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Conversion Motifs

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The recent renaissance of research on religious conversion, and the varying stresses emerging in that work, prompt an effort to isolate "conversion motifs." Based on five major and underlying variations, six motifs are identified: intellectual, mystical, experimental, affectional, revivalist and coercive. Social psychological and social organizational implications of these patterns are discussed.

The study of religious conversion has undergone a research renaissance in recent years. In the wake of the world-wide wave of "new religions" and the resurgence of traditional religions, social scientific and journalistic inquiry into this phenomenon has blossomed. As is to be expected, investigators have stressed different aspects of the conversion process. Focusing on how organized group activities can induce conversion,

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some employ such concepts as “affective bonds,” “programming,” or even “mind control.” Others highlight the individual convert’s subjective life and what is seen as the “self-guiding” and “self-induced” side of conversion. Yet others attempt to encompass all these aspects and point to various additional facets. Indeed, the literature on the topic is becoming so rich and diverse in these and other ways that we believe a pause and provisional stock-taking is now in order.¹

Such a stock-taking is prompted by a sense, moreover, that the differences among conversion experiences which investigators are reporting with increasing frequency are not simply a matter of the “theoretical goggles” worn by the researchers — or, in a perjorative view, their conceptual blinders. Rather, such differences are inherent in the central or key features of conversions themselves. Therefore, we explore the usefulness of the analytic supposition that there are several major “types” of conversions or even “conversion careers.” Given this assumption, our yet more restricted aim is to isolate what we think of as key, critical, orienting, defining, or “motif” experiences as they vary across conversions. The notion of a “motif experience” in conversion is, on one side, an effort to attend to accounts of conversion which describe the subjective perceptions of the convert. What converts stress in their accounts varies markedly, and we suspect that the differences are not simply artifacts of the “accounting” process (Beckford, 1978), biases elicited by researchers, or the result of selective perception in the construction of conversion accounts. Instead, we are suggesting that holistic, subjective conversions actually vary in a number of acute, qualitatively different ways which are best differentiated by their respective “motif experience.” “Motif experiences,” then, are those aspects of a conversion which are most memorable and orienting to the person “doing” or “undergoing” personal transformation — aspects that provide a tone to the event, its pointedness in time, its positive or negative affective content, and the like.

However, in so attuning to the convert’s subjective experience we do not elect to be bound entirely by it. We want also — on the other “side” — to “bracket” that subjective experience in longer, temporal terms and in broader ways than the convert might be prone to do. We need particularly to look at the objective ways in which the social organizational aspects of the process differ. Our approach, therefore, strives to blend phenomenological fidelity with some distance on the perspective to which we are faithful. Both sides together — salient thematic elements and key experiences combined with objective situations — may be thought of as making up the “motif” of a conversion.

By such an approach we hope both to incorporate and to go beyond the kind of problems James Beckford (1978) poses in his seminal thoughts on “accounting for conversion.” Beckford points out that among Jehovah’s Witnesses, at least, there is a rather formal, public or even official conception of appropriate features of the conversion experience. The organization provides, in effect, a paradigm which converts use to pattern their conversion accounts; some aspects are stressed, others deemphasized or deleted altogether. In the case of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, conversion

1. Even though the research outpouring is rich, no comprehensive bibliography has yet been published. We know of one in the works, however, and we are indebted to Lewis Rambo for sharing his in-progress work with us. A preliminary version is available as Rambo, 1979. Limitations of space force us to draw quite selectively on what is, in fact, an enormous body of literature.

is expected to be slow, progressive, extremely cognitive and something which one achieves. Experiences “which smack of sudden or idiosyncratic illumination/revelation [are not . . .] reconcilable” with Witness theory (Beckford, 1978: 254).

Some investigators take such molding to pose an insurmountable problem confining us forever to the study only of molds. We, however, do not consider such molding or structuring a problem. Instead, we recognize that the conversion experience *itself* is partly molded by expectations of what conversion is about or “is like,” that that there is therefore the probability of a relatively “good fit” between the “real” experiences and paradigmatic accounts. Because it is probable that they reflect “raw reality” (the *first level* of social reality), it is our intention here, in part, to delineate the variety of conversion accounts (the *second level* of social reality).

The efforts of analysts may be thought of, indeed, as a *third level* of social reality — one that tries to keep pace, often unsuccessfully, with the ever-changing character of the first two levels.

Following tradition, we use the term “conversion” to refer to, in the oft quoted words of Richard Travisano (1970: 594), “a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, life.” Or, in Max Heirich’s felicitous phrases, conversion is “the process of changing a sense of root reality” or “a conscious shift in one’s sense of grounding” (Heirich, 1977: 674).

In overview, we believe it worthwhile to distinguish six “motifs” of conversion. These and the major variations that distinguish them are depicted in Chart 1. The five major dimensions along which they vary should not be construed as exhaustive profiles of features of each type. Instead, they are only *major* aspects that serve to locate each in a very large field of possibilities.

CHART 1
CONVERSION MOTIFS

		Conversion Motifs					
		1. Intellectual	2. Mystical	3. Experimental	4. Affectional	5. Revivalist	6. Coercive
Major Variations	1. Degree of Social Pressure	low or none	none or little	low	medium	high	high
	2. Temporal Duration	medium	short	long	long	short	long
	3. Level of Affective Arousal	medium	high	low	medium	high	high
	4. Affective Content	illumination	awe, love, fear	curiosity	affection	love (& fear)	fear (& love)
	5. Belief-Participation Sequence	belief-participation	belief-participation	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief	participation-belief

The five major variations that appear most salient in the “raw reality” of conversions, in the conversion accounts, and in our “bracketing” of those accounts, encompass the traditional trinity of the intellectual, physical, and emotional. The first variation is quite physical in asking the degree to which the actor is subjected to and experiences external social pressure to convert. The second is also physical in inquiring into the subjective and objective duration of the conversion experience. The third and fourth focus on affect, the former seeking to gauge the degree of emotional arousal accompanying the experience, the latter concerned with its content. The fifth dimension seeks to determine the sequential order in which individuals adopt a religion’s cognitive framework and actually participate in its ritual and organizational activities. As Chart 1 illustrates, it appears rather common for people to participate actively in their new roles as converts in advance of their cognitive assent to its theological implications. In fact, this is a conscious, conspicuous, and significant aspect of some conversion motifs.

1. *Intellectual.* The first motif we want to single out is as yet relatively uncommon, though we expect it to become increasingly important. The “intellectual” mode of conversion commences with individual, private investigation of possible “new grounds of being,” alternate theodicies, personal fulfillment, etc. by reading books, watching television, attending lectures, and other impersonal or “disembodied” ways in which it is increasingly possible *sans* social involvement to become acquainted with alternative ideologies and ways of life. In the course of such reconnaissance, some individuals convert themselves in isolation from any actual interaction with devotees of the respective religion. A prototypical case is that of sociologist Roger Straus who, while an undergraduate, substantially converted himself to Scientology through extensive reading. His first contact with an actual Scientologist was for the predecided purpose of attaining full membership:

Although I was highly suspicious of any organized group, after several months I concluded that the only way to check the whole thing out was to take the plunge: I walked into New York Org and asked the receptionist what I had to do to ‘go Clear’ and become an auditor (Straus, 1979a: 7).

In the literature, this pattern is spoken of as the “activist” model of conversion (Lofland, 1977; Straus, 1976, 1979b; Richardson, 1979). In terms of the major variations mentioned, there is little or no external social pressure; the events defined as making up the conversion appear to be drawn out over a number of weeks or months — a period we might characterize as “medium” in length. The convert-in-process is affectively aroused, but the emotional level is far from ecstatic. The emotional tone of the experience seems best characterized as one of “illumination.” Furthermore, and most importantly, a reasonably high level of belief occurs prior to actual participation in the religion’s ritual and organizational activities.

The intellectual or self-conversion motif is largely a new mode of entry into a religious community or movement. Its incidence as a conversion mode is probably on the increase due to the “privatized” (Luckman, 1967) nature of religion in Western society, the smorgasboard assortment of religion’s competing for members, and the ever-increasing presence of disembodied modes of religious communication: books, magazines, specialized newspapers, movies, television, video and audio cassettes, etc.

The so-called “electronic church” — the television-production-oriented Christian Fundamentalist groups whose “congregations” are essentially television viewers — is a particularly good example of this current trend. It has become very easy for people privately to control their own decisions about religious beliefs, organizations, and even ways of life quite apart from any physically embodied social contact, support, or inducement of an affect-laden sort. In such a situation people in search of “truth,” community, identity, salvation, etc. can calmly and privately elect to “go for it,” as people in the late seventies often expressed their adoption of a new “trip.”

2. *Mystical*. Historically speaking, the best known conversion motif is probably the one we here label “mystical” — a term not entirely accurate but better than its alternatives such as “Damascus Road,” “Pauline,” “evangelical,” and “born again.” The term mystical at least has the virtue of signalling the common feeling among converts that “the experiences cannot be expressed in logical and coherent terms,” — that “clear characterizations . . . miss its depth” (Jules-Rosette, 1975: 62). The prototypical instance within the Christian tradition is, of course, the conversion of St. Paul in a dramatic incident on the Damascus Road in the 1st century A.D. In fact, St. Paul’s conversion, as recorded in Acts 9 and elsewhere in the New Testament, has in a sense functioned as the ideal of what conversion should be in the Western world.

It is of note that the earliest scholars of conversion — William James (1911), Edwin Starbuck (1911) and E. T. Clark (1929) — focused heavily on mystical conversion. The reason for this might have been its more widespread incidence in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. It seems to have attracted less interest among converts and scholars (who simply follow converts) in the middle third of the twentieth century save as a minor topic within psychoanalytical analysis. In fact, our contemporary definitions of mystical conversion are provided by psychoanalytically oriented scholars such as Carl Christensen, who describes it as:

an acute hallucinatory episode occurring within the framework of religious belief and characterized by its subjective intensity, apparent suddenness of onset, brief duration, auditory and, sometimes, visual hallucinations, and an observable change in the subsequent behavior of the convert (Christensen, 1963: 207).

It is characterized, further, by seeming “not to be wrought by the subject but upon him” (Coe, 1916: 152, quoted in Christensen, 1963). This “feeling of submission — of giving up or giving to” is preceded by “withdrawal from others with a sense of estrangement and often in feelings of unreality” and the outcome is

a sense of sudden understanding accompanied by a feeling of elation and by an auditory and sometimes visual hallucination. . . . There is a feeling of change within the self . . . associated with a sense of presence (Christensen, 1963: 214).

In terms of our “major variations,” there is little or no social pressure, the convert is even likely alone at the time of the actual event. What the convert defines as the most critical period of the conversion is quite brief — perhaps on the order of minutes or hours — although a period of stress preceding the critical event may stretch back some days or weeks. Its very brevity functions, indeed, to heighten the meaning. As stated by an anthropologist who was converted to an African Apostolic church: “In my case the initial shift from one set of interpretations to another was dramatic, resulting

in a moment of shock in which even the physical terms of existence seemed to alter" (Jules-Rosette, 1975: 62-63). The level of emotional arousal is extremely high — sometimes involving theophanic ecstasis, awe, love, or even fear. And, the event signals the onset — or active intensification — of belief which is then followed by participation in the ritual and organizational activities of the religion with which the conversion experience is associated.

3. *Experimental.* As observers of social life we are prone to commit the *fallacy of the uniformly profound*. If someone makes a dramatic change of life orientation ("a radical reorganization of identity, meaning, life," as Travisano puts it), we are likely to feel that equally dramatic, deep, and strong forces must have brought it about. In the eyes of analysts, one strong event must be "balanced," as it were, by some other strong event or events. Accounts of mystical conversion, for example, often display such a balancing of cause and effect in the reports of both convert and analyst — as in the crescendo of personal guilt which culminates in the mystical experience.

The imagery often seems, indeed, to fit the "first" and "second" level of reality we have mentioned — but not always, thus we have the fallacy of the uniformly profound. Specifically, recent research is uncovering the surprising degree to which — and the frequency with which — a transformation of religious identity, behavior, and world view can occur quite tentatively and slowly and yet be identified by the convert-in-process as happening in that manner. This motif has been scrutinized most closely by Robert Balch and his associate David Taylor. Studying followers of the Process — a group in which one gives up all possessions and becomes an itinerant — they have found a "pragmatic 'show me' attitude, ready to give the Process a try, but withholding judgment" for a considerable length of time after taking up the life-style of the fully committed participant and making significant sacrifices (Balch & Taylor, 1977: 5). Attuned to similar themes proposed by Bromley and Shupe (1979) and Straus (1976), Balch concludes "the first step in conversion . . . is learning to *act* like a convert Genuine conviction develops later . . . after intense involvement" (Balch, 1980: 142).

The research that has revealed this conversion motif has focused on "new age," metaphysical types of groups. However, experimental conversions do not appear to be confined to them. Groups that might appear to be poles apart in their authoritarianism and organizational structure, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Scientology, typically insist that the prospective convert take an experimental attitude toward — and *participate* in — the group's ritual and organizational activities. This is quite clearly brought out in James Beckford's analysis of Jehovah's Witnesses' "talk about conversion." He outlines four characteristics of conversion which are central in conversations among Witnesses concerning their conversions: 1) it is thought to involve a "progression of mental states;" 2) it is considered to be "predominantly cognitive" in nature; 3) it is "framed as something they *achieved*;" and 4) it follows a policy immediately to involve the neophyte "in practical work alongside more mature Witnesses" (Beckford, 1978: 253, 255, 257; see also Straus, 1979a: 9).

In terms of our list of major variations, experimental conversions involve relatively low degrees of social pressure to participate since the recruit takes on a "try-it-out" posture. The actual transformation of identity, behavior, and world view commonly

called conversion takes place over a relatively prolonged period — often months or even years — and does not appear to be accompanied by high levels of emotional arousal in most instances. The affective content of the experience appears to be that of curiosity.

This motif of change is, of course, not unique to religious or other highly ideologized contexts. In fact, it resembles the ubiquitous manner in which people learn new social roles and are more ordinarily assimilated into groups. The social mechanism of such socialization processes have long ago been identified by Howard Becker as *situational adjustment — commitment* being the end result of increasing adaptation and the making of *side-bets* (Becker, 1964). The notion of situational adjustment provides for us a “picture of a person trying to meet the expectations he encounters in immediate face-to-face situations,” thus encouraging us to “look to the character of the [micro and immediate] situation for the explanation of why people change as they do. We ask what there is in the situation that requires the person to act in a certain way or to hold certain beliefs” (Becker, 1964: 44). Once we assume that, for whatever reasons, a person wants to continue in a given situation, subsequent behavior can then be understood in terms of ordinary situational requirements.

It is in such terms that we can hope to shine new light on the consistent finding that “intensive interaction” is a significant feature of many conversion experiences. Indeed, one recent study of Nichiren Shoshu asserts that intensive interaction is “the key to . . . transformation” (Snow & Philips, 1980: 444). Reformulated, “intensive interaction” is an abstract and rather gross way in which to talk about opportunities for progressive situational adjustments and the consequent development of committing side-bets in Becker’s (1964) terms.

4. *Affectional*. As alluded to at the outset, a continuing interplay of three levels of reality occurs in the study of conversion. At the first level — that of “raw reality” — the conversion process involves “actual,” “out-there” occurrences or situations. That level is, however, ambiguously and imperfectly available to us. The second level — that of the convert’s experience and interpretation — is structured by the first level and by any particular paradigm found useful to the convert to interpret the former. The third level — that of analytic interpretations — provides, in its own right, a screen through which we attempt to perceive the social-psychological reality of the transformation. However, we must keep in mind that the prominence of any particular conversion motif is likely to vary over time and geography, partly as a function of shifting fashions at the second level, but mostly as a consequence of more weighty factors such as the prevalence and content of mass communications. And, of course, the third level changes in order to keep up with the first two.

We reiterate these ideas because they are especially pertinent in understanding the dominance of the “affectional conversion” motif over the last two decades in social science theory and research. The identification of this motif dates back to John Lofland and Rodney Stark’s 1965 analysis of positive affective bonds in the conversion process. The notion was widely adopted and rapidly documented during subsequent years (see, for example, the literature reviewed in Gerlach & Hine, 1970, Ch. 4, Richardson, ed., 1977; Hierich, 1977; Robbins, Anthony & Richardson, 1978; Snow & Philips, 1980). By 1980, the motif was formulated in such phrases as “interpersonal bonds are the fundamental support for recruitment” (Stark & Bainbridge, 1980: 389) — a more formal

rewording of the original phrase that becoming "one" was "coming to accept the opinions of one's friends" (Lofland & Stark, 1965: 871). Critical causal efficacy implied here aside, the motif thesis is that personal attachments or strong liking for practicing believers is central to the conversion process. Such sentiment has the same defining importance or central significance in the process of affectional conversion as intellectual illumination, mystical encounter, or experimental immersion do in the motifs already described.

We would like to believe that the fashionableness of the affectional motif in social science in recent years has been more than mere intellectual fadishness. Rather, during that period, investigators were uncovering — however fitfully and imperfectly — a new central meaning in conversion — one that was both there in "raw reality" (our first level) and to a reasonable extent in the convert's own perceptions and accounts (the second level).

As a motif, the cognitive element is deemphasized (in decided contrast to intellectual conversion). Reflecting the reality constructionism of the sixties (which was itself a reflection of a broader relativism of the time), there is stress on the strong degree to which all systems of social knowledge and beliefs are sustained by an underlying "sentimental order" (Shibutani, 1961; Berger & Luckman, 1967). Truth is a function of what is defined as such in the individual's social and emotional milieu. "Social pressure" is certainly present but exists and functions more as "support" and attraction than as "inducement" to convert. Analysts are somewhat vague on the point, but one gets the impression that the process is relatively prolonged — a matter of at least several weeks. Even if the central experience is affection, the ordinary level of emotional arousal seems more in the range of "medium" intensity rather than the more extreme states we find in the revivalist or mystical motifs. As in experimental conversions, belief arises out of participation.

5. *Revivalist*. In several studies since World War II, the phenomenon of revivalist conversion has been debunked by the finding that the most famous of revivalist preachers and their organizations appear merely to simulate or stage quite mild conversions rather than bring about the kind of dramatic occurrences asserted to have been common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g., Lang & Lang, 1960; Altheide & Johnson, 1977). We have thus become cynical about the existence of true revivalist conversions, and the abundant literature documenting their occurrence in earlier centuries has been ignored or at least neglected. However, that neglect is combined with the probability of an actual decline in the incidence of revivalist conversions in modern societies — or at least a decline in the incidence of their more extreme versions, representing a decline of experiential acuteness at what we have called the "first level of reality."

It is particularly incumbent on those of us who work at "level three reality" to "keep alive" in human consciousness the broad spectrum of possibilities in all areas of social life, including that of conversion. Even though it appears to be in decline in contemporary industrialized societies, conversion whose central feature consists of profound experiences which occur within the context of an emotionally aroused crowd is far from absent in most societies throughout the world. Probably owing to a rationalist tendency to retreat from emotionalism, however, scholars of crowd behavior

— or collective behavior — have generally lost sight of the very real fact that crowds *can* be brought to ecstatic arousals having a critically transforming effect on some people. The “social pressure” and “contagion” — albeit brief — can produce fear, guilt, and joy of such intensity that individuals may obediently go through the outward and inward methodology of a fundamentalist or evangelical conversion (Lofland, in press).

There are, however, apparent revivalist “waves” of recurrence in spite of the long-term decline of this conversion motif in Western societies (McLoughlin, 1978). Some people have even argued that we witnessed a relatively mild wave of revivalist conversions during the early seventies concomitant with the coming of the “new religions.” Indeed, the Unification Church appears to have resurrected the revivalist experience in highly effective modern garb. Prospective converts recruited literally off the streets are taken on weekend retreats which involve a whirlwind round of singing, chanting, hand-holding, preaching, and diffuse, loving camaraderie. In the apt terminology of its closest participant observer, David Taylor, the effect is “enthraling” for many. There is a marked “transition from a relatively mundane world to a dynamic environment of ecstatic youth” (Taylor, 1978: 107):

Events and activities have an exciting quality. Participants experience emotional heights without suffering subsequent letdowns. The exceptional nature of collective joy lies in . . . members' ability to create events [that] have natural endings, yet the stimulation produced is seemingly inexhaustible. There is the promise of more — the next event, the next day, the coming week.

All aspects of the training session blend together with exhilarating momentum. [The members'] enthusiasm requires prospects to invest their entire beings in the participatory events. Jumping up to sing tumultuous songs; running from place to place hand in hand with a buddy; and cheering, chanting, and clapping in unison with dozens of others inevitably makes a deep impression on prospective members.

Event the most reticent . . . find it difficult to resist being swept into this performance of continual consensus. One may remain intellectually unsympathetic to [the members'] . . . beliefs and goals, but he [or she] will be in some way moved by the intense revelry. Possibly no participant escapes feeling intense excitement, even if he regards the performance as inauthentic (Taylor, 1978: 153-154).

6. *Coercive*. We come, finally to a conversion motif that takes place only in extremely rare and special circumstances but which has been alleged by some to be rampant among the new religions of the Western world. Our reference is to what has been labeled, variously, “brainwashing,” “programming,” “mind control,” “coercive persuasion,” “thought reform,” and “menticide,” among other names.

The accusations surrounding this topic make it especially important to form a very clear conception of the “nature of the beast” under discussion — a step that seems noticeably neglected in the leading literature (e.g., Delgado, 1977). Toward that clarification, we draw on what we believe to be the best single and most accurate summary of “brainwashing.” It appears under that title in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968) and was written by Albert Somit. An extremely cogent treatment remaining inexplicably unattended, Somit's vision may have been clear because he wrote *after* the fifties fears of communist brainwashing and *before* the seventies fears of “cult mind control.”

The two key features of brainwashing — or as we prefer, coercive persuasion (Schein, 1961) — are (1) the *compulsion* of an individual (2) *sincerely* to confess guilt or

embrace an ideological system. The process of brainwashing individuals was independently invented in the early twentieth century by European communists extracting simple confessions of guilt and by Chinese communists striving for systematic ideological conformity.

While practices differed somewhat in Europe and China, Somit delineates seven "measures" which characterize both traditions: (1) *total control* of the prisoner's round of life "down to the most intimate needs;" (2) *uncertainty* of the charges against one and one's entire future; (3) *isolation* from the outside world; (4) *torture* in the form of "mental and physical torment;" (5) *physical debilitation and exhaustion* achieved by a "diet . . . planned to ensure rapid loss of weight, strength, and stamina" and induced by the "constant interrogation, tension, and terror" associated with the other measures; (6) *personal humiliation* association with denial of "any previous claim to personal dignity or status;" and, (7) *certainty of the captive's guilt* — "the unyielding assumption that he will confess and change" — which, when displayed by the captors, "justifies even in the prisoner's mind the stringency of the measures applied . . ." (All quoted phrases from Somit, 1968: 139-140). Although these are the fundamental, social interactional aspects of brainwashing, the process is not entirely negative. As the subject begins to capitulate — or to "see the light" — "living conditions improve . . . [and] even . . . interrogators become more friendly and less impersonal" (Somit, 1968: 140).

As a strategy, however, coercive conversion has two serious problems which limit its usefulness even by ideologues who hold state power. First, if allowed to return to a more or less open society, subjects "back slide;" "the results achieved are not permanent" (Somit, 1968: 142). Something very similar to this may well have happened to Patricia Hearst who, after being converted to the radical Marxist doctrine of the Symbionese Liberation Army, appeared to return to her earlier socio-political beliefs relatively easily and quickly once she was removed from the influence and control of her abductors. Second, an inordinant amount of personnel, space, time, and other resources are required to achieve sincere ideological change. At best, a relatively large staff must be marshalled to "process" a single person or, at most, a small group. Compared to other motifs, this is likely the "most expensive and uneconomical" of possibilities (Somit, 1968: 142).

We appreciate it is currently common to summarize chapter Twenty-two, titled "Ideological Totalism", of Robert Lifton's *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (1961) in characterizing "brainwashing." The eight "psychological themes" he so skillfully evokes have become, indeed, a kind of litany on the topic. We also think it is a litany that is off the mark even though it is *also* likely accurate as a characterization of certain abstract features of certain ideologies. Indeed, *by definition*, ideological totalism is constructed of the eight items he enumerates: milieu control, mystical manipulation, the demand for purity, a cult of confession, a sacred science, loading the language, doctrine over person, and dispensing of existence. Such features are surely found in brainwashing settings but *not confined to or definitive of them*. Instead, we must go on to *add* the kinds of considerations Ablert Somit makes so explicit (above) but which are muted in Lifton's treatment. And, we must appreciate how we can find totalistic settings (in the sense they display Lifton's eight features)

which are *not* brainwashing settings (in the sense they do not have Somit's seven features), as for example the Bruderhof as reported by Zablocki (1971).

The possibility of *social-psychological* coercion cannot, nevertheless, be ignored; interactional affective pressures and fears resulting from theological precepts could conceivably function as coercively on some individuals as actual physical restraints and threats. For example, some evidence of such pressures is apparent in Taylor's (1978: 153-4) description of revivalism quoted in our discussion of revivalist conversion. Future treatments will have to deal with the crossovers between revivalist and coercive conversion as well as the question of what "legitimately" constitutes coercion.

Summarized in terms of our five major variations, coercive conversion entails an extremely high degree of external pressure over a relatively long period of time, during which there is intense arousal of fear and uncertainty, culminating in empathetic identification and even love. Belief, of course, follows participation.

Implications. We want to conclude by pointing out two classes of implications of this kind of endeavor. The first concerns the social psychology of conversion *per se*. (1) Differentiating "motifs," "careers," or "styles" should allow us to sharpen our understanding of the phenomenon of conversion. Irrespective of the merits of the present formulation, we feel that efforts of this kind are very much in order, and we urge others interested in the subject matter to join us in improving on schemes of conversion types. (2) The present effort is, of course quite narrow in the specific sense that it adduces types but does not go on to delineate steps, phases, or processes within each type. In future refined schemes rendering this one obsolete, we hope this specification of process will receive prominent attention.

A second class of implications is socio-historical and organizational. (1) As previously mentioned, we suspect conversion motifs differ significantly from one historical epoch to another, across societal boundaries, and even across subcultures within a single society. There are probably trends and subtrends in the prevalence of particular conversion motifs and in the social conditions with which such trends are correlated. Among other possibilities, we have suggested that in the media-drenched ("advanced") societies, intellectual and experimental conversion are on the increase, and revivalist in relative decline. A wide variety of other conjunctions of social circumstances and conversion motifs are likely discernable. (2) Certain religious ideologies and organizations may have an affinity with some, rather than other, conversion motifs. The classification of religious systems is itself a complex and contention-ridden task. Nevertheless, one recurrent dimension of difference appears to be the degree to which a religion absorbs and reorders an adherent's round of life. We might expect, for example, those religious systems least affecting an individual's life to be characterized by conversions least arousing (e.g., intellectual and experimental conversions), while those most affecting an individual's life to be characterized by the more dramatic (e.g., revivalist conversions). The picture is obviously far from simple, partly due to the fact the converts to any single religion do not all experience the same kind of conversion, and the dominant motif of any one religion (if there is one) sometimes changes over time (e.g., the Unification Church's moving from affectional to revivalist conversions, as reported by Bromley & Shupe, 1979).

In any event, the topic of religious conversion is among the most active,

challenging, and exciting in social science at the present time, and we invite others to try their hand at increasing our understanding of this complex and evolving body of materials.

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