topic are rather speculative so far (cf. Coe 1900:144).

In order to further the convertibility of prospective converts it becomes clear that the advocates of Christianity must become familiar with the patterns of those cultures rather than to impose the advocates' culture as if those alone were Christian. For Kroeger (1996a),

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[87] Another related term is *availability.* Rambo (1993:60-63) discusses four modes of 'availability': structural, emotional, intellectual and religious. Rambo's view is that "the conversion process is an interplay of forces of attraction, resistance and repulsion". Robbins (1988:85-88), in his study, discusses the 'availability' for conversion of people in their social networks (he focuses mainly on the NRM's in the USA). Snow and Machalek (1984:182) argue that certain "social characteristics create a pool of candidates available for conversion, but whether these people actually become converts depends upon social interaction processes".
[88] Robertson (1978:208-214) discusses this in one paragraph *Culture and Individual Convertibility in the modern World.* He is the opinion, that "the less that faith is emphasised at the individual level, the less that culture is seen as a form of commitment".

'convertibility' becomes operative basically in his 'paschal paradigm'[89] which challenges Christian witnesses to become 'paschal evangelizers'. He (1996:378) is of the opinion: "Paschal mission can be lived in all cultural contexts and situations. As a missionary approach, it easily finds an inculturated home among diverse peoples. Paschal mission is also clearly transcultural".

Another challenge for the theological understanding of conversion comes from an increasing interest and investigation in conversion-like phenomena in social sciences and from research findings in that field of study.

In this regard, Kraft (1979a:339) discusses what he calls *Cultural* versus *Christian* conversion. His definition of 'cultural conversion' is "conversion to a culture or subculture that is not that natural to the convert". Kraft maintains that in the past missionary bodies have erred by requiring people to first convert to e.g. Euro-American culture and then to the Christian faith. Kraft calls this version also 'indirect conversion to Christ', because the convert is expected to exchange his culture for that of the witness. In such a situation the convert is not free to respond directly to God in his/her own culture but rather through a different culture. The danger is that a person 'converts' to the culture of the witness as an end in itself, while not experiencing a genuine conversion to Christ. This means that the witness propagates a conversion which is concerned mainly with cultural issues. Kraft (1979a:340) warns that "the result is widespread nominalism with little real understanding of essential Christianity".

Kraft (1979a:341) shows that the Bible presents a different picture. He gives the illustration of Peter in Acts 10. Here Peter receives through a vision the order to share the gospel with Cornelius and his household. By this, God is indicating to Peter that 'unclean' Roman people are also acceptable to him.[90]

Kraft (1979a:344) concludes by summarising important principles concerning the relationship of Christian conversion to the culture in which it occurs. First, ".. conversion can and should take place within and in terms appropriate to the culture of the receptors".

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[89] See explanation of Kroeger's 'paschal paradigm' in chapter 2.2.

Second, people begin to change their world-view when they are converted. They go through a paradigm shift (cf. Kuhn 1970: 202, 204). Third, according to Kraft (1979a:336), Christian conversion is a long process, basically a 'three-step process' (cf. Syrjänen 1984:65), and fourth, it "should be in accord with the decision-making patterns of the converts' culture". Lastly, Kraft emphasises the importance "to relate the Gospel message to their felt needs".

However, Spindler (1997:295f) is of the opinion that Kraft exaggerates the anthropological factors in respect to his theory of conversion. Spindler has problems with Kraft's (1979a:338) rule: "The human beings' part of the conversion process is to be in keeping with the culture in which they are immersed". Spindler cannot endorse such an instruction to converts by asking: "What about cultures breaking down or changing rapidly? What about cultures where the decision pattern makes conversion impossible? What about individuals and families searching for liberation from oppressive contexts?". Spindler believes that Kraft's anthropological insights have overwhelmed his missiological purpose.

Spindler (1997:296) also takes note of the fact that anthropologists are often not impressed by missiological studies of conversion.[91] Accordingly, "missiologists are apparently not deemed capable of any valid interpretation of conversion to Christianity".[92] Hiebert (1996:73) signals the same animosity concerning conversion to Christianity when he says: "Change is seen as unfaithfulness to the spirit of culture. This is the reason for the deep animosity many anthropologists have for Christian missionaries: they judge cultures by the standards of divine revelation and seek to convert the people"[93] (cf. Moore 1996:204). Missionaries were often charged with destroying native cultures when they tried to convert people from other faiths. But can we ever *really understand* the Other and call for

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[90] Kraft (1979a:341) is convinced that Peter has learned his lesson because he says: "I now realize that it is true that God treats all men on the same basis, no matter what [culture] he belongs to (Acts 10:34-35)".

[91] Spindler's argument is based on the book edited by Hefner (1993). There, in the general introduction, Hefner does not even consider to quote or discuss missiologist like e.g. Freytag, Kasdorf, Triebel.

[92] According to my experience the reverse is not true: missiologists generally benefit from and make use of anthropological research. Ways are needed to be found to correct this asymmetry of relationships between anthropology and missiology.

[93] In respect to the topic of revelation and conversion, Raschke (1978) gives psychological explanations of this phenomenon in his article *Revelation and Conversion: A Semantic Appraisal.* He (1978:420) is convinced that "revelation is intimately involved with the psychological event commonly called 'conversion'".

conversion which is free from any wrong attitude? Are we not condemned to live alone on our own cultural islands?[94]

In the past, people from one culture often judged those from another, thus displaying an ethnocentric[95] or even imperialistic attitude. The situation today is very different, as Luzbetak (1988:55) confirms: "To label missionaries, particularly those of today, as ethnocentric oppressors, colonisers, and imperialists would mean to be blind to the obvious: today, as a group, the churches are in the forefront, second to none, in defending human rights and promoting betterment".

Recently, some missiologists have focused on a relatively new approach to Christian conversion which they term as 'ethnotheology'. Kasdorf (1980:20-21) describes it as "a discipline that seeks to integrate the scientific studies of theology, sociocultural anthropology, history, and psychology with a biblical view of God, humankind and culture. The objective is to understand the role of conversion from a biblical perspective within these various contexts". People and cultures are not morally neutral. Cusack (in Olson 1996:7) expressed the same notion by saying that:

> Several others in the field of mission have emphasised the similarity between the function of the missionary and that of the anthropologist, and have suggested 'ethno-theological sensitivity' and the adoption of anthropologically-developed 'roles' in order to relate effectively to alien societies.

It is important to return to a biblical view of 'others' in order to discern a new way for missions and anthropology. As a suggested answer, Hiebert (1996:77-80) outlines three points as to how Christians should view the 'others':

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[94] This is indeed Kuhn's (1970:228) argument: That we can never truly understand each other! Kuhn's work is concerned with showing the effect of world-view and standpoint regarding the nature and conclusions of scientific research. He shows how the logical empiricist and 'objective' nature of science is an illusion and that science is far more influenced by 'subjective' cultural and non-rational factors than has been conventionally accepted (Bate 1993:334).

[95] Moore (1996:204) says that "a corollary of cultural relativism is 'ethnocentrism', which in its more benign form could be considered the fallacy of perceiving an alien culture in term of one's own culture" (cf. Hofstede 1980:31-33).

1) Christians must affirm the common humanity of all people (Gen 1:26, Isa 45:22 etc., cf. Bosch 1991:18).

2) Scripture leads Christians to the conclusion: In the church there are no Others; there are only us-members of the body of Christ (Acts 10:34, cf. Bosch 1991:117,148).

3) Christians are called to minister in a fallen world and to call for its transformation;[96] the church in the world (cf. Bosch 1991:386, 484).

These approaches give a positive perspective of human cultures and their role in providing foundations for people's lives, by acknowledging that people's culture is an indispensable part of their lives. It follows, for instance, the acknowledgement and understanding in cultures between an individual and a more collective emphasis. That means that, where the emphasis is more collective it is inappropriate to apply versions of Christianity which focus strongly on individual, interior religious sentiment (Olson 1996).

Another cultural aspect needs to be considered: Do the cultures contain some elements which could be termed as 'evil' in the light of the gospel? The Christian call to conversion certainly implies this and calls to put away these evils and sinful behaviours. Hofmann (1968:2) reports that in the past "many Christian missionaries regarded everything in the non-Christian religion and cultures as evil, idolatrous and superstitious, and they determined that these should be replaced by the Christian religion and cultural values". For this Christians have often been criticised. The other extreme, however, has been expressed by Moore (1996:204) when he says that "during the equality generation the doctrine of cultural relativism assumed every culture to be inherently good and as good as every other culture. After the atrocities of World War II, this naive doctrine began to give way, and even the strongest advocates of pluralism recognised the need to talk about evil".

Today, Christian missionaries have a much more balanced approach to conversion and culture as this is evident in many writings.[97] The main concern is that culture should not be destroyed through the conversion process. Richardson (1981b:493) expressed this notion

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[96] Staples and Mauss (1987:138), for instance, speak of a 'self-transformation' and emphasise the subjective character of conversion.

[97] In the book by Winter and Hawthorne (1981), for instance, 18 articles are published on *The Cultural Perspective* by well known authors such as Hesselgrave, Hiebert, Richardson, Larson, Richardson and Parshall.

with the following words: "We may destroy certain things 'in' cultures, just as doctors sometimes must destroy certain things 'in' a human body, if a patient is to live. But surely as we grow in experience and God-given wisdom, we must not and will not destroy cultures themselves". The same sentiment is expressed in the writings of *The Willowbank Report* by the Lausanne Committee (1981:522,524), there it is emphasised that "elements in our traditional evangelical view of conversion are more cultural than biblical and need to be challenged … conversion should not 'de-culturize' a convert".

Considering the change in the conversion process, Mayers (1974:255) is convinced that the above problem can be solved by asking four cross-cultural questions in the following sequence: "1) What is the norm, i.e., life-way? 2) Is the person living in keeping with his norm? 3) Does the norm need changing? 4) Who is responsible for changing the norm?". As a result of observing these steps the culture of the convert is not destroyed since "the change agent is now open to a number of possibilities: his own norm needs changing, the other's norm needs changing, both need changing, or neither needs changing" (Mayers 1974:256). Or in other words; both parties are involved in the change process. Saayman (1992:169) explains the same notion, by differentiating between the two terms *cross-cultural* and *intercultural*, with the following words: "Communication among people from different cultures can change from a one-way *cross-cultural* communication, to *intercultural* communication". Conversion does not happen in a vacuum but rather within cultural environments. The present study focuses on conversion in an urban environment; the area around Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Bate (1993:235-262) gives an interesting insight into the cultural understanding in the South African context. He shows that the term *culture* is used and understood in many diverse senses. Under the heading of 'Culture as The People', Bate (1993:236) says that "South Africa is popularly seen as made up of a number of 'cultural groups' which more or less coincide with the ethnic groups of apartheid ideology".

With the political and social changes in the 1990's in mind, Bate describes the emergence of a common 'South African' culture (Bate 1993:246,261). In addition, it is evident that in an urban situation, where people from originally different cultural backgrounds live closely and intermingled together, 'pure' cultures slowly disappear and take on new more

encompassing forms. As a result, conversion today often happens more and more without converts changing the society or cultural groups.[98]

2.6 Understanding of 'Authentic' Christian Conversion

Christians often have a definite understanding of what a 'true' or 'authentic' conversion is. Is this understanding still relevant in the light of meeting people of other religions, such as Islam, or should Christians have a different, possibly wider perspective? The purpose of this section is to give an outline on the missiological understanding of this topic. Then in chapter eight, I answer this question in the light of the discussion in this section and the research findings and analysis in chapters five, six and seven.

There are many Christian writers who speak of 'authentic', 'genuine' or 'real' as opposed to 'impure' conversion. It is understood and explained in different ways. Kasdorf (1980:112), for instance, describes 'authentic conversion' as "a return to the Creator in repentance, a renewal by the Redemptor in regeneration or re-creation". He (Kasdorf 1980:162-164) also discusses the difference between 'genuine conversion' and 'nominal commitment'. Kasdorf makes a distinction between 'first-generation' and 'second-generation' Christians (cf. Kraft 1979a:329). He is of the opinion that first-generation Christians have a greater chance to be genuinely converted, because for them "conversion means a dramatic change of lifestyle, attitude, being, and action," whereas second-generation Christians face the danger of a "nominal commitment, namely the tendency to confess a creed, water down the ethical norms, follow certain pious practices, and apply the letter of the law rather than live governed by the spirit of Christ in relationship with God and others".

Kasdorf makes a call to all Christians to become 'first-generation Christians' in nature because he is convinced that "Christian conversion cannot be inherited". His condition of authentic conversion is therefore, that "people must be born from above in order to become

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[98] In respect to the correlation of Society and Culture, Mayers (1974:122-123) says that although "society is distinct from culture" and every "society has a culture, a total life-way that characterises it", but nevertheless "society and culture are so completely intertwined that it is impossible to determine where one begins and the other leaves off".

first-generation children of God". Nevertheless, Kasdorf admits that the Holy Spirit can use even 'dogma' to bring about genuine conversion (cf. Freytag 1961:248-253), which means that a person turns from a nominal to a genuine commitment.

Price (1981) argues very strongly in his article 'The Centrality and Scope of Conversion' for the centrality of the Holy Spirit in Christian conversion. He (1981:26) says that "conversion understood as the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit is not merely the entry-point to the Christian life. Rather, it is integral to the theological agenda and determines the shape of evangelical religious life from beginning to end" (cf. Griffin 1980:109, Brauer 1978:240, Morrison 1992:49). Wells (1989:21) is convinced that conversion is supernatural. He says:

> God certainly is the direct cause of conversion in at least three senses. Without God's saving action in Christ, conversion would not be possible. Without the convincing work of the Holy Spirit, conversion would not be desirable. And without the function of the Scriptures, conversion would not be Christian.

The nature of the Puritan conversion experience also focusses on the work of the Holy Spirit. Brauer (1978:230) is of the opinion that it can be expressed rather simply, namely "it is a profound, overwhelming, totally transforming experience in which a person believes that he has experienced death and rebirth thorough the powerful working of the Spirit of God". The Puritans insisted that every believer must have gone through a typical or standard conversion experience which consisted of a struggle of 'death or dying to self' and then the rebirth in which the new believer experiences a 'new birth'. The consequence was a totally reordered life (Brauer 1978:231).

In similar terms Nock (1933:6-7) defines true conversion as a "reorientation of the soul" involving a "deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another" as well as Conn (1986:268) who speaks of true religious conversion as a "fundamental reorientation to truth, value, and God". Conn is of the opinion that Christian conversion is more than content change. He (1986:212) views authentic Christian conversion as "fundamental cognitive, affective, moral, and faith transformations" as demanded by the Gospel. Subsequently, Conn (1986:210) is convinced that in genuine

Christian conversion "one's being is transformed so radically that one begins to follow Jesus in a direction diametrically opposed to the spontaneous, instinctive way of narcissistic self-fulfillment. One commits oneself to and seriously engages the personally reflective life of love." It appears to me, that Conn is of the opinion that 'authentic conversion' becomes evident only after the actual conversion commitment. It is when a person truly follows Jesus and "begins to live this truth" (Conn 1986:208).

Kasdorf (1980:163) makes another interesting statement in respect to what he understands as authentic conversion. He emphasises the difference between 'belief' and 'trust':

> The one is rooted in a belief system, a creed, a dogma, and can be learned, mentally accepted and verbally recited or confessed, like a confession of faith; the other is rooted in experience, existential living, discipleship, and finds expression in relationship with, and reliance on, God.

Kasdorf says that faith in the sense of belief may be acquired by accepting a creedal system and the practical result is little or no change in lifestyle (cf. Wiens 1965:5, Barclay 1963:84). In contrast, only faith in the sense of trust has the capability to bring about a change of lifestyle, ethics and values, loyalty and lordship. This is therefore what Kasdorf understands regarding genuine conversion: To trust in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and follow his lifestyle!

Barclay (1963:60-61) has the following to say about 'real conversion': "It cannot be too often said that, although the New Testament never says that a man can be saved by works, it always insists that a man is saved *for* works: and any conversion which does not produce a moral and ethical effect upon a man's life and character is not a real conversion at all … all new chastity, a new purity, a new beauty, a new quality of caring must be an essential part of the result of any conversion experience".

Authentic conversion, according to Dulles (1981:176), demands "a radical shift in a person's apprehensions and values, accompanied by a similar radical change in oneself, in one's relations to God". Dulles (1981:185) emphasises that "the kind of transformation

required by religious conversion, if it is to be authentic, must be the work of God. We cannot convert ourselves by our own unaided powers".

The topic of 'Conversion as a radical personal change' is the one theme pervading the literature on conversion.[99] This conception dates back to the Biblical use of the term and the cluster of words used to refer to it (Hebrew *shub,* Greek *epistrephein, strephein, metanoia*). These words indicate a dramatic change, a turning from one viewpoint to another, or a return to principles from which one has strayed (Gillespie 1979:12-17).

Similar words were used by the WCC (1982:433) when it emphasised that authentic conversion lays total claim to the individual; it "incorporates the totality of our life, because God's love is concerned with that totality".

For Kroeger (1996a:374), authentic conversion is seen only in the 'paschal paradigm'[100]. He perceives all human life within this 'paschal mystery' and pictures genuine conversion only in this framework. As a result, he calls people "to be converted to the paschal mystery and to a deeper love and experience of God" (1996a:376).

Kritzinger et al (1994:34-36) put forward the following points (cf. WCC 1982:433-434) on what their understanding is of authentic conversion or "acceptable practice of conversion":

1) Conversion is contextual (or socio-historical), (cf. Bosch 1991:417), where culture is an important part of this reality.
2) It should be based on God's all-encompassing love and should therefore be a joyful invitation to communion with Jesus and his followers (cf. Bosch 1991:413, Costas 1980:184).
3) It should be a call to service (cf. Scott 1980:212, Bosch 1991:239, 418, Costas 1980:186-187). This means putting ourselves at God's disposal as workers in his vineyard, in the *missio Dei*.

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[99] Even today, as in earlier times, scholars still debate whether conversion involves sudden, gradual, or multiple and serial changes (cf. Pratt 1926, Richardson & Stewart 1978, Richardson 1980). The notion of radical change remains at the centre of all conceptions of conversion, whether theological or social scientific.
[100] See description of Kroeger's 'paschal paradigm' in paragraph 2.2.

Griffin (1980:17), who experienced conversion herself, defines this event as "the discovery, made gradually or suddenly, that God is real … the direct experience of the saving power of God…it is a continuing revelation and a transforming force … becoming open to God's overflowing and powerful love".

Costas (1980:182) gives a fascinating description of authentic Christian conversion as an ongoing process in the Kingdom of God:

> For the complexity of conversion does not lie in a fixed number of experiences but in the fact that it is a plunge into an ongoing adventure. Christian conversion is a journey into the mystery of the Kingdom of God which leads from one experience to another. Initiation in the journey of the Kingdom implies a plunge into an eschatological adventure where one is confronted with ever new decisions, turning points, fulfilment, and promises which will continue until the ultimate fulfilment of the Kingdom. It also implies that one is confronted with the need to make ever new returnings to the fundamental point of reference, a signpost that accompanies one throughout the journey like the travelling tabernacle of the Old Testament or the "recalling to mind" that the children of Israel engaged in year after year in the Passover; a celebration and living again, at whatever point of their pilgrimage, of the Passover experience.

Leon (1975:1158) says that a non-authentic conversion is a sclerotic experience.[101] He goes on to describe authentic conversion as a linear experience. He too, emphasises that conversion is Christ-centred when he says that "Jesus invites us to 'follow him on the way' and this makes abundant life possible. Conversion is necessarily lineal. A line is a continuation of dots. New birth is nothing else but one of those dots". Evangelical preaching aimed at conversion, states Leon, should insist on the new birth as the beginning of a process of perfecting the image of God which is in every person.

Beernaert (1987:379) is of the opinion that 'genuine' conversion will only be demonstrated after the actual event has happened. He bases the argument on Jesus' saying that " a tree is recognised by its fruit" (Mt 3:10, 12:33). Accordingly, Beernaert says that "a genuine conversion will always be judged by its concrete fruits, that is to say, what it produced

throughout a human life … it lies in the action of our hands and of our feet once we have stood up to set out (again) and to follow Jesus Christ". Genuine conversion is therefore evidenced in the presence of works (cf. Wells 1989:25, 148, Griffin 1980:173).

Above I have endeavoured to outline some aspects of the missiological debate on 'authentic' conversion. In similar ways today, Christians and Muslims try to find their identity and seek an explanation of 'authentic' conversion. This whole matter becomes even more relevant since people convert with different motives. Often religious leaders, who themselves have doubtful conceptions, come to wrong conclusions and certain shifts of emphasis are taking place. It is therefore not surprising that converts often have a distorted understanding of conversion, which is not even in harmony with the actual teaching of the respective faith community.

Though it appears that Christians have a fairly clear idea of conversion the issue has come under scrutiny from different quarters. In the next section I will outline views which have been raised in questioning the validity of conversion.

2.7 Validity of Conversion Questioned

In an age when far-reaching changes have come upon the Christian church, people from some quarters look at preaching for conversion as a matter of proselytising. Thus, in certain quarters of contemporary mission theology, the validity of conversion has become an issue of debate. Some go so far as to say that the responsibility and goal of mission work is no longer that of converting unbelievers, but rather that of partnership in building up the Third World. Even such a well known book as *The Theology of the Christian Mission* with more than two dozen contributors makes only two or three incidental references to conversion (Anderson 1961:75, 132). This may indicate that many mission theologians prefer to shun the controversial issue.

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[101] Leon's paper (1975) is a reminder to evangelists and preachers to refrain from brain-washing techniques in order to produce conversions. He deals with a treatment of guilt as related to evangelization and conversion by differentiating between 'existential guilt' and 'neurotic guilt'.

Löffler (1969:7) very perceptively says that the conversion question "has proved to be one of the most obstinate in the history of the ecumenical movement". Hoffman (1968:1-2) states that in Catholic circles the emphasis has shifted from conversion to propagation. In more general terms he asserts that "conversion of all mankind to Christianity through missions was the church's aim" in the past, but "contemporary Christians no longer accept this notion".

In accord with much of ecumenical and conciliar thinking, Hoffman (1968:19) believes that all religions, including Christianity, must carry on dialogue "in an atmosphere of mutual esteem and respect and let all the peoples walk each in the name of its god just as Christians 'walk in the name of the Lord - God, Jesus Christ - for ever and ever'". Christian witness and service should continue, but not 'proselytizing and conversion', according to Hoffman. In stark contrast to these above views, for instance, are the mission goals (*ad quid mittendi*) of Voetius. His first goal of mission is "the conversion of the heathen" (Verkuyl 1978:21, 184).

Looking from yet another perspective, Spindler (1997:295) is of the opinion that anthropologists basically reject the existence of genuine religious conversion. He says:

> For them, conversion is never without strings attached, and hardly ever a free, purely religious, and personal decision. There must be some pressure somewhere, and conversion must have a social, economic, and political function… They argue that conversion is a means to an end, and the end is self-determination and self-fulfilment governed by self-interest.

During my missionary career in South Africa, since 1984, I have been listening to leaders in the church and lay people alike as to how they understand conversion and its motives. The variety of understandings and opinions is astonishing. Although the written statements of the respective church denominations are usually quite clear and based on biblical concepts, how they are interpreted is quite another thing. Especially in the mainline churches (e.g. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist Church) conversion to Christianity is often equated with becoming a church member. The following quotation from the 'Laws and Disciplines' of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (1997b:16-17) serves as an example in this respect:

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

> The conditions, privileges and duties of membership in the Methodist Church follow the tradition common to the Methodist People from the beginning. Membership is not conditional upon the profession to theological tenets, or dependent upon traditional authority or ecclesiastical ritual. It is based upon a personal experience of the Lord Jesus Christ, brought about by His Spirit, ranging from the earliest signs of Divine Grace in the soul to its crowning blessedness in the joy of 'perfect love', and upon a sharing of such gifts of grace with others seeking or enjoying a similar experience.

> All persons are welcomed into membership who sincerely desire to be saved from their sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and show the same in life and conduct, and who seek to have communion with Christ Himself and His people by taking up the duties and privileges of the Methodist Church.

The question here is: Are only those who 'sincerely desire to be saved' accepted as members or is it not on condition of certain theological professions? In contrast, the Pentecostal Churches usually paint a much narrower and fundamental picture of conversion.[102] Hoffman (1968:1),[103] speaking from a Roman Catholic perspective, has expressed the same concern by saying:

> As defined by the Catholic Church, conversion meant a personal moral change or turning to the Church. Theologians often identified conversion to God with conversion to the Church, bypassing the question of conversion to Christ. Actually conversion should be the work of God's grace rather than an imposition upon people.

Löffler (1967:253-254) confirms this notion by stating that "the meaning of conversion in the Roman Catholic Church is closely related to baptism and entry into the church … on the Protestant side there is no one understanding of conversion, although the term is more widely accepted in general". Thus it becomes evident how conversion has been interpreted

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[102] Harrison (1974) in his study, for instance, has described the process of building commitment to a Catholic Pentecostal group as a social learning experience culminating in the conversion passage of receiving the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit'.

[103] Ronan Richard Hoffman (Roman Catholic) is Associate Professor of Missiology and of modern Church History in the School of Theology, Catholic University of America, Washington D.C.

and understood differently throughout history and varies from one church tradition to another.

Snow and Machalek (1984:171) list three empirical indicators of conversion which, they say, has been revealed by their inspection of research literature. These three indicators are: membership status, demonstration events and rhetorical patterns. Snow and Machalek are of the opinion that it is a mistake to equate membership with conversion, since they are "two related but not identical phenomena".

An extreme position in respect to membership and conversion was taken by the Puritans in the 17th Century. Brauer (1978:236) reports that in New England "church membership was confined only to people who could demonstrate the genuineness of their conversion experience publicly before the church. This was a new membership requirement added to the traditional Puritan and Separatist demand for a pure life and a proper knowledge of true Christian doctrine".

This means that every person had to give public evidence of proper conversion before one could become a church member and that the purity of the church and the security of the holy commonwealth were both based on the concept of conversion. I agree with Brauer (1978:236) when he concludes that "conversion now found itself in a new role. It no longer functioned as a means of gathering support to transform a church and a nation. Now it was the bedrock on which the church was built and on which the state rested. Conversion became the cornerstone of the establishment".

One can easily see that this constitutes a new and dangerous role for conversion. It was doomed from the beginning since people were almost forced to produce a conversion story which was pleasing to the church. It was the start of a false emphasis on conversion and the start of fabricated conversion stories in order to gain membership. The emphasis therefore shifted; it was now on the presentation of the correct 'story' and not any longer on personal transformation. I have laboured on this debate to some length since similar trends can be seen in the conversion of Muslims and Christians today. Though I am not denying people's freedom of choice I have observed the notion that individuals are tempted to convert and adopt certain 'initiation stories' in order to gain entrance into a faith community and thus

have certain advantages. The sad thing is that people adopt a wrong idea of conversion because a shift of emphasis has taken place.

Public commitments made at revival meetings and crusades of the Billy Graham type are termed 'demonstration events' that serve as empirical indicators of conversion. Snow and Machalek (1984:172) say that only because of their dramatic nature people have often "treated demonstration events as valid and reliable evidence of conversion". According to Snow and Machalek, research has shown that a majority of such conversions are not really 'true conversions'. Thus, demonstration events do not automatically indicate conversion. However, in such cases too it depends largely on how researchers define and understand conversion and then classify it accordingly.

By 'rhetorical conversion indicators', Snow and Machalek (1984:173) understand a change "discernible in converts' speech and reasoning".[104] Accordingly, researchers make a judgement on the basis of these verbal accounts whether or not conversion has really taken place. However, this judgement depends largely on the conception the researcher has (cf. Snow & Machalek 1984, James 1902). One of the issues is the 'biographical reconstruction', whereby converts dismantle the past and reconstruct it in accordance with the new 'universe of discourse'[105] and its attendant grammar and vocabulary of motives. In other words, a convert adopts a conversion story which he/she believes is acceptable to the respective faith community and prompts acceptance and benefits. I have become aware of this phenomenon in my research on Christian-Muslim conversions as well (see chapter 5-7). This is for instance the case, where converts after a while discover that their initial conversion motive is classified as an 'impure' motive by the faith community and they then 'modify' their biography accordingly.

Another issue needs to be addressed here. It is the problem of 'how much change is needed to constitute conversion', or in other words, when is a conversion radical and complete? A number of scholars have addressed this problem, as for instance Nock (1933:7), who makes

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[104] Snow and Machalek (1984:173-174) list and explain four rhetorical properties: biographical reconstruction, adoption of a master attribution scheme, suspension of analogical reasoning and adoption of the convert role (for a more comprehensive discussion of these issues see also chapter 4.1).

[105] This technical term, 'universe of discourse', means that a person's communication language (i.e. words, symbolic interaction) undergoes a radical change as a result of the conversion experience in order to make sense of self and the world (cf. Staples & Mauss 1987:135).

the distinction between *conversion* and *adhesion*.[106] Nock understands the latter term as referring to the possibility of participating in a religious group's rituals without assuming a new way of life. Therefore, unlike conversion, adhesion involves the acceptance of new religions as "useful supplements and not as substitutes". According to Nock, the adhesionist consequently has "a foot on each side of the fence". The problem is, that it is extremely difficult in many cases to say whether a person is a convert or an 'adhesionist'[107] and it is impossible to declare where conversion begins and ends on this continuum. Further, it is not clear how to define conversion as radical change in order to be conceptualised as conversion. Snow and Machalek (1984:170) point out that the answer to this problem "depends not only on the still unresolved problem of designating the degree of change required for conversion, but also on specifying exactly what it is that undergoes change. Is it beliefs and values, behaviour and identity, interpersonal loyalties, or something even more fundamental?"

By introducing the term 'continuum' I am suggesting that the matter of conversion is not a simple either-or matter. I have discussed the understanding of a number of authors on 'authentic conversion' in chapter 2.6. There we can see how different authors endeavour to define their concept and understanding of 'pure' conversion. However, there is a whole spectrum of views on this matter between the extremes of 'pure' (or radical) conversion and 'pure' adhesion.

In accepting this continuum I am calling into question the dichotomising way of thinking that conversion can be easily defined. It is my experience that conversion takes place somewhere on the continuum. The conversion stories (chapter 5 and 6) bear evidence to this fact and other authors have confirmed this too (cf. Horton 1971:105). I will attempt to draw some conclusion on this matter in chapter eight in the context of my empirical research.

Other scholars have argued that it is something more fundamental than e.g. beliefs and identities that change when one undergoes conversion. Heirich (1977:673-675), for instance, speaks of a change in one's 'sense of ultimate grounding' or 'root reality'. Seen in

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[106] The distinction between conversion and adhesion has also been elaborated by Shepherd (1979). Snow and Machalek (1984:169) explain two more similar terms: *alternation* and *consolidation*. These terms are used in contrast to conversion and are understood as reversible and less comprehensive change.

[107] See in chapter 7 of this study where conversion experiences are analysed.

this light, conversion affects not only a change in values, beliefs and identities but even more fundamental aspects. It could possibly encompass the displacement of one 'universe of discourse' by another. The result is then, that such a conception does not restrict conversion only to changes from one religion to another or to the adoption of a new religious world view but to a much more fundamental paradigm shift (cf. Snow & Machalek 1984).

Teeter (1990) proposes to speak of 'tentative believing' rather than 'conversion' in the context of Muslims attaining a new understanding of Christ.[108] He is convinced that in a Western context religious conversion is understood in a stereotypical way in terms of the individual, spiritual dynamics of religious belief and commitment with a decisive decision (cf. Tippett 1987:261). Teeter believes that it is possible for a Muslim to walk with Christ without actually 'converting to Christianity'. Teeter has developed a 'Muslim followers of Jesus' model. In this model, being 'born of the Spirit' is seen as a process, rather than as a sudden or a single crisis event of being 'born again'. Conn (1979:101) confirms this by suggesting that for Muslims, coming to Christ may be more of a 'process of becoming', rather that a one-step decision. Parshall (1980:87) supports this as well on the basis of his experience of Muslim conversions: "It may be obscured by a process of gradually coming to the truth of the gospel … for most Muslim converts, the day and hour of conversion cannot be specified".

In Teeter's model, Muslims are not seen as objects, to be 'converted' but rather as being led slowly to a better understanding of Christ. This process is discussed as a 'dynamic equivalent' to conversion and Teeter (1990:308) illustrates this with a continuum: -5 is agonistic, +3 and +4 are termed as 'tentative believer in Christ' and +5 as 'committed believer'. Teeter is critical of those Christians who are trying to divide people into those who are 'converted Christians' and 'unbelievers'. He (1990:311) believes that only God can make this judgement and bases his argument on references such as Mt 25, 1Cor 4:5 and Rom 2:16.

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[108] Teeter and his team is testing this model with a *Friendship Centre* in Bethlehem, Israel. This is a drop-in centre for Muslim university students. There the Bible and the Qur'an are discussed. The aim is to break down barriers of misunderstanding and to give a new understanding of Jesus.

On another level, conversion is being called to question by some Roman Catholic writers. Hoffman (1968:19) of the Catholic University of America has, for instance, suggested that, after serious dialogue with the non-Christian who wishes to retain his or her religion:

> Catholics must not only give in gracefully but, even further, let them know that they would sincerely like them to be better followers of their chosen religion and leave all matters to Almighty God.

In support of this view he advances not only the statements of Vatican II, but also Acts 5:38f (Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go!) and Micah 4:1-5 (All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God) – an exegetical procedure which can be questioned.

There are many more issues at stake than just those of Biblical exegesis. The interpretation of the great non-Christian religions as containing within themselves 'anonymous Christianity', i.e. effective means of salvation, has been put forward by a number of Roman Catholic scholars in recent years. An account will be found in Hillman's book *The Wider Ecumenism* (1968), (cf. Knitter 1985:128-130). Hillman (1968:60) discusses the mystery of the universe and human destiny and challenges the Christian reader by asking whether it is possible that such a great mystery is approached by one road only. Hillman is suggesting, that the rites of other religions manifest an anonymous but none the less effective operation of grace. Hillman (1968:61) urges the church to give deeper thought to the relationship with other religions and approach their followers positively and sympathetically, while at the same time respecting the integrity of the Christian vocation.

Nevertheless, Hillman (1968:73) emphasises that "there really is only one way: Christ in whom man's faith may be, with equal validity for salvation, either implicit or explicit". This matter has been much debated (cf Wells 1989:19-20) and some missionaries have brought forward some 'revolutionary' ideas, namely that the conversion process may start within their culture and social structure. Richardson (1981a:416-420)[109], for instance, has

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[109] Richardson was a pioneer missionary among the Sawi tribe of Irian Jaya in 1962. He is the author of *Peace Child, Lords of the Earth,* and *Eternity in Their Hearts.*

suggested the prevalence of redemptive analogies in human societies with some interesting practical examples.

The above discussions on the authenticity and validity of conversion displays a wide variety of views. It seems that opinions will remain divided in the perception and in assessing the scope and dimension of conversion.

2.8 Categories of Conversion Motives

The topic of 'conversion motive' is the central concern of my study. I regard it therefore as important to review some categories which have been proposed by other researchers. By studying these lists of categories it becomes clear that the different motives reflect various historical, social, religious, economic and cultural situations. In chapter 3.4 I will propose a set of categories which is, in my opinion, most applicable to the context of my study.

The discovery of the great variety of conversion motives is not new in mission studies and in missionary experience. One way in which the question of conversion motives surfaced in the past is the reluctance of Protestant missionaries to admit new Christians to the sacraments.[110] Admission to baptism and the eucharist is often delayed and it is required that a long period of preparation precedes the admission.[111] It can also be said that missionaries were happy to see inquirers and 'catechumens', but then often remained undecided about the next steps for fear that conversion was not absolutely sincere or might be invalidated by subsequent deeds. Christian leaders tried to overcome this uncertainty by creating a policy of admission by degrees (cf. Wainwright 1969). This is still widely implemented today, often to the frustration of inquirers and converts.

Questions about motivation for conversion have always been raised in missionary circles. The attention was first directed to the motives of foreign missionaries leaving their country

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[110] The importance of the sacraments in the context of conversion is spelled out by Nissiotis (1967:264): "Conversion as an ecclesial reality is only possible through the historical community in continuity through the centuries, initiated and confirmed by Baptism and nourished by the Eucharist".

[111] The problem of easy or delayed access to baptism is an especially disturbing question in church history and missionary practice. Church constitutions and bylaws are very categorical on the matter.

of origin and living in unknown, sometimes hostile or even dangerous environments (cf. Bosch 1991:284-345, Verkuyl 1978:89-114). However, the focus then turned more and more to the motives of the prospective converts. Why did they become Christians? Often, older missionary reports give the impression that the spiritual motive or 'the love for Jesus' was the only reason why people accepted the Christian faith. In recent times, however, that has been widely questioned in missiological debates and especially by critics of missionary enterprises. It became clear that motivations other than the spiritual often play a significant role in the decision making process.

Horton (1971, 1975) and Fisher (1973) have had an ongoing discussion over the reasons for Christian and Islamic conversion in Africa. Both have contributed significantly to the understanding of the widespread conversions that are continuing in Africa. Horton addresses the question of the motivations of conversion from an intellectualist perspective, in which local religions are viewed as theoretical systems intended for explanation, prediction and control of space-time events, as well as for communion with spiritual beings including God, the ancestors, various spirits and others (Horton 1971:94). Further, Horton (1975:393) contends that sometimes the choice of whether to convert to Christianity or to Islam depends upon which religion happens to be closer at hand. McKinney (1994:149), in his study among the *Bajju,* observes that "religious conversion may also occur as a response to class oppression in which one social class or ethnic group oppresses another".

Van Butselaar (1981:112f), for instance, lists four categories. His empirical research was conducted among the people of Rwanda who embraced the Christian faith. Van Butselaar emphasises that the four factors were never found in isolation but always combined with one or more of the others:

1) **Spiritual:** It is interesting, that Van Butselaar lists this particular motive first. One possible reason is that most converts mentioned this as their primary motive, though "the danger of *hineininterpretieren* is not being ignored" (1981:112). Another reason why spiritual motives are placed high on the list is that they have "traditionally been called the 'true' motive for conversion".

2) **Social:** It is clear that the previous social structure of Rwanda played an important role in the decision making process. Some reasons are: seeking protection against another

powerful group, being exempted from forced labour demanded by either of the African chiefs or the white colonial power, and peer-group dynamics.

3) **Material:** Van Butselaar reports that early missionaries frequently offered the people material help. Employment, medical care and education were also offered. The material conversion motives have been criticized most often in the past but Van Butselaar cautions by saying that "we should not forget that many a new church member first attracted by material gain later developed real Christian maturity through the teaching and preaching of the young Christian community".

4) **Personal:** These motives are the result of positive interpersonal relationships with the missionaries and their African associates.

In conclusion, Van Butselaar (1981:113) makes some significant statements. I list them here since I believe that they relate notably to my study:

1) Conversion to Christianity in Africa is motivated by a mixture of spiritual, social, material, and personal factors.

2) Motivations that at first sight appear to have little relationship to the spiritual may, on closer examination, prove to have had a thoroughly biblical and Christian background.

3) Generally speaking, conversion is a *process* rather than a sudden experience. Even those related to the so-called 'East African Revival' indicated that their conversion experience during the revival was part of a process that began earlier and continued long afterward.

4) The social structure in a country plays an important role in conditioning the motives of conversion to Christianity.

In my opinion, Van Butselaar makes some very profound statements based on his research experience which have many resemblances to my research. I will reflect on these issues in chapter eight in the light of my empirical research.

Van Butselaar (1981:113) is convinced that "it remains unquestionable that the Holy Spirit is the creative force in drawing people to salvation in Christ. The Holy Spirit continues to do so in Africa, sometimes through missionary activity and sometimes in spite of it". This notion is emphasised by Hoffman (1968:5) who said: "To the missionary is committed the external work alone but not the conversion itself, which is the work of God and His

grace".[112] Very similar to Van Butselaar is McKinney (1994), who distinguishes between four conversion motives in his case study: political, religious, sociological and personal.

Haron (1992:11) proposes categories of motives by Africans who converted to Islam. The difference is made between 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' reasons:

1) **Intrinsic:** It has to do with the unofficial adoption of servants, conversion of domestic servants and intermarriage. Haron mentions that people in this category are also termed as 'domestic' converts.

2) **Extrinsic:** Personal attraction to Muslim dress and symbols, dissatisfaction with Christianity (social-political-economic reasons; undermining of one's human dignity).

Vawda (1994:543), based on his interviews and observations, makes the following suggestion of categories of conversion motives:

1) Personal, 2) Non-racial and non-nationalistic basis of Islam, 3)Theological, 4) Disillusionment with Christianity, 5) Political, 6) The pan-Africanist element of Islam.

Vawda does not suggest these categories as mutually exclusive. According to his experience these motives are rather involved in a "complex interplay of at least two or more". My research will show whether this statement of Vawda also applies to my interviewees.

In a recent study, Chapman (1998:57-83) includes a chapter entitled *Islamic Mission Today: Is the West Ripe for Conversion?*, in which he suggests 14 motivational conversion factors why people in the West (mainly Britain) convert to Islam. These are: 1) Dissatisfaction with a previous religion or ideology, 2) Disillusionment with Western society, 3) Conversion through marriage, 4) Personal contact with Muslims, 5) The Qur'an, 6) A complete philosophy of life, 7) Simplicity and rationality, 8) Moral and ethical standards, 9) Disgust with racism, 10) Special appeal to women, 11) Sufism, 12) Community and individualism, 13) Supernatural phenomena, 14) Emotional experiences. This list of motives is the most comprehensive and detailed I have seen. In my research I have a shorter list of motives since I have combined certain of these motives into larger categories (see 3.4). Chapman (1998:61) is convinced that in each conversion process these factors appear in various combinations.

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[112] See also Smith, J (1994) where God's role in contrast to the human role in conversion is discussed.

I have not found any further list of conversion motives emerging from practical research. One reason is that other researches do not focus on 'motives' but on other approaches to conversion such as 'process' (Syrjänen 1984). I conclude this chapter with a quotation from Löffler (1975:42). Insisting on the centrality of conversion in the *Missio Dei*, he says:

> "Fellowship" minus the passion for conversion leads to ghettoism; "service" minus the call to conversion is a gesture without hope; Christian education minus conversion is religiosity without decision; and "dialogue" without challenge to conversion remains sterile talk.

CHAPTER 3

MOTIVATION THEORIES FOR CONVERSION

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Need of this Chapter

In paragraph 1.6 I argued that missiology is unable to deal with its theological concern without the mutual stimulation of disciplines both theological and secular (Luzbetak 1988:14). Missiologists often fail to take a sufficiently broad and inclusive perspective on the topic of conversion.

There is some overlapping among the various fields of study.[113] For instance, Luzbetak (1988:23) explains the nature and scope of anthropology and says about its definition: "Anthropology inquires into the basic questions about who human beings are, how they came to be what they are, how they behave, and why they behave as they do".[114] When speaking about psychology and anthropology, Luzbetak (1988:43) says that anthropology "is concerned with the norms for behaviour for a *society*, whereas psychology focuses its attention on *individual* behaviour".

As far as sociology is concerned, its interest in conversion is only of recent origin. Religious conversion has not been a favourite theme in the sociological research tradition. Nevertheless, it can be said that it has undergone a 'renaissance' in recent years (Lofland & Skonovd 1981:373). Sociological interpretations have focused on conversion as the development of a new conception of self, as a phase in socialisation and the relationship between individuals and the group (cf. Rambo 1993:9). Lofland and Skonovd, who deal mainly with the North American context, present a list of six different conversion motifs which will be discussed later (chapter 3.2.2).

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[113] See also the graphical 'Chart of Components and Forces in the Missiological Process' (Luzbetak 1988:15).
[114] Concerning the discipline of anthropology, Luzbetak (1988:23) emphasises that "because the mission of the Church is to human beings, and because anthropology is the systematic study of such beings, a basic knowledge of this science is a *must* for anyone engaged in mission".

It appears then, that anthropology looks at collective, and psychology at individual human behaviour. The common factor is therefore that both disciplines are concerned with human behaviour. Luzbetak also points to differences which concern the methodology: "While psychology employs what is primarily laboratory experimentation, anthropology takes a cross-cultural approach".[115] Luzbetak stresses that these differences "do not imply that the two fields are not mutually useful", on the contrary, he confirms that psychology provides "very important information for anthropological research regarding such questions as cognition, learning theory, factors involved in culture change and the relation between personality and culture".

One could now of course argue in similar terms for the stimulative role which psychology plays in the field of missiology. It is evident that in recent years scholars have begun to appreciate more the research done on conversion in different disciplines and have seen it as a valuable contribution rather than as a dichotomy. Griffin (1980:31) confirms this by saying that "I have come to feel that psychology is no longer, if it ever was, an enemy of religion. Whoever expected a psychologist to deal with conversion in the manner of a theologian? To the extent that psychologists set about their work scientifically and honestly, they provide us with very good insight on conversion". Psychology focuses on the person and his/her patterns of perception, cognition, emotion and behaviour. The psychological study of conversion can be analysed in terms of different approaches (cf. Rambo 1992:161).[116]

Conversion in its broad sense has long been a subject of psychological interest. The motivation and mechanics of change – and conversion is primarily this – have always interested psychologists. Salzman (1966:8)[117] has the following to say on this matter:

> Prior to a science of psychology capable of dealing with such phenomena, these experiences were examined entirely within the framework of the prevailing philosophy and religious system. At such times these experiences were judged entirely on theological

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[115] Not all psychologists use laboratory experimentation.
[116] Rambo (1992:161-162), for instance, mentions four different approches to the psychological study of conversion: 1) psychoanalytic, 2) behaviourist, 3) humanistic and transpersonal, 4) social/holistic.

grounds and were considered to be products of either the work of God or of the devil. Psychological theory had introduced a third element, which is the recognition of the dynamic elements in a conversion experience which may be an attempt to resolve personal problems and personality disorders through the medium of religious symbolism. Such conversions then would be exploitatively related to religious feeling and would not represent a true religious experience....Thus psychology and its application to religious phenomena has a solid place in the theological armamentarium.

In chapter two we have seen how conversion is defined by Christians from a missiological point of view. However, people often change religion for various motives; e.g. an individual may accept a new religion simply in order to get a job to earn a living. The person may not know anything about the new religion in the beginning and even after a long period of time the individual may or may not be interested in the new religion though belonging to it in a 'nominal' way. Most Christians would refrain from calling this 'conversion' by arguing that it is not authentic.[118]

Does this mean that 'religious conversion' is true only in those cases where the primary motive is religious in nature or can one also speak of 'religious conversion' when the primary motive is e.g. economic in nature? Who determines what 'conversion' is and when it can be called 'authentic'? Even Christians differ widely on this matter. Why does a person want to change religion anyway? What are the motivations *(Beweggründe)* for such a move? Conversion is change. But why does a person want to change?

There is much debate among scholars as to which disciplines need to be considered in order to do justice to research on the phenomena of conversion (cf. Price 1981). Robertson (1978:197) for instance, says: "There has been much disagreement as to whether conversion has primarily to do with inner-psychological change relative to a supernatural agency or with change in sociocultural commitment". Heirich (1977:653) expresses the same notion when he confirms: "Believers have developed arguments about the nature of divine-human encounter, while social scientists have proposed a range of social and psychological forces at work". Although Wells (1989:21) is of the opinion that the secular understanding of

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[117] The aim of Salzman's (1966) paper is to explain the distinction between true and spurious religiosity. He is convinced that this rests on the ethical and moral principles involved in religious movements.
[118] See above under paragraph 2.6.

human behaviour severs conversion from any divine or spiritual reality, he admits that "conversion is a type of human behaviour that involves deep and complex psychological and sociological changes".

It is not the aim of this study to review all these arguments but rather to analyse some of those arguments which are relevant for this study. Nevertheless, I opt for a more 'inclusive' perspective; i.e. the different fields and disciplines need each other in order to arrive at a more holistic understanding. Psychology, for instance, can provide us with many insights on the experience of conversion and may cause stimulation to arrive at an adequate missiological understanding.

There is a need, then, to examine this phenomenon of drive or motivation as it relates to conversion, seen as a psychological change. The aim of chapter three of this study, therefore, is to argue for a wider interpretation of conversion with the help of psychology. This wider interpretation aims to contribute to an adequate missiological understanding of conversion and its motivation.

The point is basically that other religions speak about conversion as well, when what they have in mind is a 'change of religion'. To use an expression of Conn (1986:7), "the conversion door swings both ways".[119] Saayman (1992:170) emphasises the same notion since he regards "the invitation to conversion as an intrinsic dimension of the Christian gospel", but he adds that "an invitation to conversion is, in my opinion, also an intrinsic dimension of Islam and Buddhism, for example. The invitation to conversion in itself is therefore not uniquely Christian". The churches should therefore consider and understand conversion in both directions. This implies a new dimension in respect of caring for converts[120]. In addition, the churches should include various motives, apart from the religious one, in the conversion concept. These motives are material, political, personal, social and mystical in nature. Conn (1986:9) alludes to these other dimensions by asking the following questions in an attempt to understand the reality of conversion:

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[119] Conn used this expression in his book *Christian Conversion* to define conversion between various denominations of the Christian churches. Here I use it to express conversion between religions.
[120] This matter is elaborated in chapter 3.1.3 and the practical implications are explained in chapter 8.3.

And is there a distinctively Christian conversion? … Is there such a thing as an essentially religious conversion? … Is there a difference between an essentially religious conversion and a religiously-coloured psychological conversion which brings some unity and harmony to a troubled person's life?

3.1.2 Continuum (Collective or Individual Decision-Making)

Social sciences differentiate between two cultural orientations in human behaviour: Individualism and collectivism (cf. Hofstede 1980:214-219). These two orientations are sometimes compared by using an analogy of people standing in a circle. 'Collectivism' is described as being directed inward: the people face the centre of the circle or in other words, they are directed towards each other. 'Individualism' is described as being directed outward: the people in the circle stand with their backs to each other, which means that each person is looking away from the others (cf. Jonas 1996:78).

Collectivism has been popularly associated with African culture and individualism with Western culture. There seems to be general agreement that the Western society is predominantly individualistic. However, Jonas (1996:79) observes that there is a "resistance against attempts by outsiders to generalise about African societies as being collectivistic, leading to the kind of stereotyping that ignores any variation by forcing the societies and cultures of a whole continent into a single value-laden paradigm". Jonas goes on by arguing that "a description of African societies as being collectivistic ignores the effects of acculturation between Western and African culture that has been going on for centuries, and that has led to acceptance of a Western individualistic orientation by many Africans".

It must also be said, that during the course of history societies pass through major phases or epochs of development and therefore shift between the two extreme sides of individualism and collectivism. Jonas further observes that "few African scholars have actually gone so far as to characterise African society as collectivistic or 'communalistic'". Jonas concludes that "this typology does not imply that a society, whether African or Western, is exclusively or consistently collectivistic or individualistic. It refers rather to polar orientations, any society having both collectivistic and individualistic features, although one of these usually

manifests more prominently than the other. The relative prominence of a specific orientation is influenced by cultural conditioning" (cf. Bodenheimer 1986:222).

It is understood that the decision-making process is different in cultures characterised by the orientations of collectivism and individualism. This applies to any decision, including the change of religion; conversion. A decision to change religion is therefore to some degree dependent on how strong the traditional ties are of a family, clan, tribe or community. If these ties are strong enough, the individual may not change his/her religion if his or her family are against it.

3.1.3 Types of Conversion

Rambo (1993:12) distinguishes between various types of conversion. It depends very much on how a particular community defines conversion. The question then is how far someone has to go socially and culturally in order to be considered a convert. The answer is debatable and varies. A good example of the variety of viewpoints in recent psychological studies on conversion is an outline by Rambo (1993:13-14, 38-40). He differentiates between the following five types of conversion:

1. **Apostasy**, or defection: This is the repudiation of a religious tradition or its beliefs by previous members. This change does not involve acceptance of a new religious perspective but often indicates adoption of a non-religious system of values.
2. **Intensification:** It is the revitalised commitment to a faith with which the convert has had previous affiliation. It occurs when nominal members of a religious institution make their commitment a central focus in their lives.
3. **Affiliation:** This is the movement from no or minimal religious commitment to full involvement with an institution or community of faith.
4. **Institutional transition:** It is the change from one community to another within a major tradition. An example is the conversion from the Baptist to the Presbyterian church.

5. **Tradition transition:** This is the movement from one major religious tradition to another. Christianity and Islam are religions that have initiated and benefited from massive tradition transition.

There are other scholars who bring forward a classification of different types of conversion. Neill (1978:205-206), for instance, discusses eight uses of the term conversion. These are defined from a Christian point of view: 1) non-Christian to another non-Christian system, 2) from a nominal to an existential commitment to a non-Christian system, 3) from a secular to a spiritual understanding, 4) from a non-Christian to the Christian system, 5) from a Christian to a non-Christian system, 6) from nominal to passionate Christian, 7) transition from one religious community to another without change, 8) from one section of the Christian church to another.

Neill recognises only the first six types as legitimate uses of the term. I agree with him in respect of point seven but not point eight. This is of course debatable. I would regard a person who changes a Christian denomination to another as a 'convert' as long as the person confirms that he/she is a convert.

In order to visualise and attempt to clarify the various possible types of conversion, I present the following diagram with special reference to the two religions (Christianity and Islam) under consideration in this study:

Diagram 3.1: Types of Conversion
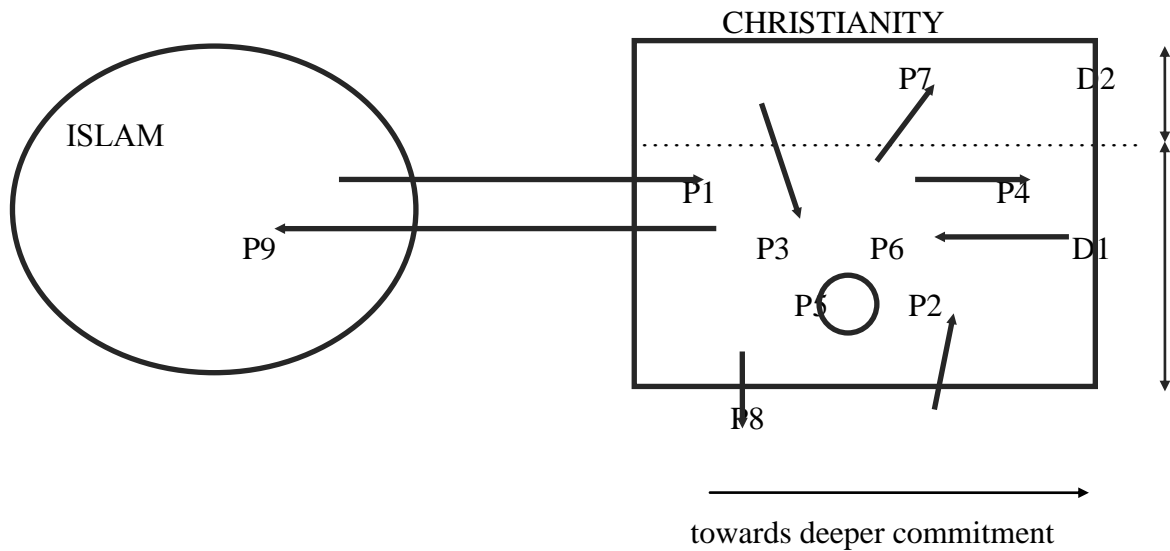
P1 = Person converting from Islam to Christianity (this is the type the churches most commonly understands as conversion, see chapter 2 of this study). This type is named by Rambo (1993:13) as 'Tradition transition' (cf. Le Mond 1993:4, Neill 1978:205; point 4).

P2 = Person converting from a non-religious background to Christianity. Rambo (1993:13) calls this type 'Affiliation'. P2-people can also be called 'first-generation Christians' (Kraft 1979a:329).

P3 = Person converting from one denomination to another (D2 to D1) within Christianity. Rambo (1993:13) calls this type 'Institutional transition' (cf. Conn 1986:7). It is also termed as 'denominational switching' (cf. Hoge 1981, Neill 1978:205; point 8).

P4 = Person converting within the same denomination (D1) of Christianity to a deeper spirituality. Rambo (1993:13) calls this type 'Intensification' (cf. Conn 1986:7-8, Witherup 1994:73, Kraft 1979a:329, Neill 1978:205; point 6).

P5 = Person with no actual conversion experience. Often called 'Nominal Christian'. P5 is being 'born and bred' in the Christian tradition.

P6 = Person converting within Christianity and the same denomination, having a negative spiritual growth. P6 is a potential convert away from the Christian faith and in opposite movement to P4. This movement could be labelled 'backsliding'.

P7 = Person converting from denomination D1 to D2 within Christianity (P7 is in the opposite direction of P3: according to Rambo (1993:13) termed as 'Institutional transition' (cf. Le Mond 1993:4, Hoge 1981).

P8 = Person converting from Christianity into a non-religious environment. This type is called by Rambo (1993:13) as 'Apostasy, or defection'.

P9 = Person converting from Christianity to Islam. Rambo (1993:14) calls this type 'Tradition transition' (Neill 1978:205; point 5).

It can be concluded that the following cases fall under the same 'types of conversion':

P1 and **P9**: 'Tradition transition'

P3 and **P7**: 'Institutional transition'

D1 signifies 'Denomination one within Christianity' whereas D2 is 'Denomination two within Christianity'. P1 - P4 symbolises conversion movements towards Christianity of denomination one. P5 could be defined as a person with 'No conversion experience'. Often such a person is called a 'nominal member' of his/her faith community. On the other hand, P6 - P9 represents people who experienced a conversion away from Christianity of denomination one (D1).

Whereas each of these types of conversion is interesting and significant to study, the special focus of this thesis is on the conversion movements of P1 and P9 (Tradition transition). This is the heart of this study with its empirical findings in chapter five and six.

3.2 A Psychology of Motivation

3.2.1 Introduction

Questions about human motivation have long been raised in missionary circles. Attention was first given to the motives of foreign missionaries in leaving their respective countries to live in what were to them unknown, sometimes hostile and dangerous regions. But the question of motivation was also raised with reference to the recipients of missionary activity, the inhabitants of the host countries and their response to the gospel. In Asia, for

instance, some new church members were pejoratively designated 'rice Christians' to indicate that 'less-than-spiritual' motivations also played a role in the conversion process.[121]

The situation in Africa is similar to that in Asia. In addition, what can be said of converts to Christianity can also be expressed of converts to Islam. Often converts were, at least in the beginning, welcomed warmly in the new religious fold. Missionaries, mission and *da'wah* organisations were only too keen to welcome converts in order to prove their success and often it was quantity rather than quality of conversions they were after. Only later were their motives questioned and converts experienced a much 'cooler' reception from members of the new religious community when their motives were discovered and classified as 'less-than-spiritual'.

In addition, considering the arrival of a missionary in a society and looking at conversions, Bulliet (1979) argues that motivations also change with time. He is convinced that it is statistically possible to divide the entire body of converts into categories according to how improbable it was for them to convert at the time that they did. The greatest improbability attaches to the earliest converts, who are pioneers in the new religion, and to the latest converts, who are lagging behind the bulk of the population.

The set of terms used by specialists on innovation diffusion for describing these different groups would be the following: the first 2.5% are 'innovators', the next 13.5% are 'early adopters', the next 34% are the 'early majority', the next 34% are the 'late majority', the final 16% are 'laggards' (Bulliet 1979:50-52). What is useful about this division into categories is that it suggests that people who converted at different times had very different motives and experiences.

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[121] In his thesis, *Christian Mission in India: A Sociological Analysis,* submitted to the Free University, Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Academische Pers, 1975), J. Boel insists that the term 'rice Christian' does not have only negative connotations. Hindus and Muslims accused 'new Christians' of only accepting the Christian faith because they received food (rice) from the missionaries. However, it is unwise to generalise since people often change their religion out of a mixture of reasons. Many who converted with the primary reason to get 'rice', later became devoted followers of Christ.

Bulliet (1979:32) concludes that "the two things to consider, then, as clues to the conversion process gleaned from the study of innovation diffusion are the idea of looking at the adoption of something new as a function of access to information about that thing and the notion of dividing the entire body of converts into groups according to the probability of their converting at the time they did". The insights gained by Bulliet are useful guidelines in discovering patterns of conversion motives. Such conclusions can however only be drawn if large amounts of information are available, i.e. many interviews of converts and observations over a long period of time.

3.2.2 Categorisation of Motives

Social scientists have brought forward different recommendations on how to classify conversion motives. Each category should define experiences that make each type of conversion distinctive. In Lonergan's (1972) framework,[122] for instance, conversion takes place on four levels related to the four levels of the act of understanding: affective (experience), intellectual (understanding), moral (judging), and religious (deciding). Like the act of understanding, these four types of conversions are interconnected and dynamically related. Lonergan's view is therefore that an integrated religious person requires a fourfold conversion. He also emphasises that the all-encompassing nature of the conversion process is "a transformation of the subject and his world" and it is "a resultant change of course and direction" (Lonergan 1972:130). What I miss in Lonergan's theory of conversion is his failure to take into account the emotive elements that shape human religious experience. Symptomatic of this failure is therefore to relate to mythic forms of experience.

Rambo (1993:14-16), on the other hand, proposes the suggestions made by Lofland and Skonovd (1981) of six different categories of conversion motives.[123] These six types are each characterised by using five independent elements (1981:375). They suggest that these major types occur at different times and with different frequencies, depending on the social and historical context. They argue that differing perceptions and descriptions of conversion

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[122] For an analysis of Loergan's framework see also Gelpi (1978:44-46).

are not merely the result of various theoretical orientations but are, in fact, descriptions of qualities that make conversion experiences substantially different. The six different motifs[124] of conversion, as adopted by Rambo, are defined as follows:

1. **Intellectual:** A person seeks knowledge about religious or spiritual issues.
2. **Mystical:**[125] A sudden and traumatic burst of insight, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus.
3. **Experimental:** It involves active exploration of religious options.
4. **Affectional:** It stresses interpersonal bonds as an important factor in the conversion process.
5. **Revivalist:** Individuals are emotionally aroused and new behaviours and beliefs are promoted by the pressures exerted (by using crowd conformity).
6. **Coercive:** Different levels of pressure exerted on the person to participate, conform, and confess.

Such a categorisation is useful as a model for basic consideration. It needs, however, to be adapted to each particular situation. Although usually all forms appear to some degree, it is feasible to list only those which are applicable in a significant way. Therefore, I will only choose those which have come to the forefront in my research work and will discuss my proposal in chapter 3.4.

Long and Hadden (1983) proposed a 'dual reality' perspective on conversion motives. It involves the so called 'brainwashing' model and the 'social drift' model. They claim that "the social drift model suggests that people become converts gradually, even inadvertently, through the influence of social relationship, especially during times of social strain" (Long & Hadden 1983:1). Long and Hadden use the expression 'dual reality' as a way of saying that both perspectives offer a valid but only partial view of the whole conversion process.

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[123] For a discussion on these six types of conversion motives see also Robbins (1988:67-71) and Gillespie (1991:49-52).

[124] Rambo (1993:14) adopts the term 'motifs' as used by Lofland and Skonovd (1981). However, I would argue that some of these 'motifs' have a motivational character and can therefore also be called 'motives'. Even Rambo (1993:15,48), for instance, speaks about 'mystical experience' in one place as 'motif' and on the other place as 'catalyst'. Catalyst however comes closer to 'motivation' since it implies "things that causes change" (see also 1.8 of this study).

3.2.3 Motivational Structures

It needs to be noted that a year rarely goes by without the introduction of a new 'theory' in social psychology. Often the theory is little more than one or two interrelated hypotheses concerning a specific phenomenon. There are many theories of motivation in the area of psychology (cf. Hofstede 1980:375-377). However, is it possible to consider whether there are principles that can provide the basis for more encompassing theories? In the following pages I will discuss a few models of motivational structures which have been presented by different scholars and which I believe are of special relevance to this study.

3.2.3.1 Epstein's 'Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory'

Epstein (1985:284, 301) has endeavoured to propose a summary of a theory of personality that emphasises the importance of 'self-enhancement and stability motives' and to discuss its implications for research in personality and social psychology. Epstein calls his theory 'Cognitive-experiential Self-theory' which assumes that there are four fundamental sources of motivation:

1. The need to maintain a favourable pleasure/pain balance
2. The need to maintain a favourable level of self-esteem
3. The need to maintain favourable relationships with significant others
4. The need to maintain the stability and coherence of a personal conceptual system (which subsumes functional autonomy).

Epstein's theory is a highly general theory that provides a framework for examining almost any significant human behaviour. It is assumed that in order for humans to function in a complex social world, it is necessary for them to organise their experiences within a theory of reality that contains the subdivisions of a self-theory and a world-theory. An individual's theory of reality is not a conscious theory that a person can report if asked to do so. It is a subconscious, or implicit, theory that the individual unwittingly constructs in the course of leading his or her life.

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[125] Mysticism was also the core religious experience highlighted by James (1902) (cf. Clark 1965:34).

Like any theory, it consists of a hierarchical arrangement of higher and lower order postulates. Others are generalisations about what one must do to avoid what one fears and gain what one wishes. These are referred to as prescriptive, or motivational, postulates. Postulates formed early in life are apt to become higher order postulates that influence the assimilation of new experiences. This does mean that later experiences in life can not also have a profound influence on personality. A person's theory of reality is the essence of a person's personality. It is no wonder, that people will do almost anything in their power to maintain the integrity of their conceptual systems.

Epstein's four functions are not completely independent, but overlap and interact with each other. Epstein (1985:286) maintains:

> Although some are developmentally more basic than others, once developed, any function can become dominant. Which function is dominant varies within individuals over time as well as among individuals … A person with a well adjusted personality would normally maintain a balance among the four basic functions. The need to maximise pleasure and minimise pain can, in a sense, be viewed as the most fundamental of the four functions, as it exists on a biological basis before a conceptual system has developed. Moreover, pleasant and unpleasant feelings are invariably implicated in the other three motives.

Epstein (1985:287) continues by introducing the three levels of awareness of his theory. These are the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious. The question is now, which system is right, the conscious, rational conceptual system, or the preconscious, experiential system? Epstein maintains that either can be right or wrong. But the point is, that both sources of input can have valid information to convey, and considering both can be advantageous in arriving at a decision (cf. Salzman 1966:11).

There has also been considerable debate over whether there is one self or multiple selves (cf. Johnson 1978:169, Oates 1978:151-152, Rahner 1978:205). According to Epstein (1985:289), based on his Experiential-cognitive Self-theory, these are both correct. He is of the opinion that there is an overall self, or organisational structure, that attempts to integrate various subselves, or identities and schemas.

Nisbett and Wilson (1977) have made a convincing case that people often do not know, and therefore cannot correctly report, the reasons for their behaviour. When attempting to account for their behaviour, people tend to make inferences based on what they regard as reasonable ways to behave. It should hardly be surprising that people are not always aware of the reasons for their behaviour, as awareness requires self-conscious effort. It is instructive to consider the following statement by Allport (1935:832) on attitudes:

> Without guiding attitudes the individual is confused and baffled. Some kind of preparation is essential before a person can make a satisfactory observation, pass suitable judgement, or make any but the most primitive reflex type of response. Attitudes determine for each individual what they will see and hear, what they will think and do. To borrow a phrase from William James, they engender meaning upon the world; they are our methods for finding our way about in an ambiguous universe.

Allport is not referring to conscious decisional processes. The attitudes he describes correspond to what Epstein (1985:287) calls the 'preconscious beliefs'. From this it can be concluded, that there are two kinds of knowledge; intellectual and experiential.

Behaviour motivated by the experiential conceptual system is experienced as spontaneous, natural and intuitively correct. It corresponds to what the individual 'feels' like doing and what the individual often 'mindlessly' does. It is common for people to do what they feel like doing. They then rationalise their behaviour by attributing it to a conscious decisional process. As a result, their behaviour appears to them to be more reasonable and consciously determined than it actually is. Epstein (1985:295) gives a practical example in this respect:

> Anyone who has observed how individuals vote in a national election cannot help but be impressed with the truth of this observation. The appearance of a candidate on television, as determined by make-up, lighting, and stage presence, can be a more important factor in influencing votes than the candidate's command of the facts and his or her reasoning ability. Yet few people acknowledge that they vote for a candidate because they like the way he or she looks.

I agree with Gillespie (1991:87) when he says that "the process of religious conversion has some elements in common with other changes in behaviour". For these very reasons it is not

easy to determine the exact motives of conversion in each case. This is especially true when the actual conversion goes back many years and the convert reinterprets the act of conversion in intellectual terms.

There has been a long-standing debate about whether motivation is primarily determined by the need to enhance self-esteem or the need to maintain consistency. It is beyond the scope of this study to review the arguments. Considerable evidence has been presented in support of both sides and it is evident that both variables are highly important. Different researchers, depending on the particular conditions, modes of measurements, subjects they examine, can demonstrate that one or the other is more important. It is not clear what the critical variables are that determine the relative importance of each motive.

Although Epstein's theory, the 'Cognitive-experiential Self-theory', consists of four fundamental sources of motivation, he (1985:301, 304) too does not come forward with any general rating of importance of the motives. He says:

> The relative importance of each function depends on the individual and the circumstances. One person will undergo torture or commit suicide rather than lose face, whereas another will select the opposite alternative … behaviour is a compromise between four basic motives.

3.2.3.2 Maslow's 'Positive Theory of Motivation'

Maslow (1970), however, is more specific by presenting a theory of human motivation. In respect of desires, Maslow (1970:7) says that "satisfaction generates new motivations":

> The human being is a wanting animal and rarely reaches a state of complete satisfaction except for a short time. As one desire is satisfied, another pops up to take its place. When this is satisfied, still another comes into the foreground, and so on. It is a characteristic of human beings throughout their whole lives that they are practically always desiring something.

Maslow attempts to formulate a positive theory of motivation. This theory is in the functionalist tradition of James and Dewey, and is fused with the holism of Wertheimer, Goldstein, and Gestalt psychology and with the dynamism of Freud, Fromm, Horney, Reich, Jung and Adler. This integration or synthesis may be called a holistic-dynamic theory (Maslow 1970:15). Straus (1976:252), a Lofland student, expresses the same notion when he says "the individual human acts creatively within a natural life setting in order to construct a satisfying life". This model relies on a view of human beings as active and meaning-seeking actors. Griffin (1980:32) expresses the same notion when she says that we are all divided selves, all seekers after something beyond ourselves, filled with longings that we cannot always account for or explain (cf. Johnson 1978:169).

Maslow presents his theory within a range of 'higher' and 'lower' needs. The theory is built on five basic needs. If a lower basic need is satisfied then the next higher need emerges and the whole cycle repeats itself (Maslow 1970:20). This seemingly unending circle to fulfil desires is expressed by Griffin (1980:36-37) with the following words: "Success, acclaim, love, friendship, marriage – these are real joys and yet they do not satisfy us. There is still a longing within us for an unattainable thing, a dream beyond the satisfactions of day-to-day existence: a heart's desire. It is this desire, this longing, that sends us looking – but for what, for whom?".

The five basic 'needs' presented by Maslow (1970:15-22) are the following:

1. **Physiological Needs:** (Homeostasis, Appetite) "For the human who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food … Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating … but when this in turn is satisfied, again new (and still higher) needs emerge, and so on" (1970:17).
2. **Safety Needs:** (security; stability; dependency; protection; freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos; need for structure, order, law, and limits; strength in the protector; and so on). "The safety needs can become very urgent on the social scene whenever there are real threats to law, to order, to the authority of society" (1970:19). If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well satisfied, there will emerge the ...
3. **Love, Affection, Belonging Needs:** "Such a person will hunger for relations with people in general – for a place in the group or family – and will strive with great

intensity to achieve this goal….My strong impression is also that *some* proportion of youth rebellion groups … is motivated by the profound hunger for group feelings, for contact, for real togetherness in the face of a common enemy" (1970:20).

4. **Esteem Needs:** "All people in our society … have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others … First the desire for strength, achievement, adequacy, mastery and competence, confidence in the face of the world, and independence and freedom. Second, we have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige … status, fame and glory, dominance, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, or appreciation" (1970:21).

   After some prior satisfaction of the four previous needs the next higher need emerges …

5. **Self-actualisation Needs:** "What humans *can* be, they *must* be. They must be true to their own nature. It refers to people's desire for self-fulfilment, namely, the tendency for them to become actualised in what they are potentially … to become everything that one is capable of becoming. The specific form that these needs will take of course vary greatly from person to person. In one individual they may take the form of the desire to be an excellent parent, in another they may be expressed athletically, and in still another they may be expressed in painting pictures or in inventing things. At this level, individual differences are greatest" (1970:22).

Maslow (1970:23-26) emphasises also two 'basic cognitive needs'. First the "desire to know and understand" and second the "aesthetic needs". When speaking about the hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1970:26-31) gives a number of characteristics:

> We have spoken so far as if this hierarchy were a fixed order, but actually it is not nearly so rigid as we may have implied. It is true that most of the people with whom we have worked have seemed to have these basic needs in about the order that has been indicated. However, there have been a number of exceptions …

Maslow also mentions that the hierarchy may give the impression that one need must be satisfied 100% before the next need can emerge. In actual fact, most members of our society who are normal are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time (1970:28). For the sake of illustration, Maslow (1970:28)

gives figures of an average citizen being satisfied: 85% in physiological needs, 70% in safety needs, 50% in love needs, 40% in self-esteem needs, 10% in self-actualisation needs.[126] Maslow (1970:29) also points out that "most behaviour is overdetermined or multimotivated … As an illustration, it would be possible … to analyse a single act of an individual and see in it the expression of physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation."

Maslow (1970:56-59) explains the differences between higher and lower needs. He says for instance, that the "lower needs are stronger; thus the safety need is stronger than the love need because it dominates the organism in various demonstrable ways when both needs are frustrated … the higher the need the more specifically human it is". By making such statements one cannot avoid seeing the evolutionistic undertone.

Based on what has been outlined so far in respect to Maslow's basic need hierarchy, the following diagram can be presented:

Diagram 3.2: Maslow's Basic Need Hierarchy
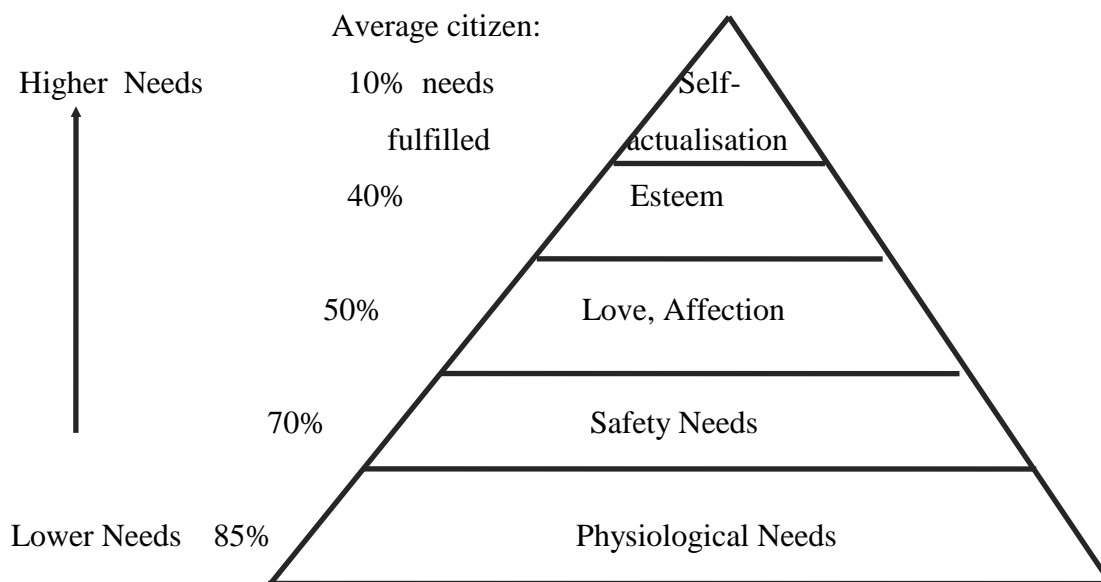
These needs, or conditions which favour change, are also commonly termed by scholars as 'felt-needs' (Luzbetak 1988:355). Rambo (1993:42) is of the opinion that "converts

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[126] These figures are based on the American context.

selectively adopt and adapt the new religion to meet their needs". Kraft (1979a:344) expresses the same notion when he says that the "willingness to change religion will often depend on how the present religion meets the daily needs". The theory of motivation by Maslow, as described above, is therefore structured according to different levels of needs.

3.2.3.3 Kraft's Model of 'Decision-Making'

Kraft (1979a:335-337) expresses the same notion when he outlines his model of the 'decision-making-process' which is in line with the psychological thought pattern of Maslow. Kraft says that his model has been developed from the model employed by Tippett (1973:123, 1977:207) with slightly different emphasis, namely Kraft's model (unlike Tippett's) focuses on the fact that the process of conversion is made up of a multitude (often very small) of decisions by human beings in interaction with God. Kraft is of the opinion that "each of these decisions may be conceived as the result of a process involving point of stimulus, realisation, decision and 'new-habit', interspersed with periods of developing awareness, consideration, and incorporation". Kraft (1979a:336) explains this process with a diagram:

Diagram 3.3: Kraft's 'Decision-Making-Process'
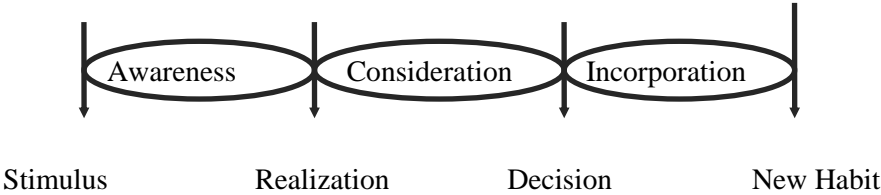
Kraft gives the following explanation of this process: "The process that leads to decision starts with a *stimulus.* This stimulus may be a matter of communicated information, observation, a new thought that seems to spring into one's mind spontaneously, or any other set of factors. Such a stimulus may then be pondered by the individual or group, increasing *awareness* of its implications, requirements, and above all the need to make a decision with regard to the stimulus. This awareness leads to a point of *realisation* of the potential relevance of such a decision to the person or group. This realisation in turn issues in a

process of *consideration* (the decision-making process) and a point of encounter or *decision.* When the decision is made, then, the process of *incorporating* the new orientation into the life of the person or group begins. This culminates in the development of a *new habit* of behaviour, attitude, relationship, etc".

It is clear that certain decisions are more important that others; e.g. change of the type of toothpaste one uses in contrast for instance with the change of religion. However, Kraft maintains that the decision-making process is in each decision the same though the emotional concomitants may differ greatly from decision to decision and from person to person. Kraft (1979a:336) observes that "the emotionality of the response is directly affected by such things as a) the newness or unexptectedness of the experience, b) the psychological makeup of the person, c) the release of tension (if any) that the decision provides from what the person or group considered to be pressing problems".

Snow and Machalek (1984:181) claim that stress and tension advance conversion and are therefore important causes often held accountable. Such situational factors that induce tension include "marital strain, the loss of a family member, change or loss of a job, the pressures of higher education, or any of a number of other tensions".[127] However, one needs to be careful not to argue that such influences will lead everyone to convert. In addition, Heirich (1977:669-672) reports about social science arguments that "it is not a single influence but the mutual interaction of various forces that makes a person susceptible to conversion".

3.2.3.4 Motivation Hypotheses

Niebuhr (1963:60) in his book *The Responsible Self* looks at the same issue from a different angle, namely from the general hypothesis of life's purposiveness. He argues that "purposiveness seeks to answer the question: What shall I do? by raising the prior question: What is my goal, ideal, or telos? … What is the law and what is the first law of my life?". Niebuhr believes that responsibility of humans drives them in every moment of decision

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[127] Snow and Machalek (1984:181) criticise for instance, that Heirich's (1977) empirical studies have failed " … to find evidence indicating that stress and tension precipitate conversion".

and choice to inquire: "What is going on?" and then respond appropriately. Therefore, according to Niebuhr (1963:61), "the first element in the theory of responsibility is the idea of *response*". For Niebuhr (1963:80), a person is motivated to respond to three *partners*:

> When I respond to natural events I do so as a social being; on the other hand, when I respond to my companions I do so as one who is in response-relations to nature. I do not exist as responsive self in two separate spheres or in two distinct encounters – with the Thou on the one hand, with nature on the other. I engage rather in a continuous dialogue in which there are at least these three partners – the self, the social companion, and natural events.

Rambo (1993:139-141) has brought forward a number of hypotheses about motivation of conversion. He is of the opinion "that motivation itself is transformed in the process of language transformation and biographical reconstruction"[128] (cf. Wanamaker 1995:52). Rambo believes that there is always more than one motive influencing the convert and that these motives are interactive (1993:140). Further, Rambo has the view that different groups have different norms for what they consider to be right and wrong motives. According to Rambo's experience initial motivation for converting is refined as the person interacts with the group.

It can be concluded from Rambo's list that the actual motivation is a combination of various influences from the group and the individual person as such. And each person responds differently in a given situation, or as Rambo (1993:140) emphasises, "each person converts when it is to his or her *perceived* advantage: satisfaction, benefit, fulfilment, improvement".

People are therefore motivated to change religion when the need directs them to do so. Subconsciously a person asks the question: 'How can my needs be satisfied?'.[129] It then

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[128] Beckford (1978:250), in his study on Jehovah's Witness' conversions, goes even further when he expresses the charge that "actors' accounts of experiences cannot be objective reports in a neutral observation language but are artfully accomplished constructions". He (1978:258, 260) comes to the conclusion that "Jehovah's Witnesses' conversion accounts depart in significant respects from what is commonly thought of as conversion", since they "indirectly rehearse the Watchtower Society's rationale (amongst other things)".

[129] One could of course formulate the question differently by asking e.g. What is my next problem to be solved?, like Lofland and Stark (1965:867) have done in their research on the D.P.: "Type of Problem-Solving Perspective". However, I prefer to use the term 'need' rather than 'problem'.

may happen that in the cause of the fulfilment of a certain felt-need the person may or may not change religion, as it appears to be convenient or as in some cases the person feels pressurised to do so. This may result in the same person changing religion more than once in a lifetime.

Salzman[130] (1966:10-11) expresses this notion with the following words "we need to entertain the possibility that some conversion experiences are in a theological framework or otherwise can be recognisable due to forces other than spiritual … they may have no spiritual significance, yet they can be dressed in religious language or symbolism … which occurs in the life of a person either with or without a mystical experience". In such a case a convert changes the religious background without acquiring, at least initially, any knowledge about the new religion. This sometimes happens when, for instance, a Christian lady marries a Muslim husband. The person may or may not acquire religious insight about the new faith.

3.3 A Psychology of Conversion

3.3.1 Introduction

The broad meaning of conversion is *change*. Varied use of the word by many people in many situations leads one to believe that it means just what a given individual or group wants it to mean, neither more nor less. By writing a thesis on this topic, one has always to bear in mind that the act of conversion is different in each situation. Rambo (1993:5) is convinced that "there is no one cause, no one process, and no one simple consequence of that process".

Rambo (1993:5) lists three fundamental aspects:
a) Conversion is a process over time,

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[130] Salzman (1966) makes one of the best contributions to conversion in terms of its *dynamics*. He links religious conversion with any change accomplished at a given time by stressing its suddenness. His insight that conversion may be caused by natural factors proves helpful. This, however, does not deny that God is in some way active in these natural changes but it rather provides the person to find some actual cause for the change. If that change is beneficial, then it serves its purpose in integrating life (cf. Gillespie 1991:42).

b) conversion is contextual,

c) factors in the conversion process are multiple.

Another distinction needs to be made between the normative and the descriptive approaches to definitions of conversion. According to the normative approach, a genuine conversion is formulated according to the theological convictions of a particular tradition. Descriptive approaches to conversion, on the other hand, seek to observe the nature of the process. The actual questions to be answered are:

- What actually happens in these conversion processes?
- What behaviours are changed?
- What beliefs are changed?
- What sorts of experiences are elicited in the process?

Rambo (1993:7) states that conversion includes the following four components: cultural, social, personal, and religious. In examining these components, the following questions need then to be considered:

- What relative weight should be accorded to each component?
- In what ways do the components interact with each other?
- What significance does the convert attribute to these elements?
- What significance does the observer give to each component?

It is also important that disciplines like politics, economics, biology and so forth should be taken into account in evaluating conversion. All these disciplines have an influence in some way or another on the decision-making process of people.

In both theology, religious studies and the social sciences one finds a wide range of usage for the term 'conversion'. In the field of psychology religious conversion has been an important subject for research since Wiliam James, who could be called the father of the

psychology of religion. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience,* James set the tone for psychological studies of conversion for several decades.[131]

In his book, James (1902:189) defined conversion as follows:

> To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct operation is needed to bring such a moral change about.

Later on a decline of interest in conversion studies took place due to the ascendancy of behaviourism in American psychology, which made this topic less respectable. In their overview of psychological conversion studies, Scroggs and Douglas (1967:206) state that very little progress has been made in this field since James's creative intuitions: "By and large books and articles written in the1960's deal with the same issues, fight the same battles, and grind the same axes as those written in 1900".

There is a continuous debate among scholars to the definition of conversion (sudden, dramatic, gradual change or growth).[132] The interest taken by psychologists in conversion has concentrated in issues such as the pathology issue (whether conversion is pathological, abnormal, regressive, a sign of illness or emotional instability), the 'convertible type' issue, the 'ripe age of conversion' issue, the voluntaristic issue and the science-versus-religion issue.[133]

The rise of new religious movements (NRMs) in the United States and Europe has given an enormous impulse to the psychological study of conversion since the 1960's. Robbins' (1988) study, for instance, presents a classical report on NRMs with primary focus to the

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[131] The contributions of James (1902) to the psychology of religious conversion are many and complex. They focus mainly on the following four aspects: on experience and its consequences; on the individual; the use of extreme cases for its data and illustrations; a respect for the role of the unconscious. Clark (1965:31), however, feels that James' book is out of date because of the "virtual absence of statistical description".

[132] See for instance studies by Richardson (1980), Richardson and Stewart (1978).

[133] For more details please consult Scroggs-Douglas (1967:206-213).

USA.[134] Researchers have adopted different perspectives to the theory of conversion in view of the rise of these NRM's.[135]

Psychological conversion studies have been marked by certain characteristics. They have focused on *individuals*, mostly in *Western* societies. Further, they have looked at conversion as an internal process and have had little interest in the cultural aspects or possible influences of prevailing social moods. Studies made in the spirit of James in non-western societies are rare. Two exceptions should be mentioned; the studies of Allier and Underwood, both of which appeared in 1925.

Allier defined conversion as a moral revolution, which goes beyond intellect and feeling (Quoted from Junod (1926:122): "It is a new self which invades the conscious life and crushes out the old self which opposed it; thus internal unity is re-established and then joy overflows". Underwood lays special stress on the consequences of conversion in his study, which he as well as Allier saw as generally positive.

3.3.2 Dimensions of Conversion

Psychologists have pointed out that conversion is not a specifically Christian phenomenon, but is also found in other religions; and that it is not necessarily only a religious phenomenon, but also occurs in non-religious spheres (cf. Salzman 1966). In fact, it is but one of the many changes that occur in peoples' lives. "At its best," says Starbuck (1911:162), "it is the individual will coming into harmony with what it feels to be the divine will". As Pratt (1926:123) understands it, "the essential thing about conversion is just the unification of character, the achievement of a new self."

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[134] Robbins (1988:64) reports that there is a wealth of empirical research available in this area but "unfortunately the research and theory in the area of conversion is redolent of multiple confusions related to the divergent premises, conceptual frameworks, nomenclature and behavioural referents which different researchers have employed. In consequence many studies are not strictly comparable".

[135] See for instance Richardson (1985:169-172) who gives an account of different methods employed by various scholars.

As to the question, whether there is anything supernatural about conversion, there is a difference of opinion among the psychologists. Coe (1900:140) puts the question: "Shall we therefore conclude that conversion is practically an automatic performance?" And he answers: "Not unless we first define conversion so as to ignore its profound relation to God and to the principle of a good life … The substance of religious experiences as far transcends their emotional forms as a man transcends the clothes he wears."

James (1902:242) feels that an orthodox Christian might ask him whether his reference of the phenomenon of conversion to the *subliminal self*[136] does not exclude the notion of the direct presence of the Deity and he replies in these words: "I have to say frankly that as a psychologist I do not see why it necessarily should." James (1902:243) finds that "if there are higher powers able to impress us, they may gain access only through the subliminal door." The representatives of the New Psychology, that is, of the Behaviourist School and of the School of Psychoanalysis, frankly take the position that conversion may come about in a perfectly natural way, without any supernatural influence. James and others hold that the real secret of the sudden[137] change in conversion lies in some activity of the subliminal self, which may or may not be subject to some divine influence. Likewise, Raschke (1978:420) is convinced that "revelation is intimately involved with the psychological event commonly called 'conversion'".[138]

Ames (1910:258) is of the opinion that there are three distinct steps in conversion, which are: "First, a sense of perplexity and uneasiness; second, a climax and turning point; and third, a relaxation marked by rest and joy". It is quite generally agreed that there are at least two outstanding types of conversion, which are designated in various ways. Speaking of

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[136] James's (1902:236) understanding of the subliminal region "is at any rate a place now admitted by psychologists to exist for the accumulation of vestiges of sensible experience (whether inattentively or attentively registered), and for their elaboration according to ordinary psychological or logical laws into results that end by attaining such 'tension' that they may at times enter consciousness with something like a burst".

[137] The conversion stories which James examines all display an element of 'suddenness' (cf. Clark 1965:34). It seems to be almost an essential ingredient in his conversion stories, for instance he (James 1902:223) writes: "The most curious record of sudden conversion with which I am acquainted is that of M. Alphonse Ratisbonne". It is therefore no surprise that Paul's conversion in Acts 9 is for James (1902:217) "the most eminent" model.

[138] Raschke (1978) focuses in his article on the *Semantic Appraisal* of revelation and conversion. His theory is built on the hypothesis that "both revelation and conversion entail a 'switch in the semantics of key religious terms', which the person of faith employs to articulate his sense of reality". Raschke comes to the conclusion that this change of meaning amounts to a new form of cognition.

these two kinds of conversion, Starbuck (1911) says that the one is accompanied with a violent sense of sin, and the other, with a feeling of incompleteness, a struggle after a larger life, and a desire for spiritual illumination. Pratt, James, and Starbuck see conversion as the result of an intense struggle within one's self but they all seem to fail to recognise the forces of hatred operating in the struggle (Salzman 1966:13-17).[139]

A distinction is made between childhood and adult conversion, between gradual and sudden (violent) conversion, and between intellectual and emotional conversions. These are but different names for the two recognised types of conversion. While conversion in general may be regarded as a rather normal experience, it is sometimes found to take on an abnormal aspect, especially during revivals, and then becomes a pathological phenomenon. In this context, Salzman (1966:12-13) suggests two major dimensions of conversion to be distinguished:

1) The progressive or maturational conversion: "It takes place when the person, after a reasoned, thoughtful search, adopts new values and goals which he has determined to be higher than those he has abandoned".
2) The regressive, or psychopathological conversion: "It may take the form of a mystical emotional change in religious affiliation or a sudden, dramatic enthusiasm within the framework of the individual's own group".

Salzman (1966:12-13) says that the first case "occurs in reasonably normal persons", whereas the second case is a 'pseudo-solution' and "is likely to occur in neurotic, prepsychotic or psychotic persons, although it may also occur in presumably normal people when they are faced with major conflicts or insuperable difficulties". Salzman (1966:18-19) shows a very negative point of view on the regressive conversion since he says things such as that the convert "has an exaggerated, irrational intensity of belief in the new doctrine … the attitude toward his previous belief is one of contempt, hatred and denial, and he rejects the possibility that there might be any truth in it … is intolerant toward all deviates … he

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[139] Salzman presents some case studies where he discovers in each conversion experience some hatred, or resentment, or hostile and destructive attitudes. Salzman is convinced that one cause are the so called 'revival meetings' where 'hellfire and damnation' is preached. There hatred and not love feelings are activated. But according to Salzman there are other circumstances where such hateful feelings were mobilised, such as the Crusades and similar incidents in history with devastating consequences.

shows crusading zeal … engages in masochistic and sadistic activities, displaying a need for martyrdom and self-punishment" (cf. Thouless 1978:141).

As far as the time of conversion is concerned, it is pointed out that conversion does not occur with the same frequency at all periods of life, but belongs almost exclusively to the years between 10 and 25, and is extremely rare after 30 (cf. Brandon 1964:24, Leon 1975:1155, Thouless 1978:143).[140] This means that it is a peculiar characteristic of the period of *adolescence*[141] and that it should last a lifetime (Richardson 1985:165). Salzman (1966:19) is of the opinion that "conversion as a means for channelling hostility is frequent during this period. At the same time there is in the adolescent period, a flowering and maturing of the person's attempts to set up meaningful values in his life". Environment, education, and religious training, all affect the nature and frequency of its occurrence.

Salzman (1966:20) believes that the circumstances of adolescence may be conducive either to conversion of the progressive or the regressive type. Gillespie (1991:94) is of the opinion that the time of adolescence is a particularly vulnerable time since it is "a prime time for conflict, identity crisis, searching, reevaluation and value selection".

Psychological studies shed light on some of the criteria that apply in the psychical life of humankind in respect to conversion. Some of them, as, for instance the work of James (1902) is one-sided, since it is based entirely on the study of extraordinary conversions, which he found most interesting (cf. Clark 1965:34). In respect to psychological studies, Berkhof (1958:489) says:

> Others reduce it to a purely natural phenomenon, and even explain it materialistically, as controlled by physical laws … There is an obvious tendency to challenge the old, orthodox idea of conversion, regarding it as unscientific to teach that the religious nature of man is miraculously implanted. They do not accept the light of the Word of God, and therefore have no standard by which to judge the deeper things of life.

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[140] These statements originate and apply primarily for the USA soiety. The empirical research results of my study tend to support this hypothesis, since out of 20 converts only 2 are over the age of 30 at the time of conversion (see chapter five and six of this study).

[141] Salzman (1966:19) calls the adolescence a period of "greatest turmoil and development … of struggle against authority in an effort to achieve independence".

Without prejudgement of the matter of revealed truth or moral worth, it may safely be said that whatever superiority one religion may have over another, it is not clearly demonstrable in a practical or mechanical sense. Inevitably, some individuals reject the arguments that are put forward by their converted neighbours and cling to their ancestral faith.

Richardson (1985) discusses a shift from an 'old' to a 'new' conversion paradigm.[142] Richardson (1985:164) suspects that "this paradigm shift may well be a part of related developing concerns within the disciplines of sociology and social psychology" (cf. Heirich 1977).

The old conversion paradigm is described as assuming the passivity of human beings and its overemphasis on the individual. The conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, the 'Pauline experience' (Acts 9), has been a major basis of understanding of religious experience for people of Western European culture, especially since the Reformation (cf. Thouless 1978:138).[143] Accordingly, this Pauline experience has influenced the perception of conversion for most people in Western culture. Richardson (1985:165) gives some characteristics of this perception: The experience was perceived to be sudden, dramatic and emotional and it had a definite irrational quality, namely "a powerful external agent over which Paul held no sway caused Paul to be converted". Richardson concludes that this "prototypical experience is psychological, deterministic, and assumes a passive subject".[144]

When speaking about Freud, Richardson (1985:166) is of the opinion that "Freud thought that unconscious psychological forces….might cause a conversion and further that this was symptomatic of something bad". However, at the same time "Freud and most of his followers have implicitly promoted a view of conversion that is derived indirectly from the prototypical experience of Paul. Only the active agent differs. For Freudians, the

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[142] It could also been described as the 'active' versus the 'passive' conversion paradigm, as Richardson's (1985) title indicates: "The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research".
[143] Richardson (1985:165) is of the opinion that even some of the new religious movements of Christian origin, such as the Charismatic Renewal and the Jesus Movement as well as the Eastern-orientated religions such as Hare Krishna "have adopted a view of conversion that seems similar in important ways to the Pauline experience (see Pilarzyk 1978)".
[144] Richardson (1985:165) adds here that Paul "is often pictured as actively fighting his conversion and being overcome anyway". Richardson is convinced that this view gives support to a passivist perspective because "no matter how hard one fights, the external agent can and will prevail".

unconscious is that agent". Recently, other expressions such as 'mind control' and 'brainwashing' have been deployed for these psychological and deterministic views.[145]

On the other hand, the new conversion paradigm stresses humans as volitional entities who assign meaning to their action and to the actions of others within a social context. This is in contrast to the more passive old conversion paradigm where Paul is described as being 'struck down by God' on the road to Damascus. The new view gives a more humanistic perspective that allows for an acting and conscious human agent. Richardson (1985:167) reports: "Within the psychoanalytic tradition Jung broke dramatically with Freud and claimed that religion can often help people integrate their lives".[146] Therefore, this view stresses an active seeking subject to develop their own 'person-hood'.

Richardson (1985:168) is of the opinion that "the Lofland/Stark model was an important step in the process of developing an alternative paradigm because it serves as a bridge between the old and the new". This model is based on the 'motivational' image as described by Zygmunt (1972) which focuses on the forces that might 'push' a person into an experience of religious conversion. Further, this model describes conversion as a definite organisational aspect and a social event. It also views people as 'religious seekers' who take actions to change by interacting with selected people (Richardson 1985:168-169). Many researchers have taken this 'bridge model' between the old and new tradition as a starting point, with each emphasising a particular aspect for their own specific research on conversion. Lofland (1978:22), for instance, has indicated his shift of paradigm by accepting the assumption that "the person is active rather than merely passive".

After having reviewed some scholars who mainly did research work about the NRM's in the USA, Richardson (1985:169-172) concludes that "it appears that a steady evolution of a new view of conversion can be traced in the work of a number of researchers over the past

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[145] See for instance Richardson (1982) for a critique of these modern applications of brainwashing methods. The basic hypothesis is that conversion is the product of deceitful but known forces acting upon unsuspecting and therefore highly vulnerable individuals (cf. Snow & Machalek 1984:178-180, Robbins 1988:72-79, Gillespie 1991:113).

[146] Richardson lists the following authors as deploying the same humanistic active view: Jung (1933), Allport (1950), Frankl (1962) and particularly James's (1902) work, with his discussion of 'volitional conversion' which is gradually, step by step, as contrasted to the 'conversion of self-surrender' which comes suddenly (cf. Brauer 1978:230). Most psychological studies of conversion from James (1902) and Starbuck (1911) through to cotemporary scholars divide conversion into these two main categories.

15 or 20 years … These researchers have found that conversion is a social phenomenon, with affection and emotional ties playing key roles in the affirmative decision to negotiate with a group about possible participation and commitment". An overall trend can now be recognised which is basically a more active person 'working out' one's own conversion. It becomes clear, that this new paradigm competes with modern versions of the traditional 'Pauline paradigm'[147] that has been dominant for decades (Richardson 1985:172).

3.3.3 Rambo's Conversion Hypotheses

In order to encourage further discussions on conversion, to focus attention on specific issues, and to stimulate more research, Rambo proposes some interesting hypotheses about the dynamics of conversion.[148] These hypotheses (Rambo 1993:41-42) which emerge from the context are worth considering.

Rambo starts by making the statement: "Indigenous cultures that are stable, resilient, and effective will have few people receptive to conversion … A strong culture will reward conformity and punish deviance". This statement has special relevance to the cultural, economic and political situation in South Africa. As outlined in chapter one of this study, South Africa went through an enormous political transformation which started in the 1950's. These events negatively affected the cultural stability and conformity resulting in Rambo's statement that "indigenous cultures that are in crisis will have more potential converts than stable societies". Cultural solidarity disintegrated to a great extent especially in urban areas over a long period of time which led to the development of interest in new alternatives.

In other words, the upheavals and unrest during the apartheid time caused many people of African origin to be displaced and uprooted from their cultural heritage. This is the source for marginality and Rambo (1993:41) correctly states: "Marginal people are, in some way, disconnected from the sources of power and support of the traditional culture".

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[147] The traditional view of the 'Pauline paradigm' emphasises that Paul's conversion was only 'between God and himself', with no other humans involved (Richardson 1985:175).
[148] Though Rambo's book is written mainly from a psychological point of view it combines a variety of viewpoints in recent studies on conversion.

These kind of people are more receptive or vulnerable to change and are therefore prepared to accept a new system. Or as Rambo (1993:41) confirms: "Those who do convert in a hostile setting are marginal members of the society … The more marginal, the more likely they are to convert".

With respect to intercultural contact, Rambo (1993:42) believes that "the more consonant the cultural system – in the context of cultural contact – the more likely it is that conversion will transpire. The more dissonant, the less likely it is that conversion will occur". This statement assumes that if people from different cultures who live closely together and in a mixed society will experience intercultural adaptation, i.e. cultural differences will slowly disappear over time.

The result is then, as Rambo (1993:42) states, that "consonance of values and symbols will facilitate conversion". I understand that this is especially true in an urban society, like Johannesburg, where religious and cultural pluralism is a reality. In such a context it is easier for people to change their religion since the cultural barriers have been removed to a great extent. Nevertheless, Rambo also says: "In a situation of cultural pluralism, there will be differential responses to conversion based on cultural and social factors". People in a pluralistic society will to certain degrees always respond to conversion in their own particular way.

With respect to expected benefits as a result of conversion, Rambo (1993:42) says: "Except in cases of coercion, converts choose a new option on the basis of perceived advantages to themselves". This statement assumes, that people usually convert because they saw advantages in the 'new life'. Rambo summarises this by saying:

> …context comprises a dynamic force field of people, institutions, ideologies, expectations, and global settings in which people confront the human predicament. Individuals, groups, and nations are situated within and shaped by various superstructures and infrastructures that influence the content and form of the drama of conversion and resistance. Congruence and conflict come together in fascinating ways to either inhibit or promote the onset of the crisis stage.

3.4 An Analytical 'Grid'

In this section I present the analytical 'grid' that I used in this study to analyse the conversion accounts I obtained in the interviews. This analytical grid has been constructed out of the material and discussions in chapters two and three and in dialogue with the research findings presented in chapters five and six.

3.4.1 Operational Conversion Motives

The results of the research findings in chapters five and six show that five different conversion motives were operative in the various narratives of the converts. These five motives have been identified as the ones which appear most frequently in the research. In 2.8 and 3.2.2 I discussed some aspects of a variety of conversion motives which came to the forefront in other research material. Each research project is done within a certain time framework and in a particular social environment which is different in every situation.

Therefore, I am convinced that each situation needs to adopt its own unique set of conversion categories without attempting to 'standardise' conversion (cf. Jackson 1908:97, Barclay 1963:92). I therefore agree with Rambo (1993:16) who says that "there is a range of types of conversion, and no one type is normative". Nevertheless, there is a certain amount of overlapping taking place. I now explain my own particular set of motives, with reference to other previously suggested categories.

3.4.1.1 The Five Conversion Motives

Though these motives appear in a list from 1 - 5, I regard all these different motives as of equal importance and endeavour to treat them impartially in my study. Therefore, the sequence in the order of listing these motives has no significance.

1) **Religious (Intellectual)**

This motive is also listed in other studies as the 'intellectual' motive for conversion (cf. Rambo 1993:14, Robbins 1988:67, Lofland & Skonovd 1981:375). It is the motive which has been traditionally called the 'true' motive for conversion (Butselaar 1981:112)[149]. The understanding of the religious/intellectual motive is that a person actively seeks knowledge about religious or spiritual issues via literature, television, lectures and other media. In my study it means that a person actively acquires knowledge of either Christian or Islamic teaching, doctrine or practical religious issues.

Some converts interviewed in this study were seeking religious knowledge about Christianity or Islam because there was a problem or 'crisis' with their experience of their original faith. The main reason given was that of not being able to 'understand'[150] the teachings or rituals. This aspect can be described as the 'pushing' part of the conversion. Since such persons could no longer understand and agree with the teaching of their faith they felt 'pushed' to study an alternative religion which was, in this study, either Christianity or Islam. Since the new religion was felt to be 'better' and 'understandable' it was 'pulling' the person to accept it. Therefore, in the religious motive one can identify a push and a pull element.

2) Mystical

This motive is also discussed by Rambo (1993:15) and Robbins (1988:68) (cf. Lofland & Skonovd 1981). According to Rambo, a mystical conversion experience "is generally a sudden and traumatic burst of insight, induced by vision, voices, or other paranormal experiences". A 'paranormal phenomenon' is usually described as an experience which cannot be easily explained scientifically or rationally (Cowie 1989:896). The prototypical conversion in respect to mystical experience in the Bible is commonly attributed to Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus (Acts 9). In religious terminology it has therefore the understanding of the direct intervention of the spiritual divine power. In James' (1902) conversion narratives the mystical factor is the central theme. Kroeger (1996a:371) is convinced that it is the Holy Spirit who "is at work in ways that pass human understanding".

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[149] Butselaar calls this the 'spiritual motive'. The meaning is however the very similar to Rambo's (1993:14) description of the 'intellectual' motive.

The term 'supernatural' can also be used in this context. Cowie (1989:1291) describes this term as something that "cannot be explained by natural or physical laws" and that the original causes are from the "world of spirits". If people speak about supernatural experiences they usually mean as having a significant dream, a vision or an impression. It is an extraordinary happening or event which is usually sudden and unexpected. The level of emotional arousal is extremely high – sometimes involving theophanic ecstasies, awe, love, or even fear (Robbins 1988:68). Rasche (1978:425) discusses the term 'revelation' in this context and gives the definition as "an enlightening or astonishing disclosure". A revelation is therefore an extraordinary disclosure which a person receives. This extraordinary insight enables a person to make a step in a direction which would otherwise not have been easily taken; such as a change in religion.

McKinney (1994:149), in her case study among the *Bajju*, pointed to the importance of dreams and visions related to conversions. Accordingly, dreams can serve to initiate conversion or to confirm it, or both.[151] Some psychologists have attempted to explain the paranormal experiences in people. Brown and Caetano (1992:152), for instance report:

> Persinger has speculated that individuals within the 'normal', ostensibly nonseizure, population who have experienced significant mystical or paranormal religious states might in fact have had what he describes as 'microseizure', i.e., slight abnormal electrical discharges of the limbic, emotional brain sufficient to sustain a mystical experience.

In their section on 'epilepsy, mystical experience, and conversion', Brown and Caetano (1992:149) differentiate between two neurocognitive models of religious conversion:
1) Conversion seen as the result of abnormal experiences which have their origin in a malfunctioning brain.
2) Conversion seen as an extension of normal mental activity, differing from other mental activity only in its content and perceived significance.

In a footnote Brown and Caetano mention a third possibility, which would be that "conversion is an entirely supernatural event, occurring entirely outside of neurocognitive

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[150] This aspect mentioned by the respondents will be explained in more detail in chapter 7.2.1.

systems". It is not the aim of this study to search for the origin of the mystical experiences reported by the interviewees. I will therefore refrain from determining whether a mystical experience comes from within or outside the neurocognitive system. What should be clear, though, is that I do not regard these experiences as the result of a 'malfunctioning brain'. It is also not my aim to critically assess whether or not such an experience has in fact taken place. If a respondent reports such an event I accept it as a fact.

3) Affectional

This motive was originally identified by Lofland and Stark (1965). It stresses interpersonal bonds as the decisive factor in the conversion process (Rambo 1993:15). A person experiences affection as being loved, nurtured and affirmed by another person or group (cf. Maslow 1970:20, chapter 3.2.3). Butselaar (1981:113) calls this motive the 'personal motive' and describes it as the "outgrowth of interpersonal relationships". Interpersonal bonds are here widely viewed as providing 'fundamental support for recruitment' (Robbins 1988:69). In my study it appears in the form of affection for a friend who is admired because of his/her religious activities. The other person can be a friend, a relative or a family member. It can be a person from the same or the opposite sex.

Described thus far, the affectional motive can be interpreted as a positive factor 'pulling' the convert to accept the new religion. However, the affectional motive can also be experienced by the convert as a negative 'pushing' factor. Negative affectional factors are events such as the death of a family member or a divorce, which constitutes a crisis in the life of a particular person and may push him/her into a conversion process. A convert may experience either a negative or positive form of the affectional motive or both during the conversion process which motivates the person to move in a certain direction.

4) Socio-political

This motive is not mentioned by Rambo. Butselaar (1981:112) calls this simply the 'social motive'. It relates to the functioning of the individual within his or her socio-political group. In this category a person is motivated out of socio-political reasons to change his/her religious allegiance (cf. Arnold 1974:3). This motive is listed in my set of motives since

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[151] See also Triebel (1976:171-173) in his chapter 'Bekehrung und junge Kirche', on the topic 'Träume und Visionen'.

many converts mentioned the socio-political situation as a reason for embracing a new religion. The political climate in South Africa during the apartheid era motivated or 'pushed' many people to look for alternative religions since the ruling government had often been identified as the "White Christian oppressors" (see chapter 1.1).

Kritzinger (1980:95) speaks of the slogan: "Christianity is the religion of the Whites" as representing a "mood of Black consciousness looking for its roots". Kritzinger is of the opinion that the reality of racism was responsible to "establish a negative image of the Christian faith in the minds of many black people" and this resulted in a "growing interest in Islam as a religion of Africa". African people in South Africa began to see Jesus as the author of racism and not the one who died to break down the dividing wall between peoples. Muslims have taken advantage of this situation and have promoted Islam as the 'religion based on equal rights and justice' (cf. Maurer 1996:21). Today there are many black Muslims, almost all of them coming from a Christian background, particularly in Soweto as well as in other areas of Gauteng.

5) Material

This motive is not mentioned by Rambo but again by Butselaar (1981:113)[152]. This particular motive is important to include since in my research it has been mentioned by various converts in their narratives. There are many poor people who find themselves in such a desperate situation that they will change religious allegiance if they can somehow improve their lot. Maslow (1970:17) calls this the 'physiological need' and describes it as one of the basic human needs (see 3.2.3). This motive has sometimes been criticised as an 'impure' conversion motive (Butselaar 1981:113).

Included are benefits such as food, clothes, any kind of gifts, housing etc. In addition, an offer for employment or a bursary for studies are also viewed as material motivation for conversion. It can therefore be said, that poverty constitutes a crisis which may 'push' a person into a conversion process leading eventually to a change of religion.

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[152] The similarities between Butselaar's study and mine may be due to the fact that both were conducted in Africa (Rwanda and South Africa respectively).

3.4.1.2 Excluded Motives

My analytical grid of motives therefore consist of a set of five conversion motives: religious, mystical, affectional, socio-political and material. This categorisation of motives is different from other studies such as Rambo's as discussed in chapter 3.2.2. Out of Rambo's (1993:14-16) six motives three are identical to my list: Intellectual/religious, mystical and affectional (see reference above). The other three, namely experimental, revivalist and coercive do not appear in my list since they were not mentioned by converts in any significant way.

Although Rambo (1993:15) is of the opinion that "experimental conversion has emerged as a major avenue of conversion in the twentieth century because of greater religious freedom and a multiplicity of available religious experiences", I have not discovered this kind of motivation in any significant manner in my research.[153] It is my experience, that people are motivated to change religion for much more fundamental needs than just out of a 'show me' mentality.

Another motive which plays a minor role is 'revivalism'. Here Rambo admits that it is less prominent in the 20th century. It is indeed true that this type of conversion which uses crowd conformity to induce behaviour, for instance revival meetings, has not been mentioned in any form by the 20 converts interviewed in my research. This does not mean that conversion do not occur at mass evangelistic rallies or 'crusades' on the Christian side or e.g at an *ijtima*[154] on the Muslims side, but simply that none of my interviewees experienced such a conversion.

A final type of conversion which I omit from my study is 'coercive'. Lofland and Skonovd believe that this type of conversion is relatively rare (cf. Rambo 1993:15). The coercive

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[153] There is one exception though in one of my samples, in the case of convert M4 (see discussion in chapter 7.2). 'Experimental' may be regarded as a special case of the 'intellectual' motive of conversion and thus be integrated there.

[154] The *Tabligh Jamaat* arranges regular mass meetings to 'revive' the faith of Muslims and such a gathering is called by the Arabic word *ijtima* (gathering).

conversion motive has not been mentioned by any converts in my research and it is therefore inappropriate to include in my list.

3.4.1.3 Crisis – Catalyst for Change

Crisis situations often force or 'push' individuals and groups to confront their limitations and may stimulate a quest to resolve a conflict. Gillespie (1991:90) is of the opinion that conflict "whether emotional or psychological in nature, actually may precipitate decisions and even encourage them". People are often confronted by life experiences which result in a crisis. These crises can have different sources, and they vary in duration, intensity and scope. Johnson (1978:176) is of the opinion that in every conversion process there is a crisis. He is convinced that "a genuine religious conversion is the outcome of a crisis". Rambo (1993:166) puts it in this way by saying that "the crisis may be the major force for change, or it may be simply the catalytic incident that crystallises the person's situation". Rambo (1993:44-56, 168) lists 'crisis' as the second 'stage' in his conversion process. He is of the opinion that "some form of crisis usually precedes conversion" (cf. Lofland & Stark 1965, Gillespie 1979:62-70, Pasquier 1978:195) and that a "crisis may be religious, political, psychological, or cultural in origin".

It is my experience however, that there were a number of converts who emphatically denied that a crisis was a factor in their conversion.[155] The political situation, for instance, was not a crisis for a convert (M9), as Rambo would suggest, but rather a 'positive challenge'. Other terms which Rambo uses for crisis are 'disorientation', 'stress' and 'tension'. Rambo (1993:46) is of the opinion that crisis "should be seen as existing along a continuum rather than as an absolute either/or state". Seen in this light almost every life experience may be termed as a crisis. I would therefore reject the *necessity* of crisis as a catalyst of conversion (cf. Heirich 1977).

Further, Rambo (1993:46) divides crises into two basic types:
1) Those which call into question people's fundamental orientation to life.
2) Those which are rather mild in themselves.

It can of course be argued, that all five conversion motives in my analytical grid can be declared to some extent as a 'crisis'. However, the three most common crisis situations which came to the fore in my research and which motivated people for conversion are:

1. The death of a family member, relative or friend (affectional).
2. Marriage problems which sometimes ended in divorce (affectional and material).
3. The problem of not being able to understand one's own religious doctrines and practices (religious).

These factors seemed to have questioned fundamentally the people's orientation of life to such an extent that they felt forced to rethink their religious allegiance. We can however not foresee the prospective decisions which will be made. In the same situation, one person may choose a new religion but another may become strengthened in his/her existing religious commitment. Crisis, therefore, may provide an opportunity for a new option or result in reconfirming the present one.

A technical term which is often used in the context of crisis is 'cognitive dissonance'. Festinger (1957) developed a theory to describe the behaviour of people who experience a 'crisis' between their expectations of beliefs and the objective data of a historical event. Festinger based his theory on social research in the elements of decision making. He calls this disconfirmation and the behaviour that follows 'cognitive dissonance'. It is experienced in the collapse of a person's 'symbolic world' and the subsequent need to put that world together again. The term is used by scholars to explain particular historical events and subsequent human behaviour (cf. Dudley & Hilgert 1987,[156] Brown & Caetano 1992:157).

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[155] See chapter 5 and 6: C4, C6, M1, M5, M9 (cf. Poston 1992:171).

[156] Dudley and Hilgert (1987:76-103), for instance, use 'cognitive dissonance' as a tool for appreciating the crisis of the early church and the resulting Christian witness. The two events in discussion are the responses to the crucifixion and the postponed parousia. In both cases the subsequent behaviour of the disciples was faithfulness and a greater zeal for witness.

3.4.2 Functional Decision-Making

In the previous section I identified five categories of conversion motives which constitute an 'analytical grid'. My analysis of the conversion narratives showed that there were always more than one motive in operation in the process of conversion, eventually bringing a person to a new religious commitment. The research analysis further revealed that there are between two and four conversion motives operational in each case.

These motives interplay with and influence each other. Sometimes a motive is active for a certain time and then disappears for a period and possibly becomes active again later in the conversion process. It is not the aim of this study to determine the exact duration when a motive is active and when not within the conversion process. However, what can with some degree of certainty be shown in each case is the initial and final motivational factors. The following diagram is presented with an example of four conversion motives which are interrelated:

Diagram 3.4: Interrelation of Four Motives

Conversion Process
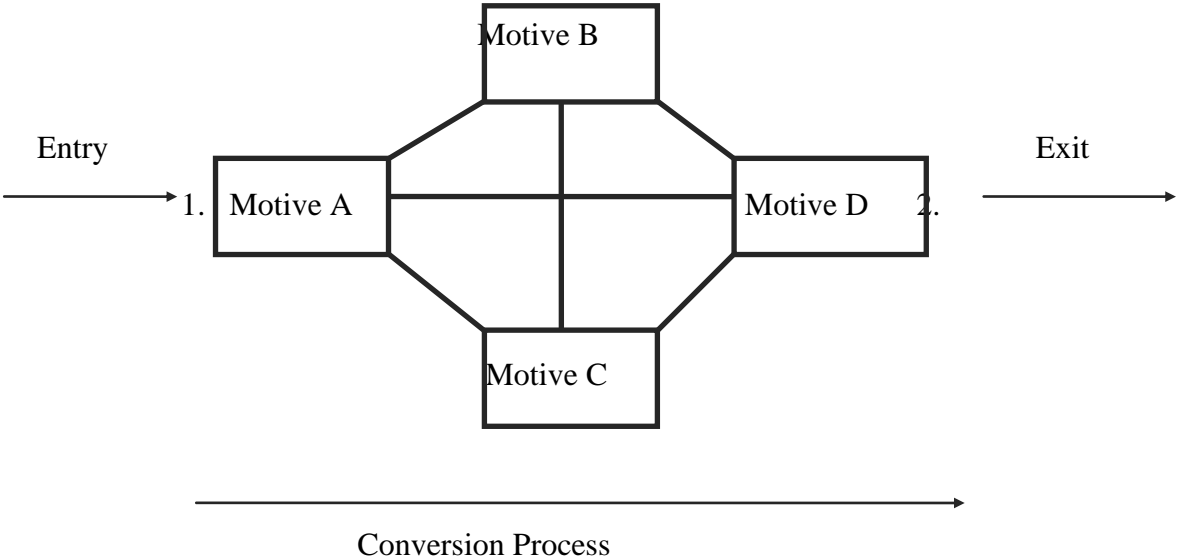
At point '1.' the whole process of conversion starts and then the interplay of the various motives come into operation. Motive A is where conversion begins and motive D is where

the convert makes a commitment. Motive A can therefore be rightly described as the initial factor or 'entrance' of the conversion process.[157]

The motives A - D are active at various intervals and in various degrees of force. Sometimes only one motive is active in influencing the individual and at other times several motives are active in various ways. With this model in mind I argue that there is usually a combination of conversion motives in operation.

Previous research confirms that conversion contains a variety of different motives which may change, be adopted or adapted over time (cf. Butselaar 1981:113). Motives of conversion vary from person to person and are multiple, interactive and cumulative (Rambo 1993:140).[158]

The configuration of the diagram may have different formats, depending on the number of motives and whether one or more motives can be identified as playing a crucial role in the commitment stage of a convert. In analysing a conversion narrative with three motives where two played a role in the commitment stage, the diagram may look as follows:

Diagram 3.5: Interrelation of Three Motives
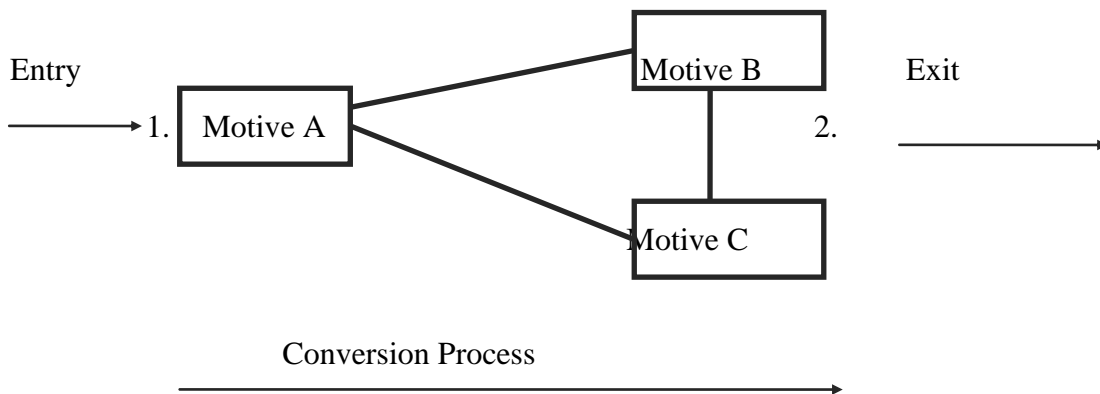
In this example motive A is the starting or entry point into the conversion process. Motive B and C have been identified to influence the convert to make a commitment to the new

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[157] This method of analysing the conversion narratives in respect of the relation of motives represents but one approach, since there are many ways that the motives and their interrelations may be interpreted.

religion. Various other combinations or constellations of these conversion motives are possible, as will become clear in chapters five and six, where I analyse the conversion narratives.

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[158] See also my discussion on Rambo's hypotheses about motivation in chapter 3.2.3.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 General Research Approach

The aim of this thesis is to gain more clarity on the 'mystery' of religious conversion, by analysing the motivations for conversion. The focus of this study is on empirical research and the emphasis is on qualitative research. Dreyer (1991:227-228), following Bogdan and Biklen, identifies the following five important characteristics of qualitative research:

1) It is usually undertaken in a *natural environment*.

2) It is *descriptive* in nature. Data are verbal or pictorial rather than numeric and may include transcriptions of interviews, field notes, photographs, video recordings, etc.

3) Researchers who use this approach pay attention to *process* rather than merely noting outcomes or results.

4) Data is usually analysed *inductively*. This implies that the theory used is 'grounded' on observation.

5) The researcher is particularly interested in the *meanings* which people attach to events and experiences.

This study aims to give answers to the question *why* people convert from one religion to another. I tend to agree with Rambo (1993:18-19) who lists six central points which I find crucial especially in doing research on conversion. Due to their importance, these points are listed and explained briefly:

1. **Observation** is of foremost importance. Rambo (1993:18) emphasises that observation needs to be "careful, objective and systematic", while distancing oneself from personal bias as much as possible. Only then is new perception and vision possible.

2. **Description** needs to be carefully done to avoid misconceptions as much as possible.

3. **Empathy** is an attempt to see and feel the world from the point of view of the person or group being studied. It is impossible for the researcher to be free from bias, but it is

important to strive for empathy in order to understand the feelings, experiences and actions of the convert.

4. **Understanding** of the convert's 'world' is central for a holistic study of conversion. It will deepen the capacity for empathy.

5. **Interpretation** needs to be done with integrity. Rambo (1993:19) is of the opinion, that "interpretation makes the process and content of conversion more fully understandable in terms of the scholar's frame of reference".

6. **Explanation** is a form of interpretation that utilises theories derived from various disciplines and applies them to the phenomenon. According to Rambo (1993:19) "interpretation and explanation are closely related, but interpretation is more integral to humanistic points of view and explanation is more typical of the social sciences".

In her book, *Qualitative Researching,* Mason gives valuable guidelines for the practice of qualitative social research. Under the heading, *What should Qualitative Research be?* Mason (1993: 5-6) lists the following important points (summarised):

- It should be *systematically and rigorously conducted* (but not rigidly or structured).
- It should be *strategically conducted, yet flexible and contextual.*
- It should involve *critical self-scrutiny* by the researcher.
- It should produce social *explanations to intellectual puzzles.*
- It should produce social explanations which are *generalizable* in some way.
- It should be conducted as *an ethical practice,* and with regard to its political context.

My response to these important issues mentioned by Mason is as follows. It is imperative that qualitative research needs to be conducted systematically, i.e. the research approach must be applied to all converts in the same manner and yet in a flexible way. In respect to self-scrutiny, Oskowitz (1997:87) confirms that "it is important for researchers to get to know and understand themselves while they are trying to get to know and understand others". I acknowledge the importance of self-scrutiny in respect to my own bias from the point of view that I am a Christian missionary and have been trying to win Muslims for Christ for many years. In section 7.1 I will elaborate further on this issue.

In chapter 1.4 I have set out the intellectual puzzle and the research questions of this study. The intellectual puzzle is as follows:

How can a deeper understanding of conversion motives contribute to a more adequate missiological understanding of conversion?

The research questions are:

1. **What are the motives of Muslims converting to Christianity?**
2. **What are the motives of Christians converting to Islam?**

Based on these research questions, the data sources and methods, as well as their justification can now be formulated for my study (cf. Mason 1993:22-23):

Table 4.1: Research Questions and Procedure

Research questions	Data sources and methods	Justification
1) What are the motives of Muslims converting to Christianity? 2) What are the motives of Christians converting to Islam?	• Converts: interviews and observation • Relatives, friends, religious leaders: interviews • Literature on conversion: documentary analysis	• Interviews will provide narratives of how converts experienced their conversions, focusing on the motives and other significant aspects • Additional interviews with people related to converts will provide supportive information • Analysis of related literature will reveal how academics describe and understand conversion From this we will be able to sketch the motives for conversion of each convert (the initial motive and other contributing motives). Thereafter we construct an adequate missiological definition on conversion.

The aim is to answer the research questions and then to endeavour to give an answer to the intellectual puzzle. Accordingly, the final goal of my whole study is to formulate an

adequate missiological understanding of conversion. This new perspective aims to be a contribution for churches to understand and respond more appropriately to converts who have changed their religious allegiance.

One of the crucial questions is: How can one determine the motivations of a convert? Is there a way to find out? And if so – by what method can this be done?

According to Epstein's 'Cognitive-experiential Self-theory' (1985:292), behaviour is often the result of preconscious cognitions of which the individual is unaware. This means that people cannot always adequately articulate their reasons or motivation for their behaviour. The obvious implication is that for personality and social psychology it is often necessary to go beyond direct self-report. Epstein (1985:296) suggests techniques and different approaches to assess preconscious behaviour (techniques for measuring experiential as opposed to intellectual beliefs):

1. Obtain adequate samples of relevant behaviour directly or through questionnaires for the purpose of inferring attitudes.
2. Another approach is to examine emotions.
3. To develop written tests of simulated situations.
4. Indirect techniques might also be explored; such as the use of content analysis of word samples.

It is clear that such techniques require the full co-operation of the individual. Even then, a high level of predictive accuracy cannot always be expected. A difficulty with human subjects is that not only may they fail to do as they are told, but they may behave as told for reasons other than those envisioned by the researcher. In addition, Salzman (1966:19), a psychologist who did extensive research on conversion, admits that conversion experiences are particularly difficult to analyse. He made the following observation:

> Most converts who come to therapy do so for problems other than their conversion. They are very resistant to discussing their conversion experience; it is sheltered and protected as an experience which has served its purpose, but which must not be explored because of the danger of shattering the pseudo-peace which it has produced. If the person will discuss it at all he overlays it with a great many rationalisations so that his true feelings can be

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discovered only indirectly. The great need to protect this experience indicates the significance of the problem it has dealt with.

While agreeing with Salzman's emphasis on the difficulty to discover conversion motives (as reflected in his view just quoted), I do not share his implicit assumptions that conversion always represents a 'pseudo-peace' or that it always deals with an underlying psychological 'problem'.

The approach used in my study is to analyse converts' verbal accounts of their conversions. However, I am aware that this is a hotly debated methodological and epistemological issue (Robbins 1988:66). Although I also draw information from relatives, friends and observation, I rely primarily on converts' own accounts for data on the motivations for conversion by treating them as 'narratives that speak for themselves'. In other words, the 'convert is the authority' (cf. Gillespie 1979:5, Miller 1969:10).

Snow and Machalek (1984:175-186) too, discuss the issue of the treatment and use of converts' verbal accounts. They argue that conversion involves 'biographical reconstruction' (cf. Richardson 1985:173). Wanamaker (1995:51-52) is of the opinion that "the phenomenon of biographical re-interpretation has long been associated with conversion and explains why converts' accounts of their conversion are of dubious value for explaining the reasons for their conversion". According to Snow and Machalek (1984:175) other researchers too have challenged the validity "suggesting that converts' accounts ought to be treated as topics of analysis, rather than as objective data on why and how conversion first occurred".

Staples and Mauss (1987) were inspired by the recent work of Snow and Machalek (1983:266-278, 1984) in respect of thinking about conversion as involving a change in one's 'universe of discourse'[159] and have therefore focused their attention on the role of language and rhetoric in conversion. They made an interesting case study among members

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[159] It means that a person's communication language (i.e. words, symbolic interaction) undergoes a radical change as a result of the conversion experience in order to make sense of self and the world (cf. Staples & Mauss 1987:135).

of a so-called "Jesus Freaks" organisation. As a result, Staples and Mauss (1987:139-145) present the following definitions of the four 'rhetorical indicators'[160]:

1) **Biographical Reconstruction:** Where the subject *actively* reinterprets past experiences or self-conceptions from the vantage point of the present in such a way as to *change the meaning* of the past for the subject.

2) **Adoption of a Master Attribution Scheme:** Any evidence that the subject attributes all outcomes or the reason for all outcomes to one source (e.g. 'God', 'Jesus', 'the Bible').

3) **Suspension of Analogical Reasoning:** The willingness of the subject to equate his or her beliefs or ideas with the beliefs or ideas of other individuals or groups.

4) **Embracing a Master Role:** The subject sees a full interpenetration of the new religious identity with all other identities; the subordination of all other identities to the new religious identity; or the elimination of other identities incompatible with the new religious identity.

Nevertheless, Snow and Machalek (1984:175) report that "most researchers who have studied conversion tend to accept converts' statements as valid and reliable records of past events and experiences (Bruce & Wallis 1983) have recently defended this practice".

Robbins (1988:66) raises another issue when he says that "most conversion researchers treat the individual as the appropriate unit of analysis". Another tradition of looking at conversion is to treat it as a form of collective behaviour, e.g. revivalist 'mass conversion'. In my study the focus is on individual conversion, although in some instances collective behaviour, i.e. the role of the surrounding culture and society, may be observed and discussed.

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[160] The four 'rhetorical indicators' as originally proposed by Snow and Machalek (1983:266-278), identify the characteristics of converts' accounts about their conversion experience (see examples provided by Staples & Mauss 1987:140-141).

Although this dimension may be difficult to assess, it is my conviction that even personal/individual conversions often have a cultural or collective dimension that may deeply affect the way a conversion takes place.

Today in South Africa Christians and Muslims live side by side and enjoy equal religious freedom. However, because of the past history there exists even up to this day a high level of suspicion between Christians and Muslims (see chapter one). In addition, my topic of research is possibly one of the most sensitive issues in Christian-Muslim relations, so that people generally refrain from speaking on this contentious theme. It is because of these circumstances that it makes it difficult first to obtain information at all and secondly, to receive truthful information.

Furthermore, this difficult situation limits my choice of method to obtain data substantially. The main problem is that I cannot ask beforehand which is the best method to use to obtain data and then merely apply it. Because of these circumstances, I must decide what is possible in any given situation. In other words, the researcher has to ask in each situation which method of investigation is best and which resources are available (cf. Mason & Bramble 1989:58-59).

One could argue that under such circumstances qualitative research on the topic of conversion motives is impossible to perform since one is very limited in obtaining information. However, I believe that I have developed a distinctive approach of friendship and trust with Christian and Muslim leaders in South Africa since 1984. It is my experience that Christians trust their minister. On the other hand Muslims trust their *imam*. When Christian converts heard that I was a minister myself, it was relatively easy for them to have trust in me. To establich a trust relationship with a Muslim convert was much more difficult. It was only possible to conduct interviews because of my friendship with the respective *imam* and the approval he gave.

Therefore, only this situation makes it possible to win the trust of and gain access to converts. Oskowitz (1997:87) emphasises this notion by saying that "these qualities are not only humanitarian prerequisites, they are also crucial in the process of gaining valid data. For it is only in a relationship of mutual trust that respondents will risk voicing their

feelings" (cf. Lofland 1976:83-84). Therefore, I am convinced that I have been able to obtain sufficient and trustworthy data, though I admit its limitations, which justify the performance of this research and above all give valuable new insights in respect to its results.

Richardson (1985:175), speaking mainly about studies done on NRM's, reports that recently researchers have used more 'participant-oriented methods'. It means that researchers "participated in the groups during the time of their research, doing indepth interviews and administering survey or personality assessment instruments while there". Richardson is mainly speaking of younger researchers, "who shared some ideals and values of those being studied, even if all that was shared was a negative evaluation of certain aspects of contemporary culture". This method is worth striving for since the researcher may obtain more accurate information by living with the people. It is however not possible in every situation.

The approach of first designing a social scientific theory and then applying the theory rigidly to research material is no longer universally accepted among psychologists and other social scientists.[161] Instead a 'discourse analysis' approach which is more hermeneutical (interpretive) in nature is favoured by many psychologists. Mason (1996:4) understands this as being qualitative research which is "grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly 'interpretivist' in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced". Durrheim (1997:181) argues that "discourse analysis is an appropriate social constructionist 'methodology' because it addresses both the problem with empiricist science and empiricist psychology … Discourse analysts understand the task of research to be interpretative and productive".[162]

Discourse analysis is not a fixed step-by-step methodological procedure detailing how to analyse discources. Snow and Machalek (1983, 1984) have pointed to the importance of

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[161] This is part of the general move away from 'modernist' to post-modern approaches in the social sciences. See e.g. the articles by Durrheim (1997) and Oskowitz (1997) on 'discourse analysis' as a new approach to psychology.
[162] The aim is to explain the social world and action as an alternative to psychology as a science (cf. Durrheim 1997:181).

language in understanding conversion. They have suggested that an analysis of the talk and reasoning of subjects can provide a fruitful approach to the study of conversion. They view particular kinds of language and rhetoric as observable indicators of some underlying change in consciousness. Thus they propose that conversion must be viewed as a change in one's 'universe of discourse', and that certain 'rhetorical indicators' in the talk of individuals should identify the convert. The aim of such a method is therefore to identify who is a convert and who is not.

That is however not the aim of my study. Because I view conversion as an inherently subjective phenomenon, I believe that only the subject is qualified to tell who he or she really is (cf. Stables & Mauss 1987:138). Consequently, I determine whether or not someone is a convert by asking the question: Are you a convert?[163] Hiltner (1966:42) mentions another definition of conversion: a person is converted when she/he stops thinking of the church as it or they, and thinks of it as 'we'. This may apply to Muslims as well (cf. Levtzion 1979:216).

4.2 Background Studies

Besides my practical experience in this field of work as a missionary since 1984, I have also undertaken specific studies in preparation for this particular study. Since 1984 I have observed and studied the conversion experiences of Christians and Muslims who have changed their former religion for various reasons. I had the privilege to be involved in running special 'Study Groups' for Muslims who have become Christians. Already then I could gain valuable information on this great transformation and witnessed and shared many joys but also sad events in the lives of these converts in South Africa.

Since 1984 I have been fascinated and interested in this particular field of missiology and have started to read as much as possible on this theme. Furthermore, I did some research work on the 'Islamic Missionary Society' in Johannesburg in 1996. That study (Maurer 1996) was in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MTH degree at Stellenbosch

University. It is a descriptive study of *da'wah* activity in Gauteng during 1958-1996. In conducting this study I was in contact with many leaders in the Islamic community and as a result received some insight into Islamic *da'wah* activities. At that time I met a number of converts who shared their conversion experiences with me. This also enabled me to become familiar with the Islamic way of recruiting new converts by different methods used by various Islamic movements.

As mentioned above, the background study was devoted to reading literature published on the topic of 'conversion' in general and on the South African context in particular. This included articles, magazines and books. The following main areas may be highlighted:

1) Literature on the topic of conversion in general:
There is a great deal of literature available on this subject, most of which has been written by authors coming from a Christian background. Muslim writers in the past have done little research and not much has been published on this subject in the Muslim community. However, the variety of viewpoints is immense and it is not the aim of this study to discuss all the ideas and concepts of conversion. Reference will be made to relevant points within the study.

2) Literature about the historical relations between Muslims and Christians, with special reference to conversion:
Christian mission societies and Islamic *da'wah* movements which are directly involved, i.e. those which are mentioned by the converts and made a significant contribution, will be described in respect of their activities. Reference will also be made to the historical developments of Christianity and Islam in South Africa.

3) Literature on Interfaith dialogue:
South Africa has an interesting history concerning interfaith dialogue. A number of books bear witness to this process. These books will be helpful in understanding the present situation and also in trying to shape the future vision. Reference to interfaith dialogue and

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[163] Though the term 'convert' is generally an accepted term it is my experience that some Muslims who are influenced by subsequent Islamic teaching prefer the term 'revert' (see also definition in paragraph 1.8 and discussion in section 7.3.6, cf. Maurer 1996:62).

relevant aspects thereof will be given as they relate to this study and the narratives told by converts.

4.3 Data Collection

Written sources constitute only a part of the material available to be analysed in this regard. The heart of my study is information drawn from interviews with converts and people who are somehow involved in this process. Dreyer (1992a:432) has to say the following about interviews:

> Depth interviews are widely used by qualitative researchers and may be described as 'a conversation with a goal'. Unlike the structured interviewing in survey design, depth interviews are more conversational. The researcher directs the interviews towards the themes that interest her or him, but leaves the subjects to discuss these in their own way. Field research has many advantages. It has a high degree of realism because it is conducted in people's life world and the researcher does not attempt to control the situation. Owing to the intensive investigation of phenomena and the flexible approach followed, field research normally promotes deeper insight into phenomena than is gained from other types of research design.

What in my empirical field, in view of the limitations mentioned above, is possible in respect of research and data gathering? Considering the situation, I propose that my specific field of research consists of the following data collection strategy:

1. Establishing trust relations with Christian and Muslim leaders specifically in Gauteng.
2. Contacting converts with the reference and support of religious leaders.
3. Visiting the converts and finding out what method of data gathering is possible in each case. It was vital to I ask each respondent for permission for whatever action I planned and to make sure that the "interviewees enjoy being interviewed" (Mason 1996:42, cf Lofland 1976:27).
4. Gather information through the following possible methods: a) conversion experience spoken freely on tape-recorder, b) informal discourse observations.
5. If possible, conduct follow-up visits.

These points of strategy will be explained later in more detail. I have chosen interviewing and observation as a data collecting method. In other words, this study reports and analyses the findings based on primary data, collected through scheduled and non-scheduled interviews, and on secondary data as well (cf. Robbins 1988:67). In respect to point four above, I aim first to gather information by means of a tape-recording and if possible add data through the means of observation.

The following procedure can now be reported (actual practical field report):[164]

It has only been possible for me to speak to converts because I have built a relationship of trust with Christian and Muslim leaders whom I have known personally for many years and who recommended me to the converts. Lofland (1976:25) emphasises the importance of connections when he says that "it's who you know that counts". Some of these leaders were supportive of my study and provided me with names and telephone numbers of converts. I then phoned these converts and told them that the respective religious leader had given me his or her name, and introduced myself. Then I explained briefly the purpose of my contacting them and told them that the religious leader and I would value their kind co-operation in this matter. I then asked the convert for an appointment at a venue convenient for them.

Obviously, not all converts were happy to meet me and many had excuses and various reasons for not wanting to see me for this purpose (see paragraph 4.3.3). In addition, even some of those who were happy to meet me to share their conversion narrative were initially suspicious and often reluctant to speak about conversion at the actual meeting (cf. Morrison 1992:70). I must admit, that the interviews proved to be more difficult than expected.

With some Muslim converts, I made several attempts at arranging an appointment, which they either did not keep or refused at the last minute to share their testimony. It also became obvious that the more interviews I conducted the better I became known in the Muslim community and the more suspicious they became of me as a Christian conducting

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[164] See also Lofland (1976:58) for practical steps of conducting interviews.

this kind of research, even though the respective *imam*[165] was in favour of my research. In order not to endanger the relationship and possibly closing doors[166] for ever, I decided in April 1998 that it was better to stop conducting new direct interviews and preferably just nurturing the existing friendships. In fact, most of the converts were not prepared to talk continually about their conversion experience. Similar problems have been reported in earlier studies, like Poston (1991:159) for instance, said that his research has been hampered "by the general reluctance of Muslim converts to co-operate in the kind of academic investigation necessary to obtain useful data … lack of openness on the part of converts makes it extremely difficult to draw firm conclusions from the data obtained".

As regards to the Christian community, the situation was slightly different. The first problem was that there are not many converts from Islam to be found in Gauteng. Another problem was that a number of religious leaders promised to supply me with names and telephone numbers of converts in their congregation, but even after my contacting them on a number of occasions, they did not keep their promise. This venture was at times rather frustrating and took a lot of time. I also made attempts to search for converts in churches directly without the support of the minister. However these attempts were again futile. Some Christians also refused to share their testimonies because of various reasons: fear of publicity, fear of persecution, indifference, etc. Nevertheless, I count myself fortunate to have received some names of converts from a number of Christian leaders and to have actually conducted 10 interviews with their support.

I also tried to recruit one or two Christian and Muslim friends to help me conduct interviews with converts. This would have been an advantage, especially in Soweto with a cross cultural situation and with the many different languages. I am sad to report that I was unable to find a person who was willing to help in such a way. People were sometimes willing to refer me to converts but to actually conduct such interviews on such a contentious topic was out of the question. Some reasons given to me were for instance: no time, too sensitive an area of research, not enough experience to know how to handle the situation, being afraid, etc. (cf. Lofland 1976:32).

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[165] The 'Imam' is the leader of the mosque and considered by Sunni Muslims to be an authority in Islamic law and theology.

4.3.1 Interviews Spoken on a Tape-Recorder

As pointed out above, interviewer empathy is an important ingredient of qualitative research. Several authors have compiled helpful hints for achieving greater success in interviewing. I am of the opinion that one of the most salient components in this venture is expressed by Murnighan (1992:29):

> One of my mentors gave me some terrific advice: He told me that the most important thing in an interview was to make sure they like me. Certainly I needed to show that I knew what I was talking about. But the most important thing was personal – I should try to make sure that they liked me. I don't think he was saying that I should hide my true personality … Instead, he was telling me to be pleasant, smile a little here and there – in general, to be someone that they would like to have as a colleague.

Lofland (1976:39) emphasises the same notion when he says that "a naturalistic researcher is a non-threatening learner". The actual procedure of a meeting with a convert generally went as follows: First I introduced myself and explained the reason for my visit in more detail than I had done when I spoke to them earlier on the phone to make the appointment. The 'Letter of Recommendation' (see copy in appendix), written by my promotor Professor JNJ Kritzinger of UNISA, was then presented and briefly explained. I then further explained on the content of the study and in addition, outlined the table of contents of my study to those who were interested as well. I also expressed my appreciation and thanked each convert for having allowed me to ask such personal questions about their conversion experience.

The exact procedure of the interview was then explained. I asked the respondent to share his or her conversion experience freely while being recorded on tape. I assured each person that all information would be treated confidentially and that his or her name would not appear in the study (cf. Lofland 1976:29, Lofland & Lofland 1984:29). This was a very crucial issue and most converts only shared their testimony after my assurance of maintaining confidentiality.

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[166] See also Lofland (1976:43) on the problem of 'closing doors'.

I am most grateful to those converts who were willing to speak their narrative freely on a tape recorder. It was a unique experience for me to listen to these people as they unfolded their decision to change their religion and what they experienced in what probably constitutes the most important period of change in their lives. These tape recordings provided me with much valuable material to be analysed. The aim was to give almost unlimited freedom to the converts to share their conversion experience as far as they could remember and what they felt was important to share. It was important to me not to influence the convert in any way nor to direct the presentation.

The only guidance I gave to the interviewee was to ask him/her to concentrate on the three main periods in the conversion process: pre-conversion, actual conversion, post-conversion[167] and to focus on the motives of conversion, i.e. the reasons of change. This procedure corresponds with an 'unstructured interview'. Dreyer (1992b:351) emphasises that the mark of this type is "that respondents are encouraged to talk about a certain subject but the interviewer gives as little direction as possible". Tubbs and Moss (1994:245) classify this type as an 'open question' where "it places no restrictions on the length of the respondent's answer".

Most converts spoke without any significant interruptions. Nevertheless, sometimes there were interruptions such as visitors arriving, children had to be cared for, the telephone needed to be answered and the like. Only in such cases where the convert stopped – and did not subsequently know how to continue – did I ask a suitable question in order to continue the interview. In addition, if there was a considerable gap of information lacking in the conversion narrative, I would ask a leading question in order to receive some more information. With respect to the duration of the interview, I left it entirely to the convert. The conversion narratives varied from about 15 minutes to 50 minutes. The main aim was to ascertain the motives and significant events in the conversion experience. I found it a

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[167] These three phases are according to a model adapted from that of Kraft (1979:335-337), (cf. Tippett 1973:123, Conn 1986:188, Gillespie 1979:62-70, see also 3.2.3.3 of this study). The seven stages developed by Rambo (1993) proved to be too long and complicated for this purpose.

very exciting experience to listen to these life stories on the tapes again and again. The recorded testimonies were afterwards transcribed in written form for careful analysis.[168]

4.3.2 Informal Discussions and Observations

In addition to the interviews on tape I was able to hold informal discussions with the converts and then write down my observations afterwards.[169] My advantage was that I could rely on these observations since I had been in contact with converts over a long period of time. In fact, as mentioned above, I have known converts, both Christians and Muslims, since my arrival in South Africa in 1984. In many instances, colleagues, friends and relatives of converts have confirmed these observations. It is important to note that the observations mentioned in these reports and related to this study are not only based on my own interpretation. The aim is therefore to combine interview data with field observation as this has been done in other research projects (cf. Heirich 1977:657).

4.3.3 Reasons for Refused Interviews

As indicated above, it was possible to find 20 converts who were prepared to share their conversion narrative on tape recorder. I have, however, approached many more converts and asked for permission to conduct an interview on this issue. Many Muslim and Christian converts refused to give information for various reasons. Such reasons for refusal to co-operate in any manner were for instance:

- A convert expressed that he/she was simply not prepared to spend any time for an interview on the topic of conversion.
- Some converts also feared that if they spoke out, the threat of persecution could emerge. It must also be said at this point that I met converts where neither the family, nor

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[168] See also Staples and Mauss (1987:139-140) who use a very similar method for their case study among the 'Jesus Freaks' organisation.

[169] Mason (1996:46) emphasises that researchers work on developing the skills they need to handle the social, intellectual and all practical elements of these kinds of interactions. These includes skills such as listening,

friends, nor the religious community were aware that they had changed their religion at some stage in their lives. These converts expressed the desire that their conversion should remain a secret, at least for the near future (cf. Schreuder & Oddie 1989:517, on 'secret believers').

- Other converts did not want to speak for fear of losing their jobs or that pressure from family or friends would result.

- Some converts were simply not interested in sharing their testimony. Some also said that there was nothing to say on this matter.

- I also met many illegal immigrants and a few of them had changed their religion. These people were afraid to relate anything about their lives for fear of the police. In such cases it was impossible to convince them about the confidentiality or the need for such a research.

I found that especially African people in Soweto were very reluctant to speak freely about their conversion and I had no option but to find out about their motives of conversion in an indirect way. In other words, it was futile to ask a convert directly what his or her motive(s) for conversion was.

4.3.4 Interviews of Friends and Relatives of Converts

In order to have more information in the context of conversion and to be able to analyse more effectively, I also attempted to speak to people who knew the respective convert: family members, relatives and friends. I was of the opinion that through this data collecting method, a better picture may be gained (cf. Robbins 1988:67, Lofland & Stark 1965:863). However, I could not interview as many people as I would have wished. I realised again that for many Christians and Muslims the topic of conversion is a 'hot' and sensitive issue, especially when they need to speak about a family member or friend whom they now dislike and disapprove of as a result his/her conversion.

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remembering, achieving a good balance between talking and listening, observing and picking up verbal and non-verbal clues.

Because of these problems I was able to conduct only a few interviews among relatives and friends of converts. Nevertheless, the information gathered was helpful though in many cases there was nothing substantially new in their observations. It must therefore be emphasised that the bulk of the useful information came from the converts directly and not from any other sources.

4.4 Sampling Design and Procedures

As I mentioned earlier (paragraph 4.1 and 4.3), I could not really choose the people whom I interviewed but had to be content with the names given to me by various religious leaders. Although I was aware that the topic of conversion in Christian-Muslim relations is a sensitive theme, I hoped to be able to collect more data by interviewing a great variety of converts. I had great expectations particularly for Soweto since there are many converts to Islam in this huge suburb.

However, I was greatly disappointed as only a few black Muslims were willing to share their testimony on a tape recorder. I therefore had to accept the situation. Restrictions on sampling and social influence have been reported in other research projects as well (Heirich 1977:664). Nevertheless, I made an effort to meet as many people as possible and to communicate with them on an informal basis in order to receive as much information as possible over a period of many years.

Therefore, in the light of all the encountered problems I regard it as remarkable that I was able to conduct 20 tape recorded interviews. I have met most of these converts several times (although some were not keen to see me again) over a period of many years (see time framework 4.7).

In order to have a good variety of interviews with converts from different cultural backgrounds I endeavoured to get to know religious leaders and converts in different societies in Gauteng. In the context of my study and in order to answer the research questions I saw it as an advantage to receive data from converts in as many different parts of Gauteng as possible (cf. on sampling design: Mason 1996:89, Mason & Bramble 1989:115-118). I have been able to conduct interviews in the following suburbs: Soweto,

Mayfair, Lenasia, Laudium, Riverlea, Eldorado Park, Robertsham and Mondeor. These areas represent people from different backgrounds such as African, Coloured, White and Indian (see chapters 5 and 6).

Christians who have embraced Islam come from different church denominations. With regard to gender it happened that five ladies and five men shared their conversion narratives from Islam to Christianity. This was coincidental to have achieved a male/female balance.

With respect to the Muslims it was a different matter. I realised that there were mainly men who were willing to share their testimony with me as a man. Though I tried my utmost to balance this matter as best as possible, it proved to be very difficult to interview Muslim women. This had to do with the role of women in Islam who do not have equal rights in public as men (cf. Maurer 1996:50-52). Women in Islam are submissive to their husbands and are not encouraged and often not allowed to speak in public or to strangers. Women in general need the permission of their husbands in such matters. I approached a number of men to endeavour to get permission from them to interview their wives, but did not succeed except in one case.

I was therefore fortunate to interview at least one Muslim woman (M10), whose husband I know well (M9) and who agreed after two years of friendship, that his wife could share her testimony with me. Another reason is that most Muslim women seldom go to the mosque and know only the basics of Islam. According to my experience, many women who have converted to Islam do so because of marriage. They are seldom instructed in Islamic teaching.

4.5 Data Processing and Analysing Procedures

The aim of the whole research project was to gather data and then to communicate the findings as accurately as possible (cf. Levtzion 1979:46, Richardson 1978:119). As an interpreter I tried to be involved personally as much as possible by entering into 'the world of the convert'. In some cases I was able to go back to the convert and discuss the results and make sure that my interpretations were correct. This procedure was on the one hand a

very exciting venture but at the same time a difficult task. During the whole process of writing this study and collecting the empirical material I had to go back and forth in order to adjust my interpretation as a result of the new insights gained. Mason (1996:33) emphasises this aspect when she says that "qualitative research designs invariably need to allow for flexibility, and for decision making to take place as the research process proceeds".

Dreyer (1993:220) pointed out that data analysis may be regarded "as the process by which a researcher tries to make sense of a multiplicity of data. To this end the researcher categorises, brings order and manipulates the data so as to obtain answers to research questions". From the beginning of conducting interviews I have been trying to find ways to analyse the data and I have realised that it is a rather creative process. Dreyer (1993:224) discusses five phases of the qualitative data analysis process: 1) organising the data, 2) generating categories, themes and patterns, 3) testing hypotheses, 4) searching for alternative explanations, 5) writing the research report (cf. Lofland 1976:131-138).

To prepare the data for analysis, it was necessary to transcribe the narratives recorded on the cassettes. This has been quite a big task, but the advantage is that as one listens to the material again and again one becomes very familiar with it and it serves as a good introduction to analysing the material (cf. Lofland 1976:58). In analysing each conversion story I was trying to answer the research question and therefore determine the conversion motives. The informal discussions and observations are also included in this whole process. The final phase consisted of communicating the research findings (see chapters five, six and seven).[170]

4.6 Ethical Considerations

In performing empirical research, ethical problems regarding the collection or analysis of data often arise. This is specially true in the context of the present study. In this regard, I

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[170] For indexing cross-sectionally see Mason (1996:112), producing analysis and explanations which are convincing see Mason 1996: chapter 7.

attempted to observe the eight general guidelines for ethically responsible research, as outlined by Dreyer (1991:246-251), (cf. Lofland 1976:43, Lofland & Lofland 1984).

The first guideline raised by Dreyer (1991:249) is that "the *dignity* of the respondents/participants should not be violated in any way". This means that the convert's convictions and lifestyle in respect of religion and culture need to be known and respected. I have become particularly sensitive when conducting research in this area.

Secondly, the voluntary participation of respondents needs to be respected. This has to be spelled out in the covering letter. It implies that the convert has the right to withdraw from the process of the interview at any time and for whatever reasons. It means basically that the respondent must be informed properly and consent must be obtained to any involvement and action taken. As already mentioned, this issue has been a painful experience in some cases, especially when a convert for instance withdrew from participating in providing information at the last minute. I took special care to explain the purpose and aim of my research to each interviewee and wished to have his or her full collaboration. It was also important to ask for permission to conduct the interview and to say how much time it would involve.

Thirdly, Dreyer (1991:249) finds it important to mention that "no *physical or psychological suffering* may be inflicted on the respondents". This issue has not been a real problem in this research project. Usually those converts who gave their consent participated quite happily and shared their conversion experience with readiness. I can only remember one case where a convert was so moved by the events shared that the person started weeping. It was then necessary to be sensitive, to stop and wait in order to ascertain whether the respondent wished to continue or not. In that particular case the person continued the interview after a short while. Otherwise, I can testify that I experienced exciting times in the presence of these converts. One person (C7), for instance, confessed afterwards that it was a wonderful and refreshing experience to share this important life experience of conversion.

Fourthly, it is of utmost importance for research done in this field to maintain the anonymity of respondents and their confidentiality throughout the whole process. For this

reason, no names of any converts nor family members or friends are mentioned in this study.

The fifth guideline relates to the fourth one, namely the use of identificatory numbers. To maintain confidentiality a code-name has been attached to each person involved and only these code-names appear in this study. The corresponding research findings, which include written material and tapes, will be kept in a safe place.

Sixthly, respondents or test persons must not be *deceived*. The purpose of the research must be honestly disclosed. I have taken care to explain openly the whole purpose of my study. Converts were also assured that if they had any questions in regard to the integrity of the process they were free to contact their respective religious leader or the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at UNISA.

The seventh point is, according to Dreyer (1991:250), that "*vulnerable* people should be handled with special sensitivity". Vulnerable people, according to Dreyer, are children, the aged etc., or in other words people who are sometimes unable to refuse to participate in a research project. This issue has not come to the forefront in the process of my research and is therefore not a problem.

Next, the researcher is responsible for keeping the research ethically above board. It means that the ethics of the data gathering process for this study needs to be constantly critically reviewed and openly discussed with people involved, such as the promoter or colleagues. There are not always easy answers in respect to ethical questions. One question for instance, was, whether or not to offer a small amount of money to converts who were willing to share their conversion experience as a token of appreciation. This may have changed the picture dramatically in that I may have gained more interviews, especially among the African people in Soweto. However, this comes very close to offering bribes and in addition it must be said that the danger is that people would come forward and tell invented stories just in order to receive some money. For this reason, I refrained from offering any money for interviews.

A final point needs to be made. During the interviewing process I was careful to refrain from starting any religious discussion which was outside the field of my research on conversion. I felt it was important to remain as neutral as possible and not to misuse the situation in making any negative comments on anything the interviewee said. I also did not start to 'preach' or 'evangelise' in any manner during the course of the interviews, nor in follow-up visits. I made it a habit to respond only in those cases where interviewees asked me questions.[171] But I made sure that the actual interview was completed in order not to influence the respondent in any way. Then, after the interview, if time allowed it, I would attempt to answer the person's questions or engage in an informal talk with the people present.

4.7 Time Framework

The time framework of this study was as follows:

1984: Arrived in South Africa as a missionary. Started to meet converts in Cape Town and write down my observations concerning their motivations.

1992: Moved to Johannesburg. Made contacts with various Christian and Muslim leaders, thus establishing relations of friendship.

1994-96: Conducted research for my MTH with Stellenbosch University, which was an empirical study of the 'Islamic Missionary Society' in Johannesburg. I also started visiting Muslims in Soweto, most of them coming from a Christian background.

Nov. 1997-April 1998: Conducted in-depth tape-recorder interviews among 20 converts (all the names having been received from religious leaders). All Muslims I approached directly (without the recommendation of a Muslim leader) refused to talk to me about their conversion or gave me very little direct information. I often had to be content to speak with them on an informal basis, trying to find out their conversion motives in indirect ways. One

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[171] The questions were different in nature, such as: "What is your religious belief?", "Why are you a Christian?", "To which Christian denomination do you belong?". Or about my family, background, the

of the Muslim leaders told me that he had already come under pressure from his community, because "they don't like me doing this research".

April 1998 until February 1999: Continued to be in touch with converts and met them at different venues: at their home, in the mosque or church, or at public places. I contacted them when there was a need for some more information or other specific questions. Unfortunately, I was not always successful in arranging follow-up visits to converts, for reasons such as their having moved to an unknown address, not interested any longer, etc. Another frequent expression by converts was that they "have already told me everything", and they cannot see the meaning of further discussion on this topic. During this period I also endeavoured to prepare and organise the data for qualitative data analysis.

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economic and political situation in South Africa, etc.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF THE CONVERSION NARRATIVES FROM ISLAM TO CHRISTIANITY

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the conversion narratives as told by each convert who made a change of religion from Islam to Christianity. The introduction presents general information to clarify the content. A table with some information about the converts is also included.

The recordings and observations of each convert have been analysed and the findings from every narrative written in a separate subsection of this chapter in the following way:

1. Each narrative is summarised and the motives of the conversion are discussed. Verbatim quotations from interviews are given, where necessary. All names and references which could possibly identify a person have been omitted.
2. A diagram is then drawn to indicate the interplay of motives which were operating. An attempt is made to indicate the initial motive, i.e. the motive which initiated the whole conversion process. Further, the motive(s) which most likely caused the convert to finally take the step of commitment is also indicated. Thus, the whole conversion is seen as a process with various motives playing a role at different stages (see chapter 3.4.2).
3. In conclusion, further interpretation and explanation of each narrative is given, including a summary of the conversion motives.

In order to secure anonymity of all the people involved I have developed a code-reference system that will be used throughout this study when referring to the people interviewed (cf. Syrjänen 1984:78):

C1 - C10:   These are Christians who have converted from a formerly Islamic background. These ten people have co-operated fully with the research project and I have received information from each of them in the form of taped interviews. These spoken interviews have been transcribed (see appendix). Most of these converts I have been able to meet on a number of occasions. With some of them I have discussed my research findings in order to make sure that my interpretations are correct.

In the empirical research and its analysis five conversion motives have been identified as repeatedly coming to the fore and therefore interchangeably playing a significant role. These five motives were developed in conjunction with chapters two and three and presented as an analytical grid in chapter 3.4 of this study.

In the following table important information is presented about each convert (C1-C10). Since the focus of this study is to identify and analyse the motives of the converts, special attention is given to this matter. In order to safeguard the anonymity no further details of the people involved are given.

Table 5.1: Information about the Converts C1-C10

Code	Gender	Ethnic Background	Age at Conversion	Present age (1998)	Motives
C1	m	Indian	20	28	Rel/ Affect/Myst
C2	m	Moroccan	23	26	Mat/ Affect/Rel
C3	f	Indian	26	42	Affect/ Rel/Affect
C4	f	Coloured	21	24	Rel/ Myst
C5	f	Indian	25	40	Affect/ Rel/Myst
C6	f	Indian	16	39	Affect/ Mat/Myst
C7	f	Coloured	44	45	Rel/ Affect
C8	m	Black	25	43	Rel/ Affect
C9	m	Black	16	17	Rel/ Affect/Myst
C10	m	Indian	21	40	Affect/ Rel/Myst

As is evident in this table, each narrative is unique and the research reveals that a combination of between two and three motives are operative in each case. It must be emphasised that there is no less or more important motive as such. All motives are equally important and are listed for each case according to the findings. The first motive on the list is the one which was identified as playing the initial role in the conversion process. The last one (or two) on the list represents the motive which appears to have influenced the convert to make the culminating decision towards a commitment of change. The abbreviations for the different conversion motives as used in the table are as follows:

1. Religious/Intellectual   = Rel
2. Mystical   = Myst
3. Affectional   = Affect
4. Socio - Political   = S-P
5. Material   = Mat

The terminology used for Muslims in South Africa of different ethnic backgrounds is as follows:

Indian = Muslim living in South Africa whose ancestors originally came from India or Pakistan (main areas Mayfair, Lenasia, Laudium)
Black = African Muslim (mainly from Soweto)
Coloured = Muslim from the coloured community (mainly Riverlea area)

I like to repeat that I do not use these terms in a racist sense (as under the apartheid dispensation), but since the racist residential patterns established by apartheid are still very much in place, these 'political' categories are relevant for this research (see also 1.2).

5.2 Conversion Narratives C1 - C10

5.2.1 Conversion Narrative C1

C1 was a former Muslim who was seeking knowledge and insight about religious issues. He relates that as a youth he used to argue with his mother "why in Islam I always had to read the Qur'an and go to *madressa* … and having to learn things which I did not understand (in Arabic)[172] … I could recite things from the Qur'an but not get anything from it". He seemed to be very frustrated as a Muslim because of this "emptiness and having no hope" and not being able to find answers for his religious quest in Islam. Out of this frustration he used to go to mosque with his friends "drunk and high on all sorts of drugs … we used to go to the mosque with no conviction". In his religious quest C1 decided one day to visit a church with a Christian friend to find out about Christianity: "One Sunday morning I got up and went to a friend and said, 'I feel like going to church'". He started to become interested in the Christian faith.

Another factor which contributed heavily to his 'availability'[173] for conversion was a crisis in C1's life, namely the death of his mother. This event seems to have urged his religious/intellectual quest of finding a solution to this desperate situation. The things he learned at the church suddenly became meaningful and C1 relates that for the first time even the 'trinity' made sense to him: "I heard this message and it really spoke to me". He relates in his own words that "a reason why I became a Christian was that I lost my mother and things were really going badly in my life and I moved away (from Islam)".

Another factor which needs to be mentioned since it contributed to the fulfilment of C1's religious quest was a vivid dream which he claims to have had on a number of occasions. C1 said that he had a dream which he experienced three times in the exact same way. In this dream he heard a voice out of a furnace saying to him: "I will be your only helper". During

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[172] Orthodox Islam teaches that all Muslims have to learn Arabic since the Qur'an has been revealed in Arabic (cf. Qur'an 16:103). Some Muslim leaders are of the opinion that the Qur'an cannot be translated into any other language and that Allah needs to be worshipped in Arabic. In South Africa, as in many other countries, Arabic is not one of the official languages. The Muslims are then only required to learn to pronounce Arabic without necessarily understand the meaning. I have myself met Muslims who could recite large portions of the Qur'an without knowing its meaning.

[173] For the explanation of this technical term see chapter 2.5 and Rambo (1993:60-63).

that time C1 went to church with his Christian friend and the preacher spoke about John 3. It was then that C1 immediately remembered his dream and knew that this voice was Jesus speaking to him. Jesus was now answering him in the words of John 3:3: "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God".

Although C1 did at this point of time not fully understand what it meant to be a Christian it became abundantly clear to him that this was the answer to his quest and that Jesus could give him the hope he was looking for. C1 was now sure that this dream was God's given sign and that he should follow Jesus. C1 relates this decision with the following words: "I gave my life to God. I said, 'Lord Jesus you can have it all'". This mystical experience motivated him in his religious quest and at the same was a confirmation that he should accept "and follow the Lord Jesus".

Another motive, which has already been alluded to above, is the 'affectional' one. C1 had a Christian friend whose life and witness to him made such an impression on him that it grew into a desire 'to become like him' and to intellectually acquire more knowledge about Christianity. He states that because of the friendship of a Christian he found it easier to go and attend a church. This friend introduced him into the Christian community and today he confesses "I have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ today … it's a free and open conversation". It was also the clear Christian witness of this friend which was a model and a motive of conversion to Christianity for C1. He also displays a strong desire to witness as he relates that "the desire in my heart is to reach out to every Muslim friend … no matter what it takes … and the greatest desire in my heart is for me to reach out to my family first".

Diagram 5.1: Conversion Motives of C1

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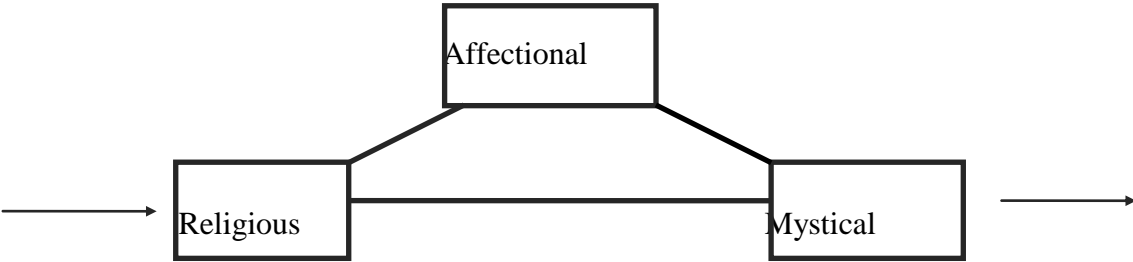
I have identified the religious motive to seek knowledge about spiritual issues as the initial motive in C1's conversion. The two other motives which played a significant role in this conversion process can be seen as playing a supportive and confirming role. The dream, as being a mystical experience, appears to have been the final and decisive motive which led and convinced C1 into making a commitment. In summary, the following combination of motives can be identified which contributed to the conversion of C1:

1. Religious: Questioning of Islamic ritual and a quest for new fulfilment.
2. Affectional: This motive in C1's life has a 'pushing' an 'pulling' aspect[174]: 1) The death of his mother which deepened his state of 'hopelessness' and intensified the urgent need to find new hope. This crisis situation seemed to have pushed C1 to conversion. 2) The interpersonal bond and witness of his Christian friend which confirmed the direction of his religious quest.
3. Mystical: The dreams in which C1 found confirmation that to follow Jesus who proclaimed the truth, was the right thing to do.

One could therefore describe C1 as a person who was actively looking for new options because of dissatisfaction with the old ways and felt a desire for innovation and the need to search for fulfilment (cf. Rambo 1993:59).

5.2.2 Conversion Narrative C2

C2 represents a person who immigrated from a North African country to South Africa in the mid 90's. He was a young Muslim from Marocco, coming to South Africa to seek a better life in 1995: "I came here with the idea of finding a better life, and to find a job … to find more money and material things". He came as a result of a promotion done in Morocco about South Africa, displaying the 'New South Africa' as a wonderful country with many new opportunities. Today however, C2 sees things differently and he is of the opinion that "it was mainly a campaign by the airline to make money by selling tickets". C2 was seeking a job to earn a living and if possible to improve his education. Having arrived in Johannesburg he was confronted with the reality: instead of great job opportunities he faced

unemployment and instead of being welcomed he encountered hostility from the indigenous people who see this flood of foreigners as a threat to steal their own jobs. This difficult situation led C2 to accept anything which could help him out of this predicament.

Now, it happened that he met some Christian missionaries who explained Christianity to him and helped him with some food and clothing. He was attracted, as he confirmed, by their love but could not really understand their message. C2 confirms that the bond to the Christian friends was an important motive which drew him towards Christianity: "God sent these two missionaries to tell me about the 'good news' of the Gospel … and I was interested … I went with them to all kinds of Christian meetings and I saw the enthusiasm of these people … they showed me what Christianity is all about". In order to please his new friends and to conform, he felt that the right thing to do was to be baptised in the church.

With the help of his new Christian friends, he applied for a study permit to study at a local Bible College. This seemed at that time also the only way for him to stay legally in South Africa. He was interested to know more about the Christian faith. Although the religious/intellectual conversion motive was not the initial one in C2's life, it becomes evident in his conversion narrative that the search for more religious knowledge was an important factor for C2. He had the desire to attend a Christian Bible College and said, "after I committed myself to the Lord (baptism) I went to Bible School … there I really learned about the word of God … and each day I was growing spiritually and in the knowledge of God".

C2 confirmed, that only after about three months of religious study did he slowly begin to grasp what the Christian message was all about. The question was whether C2 would now remain a 'Christian' or whether he would go back to Islam? However, as he studied Christianity, C2 realised that the Christian faith was "the right faith" for him and continued his studies and remained a Christian.

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[174] See explanation on this issue in chapter 3.4.

Diagram 5.2: Conversion Motives of C2
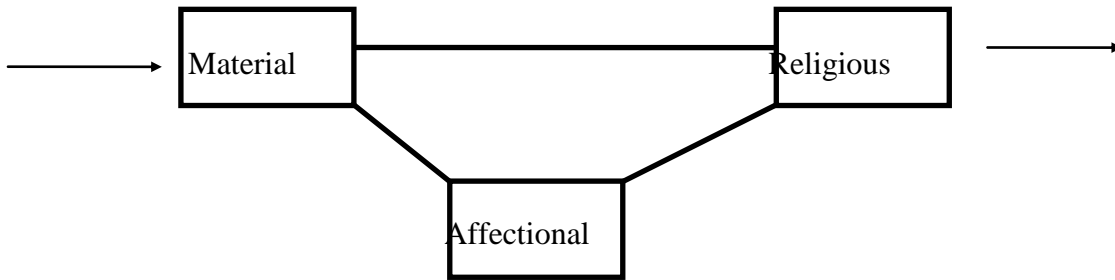
The initial motive appears to have been the material one in C2's case whereas the final factor of committing himself to Christianity was the religious motive. The affectional motive constitutes the friendship to his new Christian friends, mainly the missionaries. This friendship seems to have been a vital motivational factor throughout the conversion process. In summary the following motives can therefore be listed:

1. Material: C2 came to South Africa to find a better life and a job.
2. Affectional: He was attracted by the love of Christian missionaries and their witness.
3. Religious: C2 had a desire to study Christianity at a local Bible College.

C2's friend, who went through exactly the same process up to this point, reverted to Islam after being at the Bible College for three months. By then he had the required visa to stay on in South Africa (with the help of Christian friends) and had more freedom of choice.

The church baptised C2 and his friend, together with some others, without realising that they had 'accepted' the Christian faith simply to obtain material help. This behaviour would confirm Epstein's (1985:284) theory. In this case it was the 'need to maintain stability of coherence' which prompted C2 and his friends to go through this process of the Christian ritual of baptism, although they did not at the time understand the Christian message.

5.2.3 Conversion Narrative C3

C3 relates that as she grew up: "I was a 'staunch' Muslim, I used to go to *madressa* as we all do. My father was very strict in following the Islamic religion". Later she married a Hindu, "he was a Tami … I said to him that I don't want to convert to Hinduism because of all the gods they have … he agreed and we didn't have a problem … he would go to the temple and I would just pray as a Muslim at home". She was greatly influenced and guided in religious matters by her father and his religious beliefs and it was therefore a great loss and tragedy when her father died. This event pushed her into a crisis and it shook her faith in Islam and she started questioning. Since her father was something like her 'spiritual guide', she relied heavily on him in regard of Islamic way of life and decisions. After he died, she became unsure about her religious life. This also caused her to become open and available to other religious options.

She realised that by marrying a Hindu she had compromised her Muslim faith in many religious issues: "I knew that I was not being a true Muslim because my life was not completely Islamic". To accept the faith of her husband was out of the question as she said that "I don't believe in all the gods they have, since Islam had taught me that God is one and he can't be in any image".

It then happened that C3 was visited by some Christians who brought her a Bible and some Christian literature. It seems that she was eager to know more about Christianity, because she said that "I think I was open and I would ask questions and that's where my interest began''. These Christians started visiting her on a regular basis and a friendship developed: "I didn't know anything about the Bible or Christianity except what I learnt at school or what I had heard people say … they explained many things to me … I began to get very interested". The friendship which this Indian woman developed with these Christian friends played an important role in her conversion process to Christianity.

Then another crisis occurred in C3's life; her husband was murdered. She suffered great sorrow and grief over the death of her husband. In that situation she experienced something significant: "The only people who came and helped me were my Christian friends … none of my Muslim family did what the Christians did … they would pray for me and give me encouragement … They were always around me … whenever I felt lonely or depressed they

would come and help me". After her husband's funeral she found herself in a situation of tension. People from both religions – the Muslims from her father's side and the Hindus from her late husband's side – came and put pressure on her to accept the respective religion since they believed it to be the correct one. Both groups of people were also concerned that her children should be raised accordingly.

C3 was greatly confused and she was under pressure to make a decision in order to free herself from this crisis: "At the time the only religion I understood was Christianity and I said to my children: Now we are all going to church and we will leave all these other religions behind us … in Islam and Hinduism there is so much ritual which you don't really understand … I could feel that my children wanted this as well". Her decision to convert to Christianity was eventually decided by the interpersonal bond to her Christian friends "and then it came back to me how the Christians had helped me and the Muslims had left me". The witness of the Christians had obviously left a deep and lasting impression on her so much so that she felt 'pulled' to decide for Christianity as opposed to Islam and Hinduism.

Diagram 5.3: Conversion Motives of C3

Affect. (pushing)   Affect. (pulling)

Religious
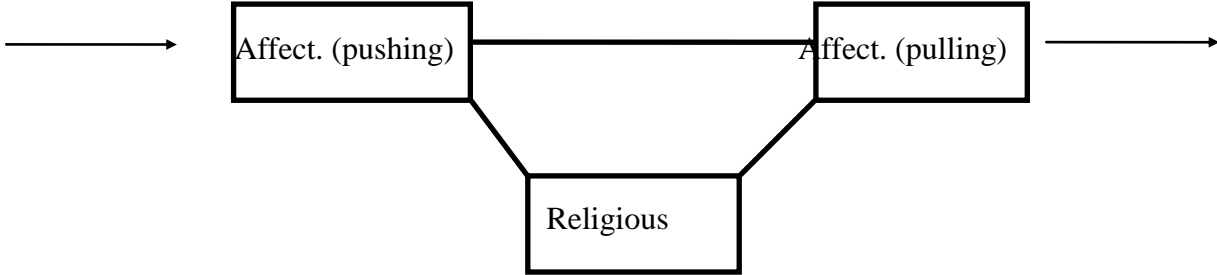
In this conversion story the crisis (death of her father) may be described as the initial affectional motive which pushed C3 into the conversion process. In addition, this led her into finding answers to spiritual issues. It is not always easy to determine the motive which eventually convicts a person to make the final step of commitment. However, it seems that the friendship which she had developed with the Christians was the 'exit' motive. I would argue that the saying of C3: "It came back to me how the Christians had helped me and the Muslims had left me before", supports this. In summary, the following motives may be described as operative in C3's conversion process:

1. Affectional (pushing): The death of her father and later her husband were important motivational factors in the conversion process. It appears that the death of her father initiated the conversion process and subsequently her quest to seek answers to spiritual issues.

2. Religious: C3 was caught between the two religions of Islam and Hinduism. Both of these religions did not seem right for her. After studying Christianity she was convinced to some extent that this was the right religion for her to choose.

3. Affectional (pulling): The visits, love and care of Christians finally motivated her to choose Christianity.

C3 described herself in the beginning of the narrative as a 'staunch' Muslim. However, a 'staunch' Muslim woman who marries a Hindu man is a rare occurrence in a South African Indian community. The evidence points rather to a 'liberal' Muslim family, since a strict Muslim family would only allow such a marriage if the prospective husband converted to Islam.[175] There was therefore a reasonably high structural 'availability' for conversion in her life even before she came into contact with the Christian friends. The fact that she describes her former life as 'staunch' may have something to do with biographical reconstruction (see sections 2.7, 3.2.3.4 and 4.1).

5.2.4 Conversion Narrative C4

This young Muslim woman grew up within a secure Islamic environment and she was convinced that she would never change her religion since "I was a Muslim for 21 years … I followed all the pillars of Islam … and I went faithfully to *madressa*". However, one day her religious quest for spiritual answers in her life started when she had a religious discussion with some friends: "I had all the answers … but in my heart I really did not know". C4's religious/intellectual quest took a new turn during the month of *ramadan* when she compared the Qur'an with the Bible.

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[175] The Qur'an says: "Do not marry idolatresses until they believe …" (Qur'an 2:221), further verses in support of not marrying an unbeliever unless he/she becomes a Muslim are: Qur'an 4:25, 4:3, 24:3, (cf. Dagher 1995:26-27).

As a result of this endeavour, C4 was confused about whether the Islamic or the Christian God was the true one and how she could enter heaven: "As a Muslim it was not an easy thing to deal with because there is no assurance that when you die you will go to heaven…many Muslims believe that you can get favour with God by doing good works and there is the punishment of the grave … and I would pray that God would open my eyes and show me the truth … I felt that I needed guidance and to know if I was on the right path". From this issue it seems to be clear that for C4 the initial motive of the whole conversion process was the religious quest to seek certain knowledge about spiritual issues.

C4 then had a supernatural experience which gave additional motivation to her religious/intellectual quest and the desire to change her religion. In this experience, which she termed as a 'vision', she was encouraged to read a certain Bible verse and to attend a certain church in Johannesburg: "One day I got a verse from God … it was like God told me to find John 3:16 … I had never read that verse before and so I believed that God wanted me to read it … then I felt like going to a certain church (name is mentioned) just to experience what it would be like … and so I went". Through the reading of such a specific Biblical reference and the visit of that particular church C4 was strongly motivated to accept the Christian faith.

C4 was now convinced that God was speaking to her personally and directing her life and this made it clear to her which decision she should take. This supernatural experience was therefore a confirmation of her quest of seeking knowledge about spiritual matters. She was touched by the message and followed eventually the call of the minister to come forward.[176] She relates this event as follows:

> … then the pastor said that any one who wants to receive the Lord Jesus into their lives must raise their hands. I felt I wanted to raise my hand but I couldn't get myself do it … in fact after the 'alter call', after praise and worship, not even a message was preached, I wanted to raise my hand and I couldn't do it … it was like a spiritual battle inside me, it was questioning and doubting like a fight within myself. I just stood there with this fight in myself. Then a lady came up to me and said I can see that you want to go forward, yet I had not given any indication that I wanted to go forward, yet she knew I wanted to go forward. She took me by the arm, she asked me if I was afraid and I said yes I am. She said don't be afraid. And she led me forward by my arm … for me that was truly amazing because she

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[176] It is a custom in some churches that the minister makes an 'altar call' at the end of his sermon. Those people who want to commit their lives to God and follow Jesus are encouraged to come forward and make a public stand. Sometimes people also come forward for healing and prayer.

had no indications that I wanted to go forward … only God knew what was going on inside me. But by the Spirit of God she was able to know and was sensitive enough to come up to me and encourage me to go forward. I feel that this was from God and he has taken me by my hand and told me this is the way to go. That night I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into my life. It was a new experience for me – somewhat strange and exciting.

These 'altar calls' are a disputed and contentious issue among churches. However, in the case of C4 it seemed to answer her need for peace and it ended her religious quest in her life by converting to Christianity.

Diagram 5.4: Conversion Motives of C4

Summarised, the two motivations which can be described as operative in C4's conversion process are:

1. The religious motive to find answers to spiritual issues may be identified as being the initial motive in the conversion process.
2. Mystical: a 'vision' in which C4 was guided to read a verse from the Bible and attend a certain church and respond to the 'altar call' by committing her life to follow Christ.

5.2.5 Conversion Narrative C5

C5 is also an Indian woman. She grew up in a Muslim family in one of the suburbs of Johannesburg. Being the youngest child in the family she was assigned certain religious duties: "Thursday night is a holy night … we must read the Qur'an and burn incense. If we can, we must have milk and fruit on the table … I used to perform these duties on behalf of the family … we used to recite certain prayers from the Qur'an … I felt it an honour to prepare for this night. It was something nice because after I bath I must burn incense … I would put on a scarf and be quiet and perform this prayer".[177] These words give some

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[177] It depends on how strictly each Muslim family conducts the Islamic way of life. Thursday evening is usually celebrated as a special occasion in preparation for Friday, where Muslims go to mosque over lunch

indication about the importance of C5's Islamic rituals in her youth and her religious background.

At the age of 19 she got married to a Christian man "and my father said I must tell my husband to become a Muslim … he was born an Anglican". The agreement between the married couple was however that "I can carry on being a Muslim and he will be a Christian…we must not interfere with, but respect each other's religion". After a while, C5 was attracted to accompany her husband to attend some kind of "Christian meditation type of service". C5 started to observe her husband's religion more and more and attended different church meetings. As a result she started studying the Christian religion.

Then something happened during the month of *ramadan* while C5 was trying to observe the Islamic ritual of fasting but "deep inside of me I was seeking and I had very deep loneliness inside me". She made a kind of 'contract' with God on the 27[178] night of fasting that "if he does not reveal himself to me then I will not serve him any more and I will go out into the world and live as they live".

About a week after this incident, C5 decided to go to church with her husband again. It seems that the interpersonal bond with her husband made Christianity attractive to her. While she was listening to the service she noticed that "the pastor kept on saying that there is somebody here who is seeking God". It was then that C5 experienced a supernatural event which changed her life and additionally motivated her to become a Christian. She was convinced that God was answering her 'contract' which she made a week ago. She knew that God was speaking to her and she relates this event as follows:

> At that moment I couldn't see anything else. I just heard this man, like he was speaking to me. I burst out crying like I have never cried before in a public place. It was not a cry of hurt … I can't explain to you. It was the most beautiful cry I had. I felt so relieved…it's just I had a confidence. It was the spirit of God around me … then I responded to the altar

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time (comparable to the Sunday service within the Christian week). Thursday is also a special day for the Sufi movement and its practices.

[178] This night, *Laylatul-Quadr* (the 'Night of Power'), is believed in Islamic tradition to be the most important and holiest night in the Islamic year where the doors of heaven are opened and whatever a person asks is supposed to be granted by Allah (Qur'an 97:1-5, cf. Gilchrist 1986:307).

call. That day I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. The whole service I could not stop crying but I had an inner peace … within myself I was changed.

This supernatural experience happened on three successive Sundays in church. At the end of these mystical events, as a kind of culmination C5 relates in her story: "I started speaking in tongues". She also felt an even more urgent desire to "study the Bible and find out what Christianity is all about". It seems clear that this sudden and traumatic experience and burst of insight made a deep impression on C5 and that it was a very significant and final decisive motive to accept the new religion.

The crisis in C5's life was the increasing problems in her marriage which had been developing over the years and which eventually ended in divorce. At one stage the crisis reached such proportions that she left her husband and stayed with her own Muslim family. As a result of this problem she was additionally motivated to make a clear decision as to which religion to chose for the rest of her life.

Diagram 5.5: Conversion Motives of C5
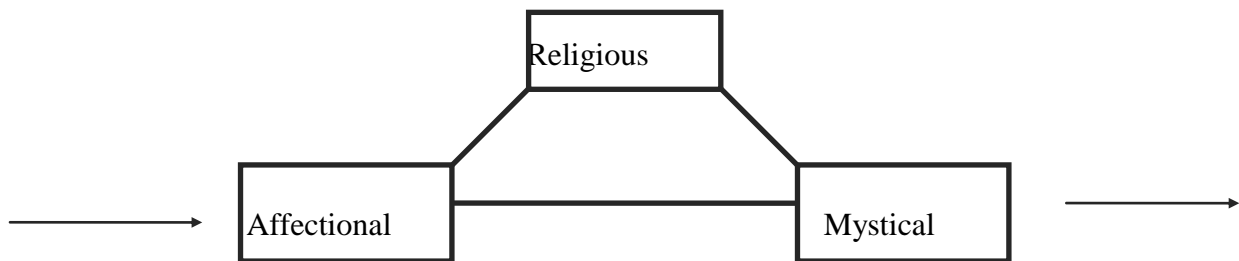
It appears now that the following three motivational factors can be described as being operative in the conversion process of C5:

1. Affectional: C5 was motivated and 'pulled' towards Christianity by her marriage to a Christian. This was an important factor by way of getting interested in this new religion. Although she was divorced later she remained in her newly found faith. Certain marriage problems motivated her to make definite steps towards Christianity in order to have firm spiritual ground. In this crisis, cognitive dissonance happened when the marriage dissolved and C5 realised that their relationship was dysfunctional. In the

beginning of her marriage she was confident that it would work but now she lost her faith in the marriage (which Festinger (1957) calls disconfirmation). C5 felt pushed to make a decision for a stable life. She chose to be divorced and to become a Christian.

2. Religious: As she accompanied her husband to church she got interested in Christianity and therefore was motivated to start studying this religion.

3. Mystical: The supernatural experience in church motivated her to finally decide to commit herself to Christianity.

5.2.6 Conversion Narrative C6

This Indian woman grew up in a mixed religious background: her father was Muslim and her mother Hindu. Though the father left the family when C6 was born, the mother insisted that C6 be brought up in an Islamic fashion "so that I could grow up in my father's religion". C6 however appears to have been very stubborn and very reluctantly went to the *madressa*, "so my mother got me a tutor to come and teach me at home … to learn the ABC of the Arabic language".

C6's family was very poor and the pastor of a local church started to come and visit this family on a regular basis. The material motive definitely played a part in the decision of C6 to move towards the Christian faith as it is evident in listening to her narrative that "at that time when the pastor used to come to our home we were very poor, we didn't have food. My mother and I were suffering from malnutrition … the pastor and his wife used to come every week and see to our physical needs…they never forced us to become Christians". The example of help by the pastor and his wife made a deep impression on C6 and an interpersonal bond developed between the two. This may be described as the initial motive which drew C6 towards Christianity.

Because of the friendship which developed between the pastor and C6, she decided to attend the youth club of the church. "So I started going to youth club every Friday and I enjoyed it. It was a new perspective in my life". It does not appear that C6 gained much intellectual knowledge about Christianity. At some stage C6 also started to visit the church services. At the first gathering she relates that she had a supernatural experience: "I was

listening to the sermon and I don't know what happened but there and then I knew that I wanted to become a Christian … I just felt this warmness". C6 calls this important experience in her life as an "impression during the sermon". This event appears to have removed all barriers and finally motivated C6 to embrace the Christian faith.

Diagram 5.6: Conversion Motives of C6

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 ────────▶  ┌──────────────┐          ┌──────────────┐  ────────▶
            │ Affectional  │──────────│  Mystical    │
            └──────┬───────┘          └──────┬───────┘
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                     \   ┌──────────────┐   /
                      \──│  Material    │──/
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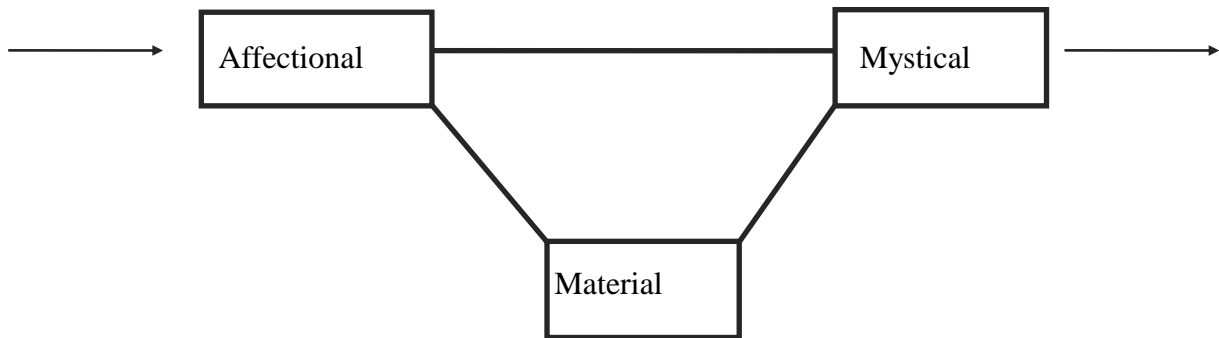
In the conversion process of C6 the following motives were in operation:

1. The initial motive is the affection for the pastor and his wife. The compassionate witness of this Christian couple made such a deep impression on C6 so that she started to become interested in her new friends' faith.

2. The other important motive in operation is the material one. The pastor and his wife attended to the physical needs of C6 and her family. This contributed to the fact that C6 was 'moving' gradually further towards the Christian faith.

3. The next motive which actually made C6 commit herself finally to the Christian faith was the mystical experience at church. In a distinct way she felt the presence of God and she now knew clearly that it was the right step for her to commit herself to 'follow Jesus'.

5.2.7 Conversion Narrative C7

It appears that in the life of C7 a crisis situation initially pushed her into the conversion process. This woman from a coloured background and raised in a Christian home (Methodist) married a Muslim at the age of 29. "We got married the Muslim way and what the *imam* said was not so clear to me". Though they were aware that they belonged to two different religions they thought that this would not cause any problem in their married life. However, the opposite was true and the relationship with her husband soon became a big crisis in C7's life: "Things started going wrong … he complained about my cooking (not *halaal)* and the way I bath and everything … everyday I had a hard time … he would never allow me to go to church … it became difficult … I was not free".

For her husband's sake C7 tried to become a Muslim. In her testimony, however, C7 indicated that the *imam* and her husband did not explain the Islamic way of life well to her. "I didn't understand what they were saying". C7 stopped going to church and being a Christian and tried to be a good Muslim. But despite this effort the crisis in their marriage increased. The husband complained about the way C7 lived since it did not seem to meet his standard of the Islamic way of living. After 14 years of marriage, C7 could no longer bear the burden of this crisis and a divorce was unavoidable.

This marriage crisis culminating in divorce was a reason for C7 to reconsider the Christian faith. However, C7 felt ashamed to go back to Christianity since she had turned her back on the church 14 years ago. She was unsure whether the church would welcome her back and in her mind she thought that the "priest of the church would reject me … what should I do?". Should she therefore remain a Muslim? It was only through the affectional bond to her cousin who encouraged her to go back to the church and to choose Christianity as her faith that she had the courage to re-commit herself to Christianity: "One Sunday I got up and went to church, that was the most wonderful day of my life … the preacher spoke about the lost sheep … it was as if he was speaking about me … when I came out I was like a changed person". On that day, C7 committed herself to Christianity and took up membership in her church again. The crisis in her life seems to be over and she relates: "Now I'm very happy".

Diagram 5.7: Converison Motives of C7
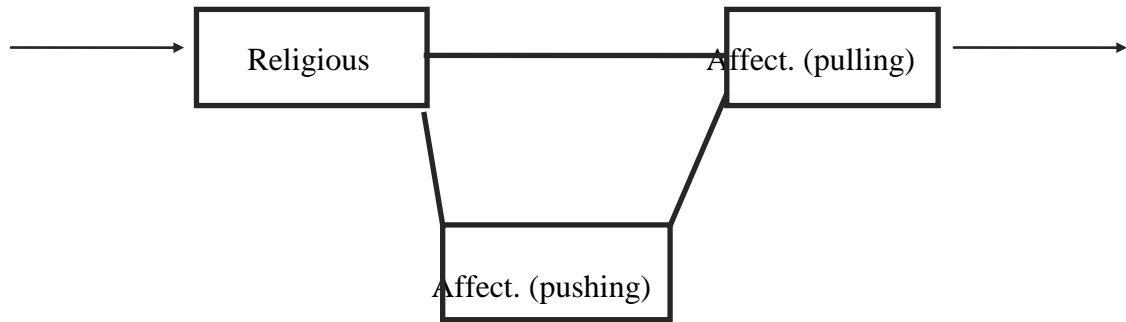
The motives of conversion in operation in the life of C7 can now be summarised as follow:

1. Religious: The initial crisis which C7 experienced was the problem of not 'understanding' the Islamic way of life. This seemed to have pushed her into the process of reconsidering the Christian faith.

2. Affectional: The problems in her marriage (point 1) were the cause of cognitive dissonance. Although C7 tried hard to live a life as Muslim women should, she could not succeed in pleasing her husband and his level of religious standards. As she saw her marriage dissolving she was pushed into making a decision concerning which religion to choose. From the evidence at hand we can see that this crisis was a catalyst for C7 to push her back towards the Christian faith.

3. Affectional: The final motive was the interpersonal bond with her cousin who encouraged her to go back to the Christian faith and attend the church again. By this C7 felt pulled towards Christianity. She emphasised that it was only through this encouragement and witness by her cousin that she made the step and re-committed herself to become a Christian.

5.2.8 Conversion Narrative C8

C8 was attracted to Islam and converted to this religion at the age of 20.[179] Soon thereafter he married a Muslim lady. As he tried to follow and understand Islam, he was heading towards a crisis:

> For all these years that I followed Islam most of the preaching and the prayers were in Arabic and I could not understand the things I was reciting. I did not know the meaning of it … I couldn't share emotions … the Islamic family I married into was not serious about Islam, they were just Muslims because they were born into Islam … they never explained anything to me … it became very frustrating to me.

This frustration of being unable to understand his own religious utterings and teachings, and receiving no help, contributed to increased tension between C8 and his wife's family. Apart from other problems, a marriage crisis developed as his wife was on the side of her family. Unfortunately, these circumstances ended with a divorce after 17 years of marriage.

After the divorce, at the age of 42, C8 continued to be a Muslim for a while but soon he could not endure this tension and crisis any longer. One day, he remembered his original roots: "One morning I started thinking about all these things. In church they speak English and Afrikaans which I can understand and I can feel and share emotions in those languages … then I made a decision to go to church". His son had already been attending this church for some time.

When C8 walked into the church on the following Sunday he was warmly welcomed by some church members. This affectional bond between his son and the church members seemed to be another important motivation for C8 to leave Islam and become a Christian. He relates as follows: "I went to church and the people welcomed me warmly … I came to make peace with my Maker … and I found peace … it changed my life completely". Now C8 was released from his crisis and he found fulfilment in that he could understand his religious belief since it was in his own language.

Diagram 5.8: Conversion Motives of C8

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[179] C8 originally came from a Christian background (Anglican Church).

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            ──────────►   Religious    ──────────────   Affect. (pulling)   ──────────────►

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                                    │ Affect. (pushing)│
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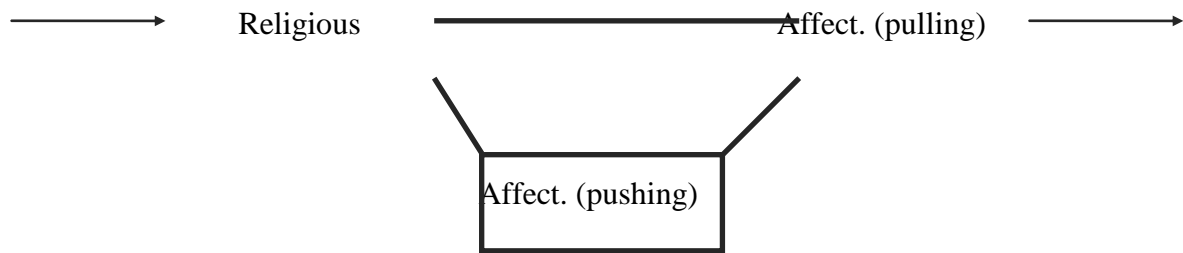
In C8's conversion process the following motivations can be identified:

1. Religious: The conversion process was initiated by the crisis of 'not being able to understand' the Islamic religion. This crisis was the reason why C8 was 'pushed' to move towards Christianity. In his desperation of not being able to understand 'Arabic', C8 came to the conclusion that Christianity was the faith he could relate to and understand better. The religious motive consists therefore of a 'pushing' and 'pulling' aspect.

2. Affectional (pushing): Cognitive dissonance happened in C8's life when his marriage dissolved and he realised that his relationship with his wife was dysfunctional.

3. Affectional (pulling): The final and 'exit' motive of the conversion process is the interpersonal bond with his son and the church members. His son was a witness to him which he eventually wanted to follow and it appears that this affection caused him to make the commitment to become a Christian.

5.2.9 Conversion Narrative C9

C9 is the son of C8. He grew up as a Muslim: "I was born Muslim … I was forced to follow the Muslim religion … at the Muslim school in the afternoons I learnt to read the Qur'an but did not understand it". This situation drew C9 into a major life crisis which motivated him to "compare the two religions (Islam and Christianity)". This religious motivation drew him towards Christianity since he came to the conclusion that this was the right way for him to follow. He said that "when I was young I didn't have a choice of which religion I should follow … I think that anyone can turn to the Christian religion if they find out more about it". In other words, C9 is convinced that anybody comparing the two religions seriously would decide to choose the Christian faith.

A further significant motive to accept Christianity was a mystical experience in the life of C9. He distinctively had a dream which motivated him to attend the church and subsequently become a Christian. In the dream he saw a bright light and a voice was calling him by saying: "Turn to me and I will lead you through". He is convinced that this was Jesus' voice calling him to follow him.

In addition, C9 was encouraged earlier for quite some time by a Christian friend from school to join the church. "The first time I went to church with my friend I was 16 years old … and I felt a warmth among the people". This interpersonal bond can be described as an additional motivational factor for C9 to become a Christian. There were therefore a combination of three motives in the life of C9 to convert to Christianity.

Diagram 5.9: Conversion Motives of C9
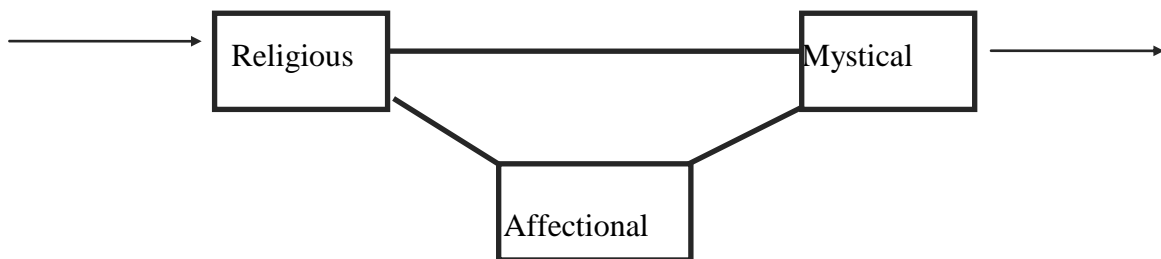
In C9's conversion process the following motivations have been identified:

1. The conversion process was initiated by the crisis of 'not being able to understand' the Qur'an and the teaching of Islam. It pushed C9 to compare the two religions. C9 was seeking religious knowledge in order to make a decision.
2. Another motive which was in operation for some time was the affection to his Christian friend at school. Through this friendship C9 was drawn or 'pulled' towards Christianity.
3. The motive which caused C9 to finally commit himself to become a Christian was a mystical experience in a dream.

5.2.10 Conversion Narrative C10

C10 grew up in a "very strong Muslim home" in the Indian community in one of the suburbs of Johannesburg. As is the custom, from the age of six years he attended *madressa* and graduated from this school as a '*Hafiz* of the Qu'ran' at the age of 19. For this achievement he was honoured by the Muslim community to read the Islamic prayers during the month of *ramadan* in the mosque. C10 describes himself as "the type of Muslim who would not entertain any other religion or belief other than Islam … to me Islam was a way of life … it was everything I needed … I would not convert or become anything else other than Islam … I never indulged in any other religion during those 19 years. I was completely devoted to Islam and I loved this religion". C10 was the youngest child and it is believed that the gifts of the father would pass on to the youngest son. His father held a leading position in the Islamic community and he used to pray for people and drive out demons.

However, his life took a drastic turn when at the age of 20, C10 "met a beautiful young girl". He relates then what happened as follows:

> … among the Indians you get three different types of people; you find the Muslims, the Hindus and the Tamil speaking people who are dark in the colour of their skin. The Muslims are much fairer. When my family found out that I was going out with a Tamil girl they were very disturbed, because to them it was a disgrace to the family. Christianity had nothing to do with it in the beginning … Tamils are regarded as 3rd grade Indian citizens. They are regarded as the dirt and lower class people. My family therefore beat me up and warned me not to see her again.

However, the affectional bond of love, which can confidently be described as being the initial motive of conversion, was stronger and C10 continued meeting the young woman in secret. After some months he asked her to marry him. As a response he heard something very shocking: "She said, 'I am a Christian and God's word says that I must not unequally be yoked'. She said that, 'unless you become a Christian I can never marry you'". C10 replied that according to the custom "a woman has to come a man's way and accept his religion".[180]

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[180] See explanations on this issue in section 7.2.3.

This was the end of the relationship between these two young people for a few weeks. The bond of love was however stronger so that soon C10 contacted the young woman again and said that he was willing to compromise and go to church with her if she was willing to learn about Islam. He was of course hoping to convince and eventually convert her to Islam. As C10 went to church he relates that "I sat at the back and was very critical … after church I began to mock and joke about the church service … how foolish can you be to believe all the rubbish that this man is preaching?". The young woman was not shaken but was convinced that God would convict C10 in due time. Although C10 was negative towards Christianity, his increased knowledge was a contributing motivational factor which came into effect later when he converted.

In the meantime his family discovered that he had gone to church with this Tamil woman. They became very upset, beat him up again and warned him to discontinue the relationship. C10 however, because of the strong love affection, continued to see her secretly. Another thing made C10 move away from Islam: "One Sunday as I was sitting in church and heard about Jn 3:16 … I began to question the love of God in Islam … I began to ask myself that if my family were really and truly serving a God of love … how can they condemn God's creation where my girlfriend is part of it? How can they call her bad names … why do they not encourage her to embrace Islam? I came to the conclusion that the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur'an are different … for the first time I met a God of love". C10 was emotionally broken and it was soon thereafter he indicated that he wanted to become a Christian. He also soon married this Tamil woman against the will of his family.

Then it also happened that he met a missionary who spent many hours explaining the Christian faith to him. C10 admired this person and a friendship developed. He was further drawn towards Christianity by the love and encouragement he received from other Christian friends. "We used to talk for hours and they would show me things in the Qur'an and in the Bible … it was like scales falling off my eyes and for the first time in my life I began to see a lot of things … I thank God for good Christian people whom I met at that time … they showed me a lot of encouragement and love which I was lacking".

C10 also experienced a supernatural happening. He relates the following dream: "While I was laying on my bed I had a vision that I was going to a church (name mentioned) … I saw

myself walking into the church and the pastor (name mentioned) introduced a guest speaker … as he finished his sermon he said that there is a man here tonight who has turned his back on God and he wants to restore this man". This vision appeared to C10 at a time when had reverted to Islam although he had temporarily embraced Christianity beforehand. He had also left his wife and children because of certain problems.

The following Sunday he had a strange longing to be with his children. He met his family after their church service and went with them to a public garden in Johannesburg. As they were planning to drive home he had this strange urge to visit a certain local church. It was the same church he saw in his vision and the exact things happened as foretold in the vision. He was so moved that he finally committed his life to follow Jesus. It is therefore clear that this supernatural experience finally motivated and convinced C10 to embrace Christianity.

As a result of all this he eventually converted to Christianity. His own Muslim family held a burial service because they believe that if a Muslim rejects Islam he/she is dead and that that person no longer exists.[181] As a result, C10 was totally rejected and disowned by his own family. By converting to Christianity he paid the heavy price of losing all his family and former friends. In the coming years he encountered many difficulties and often faced heavy persecution from the Muslim community. However, C10 also reports that things have changed during the cause of many years: "A lot of Muslims have come to our church to threaten and assault us, but today I am highly respected in my community … sometimes Muslim people come to ask me to pray for their family and business".

Diagram 5.10: Conversion Motives of C10

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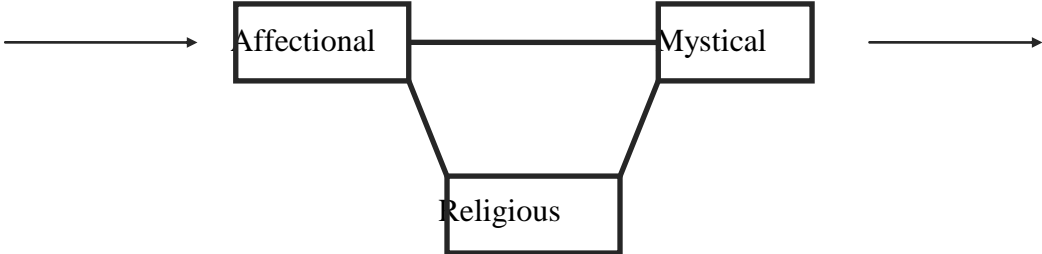
[181] See also 'Law of Apostasy' in Islam (section 7.3.2).

In summary the following three conversion motives are in operation in C10's life:

1. Affectional: The motive which initiated the whole conversion process was the bond of love between C10 and the "young beautiful Tamil girl". This motive was very strong and binding during the whole time.

2. Religious: The other motive which was pulling C10 towards Christianity was the intellectual quest first to compare the two religions and later to simply increase his knowledge about spiritual issues.

3. Mystical: The motive which made C10 finally commit himself to Christianity is definitely the dream he had and which was fulfilled the next day. This mystical experience was an important and decisive event in C10's life.

In chapter five I have analysed the conversion narratives and attempted to show how the motives of converts from Islam to Christianity are interrelated. In the next chapter, I do the same with people who have converted from Christianity to Islam. Then in chapter seven, I do further analysis but this time consider all the narratives of the 20 converts from chapters five and six. Firstly, I look at the five conversion motives and secondly, I analyse some emerging aspects.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS OF THE CONVERSION NARRATIVES FROM CHRISTIANITY TO ISLAM

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the conversion narratives as told by each convert. In the introduction some general information is given in order to clarify the content. The procedure is the same as outlined in chapter 5.1. Therefore, the correspondings code-reference system for the 10 converts who are now Muslims is: M1 - M10. In the following table important information is presented about each convert (M1-M10). Since the focus of this study is to identify and analyse the motives of the converts, special attention is given to this matter. In order to safeguard their anonymity, no further details of the people involved are given.

Table 6.1: Information about the Converts M1-M10

Code	Gender	Ethnic Background	Church	Age at Con-version	Present age (1998)	Motives
M1	m	Black	RC	26	29	S-P/Rel/Mat/Affect
M2	m	Black	Met	20	30	Affect/Mat/S-P/Rel
M3	m	Black	L/RC/Met	18	20	Rel/Affect
M4	m	White	RC	24	39	Rel/Affect
M5	m	Coloured	RC	35	49	S-P/Rel/Affect
M6	m	Coloured	DRC/Ang	20	58	Affect/Rel/Affect
M7	m	Coloured	Apos.	11	37	Affect/Rel/Affect
M8	m	Coloured	RC/Ang	38	42	Mat/Affect
M9	m	Black	AoG	19	27	S-P/Rel
M10	f	Black	RC	21	26	S-P/Rel/Affect

The converts in this research come from a wide variety of Christian denominations. The abbreviations are as follow: RC = Roman Catholic, Met = Methodist, Ang = Anglican, Apos. = Apostolic, AoG = Assemblies of God, L = Lutheran Church, DRC = Dutch Reformed Church.

6.2 Conversion Narratives M1-M10

6.2.1 Conversion Narrative M1

M1 grew up in Soweto with a Roman Catholic Church background: "I never thought about changing my religion … I was a true Christian, I went to church and all those things". However, as he looks back at his Christian upbringing he relates that "I never wanted to be a Christian … they made me a Christian … even if you go to the department of home affairs and you tell them your African name they ask you what is your Christian name … even on the forms it says that … so in a way you had to be a Christian … if you don't provide a Christian name it's a problem."

M1 was active during the 1980's in the African National Congress (ANC). It was then the main political force promoting liberation in South Africa. He said, that "there were many things which made me become a Muslim … one is that the previous government of South Africa was Christian … I had a problem with their political views". Since he identified the government with Christianity, he was no longer happy to be a Christian and was therefore looking for an alternative. It appears therefore, that the socio-political motive was the initial cause for M1 to start the conversion process by moving away from Christianity. He also seemed to develop a dislike of Christians: "Christians that I have met say that they are born again and the next day you find them stealing cars in town ... I stay in the township and over the weekend they are involved in all sorts of bad things … they even use Christianity to do filthy things to con people out of their money … but some of them are true Christians".

At an early stage in the conversion process he met a friend who "was already a Muslim, he was a part-time worker in an Indian shop … I asked him some questions and he answered them very positively. He gave me some Muslim material to read … he taught me many

things about Islam … at the library he showed me where the Islamic material is found". M1 went on a regular basis to the library with his friend. The witness and care of this friend seemed to have made a big impression on M1 and the friend appears to have become his role model. This interpersonal bond made it possible for M1 to start studying Islam.

By studying Islamic literature M1 found answers to his religious quest: "There is not much that I questioned in Islam or did not understand … whereas in Christianity there are many things that I questioned, not only Christianity but also Christians … there were many problems which I did not understand … if you read the Qur'an I don't have to question it … it is very straight forward I understand it more than the Bible". The religious motive was therefore yet another factor which made M1 move closer to Islam. The next step in his spiritual journey was to start studying Arabic: "I can understand the Qur'an in English and it is clear to me … but if I can read the Qur'an in it's original Arabic I will be the happiest man on earth".

A further motive which played a role in the conversion process of M1 appears to have been the material one. He indicated that he did not receive much help from the Christians but with the Muslims it was different: "If you go to Christians and ask for money to buy bread they will say no, you must go and work, that is not a good response….but Muslims help each other … in the mosque if you don't have money for bread you can ask your Muslim brother and they will give to you … it fits me as a township guy … even if I go to a Muslim Indian shop they will give".

The motive which also played an important role in the conversion process of M1 to become a Muslim appears to be the affectional bond to his friend: "This friend of mine used to go to a mosque in (name mentioned) … during this time of the year it was *ramadan* … he used to see me playing soccer when he was on his way to the mosque, he also played soccer then went to the mosque and stayed there the whole night, then I became really interested … I used to pass the mosque and I always wanted to go in, then one day I went there and I was welcomed and I converted to Islam and I enjoyed it there". The Islamic way of life seemed to have impressed and appealed to M1. Compared with Christianity he relates that "in the Muslim world they are so loyal in that they pray five times a day … Christians only go to church on a Sunday".

Diagram 6.1: Conversion Motives of M1

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                    ┌──────────┐
                    │ Religious │
                    └──────────┘
                       /    │
   ──────────►  ┌────────────┐  ┌───────────┐
                │Socio-Political│──│ Affectional │
                └────────────┘  └───────────┘    ──────────►
                       \           │
                    ┌──────────┐   │
                    │ Material  │───┘
                    └──────────┘
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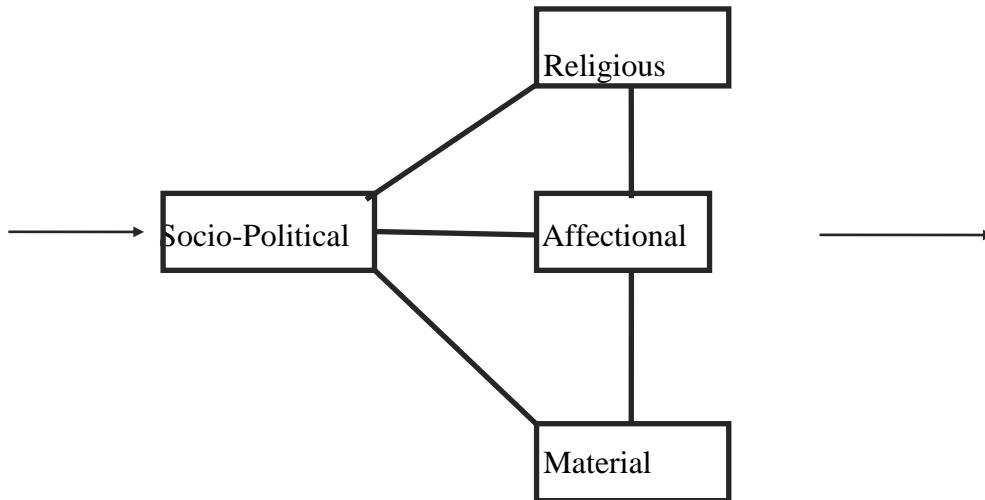
The four motives which were interacting are summarised as follow:

1. The socio-political situation pushed M1 initially into the conversion process. Because of the actions of the apartheid government he could no longer identify himself with Christianity and was 'pushed' to look for an alternative.

2. The quest to seek knowledge in religious matters was another motive. His friend introduced him to Islamic literature and the knowledge he gained there attracted him to Islam. As he compared the two religions it became clear to him that Islam was the better option.

3. The material motive appears also to have been a vital factor in the conversion process. The help he was looking for seemed to be satisfied only by the Muslims whereas the Christians were rather hesitant to supply material help.

4. The affectional motive was in operation from an early stage in the conversion process. It was also the interpersonal bond to his friend which made him 'dare' to enter a mosque. This motive contributed therefore also to the fact that M1 committed himself to the Islamic faith.

6.2.2 Conversion Narrative M2

When the grandparents of M2 passed away he was heading for a crisis. So far his grandparents cared for him and his life was secure. Now, at the age of 16, the life of M2 was no longer secure and he was suddenly on his own and had to care for himself. He also started doubting the teachings of the Methodist Church. This crisis signals the start of his conversion process. In respect of his church background M2 says that "I was just a normal South African Christian. I was thinking that my own church was the right one … I was in the youth movement of the Methodist Church as well as in the choir". He then met some friends who were very critical of Christianity and he relates that "they taught me a lot to counter Christianity … I began to doubt on Christianity".

Then it happened that M2 visited the International Propagation Centre International (IPCI) in Durban and was invited to watch videos on debates between Muslims and Christians. As time passed he became interested in the Islamic religion and learned more about spiritual issues. One thing made a significant impression on him as he was watching the videos. He observed that "when Deedat challenged the great scholars of the Christian world it seemed as if the Muslims were scoring more points in these discussions". The religious quest to find answers appears therefore to be another motive to have contributed that M2 decided to accept Islam. M2 relates that "after about a year of studying Islam I was convinced and I decided to submit myself totally to Islam". This step was welcomed by the Muslims and he chose a new Muslim name for himself. M2 also confirmed that he continues learning more about Islam and "the different divisions … now I am studying *sufism*".

M2 also faced another problem following the death of his grandparents who had cared for him till then: he now had no work and no food. The Muslims seemed to have cared for his needs and today M2 has a job with a Muslim organisation in Johannesburg. The material motive certainly contributed to the fact that M2 was moving closer to becoming a Muslim.

Yet another motive seems to have drawn M2 towards Islam. The socio-political issue was also an influence in distancing him from the 'Apartheid Christians': "I find Islam to be the religion where man's mind is free from inferiority complex … since apartheid man has been brain-washed about so many things, but Islam has opened up my mind and shown me that we are all equal … there is no superior or inferior, we are all the same". Among the

Muslims M2 found himself to be accepted as an 'equal' human being, although some time later he was confronted by another 'apartheid': "In Islam I find peace although in South Africa Islam is Indian dominated and they have prejudices against other races, which Islam does not preach … once you get to know them it seems as if they like you, but behind your back they back-bite you. Allah will punish them for that".

Diagram 6.2: Conversion Motives of M2
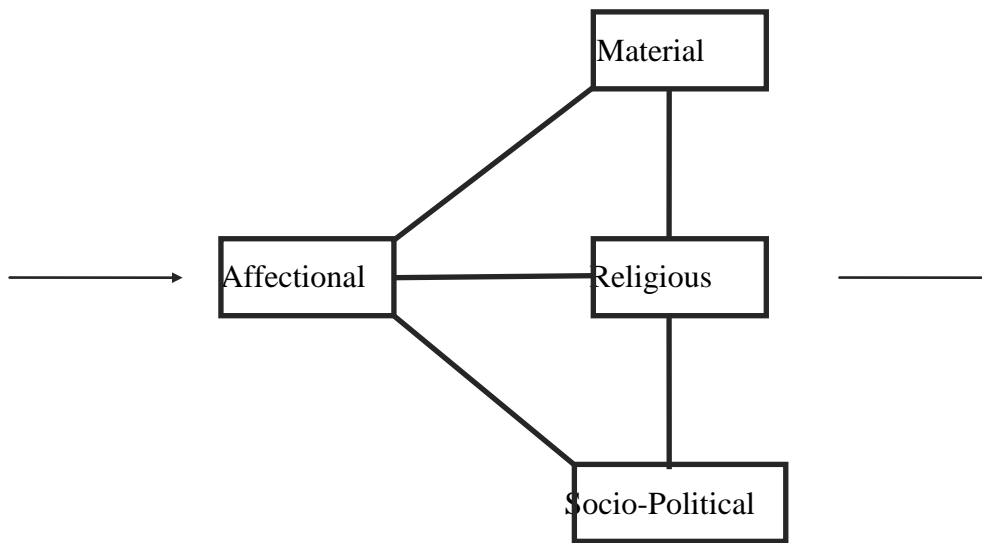
In the conversion process of M2 the following motives, which were interactive, can be summarised:

1. Affectional: The crisis and the following cognitive dissonance were caused by the death of M2's grand-parents. The effect of him being pushed to find solutions and a stable life initiated the conversion process.
2. Another motive which drew M2 towards Islam was the socio-political situation in South Africa. He wanted to be an 'equal' human being and Islam seemed to answer that need.
3. M2 was also facing material needs which were met by Muslims. He was therefore motivated to move towards Islam as only the Muslims provided him with food and eventually a job.
4. The religious motive was also an important factor which pulled M2 towards Islam. The religious knowledge he gained during one year of study contributed greatly to the fact that M2 left Christianity and committed himself to Islam.

6.2.3 Conversion Narrative M3

M3 grew up in a township on the outskirts of Johannesburg. He comes from a Christian background: "I spent a few years with my grandfather and I would go to church a lot with him, he was a prominent minister in the Lutheran Church … on my father's side both my grandmother and grandfather were very staunch Methodists with also some traditional religion and ancestral worship, which goes hand in hand in most African families … my parents then sent me to a Roman Catholic school because these schools are highly disciplined and provide a very good education".

As M3 grew up he relates that "I started asking questions … I was always inclined towards religion to give me direction". However, soon M3 was heading towards a crisis: "I did not understand all the activities … I never understood the trinity … I never understood how to relate to Christ" that M3 started his religious quest to find answers in an alternative religion. Then one day "a man came to my house and brought me some tapes of Ahmed Deedat….it made such an impression on me … also the *adhan* – there is something beautiful about it … I was fascinated by it and used to love it". However his parents tried to prevent this new venture and insisted that M3 should go to church and be more active there. According to M3 the main reason why his parents were concerned that he goes to church regularly was that "in our community if you don't go to church the minister won't bury you … that's the worst fear of the people so they go to church now so that the minister sees you and will bury you".

M3 however, continued to study Islam and was more and more attracted to this religion. He also watched how Islam was portrayed on TV: "I saw how the media portrayed Muslims as hijackers of planes and terrorist … instead of putting me off I became more interested … I asked myself who are these people who can obey God so much that they are willing to blow up planes?"

Then another significant event happened. During a school camp, "there was a lady present whose behaviour was different from all the other ladies around … she had a sense of modesty and her conduct was different. I discovered later that she was a Muslim, she was

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also very careful about how she related to guys … she was kind and sweet". Shortly thereafter M3 met an Islamic leader who became his friend and teacher. The relationship between M3 and this lady as well as with his teacher greatly influenced him to finally commit himself to Islam.

M3 faced considerable rejection and pressure from his family and also friends at school who "were predominately Christian … I had to go to the Bible class … in those classes Islam was painted very badly … my girlfriend also didn't understand me". But the main problems came from his father: "He stood up and was so angry he started shouting and it was big tension … my father began to threaten me that if I don't leave Islam I am going to kick you out of school". M3 faced this opposition and today he relates that "all in all I am still happy to be a Muslim".

Diagram 6.3: Conversion Motives of M3

As a result of the conversion narrative of M3 the following motives can be shown to have been in operation:

1. Religious: The crisis of not finding answers to his questions in respect to certain Christian teachings resulted in cognitive dissonance. This pushed him into the conversion process. M3 felt compelled to look for an alternative religion which he found in Islam. The increased knowledge about Islam appears to have been very attractive and appealing to him and was therefore pulling him towards Islam.

2. Affectional: The motive which was operative for quite some time was the moral example of the Muslim woman whom he met at the school camp. In addition, the interpersonal bond with his personal teacher whom he got to know also contributed significantly to the fact that M3 felt pulled towards Islam. These relationships directed him to make the final step of commitment to Islam.

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6.2.4 Conversion Narrative M4

M4 grew up as a Catholic and said that he "was quite committed … I even considered at one stage of becoming a priest". From a young age M4 was eager to seek knowledge about spiritual issues. The religious motive appears therefore to be the initial factor which started the conversion process. This eagerness to acquire religious knowledge brought about a crisis. It happened at the end of his schooling when M4 realised that "there were things about Christianity which I could not accept rationally … there were two key issues which I struggled with; the one is the trinity – it just did not seem reasonable. The second was the divinity of Christ, I just could not understand how you could squeeze the whole universe or the absolute into a single person".

M4 started to seek a solution for his crisis. Then he went to university and "things changed … I did a lot of spiritual experimentation like Yoga, Transcendental Meditation and ceremonial magic and all kinds of things". In order to find answers to his questions he actively explored some religious options.[182] These also included Hinduism and Islam.

At one stage during the conversion process M4 met a Muslim who became his close friend: "There I met a very simple Indian man (name mentioned) … he was very kind to me and he was actually trying to convert me (to Islam) … he was a *tabligh* and eventually he invited me to the mosque". Though M4 was not totally happy with all the activities of this movement he said that compared to all the other religions, "what I found really interesting is that all the basic beliefs of Islam did not offend my reason. I could accept all these things….not like in Hinduism where you have to accept that Krishna is a God – same problem as in Christianity."

Soon M4 got to know some more Muslim spiritual leaders. These leaders seemed to have made a big impression on him and it can be said that these interpersonal bonds played an important role in attracting M4 to Islam. He got involved in various spiritual activities which seemed to answer his religious quest: "I started chanting and I joined a group that

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[182] M4 represents the only convert in my research to whom the 'experimental' motive could be assigned (cf. Rambo 1993:15, see also chapter 3.2.2). However, it can be argued that 'experimental' is a special form of the intellectual motive. For this reason, since 'experimental' only appears once, I do not list it separately. The 'experimental' motive seems to occur in a special kind of environment, like on a university campus.

was following the "Naqsh'bandiya"[183] order … in the course of time my inner and outer life have married." Later M4 became himself a spiritual leader.

Diagram 6.4: Conversion Motives of M4

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──────────▶   ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐   ──────────▶
              │  Religious   │────────│ Affectional  │
              │(Experimental)│        │              │
              └──────────────┘        └──────────────┘
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As a result of M4's conversion narrative, the following motives can be seen as being inter-related in the conversion process:

1. The religious motive seems to have initiated the whole conversion process of M4. From a young age he was eager to acquire religious knowledge. M4 also engaged in active exploration of religious options. This action drew him closer to Islam. The crisis M4 faced was that he did not find answers nor did he understand certain Christian teachings. This led him to search for another spiritual solution.
2. At various stages during the conversion process M4 met different Islamic religious leaders who impressed and attracted him further towards Islam. This appears to be the 'exit' motive which finally made him commit himself to Islam.

6.2.5 Conversion Narrative M5

M5, similarly to M1, was active during the 1980's in the ANC, which was then the main political force promoting liberation in South Africa. He said, that "one thing which made me move towards Islam was that the previous government of South Africa was oppressing the poor. I did not agree with their political views … they were supposed to be Christians and look what they did, they were racists … today you can see for yourself on TV what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has uncovered." Since M5 identified the

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[183] It is a *Sufi* order which was founded in 14th century C.E. by Baha al Din, also called 'Naqshband' ('painter') who died in 1389 C.E. in Bukhara (Persia). See Rahman (1979:164).

government with Christianity he did not want to be called a Christian any longer and was therefore looking for an alternative. It appears therefore, that the socio-political motive was the initial cause for M5 to start the conversion process by moving away from Christianity.

From his youth M5 had been in contact with Muslims. Now he started to have "a closer look at their teaching and practice" and he attended lectures in the nearby mosque. He also studied Islamic literature. The religious motive appears to be a strong force which pulled him towards Islam. M5 relates that "Islam is a straightforward monotheistic religion … you have a direct link to Allah … when I studied Islam I felt good inside."

Another motive which was in operation from a very early stage in the conversion process was the affectional bond to his Muslim friends and teachers. He confirmed that he felt drawn towards Islam because of "I had a teacher whom I really liked, he had a lot of patience with me and I was impressed what the Muslim missionary said and how he lived". This interpersonal relationship seemed to have contributed by convincing M5 that he wanted to "submit and embrace Islam".

Diagram 6.5: Conversion Motives of M5
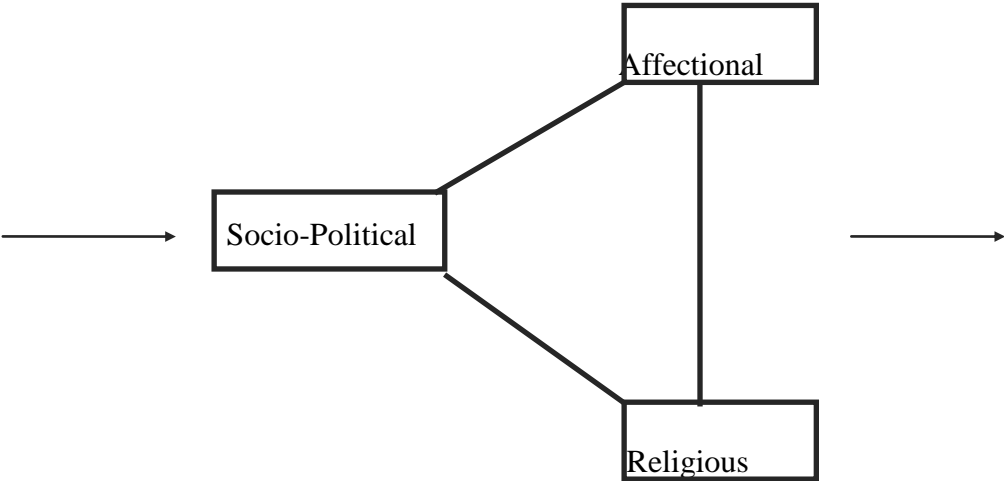
From the conversion narrative of M5 the following three motives emerge:

1. The socio-political motive seems to have started the conversion process in M5's life. Because of what he experienced during the apartheid era he no longer wanted to be associated with Christianity and was therefore looking for an alternative.

2. The religious motive, which moved M5 to gain religious knowledge about Islam, appears to be a strong factor in drawing him closer to Islam. This religion seemed to fulfil all the requirements of M5.

3. The interpersonal bond to Muslim friends and teachers seemed to make a significant impact on M5 which resulted in committing himself to Islam.

6.2.6 Conversion Narrative M6

M6 grew up in a coloured community close to the centre of Johannesburg. A significant feature of his upbringing was the close relationship and friendship he experienced with Muslims: "For as long as I can remember I was in and out of Muslim homes since we had Muslim neighbours." His family belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC), "I attended Sunday school classes … that was our way of living". At the age of 11, M6 was plunged into a crisis which signalled the start of his conversion process: his mother died.

This event caused him to distance himself from Christianity not so much because of the actual death, but because of the way the church handled his mother's funeral: "They refused to bury her from that church … I don't know why, maybe because she was not regularly at the church … still today I cannot understand if you are a follower of that church and yet they refused her … it's like punishing the dead". The response of the church in respect to his mother's death must have caused deep hurts and anti-Christian feelings in M6.

M6 also seemed to be a young man who was searching for knowledge about spiritual issues: "When I was young I used to go to the priest and ask him questions, but he could not answer my questions. I don't believe that Christ is crucified … people say Jesus died for our sin, that I cannot swallow – if someone else makes a mistake they can't punish me … the person who did the sin must be punished." Being unable to find answers in his spiritual quest seemed to have distanced M6 from Christianity.

Because of what happened at the death of his mother, M6 and his family joined another church: the Anglican congregation in the same suburb. Shortly thereafter M6 met his future wife, "she was a Muslim … we got married when I was about 20 … my wife was already

pregnant". This relationship with his wife caused M6 to "revert back to Islam". It is very important for M6 to call his 'conversion experience' not *conversion* but *reversion.* He emphasises that "I use the word reversion because even you are born a Muslim … it is your parents who teach you otherwise … but you are born a Muslim, so I am actually reverting back to the original belief. Islam was there from the beginning of Adam … the term conversion is a wrong term."[184]

M6 already knew quite a bit about the Islamic way of life as he always had Muslim friends. He acquired further knowledge about spiritual issues from his wife and a certain Islamic teacher before and after his commitment to Islam. This teacher seemed to have been his role model: "I always went to him when I had something on my mind … he would open the Qur'an and show where it is written and what it means … then he would tell me a type of story … he was an *imam* and a good man."

Diagram 6.6: Conversion Motives of M6
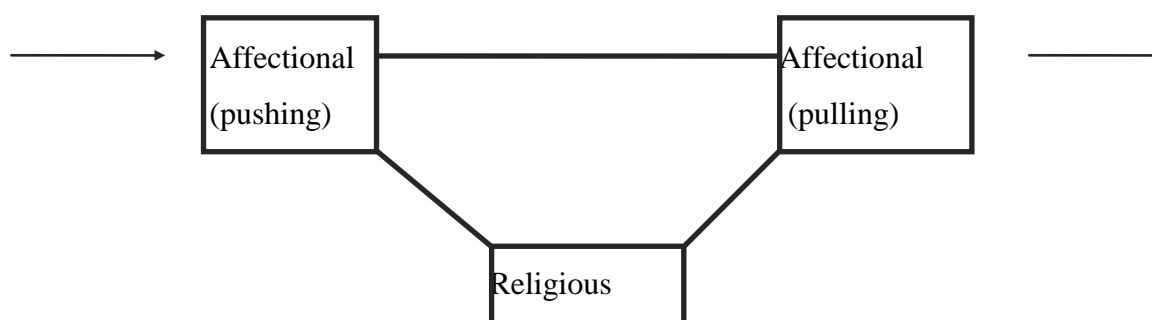
In the life of M6 the following motives were operative:

1. Affectional: A crisis was caused by the death of his mother and the subsequent refusal of the church to bury her. This crisis was the beginning of the whole conversion process and pushed M6 towards Islam.
2. Religious: Secondly, the crisis was deepened by the apparent inability of the priest to answer M6's religious questions. The religious/intellectual quest to increase his

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[184] See also explanations on 'reversion' in sections 1.8 and 7.3.6.

knowledge on spiritual matters was an important further motive which attracted M6 to Islam.

3. The motive which finally caused M6 to commit himself to Islam was the relationship with his wife. All doubts were cleared and he became certain that he should convert to Islam.

6.2.7 Conversion Narrative M7

The conversion narrative of M7 is a rather short one. He grew up in a coloured community in a suburb of Johannesburg. His Christian background is, "I attended the Apostolic Church myself as well as my whole family". At the age of 10, M7 and his whole family were plunged into a crisis: the father died. The family had already been in contact with Muslims for some time and M7 commented about them: "I was fascinated by the way these people live".

One year later his mother married again; this time a Muslim. M7 insisted that he had been given free choice as to which religion he chose to belong to. From the beginning he appears to have loved his new father and was attracted by his religious lifestyle. The interpersonal bond with his father caused M7 to commit himself to Islam though he did not yet have much intellectual knowledge about this religion. This means that the love and witness of his new father was such a great attraction for this young boy as to convince him about the choice he should make.

Then M7 "attended mosque and went to *madressa*". Today M7 is very proud to be a Muslim as he confirms: "I am a Muslim and have furthered my studies in the Islamic religion. I have studied the Arabic language … I feel wonderful as a Muslim. I am very happy that God has given me direction and has opened my heart to this wonderful religion of Islam, I thank God every day because he has bestowed on me his grace … I am so blessed … my whole family is very happy." M7 is today an Islamic teacher himself and he proudly said that he had already converted some 20 Christians to Islam.

Diagram 6.7: Conversion Motives of M7
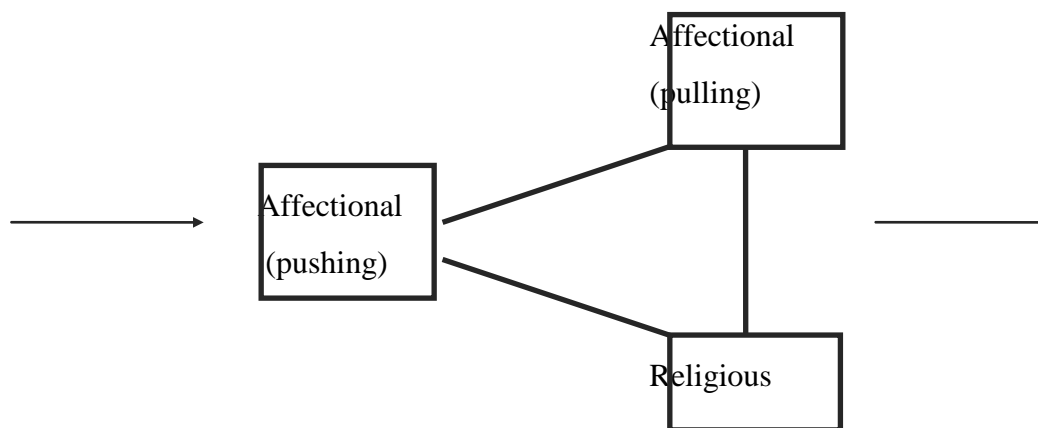
The conversion story of M7 can now be summarised with the interplay of the following motives:

1. Affectional: The crisis which initiated the conversion process and which resulted in cognitive dissonance was the death of his father. This crisis pushed M7 to make a choice between Christianity and Islam since his mother remarried a Muslim a year later.
2. The close rapport with his new father seemed to have made the choice easy for M7. His father's lifestyle and witness made a big impression on M7 so much so that he felt pulled towards Islam and as a result committed himself to this religion.
3. M7 had from childhood Muslim friends and was therefore to a certain degree accustomed to the religion of Islam. He confirmed that he always liked Islam. Though the religious knowledge at the time of commitment was not extensive, it definitely played a positive influence in the decision making process of M7 to choose Islam. After the commitment M7 studied Islam in great detail. The increased religious knowledge confirmed positively the decision taken earlier in life to have chosen Islam.

6.2.8 Conversion Narrative M8

M8 grew up in a coloured community in one of the suburbs of Johannesburg. He relates "I was born as a Christian … we went to church every Sunday and Sunday school in the afternoon." One important thing M8 can still remember very well from his youth was that "the school used to have weekend camps … we used to go to a farm for the weekend … we spent a lot of time with our Bible teachers and at night sitting around the camp fire and

singing hymns, it put the Bible into your heart, it gave you that love … the truth lies in the Bible."

M8 was first a member of the Roman Catholic Church and later of the Anglican Church. At the age of about 24 he married and had children. Then things went wrong in M8's life as he relates: "After that I had some bad experiences where I ended up in prison … there I joined up with 6 other guys and we had a Bible study together … they were all from different backgrounds."

M8 was about 34 years of age when he came out of prison. During the time of his imprisonment he also got to know a Muslim friend. M8's friend helped him with clothes and money in order to "to get back on my feet". The material motive seems to have been the start of drawing M8 towards Islam, "he bought me some clothing … he also gave me a job, then he invited me to the mosque to see what it's all about it…after that I converted." The interpersonal bond with his friend convinced M8 to commit himself to Islam. At that stage M8 had little knowledge of Islam. He acquired some basic knowledge about Islam after his commitment.

Today M8 works for a company owned by Muslims. He sees it as an advantage to be a Muslim otherwise as he said "I might lose my job if I am not a Muslim". However, because of his upbringing and his love for the Bible he also wants to remain a Christian at the same time "there is no difference in Islam and Christianity … when I was a Christian I believed in the unseen, as a Muslim I believe in the unseen … I read both the Qur'an and the Bible – there is no difference … I go to the mosque and sometimes to the church." The rest of the family are Christians. His wife is unhappy with regard to his religious views and practices. M8 appears to be happy about being a Muslim and a Christian at the same time. The only fear he has is that "the Muslims should not know that I am still a Christian … otherwise I am in trouble … therefore, in public I am always a Muslim."

Diagram 6.8: Conversion Motives of M8

From the conversion narrative of M8 the following two motives can be seen as having been operative:

1. The material motive appears to have been the initial factor in drawing M8 towards Islam. Yet this motive played an important role throughout his conversion process.
2. Affectional: The close relationship with his friend who took him to the mosque and through whom he also received a job was the motive which made M8 finally decide to commit himself to Islam.

The fact that M8 wants to remain a Christian may be attributed to his Christian upbringing, his love of the Bible and the church and therefore his 'resistance to change' (cf. Epstein 1985:302, Thouless 1978:138). In being a Muslim he sees advantages such as having secured a job. To justify this 'double belonging' M8 brings forward the notion that there are no differences in the two religions.[185]

6.2.9 Conversion Narrative M9

M9 grew up in Soweto in a Christian home. His family were members of the Assemblies of God: "I grew up as Christian doing all the Christian things." During his youth he experienced apartheid with his friends and he relates that "during the 80's when South Africa was undergoing political turmoil we were all disillusioned about the religion we had. Most of us were searching for an alternative for spiritual fulfilment." M9 highlighted the oppression of the government which had 'Christian origins' and for this reason he did not desire to be a Christian any longer. The socio-political motive signals therefore the start of the conversion process of M9. This seems also to be the start of having anti-Christian sentiments.

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[185] The desire of M8 to belong to both faiths at the same time has been confirmed to me by friends of M8 and his wife (interview 9/5/98). It is therefore not just being said by M8 to 'please' me as being a Christian researcher. On the topic of 'double belonging' see also discussion in paragraph 7.2.5.

In his search for an alternative religion, M9 said that "in 1990 someone introduced me to Islam. I didn't just embrace Islam, I did a lot of reading and questioning on areas in which I was not clear". At the same he relates that "that's when I started questioning a lot about Christianity … Christian theologians could not answer my questions but in Islam I found answers." M9 found a number of Christian doctrines unreasonable "like the trinity I don't understand … I have also questions about family life; it does not tell you how to raise kids, what food to give them and what to do when they are sick … like in Islam where it tells you what to recite … marriage is too summarised in the Bible … in Islam everything is detailed from your sexual life, also about breastfeeding; how long you must breastfeed. Islam is a very practical religion and a way of life."

M9 strongly emphasised the difference between the two faiths: "Many Christians justified apartheid with the scriptures … there is much inconsistency in the Bible … it's too summarised and everybody has his opinion and version … at one stage I read the whole Bible, but it was more of a hobby and not a way of life … Jesus is a good example but how did he do it in detail? … if you don't have a set of clear principles then you will have a lot of conflicting ideas, that's why there are so many interpretations – in Islam everything is clear in detail."

M9 related that because of these reasons "I decided to convert". Later on in the conversion however he emphasised that he did not see this as an act as 'to convert' but rather 'to revert'. His sees Islam as being the 'natural' religion and that all people are actually Muslims. So he reverted to his original roots.[186]

Diagram 6.9: Conversion Motives of M9

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  ———————→   | Socio-Political |———| Religious |   ———————→
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[186] See also explanations on 'reversion' in sections 1.8 and 7.3.6.

In summary the following conversion motives can be identified in the conversion narrative of M9:

1. M9 searched for an alternative religion because of the socio-political situation in South Africa. This motive definitely initiated the conversion process.
2. The religious/intellectual motive finally made M9 commit himself to Islam. After having compared the two faiths in some depth he was convinced that Islam was the right decision to make.

6.2.10 Conversion Narrative M10

M10 grew up in the similar environment to M9 (her husband) in Soweto. With respect to her religious upbringing M10 has the following to say: "I was born in an orthodox Roman Catholic family in the sense that we used to follow what my father expected from us … there was a stage where we were forced to go to church." M10 was also drawn into the struggle against apartheid as were so many young people from Soweto.

M10 then got involved with a youth group where they were studying the Bible. First she was excited about "studying the Bible from Genesis through to Revelation", but soon things changed. During the course of studying the Bible she was moving into a crisis which was the conflict between her beliefs and the objective data from the historical events. She started to doubt and criticise the Bible, something which she had never done in her life before "I got to the stage where I couldn't pray or read the Bible any longer … I felt I was dying slowly … I couldn't tell anybody about God … this went on for about three years." M10 was not actively engaged in looking for an alternative religion.

Some time later M10 heard about Islam through some friends, "somehow I got to know about Islam … I was a bit resentful in the beginning because it was a totally new concept for me … when I started learning more about Islam it made sense to me, like for example that we are not allowed to eat pork … everything had a reason". Slowly M10 learned about Islam and she began to accept and appreciate this 'new religion' while at the same time distancing herself from Christianity.

To make the final step of commitment, however, M10 was influenced by her future husband. She admits that "I learnt about Islam through my husband". Because of her relationship with her future husband and his influence on her, she committed herself to Islam. This motive of affection therefore played a decisive role in the final stage of the conversion process. Three years later she got married to M9.

Diagram 6.9: Conversion Motives of M10

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            ┌─────────────────┐                    ┌──────────────┐
───────────▶│ Socio-Political │                    │ Affectional  │───────────▶
            └─────────────────┘                    └──────────────┘
                      \                              /
                       \        ┌──────────┐        /
                        \───────│ Religious│───────/
                                └──────────┘
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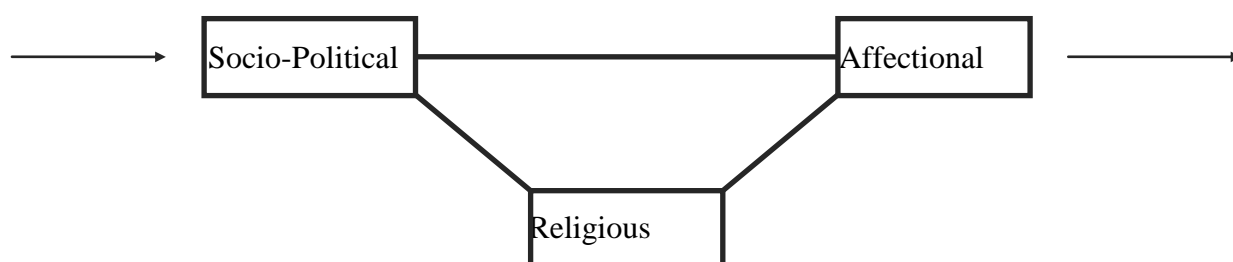
In the conversion process of M10 the following three motives can be identified as being in operation:

1. The socio-political motive indicated the entry of M10 into the conversion process. This motive is responsible for drawing M10 slowly towards Islam. The crisis which caused cognitive dissonance in M10's life was the realisation that the so-called 'Christian government' and its apartheid policy did not measure up to the standards of Christianity.

2. M10 was introduced to the Islamic faith and began learning about this new religion about which she had been rather suspicious to begin with.

3. Affectional: M10's close relationship with and influence by her future husband to be convinced her to reject Christianity and to take the step of commitment to Islam.

According to the Islamic teaching women in Islam have a prescribed dress code (cf. Dagher 1995:113-122). This 'veil' sometimes has a special appeal to women, interestingly enough also in a western society. M10 for instance reported in her conversion narrative that she feels now as a Muslim women much more secure compared to time when she was walking around in a miniskirt and attracting men. She appears to prefer the veil in Islam. This sentiment is reported in other research too, such as Chapman (1998:69). He concludes that

women "have been impressed by the respect shown to women in Islam, explaining, for example, that the wearing of the veil makes it harder for them to be treated as sex objects".

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF THE CONVERSION MOTIVES

7.1 Introduction

In the chapters five and six I attempted to determine the motives of conversion for each convert. This has not always been easy and is open for debate (cf. Arnold 1974:9). The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the findings of chapters five and six. In those two chapters each conversion narrative has been presented and analysed separately. Now, in this chapter, I look at all narratives and attempt to make an analysis cross-sectionally (cf. Mason 1996:111-128). The aim of this chapter is threefold:

1. To discuss general issues which concern all motives.
2. To discuss each motive in a separate section as they appeared in all the respective conversion narratives.
3. To present some emerging aspects resulting from the narratives.

The narratives reveal that there were between two and four motives in operation in each conversion process. The following table indicates how many times each motive occurred in the 20 conversion narratives:

Table 7.1: Occurrence of Conversion Motives

Motives	Chapter 5: Muslim ➜ Christian	Chapter 6: Christian ➜ Muslim	Total
Religious	9	9	18
Mystical	6	-	6
Affectional	9	9	18
Socio-Political	-	5	5
Material	2	3	5

It is significant to observe that the religious and affectional motive seemed to be the most influential factors in all the conversion narratives. Both of these two motives appeared in 18 out of 20 conversion narratives. The significance of each motive as a result of these findings will be analysed in more detail in the respective sections of this chapter.

In this context a number of issues need to be considered. As discussed in chapter two, there are so called 'pure' and 'impure' conversion motives the classifications of which the convert is usually aware.[187] The religious/intellectual or spiritual conversion motive is usually placed highest on the list as a 'pure' motive whereas, for instance, converts would rather refrain from mentioning motives such as the material or socio-political one as a reason to convert since these are termed as less spiritual or 'impure'. An interviewee would rather try to make a good impression on the interviewer and try to avoid mentioning the 'impure' motives although these might have played an important or initial role in the conversion process. The convert usually does this for two reasons: to hide the 'impure' motives and to say what s/he thinks the interviewer wants to hear (cf. Thouless 1978:141).

It is for these reasons that it is not always easy for an interviewer to discover the various conversion motives in each case. I have also discovered that it is not wise to ask a convert directly what the motives are since s/he will most likely not mention all the factors which played a role in the conversion process. The method I have chosen (see also chapter 4), namely to let the convert share his/her experience and then try to discover the motives, is according to my view, more successful. Although I have taken the utmost care in my observations, as well as interviews and informal talks to uncover the conversion motives in each case, I do not claim that I found all the reasons for conversion in each case. In order to be as accurate as possible, I have also discussed my findings and analyses with some of the converts themselves.

In this context the 'etic-emic'[188] distinction needs to be addressed. The etic viewpoint observes behaviour from a perspective external to a particular society. The emic approach studies behaviour from inside the culture. Etic understandings are alien and often fail to adequately deal with issues that are crucial to insiders. Emic perspectives provide a view

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[187] A number of interviewees (e.g. C1, C8, C10, M3, M9) have commented on this matter, i.e. that only the spiritual conversion motive is seen as the 'pure' one.

that grapples for answers from within which is understood as being superior to a purely etic one (cf. Parshall 1980:31-42). In my situation an emic approach was not possible. With the Christian converts it was a mixed emic/etic approch whereas with the Muslim converts the approach was almost only etic (see also chapter 4). Another issue in this context is that a person him/herself is not always aware or does not understand all the reasons or motivations for his/her conversion (see the discussion in chapter 3.2.3). This sentiment applies to the converts as well as the researcher.

A further danger of designating the conversion motives wrongly is the problem of *hineininterpretieren.* This is the temptation for an interpreter, like myself, to read motives into the words of an interviewee that 'are not there' but which the interviewer would like to see. Since I am a Christian missionary this is indeed a temptation, namely that I may want to find in my research that Muslims who become Christians have 'more noble' motives than Christians who become Muslims. This could lead me, for instance, to highlight the religious motives among Christian converts but material motives among Muslim converts. I am aware of this possible bias and I have tried my utmost to be fair and honest in my interpretation. However, nobody is free of bias and able to interpret findings neutrally. We are all characterised by our background including our cultural heritage and the way we look at and interpret events. I am no exception and admit that I cannot escape this 'predicament', but the fact that I admit this as a problem and consciously dealt with it in my research should increase the validity of my findings and interpretions.

One has to be careful of making hasty conclusions when analysing these tables. In view of the small sample, broad generalisation is totally inappropriate. Nevertheless, I believe certain trends can be seen in these analyses of the conversion motives bearing in mind the area of my field of research. As the converts look back to that event in their lives which they call 'conversion' and share their 'story' they are urged to justify what they have done by giving the reasons. Being convicted that their decision was the right step in their lives, they explain the superiority[189] of the new faith they have adopted.

7.2 The Conversion Motives

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[188] Pike (1962) introduced and derived these words from 'phon*etic*' and 'phon*emic*'.
[189] I use this language since the converts themselves used it.

7.2.1 Religious

The research findings reveal that 18 out of 20 respondents experienced the religious motive as a vital factor in their conversion process. Seven converts seem to have this motive as a factor which initiated their conversion process. There is no difference in respect of the importance of the religious motive in conversion either way. It seems that to gain knowledge about religious matters is a vital factor for either Christians or Muslims when converting to Islam or Christianity.

7.2.1.1 Contrast of the 'Old' and 'New'

The conversion narratives reveal that many converts found themselves in situations where they were unhappy with their present faith. They felt 'pushed' to seek an alternative religion and to gain new religious knowledge. In this process of acquiring knowledge about a new faith they compared the new with the old faith. If the new faith appeared to be superior then this became one of the motivations towards accepting it. The converts engaged the new faith in dialogue in which they sought to reinterpret, integrate and synthesise the 'new' and 'old' in an attempt to marry both meaningfully together (Okorocha 1987:262).

In order to illustrate this notion, I have made a list of some significant claims made by converts as to why they converted with regard to the religious motive. In all of these quotations names of people and places have been removed. First comes the table of the converts' opinions who converted from Islam to Christianity and they are followed by the converts who have changed from Christianity to Islam:

Table 7.2: Contrast of the 'Old' and 'New' of C1-C10

Convert	Old	New
C1	I felt that there was no hope for me in Islam … I could recite things from the Qur'an but not get anything from it … in Islam it is more moral laws what you must do …. in *madressa* if you didn't know something you would get punished for it	I have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ today … it's a free open conversation … God tells me now what to do … in Christianity it is different: you have to follow the Lord in truth and faithfulness … as long as you do all things in Christ's name it's enough to see you through anything … I don't follow my way, I follow God's way
C2	I had no real understanding of the meaning of life … Islam was only about materialism and how to get money…and how to do good works … I had no peace within myself	Life is about God and his will for us … God created us to do his will… eternal life is with God in heaven … the new life is really to have a relationship with Jesus Christ
C3	In Islam there is so much ritual which you don't really understand	… the only religion I understood is Christianity … and the Christian religion was the way I had chosen because I could easily adapt to it
C4	As a Muslim it was not an easy thing to deal with because there is no assurance that when you die you will go to heaven … not even a formula is provided for where you will go when you die … many Muslims believe that you can get favour with God by doing good works	Now I know the truth … Jesus Christ did it all for me on the cross … now I have assurance of going to heaven … I believe that now I am serving the true God …the Holy Spirit is guiding me
C5	In the month of *ramadan* I was fasting … but deep inside me I was seeking and I had a very deep loneliness …	That day I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour … I had an inner peace … I felt that I had found something so special … within myself I was changed … I will not give up Christ for all the money in the world
C7	…what the *imam* said was not clear to me, I didn't understand what he was saying about Islam … I was confused	… when I went to church, that was the most wonderful day of my life … I was like a changed person … I understood what the minister said … now I am a member of that church
C8	I could not understand Arabic and the Qur'an … I did not know the meaning of which I was reciting … I could never	In church they speak English and Afrikaans which I can understand … I understand the Bible … I can feel and

	feel at home and share emotions	share emotions … I feel at home in the church … I found peace and it changed my life completely … I can trust the Lord and there is no other way
C9	I read the Qur'an but did not understand … there was racial discrimination among the Muslims … it was an empty feeling in the mosque … one is forced to say certain prayers in Arabic	I can understand the Bible … there is love and trust in the church and no discrimination … I felt a warmth among the people in the church
C10	I began to question the Muslim God: How can Muslims serve a God of love when they are condemning and hate other people and calling them names ... my own family rejected me and they had a burial service because I became a Christian	I came to the conclusion that the God of the Bible and the Qur'an are different … I want to serve the God of the Bible who is a God of love (Jn 3:16) … Christian people really showed me what love is

The main issue which Christian converts found in Christianity and which they had not felt while being Muslims, was the love displayed in the Bible through Jesus and also the warmth in the church among Christians. The converts also found 'hope and assurance' which they didn't have before. Islam was basically perceived as a religion with meaningless ritualistic practices and utterances in Arabic which most people in South Africa do not understand.[190] By contrast, converts expressed their joy of having a 'living relationship' with Jesus and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

As is evident from this list of quotes, there are Muslims who query Islam and find answers to their life-problems in Christianity. These converts state that their earlier religion failed to satisfy their deepest longings; that there were deficiencies, questions and problems to which they found the answer only in Christianity.

The second table displays the opinion of those converts who changed from Christianity to Islam:[191]

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[190] This sentiment has been expressed in other case studies such as that of Okorocha (1987:213-217). He gives a number of reasons why for instance the Igbo of Nigeria have rejected Islam.
[191] Poston (1991:159-168) in his article *Becoming a Muslim in the Christian West* has made similar observations in his study; i.e. why Christians have become Muslims.

Table 7.3: Contrast of the 'Old' and 'New' of M1-M10

Convert	Old	New
M1	… in Christianity there are many things that I questioned and could not understand … Christians only go to church on a Sunday	… if I read the Qur'an it is straight forward, I understand it more than the Bible … I still need to learn Arabic … Muslims pray five times a day
M2	… as my friends criticised Christianity, I started to doubt … Christians practised apartheid	When Deedat challenged the great scholars of the Christian world it seemed as if the Muslims were scoring more points in these discussions … in Islam I am an equal human being
M3	I never understood the trinity … and I could not relate to Christ … I found in Christianity there is no discipline	… the *adhan* impressed me, it was so beautiful …there was this Muslim lady who's behaviour was so different … after I became a Muslim I changed and was praying more
M4	Two key issues which I struggled with: the trinity did not seem reasonable and the divinity of Christ: I could not understand how you could squeeze the whole universe or the absolute into a single person	What I found really interesting is that all the basic beliefs of Islam did not offend my reason … I could accept all these things
M5	I could no longer identify myself with the racist 'Christian' government	Islam is a straight forward monotheistic religion … one has a direct link to Allah
M6	The priest could not answer my questions: How can Jesus die for your sins? … this is not fair … the person who committed the sin must be punished? … I don't believe that Christ was crucified … the Christians have so many different Bibles	In Islam my questions were answered … my teacher would just open the Qur'an and show me where it is written and what it means
M7	(no comments)	I feel very happy and wonderful to be a Muslim … I have studied the Arabic language … I am happy that God has given me direction and grace … I have been blessed with Islam
	Christians justified apartheid with their	In Islam everything is detailed … every

M9	scriptures … the Bible is inconsistent, it is too vague … I do not understand the trinity … Christians interpret the Bible to their own advantage … Jesus is a good example – but how did he do it?	part of your life is described … it is a very practical religion and a way of life … in Islam everything is detailed from your sexual life, marriage and how to raise kids and about breast feeding
M10	…the church could not give me what I wanted	Islam is practical … there is a reason behind everything … with the dress code I am protected as a woman

It is significant to see the same religious arguments came out on both sides. In other words a person has a grievance against Christianity and accepts Islam while another person has a similar grievance against Islam and accepts Christianity. An example of this is for instance C8 and M9. C8 said that he could not understand the Qur'an but that the Bible made sense to him. On the other hand, M9 said that the Bible did not make sense to him but that the Qur'an gave him clear guidance for his life.

Although in some cases the arguments were the same, as seen above, in other cases they were not. A number of converts accepted Christianity because they said that they had no inner peace in Islam.[192] In these cases words such as "practical, ritual, detailed, no hope" contrasted with words like "warmth, trust, love, inner peace, relationship, assurance". These converts found Islam as being a rather "outward, cold and ritualistic" religion with little benefit for the inner life and the heart. According to their testimonies they found these missing characteristics in Christianity.

On the other hand, a number of converts accepted Islam because they said Christianity was not practical and was against common human reason (cf. Gilchrist 1977:73, Chapman 1998:65).[193]
Here words such as "illogical, impractical" contrast with "reason, logic, practical". Islam was perceived as a supremely rational religion by many Muslim converts (cf. Poston 1992:177, Chapman 1998:66). Christianity was said to be opposed to reason, learning and science, and to be replete with irrational concepts such as the doctrines of the trinity, the incarnation, etc. According to the converts, Islam did not require a person to forego his/her

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[192] See C2, C4, C5, C8, C9, C10.
[193] See M4, M5, M9, M10.

rational faculties. It was instead a religion that accommodates the finding of modern science and was therefore held up as the only viable option for the enlightened man or woman (cf. Poston 1991:164, Naudé 1978:8).

7.2.1.2 Cognitive Dissonance and the Crises of Faith

A term most commonly said (see table in 7.2.1.1) was "I did not understand" and as a result of this not being able to understand his/her own religion a conversion process was initiated (cf. Poston 1991:165). This notion of not being able to 'understand' did in many instances cause a crisis in the lives of the converts. The fact is therefore that in many cases of conversion a crisis plays a vital catalytic role (Rambo 1993:166).[194]

The research findings reveal that a relatively high number of converts indicated that they were unable to 'understand' their own religion and that this created a crisis which in turn motivated them to seek an alternative faith (cf. Köse 1996:52). The issues concern religious teachings, doctrines and rituals. A common complaint of Muslim converts is, for instance, that they could not understand the concepts of the 'trinity'. Other issues were also mentioned like the divinity of Christ (cf. Chapman 1998:61).

Christian converts on the other hand, complained about issues such as being unable to understand the teachings of the Qur'an or the prayers which have to be said in Arabic, as well as other issues (see list in section 7.2.1). A number of the converts also commented that the religious leaders were often unable to give satisfactory answers to their spiritual questions.

7.2.1.3 Are Muslims Encouraged to Study Christianity?

In the past, because of the apartheid policy, Muslims and Christians were generally kept apart and were often rather distant and hostile, as has been indicated in chapter one. It must be said, though, that such a general statement does not apply to every community. In the coloured community, for instance, contacts between Christians and Muslims have been

common for many generations, even during the apartheid era. More recently, however, the PAGAD[195] phenomenon may have hardened some Christian-Muslim attitudes in general in South Africa. In the relationship between white South Africans and the rest, apartheid kept white Christians effectively isolated from black, coloured and Indian Muslims.

Today, however, in the new South African context it is possible for many more Christians and Muslims to rub shoulders on a daily basis. There are now instances where Muslims and Christians enjoy good relations in the community. Such close contacts promote and often motivate Muslims to study and inquire about the Christian faith. There is therefore a certain amount of freedom in South Africa for Muslims to study the Christian faith, read the Bible and go to a church (as it is evident in the conversion narratives C1-C10). The same is true in reverse: In the 'new South Africa' Christians see and hear much more about Islam – in TV broadcasts, newspapers, etc. and are therefore much more exposed of Islam than before. It is clear that such a situation increases the 'convertibility' greatly or in other words, people have more freedom to embrace a new religion and are available for conversion (see also my discussion on 'availability' in chapter 2.5).

The Qur'an (e.g. Surah 5:68, 71) refers in some places to the Christians and Jews as the 'People of the Book'[196]. This is a central theme in the Qur'an and it is therefore no wonder that the Muslim awareness of Christians and Christianity is not only a matter of everyday observation but a certain frame of reference is created in their minds by the Qur'an itself. It can be concluded, after a careful study of the Qur'an's attitude to the Bible, that the Qur'an teaches that the Bible is from God and must be believed (cf. Pfander 1910:41-54, Rice 1910:147, Kateregga & Shenk 1981:117). One verse in the Qur'an, for instance, even indicates that if Muhammad, and subsequently also his followers the Muslims, are in doubt about what has been revealed to them they should "ask those who have been reading the

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[194] See for instance C7, C8, C9, M3, M4, M6, M10.

[195] PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism And Drugs) is a movement which originated in Cape Town mainly among the Muslims in the late 90's. Its original intention to fight against 'gangsterism' and the use of drugs appeared to be a good cause. However, since PAGAD also uses physical force and violence to pursue its aims, many, Muslims and Christians, have distanced themselves from this movement which again has caused divisions and hatred.

[196] Surah 5 is replete with references to the 'People of the Book'. See also Gilchrist (1994:71-73) in his paragraph on 'The Prophet and the People of the Book'.

book before them" (Qur'an 10:94).[197] These people are by implications the Jews and the Christians. Kateregga & Shenk (1981:26) too emphasise this notion by saying that "the Qur'an further encourages Muslims to live amicably with the People of the Book, and even marry their women" (see Qur'an 5:6).

It is not possible to refer to all those verses of the Qur'an in which Christians and their Scriptures are mentioned and the connotations of these verses.[198] Suffice it to say that Christians and Jews are mentioned quite often in the Qur'an, so often that it certainly inspires questions in an inquiring Muslim's mind (cf. Parrinder 1965:152-165). It comes as no surprise therefore that often when Muslims start questioning their own faith they are motivated to look to Christians for help.

What I have said thus far may create the impression that the Qur'an portrays a consistently positive view of Christians and Christianity. This is, unfortunately, not the case. Gilchrist (1995:41) points to the other side, namely that "the general tone of the Qur'an in respect of the Jews and Christians is negative". In support of this negative attitude, Surah 5:54 in the Qur'an even warns Muslims not to take "Jews and Christians for your friends and protectors". In his section on "the Qur'an's attitude to the Jews and the Christians", Gilchrist (1995:43) comes to the conclusion:

> Although there is at times a spirit of tolerance towards the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an and even a declaration that the truly pious among them will be rewarded in Paradise and find favour with Allah, the general attitude is animosity. Jointly they are seen to be serious opponents of the prophet and his message and their presence is viewed as a threat to the well-being of the Muslims whom they are determined to lead astray.

There therefore appears to be two lines of thoughts in the Qur'an.[199] On the one hand Muslims are encouraged to approach Christians in respect of finding answers to spiritual issues, but on the other hand Muslims are warned against having Christians as their friends. The reason for these two opposite attitudes to Christians by the Qur'an is generally

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[197] The Qur'an teaches Muslims that the 'Injil' (The Gospel) is a 'revealed book', a guidance to mankind, a light and a confirmation of the 'Taurat' (Books given to Moses). See Surahs 3:3, 65, 5: 47, 69, 71,

[198] There are many authors who have written about this theme, such as: Pfander 1910, Zwemer 1912, Parrinder 1965, Saifuddin 1969, Imran 1979, Shafaat 1979, Shafaat 1982, Parshall 1983, Cragg 1984.

[199] Bosch (1977:142-146) has similarly argued that there are two lines of thought in the Bible regarding other religions.

explained by scholars in the following way: The positive references come from an earlier period (Meccan period) when Muhammad's relationship to Jews and Christians was friendly. The negative references are attributed to the later period in Medina. Muhammad was a powerful leader in Medina and demanded the allegiance and subordination of the Jews and Christians. They however rejected him as a 'true Prophet of God' which caused enmity between the two parties. There were a number of further issues which caused frictions (cf. Parrinder 1965, Tröger 1986:122-124, Gilchrist 1986:149-157, 1994:63-77).

Whether or not a Muslim should inquire about and read the Bible is a contentious issue up to this day in the Muslim community and a dividing factor within groups of the Muslim community.[200] This tension is also seen in the conversion narrative told by converts.[201] Muslims are divided because of the two opinions which exist. On the one hand the Qur'an is very positive about the Bible and therefore encourages the Muslims to read it. On the other hand Muslims are confronted with the teachings of the *ulamah* who often discourage the Muslim community from reading the Bible because of their claim that it has been corrupted, changed and is no longer valid (cf. Rice 1910:167, Kateregga & Shenk 1981:27).[202] Despite this uncertainty there are, however, many Muslims in South Africa who study the Bible and are for various reasons motivated to do so, whether in public or in secret, as we have discovered in the conversion narratives. It is a fact that Muslim scholars have studied Christianity in the past, though often reluctantly and inadequately (cf. Zebiri 1997:137-182).

There is another issue that needs to be considered. In Islam the role of the Qur'an is vastly different from that of the Bible. The basic difference is with regard to the concept of the revelation. In Islam the Qur'an, a book, is regarded as the perfect revelation whereas in Christianity it is Jesus, a person. The Qur'an is regarded by Muslims as a direct revelation from God without any human element in it (Kateregga & Shenk 1981:117). In Islam,

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[200] I have myself experienced this tension. The MYM, for instance, held their study circle for many months in one of the mosques in Johannesburg, where the Qur'an and the Bible were read and compared. In 1997 however, they had to move to another venue because of pressure mainly from the *Tablighi Jama'at* of Muslims. For them this kind of comparative study was not tolerated.

[201] See for instance the following conversion narratives: C1, C3, C4, C5, C10.

[202] There are a number of contentious issues and the *ulama,* or the Muslim scholars, are often not in agreement. I myself have witnessed a number of such discussions. The information in books is often confusing and even contradictory in this matter. Kateregga and Shenk (1981:27, 31, 32, 117), for instance, say that on the one hand the Bible is 'imperfect', but on page 31 and 32 it is written that "all the previous Books revealed by God must be accepted as true". Again on page 117, speaking about the *Taurat, Zabur and Injil,* Kateregga and Shenk say that "these scriptures are acknowledged as true Divine guidance".

therefore, the Qur'an is used as the key source of law. There are however many questions the Qur'an doesn't answer so the traditions serve as a supplement to the Qur'an. Traditions also help to explain the Qur'an and they support its authority by providing background information (cf. Kateregga & Shenk 1981:31, Gilchrist 1986:139-249). The *hadith* have become the real foundation of the ethics, laws and practices of Islam. While the Qur'an remains the Scripture of Islam, the *hadith* have become the major source of its jurisprudence (Gilchrist 1986:231).

The sources are therefore the Qur'an together with *sunnah*, *ijma* and *qiyas*. These four sources form the basis of authority for Islamic law, the *shariah*. There are for instance many *sunnah* recorded (*hadith),* which encourage Muslims in general to acquire 'knowledge' (Ali 1978:31-39). One such *hadith,* (*Bukhari* 93:40) for instance, encourages Muslims to learn the writings of the Jews: "Zaid ibn Thàbit reported that, The Prophet, commanded him to learn the writing of the Jews so that I wrote for the Prophet, his letters and read out to him their letters when they wrote to him". There are *fatwa* about Muslim attitudes to Christians that are derived not only from the Qur'an but also from the other three sources. These are hugely influential in the Muslim community because the *ulamah* are accepted as the lawful authorities on the divine law.

The *fatwa* are not uniform but vary from community to community. They depend to a large extent on the socio-religious structure of the country (cf. Doi 1984:204-215). In some Islamic countries Christians are, for instance, not allowed to enter a mosque at all while in South Africa it is possible for a Christian to enter most of the mosques provided the regulations are observed.[203] On the other hand Muslims are free to visit churches in South Africa, which they do especially in the case of funerals.

How these *fatwa* are applied in practice is again a matter of debate. As far as the Muslim community in South Africa is concerned, the following general attitude can be derived: Muslims have relative freedom to mix with Christians. They are however often not encouraged to study the Bible since it is believed to cause doubt. Further, Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the final revelation, superseding all former 'holy books', and it is

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[203] I myself have visited many mosques in South Africa and watched the prayer ritual by sitting at the back of the room. I was usually requested to observe the following three rules: Take off my shoes at the entrance; dress modestly; do not sing or pray aloud.

therefore not really necessary to consult any other book in religious matters (Kateregga & Shenk 1981:27). In addition, Muslims often fear that by studying Christianity they might be influenced to convert.

In the case of a Muslim converting to Christianity, a very harsh approach is often applied to that person by his/her family. This notion is, for example, reported by C10. After his conversion to Christianity his family "had a burial service and took strict measures to cut all ties with Christians"[204], in order to prevent another such 'painful' experience within the family. The measures taken included things such as taking all their children out of secular school and sending them to Muslim schools only, in order to prevent them from learning anything about Christianity.

7.2.1.4 Are Christians Encouraged to Study Islam?

The Bible has a definite command to Christians in conveying the 'Great Commission' given by Jesus: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spririt, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Christians are commanded therefore to follow Jesus' example and "preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). This call of Christ includes all people including the Muslims – as Addison (1966:311) confirms: "The command of Christ which summons us to be His fellow workers in seeking to win for Him the community of Islam". This 'Biblical missionary attitude' can be illustrated in the approach of Paul, the early church's great missionary, who is also seen by many Christians as a model (cf. Massih 1979:86-87, Parshall 1980:33-38).

In this respect Acts 17:2-3 is often quoted by Christians:

> As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah", he said.

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[204] See also my explanation on the 'Law of Apostasy' in section 7.3.2.

A few points from this quotation can be learned and serve as guidance with regard to Christian attitudes towards Muslims (cf. Gilchrist 1988:77-81)[205]. Firstly, we read that Paul *reasoned with them.* It is evident that Paul took the initiative in creating debate and dialogue with them on the whole subject of his message, being quite willing to put its veracity to the test of scrutiny and critical analysis. Secondly, we learn from Paul's approach to the Jews at Thessalonica that he argues with them *from the scriptures.* We can conclude, that in order to engage in fruitful dialogue with Muslims it is obvious that Christians need to know not only their own scriptures, the Bible, but also the Qur'an.

The Bible therefore seems to be clear that in order to obey the 'Great Commission', Christians are encouraged to do whatever is necessary to 'win people for Christ' (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23) by 'becoming a Greek to the Greeks', etc. This may include studying the Qur'an, going to various places such as the mosque, and engaging in fruitful dialogue. It may however happen that by engaging in such an endeavour, a Christian may wish to convert and accept Islam for various reasons. Chapman (1998:65), for instance, gives evidence that for many converts, the reading of the Qur'an was an important factor in their conversion.

In praxis however, most Christians do not engage in dialogue with Muslims for various reasons such as fear, indifference, complacency and ignorance (cf. Gilchrist 1988:81, see also paragraph 1.2). It must also be said that mission or witness to people of other faiths, such as Muslims, is not as seen necessary by all Christians (cf. Bosch 1977:105).

In my experience I have very seldom heard a Christian minister or leader encouraging Christians to engage in dialogue with Muslims, go to a mosque or to study the Qur'an. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable number of Christians involved in studying the Qur'an and witnessing to Muslims in some way or another and for various motives such as study purposes.

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[205] Gilchrist endorses the approach used by Paul as a method to be applied for Christians to witness to Muslims today. One could consider the different socio-religious settings: Paul grew up in Judaism and was familiar with the proceedings of the synagogue and he knew the Jewish faith very well. This is a very different background from most Christians of today who are often unacquainted with Islam, the mosque being unfamiliar, often foreign and totally new.

From the above one can deduce two approaches as to whether or not a Christian should study Islam. Interestingly enough, each side bases its arguments on the different directions of interpretations of the Bible. The cause of this lies in the fact that the Biblical data lends itself to more than one interpretation and as a result, people adopt contradictory positions. Bosch (1977:141-146) has described these two 'lines' as the 'universalistic' and the 'particularistic'. Bosch (:142) argues that

> … in both the Old and the New Testaments there are two 'lines' which in a certain sense stand in tension with one another. One we would mark as exclusive, negative towards all extra-Biblical religions, and particularistic. The other is inclusive, positive towards extra-Biblical religions, and universalistic. Some scholars select one 'line' rather that the other, and thus arrive at conclusion which differ from those of men who choose the other.

Bosch is of the opinion that both 'lines' should be held together rather than to choose only one 'line' and disregard the other. How should this argument be practically applied in regard to our question, namely whether or not a Christian should be encouraged to study Islam? I believe that every Christian should be free to study Islam according to his/her calling. There should be no compulsion nor restriction applied from Christian leadership in this respect. With regard to witness and dialogue, I have always maintained that every Christian can be a witness but the more one knows about the other person's religion the better. I agree therefore with Bosch (1977:206) when he says: "Our lack of respect for others and their convictions is often apparent in our unwillingness to learn as much as possible about them. Conversely: the more willing we are really to know and understand, the more temperate will our pronouncements about them become."

This whole concept may have positive and negative consequences seen from a Christian point of view. On the one hand Christians may expose themselves and as a result, often reinterpret their own faith and grow spiritually. On the other hand it may lead to vulnerability and eventually to conversion. This may be the reason why Christian leaders, and respectively Muslim leaders, often discourage their own people from studying the other religion; i.e. the fear that they may convert. Fear should, however, not dominate our actions. Bosch (1977:207) has rightly said: "Authentic Christian faith is vulnerable … to choose the path of 'invulnerability' out of fear of failure might in reality mean worshipping a false

god". This is a significant statement which should be heeded by Christians and Muslims alike!

7.2.2 Mystical

Mystical experience was another motive which came to the fore in the conversion narratives. Six out of ten interviewees who converted from Islam to Christianity said that a supernatural experience contributed greatly to their decision to convert. Parshall (1980:23-24), too, observes the same phenomena about converts from Islam that "there has been an appreciation of the supernatural on a practical level. Visions and dreams of spiritual significance have been fairly frequent".

However, none of the 10 interviewees who changed from Christianity to Islam reported any kind of mystical experience as part of their conversion. I am not hereby implying that converts to Islam never have mystical experiences.[206] All I am saying is that the converts to whom I have spoken did not report any mystical experience.[207] Other research has shown, that Muslims do also have supernatural experiences in the conversion process, though only few in number, such as for instance Poston (1992:170), who out of 72 conversion narratives reports that three had had a supernatural experience.

Another significant fact can be seen in the analysis of the conversion narratives. All six converts who reported a mystical experience emphasised that this supernatural encounter happened towards the end of their conversion process and that it was the 'final straw' which convinced them to make a commitment to Christianity.

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[206] See Fisher (1979) in his article on *Dreams and Conversion in Black Africa.* Fisher is convinced that "dreams have been important since the very beginning of the Muslim era", but he also observes that "very little has been published". He (1979:226) discusses the following categories of dreams: meaningless, evil, good, dreams which concern oneself and others.
[207] I have also spoken with the Imam of the Soweto mosque (interview 15/5/98) on this matter. He also has not personally met Muslims who had a mystical experience as part of their conversion process.

By analysing the mystical events reported by these converts, a few more things can be said. The converts seemed to be convinced that the voices they heard and things they saw came indeed from God. They interpreted these events as emanating from God, Jesus or the Spirit of God. The converts appeared to be absolutely convinced that God had spoken to them in a direct and particular way and that they could therefore be sure that to convert to Christianity was the right step to take. The following list briefly recalls the events (cf. chapter 5):

- C1 said that *Jesus* spoke to him out of a furnace: "I will be your helper". He was also convinced that it was Jesus who gave him the Bible reference from John 3:3.
- C4 reported that *God* told her to find John 3:16 in the Bible and attend a certain church (name mentioned).
- C5 was convinced that *God* spoke to her during a church service. As a result she had a supernatural experience.
- C6 related that she had an "Impression during the sermon" from the *Spirit of God.*
- C9 is convinced that it was the voice of *Jesus* who said to him: "Turn to me and I will lead you through".
- C10 is absolutely convinced that the dream he had was from *God.*

The mystical conversion motive is related by women and men on an equal basis from my research. There appears to be no gender prevalence. These people also did not report that such experiences were happening on a regular basis in their lives. On the contrary, the converts expressed their surprise that God had spoken to them in this unique form. Further, I cannot detect any pattern in respect of culture or class among the converts, especially as it is from such a small sample.

As mentioned above, none of the converts from Christianity to Islam related any mystical experience from their conversion narratives. From a Christian point of view, it can be argued that God was at work in the lives of the converts who mentioned a mystical experience. Orthodox Islam on the other hand is fundamentally not mystical in nature (cf. Poston 1992:170). This notion can possibly also be explained by the age-old difference between Islam and Christianity which surfaced when Jews asked Muhammad to perform a miracle (sign = *'ayah*) in order to prove his prophethood. Muhammad declined and said that he was just a 'warner to Arabia', one who did not perform miracles and signs, and that the

miracle of the Qur'an was his only authentication form God. It is for this reason that a verse of the Qur'an is called an *'ayah* (sign = miracle).[208]

Therefore, from the beginning, Islam did not build its credibility on miracles or emotional experiences, but on a pragmatic, world-affirming spirituality of obedience to God's sovereign will as revealed in the Qur'an. In general, converts to Islam say that the change came about in an entirely natural way, without any obvious supernatural intervention (Chapman 1998:72). Mystical experiences such as dreams do however appear in popular Islam (cf. Musk 1989:41,82,99, etc, Gilchrist 1994:123-126). These mystical experiences are, however, only known to happen by believers within popular Islam.

7.2.3 Affectional

It is significant that the affectional conversion motive is the one which, together with the religious motive, was mentioned by the most converts. It appears in 18 out of the 20 conversion narratives. It can therefore be concluded that the affectional motive, which includes interpersonal bonds to either family members, relatives or friends, is a powerful influence for conversion. In addition, it can be assumed that the reason why people convert (in both directions) is often not that they are intellectually convinced about the new religion but because a 'friend has shown them the way' (cf. Poston 1991:163).

From the narratives it can be concluded that the affectional motive played a significant role in each case in the transformation to the new religion (see chapter 5 and 6). It is also evident that the personal affectional bond is in some cases similar as the summary shows:
 C1: Friendship and witness of a Christian.

C2 and C3: Witness, love and enthusiasm of Christian missionaries.

C5: Witness of Christian spouse.

C6: Witness and love as experienced from a pastor and his wife.

C7: Care and love received by cousin.

C8: Family bond to his son and practical witness of Christians.

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[208] See references in the Qur'an which address this issue: Surah 6:109, 10:20, 13:7, 17:59, 21:5, 29:47-51. The reference in Surah 29:47-51 reveals a clear contrast between miracles and Qur'anic verses.

C9: Friend from school and his lifestyle.

C10: Personal bond of love and later marriage to a Christian woman.

In respect of the Muslim converts, a summary of the following people who made a significant impact with their witness and lifestyle is listed:

M1: A friend of his who converted to Islam earlier.

M3: A friend of his who later became his personal teacher in religious matters.

M4: The life witness of a "very simple Indian man" and a *sheikh* who became his teacher.

M5: A Muslim missionary to whom he felt drawn.

M6: Personal bond of love and later marriage to a Muslim woman.

M7: The interpersonal bond to his mother's second husband who was a Muslim.

M8: A Muslim friend who helped him in a time of need.

M10: Love relationship to a friend who later became her husband (also a convert to Islam: M9).

Chapman (1998:64) too observed that "personal contact with Muslims" was a significant influence in the conversion process. It can be concluded that the witness and lifestyle of local Christians and Muslims played an important role in the lives of these 18 converts and contributed to their conversion in a significant way. In addition to being agents of culture change these Christians and Muslims might therefore be called advocates of an innovation called conversion (Luzbetak 1988:351).

Regarding mixed marriages a number of people have confirmed that in the case of a marriage in the Indian community the wife is expected to adopt her husband's religion (see e.g C10).[209] Levtzion (1979:238) says of the role of Muslim women in conversion that they "are considered as having no faith apart from that of their husbands" (cf. Arnold 1974:290). In addition, in the Muslim community the non-Muslim spouse is usually expected to convert to Islam (see C7). Muslim men are allowed and even encouraged to marry Christian women but Muslim women are not allowed to marry Christian men (Qur'an 5:6, cf. Kateregga & Shenk 1981:26). It is the duty of the Muslim man to convince his Christian wife of the superiority of Islam and to motivate her to convert since mixed marriages are

not recommended to be of permanent nature in Islam (cf. Tröger 1986:124). Women in Islam appear to be not treated as equal to men (cf. Devadason 1982:36-37, Vanzan 1996:332, Maurer 1996:50-52). Syrjänen (1984:20, 103) is of the opinion that the position of women in Islam "seem to run counter to those of present-day ideals".

So far the affectional motive as discussed in this section appears to have a 'pulling' effect. As discussed in paragraph 3.4.1, the affectional motive may also have a 'pushing' effect in the form of a crisis. The research reveals the following two categories of crisis:

1. Death of a family member, relative or friend (C1, C3, M2, M6, M7).
2. Marriage problems which ended in divorce (C5, C8).

In these cases the convert lost a person in his/her life who is no longer present. This loss of an important affectional bond causes the convert to be 'vulnerable' or 'available' to a new religion. In my experience, the convert mainly belonged to the former religion as long as this significant other person was present. When this bond was broken, the religious affiliation was also questioned.

7.2.4 Socio-Political

Five out of the ten converts form Christianity to Islam indicated that the socio-political situation in South Africa was a reason for them to convert to Islam. For four of these five converts this motive was the initial factor why they were motivated to consider an alternative religion. This means that a significant percentage of the Muslims living in South Africa today and who converted from Christianity, entered a conversion process because of the existence of apartheid in South Africa (cf. ICSA 1985:16).[210]

This fact confirms Rambo's (1993:41) hypotheses: "Indigenous cultures that are in crisis will have more potential converts than stable societies" (see also my discussion on this matter in 3.3.4). Other reports confirm Rambo's hypotheses as well regarding the socio-

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[209] For a comprehensive study on the topic on 'women's conversion to Islam', see Shatzmiller (1996:235-266).
[210] My sample is however too small to make generalised conclusions.

political conversion motive (Sarbin & Adler 1970:607, Augustine 1981:51). Conversion thus becomes an act of revolt against the religion and society in which the converts were born and brought up. It is a break with their past with all its painful memories. In Muslim minds, Christianity is identified with Western culture, colonial domination, exploitation and imperialism (Wells 1989:105).

Many Africans looked back to the roots of Christianity in South Africa and saw it as 'forced conversion' and part of the 'evil package' brought by the European Imperialists (cf. Magubane 1990:36, Levtzion 1979:187). Christians appeared to have failed to treat people equally and as a result of socio-political frustrations many now accept the promise of equality offered by Islam (cf. Devadason 1982:61-62, Arnold 1974:218). In South African black townships, therefore, socio-political protest has assumed the form of conversion in the lives of some people.

None of the interviewees who converted from Islam to Christianity implied that this motive played any role in their conversion experience. The political climate, as outlined in chapter one, didn't seem to promote conversion in this direction.

This does not mean, that the socio-political situation does not play a role in conversion from Islam to Christianity. All I am saying is that in these cases at hand, I did not come across such a motivation from the interviews. Studies in other parts of Africa and the rest of the world have shown that the socio-political climate indeed plays an important role in conversions to Christianity (cf. Butselaar 1981, Syrjänen 1984, Kyu 1983, Devadason 1982:20). One could ask whether the socio-political climate during the apartheid era discouraged conversion from Islam to Christianity in South Africa. This question is difficult to answer or to assess as to what extent the political situation was a barrier to conversion in this direction. The fact is, that from the converts C1-C10 (as recorded in chapter 5) six out of ten converted before the year 1994. This means that these Muslims became Christians despite the odds against Christianiy in respect of the political arena.[211]

Islam is a 'total way of life' including religious, economic, political and social life. It appears that some people who are politically more aware tend to favour Islam instead of

Christianity, since Islam offers 'equal justice to all'. Christians, on the other hand, tend to separate church and state, and fed a greater obligation to the church than the state. Muslims appear to lay similar emphasis on the 'purity of faith' as well as 'justice in the state'. Chapman (1998:68) reports as well that the "disgust of racism" has motivated many people to turn their back on Christianity and embrace Islam. The situation as recorded in this study of socio-politically motivated conversions because of apartheid in South Africa, therefore does not stand alone. Chapman (1998:68) says: "Both in the USA and in Britain … many blacks feel that Christianity is the white person's religion and have become Muslims in reaction to the racism they have experienced."

7.2.5 Material

The material motive appears in five of the conversion narratives (see chapter 5 and 6). This motive has been mentioned and discussed in a number of studies on conversion. Schreuder and Oddie (1989:513), for instance, when speaking about such inquirers use terms such as 'would-be-converts' whereas the motive is called a 'temporal' reason. Often this motive is criticised by Christians as not being a 'true' motive of conversion and many look down on these converts. Butselaar (1981:113) however, is of the opinion that "in criticising this as a motive for conversion, we should not forget that many a new church member first attracted by material gain later developed real Christian maturity through the teaching and preaching of the young Christian community." I agree with this opinion and testimonies of converts seemed to support this view as for instance in the case of C2.

There are cases where the material motive is misused, namely in the form of bribes. Devadason (1982:46, 51) reports of cases in India where money was used to bribe people to conversion. In this context he speaks of money used as an 'incentive'. Devadason is of the opinion that

> those who are bribed to embrace one religion will keep on making further demands that it would be impossible to satisfy and, therefore, at some point or other they will be disillusioned and will be bound to revert to their original religion. No one can be sustained

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[211] The converts are the following: C1, C3, C5, C6, C8, C10.

by bribes endlessly … those who are converted by such allurement can only become parasites.

These are strong words but I think there is some truth in them and people who are engaged in winning converts should be warned about this matter. In cases where people convert by accepting a bribe they can surely become 'parasites' and may demand more and more. When it ceases they may turn to another religion where their need is met. Devadason (1982:46) is however convinced that "no religious leader worth his name would resort to bribery to win adherents to his religion". In addition, he also views such methods as "an insult to those who are converted". I agree with Devadason that such methods as bribes are unethical and that people who convert to a religion because they were bribed usually revert at some later time. There might be conversion cases in South Africa where bribery was involved.[212] As far as I am aware, however, none of the converts interviewed in this study converted for this reason.[213]

As already noted, the relative importance of each motive depends on the individual and the circumstances. Epstein (1985:301)[214] indicates that the need to maintain the stability of a conceptual system is fundamental and therefore an important motive in respect of the decision making process. In Maslow's (1970:17) basic need hierarchy, the 'physiological needs' are the strongest. Maslow is of the opinion that if a person is hungry "no other interests exist but food … Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating".

I agree with this notion and say that it applies to conversion too. In other words, if a person sees that his/her basic needs are fulfilled he/she is often prepared to change religion if this is seen as an advantage. People with serious physiological needs often display a high 'availability' for conversion (see discussion in section 2.5).

The kind of people who may convert for material reasons can be categorised in the following way:

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[212] C2 reported that he had been visited by Muslim leaders who offered him money if he would revert to Islam again. C2 however refused (interview 11/12/97).
[213] I must concede that it is unlikely for a person who accepted a bribe to admit that in an interview with a relative stranger. It can therefore not be ruled out as a factor in any of these interviews.
[214] Epstein's theory has been presented in section 3.2.3.1.

- Those who have no job and therefore no daily income with no money to buy food or the necessities for daily living. Many are desperate and will do anything to improve their quality of life. Some will even be prepared to change their religion if they are offered a job or some food on a daily basis. Most of these are poor African people and Christians (nominal or committed), since in South Africa there are many more Christians than Muslims and also relatively few poor Muslims.

- Young people who would like to study and cannot afford to pay for their education.

- Immigrants: Especially Muslims from North African countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt etc. … most of them came to South Africa after the 1994 election in April when SA became an open country for these immigrants and many thought they would find a new life here (see for instance C2).

These people, who represent the masses of poor people in South Africa, show a high 'availability' to conversion. Stravers (1988:335) concludes from social studies that "poverty is accompanied by certain worldview assumptions … the culture of poverty is characterised by certain kinds of interpersonal relations, time orientation, and value systems." Stravers adopts a model of a 'culture of poverty' from Oscar Lewis. He lists 5 'cultural traits': 1) A strong present-time orientation, 2) Inability to plan for the future, 3) A sense of resignation and fatalism, 4) A mistrust of government, 5) A sensitivity to status distinction: strong feelings of helplessness, dependency, alienation, powerlessness, inferiority, and worthlessness.

A remark frequently made by Muslim converts,[215] especially from the category where the material motive is an important part of conversion, is that "Islam and Christianity are the same religions and that there is no difference in religious teaching" (see especially the comments made by M8 in this context). Many converts whom I have met in the Soweto mosque converted because of material reasons and they indicated to me that they see "little or no difference between the two religions". In respect to the similarities in the teaching, Wingate (1981:36) made the following observation:

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[215] This does not only apply to the converts interviewed in this study but also to many more converts with whom I had contact since 1992 in Johannesburg, especially in Soweto.

> The Muslim emphasis on One God and on Jesus as prophet, as well as its social teaching: The jump from Christianity does not seem a great one. They do not feel they are leaving Jesus behind them, only the church, and that they do not mind doing.

It is true that there is common ground in the two faiths. However, there might be other reasons why so many converts make this statement that there is no difference. Psychologists have pointed out that human beings are generally resistant to change (cf. Pasquier 1978:195-198, Thouless 1978:138, Epstein 1985:302). For this reason people are inclined to receive the benefits from the members of the new faith, but if possible avoid actual conversion. Many Christians have become Muslims in South Africa in order to get food or a job.

However, sometimes these converts have a bad conscience,[216] especially when they are compelled to justify their action to their Christian relatives. It therefore comes as a convenient explanation that there is really no difference in religion and as a result it does not really matter whether you call yourself a Muslim or a Christian. However, this works only in societies where people are poorly informed about the teachings of their own as well as other religions. In other words, there appear to be many adherents of Islam and Christianity in South Africa who have little education about their own faith and do not know the theological differences between other religions.

In this respect, we may recall a discussion with convert M8.[217] In his conversion story he stated emphatically that Islam and Christianity are the same religions and that there is no difference. Though I politely pointed out a fundamental difference between the two faiths he insisted that there is no difference.[218] However, he also admitted that he avoids any controversial argument with Muslims and Christians. He seems to be a person who depends on Muslims in order to be employed in an Islamic company. He indicated to me that if he were not a Muslim then his job and as a result his income would be in jeopardy. He does not want to risk this considering the high unemployment rate in South Africa.

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[216] This has been confirmed by converts, e.g. C7 who became a Muslim at the age of 30 by marriage and after the divorce converted back to Christianity at the age of 44.

[217] M8 comes from a RC/Anglican background and converted to Islam at the age of 40.

In the above section I looked at each conversion seperately in the context of the 20 conversion narratives. Nextly, I discuss some significant emerging aspects which came to the fore in the conversion narratives.

7.3 Analysis of some Emerging Aspects

7.3.1 Desire to Witness

Christian writers have put forward their different emphases on the implications of conversion to Christianity. The privileges of conversion are many, implying such benefits that come with "the deepest kind of personal cleansing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal" (Newbigin 1969:112).

A significant feature in the conversion stories of this study after the actual conversion experience, is the strong desire to witness to family and friends from the former religion. This notion has been noted as well by other scholars such as Whiterup (1994:110). In synthesis of his study, Whitherup (1994:110) lists as point 15: "One prominent effect of conversion is the urge to give *testimony* to others and consequently to evangelise."

Converts seem to be convinced that their newly found faith is the truth and they are therefore eager to share their joy, the new life and newly found peace. Since this desire to witness is prominent in a number of the conversion stories here, I quote some of the actual excerpts:

C1: "The desire in my heart is to reach out to every Muslim friend of mine … to my family first … no matter what it takes … If we had even 10% of Christians in this area with the same commitment to the Lord we could reach this whole area. But we need to make a stand and go for it[219] … The Lord has been good to me, my one sister and her son and daughter they have all converted."

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[218] I pointed out the following difference to M8: In Surah 4:157 the Qur'an denies the crucifixion of Jesus whereas the Bible clearly attests to this event.

[219] At the first interview (28/11/97), C1 said that at present he is explaining the Gospel to nine Muslim friends in secret and some of them expressed the desire to become Christians but out of fear have not converted yet. It

C4: "I pray that God will use me to reach them … I actually have a vision of my family and how God will use us to minister to others … That was an opportunity to share my testimony and that's what I did … I believe that one day they will know the truth….and it didn't worry me that everyone around me were Muslims because. I had the authority … I thank God that he has chose me … I am a Christian now for three years and it's wonderful to serve God. I believe that I serve the true God and I pray that every Muslim out there will come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour".

C5: "She said I should go back to being a Muslim. But I told her what I have gained through Christ I will not give him up for all the money in the world … one day I told my sister about my relationship with God … I witness to all my family even at public functions".

C6 seemed to witness for her new faith in a more passive way. A friend of hers remarked the following: "You have nothing to be happy about but you always have a smile on your face … What is it?". C6 then replied: "It is because I know the Lord Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour." Partly as a result of this testimony the friend too accepted the Christian faith.

C10: This convert had a vision of his own Muslim father "burning in hell". His father asked him why "he was never told about Jesus". This vision motivated C10 to attend a Bible College in order to be trained as an evangelist and minister in a church. C10 has a deep desire to witness to his family and to the whole Muslim community in his particular suburb of Johannesburg. Today he is serving a church where there are a number of people from an Islamic background. C10 is also respected, after many years of being a Christian, in some sectors of the Muslim community. He is sometimes called by Muslims to pray for certain needs.

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is a fact that there are 'secret believers', i.e. Individuals who outwardly belong to Islam but in their hearts are Christians. These people do not openly admit their allegiance because of fear of death or other threats to their lives. I have met such people myself, but it is also reported by authors such as Schreuder and Oddie (1989:517).

M2: "My aim is to stick to Islam and I would like to spread it amongst my people in South Aftica … make the whole of South Africa Muslim … even the President himself must be Muslim."

M4 became himself an Islamic spiritual leader. He is eager to teach other people, mainly Muslims, to gain deeper spiritual knowledge: "For the last 11 years then I have been taking this knowledge into the world and making it practical."

M7: "All I can say is as a Muslim I'm very happy … I have studied Islam extensively and I have already converted about 20 Christian friends to Islam."

These are therefore 8 converts out of 20 who indicated to me during the interview that they are eager to share their new faith with others. These respondents did this without my asking them. I have met many Muslims and Christians who have been 'born' into their religion and it is my observation that I seldom find such enthusiasm to witness as among the converts. How can this phenomenon be explained? A reason might be that many of these converts have experienced a dramatic change in their lives as is evident from the conversion narratives. They often had to bear the high cost of losing their family as a result of rejection. To go through such dramatic life changes, a person needs to be deeply convinced that the step taken is the right one. Because of this strong conviction, these converts develop a great eagerness to see their own people from the former religion taking the same step and accepting the newly found truth.

Another explanation is that the Muslims and Christians who are 'born' into their respective faiths often view religion as a personal or private matter of which they see no need to share it with others. Converts, on the other hand, often have a 'real' faith where they see the necessity of witnessing as they themselves relied on a witness who told them about this new faith. In addition, as the convert reads the book of the new faith, be it the Bible or the Qur'an, they will come across the command to share their faith (see e.g. Matthew 28:18-20 and Surah 16:125). The new converts have at the same time a strong desire to obey the commands of God. It is therefore no surprise that these converts often become spiritual leaders in the new community and propagate the new faith from a central position in the

community; e.g. C10 is today a pastor in a Pentecostal Church whereas M4 has become a well known spiritual leader in the Muslim community of Johannesburg.

A verse in the Bible which may bear special significance regarding to the topic of 'conversion and witness' is the verse in 1 Peter 2:9:

> But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

A convert to Christianity might find this verse very inspiring since he believes that God has called him/her 'out of darkness' into the light. He/she certainly wants to praise God for the newly found faith as is evident in the conversion narratives. The convert also feels that he is being called to be a 'priest' which means to witness and serve the people. This and other verses in the Bible may indeed stimulate the converts in their desire to witness.

As I have indicated above, there are a number of verses in the Qur'an and *hadith* which call Muslims to *da'wah* work (cf. Maurer 1996:6-8) and motivate them in the desire to witness.

7.3.2 Opposition and Persecution

A number of converts expressed their grievances regarding the opposition and even persecution they encountered from their own family, friends, religious leaders and the community (cf. Poston 1991:163). Some of this information comes from the stories told on the tape recorder while other excerpts come from unrecorded interviews:

C1: "I was confronted by guys from PAGAD; they actually beat me up and asked me if I would now continue being a Christian and speak to other Muslims? … There are many others who are Muslims who want to be Christians but they are afraid of the Muslims, I just tell them that if the Lord is speaking to you then you must do what I did and follow him".

C2: Since he was away from his original religious community, he did not face direct persecution. However, C2 relates the event that some day, while studying at the Bible

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College, he received a visit from three local Muslims. These Muslim leaders came to urge him to come back to Islam by leaving the Bible College. They also offered him a job and accommodation. In addition, these Muslim leaders also promised him to arrange a marriage with a South African Muslim woman. The visa problem would then be solved. C2 felt the pressure of this temptation but he stayed firm and rejected this offer.

C4: "It's not easy to accept that people deliberately ignore you or look the other way when you come along and to be told that because you converted you cannot get a lift with them anymore … it was tough for me in the beginning because I came up against a lot of persecution … like when I would go to our family doctor who is a staunch Muslim … there they questioned me about my conversion … and when they came for my sister's wedding I was questioned and persecuted".

C9: "I think that most Muslims who are born Muslim never get a chance to compare the religions from a Muslim point of view. Everything a Christian does is seen as sin … I also think that if more young Muslim people could find out more about the Christian religion, I'm sure that most of them would consider converting to Christianity".

C10 has been persecuted severely. He relates the following story: "When my family found out that I was still going out with this (Christian) girl … the whole thing turned around again. They also discovered that I was going to church and they became very upset. They began to persecute me and they beat me up and warned me not to see her again … because of that my family put me out of the house and had a burial service because they believe that if you reject Islam you are dead, you don't exist … it was very frustrating and hurtful and I was really down … it's now been 19 years and my family still don't want to do anything with me … a lot of Muslims have come here to our church, they have come to threaten us and assault us." The house of C10 and his family was at one stage petrol bombed by Muslims and burned down completely.

M3 was facing opposition from his family when he confessed to them that he had accepted Islam. The most severe pressure was from his father: "One day I went to my father … I told him I have become a Muslim. He stood up and was so angry he started shouting and it was

big tension … my father began to threaten me that if I don't leave Islam 'I am going to kick you out of school'".

It is significant that 5 Christians faced persecution compared to only one Muslim. Why is it that Muslims who want to become Christians face more opposition and persecution than their counterparts? Why do Muslims who desire to become Christians often have a hard time? Why do Muslims have to inquire about Christianity in secret and out of fear often do not dare to convert, as C1 and C9 reported? There is no official law from the Christians to persecute anyone who wants to leave the Christian faith. In Islam however, there is the 'Law of Apostasy'[220]. Although this legislation is not binding in most contemporary Muslim states, apostates are threatened with severe punishments – exile, imprisonment or murder by their relatives (Tröger 1986:124).

As seen above, Islam is a missionary religion. It is a basic Muslim duty to bear witness in one's community to the message of Islam and try to convert them. The Islamic *ummah* may tolerate the 'unbelievers' with a view to their eventual conversion and salvation (Qur'an 9:6). Why is such a privilege not accorded to people of other faiths? This restriction appears to be against the spirit of human rights and religious freedom (cf. Batumalai 1991:126).

In recent years it is religious pluralism that has forced people into the realisation that some members of their own faith community might convert to another religion. This is a new aspect for many and not easy to handle. The conversion of family members especially threatens to cut them off from a future generations of believers. The fear now exists that their grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be numbered among the 'infidels' (Le Mond 1993:5). This causes anguish not only to Christians but especially to Muslims. Muslims try their utmost to prevent or at least make it as difficult as possible for members of their own faith to convert to another. However, Devadason (1982:22) is convinced that persecution is counterproductive and only leads to the furtherance of the cause of the religion being persecuted: "It is a historical fact that martyrdom has only helped the spread of any religion". From a legal position, Devadason (1982:34) says that "the right to propagate religion is incomplete without the right to win any adherents."

Any Muslims contemplating conversion from Islam to Christianity will know that the step will not be without reaction from their own community. At best they can expect to be ostracised by their people and disowned by their family. At worst they could become martyrs for the faith in a very short time. Zwemer (1975[1924]:73) confirms this notion by saying: "Every one who makes the choice faces the possibilities of loneliness, disinheritance, persecution and even death". From early times it has been taught that the penalty for the apostasy of an individual from Islam is death (Swidler 1986:182). Gilchrist (1986:340) is of the opinion: "There does not seem to be any Qur'anic authority for this extreme form of punishment, one which allows a Muslim no degree of freedom to discover the true revelation of God independently for himself."

The *hadith,* however, openly state that Muhammad demanded the death sentence for those who turn their backs on Islam, whether for another faith or not (cf. Zwemer 1975[1924]:38). One such reference is the *hadith Muwatta Imam Malik*, page 317 (quoted from Gilchrist 1986:340):

> Zaid b. Aslam reported that the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) declared that the man who leaves the fold of Islam should be executed.

There is evidence in Islamic history showing that this penalty was often enforced, occasionally by public authority but usually by relatives and others taking the law of Islam into their own hands. Many of the jurists of Islam have held that the *murtadd* (apostate) should be given three days or three public opportunities to return to Islam and is only to be put to death if she/he refuses to do so (cf. Zwemer 1975[1924]:40).[221]

There are some Muslim writers who say that the death penalty is an appropriate consequence for apostasy as the public image of Islam is allegedly shamed and weakened by such defections: "An act like this is a kind of mockery and a practice which misleads the pious" (Tabbarah 1978:390). It is, however, hard to see how the execution of converts from

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[220] In this section the 'Law of Apostasy' is described only from the orthodox point of view (the view of the Sunni Muslims who constitute the majority). Other groups, such as the Ahmadiyya, have different attitudes in this issue (cf. Gilchrist 1986:344-345).

[221] In an interview (1/10/1997), a Muslim scholar in Johannesburg confirmed the validity of this law to me.

Islam restores its image. Cragg (1967:336-337) has also expressed similar misgivings about a religion that has to confirm and retain the allegiance of its adherents through forceful means and the threat of dire, immediate consequences for those who dare to express their disillusionment with it.

Freedom of religion in Islam has, all too often, only meant the freedom to become a Muslim. No one appears to be free to leave Islam of his/her own free will and choice. Even though a swift martyrdom may be less likely today than it was in earlier times, the convert, especially in solidly Muslim lands, still faces a harrowing future. As an example, Zwemer (1975[1924]:22-23)[222] quotes from a letter written by an Egyptian convert from Islam to Christianity, one which reflects the experiences of many Christians in Muslim lands:

> I am again a prisoner, unable to go out at all or even to step on the balcony; because they are so excited and watching me night and day, desiring to quench their thirst with my blood, the blood of the helpless young Christian. My brothers, according to their law, often assured me that if they murdered me they would be martyrs for doing so. I thank God who delivered me out of the hands of my Government, which I fully believe is watching me and allowing my relatives to do whatever they please and wish, so that I may be destroyed.

Conversion to Christianity for a Muslim often means expulsion from family and community. Are there alternatives to this problem? Does a Muslim have to publicly confess that he/she has converted to Christianity? Or can the person not remain a 'Muslim' and at the same time follow Jesus? Teeter (1990) for instance, has proposed the model 'Muslim followers of Jesus' as an alternative. He asks the question: "Is it possible for a Muslim to walk with Christ, as a nominal Muslim, without actually converting to Christianity?"

Teeter suggests a 'dynamic equivalent' to conversion and calls these Muslims 'tentative believers'. In this model conversion is seen as a process in a continuum and not as a sudden event. Teeter (1990:310) derives his argument from Mark 16:16 where he deducts three categories of people:

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[222] Zwemer (1975[1924]:57-76) quotes many more converts who have been persecuted; some of them are gruesome stories told of different kinds of brutal persecution and torture.

Response	Status
1. Believes and is baptised	Salvation assured
2. Does not believe	Condemnation assured
3. Believes, but is not baptised	Outcome unresolved (decided on day of judgement)

According to Teeter, the third possibility is the grey area where he thinks that many 'tentative' Muslim believers may be found. Teeter justifies his theory from this statement. Or in other words, Muslims find legitimate reason to remain Muslims and yet follow Jesus.

Many name these converts 'secret believers' (Zwemer 1975[1924]:24). By doing so they avoid the harsh consequences of the 'Law of Apostasy'. Whether this is the best way to follow is a matter of debate in Christian circles. I am of the opinion that generally we should not prescribe to a convert which way he/she should follow. I think that under the 'Law of Apostasy' it is wrong to urge a convert to make an open confession since it could lead to martyrdom (Zwemer 1975[1924]:105). The convert should decide for him/herself what way is best according to the present situation. I believe that it is wrong to make rigid rules which should guide all converts, especially when it means imposing possible martyrdom on others from a safe distance.[223]

How should this issue be handled in the future? Many scholars express their hope that religious freedom and liberty will come. Christians should appeal to Muslims to place their religion on the same basis as Christianity and tolerate a 'two-way' conversion process. It is also hoped that in inter-religious discussions Muslim and Christian leaders will come to a mutual understanding, respect and agreement on this issue (cf. Zwemer 1975[1924]:156-159).[224]

7.3.3 Good Responses from People of a former Religion

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[223] Cf. WCC (1980:251). This resolution of the 1980 CWME conference in Melbourne was proposed by Prof David J. Bosch (according to Prof JNJ Kritzinger, UNISA). It clearly expresses this notion of avoiding to impose martyrdom on fellow believers from a safe distance.

[224] I propose the issues of 'Human Rights and Religious Freedom' for further research (see chapter 8.4.2).

A few converts expressed their appreciation with respect to the positive reaction of people from the former faith:

C4: "What amazes me is that the *imam* said that he admires me because I didn't just go along with tradition. That is what Islam is, it's culture and tradition … today if I see him I will still go and shake his hand."

C10 was severely persecuted at the beginning of his Christian life and is still rejected by his immediate Muslim family. However, some Muslims in the community started to change their attitude by observing C10's lifestyle over many years: "I have been in this community for 20 years … people know me … there are some Muslims who call me and ask me to pray for them and their business."

M10: "Then I converted to Islam … I was lucky that my family did not reject me. My father told me that he thinks I am old enough to decide for myself."

There are, unfortunately, relatively few responses mentioned by the converts which indicate that their family, friends and other members of the former faith community reacted favourably in respect to the conversion. However, in a way this is understandable since it is generally a painful experience to see a family member or friend leaving the religion which is dear to all (cf. Le Mond 1993:5).

In a religious pluralistic society it is foreseeable that people will choose to belong to another faith. In other words conversion will take place and people need to come to terms with this new phenomenon and accept the consequences. Attitudes of hatred should make place to understanding and love (see also my proposal in chapter 8.5).

7.3.4 Reasons for bad Relations and Misunderstanding

In chapter 1.2. I stated why there is often a rather bad relationship between Christians and Muslims. Some of the comments made by converts express this notion:

C5: "Muslims are very racist. They think they are the chosen people."

C7: This woman was facing a crisis partly because she did not get proper information from the *imam* about the Islamic way of life: "What the *imam* said was not so clear to me and I didn't understand what he was saying … I was confused." As a result of this, C7 was criticised by her husband for not living up to the Islamic way of life. It is clear that this problem of misinformation did contribute to the already strained marriage relationship.

C8 too complained that "the family that I married into was not serious about Islam….they were just Muslims because they were born into Islam … they never encouraged or motivated me. They never explained anything to me, it became very frustrating." C8 did not feel welcomed in the Muslim family or community. Since he did not receive explanations he remained misinformed and ignorant about the Islamic way of life. In addition, C8 (who is from the 'black' community) also mentioned that racism is causing tension within the Islamic community: "Islam is broken up into two or three types of Muslims. You get the Cape Malay, the Somali and the light complexion Indian … in most cases the white Islamic people are superior to the others … as I mixed with them I realised the difference … there is discrimination – Muslims from Somalia will always be in the background."

C9 suggested that young people should have more opportunities of studying and comparing the two religions of Islam and Christianity. Then people would be more understanding, respectful and tolerant towards each other. C9 also believes that there should be freedom of choice. He is of the opinion that the reason why Muslims distance themselves from the Christian religion is the fear that many would turn to Christianity if they got to know this religion better: "If more young Muslim people could find out more about the Christian religion I'm sure that most of them would consider converting to Christianity."

M3: "In the classes (Christian Bible class) Islam was painted very badly, because we discussed different religions."
M6: "Many Muslims and Christians grow up and they only know their own religion. Then they condemn one another because they do not know the other's religion … I must respect Christianity and all religions."

One of the common problems mentioned was that Christians and Muslims judge and condemn each other without having proper knowledge about the teaching and practice of the other religion. In this respect I would make the following proposal: It would improve the mutual respect and understanding if each faith community could make a greater effort to acquire knowledge directly about the other religions which are present in the same society.

This information about the other religions should be taught by teachers of the respective faiths. This means in practice that an *imam* should go to a church and inform the Christians about Islam whereas a Christian minister should go to a mosque and inform the Muslims about Christianity. People should be allowed to ask questions and have access to more in depth information and teaching if necessary. People of both faiths should have the facility and freedom to visit the place of worship of the other community. Or in other words, Muslims should be encouraged to visit a church service in order to get a clear impression of the faith and first hand information on it. The same should apply to Christians visiting mosques to get first hand information on Islam.

Such an endeavour is however only possible where a genuine desire exists to improve interfaith relations. It also requires openness and honesty in order to correct wrong views and misconceptions about the people of the other faith. This could also lead to people getting rid of their prejudices. I have personally made an effort to work in this direction and can report that it is possible for Christians and Muslims to meet each other, exchange views honestly and learn from each other.[225]

7.3.5 Ritual of Commitment

The ritual of commitment is seen as a final break with the past and as an outward confession of embracing a new faith. It plays a different role in each convert's life (cf. Wells 1989:45, Barclay 1963:92, Kasdorf 1980:185-187). It reveals the depth and seriousness of the convert's intentions. However, in my research very few converts mentioned this event on their own in the tape recording. It seems therefore, that the 'ritual

of commitment' did not play a significant role in the conversion process of the converts in my research. One reason might be, from a Christian point of view, an issue which Wells (1989:45) mentioned: "Much modern evangelism omits the apostolic call to believe and *be baptised*."

However, I did ask the converts to comment on this issue. Even then, I got the impression that this matter did not seem to be important. The following are the answers:

C1: He was baptised in his new church in front of the whole congregation. For C1 it meant not so much for himself as such but that he used this event as a means of witnessing: "It spoke to the deacons and to the whole congregation". Baptism was for C1 an act of obedience in response to the Bible's teaching (Acts 2:38). But on speaking to C1 on various occasion I felt that for him baptism was not such an important factor in his life, as he could hardly remember what really happened.

C2: As indicated above, for C2 the ritual of baptism at the church was a rather formal event in order to please his new Christian friends and thus securing their further help. It was only after about three month study at the Bible college that C2 realised what the Christian faith is about in contrast to Islam. He relates: "That point in my life became my actual commitment to Jesus and not the baptism at the church".

C5 was baptised some weeks after her conversion. On one Sunday, the pastor announced that they conduct a baptismal service. C5 went forward spontaneously to make a public confession of now belonging to Jesus Christ: "I made history in that church by being the first Muslim to be baptised in water". It seemed to be important for C5 to make this public declaration in order to communicate to her friends that she had adopted a new religion and had therefore broken with the past.

M2 recalls his commitment ceremony in the following words: "We went into the mosque … I was with five others who were also joining Islam … we said the *kalimah* and then received a new name … they have given me a certificate and an Islamic document". It

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[225] In the years 1997 and 1998 meetings as suggested here have taken place between the following faith communities: Mondeor Methodist Church and Mayfair mosque; Robertsham Methodist Church and mosque in Robertsham.

appears that this ritual was not a very significant event in M2's life as he did not really want to discuss this matter and he also said he could not really remember it.

M3 decided one day to become a Muslim and went to Mayfair to look for a mosque: "So I went there and said I want to be a Muslim … they took me to the *muezzin's* house and started telling me things about death and the day of judgement … then the *maulana* recited the *shahada* and a paper was signed".

Poston (1991:164) reports from his research that people converting to Islam often find the precepts of Islam less complicated than when compared to Christianity: "In the eyes of the converts the proclamation of the *shahada* was the only requirement for becoming a Muslim; no baptismal ceremonies, mystical experiences, catechetical classes or the like were imposed upon them" (cf. Arnold 1974:413, Gilchrist 1977:73, Naudé 1978:8).

From a Christian point of view, the importance of incorporation into the fellowship of the visible church is obvious from, for instance, the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. One might reason that after Cornelius and his family had received the Holy Spirit, they were fully absorbed into the invisible church. What is striking is that the very first thing Peter did after the Holy Spirit fell on them was to baptise them.[226] In this way they were incorporated into the visible community of those who confessed the same faith (cf. Newbigin 1969:104). Thus, Bosch (1977:213) is of the opinion that baptism "despite, let us reassert, all malpractices and misconceptions which prevail in connection with it – becomes the outward and visible sign of embodiment in the new community."

The question when and whether a convert should be baptised is a matter of debate (cf. Zwemer 1975[1924]:110). Since in Islam there exists the 'Law of Apostasy', an open public confession could mean martyrdom (see section 7.3.2 on this topic). I would therefore agree with Zwemer that we should leave the final decision to the convert and not pressurise him/her in any way. Cragg (1985:305) emphasises this by stating that baptism belongs to the personal realm.

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[226] Rahner (1978:206) is of the opinion that baptism is "*the* event of conversion in the early Church with its baptismal devotion."

Parshall (1980:257) experienced that for many Muslims who converted to Christianity, "baptism is synonymous with the denial of one's cultural, social, political, economic, and religious value systems. Alienation from one's heritage is considered to be subsumed within the act of Christian baptism." Parshall is convinced that Islamic forms should be adapted to Christianity. In South Africa the denial of the value systems is often not as strong and dramatic as Parshall has observed in his field of service (cf. Bate 1993:246, 261).[227] On the contrary, it is my experience that converts have often specifically chosen the act of baptism in order to break with the past life (e.g. C1, C5). Cragg (1985:306) uses the term 'Enchurchment' in this context of baptism. Accordingly, the purpose of the Christian mission is not cultural displacement but it ought to 'enchurch' the converts which means that it "bears creatively upon all areas of its context". Conversion and baptism is therefore not seen as 'migration' but "as the personal discovery of the meaning of the universal Christ within the old framework of race, language, and tradition" (Cragg 1985:306).

For the Muslims the recital of the creed[228] is the first 'pillar' among the five 'pillars' of Islamic practice. This creed has become one of the deliberate acts of piety in Islam, indeed its foremost duty. Anyone wishing to formally become a Muslim need only recite this creed with the express intention[229] to personally profess what he/she is reciting in order to be admitted to the faith. The actual testimony is a single creed: *La ilaha illa'llah Muhammadur–Rasulullah,* which means "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's messenger". This whole confession does not appear in this exact form in the Qur'an, but its two constituent parts appear in Surahs 9:31 and 33:40 respectively. It can be said that this brief declaration is the equivalent of the Apostle's Creed in Islam. The recitation of the Muslim creed is not sacramental in character in contrast to the sacrament of baptism as in the Christian faith (cf. Häring 1978:222).

The first half of the Muslim creed, "There is no god but Allah", implies a commitment to Allah as only Lord. During Muhammad's time in Arabia this meant turning from polytheism as it may be the case today among Hindus or African tribal people. It implies submission to his will, for he alone is Lord. This first part of the creed therefore appears to

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[227] Parshall's experience is mainly based upon his field of missionary service: viz. Bangladesh.
[228] In Islam the creed is known as the *kalimah* (the "Word"), or the *shahadah* (the "Testimony" of Faith).
[229] This intention is known as the Muslim's *niyyah.*

unite Muslims with Jews and Christians, even though many would interpret it as distinguishing them from Christians (Woodberry 1992:33).

The second half of the creed, "Muhammad is the messenger of Allah", distinctly separates Muslims from other faiths. It refers to Muhammad's function as a conveyer of what Allah wants to say to humans. Since, in Islam, God's revelation centres in a book, the focus is on obedience to what it says in contrast to Christianity where God's revelation centres in a person and the focus is on a relationship with Jesus. To affirm Muhammad's function as an apostle implies accepting and obeying the message in the Qur'an and by extension the authorised traditions of Muhammad and the Shari'a law derived from them both (Woodberry 1992:33).

The importance of this creed in Islam can be seen in the fact that it is also written above the *mihrab* in many mosques or above the entrances, on letterheads and posters, etc. In addition, as soon as a child is born into a Muslim family these words are whispered into his/her ears and every effort is made to get a dying Muslim to repeat the testimony (Gilchrist 1986:285). Zwemer (1905[1924]:15) has aptly remarked: "On these two phrases hang all the laws and teaching and morals of Islam".

The above information on the practices and traditions show how prominent the creed in Islam is in the exercise of the Muslim's faith. The first step of a person accepting Islam is that he/she should pronounce the creed. The creed will then be part of the Muslim's every day life. This is quite contrary to the Christian's experience of baptism which is rather seen as a once-off event.

7.3.6 The issues of 'Re-Conversion' and 'Reversion'

Two converts, C7 and C8, represent a special situation in that they grew up in Christian families, became Muslims and then re-converted back to Christianity. The question arises: In which way is this conversion different? One might think that for such a person it is generally easier to make a commitment back to his/her original faith since the Christian way of life is familiar. This is true in the case of C8 (see conversion narrative in chapter 5).

However, in the case of C7 the opposite seems to have been true. It therefore depends very much on the situation whether or not a re-conversion to an original faith is easier or not.

In such re-conversions there are often other 'barriers' at work. For C7 this barrier was 'shame'. C7 felt ashamed to have originally left Christianity and she felt like a betrayer to her original faith community and she said that "I would never have gone back to the church … unless my cousin would have encouraged me". This means that because of this barrier of 'being ashamed' she hesitated strongly to convert back to Christianity. It was only because of the interpersonal bond with her cousin that she re-converted. Having formerly been a Christian did not in this case grant an easier re-conversion as such. However, once C7 had made the step of commitment she immediately felt at home again in the church.

Another issue needs to be discussed in this context. It is the notion of 'reversion' in contrast to 're-conversion'. By re-conversion we understand that a person has, as discussed above, e.g. been brought up as a Christian, converted to Islam at some stage in his/her life, and later 're-converted' back to Christianity. This may also happen vice versa as in the case of the one Moroccan friend of C2. The notion of 'reversion' is however different. I have heard this expression mainly from Black youth from Soweto. It is their teaching that Islam is the 'natural religion' of all human beings and that all people are Muslims whether they know/accept it or not (cf. Poston 1992:169).

Accordingly, a person 'reverts' to Islam as the original religion in that stage of his/her life when the person wilfully acknowledges that she/he is indeed a Muslim and actually has always been a Muslim. I have discussed and defined this term in paragraph 1.8 under the heading of 'convert'. In chapter five it was especially M6 and M9 who emphasised that they have 'reverted' and not 'converted' to Islam. In this study, especially in quotations and in the conversion narratives the terms 're-conversion' and 'reversion' sometimes appear interchangeably as if there were no difference in meaning.

However, as we have seen, in the eyes of many people it makes a big difference. Reversion may be described as being the idea of 'restoring' the lost image of God. The powerful effect of this notion appears to be connected with the search for roots among South African black youth. The question of identity is central in this respect. In addition, this theory gives these

people a valid explanation that it is only 'natural' that they should accept Islam and that Allah had always intended it this way.

CHAPTER 8
IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSIOLOGY

To conclude this study, I first look back at some aspects in past chapters in order to make some conclusions in the light of my empirical findings.

8.1 Traditional Christian Understandings of Conversion

First I give some concluding comments and my opinion on issues raised in chapter two. Comments and practical suggestions are made in the light of my empirical findings in chapters five, six and seven. Then I summarise what in general terms is being understood by Christians about conversion.

8.1.1 The Question of Proselytism

In chapter 2.3 I discussed the missiological debate on conversion versus proselytism. In the light of my findings in this study, I am of the opinion that it is difficult to draw a clear line between 'conversion' and 'proselytism'. A number of scholars have addressed this problem and attempted to distinguish between conversion as a *substitute* in contrast to *supplement*. By *substitute* it is understood that a person accepts a new religion and rejects the old. On the other hand, *supplement* means that a person combines two contradictory religious beliefs (see also discussion on this topic in sections 2.6 and 7.2.5 of this study). Further, I would argue that this question cannot be answered and judged satisfactorily in a general way and it therefore needs to be explored and answered concretely, in a specific context (cf. Dulles 1981:182-183).

I propose a more holistic approach in this matter. I would refrain from trying to distinguish between conversion and proselytism. In fact, I would not use the term proselytism at all but

would instead just speak of 'tolerated' and 'untolerated' conversion[230]. In my opinion, the only type of 'untolerated' conversion is when physical force is applied by the agent of change. It should therefore be agreed by members of the different religions that all should abstain from using physical force in any way to induce conversion.

All other methods of winning converts should be allowed and tolerated. In other words, converts should have freedom to change religion, for whatever motivations. The issue of proselytism or 'applying false methods' is a thorny matter between Christians and Muslims. Each side accuses the other of using unworthy methods and call on each other to suspend such missionary activities. These accusations have been made in the past not only by Christians and Muslims but also by leaders of other faiths, e.g. Hindus (cf. Chambésy Dialogue Consultation 1982, Banerjee 1983:397, Batumalai 1991:119, Scantlebury 1996, Zebiri 1997:29).

This is inappropriate since every faith community has the right to define how it views conversion and which methods may be used for winning converts.[231] In other words, the missionary of any religion should be free to choose his/her methods of winning people. The respondents should also be free to choose the religion they would like to belong to. This whole notion is therefore a matter of religious freedom and individual human rights.[232]

As a result, I would argue that all of the 20 conversions in chapter five and six can be declared as valid or 'tolerated' conversions. I emphasise this issue since some religious leaders, family members and friends of the converts have made pejorative remarks about such conversions and their motives. If my proposal were to be accepted and applied, then in my opinion, there would be more tolerance and freedom of religious change in Christian - Muslim relations.

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[230] In this context, Neill (1978:205) uses the more legalistic terms 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate'. It should be the aim of dialogue between faith communities in a certain society to agree what is 'tolerated' conversion and what not.
[231] For examples of conversion methods used by Christians and Muslims see Chambésy Dialogue Consultation (1982) and Maurer (1996:34-43).
[232] I propose that this issue "human rights and religious freedom in conversion" be a matter of further research (see paragraph 8.6.2).

8.1.2 Individual, Personal or Collective Conversion

The next issue which needs to be considered and which came to the fore in the previous chapters is the question of individualism and collectivism (see paragraphs 2.4 and 3.1.2). Considering each convert and his or her conversion motives the following question may be asked and analysed:

Was the decision to convert primarily an individual one or was it rather collective in nature?

This question might not always be easy to answer, since it is difficult to assess where each convert stands in terms of the collectivist-individualist continuum. In addition, "In group conversion," says Warnshuis (1973:17-18), "the individual is still as important as ever. Groups are influenced through individuals." As the Apostle Paul lived for the conversion and spiritual welfare of the individual (Kähler 1893:174), so he laboured with confidence for the conversion of the world. Warnshuis' contention that the group is influenced through the individual confirms that of the German missiologists Warneck and Kähler. From a missiological perspective "the mistake occurs when the objective is only the individual who is separated from the group. Instead of separating him from the group, the individual should lead the way into the group" (Warnshuis 1973:18). The dimension of quality in New Testament conversions seems to have found its most appropriate expression in the phenomenon of *koinonia* (fellowship)[233]. Here the disciples demonstrated the test of quality in corporate quantitative action and response to God's will in the world for the building of His Kingdom.

One indicator might be the desire expressed by some converts that their family and friends might follow in their decision made (see under topic 7.3.1 above). C1, for instance, indicated a number of times the strong desire to see his family members "saved by the Lord Jesus" as well. It indicates that although his decision to change religion was 'a personal

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[233] Lonergan's (1972) theology of Christian conversion has implications for four dimensions: 1) *Metanoia*: Conversion as human transformation, 2) *Kenosis*: Conversion as generous self -giving, 3) *Diakonia*: Conversion as serving others, 4) *Koinonia*: Conversion as friendship, communion, community. These represent four complementary dimensions of Christian conversion both as event and lifelong process (cf Navone 1989).

one' he longed to be united again with his family by all belonging to the same faith: "The greatest desire in my heart is for me to reach out to my family first". In fact, C1 would have preferred his decision to convert to Christianity to have been a collective decision.

Although the bond of the Islamic *ummah* is generally very strong and reveals more of a collectivist nature, C1 – and for this matter all the other converts from Islam – who all made individual decisions, it was more important to find 'peace' in their lives than to obey the call of the Islamic *ummah* not to embrace the Christian faith. This was the case despite the possible consequences of facing persecution in various ways. C1 was not happy with the 'senseless rituals' in Islam and as a result converted to Christianity. Now he treasures the fact that he can think for himself without having to continue with rituals and doctrines he simply could not understand.

This attitude, which is held by other converts as well, reveals more of an individualist mind set although these converts come from a rather collectivist society.[234] Chapman (1998:71) emphasises this notion when he says that "while Islam stresses that every individual must stand before God on his/her own, it also holds out the possibility of belonging to a local and world-wide community".

A similar attitude is seen in the life of C4. Although this young woman took a very bold and individualistic decision to convert to Christianity, it is evident that she longs to see her family 'saved' and would therefore have preferred a collectivist conversion decision. C4 was especially attached to her mother: "I haven't seen my mother often since I've been a Christian… it hurts me a lot because I know she did not understand because of the spirit of Islam … there were times when I felt my mother's pain because she heard about my conversion … and I prayed for her".

With regard to the religious motives, I suspect that individualist versus collectivist cultures/ personalities do play a role. Someone who is happy to be told what to do, without thinking for him/herself, is from a more collectivist culture. On the other hand, someone who appreciates personal assurance of salvation and the freedom to be led by the Lord, is from a

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[234] See the quotes made by the converts C1-C10 in chapter 7.2.1.1.

more individualist culture. In the quoted testimonies one can find evidence of these kinds of differences (see chapters 5, 6 and 7.2.1.1).

It is commonly known that African culture is more collectivist in nature.[235] Islam as a religion is also more collectivist in nature, which is one reason why it appeals to many African people across the continent.

This issue might have played a role in the conversion process in that the converts found it attractive to accept Islam. Five converts (M1, M2, M3, M9, M10) indicated that they were happy that they were told what to do and that Islam gave them practical guidance on how to live their lives. This would confirm what Levtzion (1979:188) said, namely that "Islam is a patriarchal religion and that suits many in Africa". These converts rejected Christianity partly for the reason that they had to think for themselves too much. I often heard from these converts that they preferred Islam since it is a "simple and straightforward religion where a person is guided in every practical detail of his/her life" (see for example quotes by M1, M9 and M10).

In the conversion narrative of M7 the whole family converted to Islam though M7 insisted that he had free choice between Christianity and Islam and that he took a personal decision to follow Islam. Nevertheless, a collective influence and decision is not to be excluded. It appears that collectivist cultures play a role in the background of many of these conversions, even though this is not immediately obvious.

8.1.3 Who Determines what 'Authentic' Conversion is?

In my empirical findings of chapter five and six I have given evidence that conversions and the respective motives are evident in both directions (i.e. Islam-Christianity and Christianity-Islam). Testimonies of converts in both directions often reveal similar motives. For example, a number of converts appear to have exactly the same pattern of conversion motives: e.g. Religious/Affectional (C7, C8, M3, M4).

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[235] See also the discussion on this topic in chapter 2.4 and 2.5.

Therefore, in my study I have shown that conversion may take place according to the same pattern in both directions. This challenge has naturally been most painfully felt in Christian circles, which have placed a special emphasis on the conversion experience as a distinct and independent phenomenon in the life of a Christian. In chapter two of my study I have discussed the 'specificity of Christian conversion' and outlined what missiologists regard as the uniqueness of Christian conversion' based on Biblical concepts. However, even this argument is debatable, as I have experienced in the case of M2 who emphatically states that since he became a Muslim he has turned closer towards Jesus and loves Jesus much more[236]. This often leaves one puzzled and prompts the question: "Is there then no difference or specificity?".

However, this similarity is only superficial; in a deeper theological analysis the difference can be seen very clearly and the specificity of Christian or Islamic conversions stand out clearly. But the fact remains; if one would listen to the testimonies of converts and omit the names of the religion, one would often not be able to say in which direction the conversion took place.

I have met people who see themselves as belonging to both faiths; Islam and Christianity (e.g. M8, see also discussion in section 7.2.5). They 'stand with one foot on either side of the fence', so to say, adopting a new worship as a useful supplement.[237] Converts often adopt such a position when the motives of conversion allow them additional advantages which they do not want to lose. They like to be both Muslim and Christian in order to retain accumulated benefits.[238]

In such cases one can speak of a person belonging to a new 'mixed' faith or ideology. It is sometimes also called *syncretism* – a topic which is hotly debated by Christians and Muslims (cf. Fisher 1973:37-38). People who belong to two faiths appear to make a compromise which is neither in the interest of Islam nor of Christianity.

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[236] In Islam, Nabi Isa (or Jesus) is one of the popular prophets (see Surah 19:30, cf. Parrinder 1965:37). In my interviews many Muslims have placed Jesus at the second highest position after Muhammad.

[237] Nock (1933) calls this 'adhesion'. It is in contrast with a conscious conversion where a change is involved and a person is convinced that the old way was wrong and the new way right.

[238] This is the case with M8: he wants to be a Muslim in order to secure his job and yet he likes to remain a Christian as he does not want to lose his Christian friends and all the beneficial connections.

The teaching of both faiths does not support such people who belong to both faiths at the same time. Such a state may be described as indifference, complacency and in biblical terms as 'lukewarm', which is strongly rejected (Rev 3:16). Often the problem lies in the relative ease of admission to the two faiths (cf. Fisher 1973:33). On the Christian side there is sometimes a traditional lengthy catechumenate, or a literacy requirement, a probationary period and so on. But even such lengthy requirements do not hinder people from belonging to two faiths. On the other hand, many churches today have very relaxed admission requirements which makes it relatively easy to become a Christian. Questions as to whether a person still belongs to another faith are seldom asked.

In Islam the mere profession of faith, the recitation of the *shahada*[239] is usually sufficient to be accepted as a Muslim and as a member of the *ummah*. It often leads to individuals not making a decisive switch of allegiance. Fisher (1973:33) observes that "while Islam is a prophetic religion, theoretically demanding conversion, it is very often regarded in practice, in its mixed form in Africa, as a non-prophetic one, for which adhesion is entirely adequate".

I previously discussed the general and universal understanding of what 'authentic' conversion is. But I am convinced that each individual faith community must have its own unique understanding of this matter and needs to instruct its members on this teaching. Christians and Muslims need to make more effort to instruct and nurture their members so that they have a good understanding of what their faith is so that their members may grow spiritually. If during the course of instruction some converts decide to leave the religion again, they should have the freedom to do so. Religious leaders are often just content to add people numerically, without taking the trouble of giving proper religious instruction, so that they can show their 'success rate'.

By promoting the issue of proper instruction and calling the respective faith communities to engage in teaching their converts, I am proposing a strategy of 'reform' (see below). It is up to each faith community to work for 'authentic' conversion in its own terms. In this respect I refer to the discussion between Horton (1975:395) and Fisher (1973:31) about three

phases regarding the underlying movement which governs people's reactions to monotheistic ideas. They discuss this scheme as a means of gaining insight into the processes of religious change in West Africa. Although the situation in South Africa is different and the term 'pagan area' is not appropriate, I still believe it is worthwhile quoting these three phases since certain parallels can be drawn:

1. **Quarantine:** A small group of people professes a monotheistic faith in the middle of a Pagan area; but there is little or no exchange of religious ideas.
2. **Mixing:** Monolatric ideas diffuse from the original carriers into the mind of the surrounding population, becoming considerably mixed with Pagan ideas in the process.
3. **Reform:** A small group of holy men who have kept the original monolatry untarnished moves into the 'mixing' area and attempts to convert the 'mixers' to a pure version of the faith.

Similar patterns can be drawn in the South African situation where in a society the two monotheistic religions, Islam and Christianity, are present. Sometimes there is a 'quarantine' situation in that there is no or little exchange of religious ideas and as a result no conversions are taking place. This is however rather the exception. More often, I believe that there is a 'mixing' process at work. In respect of my case study it means that people belong to the two faiths at the same time to a certain degree. This is, as I argued above, not bad in itself but I would say that this should be avoided in the long run and should be corrected by the respective faith communities. A solution could be 'reform'. Religious leaders should endeavour to make sure that proper or 'authentic' conversion takes place, thus converting the 'mixers' to a pure version of the faith.

Based on my empirical research, I have accepted a person as a 'convert', simply because he/she says so, but actually each conversion takes place in the range of a continuum. It would seem that all the converts interviewed can be placed somewhere on a continuum between 'pure' conversion and 'pure' adhesion (see 2.7). It means that although the converts say that they have adopted a new faith, they still retain certain elements of their former faith, for example M8 who is a mixture of being a Christian and Muslim. He accepts

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[239] It is the recitation of the Islamic creed: "There is no God but Allah, and Muahammad is his messenger". Saying this sincerely, usually before two witnesses, is all that is necessary in orthodox Islam to become a Muslim (see also section 7.3.5).

the Qur'an as well as the Bible as fully authoritative books and reads both books in order to gain guidance for his life. Others have also indicated similar attitudes. C4, for instance, has told me that especially in the beginning of being a Christian she had a desire to observe the fast during the Islamic month of *ramadan*.

That converts can be placed on a continuum has been noticed by other authors previously. Horton (1971:104-105) makes this observation concerning Islam in Africa:

> Islam seems to have been fairly content with its catalytic role. It has been tolerant in allowing the individual to make his own particular selection from official doctrines. It has accepted that those who come to the mosque form a continuum rather than a bond of total converts; and it does not nag excessively at those who lie towards the pagan end of the continuum.

What Horton observes about the Muslims in West Africa can be said in similar terms of the Muslims and Christians in South Africa based, on my empirical research. Often religious leaders display a rather 'accommodative' attitude in order to attract prospective converts and make it easier for them to embrace the new religion.

What then is my view on this matter? I would propose a procedure which is similar to that suggested by Brauer (1978:237-139), which he brought forward after having analysed conversion to Puritanism and Revivalism in England and America in the 16th century.[240] I am convinced that this basic suggestion can be generalised and adapted to other faith communities as well. Some ideas are taken from Brauer but I have enlarged on them and would present them as follows. These guidelines are designed for religious leaders:

1. Both sides, Christians and Muslims, should basically accept and welcome new converts for whatever motives people come.
2. But the reverse should also be allowed; people should be free to leave the religious fold for whatever motives they choose.

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[240] See also my discussion on this topic in chapter 2.6.

3. People should even have the freedom to belong to both faith communities if they chose to do so. They should, however, be educated on religious matters and should then be encouraged to make a choice for one religion only.

4. Therefore, religious leaders should constantly teach people,[241] besides other things, about what they understand concerning their own particular version of 'authentic' conversion. People should be free to choose that particular type of conversion and in any case, be free to remain part of that faith community.

5. Religious leaders should hope that through the preaching, nurturing or any other ritual that God might bring individuals to an authentic conversion experience.

6. Converts should also not be pressurised to make any public profession. If a convert chooses to make a public profession it must be of his/her free choice.

7. If a convert chooses and has the desire to enter into membership then the religious leader should guide the convert through the respective conversion ceremony. The paradigm for conversion needs to be carefully worked out by the leaders.

I have endeavoured to use inclusive terminology. I have done this on purpose because I believe that these above guidelines may be successfully implemented by both Christian and Islamic communities.

8.1.4 Summary

According to what has been said in chapter two and in sections 8.1.1-3, the following can be derived about conversion as understood by Christians:

1. It is mainly described in respect to one conversion motive: that is in spiritual terms.

2. It is only seen as a turn in one direction, namely from an 'unchristian' into a Christian way of life or in other words as a one-way process towards Christianity.

3. Conversion is generally understood as involving a necessary radical change that is also an ongoing process.

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[241] Gillespie (1991:194-213) gives practical directions about this matter from a Christian point of view: *Conversion: Identity and Religious Instruction.*

4. It can further be said that the theme of conversion in general and its motives in particular are not an important issue in the church today. People have misconceptions on this topic and even avoid talking about it (Hoffman 1968:1, cf. Costas 1979:12).

It is my conviction and experience that the lack of understanding of 'conversion and its various motives' has serious negative implications for the churches:

1. Because of their narrow view of conversion, Christians lose their holistic witness to non-Christians. ('Holistic witness' attempts to address all the needs of the people, as Jesus did in his ministry, not just the spiritual aspect, cf. Kritzinger & Meiring & Saayman 1994:116-117, cf. Bosch 1991:519, see also section 8.4)
2. Since the churches are mainly concerned with welcoming people who are investigating the spiritual aspect, Christians are often unable to love and welcome other people who approach the church out of motives other than narrowly spiritual ones.
3. The church may lose members because other aspects of human life (social, cultural and political) are not addressed and Christians are therefore tempted to look somewhere else to have those needs met.
4. The local church also often refrains from participating in the constructive building of community life because it regards everything as worldly, except the 'spiritual' motive of conversion.
5. The church may also distance herself from engaging in interfaith dialogue because she does not see the need to listen to, talk to, understand and respect people of other faiths. Many churches view this kind of endeavour as being a 'waste of time and energy' or, worse, as a betrayal of the calling to evangelise.

8.2 Understanding of Conversion in Psychology

As has been discussed in chapter 2.1 and 3.1.1, a serious challenge to the Christian missiological understanding of conversion comes from an increasing interest and investigation in conversion-like phenomena in the social sciences and from research findings in that field of study.

In chapter 3.2.3.1 I have discussed some theories of motivation in the area of psychology. As already indicated in that section, Nisbett and Wilson (1977) made a convincing case that people often do not know, and therefore cannot correctly report, the reasons for their behaviour. When attempting to account for their behaviour, people tend to make inferences based on what they regard as reasonable ways to behave. Therefore, it should hardly be surprising that people are not always aware of the reasons for their behaviour, as awareness requires self-conscious effort.

Allport (1935:832) emphasised that "without guiding attitudes the individual is confused and baffled". These guiding attitudes determine what each individual will see and hear, and what they will think and do. These attitudes are also the guiding force for making a decision in respect of conversion. In addition, Heirich (1977:669-672) reports about social science factors that "it is not a single influence but the mutual interaction of various forces that makes a person susceptible to conversion". These arguments support the view that decisions, including conversion, consist of a variety of motivational factors.

In chapter two we have seen that a wide range of theological options on the understanding of conversion does exist within the Christian tradition. Generally it can be said that 'conservative' Christians tend to affirm sudden and dramatic conversion while 'liberal' Christians tend to understand and foster gradual religious change (cf. Rambo 1992:160). I feel that each side should be more open to the variety and validity of forms of religious change. The theological debates about conversion are paralleled in the human sciences as the literature is full of 'battles' on definition. It is my observation that most of the debates arise when a scholar takes his/her own research data and forces all other conversions into the framework proposed by his/her own particular research.

In my opinion conversion is what a particular religious group says it is (although among Christians there are some fundamental common criteria, see chapter 2). No one type of conversion can be seen as normative from a psychological point of view. I agree with Rambo (1992:161) when he says:

> Psychological understanding is merely a human attempt to comprehend what is ultimately,
> to the person of faith, an encounter between a majestic and mysterious God and a person

who is a being with vast potential, perversity, and extraordinary complexity. Scientific psychology is a human discipline which can only attempt to use theories to understand a phenomenon that is beyond the scope of human comprehension.

As can be seen in chapter two, some Christians insist that conversion is precisely defined in both content and process. I do not reject this notion nor the right of every faith community to require certain beliefs, behaviours and experiences as normative before accepting a person's conversion as authentic (see section 8.1.3). Even within Christianity, there is a rich diversity of types of conversion within the various denominations and para-church organisations.

Psychology therefore looks at conversion in general and its understanding or definition is not limited to any particular religion. With the additional help of psychology, as I have argued in chapter three, I propose a more holistic understanding of conversion. In section 8.5 I present this broader understanding of conversion.

8.3 Conversion in the Light of my Empirical Findings

The empirical findings have been analysed in the chapters five to seven. In this section I highlight the two main points which have emerged.

Firstly, the conversion process does not just consist of one motive, as so many Christians seem to think, namely the religious motive. Practice shows that people convert to another religion out of a variety of motivations. The contextual empirical findings in this study reveal that every conversion process contains more than one motive. According to my analysis of the 20 cases, a combination between two and four motives can be discerned in each conversion narrative. As a result of this evidence I propose a holistic understanding of conversion which makes room for a variety of motivations, depending on the social context in question (see 8.5).

Secondly, the research findings confirm that conversion is taking place in both directions. This usually happens in religiously pluralistic societies such as South Africa. Muslims

speak of conversion when becoming Christians and Christians do the same when becoming Muslims. I argue therefore that it is important that an adequate understanding of conversion should consider both ways of conversion.

8.4 Perspectives of Theological Anthropology

The purpose of this section is to explore the sources for a holistic understanding of conversion that are to be found in theological anthropology (view of human nature and human society). The section is divided into two parts: Firstly, I look for theological support with respect to the various conversion motives which emerged from the narratives in chapters five and six. Secondly, I analyse the fact that conversion takes place in both directions.

By doing this I express my contextual theological method which involves an interplay between contextual and textual analysis:

1) Through contextual analysis I first of all listen to relevant individuals telling their story. This is what I did in chapters five to seven of this study. It produces a theology supported by the real life experiences of people in a specific society. It also takes into account the psychology of human motivation (see chapter 3). Without contextual roots, theology loses its sense of reality and easily lapses into abstract speculation.

2) Secondly, theology should be supported by Scripture. A contextual approach must also be scriptural and true to the Christian tradition. A theology that only values contextual relevance may lose its roots in the Christian community. I therefore reinterpret Scripture in the light of the questions raised by my contextual analysis, in order to develop a truly contextual theology: both relevant to a specific context and true to the Christian tradition.

As an expression of my commitment to such a mutual relationship between these two dimensions of theology, I attempt in this final chapter to develop a missiological understanding of conversion that will adequately address the issues raised by Muslim-Christian conversions. One fundamental issue raised in this connection is a holistic approach to conversion, that is to consider the whole person as a unity in the process of conversion. Such a holistic and inclusive anthropology also needs to be applied to the

various conversion motives that came to the fore in chapters five and six in the stories of the converts. Although I have separated these different motives for analytical purposes, I must emphasise that the motives cannot be separated. In a holistic approach to conversion, the intimate connection between these motives needs to be made clear. These motives form a dynamic unity in which they are closely and inseparably interrelated.

8.4.1 Holistic View of Conversion in Respect of the Motives

Based on my empirical findings in chapters five and six I proposed in section 3.4 five conversion motives which apply to the context of my research. As a result of the conversion narratives it became evident that the conversion process usually contained a combination of two to four motives operating at the same time. I have argued that all the different motives must be seen as equally important and that the convert, as a human being, must be viewed in a holistic way as a person with different needs that all contribute to the movement of conversion. The question is whether a theological anthropology would support such a point of view. Or in other words, does theological anthropology view a human being only in spiritual terms or in a more holistic sense? I will deal with this issue below by using some relevant theological topics.

8.4.1.1 Creation and the Image of God

Theological Anthropology is concerned with what the Bible says in respect to a human being and the relation in which he/she stands and should stand to God.[242] It recognises Scripture as its source and interprets the teaching of human experience in the light of God's Word. Human beings are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26). Berkhof (1958:183) distinguishes between two elements in the creation of human nature, namely the body and soul. The body was formed out of the dust of the ground in which God made use of pre-existing material whereas the soul is seen as a new production of God. Only by the combination of these two elements does a human person become a 'living being'. This is

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[242] Deissler (1985:93) says in this respect that "… die biblische Theologie ist zu einem wesentlichen Teil Anthropologie, wenn auch eine theologische Anthropologie".

what is generally termed as the holistic view of a human being or 'the whole person' (cf. Sherlock 1996:215-218).

I would argue that one cannot separate the two elements and that these need to be respected and in all spheres of human experience which includes the process of conversion. This 'wholeness of human life' is also confirmed in psychological studies of human behaviour, for instance the 'Positive Theory of Motivation' by Maslow (see section 3.2.3.2). The notion of human beings and the 'life of man' to be treated as a unity is also emphasised by Tillich (see analysis by McKelway 1964:190-192), (cf. Berkhof 1992:82). Deissler (1985:16) is of the opinion that the expression in Gen 2:19 "lebendigen Wesen" (nepheš hajjah), "… will den Akzent offensichtlich auf die Einheit des Menschenwesens setzen"[243]
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Berkhof (1958:191) explains that it "is customary, especially in Christian circles, to conceive of man as consisting of two, and only two, distinct parts, namely, body and soul. This view is technically called *dichotomy*". It appears to me, after having studied some missiological approaches to conversion (see chapter 2), that because of the existence of this dichotomy Christians often see conversion only from a religious point of view.

Further, Berkhof also points to the appearance of a *trichotomy*[244]. This is the understanding that human nature consists of three parts: body, soul and spirit. However, the prevailing representation of the human nature in the Bible appears to be dichotomous, i.e. body and soul.[245] Scripture teaches us to view human nature as a unity and not a duality (Berkhof 1958:192, cf. Pannenberg 1985:447). The idea of mere parallelism between the two elements is entirely foreign to biblical teaching. Berkhof (1958:192) is of the opinion that

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[243] Deissler (1985:16-27) sees this unity with the following aspects: "Der Mensch als … 'Fleisch', 'Lebenskraft', 'Lebensgeist', 'Person'." In respect to the New Testament, Deissler (1985:64) asserts: "Die Ganzheitsschau des Menschen steht auch bei Paulus im Vordergrund".

[244] This tri-partite conception of man originated in Greek philosophy (See Berkhof 1958:191-192 for further discussions and debates about the two and three parts of human nature, cf. O'Grady 1976:125). See also Barth's view (in Peters 1979:128-130) in *Der Mensch als Seele und Leib, gehalten vom Geist.* McDonald (1981:75-79) outlines major positions taken in the Christian tradition. He is of the opinion that the first direct evidence of Christian dichotomy or trichotomy in the human person is in Tertullian and Justin and not in the Bible.

[245] Berkhof (1958:194) also discusses the two passages (1Thess 5:23, Heb 4:12) which seem to conflict with the usual dichotomous interpretation of Scripture.

while "recognising the complex nature of man, it [Scripture] never represents this as resulting in a twofold subject in man. Every act of man is seen as an act of the whole man".

This last statement by Berkhof I find significant since I argue in my study that the conversion experience, being an 'act of a person', must be seen as an act of the whole person who needs to consider all aspects of human needs and motivation. This unity finds expression in the account of the creation of Adam (Gen 2:7). In this passage it speaks of the creation of 'man' and not of creating separate parts, i.e. body and soul[246] (cf. Sherlock 1996:38, 215). Therefore, the act of creation should not be seen as a mechanical process as if God would first form a body of clay and then put a soul into it. Berkhof (1958:193) concludes that "this passage, while indicating that there are two elements in man, yet stresses the organic unity of man." This notion seems to be recognised throughout the Bible and emphasises the holistic point of view.[247]

That human beings are created in the image of God emphasises again the unity of a person. The image includes elements such as intellectual power, natural affection, moral freedom and spirituality (Berkhof 1958:204, cf. Pannenberg 1985:45). Such elements are very much in line with the five motives of conversion which I have identified in my area of research (see 3.4). Thus religion and humanity are intimately connected. O'Grady (1976:15), when speaking about the "Image of God" asserts this notion by saying: "Conversion, a change of heart, is always possible and once again he will reflect what he can always reflect: the qualities of God".

Augustine's theology of human nature was an emphasis on the spiritual aspect to the disadvantage of the biblical understanding that the whole person, body and soul, is created in the image of God. Later theologians followed Augustine's teaching and thus concentrated on the spiritual nature of human beings by formulating a Christian anthropology in the image of God in terms of the 'soul of man'. O'Grady (1976:18) is of

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[246] Scholars have brought forward various explanations in respect to the relation of soul and body. Many have admitted that it remains to a great extent a mystery (cf. Berkhof 1958:195).

[247] Speaking on the Old Testament as a whole, Sherlock (1996:216) holds the view: "Throughout, the analysis of human nature is eminently practical, and though we are described in many ways there is no dividing up of the human person into various parts".

the opinion that this "same teaching influenced the catechisms down to the present time". A holistic anthropology was lost in favour of the spiritual orientation. This trend can be observed in the different missiological understandings of conversion discussed in chapter two.

There is, however, a trend to be seen in so far as today many theologians have returned to the relevant biblical approach to humanity as created in the image of God (see also chapter 2). Here the totality of a human life in an individual person, with emotions, needs, intellect, body, desires and attitudes comes closer to reflecting the image of God. O'Grady (1978:18) concludes that there "is dignity and worth present in every individual life that ties together the spiritual and the bodily".

8.4.1.2 Kingdom of God

Another concept which needs consideration in developing a holistic understanding of conversion is the 'Kingdom of God'. Jesus took hold of this eschatological concept and made it prominent in his teaching. It is in the framework of this kingdom that the call to conversion is issued (Mark 1:15, cf. Costas 1979:9). Conversion is therefore directly related to the revelation of the 'Kingdom of God'.[248] Costas (1982:182), for instance, is convinced that authentic Christian conversion is an ongoing process in the 'Kingdom of God' (see also 2.6). In this context it is significant that C1 related in his conversion narrative that in his dream Jesus was quoting the verse from John 3:3: "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (see 5.2.1).

McKelway (1964:235), in his analysis of the *Systematic Theology* of Paul Tillich, is of the opinion that the "Kingdom of God is the final meaning of history because it grants fulfilment to man in every area of his life". McKelway then outlines that the Kingdom of God is at once political, social, personal and universal. Padilla (1985:189) is equally convinced that the Kingdom of God is "a new reality that has entered into the flow of history and affects human life not only morally and spiritually but also physically and psychologically, materially and socially". These aspects find a parallel in the conversion

motives which I identified on the basis of the conversion narratives (see 3.4, and also chapters 5 and 6). I therefore again find theological confirmation for the view that conversion includes every aspect of human life (cf. Berkhof 1958:570).

For Calvin, the profile of history is shaped by both 'secular' and 'spiritual' forces.[249] These forces are however *not* independent of each other but are rather included under a providential view of history as moving towards their ultimate consummation in the Kingdom of God. The kingship of Christ over history means that life itself is all of 'one piece' (McKim 1992:365). Thus, we again find evidence that human life needs to be treated as a 'whole'.

In this context it is also appropriate to consider the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4). Immediately after Jesus prayed "your kingdom come " he goes on to say: "Give us each day our daily bread". The prayer in this form is a petition for the kingdom and the bread which holds together material and spiritual needs without making one more important than the other (WCC 1980:78). It binds together the mutual importance of the spiritual and social needs of human beings in a unique way and is therefore 'Good News to the Poor'. There can be no serious understanding of Jesus' mission, and his call to conversion, without reference to his commitment to the poor and the rejected of society (WCC 1980:84).[250]

There seems to be no doubt that Jesus welcomed and cared for people who approached him out of different motivations. Often he just cared for their physical needs and at other times he brought in the religious aspect of how to enter the Kingdom of God. I would therefore argue that Jesus had an understanding of conversion which made room to include a number of different motivations and not just the religious factor. It also becomes evident that people followed and were motivated to do so in a combination of various motivations. For instance, the crowd which followed Jesus to the mountain where he taught the famous Beatitudes (Matthew 5) were following him because of physical needs to get healing and were at the same time attracted by his teaching of the kingdom.

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[248] See also discussion of this topic in 2.2 (Witherup 1994:108: point 5, cf. Barclay 1963)
[249] See *Institutes* by Calvin (2.14.3 and 2.15.5).

8.4.1.3 Covenant

The theme of 'covenant' seeks to view the whole history of salvation and divine-human relationships in terms of a bond or agreement between God and humankind.[251] The covenant was first in the form of a covenant of works made with Adam and then, after that failed, in a covenant of grace with Christ. The covenant with Adam and his posterity was on the condition of perfect obedience and the covenant in Christ with believers was offering the gift of salvation on the condition of faith in him (Klempa 1992:94-95, 99). The covenant theme represents an offer, promise and call initiated by God to humankind. In other words, God calls all people to turn to him and to accept the conditions of the covenant. God always looks for a response and the covenant becomes mutual when humanity by God's grace binds itself to accept its provisions.

The Hebrew word *berith,* translated as 'convenant', occurs first in the story of Noah. There God established a covenant with Noah, his family and every living creature to save them from the flood (Gen 9:8-17). This covenant was initiated by God with all humanity and includes all aspects of human life. God is concerned to preserve the human race (cf. Cochrane 1992:114). God was not just caring for the spiritual well-being but also for the social and physical needs of Noah and his family, including every living creature. Therefore, the covenant includes the whole creation and all aspects of human life.

The covenant with Noah was followed by a different covenant, a more particular one made with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15:18). According to the author of Exodus 2:24, it was this covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that God remembered when Israel was in bondage in Egypt. Here the theme of justice is prevalent and we can draw parallels to the situation in South Africa under the apartheid era (see 1.2). Christians need not be surprised if many Africans decided that they did not want to be part of a 'white Christianity' with no concern for the socio-politically oppressed. This is the reason why this conversion motive is included in the contextual conversion process of this study.

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[250] For a comprehensive discussion on *Vocation: Calling to Service,* see McKim (1992:365-367).
[251] For a discussion about positive and negative aspects of covenant theology see Klempa (1992:103-106).

After the Exodus, God made a covenant with Moses and the people of Israel: "And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant – the Ten Commandments" (Exod 34:28). The Ten Commandments again include all aspects of human life, such as worship, the relationships between people in a family, life and society, as well as social aspects.[252] These aspects could be drawn parallel to my categories of conversion motives. I again see evidence that God views all aspects of human life as equally important since he includes them in the covenant. I would therefore argue that it is equally important to include all aspects of human life in the conversion process (cf. Kasdorf 1980:116, see also 2.4), which takes place in the context of God's covenantal dealings with the world.

Klempa (1992:96) mentions further incidents where the Old Testament writers speak of covenants, such as a covenant between individuals like Laban and Jacob (Gen 31:43-54) and a covenant of friendship between David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:1-4). Marriage is also referred to as a covenant (Mal 2:14).

The New Testament writers identify the covenant with the new one established in Christ. This covenant is contrasted with the mosaic law characterised as the old covenant (Gal 4:24, Heb 8:8-13).[253] Here it is asserted that the new covenant is superior to the temporary and imperfect "first covenant" (Heb 8:7-9:1). The new covenant is symbolised in the cup that Jesus gave to his disciples at the Last Supper (Mark 14:24, 1Cor 11:25), (Klempa 1992:96). This new covenant too includes all aspects of life since God says "I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Heb 8, cf. Jer 31:31-34, Douglas 1962:267-268).

8.4.1.4 Salvation

Christian teaching points to Jesus Christ as *the* perfect example of a whole life lived in full integrity and "without sin" (Heb 4:15). The unique feature of the work of Christ is that he freely gave up his life so that his wholeness might be offered to all people. The word in

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[252] McKim (1992:364), quoting from Paul, confirms that the covenant relationship was not restricted to "the relationship between God and the elect individual. The covenant was also *societal,* for God had shown that he was concerned with the human community".

[253] Cochrane (1992:114) observes that "according to Barth the covenant consists of dogmatics and ethics, the gospel and the law, and that these are inseparable".

Scripture *soteria* is usually translated as salvation but could also be rendered as 'health' or 'wholeness'. The major Christian understanding is that salvation in Christ Jesus brings forgiveness and healing from the consequences of sin. In this context Sherlock (1996:213) asks the question: "Is a person saved as a whole, or only in part?" The Bible appears to be clear on this issue in that believers are saved wholly and looking forward to the "redemption of our bodies" (2Cor 5:4) .

On the basis of this argument, namely that the biblical teaching in regard to salvation is directed to the whole person, I feel free to reason that conversion must be viewed in terms of the same 'wholeness'. Or, in other words, the different aspects of human life need to be included in the concept of an adequate understanding of conversion. I therefore propose that justification should include the different motives in the understanding of conversion and not just the religious one, as converts have experienced them in their lives (see chapter five and six).

Throughout history Christians have often thought about salvation in Christ only in terms of the 'soul', 'spirit' or similar spiritual aspects. Theories such as this are certainly based on the notion that human beings are divided into a number of parts, usually body and soul, or body, soul and spirit (dichotomy/trichotomy, see discussion above).

8.4.2 The Conversion Door swings in Both Ways[254]

The question which I want to explore now is whether the Bible does support a view of conversion which includes a two-way movement; i.e. conversion towards Christianity and away from it, e.g. in the context of this study towards Islam. I have outlined the different movements of conversion in section 3.1.3 and named the conversion from Islam towards Christianity as 'P1' and conversion from Christianity towards Islam as 'P9'.

There is no problem to declare a person a 'convert' in Christian terminology if this person turns towards Christianity, as we have seen in chapter two. But can a person also be declared a 'convert' if he/she turns away from Christianity? What view does the Bible have? It appears that the Bible does not use the term 'convert' for such people but rather

views them as 'apostates' (see chapter 2, cf. Douglas et al 1962:48, 250-252). In the next section, 8.5, I propose that it would be to the benefit of missiology to adopt a more holistic view of conversion and include both ways of conversion in its definition.

With respect to the origin of 'turning away'[255] or disobedience to God in the history of mankind, the Bible teaches that it began with the transgression of Adam in paradise. It was a voluntary act on the part of Adam in that he did not follow God's instructions and in a way we could say Adam 'converted' away from his original faith. Theologians usually name this act as the "origin of sin in the human race" (Berkhof 1958:221). The consequence or punishment of this act by Adam and Eve was that God 'made their life difficult' and in addition banished them from the 'Garden of Eden' (Gen 3).[256] This turning away from God, which is sin in biblical terminology, separates people from God and that means death, for it is only in communion with the living God that a person can truly live (Rom 6:23). The Bible does not know the distinction between physical, spiritual and eternal death but it has rather a synthetic view of death and regards it as separation from God (Berkhof 1958:259)[257].

In the Old Testament God gave Israel a detailed code of laws for the regulation of its civil, moral, and religious life and clearly stipulated the punishment to be administered in the case of each transgression (cf. Ex 20-23). These punishments appear to be harsh and are in many cases death as for instance in Ex 21:17: "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death".

A case of apostasy in the Old Testament is for instance narrated in Exodus 32; 'The Golden Calf'. God's immediate reaction was to "destroy them", but after the intervention of Moses God softened the punishment in that he "struck the people with a plague" (Ex 32:10, 35). In this incident Moses made a clear call to divide the people into two camps: Those who are for the Lord and those who are not. Then he ordered the Levites to kill the apostates. The

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[254] This title is adapted from a quote by Conn (1986:7), (see also sections 1.3 and 3.1.1).
[255] The expression 'turn away' is used in the Bible as for instance in Ex 32:8.
[256] In respect of the 'Punishment of Sin', Berkhof (1958:255) differentiates between *natural* and *positive* penalties.
[257] Berkhof (1958:259-261) distinguishes 'the penalty of sin' in the following: spiritual death, the sufferings of life, physical death, eternal death.

Bible records that on that day about 3000 of the people died. Consequently, according to this incident the punishment of apostasy was death.[258]

Apostasy in the New Testament appears to be a continual danger to the Church and it contains repeated warnings against it (cf. 1Tim 4:1-3, 2Thes 2:3, 2Pet 3:17). The nature of apostasy is explained in terminology such as "abandon the faith" (1 Tim 4:1) and "turn away from the living God" (Heb 3:12). How then does Jesus treat apostates? It appears that Jesus had a different attitude towards apostates than issuing the death penalty as it so often was the case in the Old Testament.

One such account is recorded in John 6:60-71 in which many disciples deserted Jesus. They did this after having heard Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. The response is written as follows (verse 60): "On hearing it many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?". This 'hard teaching', in this case, is that Jesus claims to be the "Bread of Life" and that "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:35, 54). The disciples appear to have left Jesus since they could not understand this teaching.[259]

These arguments seem to be very similar to those mentioned in the conversion narratives of M1-M10 of this study (see chapter 6). In section 7.2.1.1 I listed some significant sayings by converts to Islam as to why they left Christianity. It was often because of this same 'hard teaching' that people abandoned the Christian faith. The main issues mentioned which motivated these people to leave the Christian faith were things like the trinity (M3, M4, M9), the divinity of Christ (M4), the atonement and crucifixion of Christ (M6).

Jesus then gave further explanations to these disciples who were in the process of deserting him (John 6:61-65). What follows is recorded in verse 66: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him". It appears that Jesus allowed these

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[258] Other examples of apostasy in the Old Testament are: Dt 13:13, Jdg 2:17, Ne 9:26, Eze 36:20. Verses which clearly say that the penalty of apostasy is death: Ex 22:20, Deut 13:9, Deut 17:5. Another example is Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Ki 18) – the killing of the Baal prophets.
[259] People did not just turn away because of Jesus' teaching but also because of his works (cf. Padilla 1985:193).

disciples to leave him freely. Jesus then turns to the Twelve (verse 67) asking them: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" It seems as though Jesus was telling them that if they wanted to leave, then they would be free to go. He would not hold them back. Jesus was not afraid of losing disciples but he left it to them to make a choice (cf. Buttrick et al 1952:574-575).

Jesus appears to have a more relaxed attitude towards people who turned away from him than that shown towards an apostate in the Old Testament (see above). The same can be concluded from the narrative about the "Rich Young Man" (Mk 10:17-22, Mt 19:16-22, Lk 18:18-25). In Mk 10:21 it even says that "Jesus looked at him and loved him". I believe we can learn much from this attitude and ask ourselves: Are we able to meet, speak to and love those who are in the process of turning from the faith we belong to?

Seen in this light, I find it possible to say that missiology and Christian praxis should include the notion of conversion in both directions. Jesus also dealt with these people who were turning away from him and he did not just ignore them as is the case so often in missiology and church praxis today (see also 7.2.1.4). It is true that Jesus spent much more time with those who were moving towards him than with those who were turning away from him.

However, I argue that missiology and church praxis should aim to balance this, taking into account the contextual pluralistic society of today. I would therefore suggest moving away from the harsh dealings deployed in the Old Testament and adopting a more friendly attitude as applied by Jesus. There is therefore a need for a fresh approach, which I will discuss in the next section 8.5.

This new approach is very much in line with what Bosch (1991:483-489) outlines in the Part 3: "Toward a Relevant Missiology" and in particular the section "Dialogue and Mission". Bosch (1991:484) emphasises that "both dialogue and mission can be conducted only in an attitude of humility".[260] Bosch goes on to say that when the Christian church

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[260] Verkuyl (1978:362) stresses this attitude by saying that Christian mission should be done "by our deep personal humility but also by our willingness to listen as well as to speak, to learn as well as to communicate … In dialogue each partner should share his/her deepest insights". Castro (1980:26) is of the opinion that "dialogue is a way to describe God's attitude towards humankind: serving, suffering, calling, hoping". I

encounters people of other faiths Christians become *vulnerable*. Christians have to come to terms with this vulnerability since it may lead to doubts and conversion to another faith such as Islam (cf. Bosch 1977:206-207, see also discussion in section 7.2.1.4).

Lochhead (1988:54-58) describes this notion under the heading 'Preparation for Conversion'. Bosch (1991:488) then addresses the problem of the tension between dialogue and witness by asking the question: "How do we maintain the tension between being both missionary and dialogical?" By referring to the report by the WCC (1990:32-33), Bosch (1991:489) concedes that Christians do not have a solution for this tension but rather acknowledge the tension by saying: "We appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it". Therefore, in the process of mission and dialogue, conversion may take place in both directions or in other words the "conversion door swings in both ways".

8.5 An Adequate Understanding of Conversion

Löffler (1967:253) observed a revival of interest in conversion and gave reasons why conversion has emerged as a topical subject for discussions: "As a term and as a concept it is surrounded by misunderstandings which block the way for dialogue between the different traditions on a point of substance". Löffler[261] continues by saying that if a discussion on "conversion is to be successful it must take a wider approach".

After a brief review of conversion histories, Löffler (1967:255) comes to the conclusion that "there does not exist one mode of conversion. On the contrary, we became aware of the factors, religious and cultural, which have influenced each particular history. Different patterns occur and recur". However, Löffler observes two vital elements which are common to all conversion cases and which run like a golden thread through all accounts, namely that:

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recommend that the topic of interfaith dialogue in the context of conversion be an issue for further research (see 8.6.3).

[261] In this article Löffler speaks mainly in the ecumenical context. I am of the opinion that these statements also apply to inter-religious dialogue.

1) There is a personal element in conversion.

2) It is closely related to the entry or rediscovery of the church (cf. Stravers 1988:342).

In addition I emphasise and endorse Löffler's (1967:259-260) three points to act upon for the rediscovery of conversion and which the church needs to take cognisance of:

1) Re-state the meaning of human beings as persons and the belief in a personal God.

2) Re-define the role of the church.

3) Conversion as a personal event and commitment to social responsibility.[262]

One of the underlining emphases of this study is that I argue for 'wholeness'. Wholeness is an idea which has gained much attention in recent decades. Anything which contributes to holistic living is valued highly today, while dualistic impulses are frowned upon. The notion of the whole person is more that a passing fashion – it has rather been the goal of systems of philosophy and the aim of many social systems. The modern quest for wholeness has come about not only as a search in its own right, but in reaction to the idea that we are divided selves, an idea most common in western Christianity (Sherlock 1996:213).

As I have discussed above, many Christians assume that each of us has a self divided between body and soul and/ or spirit and that this idea is biblical. As I have argued above, strict forms of this cannot be sustained from the Bible but are rather presuppositions about human nature and read into the Scriptures. A consequence of this dualism is that 'body-denying' tendencies slowly made their way into the churches. It produced some fanatics but generally led to the idea that 'spiritual' Christians avoided practical or secular affairs. Such ascetic attitudes can be found in all Christian traditions (Sherlock 1996:214).

8.5.1 Towards a Theology of Conversion

O'Grady (1976:15-16) sees conversion in the context of his topic: "The Christian and the Image of God". He observes that the "Bible is clear in its teaching on the meaning of man: man as a totality, male and female with all of the spiritual and material aspects, is the image

of God … much of this teaching seems to have been lost". On the ground of the evidence on theological anthropology where I have discussed above (Creation and the Image of God, Covenant, Kingdom of God and salvation), I see a positive basis to bring forward a holistic understanding of conversion.

In the past many churches have often lived with a dichotomy between evangelism and social action.[263] This is contrary to the holistic approach in the New Testament witness (cf. Paul 1992:359). It seems to have locked many churches into a 'both/and' or 'either/or' approach to ministry which is unacceptable (Stravers 1988:345). In addition, Barclay (1963:92) is of the opinion that "perhaps the most serious mistake of all has been the tendency to standardise the experience of conversion and to take as the norm the experience of Paul on the Damascus Road. The inevitable result of this has been the implication that the normal conversion experience must be sudden, shattering and complete".

My theology of conversion rejects therefore any form of dichotomy or trichotomy of a person or human life and adopts the wholeness of the human person as its basic foundation. In view of the above Scriptural evidence in section 8.4, the practical life experiences of the converts as analysed in chapters five to seven (see also conclusion in 8.3), as well as the support of psychological insights outlined in chapter three (see summary in 8.2), I content that this approach is holistic[264].

As a consequence of this view of conversion all motives need to be accepted as playing a valid part in the conversion process. Therefore, the term *conversion* is not limited to change for religious reasons only but accepts a combination of motives, as is evident in the conversion narratives of chapters five and six. This understanding of conversion therefore accepts a variety of motives for each convert. In addition I include both directions of conversion movement into this understanding of conversion.

My conclusion therefore is to suggest a broader missiological understanding of conversion which will declare every person a *convert* who has changed his/her religious allegiance, for whatever motives. Therefore, I have to clarify that I am not just speaking of 'Christian

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[262] On the topic of the social involvement of the church, see Henriot (1978:314-326) and Padilla (1985:197).

[263] Padilla (1985:197-199) is convinced that "Evangelism and social responsibility are inseparable".

conversion' but rather of 'Religious conversion' and thus accepting all conversion movements between various religions in my definition (cf. Oates 1978:149, Wells 1989:23,27).

My missiological understanding of conversion can be summed up as follows:

1) Each faith community has its own unique and particular definition and understanding of conversion. Conversion is what a particular group says it is. We have seen in chapter two that even within the Christian tradition there is a wide range of possibilities for the nature of religious change.

2) What has been spelled out in point one above, can be said about other religions as well. My conclusion is that there is often no difference empirically between the conversion process to Christianity and conversion to Islam (cf. Rambo 1992:161).[265]

3) This adequate understanding of conversion includes therefore a faith community's own definition as well as respecting the definitions and practices of other religious groups.

This whole issue may be illustrated as follows (four different faith communities may serve as an example):

Diagram 8.1: Traditional Christian Understanding of Conversion

Traditional Christian Understanding of Conversion

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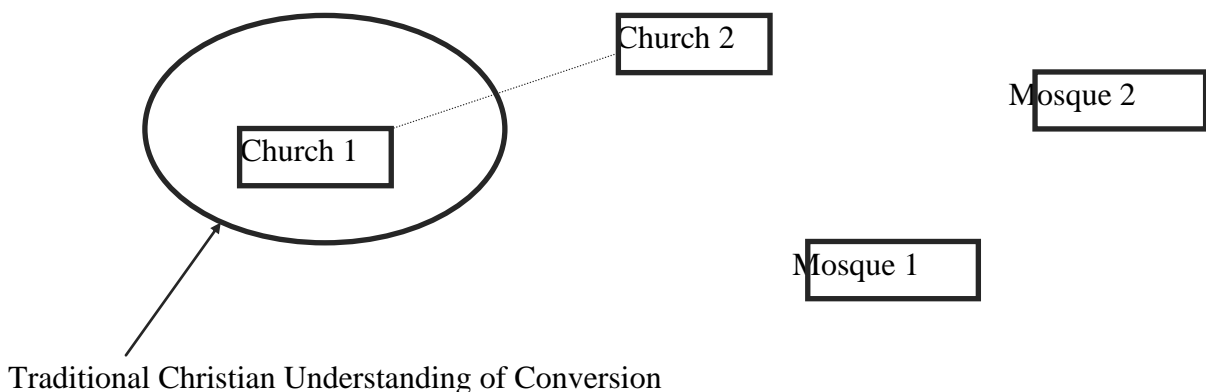
[264] See above section 8.4 for my *holistic* understanding of conversion.
[265] In some cases the pattern of conversion motives appears to be the same, e.g. Rel/Affect: C7, C8, M3, M4. On the other hand, that e.g. the mystical motive only appears among converts to Christianity seems to signal a basic difference (see section 7.2).

The Christian faith community, 'Church 1', has a certain understanding of conversion. This understanding is the only one known as 'authentic', accepted and respected (see chapter 2). This is what I would call the "Traditional Christian Understanding of Conversion" which is a narrow view (see circle in diagram 8.1). It is defined within the following basic framework: Conversion is basically understood towards Christianity only and with the motive being religious in nature only. 'Church 1' may have some vague idea about other Christians' understanding of conversion, e.g. 'Church 2' = another Christian denomination (see doted line), but it is generally not acknowledged and respected since it is different. In addition, 'Church 1' may know about the existence of other religions but is in general ignorant about their understanding of conversion (indicated with example of Islamic communities 'Mosque 1' and 'Mosque 2').

Diagram 8.2: Misssiological Understanding of Conversion
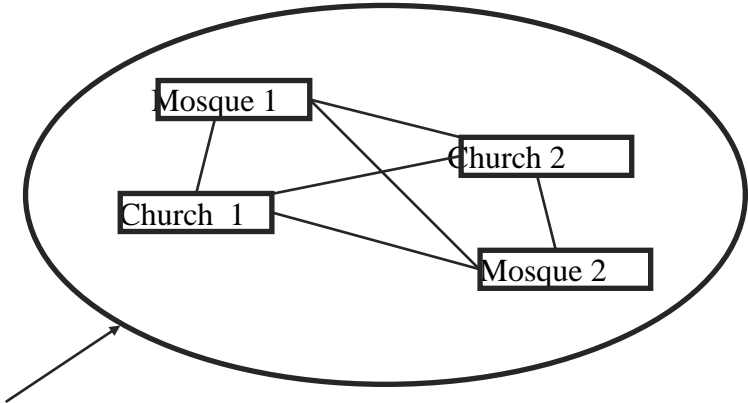
Missiological Understanding of Conversion

In this new framework each of the four faith communities still has its own particular definition and understanding of conversion. However, in addition, each community knows about the others, accepts them and their understanding of conversion fully though these might be very different. Conversion is now seen as operating not only in one direction but in various directions. In addition various conversion motives, not only the strictly religious, are accepted and respected.

8.5.2 Implications for Contextual Church Praxis

In his article, 'The Adult Gospel', Poston (1990) mentions five points why Western converts choose Islam over Christianity. These five points are: simplicity, rationality, practicality, equality and anticlericalism. Poston recommends guidelines on how churches can better address these needs by changing their attitudes to these five topics and thus adopting an adequate holistic view on conversion (cf. Nissiotis 1967).

My proposed understanding of conversion (see 8.5.1) has a number of advantages. Firstly, it encourages a faith community to take adequate measures to care for new converts who join the community from a variety of motives. Secondly, a faith community will also care for people who wish to convert to another faith. In order to help converts better a few practical steps can be recommended (cf. Barclay 1963:82-103, Rahner 1978:206-211, Kasdorf 1980:60, Ismail 1983:391, Wells 1989:44-47, Heidemann 1996:12):

1. Within each faith community there should be a 'small group'[266] which is 'specialised' and trained to welcome new converts from another faith.

2. This small group should show a great interest and care for converts and leads them in the study of their new faith and religious practices.

3. In due course, the convert should be introduced through this small group into the larger faith community.

4. If the convert is a single person he/she should be 'adopted' into a family of the new faith community.[267]

5. By applying these guidelines the faith community will take care in an organic way of the spiritual and social needs of the new converts in their group.

6. In addition, this 'small group' should also be able to counsel and care for people who are contemplating converting away from Christianity to another religion, such as Islam, in the same loving attitude. Firstly, this would mean trying to encourage them to review their Christian faith before converting. Should a person still want to convert to another faith, the group should be sensitive to their desire to search for a new faith and even

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[266] This 'small group' would function in the context of my holistic understanding of conversion in regard to human beings, namely: Considering all the needs and motivations of people and providing care for converts who move towards and away from Christianity.

[267] I am referring to converts who come from a Muslim background. These people are often ostracised by their own family and need a 'new family' (see C10).

assist them in investigating it.[268] Finally, should the person convert to another faith, then the church should let them go in peace and Christian love.

I want to illustrate this by using C2 as an example (see 5.2.2). He was baptised in Church without his really being aware what conversion was and what this step of 'commitment' meant. Was it therefore a mistake that C2 and his friends were baptised? The question is not simple to answer. I would argue that it was not necessarily a mistake but if the Christians had understood the background and context of C2 more clearly, they would have been in a position to help C2 more positively; i.e. to understand his cultural and religious background and thus attend to his needs, which were first of all material and secondly spiritual in nature (cf. Spindler 1997:296).

My impression in the case of C2 and his friends (cf. 5.2.2), is that the local Church did not nurture the converts in a proper way (there was no 'small group'). It might well be that if the church had done a better job and acquired more background information, the friends of C2 would have remained Christians and not gone back to Islam (although this is debatable). It is therefore necessary that churches have a holistic understanding of conversion, which takes into consideration all aspects of human life in order to teach and nurture prospective converts accordingly.

Secondly, it also challenges each faith community to take a closer look at why someone would choose to leave one community to enter another. A question such as: "What are the areas of human need that are not being addressed, or not addressed sufficiently in our faith community?" will then be asked, investigated and the necessary steps taken to correct and improve the situation. These areas may be social or spiritual in nature. Converts can therefore actually guide a community in its search for self-awareness. However, this will only happen if a community opens itself and welcomes the converts' insights by hearing from them the wisdom they have received in their new religious environment.

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[268] Many Christians would say that this is going too far, namely to assist people who want to leave the faith community. I disagree with this argument. By assisting a person I mean that I would provide that person with literature about that other religion, I would accompany them to visit people of the other faith and allow them to get information before making a decision, etc. In actual fact I would say that through this process both parties benefit. In my experience, by displaying a caring and loving attitude, certain people reconsidered the situation and did not convert to the other faith. This might also have been the case in the life of C7, had a

A community will naturally be saddened by the conversion of some of its members to other religious faiths but such pain may be transformed into a deeper commitment to renewal and reconciliation. There will inevitably be times when a community will disagree with certain aspects of a convert's perspective but as long as there is mutual respect there is hope for future communication and understanding (cf. Le Mond 1993:5).

I want to illustrate this matter by using C7 as an example. This woman grew up as a Christian and then became a Muslim when she got married. Later she converted back to Christianity (see 5.2.7 and 7.3.6). A remark made by C7 is worth mentioning: "If my Church would have given me counselling before my marriage to a Muslim man … and would have taught me about the religion of Islam … and I would have been aware about the consequences of being a Muslim wife … I would have thought twice of entering this marriage … and I would not have to go through this many years of crisis … and eventually face divorce".

Can a Church be blamed for not counselling a would-be convert away from a faith community? Or in the case of C7, can a Church be blamed for not counselling people enough when they contemplate entering into an inter-faith marriage? I would answer in the affirmative. I am convinced that churches are often unaware and ignorant about the plight of such people. Churches need to come to terms with the challenges of a religious pluralistic society. I am convinced that if Christians (in particular the 'small group', or minister) applied the guidelines outlined above (see also section 8.1.3), that such hardship as C7 had to go through could have been avoided.

For C7 I would propose that the 'small group' would apply point six of the guidelines above. It means that they would first try to keep her in the faith community and attend to her needs, whatever they may be. Christians should also explain to her the Christian faith and what it means to follow Christ. If C7 continues to show interest in converting away from Christianity, the 'small group' should then carefully explain to C7 the implication of

Christian person helped her to make a thorough investigation of both faiths before taking a decision towards Islam.

marrying a Muslim and of possibly becoming a Muslim later on herself.[269] This means that the Christians should inform themselves about Islam and be in consultation with the local Muslim community. In addition, C7 should have the opportunity to receive information from Muslims about her intention to marry a Muslim. After some time C7 should then be able to make a decision whether or not to enter into such a marriage.

If she decides that she indeed wants to become a Muslim, the Christian community should let her go in peace and accept her decision, though of course, with sadness. In such a case it would be good to conduct a farewell ceremony.[270] The Christians should always love C7 and be prepared to welcome her back without any grudge should she decide to do so at any time in her life. This attitude is in line with that of Jesus who was also faced with disciples who left him (cf. John 6:60-67, see also discussion on this topic in 8.4.2).

In conclusion I emphasise three points:

1) Although this study is written within the field of Christian missiology, I have endeavoured to use inclusive terminology wherever possible (see in particular section 8.1.3). I have done this on purpose because I believe that these above guidelines may also be successfully implemented by an Islamic community. I am convinced that in this way it is possible that Christians and Muslims work on common ground and yet without losing their individual, unique identities. Furthermore, I am convinced that mutual respect and understanding will be the result of such an exercise, including better relations between the two faith communities.

2) The above outlined procedure is, of course, no guarantee that nothing could go wrong. We are all aware that we are dealing with imperfect human beings. I am also aware that my proposal is highly optimistic and that in practice these suggestions might not be

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[269] Another option for the woman would be to marry a Muslim man but remain a Christian. This is theoretically possible according to Islamic law (see section 7.2.3). The minister could therefore also explain such an option – though it is my experience that in practice it seldom works.
[270] Often churches conduct special welcome receptions for new converts – so why not have a farewell ceremony?

implemented for one reason or another.[271] However, I am convinced that in aiming at and following such a procedure, it may well help to avoid hurt and pain in the lives of people in future.

3) This understanding of conversion is adequate and relevant for the particular context as outlined in chapter one. Therefore, the practical guidelines in this chapter apply to a society of Christians and Muslims in the Johannesburg-Soweto area, which is in Gauteng, South Africa. I do not claim that this understanding of conversion is perfect or complete nor do I say that it is globally applicable. If some aspects find favour and may be helpful in other similar contexts then the aim of this study is enhanced.

8.6 Issues for Further Research

I propose the following topics for further research that emerge from the present study. These are important issues that have arisen in my research, which I was unable to address in this study.

8.6.1 Attitudes of the Christian Community to two-way Conversion

I have noticed that churches that show signs of spiritual vitality in "faith, life and witness" appear to be relatively immune to losses resulting from missionary activities of other religions such as Islam.[272]

The point which I want to make is, that the churches need to accept the fact that some people turn away from Christianity for similar reasons that other people turn away from their religions to embrace the Christian faith. In order to understand the uniqueness of the Christian faith as well as its 'good news in Christ', churches need to come to terms with conversion towards *and away from* Christianity. For too long has the church avoided people who turn their back on her and neglected the fact that conversion is also taking place away from Christianity.

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[271] Some reasons are: Religious leaders may not be willing to co-operate; show no interest to listen to and try to understand people of other living faiths; having an attitude of enmity instead of love to people of another faith community, etc.

[272] Robeck (1996:6) makes a similar observation in respect to proselytism.

Christian love demands that converts be accepted as such, whatever their motives may be. Jesus was also aware that people followed him simply to get food or to be physically healed (Jn 6:26) and not just because they were looking for the 'truth'. Jesus welcomed all people with love and cared for them whether or not they accepted him as the Messiah. Similarly, we have people joining or leaving the church from different motives and the church would do well to recognise this and respect people's choice and freedom. The church should acknowledge and respond with Christian love and see where they may have failed.

What then is the attitude of different churches to conversions towards Christianity compared to conversion away from Christianity to Islam? This important issue could be the subject of further research. The study could consist of a theoretical as well as an empirical part. Church leaders and members could be interviewed, the findings be analysed and appropriate recommendations be made for improved understanding and relations to be established. The theoretical part would entail a historical study and outline of past attitudes of the different Christian denominations.

In this context and as a new proposal one could also think of developing a 'theology of apostasy'. These new guidelines could help the churches to approach this thorny issue in a more understanding way and treat converts leaving the fold in a friendly and caring manner without thereby compromising their central confession that Jesus is Lord and their commitment to remain faithful to Christ "unto death" (Rev 2-3).

8.6.2 Human Rights and Religious Freedom in Conversion

The particular religion of a person is usually determined for him/her *a priori* by the accident of birthplace, by obscure historical events, or by current political situations. Most people are not sufficiently free to choose for themselves which road they should follow in order to concretise and fulfil their inner religious aspirations. They tend quite uncritically, and in good faith, to accept the way of their fathers: the way of their culture-religion, whatever that may be. For them, 'a meridian decides what is the truth', as Pascal said. Are they wrong to do this? Will the religious situation of most people ever be otherwise?

As is evident from the conversion narratives in this study, a number of converts did not have full religious freedom to make a decision of conversion. In addition, C1 for instance, reported that he meets Muslims in secret in order to witness to them because they fear intimidation and persecution. On the other hand, do Christians have full freedom to enquire and possibly convert to Islam? There are indications that in South Africa people do not have full rights of religious choice. This appears to violate the country's constitution.[273]

This issue could be the subject of further research. Human rights violations in respect to religions need to be investigated and analysed.[274] The origin of these acts should be studied and explained. Empirical research should be conducted as far as possible. As a result of this study, recommendations could be worked out and be used as a discussion base by the different faith communities. The aim is to achieve freedom of religious choice for all citizens (cf. Moore 1996).

There are many scholars who have dealt to some extent with this issue in the past. Batumalai (1991:124-126), for instance, says on the topic of religious freedom and human rights: "Islam enjoys the freedom to 'convert' others but does not even tolerate non-Muslims sharing their good news to Muslims, though it is allowed in the Qur'an." Hoffman (1968:8) emphasises that "the religious freedom of all men must be scrupulously observed."[275]

8.6.3 'Conversion' in Interfaith Dialogue

In interfaith dialogue adherents of different religions need to start to accept each other as they are. Christianity and Islam are missionary movements and it is therefore vital that members of both faiths begin to view each other in this way (cf. Kritzinger 1991:218, Sanneh 1989:5, 1996, Kroeger 1996b).

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[273] See *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996: 7, 8, 15).
[274] On this topic a key source could be the book by Swidler (1986).
[275] See also Kritzinger (1991:226) on 'a charter on religious freedom' and Kritzinger (1995:389).

Conversion has not been a popular topic in interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims (Hiebert 1996:77, Triebel 1976:219). What is the reason for this attitude? Why do religious leaders tend to avoid this issue? Is 'true' interfaith dialogue on this topic possible at all? (cf. Scantlebury 1996:266). This matter could be the subject of further research. Interfaith meetings in the past need to be studied and analysed. Leaders involved in these discussions could be interviewed. The general purpose of such meetings should be spelled out. New ways should be explored such as the involvement of converts, since their testimonies may have great value (Robeck 1996:6, O'Rourke 1985:29).

The specific aim of such a study would be that the topic of conversion be dealt with in an open and honest way at such meetings. Steps could be suggested to improve the situation (cf. Lochhead 1988). A proposal should be presented on how conversion could be approached in an idealistic way and how it could be implemented in practice. One could also think of negotiating a 'missionary code of conduct' (cf. Devadason 1982:60, Kritzinger 1991:225, 1995:394). This will have to be a product of various 'missionary minded' religions.

8.7 Epilogue

"… I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace". John 15:33

"… they will call out to the Companions of the Garden, 'Peace on you' …" Qur'an 7:46.

In the preamble I quoted Matthew 11:28 and the Qur'an 16:125, 128. Both, Jesus and Muhammad, call all people to follow them in order to find 'rest' or 'God's presence'. In the above two verses quoted, both Jesus and Muhammad offer peace. In this study we have accompanied 20 converts who have made choices which remarkably changed their lives: 10 from Christianity to Islam and 10 from Islam to Christianity. In some cases converts have chosen Islam or Christianity for the same combination of motivations. In this study we have discovered that both sides are convinced that they have found what they were searching for: **a new life and subsequently peace**.

Islam and Christianity are two living faiths which claim to have a mission to all peoples on earth. In this study I have focused on one of the central issues in both faiths – conversion and conversion motives. While being aware that there are common theological elements we also need to acknowledge the existence of fundamental differences between Christianity and Islam. These differences are also in the area of conversion as this study shows. There is no way that a Muslim or a Christian can honestly proclaim that these differences are irrelevant or insignificant.

This issue cannot be resolved by argument – the very nature of the issue demands patience, listening, and witness by both communities of faith. As a result of this witness and until the day of judgement conversion will continue to take place in both directions based on a variety of motives.

I believe that the pain caused in the past by these differences should not prevent us from continuing to strive for better relations between the people of the two faiths. The issues which divide us must not build walls of hostility between us but we should aim for fruitful dialogue and witness. If we truly desire truth and a deeper understanding of one another then our mutual respect must grow. Probably the most significant level of mutual respect and love should be good neighbourliness. We must know one another as friends. We must pray to God asking Him to help us cultivate bridges of love between ourselves.

I repeat my hope that this study will foster greater understanding and thus contribute to better future relations of respect between Christians and Muslims. It is also a call to empathise better with neighbours and fellow-travellers. As Christians, in our growing sensitivity towards other people, may new doors open for compassionate witness and for encouraging people to come to the Jesus who has promised to give them a new life and consequently peace.

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APPENDICES

i) List of Abbreviations

AMA	Africa Muslim Agency
ANC	African National Congress
ATR	African Traditional Religions
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
ICSA	Islamic Council of South Africa
ID	Identity Document
IMS	Islamic Missionary Society
IPCI	Islamic Propagation Centre International
MARC	Missions Advanced Research and Communication Centre
MERCSA	Muslim Evangelism Resource Centre of Southern Africa
MYM	Muslim Youth Movement
NP	National Party
NRM	New Religious Movement
PAC	Pan African Congress
PAGAD	People Against Gangsterism and Drugs
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
SA	South Africa
SACC	South African Council of Churches
Soweto	South West Township
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopädie
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
US	University of Stellenbosch
WCC	World Council of Churches
WCRP	World Conference of Religion and Peace
WITS	Witwatersrand University

ii) Glossary of Islamic Terms

Note: Only those terms used in this study are explained and are to be found in alphabetical order. These terms are in italics in the text. For more explanations see *Dictionary of Islam* by Hughes (1885).

adhan:	Daily call to prayer anounced by the *muezzin* from the mosque.
'ayah:	A sign (or a miracle = verse in the Qur'an).
baraka:	A blessing. It is often thought of in terms of some kind of positive, magic force available from holy people, places or objects.
Bukhari: Islam	(AD 810-870) The name of a learned scholar in who compiled sayings of the prophet of Islam, Muhammad. His work is regarded as the most authentic book after the Qur'an.
dar al-Islam:	'The house of Islam', (territory where Islam is established in the world).
dar al-harb:	'The house of war', (territory which still needs to be conquered for Islam).
da'wah:	Islamic missionary activity.
dhimmi:	A person from another religion than Islam who lives among the Muslims.
fatwa:	Legal verdict/ judicial ruling.
Five Pillars:	The chief religious duties of Muslims namely, to recite the creed (*shahada*); to pray five times a day (*salat*); to fast (*sawm*); to give alms (*zakat*); to make the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca at least once in their lifetime.
hadith:	Written records transmitted by a chain of authorities, of the sayings and actions of Muhammad.
hafiz:	A person who memorised the whole Qur'an, a professional reciter.

hajj:	Pilgrimage to Mecca; one of the *Five Pillars* of Islam.
halaal:	Ritually clean and therefore permitted to Muslims.
haraam:	Ritually unclean and therefore forbidden to Muslims.
hijab:	Veil which Muslim women wear.
ihtida':	Following the right guidance.
ijma:	Consencus of Muslim legal scholars, (introduced in the eighth century to standardise legal theory and practice).
imam:	This is the title of a Muslim leader. Sunni Muslims consider an *imam* to be an authority in Islamic law and theology.
iman:	Faith in God.
injil:	*Injil* is the Arabic equivalent of the Evangel (Gospel). Consequently Muslims refer to the Gospel as *injil.* Gospel is an English translation of the Greek word *euaggellion* which is commonly known as evangel. *Euaggellion* or Evangel means Good News.
irtidad:	Apostasy from Islam.
jamaat:	Political party, group, class.
jihad:	A holy war; to struggle to the best one's ability to accomplish a job.
kafir:	An unbeliever, infidel.
kalimah:	The Word (or creed, *shahada).*
madressa:	Name for an Islamic school. In South Africa Muslim children attend this school in the afternoon (after the secular school has finished) in order to learn Arabic and Islamic beliefs and behaviour.
maulana:	A qualified Muslim theologian.
mihrab:	A niche in the centre of a wall of a mosque, which marks the direction of Mecca, and before which the *imam* takes his position when he leads the congregation in prayer.

muezzin:	A person who calls to prayer.
murtadd:	Apostate from Islam.
nabi:	A prophet.
niyyah:	The intention inherent in an action.
qiyas:	Measuring; reasoning by analogy to decide new issues, questions of doctrine and practice.
ramadan:	This is the ninth month of the Muslim lunar year devoted to fasting. It is believed that during this month the Qur'an was brought down to the first heaven.
shahada:	(or *kalimah)* The creed, confession: "There is no God (or deity) but Allah and Muhammad is Allah's messenger, *La ilaha illallah wa Muhammad rasul allah.*
shariah:	Islamic Law based on the Qur'an, *hadith, ijma,* and *qias*.
sheikh:	Title given to a learned man in the science of Islam.
sufism: died	Islamic mysticism legitimised by al Ghazali who AD 1111.
sunnah:	The actual form of behaviour or code of conduct of Muhammad which has become the prescribed norm (second in importance after the Qur'an) for the universal Muslim community.
sunni:	The major group within Islam.
surah:	A chapter in the Qur'an.
tabligh:	Muslim group who devote their time and effort for the cause and spread of Islam.
taurat:	Books of Moses.
tawiz:	'To flee for refuge'. An amulet or charm. A gold or silver case, enclosing quotations from the Qur'an or *hadith* and worn upon the breast, arm, neck, or waist.

ulamah: The principles that Muslim scholars arrived at by consensus, considered authoritative by Sunnis; those learned in religious matters (scholars).

ummah: 'Brotherhood', the community of Muslim believers.

zabur: The Psalms.

iii) Letter of Recommendation

iv) Christian Certificate of Baptism

v) Islamic Form of Declaration

vi) Transcripts of Conversion Narratives C1-C10

Note: The following text represents the transcripts of the actual narratives as told by the converts on the tape recorder. The procedure is explained in detail in chapter four. The sequence of events is not always clear in these spoken narratives. I have therefore consulted the converts in follow-up visitations to make sure that my interpretations are correct. The presentations and analysis of the conversion narratives in the chapters five and six are therefore based on these transcripts *and* the interaction between the converts and myself. Names and places as well as other information which could identify the converts have been omitted in order to secure anonymity. The date displayed is the date of the actual tape recording interview.

C1: (28/11/97) … a reason why I became a Christian is that in 1989 I lost my mother and things were really going badly in my life and I moved away: I felt that there was no hope for me … One Sunday morning I got up and went to a friend of mine and said that I feel like going to church, I want to see how it is in a church. My friend was involved in the church. That morning the pastor was speaking on John 3 where Nicodemus asks Jesus how can he be born again and enter his mother's womb for a second time. Jesus explains to him that you need to die of your own sins, and this is why Christ came, to die for our sins … and for me coming from a Muslim background I did not understand the trinity and that morning it really struck me. The title of the message was "you must be born again" and the scripture was from Acts 2:38. I heard this message and it really spoke to me and the pastor mentioned that there are some Christians who think that they are born again, but we can not be born again unless we die from our old ways.

I couldn't understand why in Islam I had always to read the Qur'an and been to *madressa*. When my mother passed away, I used to read the Qur'an every night before I went to sleep because I never used to sleep well. Sometimes I used to come home drunk … but on that morning August the 10th when I went to church, I gave my life to God. I said, "Lord Jesus, you can have it all." I didn't realise what I was doing … I had good fellowship with many of my 'brothers' at the church: I got on well with them all so this made it easier for me in my Christian walk. I always used to argue with my mother about having to learn things which I do not understand. I could recite things from the Qur'an but not get anything from it: you can do it when you are in any state of mind.

When I was still in school a friend and myself would go to the Mosque and we were high on all sorts of drugs. We would go to this mosque with no conviction, which I would not do today. I would never get intoxicated and go to the house of the Lord. Every day when I get up I have to pray and ask God to see me through this day, those are the realities of Christianity … it's not something you are told to do, it's a part of you. It's like my wife and I having a relationship, it's the same sort of thing. I have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ today. It's a free open conversation. Even when you are having a hard time you can ask the Lord, "Why is this happening to me?" Like this morning I was reading from Psalm 138 (read), I don't know why I turned to this Psalm, and the first three verses were very inspiring … I was thinking about you last night and wondering how am I going to communicate with you today. What must I tell you? But God told me what to do, I have to glorify his name and look up to him, for his truth and faithfulness is always there.

And the things that I could see which were different in Christianity and Islam. With Islam it's more a moral issue; laws of what you must or must not do. Christianity teaches you something different, you have to follow the Lord and follow him in truth and faithfulness. For the Bible says "your loving kindness is better than life" and you must just look to Jesus alone. As long as you do all things in Christ's name it's enough to see you through anything … In *madressa* if you didn't know something you would get punished for it … Today I can see the difference between the two religions.

One day I was at my sister's house, and some of my sister's friends were there also. They were sitting there and drinking … and the one guy asked me, "How come you were the one out of the whole family who became a Christian?" I said, "I can only thank the Lord Jesus Christ for showing me the truth and the right way to live." Then I asked him if he is a Muslim. He replied that he had grown up as a Christian, when he came to

South Africa from Mozambique. Christianity was no help … and Muslims actually helped him. So I said, "You see, you just wanted to become a Muslim so you can be on the 'gravy train'. You want things done for you. Take me for example; I'm unemployed but I still serve the Lord. No matter what goes through my life … maybe tomorrow I will have to testify behind the pulpit about what I'm going through now."

In the book of Genesis when Adam and Eve sinned, God didn't tell Adam to go and look for work, God told Adam to work, you can do things. I help out some of my friends by selling cutlery to try and make a little bit … I get about R900 commission every month, it gets me through, God always provides for me. That's what I was telling him, and I said, "Brother if you were Christian and you became Muslim, then you better go back to what you were. Because there is only one way, the Bible tells it to you. I would have been better off than you being a Muslim and not hearing the Gospel, but you were a Christian from birth". We need to pray about your situation privately because he was sitting and drinking and I said to him that if he was Christian before he could open a can of beer he would be convicted by the Holy Spirit. He could have been witnessing to five guys in the street instead he's sitting with them and drinking. I said there is a difference between you and me. I said that I hope what we've been speaking about here will convict you some day. He was shocked because he'd never heard someone speak about Christianity the way that I had especially someone who was a Muslim. He said that people won't believe it, I said it's not that the people won't believe … it's what God wants the people to believe. I won't make the difference. It's what God puts in me to make the difference, I don't follow my way, I follow his way. As far as the Lord Jesus leads me that is what I will do not depending on other things.

The desire in my heart is to reach out to every Muslim friend of mine, no matter what it takes. Once before a friend … and myself were confronted by guys from PAGAD. They actually beat us up and asked us if we are still going to be Christians and speak to other Muslims. I told them you can even kill me and you will be doing me a favour because I'm going to heaven. My brother and I will still serve Jesus Christ. And he has moved out ... he and his wife and kids are all staying there, they are a bit afraid since his parents every second day were coming to his house and threatening him. Those are the things that made him move out of … 75% of this community is Muslim. If we had even 10% of the Christians in this area with the same commitment to the Lord we could reach this whole area, but we need to make a stand and go for it.

That's why I have applied to … Bible College next year. It's a two year course and after that they will see into which field you should go into from there … it's not for free, it's about R3000 for the year and another friend of mine asked me how I'm going to manage since I'm unemployed. I said I don't have to worry about anything, if God is with me then I will get whatever I want. Because God won't let a child of his go without. Even if it means going to people and asking them to support me. Yesterday morning somebody from … phoned and told me there is a job available so I will be going for an interview. So I might get this job and then be able to pay for my studies.

Even if I have to work, I still want to help others … every day on the street I see people who are throwing their lives away with drugs and alcohol. One morning I met a guy his name is … he is a complete alcoholic … I went and prayed for him, he was in hospital. Another lady who works in the hospital told me that the doctors had no hope for him but three days after I prayed for him he was released from hospital. I myself haven't been to a doctor for four years. When I feel ill I just pray. There are many others who are Muslims who want to be Christians but they are afraid of the Muslims: I just tell them that if the Lord is speaking to you then you must do what I did and follow him. All you have to do is look to Christ. Just walk with Christ that is the greatest testimony. I gave them the story of the tower of Babel … they were trying to make a name for themselves…

I feel that whoever has been called by God to be a Christian, and if you are now a Christian and you were Muslim you must reach out to your Muslim brothers and sisters … even to your parents …and if he has Christ's wisdom he should convert each of them. The greatest desire in my heart is for me to reach out to my family first … the Lord has been good to me so far, my one sister … and her son … and daughter … they have all converted. My other sister's daughter … she has also converted to Christianity … from my family I have four but there is still a long way to go because 60% is still staunch Muslim and I know by the Lord's will and by his way that I will be able to speak to each and every one of them so that they can know the truth … that's all what I can say. (P.S.: The mystical experience is not recorded on the tape, see chapter 5.2.1).

C2: (11/12/.97) My name is … I am from Morocco. My background is Muslim. I came to South Africa at the end of 1994. I came here with the idea of finding a better life and to find a job. In this time I met two missionaries and they shared the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ and all about Christianity. At the time

I was looking for a job in Johannesburg and I did not find it. I was really interested in what they were saying to me. After a while I went with them to church to visit Bible studies and prayer meetings to see what they do and how they worship.

After a while I committed myself to the Lord and to Christianity. I committed my life to Jesus Christ and it was not an easy thing, but something inside me, it was God who touched my heart … since it is not easy to change your religion, especially from Islam to Christianity. But by the grace of God I have changed, but it was hard … before I had no idea about what I wanted from life just to get more money and to have an easy life materially. I had no real understanding of the meaning of life and why we are here. When I committed myself to the Lord I looked back at my life and wondered what is life all about? It's not only materialism, not only to get more money or position, it is not like that. Life is about God created us in his image. He created us to glorify His name, He created us to do his will. Our home is not here on earth, it is eternal life with him in heaven.

After I committed myself to the Lord I went to Bible school in … There I really learnt about the word of God. And each and every day I was growing spiritually and in the knowledge of God. Christianity is not only religion, to do good works … it's really to have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and to realise what he has done for us in our lives. It's not easy to understand, but if you meditate on it and see what the Bible says it's a relationship and fellowship with him, and God died for us on the cross, he shed his blood.

We can't save ourselves, and if we want to be in heaven we need to be perfect. We are not perfect, we need someone from outside who is perfect to come and save us. Like if we are in the sea and we are dying/drowning. For example if I'm in the sea and I'm drowning, I can't take my own hand and pull myself out to save myself: I can't. We need someone to come and lift us out and save me from death. We don't need to do good works we just need to have faith in him and trust him and what he has done for us. And if we do good, it's only to glorify his name in gratitude for what he has done for us. As the Bible says "there is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death" . There are many things in life which seem right to us in life but it will lead to nothing. We don't need to do good works just to believe in what the Bible says. We are all sinful and wicked people, we are born like that, we need someone to come to save us … now at Bible school I'm learning more about the Bible and about God and Jesus Christ.

I thank God for touching my heart and saving me. It was not an easy thing to be changed from Islam to Christianity, but I thank God for that. I long to serve him and to tell people about him but we need to acknowledge who he is and what he has done. And by his grace we are alive and by his mercy and love.

Before I came to South Africa I was staying in Morocco with my family … I finished my study, I was in technical school … then I helped my father for a year in his garage, he is a mechanic and he repairs cars. When I was there sometimes I went to the mosque and sometimes I went to a Qur'an study … and I had no peace within myself: I didn't know what life is all about. In my mind I just wanted more money and material things, but I had no fulfilment when I was in Morocco and I didn't really find peace.

That is why I wanted to leave Morocco, I wanted to go somewhere in Europe or America wherever I could find a better life. When I came to South Africa I still could not find a job and I had no peace and a lot of troubles. I went to Muslim people to try and find help from them. But I didn't find anything. I was without money, without a job without everything: I had nothing.

And God sent these two missionaries … to tell me about the 'good news' of the Gospel … it is not easy to change, and I was interested. I went with them to all kinds of Christian meetings … and I saw the enthusiasm of these people in wanting to bring the Gospel to others who were really lost like myself. And it's not really them who changed me, it was God: They only showed me what Christianity is all about and what Jesus Christ means to them in their lives and what he's done for them.

Then I started to be a little more open and I listened more … and God by his grace changed me. Only he could change me from what I was to what I am now. I thank God for that and thank Jesus Christ for what he means to me now and what he's done for me and for many others because God is love. That is why he sent his beloved Son to die and save us because we are useless without him, we are nothing … God created us in his image to glorify his name.

When I was converted and committed myself to Christ I was not sure what I had to do, but with the help of people around me they showed me that I must be baptised and born again. You must repent and leave your old

life behind and focus your eyes on your new life. That is what it meant to me, and I never look back at what I had done before.

I'm always focusing my eyes on the future and on God. If you focus your eyes on the problems and the other things of life, you will really never do anything for God. What we have to do is focus our eyes on God and to pray that he will keep us in his way and to work with him … and thanks to God I need to grow more in him in knowledge and spiritually. By his grace and his love I will get there. Now I long to serve him.

When I finish my studies I will for sure do something for him. Because there is nothing greater that we can do for him except to be obedient to him and follow his guidance and do his will, since he died for us and we need to be obedient to him and his word.

C3: (29/1/98) I was a staunch Muslim, I used to go to *madressa* as we all do. My father was very strict and he believed that we had to follow the Islamic religion very strictly, in the sense that everything had to be done according to the Qur'an, we could not turn from that. Initially that was fine with me I accepted it … until I got married: I married a non-Muslim. He was a Tamil and I said to him I don't want to convert to Hinduism. I didn't believe in all the gods they had and they have images for everything … since Islam had taught me that God is one and he can't be in any image. My husband agreed with that and he said that if you don't want to convert to be a Hindu – that's fine, we stay as we are. Initially he would go to temple and I would just pray as a Muslim at home, we women do not really go to mosque. But I knew that I was not being a true Muslim because my way of life was not completely Islamic. My father was still alive at that stage and he was still a great force and influence in my life. I knew he would be upset with me if I converted to Hinduism. But he was also open in the respect that he said that we should always respect other peoples religions.

Then my dad died and one day a group of Christian people came to my house, they were doing door to door … and at random they knocked on my door and said they would like to share with me about God and Christianity. So I said that if it concerns God then I'm open so I invited them in and they came in and we had a good chat. They read some verses from the Bible and explaining things to me. They then asked if they could come again. So I said that's fine. I didn't know anything about the Bible or Christianity except what I learnt at school or what I had heard people say. So they came back again and I was more at ease this time. My late husband never had an objection to these people coming, but he wouldn't join in the discussion. I think I was open and I would ask questions and that's where my interest started.

Then we started becoming friends. They would pop in at any time and started explaining many things to me, I began to get very interested. They brought Bibles for the children and started getting the children involved, who were much younger then … Then not long after that my husband passed away, he was murdered. It was very tragic. I realised something very important through this time of sorrow and grief: The only people who came to me and helped me and prayed with me were my Christian friends. None of my Muslim family and friends did what the Christians did. They would pray for me and give me encouragement.

I expected that my family, my sisters and brothers … would have done that, but they didn't. It took me a while to realise that. The Christians were always around me. Whenever I felt lonely or depressed they would come around, sitting here and talking to me and even helped me financially. I realised that these Christians were doing so much for me and I wasn't even a Christian. Then they started explaining to me about being baptised and accepting Christ. But I was having a hard time still struggling with Islam.

I was depressed because my husband's family started coming here and telling the children that there fathers religion was the right religion and that they should follow it … he was buried in the Hindu way with all the rituals and everything … it was something that I didn't understand. After the funeral they said that the kids must light the god lamp and follow their religion. And from my side, my family started putting pressure on me and saying now your husband is dead you must start following the Moslem religion again. They knew that when my husband was alive I was sort of caught in between. Ultimately that made me decide. At the time the only religion I understood was Christianity and I said to my children: "Now we are all going to church and we will leave all these other religions behind us".

Since I did that everyone else fell away, but my family still came to talk to me and said that what I'm doing is wrong, I should follow the Moslem religion. And then it came back to me how the Christians had helped me and the Muslims had left me. And the Christian religion was the way I had chosen and want to follow because

I could easily adapt to it. I thought to myself if my children follow Christianity it would be easier for them since there is no rituals, it's straight forward. In Islam and Hinduism there is so much ritual which you don't really understand. When I spoke to my children I could feel it's what they wanted also, and that's what we have been doing until now.

C4: (3/2/98) I was a Muslim for 21 years. I was brought up in a Muslim home with a Muslim family. I followed all the beliefs and pillars of Islam. I went to *madressa* and I never ever believed I would change my religion … I felt it was the right religion and only way to go. One day I was at a friends house and a friend … was asking me about Islam. He asked me how do I feel about dying and where will I go if I should die? I had all the answers for him verbally but in my heart I really did not know, I never had assurance where I would go. It is something that I started thinking and wondering about it. I started praying about it and questioned whether the Christian God is the same God as the Muslim God and whether we will all go the same way to heaven one day.

The Lord was dealing with me during the month of *Ramadan,* which is the fasting month of the Muslims, because I was soul searching for the truth: I would read the Qur'an and a friend of mine also gave me a small New Testament because I was asking a couple of questions. I read parts of the word of God and parts of the Qur'an: It was as if the Lord had spoken to me because he gave me Psalm 84 where it speaks about your soul yearning and fainting to be in the house of the Lord. When I prayed I would pray to Allah sometimes and other times to God because I was not sure if it was the same God. There were even times when I was fasting that I was fasting for Allah and other times I would fast for God. I prayed for guidance for the right way that he would open my eyes and show me the truth, that he would lead me into the right direction. As a Muslim it was not an easy thing to deal with because there is no assurance that when you die you will go to heaven. Not even a formula is offered for that for where you will go when you die. Many Muslims believe that you can get favour with God by doing good works and there is the punishment of the grave. But as I know concerning the word of God everyone has sinned and has fallen short of the glory of God and I believe that.

I felt that I needed guidance and to know if I was on the right path and to know the truth. If it was the same God then I would not have become a Christian. And one day I got a verse from God, it was like God told me to find John 3:16 (quoted). I had never read that verse before and so I believe that this was directly the voice of God speaking to me because there was no way that I had the thought about that scripture, because I was not grounded in the word of God. It was a bit strange to me because I had never experienced this before. I said to a friend of mine that I would like to go to Church, just to experience what it would be like. So I went to … I remember it distinctly that evening so clearly, the church building was full and I sat in a block of seats where many others were sitting. Then everybody was standing and then the pastor said that any one who wants to receive the Lord Jesus into their lives must raise their hands. I felt I wanted to raise my hand but I couldn't get myself do it. In fact, after the alter call after praise and worship, not even a message was preached, I wanted to raise my hand and I couldn't do it … it was like a spiritual battle inside me. It was questioning and doubting like a fight within myself. I just stood there with this fight in myself. Then a lady came up to me and said I can see that you want to go forward, yet I had not given any indication that I wanted to go forward, yet she knew I wanted to go forward. She took me by the arm, she asked me if I was afraid and I said yes I am. She said, "Don't be afraid." And she led me forward by my arm ... for me that was truly amazing because she had no indications that I wanted to go forward … only God knew what was going on inside me. But by the Spirit of God she was able to know and was sensitive enough to come up to me and encourage me to go forward. I feel that this was from God and he has taken me by my hand and told me this is the way to go. That night I accepted the Lord Jesus Christ into my life. It was a new experience for me – somewhat strange and exciting.

But I was also nervous because of my family, but I first thought I won't say anything … they will just see that I am different and they will see God working in my life. But to my surprise my father had found out that I had been to … church and had accepted the Lord as well. Up until today I don't know how he found out. It was a few days later. He tried to keep me house bound and I wasn't allowed to go anywhere, he said that I should stay in the house. One day he brought the Imaam, which is the Muslim priest so to speak, to the house, and he questioned me and asked why I became a Christian? Was it to please anybody or to be defiant? That was an opportunity to share my testimony with them and that's what I did. I told them exactly how I became a Christian and how God had directed me. My father and grandmother were present at the time while I was being questioned. Strangely enough, I was a saint in Islam and I just thank the Lord that now I am a saint for Jesus. What was amazing was the fact that the *Imaam* said that he admires me because I didn't just go along with tradition. That is what Islam is all about, tradition and religion, just going along with everything and not

questioning anything and just believing that your way is the right way. But I came to know the truth and I told him that. That was the last time I ever had spoken to the Imaam. Today if I see him I will still go and shake his hand.

It was tough for me in the beginning because I came up against a lot of persecution, like when I would go to our family doctor who is a staunch Muslim. They questioned me about my conversion and every time I was confronted about it the Holy Spirit would give me the scriptures in the word of God in answers to the questions, or I would have the wisdom to keep quiet. Like one day they asked me where in the Bible does Jesus say that he is Lord. Being a new Christian I was not that strong in the word and the Holy Spirit brought a remembrance of scripture where Jesus says "The father and I are one", and that is what I said to him. It brought such a joy to my life because the Holy Spirit was discipling me, leading and directing me in how I should go. Because I was a Muslim and all my life I always had Muslim friends. I didn't really have born again Christian friends and the Holy Spirit really told me what to say and when to keep quiet. I could not freely go out with my Bible. I would sneak out to church and to youth and eventually God gave me boldness and go out with my Bible and go to church … Eventually God has been softening the hearts of people around me: Some don't greet me and they look away when they see me, but I pray for them that God will touch their hearts through me. There is a saying which says that as the Bible says, a prophet is never welcome in his home town. I believe that one day they will come to know the truth and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. It's not easy to accept the fact that people deliberately ignore you or look the other way when you come along and to be told that because you converted you cannot get a lift with a Muslim person with them anymore: Because of my conversion they treat me totally different. God then led me to people who cared for me. I was part of a … home cell and then I went to a church where I am placed now called … fellowship. God is using me there now.

God has just been great through everything, even as things were tough in the beginning And he is working in my family's life and I believe that they will come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour. I actually have a vision of my family and how God will use us to minister to others. My mother, I haven't seen her often since I've been a Christian. It hurt me a lot because I knew she did not understand. I never ever felt bitterness or real anger towards my family because I knew they didn't understand. I knew that because of the spirit of Islam they could not understand. There were times when I felt my mother's pain because she heard about my conversion and it was a real deep pain and I prayed for her. It's like she doesn't really want to believe that I am a Christian. Many times my family thought that it was a phase that I was going through and I would get over it but they did not realise the sincerity in serving God. I don't know how my mother sees it now but she knows that I am truly a Christian and serving God. But I was quite surprised how one day I went there and just before my sister got married and she didn't treat me badly because she missed me. But her family from Cape Town was very disappointed with me. And when they came for my sister's wedding I was questioned and persecuted.

At the wedding festival itself, everybody there was Muslim. And my mother's aunt came up to me: It's amazing how the spirit of God will just draw people towards you and as we were speaking she asked my mother's cousin to speak to me about it. This was now the family secret that I am a Christian and it shouldn't leak out. But as we were speaking other people were attracted to the conversation. And somehow we were all sitting around and it didn't worry me that everyone around me were Muslims because I know that greater is he who is in me than he who is in the world. I knew that I had the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions. I drew my faith from the word of God as I was questioned again I got the answers from the Holy Spirit. I spoke about death and that as a Muslim I did not have the assurance of going to heaven when I die. My aunt said to me, "Don't you know that all Muslims will go to heaven?" But I tried to explain that God is holy and nothing that is not holy can be with him in heaven in his presence.

For example baking a cake if you use one rotten egg it will spoil the whole cake. I said that God will not allow sin into heaven. She then said that Muslims when they die will first pay for their sins then they will be able to go to heaven. Then I said that I did not want that because I would not need to first suffer because Jesus Christ has already done that for me on the cross. Then she asked me if I would go and stand up on the stage and tell every one there that they were going to hell. I felt that I could but the Holy Spirit gave me the wisdom to keep quiet. I feel that in some ways through that opportunity their lives have been touched, even though their hearts have been hardened to it. My aunt even asked me afterwards how can I disappoint my mother like that and did I know that my mother would not be able to be there for me anymore because I am a Christian? I am an outcast to them.

My whole family knows now that I am sincere. It's not easy because I'm not free to serve God the way I would want to in my home but I know God had a purpose in placing me in that home. My life has been predestined … I thank God that he has chosen me. Each of us has our own strengths and my strength is boldness. He saw a potential in me and is using that gift. The word of God says "many are called but few are chosen" and I know that I am chosen. It may not have been easy but I still thank him for choosing me because I am a better person and my life is changed. I've been a Christian now for three years. I now have many Christian friends and it's just an amazing thing to serve God. I will never turn my back on him now that I know the truth. I don't believe that we serve the same God because if it was I would still be a Muslim. I believe that I am serving the true God … he is the way the truth and the life, and I thank God that he has allowed me to know the truth. And I pray that every Muslim out there and every person that searches for God will come to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour because that is the true way.

C5: (5/3/98) I was born a Muslim, that was forty years ago. My Muslim name is … both my mother and father are Muslims. We stayed in … and I grew up there and went to school there. After school we used to go to *madressa*, the Muslim school, from 3pm to 5pm. I was the youngest in the house and we grew up with the custom that in a Muslim home a Thursday night is a holy night. We must read the Qur'an and burn incense. If we can, we must have milk and fruit on the table. Being a young girl I used to perform these duties on behalf of the family. We used to recite certain favourite prayers from the Qur'an ... I felt it an honour to prepare for this holy night. It was something nice because just after supper I bath I must burn incense. I would put on a scarf and be quiet and perform this prayer.

Then I grew up until I was about 18 or 19 years old, then you are more modern and don't really follow the customs any more. And on a Sunday night I was involved in *jamaat*, which is like cell groups… Then I got married to a Christian and my father said I must tell my husband to become a Muslim. This was my ex-husband. He was born an Anglican. He was a very educated man and when I met him he was not part of any church. He was attending the 'school of truth' in town. When we got married he said he won't stand in my way, I can carry on being a Muslim and he will be a Christian. We must not interfere but respect each other's religion. One day just for interests sake he asked me to go with him to the 'school of truth' and I went. The service there was very in-depth. My ex-husband was a lawyer. He used to study the Bible and read a lot. His intelligence was too much for me, I couldn't understand his level of thinking. This place was more of a meditation type of service. It was not a church as we know it. It was more people sitting there and give a lecture and then you must go into deep meditation, I could not understand it. I thought to myself Christianity is not for me.

My husband was a very unhappy man – he was always seeking. Then he joined a church in … This is where I became a Christian. It was the month of Ramadan, and he had bought me a walkman and I wanted to buy some Islamic cassettes, because Ramadan is a very holy month and at night before I go to bed I wanted to listen to Islamic cassettes. I went to … and I bought tapes … I was fasting, I won't say I was fasting the whole 30 days … but deep inside of me I was also seeking and I had a deep loneliness inside of me, I was seeking God. On the 27th fast, that's the holiest fast, Muslims believe that the doors of heaven are open on that day and whatever you ask God, will give it to you. Now we all observe that fast. On that night I was praying and I was praying in Islam but I was talking to God. I said, "God, if you don't reveal yourself to me, if you don't show who you are then I'm not going to serve you." Because I really felt that I'm doing all these things and I don't really know who God is. And deep down within me – I felt lonely. There was something I was seeking, I wasn't happy. This night I said to God that if he does not reveal himself to me then I will not serve him any more and he will not be my God anymore and I will go out into the world and live as the world lives.

I forgot about what I prayed and the following Sunday morning my husband woke-up. At that time he was attending a church in … with pastor … That Sunday morning I woke up and I told him that I want to go with him to church, but the way he took it was that he was probably praying from his side that I would convert – I don't know. He didn't ask me, but I forced the issue. He took me to this church in …

The most beautiful thing happened when I went there, when I looked around I saw so many white people which I could not understand. I told myself, "Don't laugh at the people, it's church now and you must behave yourself." While I was standing there the pastor kept on saying that there is somebody here who is seeking God. There is somebody in this audience who is fighting to know who God is. At that moment I couldn't see anything else. I just heard this man, like he was speaking to me. I burst out crying like I have never cried before in a public place. It was not a cry of hurt … I can't explain to you. It was the most beautiful cry I had.

I felt so relieved … it's just I had a confidence. It was the spirit of God around me … then I responded to the altar call. That day I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. The whole service I could not stop crying but I had an inner peace… within myself I was changed.

The second week I was still in a daze, I didn't know what was happening. And that pastor was still saying there is someone here who is still uncertain of God. It's as if there is no one around me. And the same thing happened again when he made the alter call: I went and accepted Jesus again. The third week it happened again and by then I was confident. I began to understand. I had peace, I felt that I had found something so special although I could not explain it. I was so interested in this but I couldn't understand what was going on. Within myself I was changed. At the end of the month they explained about speaking in tongues and they did an alter call. I was so excited and I went up, then they laid hands on me and anointed me and I started speaking in tongues, then I was a Christian. I felt like I really wanted to study the Bible and find out what Christianity is all about.

Then trials and tribulations started, I think it was my marriage. My ex-husband was very domineering. He would always tell me what to do and I could never stand up to him. I used to put him before God. We then left that church because it was too far. Then a friend of his invited him to a church in ... So we went. I thought it would be a good example to the children because they were still young. We were happy there. When the preacher used to preach I could understand. Before we joined this church we went to the Anglican church in … But it was too staunch and I didn't feel comfortable. But my husband was not happy with this other church it was too Charismatic. He liked the Anglican type of worship. I told him I'm comfortable here and I am going to stay here… I made history in that church by being the first Muslim to be baptised in water there. The one Sunday they had a baptismal service and I went up and was baptised …the pastor said, "Praise God, the first Muslim in our church". Then with the problems in my marriage I back slid, I thought I'm not going to church because my life is not coming right not knowing that I must focus my eyes on God. But my husband wanted me to 'worship' him before Christ. Which I did – I put my husband first, that was wrong.

There was a time when I was very ill, I left my husband and went to go and stay with my Muslim family. I became very sick: I went to four doctors because I couldn't understand what was wrong with me. Also the doctors could not understand what was wrong: They said there is nothing wrong with me. My family insisted that I should go to a Muslim doctor. I was desperate so I went and she was not a doctor in medical terms. When I got to the house there were a lot of people there with problems. I walked into a room full of incense and I was sitting there and she gave me one look and she said, "Do you know what your problem is? – it's jealousy". I was so weak and sick I asked her to explain. She said there is someone in your life who is very jealous – it's your husband. He is going to kill you. I started to believe her, because my husband was very possessive. Then she said I must come back and go for a seven day course to drink oil and to cleanse my system. But I didn't want to. And I got worse and I think it was because my spiritual life was going down, but I couldn't see it. Then I decided to go back to my husband, then I started going to church again but I was taking Christianity more seriously. The preachers said we must wrestle with God and tell him our problems, we must speak to God. It was a tradition in our church to scream at the end of church "I am happy". But one day I just said to God, I can't lie, and scream 'I am happy' when I am not. Then I started to level with God. I had confidence in God that he was hearing my prayers. About five years ago, before my divorce, I started praying, "Please God let me separate from my husband." And I felt that I was not happy, I want to leave this man but I didn't had the guts. For five years I've been praying that prayer.

In 1992 my ex-husband never used to work, he was at home and I worked. I used to pay for everything … I just said to God, "Lord you are my witness." In 1992 I got a call from one of my neighbours saying, "You better come quickly your house is on fire." I ran to my boss and said, "Please – you have to help me." I tried to phone my house but it just rang. My boss then told someone to please take me home. I was siting in the car with this guy. I said to him, "What must I do?" He asked me, "Do you know God?", and I said yes then he said then just cling to God. I just said Lord open the way for me. When we came into the street the whole of … was at our house. I walked in and I said to the Lord thank goodness, father this is your house and not my house. The ambulance came and took my husband away, I think he was hurt but I didn't bother about him.

Our church in … and the pastor was very supportive to me because everything burnt out. The children's room, there was nothing left. They only had their uniforms which they had on. I had three children at that time. The church played a very important role. They used to pray every week that everything will come right. I went to the pastor. He knew my husband. I told my pastor we needed a place to stay. Neighbours offered us accommodation ... The assessor came out and the contents were not insured. I spoke to him and asked if there

is a possibility to get something so I can replace my curtains and everything and he said he will try. But because of my husbands attitude he could not do anything. Then three months after the house was burnt, through the help of prayer, it was rebuilt, not one of my family contributed any thing to it. I don't know how we did it but my house was refurbished I had better curtains and furniture than before, that was only through God.

Then I went to my pastor and asked him to come to my house and rededicate it. My husband was sitting in the kitchen, and everything went fine. I said to my pastor that there is something wrong in the house. But it was not the house, it was my marriage. God showed me that what he puts together no man can put a asunder. I felt I can't be foolish and ask God to take me out of this marriage, I must do it myself. But all those years I did not have the will power to do it. After discussing it with God I felt I must do it. Prayerfully I said, "Lord, I'm going to do it." I was not a coward. My husband during the day he will do nothing then at night at about two or three o'clock in the morning he will wake me up and tell me he knows I'm so unhappy in the marriage and then he would complain about everything. At the beginning of 1994, I told him that I'm tired of all his stories, I'm going to pack my bags and leave and file for a divorce. Now I was the bread winner … He was getting a pension. He wasn't shocked or anything. He asked me to give him a week so he can make arrangements. After a week he refused and said I haven't given him enough time, so I said I'll give him another week. But we never sat down and discussed our problems. I was his third wife. On Saturday I packed my things and I left. I went to go and stayed at my sisters place who was a staunch Muslim. That's where I met … (name of new husband) going through that difficult time. He was going through the same thing – a divorce. I was worried about my children. I want to do everything by the book. I thought I'll only take the children after the divorce. I felt that I really need God now … so I carried on going to church. I went back to my old church, they sent transport to come and fetch me. I also encouraged them to start a prayer group. I feel prayer is very important.

Then my divorce was finalised. I was confident, I didn't feel any remorse or hatred, I had peace. My new friend and I we got a room in … we didn't have a house. Then we started going to church. Then the pastor came to our house and we spoke, then he met ... On Sunday in church he preached on adultery and living together. My new friend had a very unhappy past. He didn't know what it was to have a child, and so he wanted to have a child … Then I became pregnant. I knew this is all in God's care. A month after the birth of our daughter … we decided to get married. Our wedding was such a blessing, you could feel the presence of God. We were very involved at church.

I just want to tell you about this last miracle. Because of our pasts, my husband and myself both have a bad name … Now the banks don't want to give us bonds. We applied for a bond on my husbands name but it was turned down… then I filled in another form and I gave it in without my husband knowing. I would pray about it every week. One day I was sitting at work and I got a call from the bank. She said, "Your application for a bond has been accepted". We rejoiced and bought this house. Tomorrow it will be a year in this house.

Muslims are very racist. They think they are the chosen people, almost like the Jews. My nephew one day asked me why do I say that Jesus is the son of God. I just prayed for the Holy Spirit to give me wisdom, and I explained it to him in detail – I don't even know what I said. Even my sister, when I was going through the divorce, she said the reason why my life is going so bad is because I sold my Muslim religion. She said I should go back to being a Muslim. But I told her what I have gained through Christ, I will not give him up for all the money in the world. My sister loves to debate about Islam. And one day I told her about my personal relationship with God and she was so interested. Today all my family when I talk to them, even if they are having a Muslim function, I tell them I have to go to church on Sunday I can't come. And I'm very proud to be a child of God.

C6: (19/3/98) I come from a background where my mother was Hindu and my father was Muslim. My father left my mother when I was born, so I didn't get an *baraka* from my father – which is a tradition with the Muslim people. But my mother made sure that I got named the correct way, that is why I have a Muslim name … when I was seven years old my mother tried to send me and my brother to a *madressa*, so that we could grow up in my fathers religion. I refused so my mother got me a tutor to come and teach me at home, the ABC and the alphabet, the numbers and the Arabic language… but soon I refused.

It went on like that. My brother was also a Hindu. When I was about fourteen years old, by that time my brother had already became a Christian. He didn't tell my mother that he was going to church, he used to tell her that he was going to do some kind of practice. Eventually my mother found out that he was going to

church on a Sunday. She asked him, "Where are you going and what are you doing?" And he told her that he had become a Christian. He said that that is where he has found his peace. He asked if he could bring the pastor of the church home with him. My mother said, that's fine. So the pastor came home and he invited us to the church … My mother said, "But I am a Hindu". I also thought that, because that was the way I was brought up. I asked my mother, "What do you want? Don't you know what you want? First you send me to *madressa*, now I'm a Hindu and now you tell me to go to church." I was confused and stubborn ... because I have been pulled on all direction. My mother decided to go to church but I didn't go with her. Then the pastor came again to our house and invited me to a youth club on Friday. So I started going to youth club every Friday and I enjoyed it. It was a new perspective in my life.

At that time when the pastor used to come to our home we were very poor. We didn't have food. My mother and I were suffering from malnutrition. It was pastor … who used to come to our home, he used to come on a weekly basis and bring us food. The pastor and his wife used to come every week and see to our physical needs and never ever forcing us to become Christians or to continue coming to church. In the meantime my mother and my brother were going to church but I was still at home. Then one Sunday, my mother didn't even ask me, I just said I'm coming with you to church. Our church was in a little house, we didn't have a church building. I was listening to the sermon and I don't know exactly what came over me, but there and then I decided that I wanted to become a Christian. I wanted to accept to Lord as my Saviour. I did that, I spoke to the pastor and said I want to be Christian because I just felt a 'warmness'. It's twenty five years on and I'm still a Christian and I have no regrets about it.

C7: (25/3/98) I was born in …. and I lived with my granny who was a Christian in the Methodist church. That's the way I knew a Christian should be. We attended youth clubs and Sunday school and everything. When I went to Teacher's Training College, I was a Sunday school teacher and then I came to Johannesburg. Here I met my husband who was a Muslim, that was in 1983. I met him in … and we fell in love. He told me that he was Muslim and I told him that I was a true Christian. We agreed to respect each other's religion. I didn't know what the implications would be.

We got married the Muslim way, and what the *imam* said was not so clear to me – I didn't understand what he was saying. Afterwards we stayed together a week or two. Then things started going wrong … he complained about my cooking, the way I bath and everything. I said to him that nobody from your family came to show me what to do, they must help me ... Everyday I had a hard time. When it came to Sunday I was used to going to church. He would never allow me to go to church. For me it became difficult, I was not free. Before we were married he let me go to church. I took him home to the … to meet my family and my grandma was not happy about this. She told me that she brought me up as a Christian and now I want to marry this man, and the two religions are so different … I said I will give it a try. I was with him for 14 years for the sake of my children. I was so confused I did not know what to do because I wanted to go to church.

I have three children – two girls and one boy. The son at the moment is with my ex-husband. We are legally divorced. Things got worse and worse everyday. I was praying and asking God to get me out of this. I was afraid of my husband. One day I went to the department and asked for a loan so I can get a place to stay for myself.

I came here and I was still confused. I thought that if I go to church the priest will reject me … Should I go back to Islam, what should I do? I went to my cousin, we grew up together, and she said to me, "Go to church". There was something keeping me back. One Sunday the beginning of this year I got up and went to church. That was the most wonderful day of my life. It was … preaching and it was as if he was speaking to me: the story about the lost sheep. I said is this man talking to me? When I came out of there I was like a changed person. Now I'm in church every Sunday. I said to … I want to be a member at your church. And I gave him my name and now I'm very happy.

Nobody told me anything about Islam when I was married to my husband. I had to pick everything up for myself. I didn't understand when they did anything. We didn't have a good understanding of each others religion and whenever I went to visit my family I could not take my children with because he said we will eat our food and the children cannot have that. This also made me unhappy. He forced me to go to my family alone ... it was terrible.

C8: (26/3/98) … I grew up in a Christian family, the denomination was Anglican. After school and university I decided to get married … I converted to Islam before I got married. The lady that I was going out with was Muslim. I was very interested in the religion and about five years before I got married I converted to Islam. I then started studying Islam and going through the lifestyle of Islam. To me it looked a very warm religion. If you look at Muslims all over the Islamic world you can see the closeness in them. They are very close people, they follow their religion very staunchly.

I became Muslim and got married and I lived Islam. Then my son was born. His name was … I was married with this lady for 17 years and for all those years I followed Islam. For all those years that I followed Islam most of the preaching and the prayers are in Arabic and because I could not understand Arabic – I still cannot understand Arabic today. Most of the things that were read was reciting, not knowing the meaning of it. I could never really feel at home. I couldn't share emotions where ever I went, because I couldn't understand a word in Arabic. As time goes on I thought that I would begin to understand most of the things. Unfortunately, the family that I married into was not serious about Islam, they were just Muslim because they were born Muslim. They never really encouraged or motivated me … they never explained anything to me. It became very frustrating to me, but in order to keep the peace in my life, in my marriage, I stayed on being Muslim.

Three years ago I got divorced. After my divorce I was still following the Islamic religion but then I was confused because my family is Christian. The only people that would be Muslim in my family was me and my son … it took me a while to decide what I really wanted from life. My son then approached me and he said: "What are we going to do about this whole situation?" … because we got to belong to a religion. I said to my son, if I had to make a decision at that stage about my religion it would be a very irrational one because I was still bitter about my divorce … but my son then decided he would start going to church. I still couldn't attend church because I felt bitter. On a Sunday morning I would get up and drive my son to church and drop him off at the church gate and then go home. When the church finished I would pick him up. One morning … when I had dropped my son off … on my way home, I started thinking about all these things: I grew up in a Christian family and in church they speak English and Afrikaans and they speak the black languages of South Africa which I can understand and I am fluent in them and share emotions in those languages, feel with the people, be it anger, passion, love or whatever – I then made a decision that it is time to go to church. When I picked my son up from church I told him that from next week I will be in church and I will never stay away from church again.

I started going to church. The day I walked into church it was like someone was waiting for me, waiting to accept me with open arms. I felt at home in the church… I felt really at home in that church. What I learnt before I turned to Islam, I still remembered about my church. This time I went to church for a different reason, to make peace with my maker. And I found that peace, it changed my life completely. At first the biggest problem that I had this bitterness was towards my wife and her family because of my divorce. And God actually healed that, he pushed it away. One morning I got up and those pain was gone…. I could make peace with anyone. People that I had not seen in years I could go back to and say 'I've got peace with you'. I even went back to my in-laws and say I am not angry with you anymore – I have peace with you .. today I can honestly say I trust in the Lord and there is no other way.

You can be a multi-billionaire, you are nothing if you don't have God. Now I read my Bible every day and go to Bible study … to me it's like I go to church to fill up my battery. In my home I know that God is here and I can speak to him. I can thank him for helping me when I was on the edge. I know that all praise belongs to him. No doctor or anyone could save me from the pain I had, only God ... and that is when I went back to Christianity: In my own language that I understand, that I can share emotions with, that I can relate to, where I can go out and actually speak to someone about the wonders of God… Islam cannot do it. How can you do that if you don't understand what you are saying? … I still say that 90% of the Muslim people in South Africa, even though they go to mosque and Islamic schools, they don't understand what they are saying because they recite it like a puppet. You don't know how the next person feels… you cannot share emotions … I want to stress, I do not want to bring down Islam because of my ex- marriage. A religion is there to be followed. All I say is: learn to know what you say and share emotions and things will work out.

C9: (26/3/98) When I was smaller I didn't really have a choice which religion I wanted to follow. I was forced to follow the Muslim religion. I was born Muslim. I was put into a Muslim school in the afternoons where I learnt to read the Qur'an – but not really understand it. When I went to high school I never went back to Muslim school again. It was just a few years before my mother left. I have always lived with my father.

I was confused as to which religion I should follow … I was 15 at the time. Since my mother was Muslim, and when she went I didn't know which religion to follow and I decided to find out more about the two religions, actually comparing. What I found was that in the Muslim religion I didn't really understand things as I understand it now in the Christian religion. In the Muslim religion people must pray 5 times a day and also attend the pilgrimage. Only certain Muslims are allowed to go on this pilgrimage, only if you have no enemies and you have been forgiven by everyone whom you had grudges against, and everyone who you didn't see eye to eye with. In the Christian religion I find that you are accepted for who you are and what you believe in. I believe that anybody can turn to the Christian religion if they just learn and find out more about it.

I think that most Muslims who are born Muslim never had a chance to compare the two religions. From a Muslim point of view, everything a Christian does is almost like sin. You can not eat what a Christian person eats even though you are invited to their home you can't eat because you don't know if pork was cooked in their pots. That was a sin. I also think that if more young Muslim people could were to find out more about the Christian religion, I'm sure that most of them would consider converting to Christianity. The first time I went to church, I was 16 years old. And I felt a warm sense of acceptance among the people that were attending.
(P.S: The mystical experience of C9 is not recorded on tape).

C10: (16/4/98) I was born in a Muslim home, I come from a family of ten, I'm the youngest in the family. We are four brothers and six sisters. I grew up in a Muslim home and from the age of six I started attending *madressa* up until the age of 19 when I graduated from *madressa*. I graduated as a *hafiz* of the Qur'an. Part of my graduation was to read the prayers during the month of fasting, *ramadan*. "Hafiz of the Quran" means I can recite the entire Qur'an off by heart from cover to cover. So I attended *madressa* for about 14 years … I loved Islam but I was not a five times a day Muslim and I was not a very pious Muslim although I had great respect for my beliefs and my religion. I always call upon the name of Allah in times of need. Especially when I was writing my matric exam … The reality of Allah in my life was there. In other words, I was the type of Muslim who would not give a hearing to anything else, I would not entertain any other religion or belief other than Islam. To me Islam was a way of life, to me Islam was it! I would not convert or become anything else other than Islam. I never indulged in any other religion or beliefs during those 19 years. In other words my life was totally and completely devoted to my belief in Islam.

I come from a very strong Muslim family. My father was an important Muslim. He used to drive out demons and pray for people, made *tawiz* and so on. My family always believed that as the youngest son my father's gift would be passed on to me. To this day because of my conversion my family has taken strict measures. They have taken all their kids out of secular schools and put them into Islamic schools. They fear that something like this can happen to someone else in the family as well – you know the conversion. They have become extra pious and more stricter in their beliefs, every single one of my brothers and sisters have now gone for *hajj*. If you look at their way of life, their lifestyle, their dressing, it is shocking because they have really become very strict … My father was very strong in his beliefs and he made sure that every single child in the home completed *madressa*. *Madressa* normally runs during the time of the school ... Because I failed two years in high school it gave me an extra two years in *madressa*. Those are the years that I studied to be a *hafiz*. Those two years I studied under ... My mother still holds a lot of certificates that I had when I graduated from when I was in Islamic school.

At the age of twenty I met a beautiful young girl who is now my wife … we were going out for a while. Among the Indians you find three different types of people; you find the Muslim, the Hindu and the Tamil speaking people who are very dark in the colour of their skin. The Muslims are much fairer. When my family discovered that I was going out with a Tamil girl they were very disturbed by this, because to them it was a disgrace to the family. Christianity had nothing to do with it at that stage … the Tamils are regarded as third grade Indian citizens. They are regarded as the dirt among the Indian and lower class people. My family therefore beat me up and warned me not to see her any more, not because of Christianity but because she was a Tamil girl. After about 4 months I was still meeting with her secretly, I had fallen in love with this girl. A time came where I felt my family was becoming too harsh and difficult and they were not understanding the feelings that I had for this girl. I approached this girl and asked her for her hand in marriage.

She said something very shocking to me: "I can never marry you because there is someone I love much more than I love you." I said, "But we have been going out for all these months how can you now claim that there is someone else?" She said: "You don't understand, I am a Christian, I am a believer and God's word says that I

must not be unequally yoked. What fellowship has light with dark? … unless you become a Christian I can never ever marry you, I cannot forsake my God to marry you." I said if that's the way you feel okay but I can never serve three gods or worship three gods. To me Christianity is completely out of the question. I said, "A woman has to come a man's way." If you love me then you will come my way. She replied, "I love you but I love my God much more than I love you. I will rather leave you than forsake my God". Then we broke up for a week or two.

I spoke to one of my sisters and said, "Don't you want to speak to this young girl about Islam and encourage her about Islam?" So I phoned … and I said, "Why don't you meet with me I am willing to compromise and go to church with you if you are willing to hear my side also?" She said, "No problem." I started going to church with her and I went through the usual thing that Muslims go through who go to church for the first time: I sat at the back and I was very critical about what was going on. After church I came out and used to say to … can you really believe everything this man is saying? … how foolish can you be to believe all the rubbish that this man is preaching? I began to mock her and criticise. To me it was one big joke when I came out of the church service, for me it was a time to rip Christianity apart. She used to simply say, "You made me a promise that you will come with me to church, how you feel about it is immaterial to me. There will come a time when God's conviction will come upon your life." I said, "That will never happen, you are wasting your time." In the interim my family discovered again that I was still going out with this girl and the whole thing turned around again. They also discovered that I was going to church and they became very upset. They began to persecute me and they beat me up and warned me not to see her again.

I started seeing her secretively again. Every day when I would go home my family would tease me, especially my sisters they would say how is the black girl that you have got, how is that rotten girl that you are going out with. This began to work me up. They used to look at her as real dirt and call her all of the worst names you can think of. On the inside it was really getting to me because I really loved this girl.

One Sunday I was sitting in church and the pastor preached on John 3:16 (quoted). Then he read from 1 John 4:20 (quoted). Then I began to question the love of God as a Christian and a Muslim. I began to ask myself that if my family were really and truly serving a God of love and care how come they are condemning God's creation, who is … ? How come they are calling her names, how come they are not encouraging her to embrace Islam ... and I began to question. I came to the conclusion that the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur'an are different God. For the first time I met a God who is a God of love. Emotionally I was broken and God touched me. On that day I went forward and I said to the pastor, "I don't understand this Father, Son and Holy Ghost business but I do understand one thing, that the God you spoke about today is a God of love and I want to embrace this."

It was then that I met ... He used to come all the way from … with a friend of his ... We used to talk for hours. He would show me things in the Qur'an and in the Bible, it was like scales falling off my eyes and for the first time in my life I began to see a lot of things. I thank God for good Christian people who I met at that time, they showed me a lot of encouragement and love which is what I was lacking at the time in my life. Because of all the love and care of the Christians. I began to embrace Christianity. Because of that my family put me out of the house and had a burial service because they believe that if you reject Islam you are dead, you don't exist. It was very frustrating and hurtful, I was really down but I thank God that I knew Christian people who really showed me love and the void and emptiness which I had in me was filled with people who had love that was overflowing.

And eventually at the age of twenty one ... and I got married, my family was totally against it. They dispised me, they completely disowned me. It's been 19 years now and my family still don't want anything to do with me. They are prepared for me to come home but not my wife or kids because they say that they are *kafir*. They will not accept them because they are not Muslim. I have made a stand in my personal life that if my children and my wife cannot be accepted then I also must be rejected. I will not disown my own family for the sake of my Muslim family. I then joined a local church where I received a lot of encouragement and was taught a lot.

Then some things crept in, a frustration because of the longing to be with my family. There were a few occasions where I left … and went back to my family. I embraced Islam again and then would come back to Christianity. It was a to and go thing. I reached the stage in my life where I was living a compromised Christian life. When I was with the Muslims I was Muslim when I was with the Christians I was Christian – I was living a double life. I was trying to please … on the one side and trying to please my family and the Muslim community on the other.

Around 1985 my father passed away and when this happened my family did not notify me. As long as I was embracing Christianity they would have nothing to do with me. Three weeks later one of my neighbour came to me and sympathised with me and I was shocked because it was the first time I heard about my fathers death. I immediately went inside the house and beat … up, I bruised her ribs, I hit her head on the wall. I blamed her for the death of my father, I said, "It was you would have kept me from my family". I grabbed her by the hair and threw her in the car and took her to my mothers house. When I got there my brothers all came out and said that I am not welcome here. I said to them, "No, you don't understand, I want to embrace Islam and I want this woman to ask your forgiveness for making me Christian." I dragged her into the house. I confessed back into Islam … I sat with my mother in the room and read the Qur'an and … was sitting in the lounge and she was weeping and my sons were crying. It didn't bother me because I was completely broken over my fathers death.

My conversion in the beginning was an emotional one, not sincere, it was not genuine from the heart. It was an emotional conversion, I was broken and had been rejected and that's why I embraced Christianity, it was an emotion. Although I had discovered many things that were wrong in Islam it was still more an emotional thing … Like the Bible says the letter kills but the Spirit gives life. I had knowledge, but no revelation, no spirit, no life and no truth in me. I slept at my mothers place that night. The next morning I came out into the lounge and … was still sitting there weeping. I said to her, "You must take your two kids and get out of my mothers house, I don't want to have anything to do with you." We were going to go through with a divorce. She walked from my mothers house to her mothers house about five kilometres. I did not want to have anything to do with her. I will support the kids but will not have anything to do with them. I didn't even want custody of the children. We were separated for about a month. I used to go daily to see my son at the school. My family began to bring some Muslim girls for me to meet and one Muslim girl from Durban my family flew her up we were planning to get married and the divorce was getting finalised.

One day I came home from work. I had gone into business with my family. I was very tired. It was a Friday so I prayed and I took my beads and started praying but I was so tired I fell into a deep sleep. While I was laying on the bed I had a vision that I was going to a church in … I came into the church and the pastor … he introduces a guest speaker for the evening and he goes up and he preaches. And when he was finished he said there is a man here tonight who has turned his back on God and broken his relationship with God and God wants to restore this man. In a vision I saw this. The Saturday morning I got up in a shock and I had this longing to see my two boys. So I said to my mother, "Can I phone … and tell her I want to see the two boys I'm missing them". She said, "No problem, phone". When I phoned my sister in law answered and said that … is not there and the boys are not there. Till twelve o'clock that night I was trying to get hold of them. I said to my mother that on Sunday morning I'm going to go there immediately that they come out of church and get my two boys.

So I waited outside the church. As soon as they came out I saw … and the two boys and I went to her and asked if I can have the two boys for the day and she said fine you can have them. I put them in the car and my one son said, "Please daddy, take mommy with." I didn't want to but I turned back and got there, and she was waiting as if she knew I was coming …so we went to the … for the afternoon. At about five o'clock we packed up as I was driving I had this urge in me to go to a church but I didn't say anything to them. I took a drive to … and my smaller son got excited and said, "Mommy, look daddy is going to church." My wife said, "Keep quiet, just now daddy changes his mind." In the church we sat down. And … walks on and he introduces a guest speaker and this guy preaches, but my mind was not there; millions of things were going through my mind.

After this guy preaches he says there is a man here tonight who has turned his back on God and broken his relationship with God and God wants to restore him. … looked at me. In the church I started swearing at her, in the church using vulgar language. I said, "It's not me there are thousands of people here and if you keep telling me it's me, then I'm going to walk out of the church." After about half a minute of silence no body responded. The man then said, "I will be more specific: the man I am speaking about is sitting in this isle," and he points to my isle. He said, "The man I am talking about is sitting right at the back and he is dark coloured in skin." I looked around me and I was the only Indian sitting there among Whites. And to this day I cannot recall how I walked to the front of the church. I found myself standing at the alter of the church. With … standing there holding my hand and my two boys and we were weeping. I don't know why I was weeping – it was just joy. The pastor laid hands on me and prayed for me. I went home after that service to my mothers house. I told … I'm going to get all my clothing I'm coming back home. When I got home, I explained

everything, my mother said to me, "Don't be a fool, they conned you. They phoned the church and told them you are coming". I said it's impossible, it's supernatural, it is unbelievable.

Three weeks later in the local church a guy by the name of … began to preach. While he was preaching, in the middle of his sermon he stopped and said, "You young man, come here." I went to the front and he said, "God has a message for you." He laid hands on me, I don't even know what happened to me. I was on the church floor for about 45 minutes. During that 45 minutes I had a vision of hell. My father was burning in hell and saying to me, "You never told me about Jesus. Why didn't you tell me about Jesus?" Some day I went into the most beautiful place which I believe was heaven and I felt a hand come upon my head and say, "My son, go and preach my word." That's when I got God's call upon my life to go full time into the ministry that was in 1996. Ever since then I attended two years Bible school. I was two years on the road as an evangelist. I then started this church where we are now. We have 300 adults and 100 kids who come to this church. I am pastoring this church at the moment. That's basically what God has done in my life, that's the conversion in a nutshell, it's been supernatural.

My house was petrol bombed in 1988. It was burned down. We ended up with nothing. But now, ten years later we possess material things 100 times more than we had then. My family still reject me, but I still go and visit my mother on mothers day and on her birthday. They don't accept it but we still do it. A lot of Muslims have come here to our church. They have come to threaten us and assault, about three or four years ago. But now I am highly respected in my community. Muslim people call me to pray for them. There are two Muslim businesses in this area where I go and pray for their businesses regularly. I have Muslim neighbours where we also go and pray. We have about 8 Muslim converts in our church. There has been a lot of persecution but God has been faithful. At the end of the day people look at your lifestyle. They look at the Christ that is in you. That is the strongest testimony and witness. I have been in this community now for 20 years, people know me. If I was a fake or a con artist I would never have been respected. God has blessed the church. We have seen peoples lives change. People have grown spiritually. It's the hand of God. There is a lot of work to do still we have only scratched the surface.

vii) Transcripts of Conversion Narratives M1-M10

M1: (19/1/98) I have converted from Christianity to Islam. At the age of ten I realised that I was a Christian and I never thought about changing my religion. I was a true Christian, I went to church and all those things. Then in 1995 I saw an advert about different religions. Before that I had an inquisitiveness about other religions. The fact is I never wanted to be a Christian, they made me a Christian. Even if you go to the department of home affairs and you tell them your African name, they will ask you what is your Christian name. Even on the forms it says that. So in a way you had to be a Christian. If you don't provide a Christian name, it's a problem.

One friend of mine was already a Muslim. He was a part-time worker in an Indian shop and he converted to Islam. I asked him some questions and he answered them very positively. He gave me some Muslim material to read and he taught me many things about Islam. At the library he showed me where the Islamic material is found. We went there one day and I went through some of the material and that is when I started to be a Muslim. There is not much that I questioned in Islam or did not understand, whereas in Christianity there are many things that I questioned. Not only Christianity itself but also Christians. If you compare a Christians' loyalty to Christianity with a Muslims loyalty to Islam, I found that with Muslims they are very loyal. There are people who claim to be Christians and are not doing what they should be. But in the Muslim world they are so loyal they pray five times a day. Christians only go to church on a Sunday. I don't know if you understand.

This friend of mine he used to go to a mosque in ... During this time of the year it was *ramadan* He used to see me playing soccer when he was on his way to the Mosque. He would play soccer then go to the Mosque and stay there the whole night and was praying there … then I became really interested. I used to pass the mosque and I always used to want to go in, then one day I went there and I was welcomed and I converted to Islam. And I enjoyed it there.

There were in fact many things which made me become a Muslim. One is that the previous government of South Africa was Christian. Also if you read the Qur'an, I don't have to question it. It is very straight forward

– I understand it more than the Bible, like the Genesis I don't understand. I have a problem – I'm still wanting to learn Arabic. Because you need to learn Arabic to be able to understand the Qur'an in it's original form. Because if you read the Qur'an in it's original form you won't miss what you miss through an English or Zulu translation. That is why I want to read it in it's original form. But I am struggling with it. But I hope that I will learn Arabic soon.

I grew up in a Roman Catholic Church. There were many problems that I did not understand. They also have a lot of rules; you cannot smoke, eat pork or drink. So it was easy for me to go from this type of Christianity to Islam, whereas in the Roman Catholic Church if you drink it is no problem. They also smoke, I have seen that. Yes I was not happy in that church … But if I can just read the Qur'an in its original Arabic I will be the happiest man on earth. Because I can understand it in English and it is clear to me. I haven't started yet but I want to register here at the school soon. So I'm still enquiring about doing an introductory course. If I can at least read Arabic that's all I want I don't need to be a master at it just to be able to read it.

The political views also I have a problem with which perhaps makes me biased. These Christian countries! They want to dominate the Islamic countries, I don't know why. If you remember the issue of the U.S.A and Iraq. You can see it's not correct.

Christians that I have met they say that they are born again Christians and then the next day in town you will find him stealing cars. I stay in the township and over the weekends they are involved in all sorts of bad things ... They even use Christianity to do filthy things to con people out of their money. But some of them are true Christians I can see that. But I have never seen a Muslim doing that. Muslims help each other. In the Mosque if you don't have money for bread you can ask your Muslim brother and they will give to you. It fits me as a township guy because if you don't have, you ask and you can get something. There is no "everyone for himself" and I think God would want us to help one another and I love to be able to give to those who do not have. If I give to those who don't have, I feel like I will give more. Sometimes if you go to Christians and ask for money to buy bread they will say, "No you must go and work." That is not a good response. But they don't realise that when a person comes to you and asks you they have already tried all the possible means. Even if I go to a Muslim Indian shop my fellow Muslims will give to me. If it's winter we will distribute some blankets to some of our poor Muslim brothers. With the churches they seem more concerned with status and being high up in the church.

M2: (17/2/98) At the start I knew nothing about Islam. I was just a normal South African Christian. I was just thinking that my own church was the right one. I was in the Methodist church since I was a boy. I was in the youth movement of the Methodist church as well as the church choir in Durban.

I then had problems at home, my grandfather passed away and my grandmother passed away. I had nobody to look after me. I had to face the world. I met some friends of mine who were following a certain cult called 'Hebrew Israelism' … We used to meet together and discuss the differences of religions and scriptures. They were following Christianity but at some point they differed and followed Africanism ... They taught me a lot to counter Christianity. I began to doubt Christianity. Before I never even considered other religions I just accepted that Christianity was right. Then my one uncle from America came to South Africa. He asked me what religion I was following? I said Israelism. He said, are you a Zionist? I was baffled and didn't even know what that was. Then he explained to me a little bit about that. Then I thought I better read more about this, I was still young then.

Then I went to the IPCI in Durban, where Ahmed Deedat has an audio visual room where you can see debates between Christians and Muslims. That was after I dropped out of university. Then I had no work and nothing to do so I sat and listened to these debates. When Deedat challenged the great scholars of the Christian world it seemed, according to my judgement, as if the Muslims were scoring more points in these discussions. Sometimes the Christians also made a stand. I had a lot of respect for the Christians because that's my family background.

After about a year of studying Islam I was convinced, and I decided to submit myself totally to Islam. Then one brother … he embraced me and called me into the folds of Islam. He asked me what name I would like to take. Since Jesus Christ is the main difference between Islam and Christianity, I decided to take the name of this great prophet, the name Isa. I am still interested in finding out about the different divisions of Islam. My

uncle used to ask me, "Are you still Muslim?" and I was still a little bit baffled and so I tried to find out more. Now I am still studying Sufism, which I am interested in.

I find Islam to be the religion where man's mind is free from inferiority complex. Since apartheid man has been brain washed about so many things. But Islam has opened up my mind and shown me that we are all the children of God, irrespective of our colour, race, gender. There is no one superior or inferior. We are all the same. It's only that God gives people riches, some people work hard and are rich some are poor.

In Islam I find peace. Although there is still oppression in South Africa, Islam is Indian dominated and they have prejudices against other races which Islam does not preach. Once you get to know them it seems as if they like you, but behind your back they back bite you. My aim is to stick with Islam and I would like to spread it amongst my people in South Africa … Make the whole of South Africa Muslim. Even the President himself must embrace Islam.

I went into the mosque with brother ... I was with five others who were also joining Islam. Every morning we would go to the mosque and we were taught how to clean ourselves and how to greet people, how to behave. Everyday they would give us money for transport to attend these classes until our project was not coming together. There was a difference between us and the Indian Muslims. They were not really supporting us. Even now it's a problem. They are not living according to what Islam teaches. It says they should love their brothers with there whole heart. They should help, but they are too busy enjoying life. Allah will punish them for that.

But they accept me. They have given me a certificate and an Islamic document. Even before I went to Islam I knew the main difference was the prophet Jesus. And I want to be like him and follow in his footsteps, to bring the true religion to our people. Blacks before in South Africa were Muslims before imperialism came along and changed the religion. Our great grandfathers used to trade with the Arabs. It makes me happy to be back home to my original religion.

M3: (26/2/98) Let me start by telling you about my family background. My family is both Christian and traditional family. My grandparents on both sides are very religious. My grandfather on my mothers side was a prominent minister in the Lutheran church, he was also a minister in the … homeland. He was known as … I think he died in 1984. On my fathers side both my grandmother and grandfather were very staunch Methodists with also some traditional religion and ancestral worship – which goes hand in hand in most African families. Coming from that type of background there had to be some religious influence. I think with me it was a process, you don't just convert or revert immediately. What happened with me is that I was brought up in the church basically. I spent a few years with my grandfather and I would go to church a lot with him as well. When I grew up I started asking questions about the world around me, I started to discover more about myself, I started looking for meaning. I was always inclined towards religion and always looked to religion as a source to give me direction and therefore I went into religious activities.

My parents then sent me to a Roman Catholic school. At that time there was a notion that these schools are highly disciplined and provide a very good education. Also I realised that there were differences in Christianity itself – between the Methodists which I grew up in and the Catholics. Then I became a Catholic and participated in all the activities even though I did not understand all the activities, like eating fish on a Friday and the nuns ... But I always accepted what I was told. In my family authority is respected, you don't question authority, especially if it comes from God. I even got baptised as a Catholic … but I never went to a Catholic school in the end and I went back to the Methodist school.

My father used to tell me stories about when he was growing up, how he had clashes with his father concerning religion. He never understood certain things in the Bible itself, and he used to ask his father. His father got angry because he said that this is what you go to school for to learn and after you come from school you come and ask me. He explained an incident when he was growing up. One day when he went to church. He was a member of the church choir. He was told that he was a powerful preacher even from an early age, and that he could move men to tears … He started asking questions in the church, some of the questions were never appreciated and when they couldn't answer his questions, he left. And thus the whole youth moved with him from the church. That had a very strong impact on my father when he was growing up.

I never understood the trinity. I never understood how to relate to God and then how to relate to Christ. Also I'm the type of person who likes discipline and I found that in Christianity there is no discipline. When I was

growing up a man came to my house one day and brought me some tapes of Ahmed Deedat. And I never really understood what he was talking about but it always remained with me. Later on when I met with Muslims I remembered those tapes. I watched the tapes with my father but my father rejected the tapes and therefore I did also because he was my authority, I did not ask questions – I rejected it automatically.

But it still made an impression on me – also the *adhan*, there is something beautiful about the *adhan*. I was fascinated by it and I used to love it. Then I dismissed it. Then I started going back to church. I don't know how it is in the Methodist church in the white communities but in the location you have elders. We have men and women as groupings. They wear uniforms, in the African communities the men wear black with a belt with something red in it. This has great religious value. And my grandfather was one of these leaders, and he passed it on to my father who had to continue this legacy. Even the women dress up … The way they dress has a religious significance. I always want to ask questions then I thought I don't really need to understand everything. I believe as long as I accept it with my heart it is O.K. … and I also felt that my questions were demonic in a way.

Then I plunged myself more into the activities of the church, like the choir, trying to participated in each and every activity, so that I could get rid of the questions and doubts in my mind. Even to ask the clergy questions I believed it was wrong. So I tried not to ask, but when I did ask I became even more confused. Also religion is even like a tradition itself in my family. My parents insisted that I go to church, you must go to Sunday school. In our communities also if you don't go to church the minister won't bury you. That's the worst fear that most of people have, so they go to church now and then so that the minister sees you and will bury you. When I never went to church I used to watch these religious programs on Sundays on Television. Then one Sunday I felt so bad that I phoned one of these programs on a Sunday and I told them that I want to be attached to Jesus, I want to have new life and accept him the way you do. Then I felt a bit better. I passed my tests at school and so my father was very proud. Also I am the first born in my family and so there was more pressure on me, and my father always said to me you don't go to church to please him but you go to please your God. One of the ways that he demonstrated this was that he allowed my mother to go back to the Lutheran church. So they went to church separately. My father never even used to go to church often so I would often go alone. My younger brother was totally uninterested in the church and so I was a light in my family.

On the SABC on Sunday a film came up about an Indian king, he was a Muslim ruler and I liked the way he ruled his subjects and the way he carried himself. I also liked to believe in God in the way that I could never ever question him. I wanted that type of obedience which Islam provides. I never knew much about Islam. But I liked what I saw. I saw how the media portrayed Muslims as hi-jackers of planes and terrorists and instead of putting me off I became more interested. I asked myself who are these people who can obey God so much that in their obedience they were willing to blow up planes? To me it came up as a totally foreign thing. I became more interested in Islam but still went to church. At school I was in an Easter play. Then one time I went to a camp which was cross-cultural, sponsored by my school. There was a lady there who's behaviour and conduct was different to all the other ladies around. She had a sense of modesty and her conduct and manners was different. I discovered later that she was Muslim, the other girls openly flaunt themselves and guys can do whatever they want. She was very careful about how she related to boys, was also kind and very sweet. Later I established some correspondence with her and she sent me a Christmas card. I then went to encyclopaedias to find out about Islam. It spoke about Muhammad who claimed to be a prophet of God – I had a problem with this word 'claimed', I didn't understand it.

At the end of the day I just said to myself – I am just going to become a Muslim. I don't really know much about it but it seems like a beautiful religion. So I came to Mayfair and I looked for a mosque. I lied to my parents, I told them I was going on a date. The *ulamah* offices were just opposite the mosque so when I went there and said I want to know more about Islam and I want to be a Muslim. They took me to the *muezzin's* house, he started telling me things about death and the day of judgement, these things fascinated me. I had one problem – I got home late but lucky my father was not there. I decided to become a Muslim the next day.

I had another problem – I loved Islam but I still wanted to have Christ in my life and I didn't know their position concerning Christ. Christ to me was important because to me you need Christ in order to get salvation. That night I had such a struggle to go back or not to go back, because I thought even if they don't accept Christ I will somehow fit him in. So I can still retain some of what I believed. The whole night I did not sleep and my parents, I knew, would not be happy about this.

I came back to the *Ulamah* offices and I met Mullanah ... I just wanted to become a Muslim. He recited the Shahada to me and told me a few things and he gave me an address in Actonville because he said it will be closer for me. So there was a big space then between me becoming a Muslim and then starting to practice Islam because I had to find Actonville. I didn't know where it was. I didn't tell my family that I became a Muslim. I went to Benoni and I took a taxi to Actonville. I then looked for the MYM offices. I made an appointment with them and I came late and they introduced me to someone who became my friend and my teacher.

Then the problem began – how do I tell my parents? I still did not tell my parents. My father started having suspicions because I wasn't going to church any more. Then one Sunday I went to my father, he is very difficult to approach – I told him I have become a Muslim. He stood up and was so angry, it was as if I committed the greatest sin of all times, he started shouting and it was big tension in the family from now on. Then they said it was because of the Indian girl that I met and I could not pray at home because they would mock me because I had to wash before I pray. I couldn't eat certain things in the house. My father said he did not teach me these things who the hell taught you these things? … he said I was leaving my cultural background. He said it was nonsense and garbage. It was a big struggle, my father began to threaten me – I was in my Matric year – that if you don't leave Islam I am going to kick you out of school. After I became a Muslim I changed and was praying more. I didn't have girlfriends. They started accusing me saying that Islam was destroying my youth, of breaking my cultural bonds. Then they started calling me 'Sheman' which mocks you like you are afraid of girls. I was then forced to have a girlfriend to get rid of the pressure in the family. But Islam has regulations on this type of thing.

At school I also had problems because the school was predominately Christian and so I had to go to Bible class. In those classes Islam was painted very badly, because we did discuss different religions. My girlfriend also didn't understand me. I didn't fit into society any more since other young people in my community were totally free to do what they wanted to. My father also used to say that I will never find a girl in my community who will accept me and love me for who I am. So I had to try and keep this girlfriend of mine. So I wanted to prove him wrong. It was very difficult and depressing for me. We also had problems at home with finances. I couldn't fit in with the high class. At school my girlfriend was the prettiest and I didn't even have a gift for her on Valentines day ... As the resistance grew I actually dared my father. We would have talks at night and he would try and dislodge me. I told him that he would never pray with me and help me. Also he always told me that I must please God and this is how I can do that in Islam.

I was praying more and concentrating on Islam and this gave my father another excuse that I was neglecting my school work. And I was doing very badly at school because of all the pressures around me. I just wanted to prove to him that I was serious being a Muslim and nothing my father could do to deter me from it. He also said that I was adopting Indian culture … My father also threaten to call a family meeting. My grandmother, being the oldest living person in the family, is also difficult to approach and he wanted me to speak to her. She started preaching to me about religion. And in the end she said that as long as I worship God it's fine, I think that was one of my greatest victories. But it is not an easy process, you have to be strong. All in all I'm still happy I'm a Muslim. My family still does not accept me. There is still the social problems but I'm still trying to find my place. And get direction, but I know Islam is something I can not live without. That is basically all I can say.

M4: (14/3/98) One of the key things for me about understanding conversion and its experience is that you do not choose Islam, but rather Islam chooses you. The whole story I feel was out of my rational control. I grew up as a Catholic and quite committed I think. I even considered at one stage becoming a priest. Then I went to WITS university and things changed. I did a lot of experimentation, like Yoga, Transcendental Meditation and ceremonial Magic and all kinds of things. Even towards the end of my schooling there were things about Christianity which I could not accept rationally. There were two key issues which I struggled with, the one is the Trinity, it just did not seem reasonable and the second was the divinity of Christ: I just could not understand how you could squeeze the whole universe or the absolute into a single person.

That's probably one of the reasons why I went into this extreme spiritual experimentation. In the end I had a degree in Anthropology, which was anything but Spiritual. By then there were a few things that were apparent to me. My current way of looking at things were all structures. I looked at Eskimo and bushman narratives and both of these were unique, there was no division on it. I had been trained to look at it in a certain way and there were all these binary opposites … It occurred to me that there is a natural knowledge that man has which

is beyond and is superior to our current way of looking at the world. I also began to suspect that perhaps the Muslims knew something about this. At the time I didn't actually meet any Muslims, I just read about it.

I came across some … He records this mythological being in mid eastern mythology called *Sheikh* who was a mystic and a joker. For instance he was standing in a village one day under a street light frantically looking for something and the people of the village came to him and asked what was wrong, can they help him and he said he lost his purse. They said, "Where did you loose it?" He said, "I lost it there." They said, "Then why are you looking here?" "Because the light is here." All these clever anecdotal ways describing the human condition – in this case that we are always looking in the wrong place for things. What I'm saying is that I had some access to Islam and to text of basic Islamic ideas.

What I found really refreshing is that all the basic beliefs of Islam did not offend my reason. I could accept all these things in the orthodox Islam: that God is one, the prophets, the angels. Not like in Hinduism where you have to accept that Krishna is a God, same problem as Christianity. So I didn't have anything to do with Muslims. I finished my honours degree. I then left WITS and started working as a clerk. There I met a lovely, very simple naïve Indian man, … he's dead now. He was very kind to me, very human, and he was actually trying to convert me to Islam. This was very foreign to me … But he was a *Tabligh* and eventually he invited me to mosque. Every time I met them it just put me off completely, I couldn't take them. I mean the *Tabligh* movement is so orthodox to the point of stupidity. I mean for me it was just not on. I felt they were just being arrogant. But it was the most peculiar event because my head said no and my being said I don't care. Something took over – I became a Muslim anyhow. Ask people who become Muslims this question, how much did you choose Islam or did it choose you? At the outset it was very foreign. It was so extreme for me when I converted because I became a Muslim in the presence of people I did not like. The whole thing was bizarre – I converted in 1981.

I then became associated with the Malay community here in Bosmont and then I started chanting and I joined a group that was following the "Naqsh'bandiya" order. And I got involved with the Shadree order that I am involved with today: This order originated in Morocco, it's north African and East African. Another thing is that I teach leadership, that is my business. In the course of my work, my inner and outer life have married each other. To develop these ideas further there have been two elements to my path. The foundation has been Islam and the various Sheikhs that I have studied under. For the last 11 years then there has been taking this knowledge into the world and making it practical, like decoding the world if you like.

M5: (5/2/98) I grew up in a Roman Catholic background in … I was a rather traditional churchgoer. My family was very poor, and this caused me to get into bad habits, so to speak. I joined a gang in … when I was 14 and I was involved in a lot of bad things, I don't even want to mention these things now … but I became soon a gang leader and was feared because of our brutality in the whole community. My mother was against this very much and today I know that she suffered a lot because of my bad actions, but I also know that she never gave up praying for me in the church. Maybe God answered her prayers, because today I am an upright person and follow the only true religion: Islam.

One thing which made me move towards Islam was that the previous government of South Africa was oppressing the poor. I myself was poor and felt rejected by the Whites. I did not agree with their political views and their selfish actions. They were supposed to be Christians and look what they did, how can anyone be associated to them? They were racists, they were murderers. Today you can see for yourself on TV what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has uncovered, all these terrible acts under the cover of Christianity – I am glad not to be a Christian any longer. I was active in the ANC, I liked their vision and their struggle was my struggle.

Already when I was young I had Muslim friends. Because of the political situation in South Africa I started having a closer look at their teaching and practice. Out of interest I attended some of their lectures in which an Islamic teacher conducted in a neighbours house. I also attended lectures in a mosque in ... According to what I learnt, Islam is a straightforward monotheistic religion. Everybody can understand it, you have a direct link to Allah, the God of Islam – all this appealed to me, the teaching was easy. When I studied Islam I felt good inside and was no longer compelled to associate myself to the 'White Christian Religion'. I had always a longing to understand God and know that he is just.

My Muslim friends were very kind to me and borrowed me Islamic teaching material. I even learnt a bit of Arabic although I never really liked school, but it was worth learning this Islamic things since it gave me new directions. I had a teacher whom I really liked, he had a lot of patience with me and I was impressed what the Muslim missionary said and how he lived. I also learnt about the prophet Muhammad and what I learnt impressed me. It makes it easy for anybody to follow these examples and to submit and embrace Islam. I realised that Islam is the only and just religion that I want to submit. Islam is a continuous challenge to be transformed in life for the better.

M6: (17/4/98) I grew up in a town called … and for as long as I can remember I was in and out of Muslim homes since we had Muslim neighbours. At the beginning when I was young we belonged to the Dutch reformed church. I attended Sunday school classes and things like that, that was our way of living. Then my mother died. In the Dutch Reform Church they have something called "Subs". Every month you have to give to the church – we did this. But when she died they refused to bury her from that church. I don't know why. Maybe because she was not regularly at the church. They refused to bury her in the church, the body goes to the church and then to the graveyard. I grew up but I still can't understand; if you are a follower of that church and yet they refused her. It's like punishing the dead.

Then I left them and went to the Anglican church in ... This was when I was about 17 or 18. Then I met my wife, she was a Muslim. We got married when I was about 20 of age. I didn't really have parents at that stage. And I'm the type of person who likes to understand things in a deeper way. You can't tell me that what I am doing is wrong, without telling me why it's wrong. I don't just swallow things … My wife was already pregnant. Then I reverted back to Islam. I use the word 'reverted' because even you are born a Muslim but your parents teach you other ways that doesn't come from you, you are born Muslim. So I am actually reverting back to the original belief. People were practising Islam already 1400 years ago. Islam was actually there from the beginning of time from the time of Adam. The term conversion is a wrong term. Every person is born a Muslim but his parents, if they belong to a church, they take that child into that belief. I believe, I might be wrong, that Islam is the follow up of the other religions; like Christianity, Judaism. The last prophet was the prophet Muhammad. All the other prophets, all came from God. We must respect them. For example Jesus, the Christians believe he is the son of God. They say God is fair, just and everything good. People say Jesus died for our sins, that I can't swallow. If someone else makes a mistake they can't punish me, that is not fairness. The person who did the sin must be punished. I have asked a lot of questions.

As I told you, our neighbours were Muslims and at fasting time people would share things with everyone. That was very good. What ever you make you must share. In our belief when you take something to someone, they might not have, they will always make a prayer and say God is great. This morning I didn't have something and God sent this man to bring me a loaf of bread. That little prayer makes my way more open. I see the light a bit more brighter.

As I said, when I married my wife I reverted back to Islam. She taught me and I also had a very clever man who knew Islam. He is now dead, his name was … He used to teach people, I always went to him when I had something on my mind. He would always tell me *why* is it wrong, not just, it is wrong. He would open the Qur'an and show me where it is written and what it means. Then he would tell me a type of story. He was an *imam* and a good man, he taught many people. He's been dead about ten years. He didn't write any books he was more of a teacher.

Well, for me it was a big step as I'm concerned to revert, yes it was. You see Islam gave me more than Christianity could have given me. When I was young I used to go to the priest and ask him questions. But he could not answer my questions. Now in a way, I don't want to run any religion down. I must respect Christianity and all religions. Our Qur'an instructs us to respect Christianity. If I don't respect Christianity then I'm not a very good Muslim. Many Muslims and Christians grow up and they only know their own religion. Then they condemn one another because they do not know the other religion. We must respect. A few times I was asked: "Do you respect the Bible?" To me that's a tricky question because I don't know which Bible you are talking about. People have come and distorted Christianity because today the Christians print Bibles which are totally different to the next person's Bible. Now which Bible must I respect? I'm confused.

You take Islam, the Christians took out the last book from the Bible. The book that speaks about Muhammad they took out – why? This is the thing that I think about, like Bible stories and things like that. We don't believe that Christ was crucified. This was also a question I asked my priest but he could not answer me. In

church I used to ask him, "Does a ghost have feelings, can he get hurt?" They say after the crucifixion when he met his mother and she touched his hand and he pulled away. He said to her I'm getting hurt don't touch me. These are the types of stories we get. And his mother asked him, "Why must you go?" He said, "If I don't go the messenger of God won't come." Now who was the messenger after Jesus? This is Muhammad.

By reverting to Islam I could not have done any better than this, I am getting answers. If I get an answer I will go deeper and try and see why. You see before time there was no facilities, but today like for example there is Arabic at RAU, where there was not before, so you can go and find out. People are more educated about things. I think that was one of my greatest things, I find answers and I am happy. Let me put it this way, everything that I have around me does not belong to me, it belongs to my creator. When I die tomorrow I can't take it with me. He gives and he takes – this is what I believe.

M7: (21/4/1998) "In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful". First I would like to begin in the name of God most gracious and most merciful. I was first a Christian and I grew up in the Christian religion and live as a Christian until the age of ten years. I attended the Apostolic church myself as well as my whole family until the age of ten. My father passed away when I was still young approximately ten years old and then my mother got remarried to a Muslim person. My whole family embraced Islam. I was then eleven years old. My family consists of two brothers and three sisters – all of us embraced Islam. When embracing Islam, I found it very easy without any difficulties.

I attended mosque and I attended *madressa*. Then my knowledge of Islam increased. I am a Muslim now and have furthered my studies also in the Muslim religion. I have studied the Arabic language. I feel very wonderful as a Muslim. I am very happy and I am pleased that God has given me direction and has opened my heart to this wonderful religion Islam. I thank and praise God every day for he has bestowed on me his grace. When I look back into my life and what I would have been today, I could have never imagine, that I have been blessed with this wonderful religion of Islam. My family who are also, like I said, embraced Islam, are very happy and very contented with this religion. All I can say is: as a Muslim I'm very happy and my life is wonderful thank you so much.

M8: (7/5/1998) My name is … and I have been converted to the Muslim religion for quite a number of years now. I was born as a Christian. My mother was an … That's the church she went to in Bosmont. My father was Chinese, he didn't really have any religion since he never attended any church or anything. We never got much spiritual upbringing from my dad's side. I assume he was with the communist Chinese before he came to this country. He couldn't speak English or Afrikaans and so we never really conversed with him. There was a translator who came once or twice a month. My father passed away about ten years ago … We went to church every Sunday and Sunday school in the afternoon. At standard five I went to the Roman Catholic Church. The school used to have Bible bands and there was a white gentleman by the name of ... He used to take us out on weekend camps. We would go to a farm for the weekend. Girls one side and boys one side. We spent a lot of time with our Bible teachers and at night sitting around the camp fire and singing Hymns and things like that. Those camps taught me a lot.

It put the Bible into your heart it gave you that love. The truth lies in the Bible – there is nothing true besides the Bible. They taught us how with all your other activities you can do the right thing and mixing with the right crowd. At school, being in this group we had a classroom where you could go of your own free will, the principal allowed it, anybody could go there and was welcomed.

At the Roman Catholic church we would go to church every Sunday. After that I had some bad experiences, where I ended up into prison. I spent about six and a half years in prison. By then I'd lost both of my parents and I got together with another group in prison where I became an Anglican. I also joined up with about six other guys and we had a Bible study together. They were all from different backgrounds …

When I came out of prison I was about 32/34 years old. Then I started working, living a normal life and staying at home. Before I went to prison I got married and had two kids. When I came out of prison I had the other two kids. Then I had a Muslim friend. I knew his dad very well and I knew his family and were very close to them. When I came out of prison he took me on a trip to Cape Town, Durban …because he is a bit wealthy and bought me some clothing – just to get back on my feet. He also got me the job in the business I am now. At that stage I hadn't even converted. Then I moved back to Mayfair … That's when I moved into a

house that was opposite … I knew his dad as well. We were discussing religion and … invited me to the mosque to see what it's all about. After that I just converted.

For me being a Christian is like being a Muslim. I see it as being the same thing. There is no difference, when I was a Christian I believed in the unseen and now that I'm a Muslim I believe in the unseen. There can't be different prophets and different Gods. It's all in the translations of English and Arabic or whatever, Urdu or whatever they speak.
I'm a driver at an electrical company. It's a Muslim who owns the company … As far as Islam goes there is no difference with Christianity the only difference is the culture. In the Muslim community you get some Muslims they call themselves born Muslims. When you become acquainted with these guys you see how they live, go to mosque and pray five times a day … and go out in the path of Islam spreading the word. There is really no difference – it's the same message.

I have not yet been in Mecca because to me it's more of a financial thing because you must have money to get there. I have spoken to many Muslims who have come back from Mecca, born Muslim guys and they say it's an experience they can't explain. But he tells me about it. When you arrive at the airport you get a feeling that this is a holy place. But after he's been home for a while he has forgotten about that feeling. And he's back to his usual self. Being a Muslim and you don't have money … other Muslims will help you but they won't give you money to go to Mecca, they go themselves. One Muslim he just went now to *hajj*. He is the owner of a discotheque and so his money is not *halaal*. But now he has gone to *hajj*, but I know a lot of others who went who are gangsters and who use money which is not *halaal*.

I'm not afraid to go into a church anytime. In fact once my brother's wife's mother died and I went to the funeral and what the preacher was saying made sense, just like when I listen to the *imam* – it's the same. I read both the Qur'an and the Bible. You get blessed more if you read Urdu or Arabic instead of English. But I don't understand why they make a difference because God has given us all the understanding to communicate with each other.

M9: (26/5/1998) I converted in 1990 at the age of 19 years. I was a Christian before that with the Assemblies of God church in … I grew up as a Christian doing all the Christian things. I was searching for information. I used to read up a lot about religion. During the 80's when South Africa was undergoing some political turmoil we were all disillusioned about the religion we had. Most of us were searching for an alternative for spiritual fulfilment. In 1990 someone introduced me to Islam. I didn't just embrace Islam – it took me quite a lot of time. I did a lot of reading and research questioning on areas which I was not clear. That's when the problem began – I started questioning a lot of things about Christianity. The answers I could get in Islam were not the type of answers I could get in Christianity. If you ask theologians there are questions which they cannot answer. But in Islam the answers are freely available.

Like the trinity, I still don't understand it. I have met a lot of learned theologians and they still have not convinced me … Also questions about family life, the Bible only describes family life in two or three verses, it does not tell you how to raise your kids. And raising kids you need to know a lot, like what to teach them, what food to give them and what to do when they are sick, like which scriptures to recite. Marriage is also summarised very briefly in the Bible, but there are a lot of comments from different people who are trying to say in their own words what the Bible is saying. But it is not detailed, it is not the word of God, it is just a summary of learned people.

In Islam everything is detailed: from your sexual life and your relationship with your wife everything is there, in fact it's a whole chapter just about that. Raising of kids, also about breast-feeding – how long you must breast-feed what food to give the child first and what not to give. It is a whole complete set of life. It's a very practical religion and a way of life.

In Christianity it's too summarised and you have too many personal opinions. Every one will come and tell you his own version … These are the problems I had with Christianity. And so I decided to convert. Other reasons are; most Christians were involved in apartheid, supported apartheid and didn't do anything about it, some even justified it with the scriptures. Also the inconsistency when reading the Bible, all these things led to my conversion.

I learnt a lot at the church where I was, but I am actually self taught because I read all the time. At one stage I read the whole Bible. We had Bible classes where we used to scrutinise the scriptures. But for me it was more like a hobby – not a way of life. Jesus Christ was a good example – but how did he do it? If you don't have a set of clear principles then you will have a lot of conflicting ideas. That's why there are so many interpretations in Christianity. In Islam we have something similar but not to the extent that it is in Christianity. That's my story.

M10: (26/5/98) I was born in an orthodox Roman Catholic family in the sense that we were baptised. As a child growing up in an atmosphere of being with Roman Catholics, we used to follow what my father expected from us. There was a stage where we were forced to go to church. When I started growing up I wanted more in life than just going to church. I changed churches and went to … that's when I started studying the Bible, from Genesis through to revelations. I was really thrilled knowing the contents of what it was about; the Old Testament and the New Testament what's all about. But I didn't stay there for very long … I got to a stage where I still wanted more but the church could not offer me what I wanted. I got to the stage where I couldn't pray anymore, I couldn't feel the presence of God, or read the Bible. I felt that I was dying slowly. I couldn't tell anyone about God. I spent about three years like that, not praying or reading the Bible.

Somehow I got to know about Islam. I was a bit resentful because it was a totally different concept to me. I rejected it for some time and when I started learning more about Islam – it made sense to me, like for example we are not allowed to eat pork. But there is a reason behind that why we cannot eat it. Everything had a reason. I converted to Islam in 1992. It was totally new like my dress code I had to put on a *hijab*, the dressing code, and I have very long hair and I had to cover it, which was different. I was fortunate that my family did not reject me. My father said me that he thinks I am old enough to decide for myself, he has completed his duty as a father. I converted and I am happy that I am a Muslim. In a sense when I am with my family I feel secluded because they sensor every thing they say. But I'm happy that they know where I stand.

In Islam you feel you need to know more every day, it is more exciting, because everything is new reading the Qur'an, not like in the Bible where all the stories are known. Reading about why you have to give Zakat, or like the *Five Pillars* of Islam … There is a reason behind everything. For me it is still different I still have many friends who are not Muslims and to them it's ridiculous. They don't understand why I have to wear long dresses, why *hijab,* why Mecca. I'm like an odd one. When I converted I was not married yet. That was in 1992. I got married in 1995. So I got married three years after my conversion. I learnt about Islam through my husband.

When you are brought up in a religious family and you reach a stage where you no longer feel God's presence you feel there is something odd. That's what happened to me. My father when he had a problem he would always pray about it, but somehow we as children never had that. You can imagine being in this stage for two years where you are just on your own. When I converted to Islam it was a totally different atmosphere.

With Islam I learn a new thing everyday. You can't say I know the Qur'an. Its impossible especially if you were a Christian before. My family are still fully committed Christians. And they have accepted me as I am. When my mother came one day to my house and I didn't have my *hijab* on, she actually asked me where is your *hijab*, so she actually noticed. Before I converted I used to dress anyhow. I would wear mini skirts and I was quite fair in complexion so people would notice me before they noticed my friends. I used to be the centre of attraction even more than any of my friends. I never sensed that it was my dress code and I always wondered why am I not being respected. And when I changed it's like I don't exist. People walk past me without even greeting. That just shows that Satan is out there twenty four hours. If I have a long dress I feel protected in a way, it doesn't give me an opportunity to sin. Evil has to find another way to get to me. Wearing long things is to protect us not to make us feel uncomfortable.