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Reconceptualising Conversion

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Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion
in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean

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This work is dedicated to three teachers who, though they might be surprised to learn this, shaped me as a scholar:

my mother Rithea who taught me to inquire into all things;

my father Patrick who taught me to distrust traditional answers;

my coach Dr. D. B. Clement who taught me to risk aspiring beyond my reach.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations and Editions

Abbreviations of all Classical authors follow the conventions of *The SBL Handbook of Style*, (ed. Patrick H. Alexander, et al.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), and the editions used are those of the Loeb Classical Library Series unless otherwise noted immediately below.

The following inscription and papyrus abbreviations follow the conventions of Bradley McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods From Alexander the Great Down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.–A.D. 337)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), and John F. Oates, et al. (eds.), *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (4th ed.; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992) respectively, but are provided below for convenience.

Aelius Aristides: W. Dindorf, *Aristides*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964; C. A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and* The Sacred Tales. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968.

BDAG   *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature*. W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich; Revised and Edited by F. W. Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

BGU   *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden*. 11 vols. Berlin: Weidmann, 1895–1968.

Ceb. Tab.   J. T. Fitzgerald and L. Michael White, *The Tabula of Cebes*. Chico: Scholars Press, 1983.

CIL   *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, Consilio et Auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Regiae Borussicae Editum*. Berolini: Reimer, 1863–1974.

CIRB   *Corpus Inscriptionum Regni Bosporani*. Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1965.

Dig   *The Digest of Justinian*. Edited by Theodor Mommsen, P. Krueger. English translation edited by A. Watson. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.

IAssos   *Die Inschriften von Assos*. Edited by R. Merkelbach. Bonn: Habelt, 1974.

IBM   *The Collection of Ancient Greek Inscriptions in the British Museum*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1874–1916.

IDelos   *Inscriptions de Delos*. Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Fonds d'Epigraphie Grecque. Fondation du Duc de Loubat. 7 vols. Paris: Boccard, 1926–76.

IG II²   *Inscriptiones Atticae Euclidis anno anteriores*. Edited by J. Kirchner. 4 vols. Berolini: Reimer, 1913–40.

IG IV²   *Inscriptiones Epidauri*. Edited by F. Hiller von Gaertringen. Berolini: Reimer, 1929.

IG XI⁴   *Inscriptiones Deli. Decreta, foedera, catalogi, dedicationes, varia.* Edited by
           P. Roussel. Berolini: Reimer, 1914.

IG XIV   *Inscriptiones Graecae. Siciliae et Italiae, additis Graecis Galliae, Hispaniae,*
           Britanniae, Germaniae inscriptionibus. Edited by G. Kaibel. Berolini: Reimer,
           1890.

IGRR   *Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes.* Edited by R. Cagnat. Roma:
           L'Erma, 1964.

IKret   *Inscriptiones Creticae: Opera et Consilio Friderici Halbherr collectae.* Edited by
           M. Guarducci. 4 vols. Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1935–50.

IKyme   *Die Inschriften von Kyme.* Edited by H. Engelmann. Bonn: Habelt, 1976.

ILS   *Inscriptiones latinae selectae.* Edited by Hermann Dessau. 3 vols. Berolini:
           Weidmann. Reprint Dublin: Weidmann, 1974.

ISardH   Peter Herrmann, "Mystenvereine in Sardeis." *Chiron* 26 (1996): 315–41.

Justin Martyr: J. C. M. van Winden, *An Early Christian Philosopher: Justin Martyr's Dia-*
           logue with Trypho, Chapters One to Nine. Introduction, Text and Commentary.
           Philosophia Patrum 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971.

Liddell, Scott, Jones: *A Greek-English Lexicon.* Compiled by Henry George Liddell and
           Robert Scott. Revised and Augmented by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. Oxford:
           Clarendon Press, 1996.

Louw and Nida: Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New*
           Testament Based on Semantic Domains. New York: United Bible Societies,
           1988, 1989.

LXX   *Septuaginta.* Edited by Alfred Rahlfs. Stuttgart: Bibelgesellschaft, 1959.

NewDocs   *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity.* Vols. 1–5 edited by G. H. R.
           Horsley; vols. 6–9 edited by S. R. Llewelyn. North Ryde, Aus.: Ancient
           History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981–94.

OGI   *Orientis graeci inscriptiones selectae.* Edited by W. Dittenberger. 2 vols.
           Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903–1905. Reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1986.

P. Fay.   *Fayûm Towns and their Papyri.* Edited by B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt, and D. G.
           Hogarth. London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1900.

P. Giss.   *Griechische Papyri im Museum des oberhessischen Geschichtsvereins zu Gießen.*
           Edited by O. Eger, E. Kornemann, and P. M. Meyer. Leipzig and Berlin:
           Teubner, 1910–12.

P. Grenf. *New Classical Fragments and other Greek and Latin Papyri.* Edited by B. P.
           Grenfell and A. S. Hunt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897.

P. Hib.   *The Hibeh Papyri.* Vol. I edited by B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt. London,
           1906. Vol. II edited by E. G. Turner and M.-Th. Lenger. London: Egypt
           Exploration Society, 1955.

P. Lips.   *Griechische Urkunden der Papyrussammlung zu Leipzig.* Edited by L. Mitteis.
           Leipzig: Teubner, 1906.

P. Lond.   *Greek Papyri in the British Museum.* 7 vols. London: British Museum, 1893–
           1974.

P. Mich. Zen. *Zenon Papyri.* Edited by C. C. Edgar. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan
           Press, 1931.

P. Oxy.	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri.* 84 vols. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1898–2001.
P. Petr.	*The Flinders Petrie Papyri.* Edited by J. Mahaffy and J. G. Smyly. Dublin: Academic House, 1891–1905.
P. Teb.	*The Tebtunis Papyri.* 4 vols. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1902–1976.
Porphyry	Mark Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students.* Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2000.
PSI	*Papiri greci e latini.* Edited by G. Vitelli, M. Norsa, et al. 15 vols. Florence: E. Ariani, 1912–79.
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum.* 39 vols. Amsterdam: Gieben, 1923–92.
SIG	*Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum.* Edited by W. Dittenberger. 4 vols. Leipzig: Hirzel, 1915–24. Reprint Hildesheim: Olms, 1960.
SVF	*Stoicorum veterum fragmenta.* Edited by H. von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–24.
Syll[3]	See *SIG*.

Introduction

It is a risky practice, to be sure, to open a work of this length with a negative statement, but doing so may help to clarify the intent of this work. This work is not about Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. It is, to state it positively, about how we understand conversion in the ancient world. Nonetheless, I have found Paul's conversion a useful point of comparison for two reasons. By situating Paul in a work that is about ancient conversion, I seek to stress that contrary to the claims of the Christian tradition, only some of which are implicit, Paul was not a paradigm-setting convert who was without peer or parallel in the ancient world. Paul was like his peers when it comes to how he talked about and how he envisioned his conversion experience. The second reason Paul's conversion is useful is because, quite simply, his is the most accessible example of conversion from the ancient world. Practically everybody, Christian or otherwise, knows about "Paul the convert." The phrase "Damascus road" has become axiomatic in English-speaking cultures to refer to people changing convictions or opinions in an unpredictable, transformative and emotionally traumatic manner.

This book brings together two trajectories of New Testament scholarship: the study of and interest in Paul's conversion, fuelled as it is by a desire to understand the relationship between the man and the event; and social scientific criticism, in turn fuelled by its desire to understand the relationship between (wo)man and his/her surrounding cultural values and institutions. The resulting combination strives to situate Paul and his conversion within the culture that housed the man and that provided the framework within which his conversion was understood. This study also takes as its point of departure from other studies of ancient conversion the seminal observation of social scientific criticism that the culture and constellation of social institutions of the New Testament world is not the same as those of the modern western world. To miss this important difference between the two worlds is to act as if culturally embedded features of the ancient world were interchangeable with culturally embedded features of the modern world, and such could not be further from the truth. It is a fact that needs to be reckoned with fully that the cultural institutions of the ancient Mediterranean and the modern West are different. Such a *fact* as this must have a greater influence

on how we understand the setting of the New Testament and its characters than simply providing us with new sets of questions and new answers we think are helpful. It should compel us to re-open questions and fields of inquiry we thought were closed in order to see if things we thought we knew, things that have perhaps reached the status of "common knowledge," need to be analysed anew. Paul's conversion, and conversion in the ancient Mediterranean world in general, is one such topic that needs to be re-opened in light of recent work in the social sciences.

The study of Paul's conversion has commanded a great deal of scholarly and popular interest. There are long and short studies on Paul's conversion that attempt either to understand the conversion better or to discuss its relationship to other features of Paul, such as his teaching, personality, or theology. Early studies on this topic were, as we shall see in Chapter One, explicitly psychological; they were either a direct outgrowth of the work of William James, or they *were* the work of William James.[1] In some later studies this reliance on James's psychological foundation to the study of conversion was implicit, part of the cultural baggage of the author and thus unrealised.[2] This can in part be traced to the great attraction of the west to the psychological paradigm and of the influence of psychology over Western ways of thinking about and of framing the world. The formative stages of the relationship between 'West' and 'Psychological' was truly a dialectical one — the sense of individualism that sets Westerners off from much of the rest of the world led to a system of framing the world and the self that in turn affected the development of the Western personality and of the Western *individual*. The subtlety of this dialectic might explain why, despite the fact that scholarship on Paul's conversion has moved away from explicitly psychological explanations, much of it has remained implicitly grounded in a psychological framework, often attempting unsuccessfully to make a clean break with past psychological approaches.

The landmark study that illustrates best this attempt to move scholarship on Paul's conversion away from psychologising explanations is Krister Stendahl's essay on "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West."[3]

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[1]   William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1902).
[2]   Arthur D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933); Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire: A. D. 100–400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
[3]   K. Stendahl, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199–215.

Stendahl was arguing against a long-standing tradition that within Christian interpretation that Paul had been driven to Christianity (sic!) because of guilt or some psychological trauma incurred as a Jew. Yet it is Stendahl's *methodological* contribution and observation that is of greater interest here. His claim that introspection was not a feature of Paul's world but rather that it is a characteristic of modern Western consciousness should have radically altered academic approaches to Paul's conversion in particular and Pauline biography in general. Instead, New Testament scholarship on conversion appears to have taken up only Stendahl's clarion call concerning Paul's robust and healthy Jewish faith, though this too was in need of correction. Stendahl's point regarding the lack of an introspective conscience in Paul appears to have been largely unheeded within many conversion studies, and thus assumptions about parallels between ancient and modern psychology continue in much scholarship on Paul's conversion as they did before Stendahl's essay appeared in 1963.

This tendency to assume parallels between ancient and modern psychological perspectives has been vigorously challenged, both directly and indirectly, by the results of social scientific approaches to the New Testament and to cross-cultural analysis. A familiarity with anthropological approaches has given social scientific criticism the keen awareness that there are not only differences among global cultures (and therefore temporally separated cultures as well), but that these differences have serious consequences for how individuals within different cultures construct and understand their worlds. This has led to some influential observations concerning the interaction of ancient characters in terms of dyadic personality structures and honour and shame, for example, but has not yet been applied to ancient human interactions with the gods, especially with respect to the issue of conversion in the ancient world. The cultures of the New Testament and of the modern West respectively have vastly different constructions of the self; they understand the relationship of individual to society differently; and they understand the realm of emotions differently. This is not to say, "completely differently," as if there are no points of contact between ancient and modern humans on a whole range of matters concerning the human condition. Nonetheless, there are very real differences between the ancient and modern human experience of the world, and these need to be understood fully even before we could hope to appreciate properly the similarities. The problem with how we have been talking about conversion for the last century of scholarship is that we have either not been aware of these differences, or we have not taken them adequately into account in our work. It stands to reason

that cultures with such different views of the self will frame and understand their social and religious experiences differently. Yet the assumption has always been one of sameness. I will return to this point of sameness shortly.

This is, in effect, the conclusion drawn by the work undertaken in Chapter One. Many areas of biblical scholarship, like other academic fields and like the West in general, have answered the siren song of psychologism. Psychologism is the assumption that all people share the same basic psychological structure, and that cultural difference leads to little more than differences in how psychological experience is expressed. Thus, in our field, it has led to the assumption that Paul's psychological experiences are accessible and understandable to us because we can use ourselves analogically. But increasingly, as cultural anthropologists and psychologists struggle with the primary experience of difference among cultures, this assumption of sameness is being undermined. The emerging consensus is that while emotion, as an example of a central feature of psychological experience, is universal (all people have them), emotions themselves are highly culturally specific. And while conversion is not an emotion, nor has anyone ever claimed it to be, I show in Chapter One that the foundational works on conversion in the field of Christian Origins have, in line with the general imagination of the West, either explicitly or implicitly defined and measured conversion in emotional and thus psychological categories.

The problem, then, that fuels the first chapter of this book is that if conversion is cast in emotional terms, and if emotional experience does not lend itself to cross-cultural transfer, how then are we of all people to empathise with the conversion experiences of ancient characters like Paul? The conclusion drawn at the end of Chapter One is that if we are to understand Paul's conversion experience, we need to overcome the psychologising tendencies of studies of conversion and approach the issue from another direction. The direction I propose in this study, therefore, involves a model that is more intrinsic to Paul's own world, one that seeks to overcome the challenges and weakness of cultural ethnocentrism. A better understanding of Paul's conversion will give priority not just to his words, but to his world. The overwhelming body of ancient sources, literary and material, suggests that people in Graeco-Roman antiquity framed their experiences of conversion in the language of ancient patronage and benefaction, and that as one formed wholly by his culture, Paul did so as well.

The Mediterranean institution of patronage and clientage has been studied in many works by classicists, historians, and New Testament scholars alike, and I do not seek to contradict that body of knowledge. There are three

ways, however, in which I hope to contribute to our understanding of patronage and clientage in the ancient world, which I undertake in Chapter Two. First, it is widely acknowledged that patronage and clientage is one of the foremost keys for interpreting human interaction in an ancient Mediterranean setting. Studies on this alone abound, and studies that presuppose this research are increasing. It is a slightly less common observation, on the other hand, that Graeco-Roman human interaction with the gods was understood in the same framework as human interaction, and an even less common claim that the God of the Hellenistic Jews was framed in the same manner. We might call this divine patronage and benefaction, since it involved the exchange of benefactions and reciprocity between humans and their gods. Illustration of these claims is not, in the interest of space, handled directly, but rather can be seen from the total collection of texts and examples provided throughout this work. If we can understand the relationship and continuity between human and divine patronage and benefaction, we are that much closer to understanding the ancient world from an ancient perspective. In short, there appears to have been a pan-Mediterranean framework within which worshippers typically viewed their interactions with the gods, and it matters little whether that God was Isis, Asclepius, or the God of Israel. Second, in Chapter Two I situate the practice of patronage and benefaction within a model of ancient exchange, thereby differentiating it from other forms of exchange that I hope people will find helpful. Third, I hope to supplement our understanding of ancient patronage and benefaction by drawing attention to the form and function of the rhetorical conventions that are the subject of Chapter Three.

The description of patronage and benefaction in Chapter Two is more detailed than many will require, since an increasing number of New Testament scholars are familiar with it. The level of detail in Chapter Two is important, however, in order to ensure the detailed arguments and observations in Chapter Three do not presuppose knowledge the reader does not have, or has to go elsewhere to attain. The focus of Chapter Three is on how participants in divine and human relationships of patron-client exchange (and mostly clients) expressed themselves, and thus it requires a full and fresh familiarity with the model of patronage and benefaction. In other words, it is on the rhetoric of patronage, as opposed to the structure of patronage, that is the focus of the third chapter.

There are five rhetorical conventions that occur consistently within what we can call the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction, and what is doubly noteworthy is that these conventions are used regardless of whether the

patron/benefactor is human or divine. The first of these rhetorical conventions is the call of the patron. Here we find the claim (sometimes it is true and sometimes it is simply claimed) that clients were approached by a patron, as opposed to approaching the patron themselves, in order to be benefited. It is an interesting feature of patronage and benefaction that clients were not solely responsible for establishing a patronal relationship, since the facts of poverty and necessity would have placed the burden of effort squarely on the shoulders of clients. That patrons human and divine were reputed to have called their clients into relationships of benefaction warrants a closer look in association with conversion and the common motif of "the call" by gods and philosophers.

The second convention is quite different from the first; it has to do with the philosopher's teaching and rhetorical delivery as a benefaction in and of itself. It was quite common for disciples and sympathetic writers to refer to philosophical teachers and their teachings, and at times to philosophy "herself," in the language of patronage and benefaction. A philosopher's lessons were a benefaction to humanity, designed to save people from ignorance and death. Philosophy in the abstract is spoken of as benefactor of all humanity, giver of all that is good and right in the world. What is more, it is not only philosophers that fall into the pattern of patronage and benefaction, but also the students/disciples whose conduct consistently reflects that of any other client. If interaction with philosophy and with the gods is framed in similar terms, then an understanding of ancient conversion needs to account for this relationship.

The third convention of the rhetoric of patronage includes three aspects, namely prayer, praise, and proselytism. We might think of these as three aspects of "Honouring Discourse," for lack of a better phrase. Within a context of patronage and benefaction, prayer and praise should require little explanation. Prayer and praise work hand in hand and were the primary way for a client to communicate with a patron or benefactor. Further, prayer is both a way of honouring the divine patron, and a way of making a request. The third element, proselytism, is less self-explanatory and much more fascinating as a phenomenon. It was expected behaviour of clients of human patrons to publicise the generosity of a patron in an attempt both to increase the reputation of the patron and to attract new clients, the logic behind this being that the more clients a patron had the greater the patron's public honour. Clients boasting about their patrons in an attempt to convince others is found when the patrons are wealthy people and when they are philosophers/teachers. It appears to have worked the same way when their patrons were divine:

spreading the good news of a divine patron's or benefactor's wonderful deeds, and thus attracting clients and increasing the number of worshippers, in effect 'patron evangelisation,' served to honour the god and was not uncommon behaviour in a client/worshipper. Prayer, praise, and proselytism were three interrelated ways in which a client could express his or her all-important client reciprocity.

The fourth convention of the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction I have come to call patronal synkrisis. Synkrisis is the simplest of rhetorical tropes — it means comparison. Typically it was used in encomiastic writing to compare the subject of a *bios* to a great man in the past, thus drawing a portrait of greatness by association, but it was also used in philosophical protreptic as a method of comparing life before and after one's encounter with philosophy. Yet, I have found that synkrisis commonly appears in the very specific setting of patron- or benefactor-oriented rhetoric. Clients were given to comparing their lives before and after their encounters with their patron in a way that always honours the current patron. They might describe their past as death, as darkness, as exile. Sometimes these descriptions are literal, sometimes obviously not; yet what matters is that the client is crediting the patron with some profound change in the quality of life. As a result we have here a type of synkrisis that I call patronal synkrisis; it offered a client an additional way to articulate the relationship of reciprocity and gratitude that was the moral and social obligation of a client towards a patron or benefactor.

A final feature of the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction is an important and still overlooked element of the vocabulary of ancient patronage: the term χάρις. Of course, the term is almost always translated as 'grace,' but the term 'grace' is so infused with Christian theological overtones that we have lost sight of the Graeco-Roman context that provided the first level of meaning for the term, namely 'benefaction.' ('Favour' is a useful translation because it reflects both a concrete and an abstract sense, but I prefer the concrete emphasis of 'benefaction,' lest we fall back into the trap of theological abstraction that 'grace' has become.) While χάρις in the New Testament can sometimes be translated as gratitude, in the majority of instances it could be simply translated as benefaction, and doing so often serves to highlight effectively Paul's relationship with his God. It is a relationship of client to divine patron, and much of Paul's language and conduct reflects exactly this.

There sits behind these five conventions of the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction a moral imperative. Each of them together and individually was designed to accomplish three goals: to give thanks to a patron, to praise a

patron, and to secure future benefactions. These three goals summarise the moral and social duty of the client towards the patron, whether human or divine. Recalling that the sole duty of the client was to increase the honour of the patron (in exchange for benefactions received or the promise of benefactions), the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction refers to the patterns of articulation most commonly invoked by the client in order to increase the honour of the patron. What is more, each of these is visible in one way or another in Paul's conversion passages, as I shall illustrate in Chapter Four. In other words, Paul's own rhetoric of conversion, like that of his ancient Mediterranean peers, is a rhetoric of patronage and benefaction. Absent in conversion narratives, Paul's included, are introspective or emotional markers; what we find in their place are the markers of patronal exchange, benefactions and gratitude. With the exception of the rhetoric of the philosopher as patron, each of these conventions of the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction appear explicitly in Paul's conversion passages (1 Cor 9:1; 9:16–17; 15:8–10; Gal 1:11–17; and Phil 3:4b–11), and Chapter Four illustrates how this is the case.

This chapter closes with a look at the parallels between philosophy as an area of patronage and Paul as one who might well have been mistaken for a popular philosopher by his Hellenistic audiences. Parallels between Paul and the Graeco-Roman philosophers have long been pointed out and their significance debated. My goal in this discussion is not to argue that Paul was himself a "card-carrying" member of any philosophy, but only to point out that understanding the parallels between the earliest Jesus movement and the indigenous philosophies will help us to understand the phenomenon of conversion better. That is, it is widely held now that philosophy and not ancient religion was the domain of ancient conversion, and understanding how earliest Christianity fits into this cultural matrix can only complement our knowledge.

Recognition that ancient narratives about interaction with the gods and with philosophers was framed in the rhetoric of patronage and clientage is a profoundly important step in acknowledging that ancient conversion cannot be understood analogously with modern conversion. Chapter One problematises the assumptions that Paul can be transported into a modern cultural setting, that we can speak about his personal experiences and features as if he were one of us; Chapters Two through Four establish the extent to which Paul's conversion narratives were consistent with his cultural paradigm, a relationship that serves only to accentuate the differences between him and us. The intent of these chapters, supplemented ultimately

by the final chapter, is to provide a workable and meaningful alternative to the dominant psychological reading of Paul's conversion experience, not simply to undermine that reading.

Lest one begin to think that ancient conversion involved automatons computing benefits and costs and changing patrons or benefactors (converting) on that basis alone (the "what's in it for me" principle), the final chapter introduces loyalty into the equation. Loyalty is an important feature of the model of ancient conversion, for without it, it appears that conversion in this cultural context was nothing more than a form of rational choice theory—that human actors behave as if the world is a market in which decisions are made rationally based only on perceived outcomes and benefits. We ought not over-emotionalise or over-sentimentalise ancient conversion; if much in conversion narratives emphasises what is to be gained by joining a certain patron, we should assume that the balance sheet was a factor in ancient conversion. We should take them at their word. This does mean that clients were apt to choose patrons based on the benefits they stood to gain. There can be no doubt that a feature of Paul's preaching to new Graeco-Roman converts involved drawing their attention to the benefactions to be gained from association with his God. Yet once inside, there was more dynamism to conversion than that. The life-blood of conversion, the dynamism, the way we know there was something at stake for all parties, is contained in an understanding of loyalty within the patron/benefactor and client bond. There is ample evidence that the bond that united some clients to their patrons went considerably beyond what can be accounted for by a sort of rational choice theory. Loyalty helps us to bridge that gap; it adds dynamism to a change in the patronal relationship that might otherwise be mistaken as entirely sober.

There lies at the root of this work an attempt to reverse a long-standing fallacy of contiguity that has resulted from the language we use—English language and psychological language. The use of the term 'conversion' in studies of the ancient world creates the illusion that conversion meant and represented then what it means and represents in the modern West. It is wholly natural that the Western (and English) hearer will hear the term 'conversion' used and assume she knows precisely what is meant. Or, conversely, the scholar can fall into similar patterns and assumptions by using the same term; the scholar's use of the term as an item of convenience inevitably becomes a statement of similarity. Our minds naturally work by analogy. What would be best is if we could come up with an alternative term. Some attempts have been made towards this (I have in mind here Beverly Gaventa's three types of conversion that arise in my Chapter One, of which

the type "transformation" best describes Paul[4]). It appears, however, that no other term has been able to take the place of 'conversion.' It may well be that the reason 'conversion' has not been replaced is because no other term so well embodies the psychological assumptions that attend the term. Whatever the case, neither have I been able to come up with a different term to describe ancient 'conversion,' so I offer this work as a step towards acknowledging that there are perhaps more differences than similarities between the two cultural constructs of conversion, ancient Mediterranean and modern Western. Despite the fallacy of contiguity that is created when we use the term 'conversion,' we should avoid facilely assuming that the ancient counterpart can be understood by using the modern counterpart as an analogical model, whether deliberately or otherwise. It turns out we have been talking about conversion in the ancient Mediterranean all this time with the wrong language—our own.

While on the topic of the fallacy of contiguity created by the use of similar terminology, I have one additional item to discuss. It is still common idiom, based largely on our modern separation of church and state, firstly to differentiate the religious from the secular domains of social life, and from there to imagine that religion is a social entity discrete from other social entities, such as kinship, politics, economics. Such distinctions work well in our culture, but remarkably poorly in other cultures. With respect to the ancient Mediterranean, religion did not exist as a discrete social entity independent of other social entities, but rather was embedded within them. What we have in the ancient Mediterranean is political-religion, kinship-religion, and economic-religion, the point being that religion did not exist alone but was inexorably tied up in other social institutions. In order to facilitate against the confusion of sharing misleading terminology, I endeavour to use the words 'cult' and 'cultic' where we usually use 'religion' and 'religious'—that is to describe activities having to do with human interaction with the gods. Where I lapse back into familiar terminology, it is due to the smoother idiom offered by the familiar, and should not be taken as an indicator of shared features. And indeed it is not simply a matter of using appropriate terminology, for it is probably the perpetuation of this false

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4   Beverly R. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). Alan F. Segal also uses this term, though with a different meaning [*Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990)], but despite its use by two influential scholars, the term has not caught on.

dichotomy between religious and secular life in the ancient world that has led to the continued misunderstanding of ancient conversion.

This study, then, seeks to establish that ancient and modern people talk differently about conversion because they are very different people, constructed differently by their cultures, and thus are prone to experience life — their interactions with each other and with their gods—differently. While we are certainly enriched by noting similarities between different cultures and people, we can be equally enriched by understanding, accepting, and honouring the differences without trying to homogenise everything. The ultimate challenge lies not in knowing that differences exist, but in actually using that knowledge to change how we think about ourselves and others.

Chapter One

The Influence of Psychology on Contemporary Society and Scholarship

1.0 Introduction

Psychology, with its emphasis on the emotional and introspective features of human experience, provides the default framework within which the modern West tends to analyse and describe conversion.[1] This claim does not assume that psychology is the only way people understand conversion, but that its pride of place is so natural to so many that its value is infrequently challenged. That the psychological approach is the default one is true despite the fact that one can study different *aspects* of conversion that are not psychological or that would not appear to lend themselves to psychological commentary or assumptions. For instance, one might focus on social aspects of conversion, looking into peer, network or community pressures, or into the dynamics of changing communities of faith, friends, and family. Similarly, one might focus on theological aspects of conversion, looking into the nature of the unique message or into the attainment of a higher religious truth.

Though some studies may well focus on aspects of conversion, they will naturally and necessarily presuppose a conversion experience that stands

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[1] The terms "West" and "Western" are a little imprecise, but they are convenient and widespread. Studies of cultures in terms of individualism and collectivism (terms that will be defined later) illustrate two important things. The first is that individualism-collectivism is a linear range, not a pair of binary opposites. There is no clear demarcating line at which one culture is collectivist and the other individualist. Nonetheless, and this is the second point, certain geographical areas predominate at either ends of the spectrum—countries in North America (excluding Mexico), Europe, Australia/NZ are clustered at the individualistic end and countries in South America, Africa, and Asia are clustered at the collectivistic end. See table 5.1 in Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.; Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001), 215. The significance of this for the present study should be clear: Biblical scholars are overwhelmingly enculturated at the individualistic end of that spectrum.

behind whatever aspect they happen to study. It is this inaugural experience, and not necessarily the various aspects of conversion, which our culture tends strongly towards framing in psychological categories: personal, introspective, individualistic, and emotionally tumultuous (to varying degrees). The West overwhelmingly understands conversion as an event marked more by its internal effects and features than it is by its external effects and features.

This perspective, however, is not *only* psychological; it is also modern and Western, in other words encompassing a very narrow perspective both temporally and geographically. These three categories—psychological, modern, and Western—are so closely related as to be almost synonymous, but it is important and useful to differentiate among them. For instance, we shall see that a construction of the self that is individualistic and egocentric is decidedly Western and modern, and that such a construction of the self stands in sharp contradistinction to non-Western constructions of the self and self-identity. In and of itself, however, this is not psychological. Yet, the construction of psychological models was founded upon the egocentric and individualistic self that dominates Western society. These are not, incidentally, value laden terms, but rather anthropological terms distinguishing Western personality constructions from non-Western ones.

Psychology is such an organic (that is, implicit and tenacious) part of the cultural Western landscape, and it so thoroughly informs how Westerners understand and articulate human experience, that one might nearly *predict* that psychology would be the default manner for understanding conversion.[2] Indeed, given our profoundly psychological cultural setting, one could be forgiven for feeling that such an approach to understanding ancient conversion is wholly natural. Such, however, is not the case. Understanding conversion psychologically is not *natural* but rather precisely and narrowly *cultural*. It is neither self-evident nor obvious that psychology provides the best way for understanding conversion, but it is our culturally prescribed way for (and hence a very convenient way of) doing so.

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[2]   See, for instance, William R. Woodward, "Professionalization, Rationality, and Political Linkages in Twentieth Century Psychology," in *Psychology in Twentieth-Century Thought and Society* (ed. M. G. Ash and W. R. Woodward; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 295–309; Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Political Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); R. Hagendijk and H. Helms, "De invloed van de psychologie op andere disciplines: een kwantitatieve verkenning," *Nederlands Tijdschrift voor de Psychologie en haar Grensgebieden* 50 (1995): 257–66.

Of course, our first task must be to define psychology, for the term itself includes a startling variety of meanings and areas of research. The arrival of psychology as a modern academic discipline was marked by the "experiential" and structuralist psychology of Wilhelm Wundt in the 1870s. For Wundt, psychology was a "science of immediate experience," where experience refers to "such phenomena as sensations, perceptions, feelings, and emotions."[3] Despite the development of sub-disciplines and specialisations since the birth of modern psychology just over a century ago, the basic interest of Wundt in the mental and emotional states and introspective activities of the individual and the individual's mind continues to characterise the interest of the various schools of psychological study. It is this admittedly narrow though equally predominant aspect of psychology that the term "psychology" implies when it appears throughout this chapter: the thoughts, memories, feelings and emotional experiences of human beings.

In what follows, I shall map out (very briefly) the influence of psychology on various academic disciplines, moving quickly towards an analysis of its influence on Religious and New Testament Studies. From there I shall narrow the focus, looking at studies of conversion, which themselves cover modern, ancient, New Testament, and Pauline conversion. The purpose there shall be to identify the often subtle and implicit psychological assumptions in these works. Throughout this section, my intent is only to illustrate, where possible, the psychological or modern orientation of each work, not to assess the work (as a work on conversion) critically. I shall then lay out in some detail the limitations of applying the modern Western psychological model to texts and characters (ancient and New Testament) that were formed in a cultural environment that is neither modern nor Western. This chapter will close by suggesting an alternative model that is more sensitive and responsive to the cultural milieu of the ancient Mediterranean, and that will be illustrated and applied in subsequent chapters.

1.1 The Early Influence of Psychology

Almost from its inception as an academic discipline, psychology has influenced other fields of study, particularly within, but not limited to, the humanities and social sciences: those fields of study in which people and their social life figure prominently. Psychology had a rapid and profound

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[3]   Fred S. Keller, *The Definition of Psychology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1973), 19.

effect on sociology, anthropology and religious studies.[4] The combination of psychology with religious studies and anthropology appears to have always been appealing, evidenced by the fact that many of the landmark studies in psychology are also landmark studies in anthropology and religious studies— James H. Leuba and E. D. Starbuck, William James, Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Émile Durkheim, and later Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung.[5] The inevitability of cross-fertilisation is suggested by the academic genealogy: Franz Boas, arguably the founder of modern cultural anthropology, as well as such seminal contributors as Émile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski, were each pupils of Wilhelm Wundt; Boas passed on the psychological torch to his students Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict.[6]

William James pioneered the combination of psychology and the study of religion, and his influence, even through those whose work is even more well known, is still considerable: Sigmund Freud, C. G. Jung, Abraham Maslow, and S. G. F. Brandon.[7] These scholars were psychologists by training

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4   J. M. White, "Psychological Anthropology," in *The Social Sciences Encyclopedia* (ed. A. and J. Kuper; London: Routledge, 1996), 687–88; Philip K. Bock, *Rethinking Psychological Anthropology: Continuity and Change in the Study of Human Action* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1988).

5   Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Religion: Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism and Other Works* (ed. and trans. J. Strachey and A. Dickson; Pelican Freud Library 13; London; New York: Penguin, 1990); C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: West and East. Collected works of C. G. Jung vol. 11* (ed. H. Read et al.; trans. R. F. C. Hull; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958); Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion: and Other Essays.* Selected and with an introduction by R. Redfield (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948); idem, *The Foundations of Faith and Morals: An Anthropological Analysis of Primitive Beliefs and Conduct with Special Reference to the Fundamental Problems of Religion and Ethics* (London: H. Milford; Oxford University Press, 1936); James H. Leuba, *The Psychology of Religious Mysticism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925); idem, *The Psychological Origin and the Nature of Religion* (London: Constable, 1921); Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (trans. J. W. Swain; London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1915); Leuba, *A Psychological Study of Religion, its Origin, Function, and Future* (New York: MacMillan, 1912); Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1911); William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902); E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899).

6   Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Psychological Study of Primitive Youth for Western Civilization* (New York: W. Morrow, 1928); idem, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (New York: William Morrow, 1935); Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

7   Abraham H. Maslow, *Religious Values, and Peak-Experiences* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964); S. G. F. Brandon, *Time and Mankind: An Historical and Philosophical Study of Mankind's Attitude to the Phenomena of Change* (London:

with a side interest, at times hostile, in religion. More illustrative of the influence of psychology on the study of religion, and the New Testament more specifically, are scholars trained in religion but with a side interest, at times hostile and at other times latent, in psychology.

1.1.1 The Influence of Psychology on New Testament Studies

Given the incursion of psychology into other academic fields and especially its influence on our culture and society, it would be surprising to find that New Testament studies had been untouched by the influence of psychology.[8] Because of their status within the early Christian movement, both Jesus and Paul have been the frequent subject of psychological evaluation. Jesus attracts psychological attention because of what is understood as his charismatic personality, his ostensibly having no human father, and probably because of his death as something of a rebel.[9] People likely consider Paul no less

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Hutchinson, 1951). For a survey of such landmarks in the psychology of religion, see J. W. Heisig, "Psychology of Religion," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. Mircea Eliade; 17 vols.; New York: MacMillan, 1987), 12:57–66.

[8]   In his introduction to D. Andrew Kille's *Psychological Biblical Criticism* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship, ed. Gene M. Tucker; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), Gene Tucker writes, "Psychological language and presuppositions are deeply embedded in contemporary culture. . . Indeed, one could argue that a leading theme if not the defining concern of modern western culture is the human psyche. . . Psychological interests abound in scholarly circles as well and certainly are not limited to the disciplines of psychology and psychiatry. . . It should not be surprising, therefore, that biblical scholarship should turn to psychological interpretation" (ix). A similar sentiment to that expressed here is found in W. G. Rollins, *Soul and Psyche: The Bible in Psychological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 66. It may be fitting at this point to indicate that Psychological Biblical criticism, which these two scholars represent, along with the Society of Biblical Literature group with which they work, is different from the psychological approaches that I am discussing in this chapter (though Tucker's comments do not seem to reflect an understanding of this difference). Psychological Biblical criticism is hermeneutically oriented, and as such is closely related to Reader Response criticism. The psychology which is more problematic and with which I am primarily concerned is exegetically oriented, in that it makes psychological assessments of the texts and characters of the ancient world. Conversely, a hermeneutic approach looks for ways in which text and reader are engaged in psychological ways.

[9]   While it would be interesting to look at psychological studies of Jesus, this would take us too far beyond the necessarily more narrow focus on Paul in this chapter. Such a study would include: Peter Malone, *The Same as Christ Jesus: Gospel and Type* (London: St. Paul's, 2000); Hal Childs, *The Myth of the Historical Jesus and the Evolution of Consciousness* (SBLDS 179; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000);