

Conversion in the New Testament

BY STEPHEN SMALLEY

AT the end of the last century, there appeared a brief article by Dr. Frederick Field of Trinity College, Cambridge, entitled "Is 'Conversion' a Scriptural Term?" In this inquiry, Dr. Field admitted the real fact of conversion; but he protested against the "indiscriminate and fanatical use of the word" in his day and pointed out both the infrequent biblical occurrence of the actual term, and also the not infrequent mishandling of the kindred terms in the AV translation. He particularly deplored the general assumption that conversion is "necessary". "When conversion is insisted upon," Dr. Field continues, "as universally necessary in order to a state of salvation—when preachers divide their hearers, being believers in a common Christianity, into the two classes of 'converted' and 'unconverted'—when the former class are led to cherish overweening ideas of eternal salvation, and the latter are driven to despair of their spiritual state, . . . a candid inquiry, how far such views of conversion are consistent with a 'discreet and learned' ministration of the Word of God, can never be deemed superfluous or inopportune."¹

This present essay takes its starting point without apology from the New Testament, in an attempt to examine the evidence for the subject of conversion as it stands, and to provide a biblical background for the discussion of this issue from other directions. In so doing, it may be possible to assess the validity of Dr. Field's provocative remarks.

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Our study will first take account of the language of conversion in the New Testament, next of its illustration, and finally of its theology. We shall then be in a position to draw together some practical conclusions.

First, then, we must examine the occurrence and meaning of the verb ἐπιστρέφω and its cognates στρέφω and the noun ἐπιστροφή. The background of all three terms, both in Hebrew and in classical and secular Greek, suggests not only a literal and physical turning (both transitive and intransitive), but also the sense of a change of direction involving mind and spirit.

The relevant Hebrew verb, שׁוּב, occurs in a large number of varied contexts. It describes the action of Reuben, who "returned" to the pit in Dothan to discover Joseph's disappearance (Gen. 37: 29), and of Moses, when he "turned again" into the camp from the tent of meeting (Ex. 33: 11). It is also used of repulsing or "turning back" enemy forces (Is. 36: 9), and passively of retreating or "turning back" in the face of the foe (Ps. 44: 10). The sense of שׁוּב in all these four examples is literal, even if the verb is employed with slightly differing connotations.

There are other contexts in the Old Testament, however, which

employ the same term in a non-literal sense, both religious and non-religious. It occurs, for example, in the passage where Jeroboam voices his suspicion that the allegiance of the northern kingdom would "turn back" to the house of David, if the Temple worship continued to be centralized at Jerusalem (1 Ki. 12: 26f.), and it is also the verb used to depict the effect of a "soft answer" on wrath (Prov. 15: 1). The verb שׁוּב is frequently used in contexts which speak of "turning" as a change of heart, or spiritual reorientation. Negatively this appears as turning back to iniquity (Jer. 11: 10), or turning away from Yahweh Himself (Num. 14: 43); and positively this kind of conversion manifests itself as turning *from* wickedness or transgression (Ezek. 18: 27f.), and turning *towards* God (as in the case of Josiah, for example, who "turned to the Lord with all his heart", 2 Ki. 23: 25). There is a similar use of this verb in the Old Testament describing the turning of God towards man, either in blessing (Ps. 80: 14) or in wrath (Josh. 24: 20).³ It was no mere play on words, moreover, that caused exilic prophecy to speak in one breath of "returning" to Jerusalem, that Jewish spiritual centre of gravity, and to Yahweh Himself (Is. 51: 11 and 55: 7, *al.*).

Where the movement of the conversion is Godward, the action is often the subject of exhortation (Ezek. 18: 30; Hos. 12: 6, *al.*), or referred to as directly the work of an agent. The Psalmist's prayer is that God Himself will restore or "turn again" His people (Ps. 80: 3); and fifteen times altogether in the Old Testament God is said to turn men to Himself. Again, the messianic promise of Malachi is that Elijah *redivivus* will avert judgment and prepare Israel for its Lord, by first effecting a general "conversion" of heart within families (Mal. 4: 5f.; *cf.* 2: 6). שׁוּב is also used in a similarly transitive sense in contexts which do not speak of a spiritual or specifically Godward conversion; as in the case of Moses, for example, who reported or "caused to turn back" the words of the people to Yahweh (Ex. 19: 8).

From the evidence of the Old Testament, therefore, we are already able to see that the basic meaning of שׁוּב is "to turn back" or "return", and that the verb is used both transitively and intransitively to denote a change of direction involving the total beginning. This "turning" may also be encouraged and even effected by an agent. In its non-literal, theological sense, the term describes a change of relationship between man and God. The normative reference in the Old Testament is the conversion of the nation of Israel as a whole, in the light of its covenant history, to Yahweh. In this case, "return" follows, and needs to follow, infidelity to the terms of the covenant (*cf.* Deut. 30: 2f., which is again a mutual "returning"); and for this reason, as Dr. J. I. Packer has reminded us,³ national repentance is often accompanied in the Old Testament by fresh covenant-making (*cf.* the intention of King Hezekiah, 2 Chr. 29: 10). The pagan city of Nineveh, the individual leaders Josiah and Manasseh, and the prospects of a universal turning to the Lord, are some of the exceptions to the regular pattern of conversion as a national, Israelite affair.⁴

In his book *Turning to God* (1963), Professor William Barclay has drawn our attention to the background occurrence of the New Testa-

ment words for conversion in classical and secular Greek. Once more, ἐπιστρέφω and στρέφω are regularly used, in both transitive and intransitive senses, to mean a change of direction which is literal as well as non-literal.⁶ Particularly noteworthy for this study is the use of ἐπιστρέφω in Epictetus (*Discourses*, 2, 20, 22), mentioned by Professor Barclay.⁶ In reply to an offer to prove the goodness of piety and sanctity, comes the invitation: "By all means prove it, that our citizens may be converted and honour the divine being (οἱ πολῖται ἡμῶν ἐπιστραφέντες τιμῶσι τὸν θεῖον)". This sense of the term ἐπιστρέφω is manifestly "religious", and it anticipates the evidence of the New Testament itself, to which we must now turn.

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We do not need to linger over the three terms προσήλυτος (Mt. 23: 15; Acts 2: 10; 6: 5; 13: 43), ἀπαρχή (Rom. 16: 5; 1 Cor. 16: 15), and νεόφροντος (1 Tim. 3: 6), all of which have been translated in some English versions of the New Testament by using the word "convert".⁷ In each case the terms are near-technical, and do not describe the process or significance of conversion, but rather the "status" it confers.

Ἐπιστρέφω (which regularly translates שׁוּב in the LXX) is often used in the New Testament intransitively, to describe the literal and physical act of turning or returning. Jesus "turned" (ἐπιστραφείς) in the crowd to discover who had touched Him (Mk. 5: 30), and Peter "turned" to see the beloved disciple following himself and Jesus (Jn. 21: 20). Mary and Joseph "returned" to Nazareth from Jerusalem after the Presentation (Lk. 2: 39), and those εἰς τὸν ἀγρόν at the time of the ἔσχατον are warned by Jesus not to "turn back" for their mantles (Mk. 13: 16 and parallels). The verb in its literal sense regularly appears in the middle voice, and is not used transitively. The prophecy that John the Baptist, in the spirit and power of Elijah, will "turn" (ἐπιστρέψει) the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and also the hearts of father to children (Lk. 1: 16f., echoing Mal. 4: 5f.), and the exhortation of James about "bringing back" a sinner from error (James 5: 19f.), both use the verb transitively; but in each case there is a shading over into a non-literal and indeed spiritual meaning.

The most common New Testament use of ἐπιστρέφω, and the one that chiefly concerns us, is intransitive and non-literal; once again it denotes a mental or spiritual reorientation, most usually in the direction of the Lord. Three points are important in this section of our investigation. First, the verb never appears in the New Testament in a passive sense, and the subject of the action of "turning" in the sense we are considering is always the person involved. The effect of Isaiah's prophetic commission, however this is to be understood, is represented as a hindrance to conversion: "lest they turn" (using שׁוּב) "and be healed" (Is. 6: 9f.). This logion is quoted four times in the New Testament (with an additional echo in the Lucan version of the saying of Jesus about the purpose of His parables, Lk. 8: 10): twice by Jesus,

once by the Fourth Evangelist (using στρέφω), and once by Paul.* In each case the initiative lies with ὁ λαός. Similarly, as a result of the healing of Aeneas by Peter, and of the preaching at Antioch, large numbers of people "turned" (ἐπέστρεψαν) to the Lord (Acts 9. 35; 11: 21); and the Thessalonian Christians, also, are described as having "turned" (ἐπεστρέψατε) from idols towards God (1 Thess. 1: 9).

Second, while the subject of conversion is always the convert, the action may be encouraged and assisted by an agent; and this is a pattern we have already noted from the background to this terminology in the Old Testament. For example, after the healing of the lame man at the gate of the Temple, Peter exhorts the people to "turn again" (ἐπιστρέψατε) so that their sins may be blotted out (Acts 3: 19). A negative version of this theological pattern is presented by the description of God sending His servant (Παῖς) to turn away (ἀποστρέφειν) men from their wickedness (Acts 3: 26); though here the verb ἀποστρέφω is used transitively, and its subject is the agent of the "conversion".

Third, ἐπιστρέφω only once in the New Testament describes the "returning" of a Christian who has been unfaithful to his Lord. The word of Jesus to Peter (Lk. 22: 32) is that when he has "turned again" (ἐπιστρέψας) he should strengthen his brethren. Whereas שׁוּב in the Old Testament consistently refers to the restoration of a broken covenant relationship, ἐπιστρέφω in the New Testament denotes (except in this one instance) a unique occasion of reorientation. The contrast involved in the change is vividly drawn in terms of darkness and light, the power of Satan and the rule of God, or the worship of idols and the service of the living God;* while the complete and unrepeatable character of the changed relationship is emphasized by a persistent use of the aorist tense. On the other hand, the apostate or backslider in the New Testament is not called to conversion, but to repentance (Rev. 3: 3, 19, *al.*); though it is also true, as we shall see later, that μετάνοια as well as ἐπιστροφή belong to the initial stage of Christian commitment.

The use of the verb στρέφω in the New Testament presents us with similar conclusions. Στρέφω is used intransitively and in a literal sense to describe the physical act of turning or turning round. Paul "turns" with the Gospel from the Jews to the Gentiles (Acts 13: 46). There is a further reference in the speech of Stephen to God Himself "turning" (ἔστρεψεν), and delivering up the apostate Israelites "to worship the host of heaven" (Acts 7: 42); and, in the same speech, στρέφω is used in a non-literal sense of the Israelites "turning" (ἐστράφησαν) to Egypt (7: 39, clearly echoing Num. 14: 3 which uses שׁוּב). Luke uses this verb frequently as a graphic way of describing Jesus, who "turns round" (στραφείς) to look at Peter (Lk. 22: 61), for example, or to speak to the daughters of Jerusalem (23: 28).

The spiritual connotation of the verb στρέφω, finally, appears much less frequently than is the case with its counterpart, ἐπιστρέφω. We have already seen the active significance of στρέφω in the quotation

from Isaiah 6 at John 12: 40, where the parallels and Acts 28: 26f. use ἐπιστρέφω. The same conclusion therefore applies to the use of στρέφω when it signifies reorientation in the direction of God—that the subject of the conversion is the convert, who takes the initiative. Στρέφω is used in this sense at Matthew 18: 3; and there again, in spite of the AV translation, the verb has a reflexive and not a passive character. Jesus says, “ unless you turn (ἐάν μὴ στραφῆτε) and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven ”.

The cognate noun for “ conversion ”, ἐπιστροφή, occurs only once in the New Testament. Paul and Barnabas, on their way to the Jerusalem council, report the ἐπιστροφή of the Gentiles to the brethren, and thus provide an occasion for “ great joy ” (Acts 15: 3). Apart from its quasi-technical appearance, this use of the term does not provide us with any further evidence for the meaning of conversion in the New Testament.

We may summarize thus far our New Testament findings, in the light of their background. Ἐπιστρέφω and the cognates of this verb derive their non-literal sense of a decisive, Godward reorientation, from a literal, intransitive use meaning a change of direction. From the spiritual use of these terms, conversion in the New Testament is seen to be the action of the convert himself, to be inclusive and complete, to involve a changed relation between man and God, and to be possibly encouraged, though (unlike the Old Testament) very rarely effected, by an agent.¹⁰

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With this linguistic evidence in mind, it will be instructive, secondly, to examine in some detail the five examples of Christian conversion which appear in Acts, since this appears to be an obvious and suitable point of departure. If the range of the selection given to us by Luke is not large, at least it is representative. All five examples refer to individuals of differing background, nationality, sex, and temperament. All five occasions are attended by differing circumstances and precipitated by differing causes. But, as we shall see, all five have certain important features in common. At the outset, it is noticeable that each example presents us with a description of the process of conversion and its results, without using the στρέφω terminology, and without attempting an explanation of either its theology or psychology.

By way of further prolegomena to this section, it is interesting to notice what makes conversion “ Christian ”. In none of the New Testament instances of στρέφω and its cognates so far examined is the “ turn ” of reorientation described explicitly as conversion to Christ.¹¹ On the two occasions in Acts (9: 35 and 11: 21) where believers are described as “ turning to the Lord ” (Κύριος) the context makes it likely that the object of the conversion referred to is (as in 15: 19 and 26: 20) the Lord God.¹² Commitment to Christ is, as we shall see, always central to the process of conversion; but the conversion itself, in the sense that we are now using that term, ultimately has God as its object, and indeed as its subject. What makes conversion Christian,

then, is the presence of Jesus Christ Himself, or the preaching about Him, and also the subsequent act of faith in Christ the true *imago Dei*, expressed by the convert in baptism. In other words, conversion is a turning to God *through* commitment to Christ.

We must first take account of the background to the occurrence of conversion in the early history of the Christian church, evident in the activity of preaching. We have already noticed the place of the preacher as an agent of conversion in the New Testament, and it will not be out of place to investigate his contribution more closely. The general pattern emerging from the kerygmatic proclamation recorded in Acts indicates that the direct challenge to "convert" to God was rarely given. Only once in the speeches of Acts is a word in the στρέφω group used in a context of straightforward exhortation; this is Peter's injunction to "repent and turn again", given after the preaching that followed the healing of the lame man (Acts 3: 19). A second, less direct example occurs in the fragmentary address of Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (Acts 14: 15ff.). The apostles see opportunity to speak arising from the confused situation following the healing of a cripple as part of their evangelistic programme (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς); and the content of their "good news" is "that you should turn (ἐπιστρέφειν) from these vain things to a living God" (verse 15).

The preaching of John the Baptist provides a model for the mechanics, if not the content, of the early apostolic proclamation. The Baptist was preaching (κηρύσσων) in the wilderness of Judea. Matthew alone summarizes the content of John's preaching in terms of the advent of the Kingdom of God (3: 2); although Mark and Luke both include in their accounts the theme of repentance, in the face of the crisis and judgment associated with the imminent arrival of ὁ ἰσχυρότερος. And all three Synoptists associate the appearance of John the Baptist, and therefore his message, with the fulfilment of prophecy; the prophetic word in this case is Isaianic: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (40: 3). The challenge is implicit: God has turned to men, who need to turn to Him even as they prepare for His arrival.¹³ The imminence of the Kingdom, in fact, exerts eschatological pressures which discover sin, demand repentance, and lead to conversion.

Inevitably, the same pattern is typical of the ministry of Jesus. He takes over from the Baptist the theme of the Kingdom (Mk. 1: 15 = Mt. 4: 17, *al.*), and addresses man as sinful and "untuned", in need of repentance and salvation (Mk. 2: 17b; Lk. 13: 2f.; 15: 4ff., *al.*). In line with this, Professor Werner Kümmel, in his book *Man in the New Testament*, has reminded us that the teaching of Jesus "presupposes the common sinfulness of all mankind", and embodies a "call to conversion which is similarly universal in scope."¹⁴ The Johannine tradition, in its own way, as well as the Synoptic, makes it clear that Jesus both inaugurates the Kingdom of God, and also provides the means of entry into it; it is on this basis, indeed, that He issues to all men a summons to repentance and faith. The prediction of the angel about John the Baptist, that "he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God" (Lk. 1: 16), seemingly imparts a character to

John's ministry more positive than that of Jesus, who (in Simeon's words) "is set for the fall and rise of many in Israel" (Lk. 2: 34). But it is the teaching of John that is in fact strongly pervaded by the flavour of judgment in the face of impending crisis (Lk. 3: 17, *al*); in the teaching of Jesus, the notes of judgment and division are carefully balanced by the truth of promise and salvation *through* judgment (Jn. 12: 31f.), in the light of which conversion becomes a real possibility as well as an imperative demand (12: 36).

What then is the content of the preaching to which those in the days of the apostles who "were being saved" (Acts 2: 47) responded? The debate about the precise limits of the apostolic kerygma, and the material it included, has not ended.¹⁶ The normative assumption in this respect, which we have learned from the work of A. Seeberg, M. Dibelius, C. H. Dodd and A. M. Hunter,¹⁶ is that St. Paul and the other New Testament writers are indebted to an underlying *paradosis* which may be described as "the apostolic kerygma". That there was a fixity about this tradition, which caused a regular kerygmatic pattern to emerge each time the Gospel was preached in the primitive Church, has been challenged by Professor C. F. Evans,¹⁷ for example, who is more prepared to discover "kerygmata" than "the kerygma" in the speeches of Acts; and more recently by Mr. D. E. H. Whiteley, who in his book, *The Theology of St. Paul* (1964), speaks of the kerygma as an "activity" of proclamation, which gathered to itself a continually expanding content, and not one that was unalterable (p. 10).

No one denies, however, that even if the speeches in Acts contain what Professor Evans calls a skilful Lucan "arrangement" of the main themes of the apostolic preaching,¹⁸ a "hard core" of doctrine apparently featured regularly in the apostles' proclamation; and this is reflected in Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament.¹⁹ It is important for our present purpose to recall the familiar fact that the central point of the apostolic kerygma is the redemptive activity of God in Christ. The incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which are the basic elements of the preaching, manifestly appear as acts of God. Through and through the work of salvation is His. It is God who attests the man, and glorifies His servant, Jesus (Acts 2: 22; 3: 13); it is He who raises from the dead the Author of life, killed with His own foreknowledge (Acts 3: 15; 2: 23; 10: 40ff.). In other words, the apostles recount the *heilsgeschichte* which has become centred in God's final visitation. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, sees the birth of his son as part of God's ultimate plan to "visit and redeem his people" (Lk. 1: 68);²⁰ and, understandably, Luke alone among the evangelists catches the comment of the bystanders at Nain after the raising of the widow's son: "God has visited his people!" (Lk. 7: 16). It is no accident, therefore, that the motif of "visitation" features explicitly in one speech of Acts, as well as implicitly in the apostolic preaching as a whole. At the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), when the conversion of the Gentiles is reported, the speech of James recapitulates Peter's news in terms of a covenant "visitation" which fulfils the prophecy of Amos 9: 11f. (ὁ, Θεὸς ἐπεσκέψατο λαβεῖν ἐξ ἐθνῶν λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ, verse 14). There is accordingly a natural

sequence in the pronouncement of James: God has turned to the Gentiles, and "we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn (ἐπιστρέφουσιν) to God" (verse 19).

The preaching of the apostles includes, therefore, a high eschatological content, since the visitation of God which is announced is seen to involve judgment as well as salvation. In his book *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* Dr. Norman Perrin has traced the background to this expectation in the eschatology of late Judaism and the Qumran sect, and shows us the "infinite variety of imagery" used in the relevant literature to illustrate the twin themes of God's intervention in history, and the final state of the redeemed resulting from this.²¹ The "day" of God's visitation ushers in the events of the end-time; and with the End both judgment and hope are revealed. This is surely the point of Peter's exhortation: "Save yourselves from this crooked generation" (Acts 2: 40). The "generation" stands under condemnation because of its rejection of the Christ (*cf.* Lk. 17: 25); the only way out is to be saved by calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 2: 21, quoting Joel 2: 32). The process of conversion in this case begins with a reception of the kerygmatic λόγος (Acts 2: 41),²² which leads in turn to repentance, the baptismal expression of faith, forgiveness, and the gift of the Spirit (verse 38); it is a direct response, in fact, to the heralding of God's active visitation in the person of His Son. To this paradigm of conversion we shall return.

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We are now in a position to investigate the five accounts of the individual experience of conversion recorded in Acts. The five people concerned are the Ethiopian (Acts 8), Paul (Acts 9, 22, and 26), Cornelius (Acts 10, 11, and 15), Lydia (Acts 16) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16). We have already glanced briefly at the problem of the historicity of the speeches in Acts; and this is not the place to begin a detailed review of Lukan historiography, or to pursue (for example) the reason for the triple record of the conversions of Paul and Cornelius. Since we can do no other, we must consider the material before us as it stands.

Once more, a fairly consistent pattern is discernible in each case of conversion; and six stages may be adduced from the five accounts we are given. In passing, it is an impressive fact that in no case does anything like an explicit confession of faith occur by itself, and apart from baptism. It is assumed that the patently credal statement of the Ethiopian, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8: 37), read by one eighth century manuscript, a variety of patristic witnesses, and a few others, is a later, "Western" interpolation.

The first stage, then, may be described as *preparation*. The Ethiopian was reading the scriptures (8: 28); Paul had been well trained in Judaism and the Law (22: 3; 26: 5), and must have known intimately the doctrine of those he was persecuting (9: 2; 22: 4; 26: 9-11); Cornelius was a God-fearer and a man of prayer (10: 2); Lydia was a worshipper of God and also in the habit of praying (16: 13f.); and even the Philippian jailer may have been given the opportunity of

listening to Paul and Silas preaching, since the apostles were in Philippi "some days" before they were imprisoned (Acts 16: 12).

The second stage is the *preaching* about Jesus, or His presence. Philip explains the good news of Jesus to the Ethiopian (8: 35); Jesus Himself forms the content of Paul's vision on the road to Damascus (9: 5; 22: 8; 26: 15); Peter preaches God's visitation in Christ to Cornelius and the other Gentiles (10: 34-43; 11: 14); Paul delivers some kind of proclamation in the hearing of Lydia (16: 13f.); and Paul and Silas deliver the λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου²³ to the jailer and his household (16: 31f.).

Third, there is *inquiry*. The Ethiopian questions Philip about the passage he is reading (8: 34); Paul asks Jesus for His identity (9: 5; 22: 8; 26: 13) and, in one account, for His commission (22: 10); Cornelius asks the "angel" for an explanation of his vision (10: 4); and the jailer asks the pertinent question of Paul and Silas, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" (16: 30).

Fourth, there is evidence of the *activity of God*.²⁴ The Spirit is associated with the ministry of Philip, who is the agent of the Ethiopian's conversion (8: 29, 39; at verse 39, the "Western" addition distinguishes between Πνεῦμα and ἄγγελος,²⁵ in order to link the convert's baptism with the gift of the Spirit); Paul encounters the Lord directly (9: 4ff.), and at the hands of Ananias, also prompted by God (verses 10ff.), presumably receives the Spirit—before baptism (verses 17f); Cornelius sees an angel of God in his vision (10: 3, 30), and also receives the Spirit before baptism, the evidence of which is speaking in tongues (10: 44ff.; 11: 15; 15: 8); and the Lord "opens the heart" of Lydia (16: 14).

Fifth, the convert in each case undergoes *baptism* (8: 38; 9: 18; 10: 48; 16: 15; 16: 33).

Finally, there are evident *results* of the conversion in each case. The Ethiopian and the jailer rejoice (8: 39; 16: 34); Paul preaches Christ (9: 20, 22; 26: 22f.); Cornelius speaks with tongues, extolling God (10: 46); Lydia and the jailer display the Christian virtue of hospitality (16: 15, 34; cf. 1 Pet. 4: 9).

What conclusions may be drawn from this evidence? In the actual description of the conversion in these five instances, only one stage belongs inseparably to them all; and that is the baptism of the convert, with (here) its implicit confession of faith.²⁶ We may for the moment disregard the results of conversion, which do not belong centrally to the occasion which is being recounted, even if they cannot be divorced from it. Otherwise, the stage of preparation is clear in four accounts, but more doubtful in the case of the jailer; while the activity of proclamation is associated with four of the conversions, though not directly with Paul's. Four of the converts ask questions, but Lydia does not; and in four cases, but not that of the jailer (except possibly in the attendant earthquake, Acts 16: 26), divine activity is prominent.

But, given the limitations of our evidence, certain features are sufficiently common to all these accounts for certain general deductions to be permitted. First, the spiritual experience in question is more than simply the work of a moment; second, it is frequently occasioned

by preaching; third, some kind of intellectual activity, however elementary, is involved; fourth, the conversion is undertaken by an individual who is treated as a whole personality; fifth, the believer is related more or less immediately to the total life of the Church by the instrument of baptism, often directly associated with the gift of the Spirit; and finally, as the premise of all that may be said about conversion in the New Testament, the work is from first to last a response to the *opus Dei*. It is this final conclusion that must govern and modify our earlier discovery about the intiation of the process of turning.

The experience of Augustine of Hippo in the garden at Milan (A.D. 386) forms as it happens an interesting parallel to these New Testament illustrations of conversion, since it includes a number of common features. Augustine himself gives us evidence of preparation for his divine encounter—in particular the prayers of the saintly Monica, but even more directly his own reading of the Scriptures, represented by the *codex apostoli* which he left with Alypius, and to which he returned.²⁷ Second, his companion Alypius, who was so helpfully at hand during this experience, may well have acted as an exponent of the kerygma. Third, Augustine asks a question, in the words and mood of Psalm 6: "O Lord, how long?" (verse 3). Fourth, he interprets the words which he hears, *tolle lege*, as a divine command, and therefore as evidence of the work of God. Fifth, though not until Easter of the following year (387), Augustine is baptized; and finally, the immediate spiritual outcome of his experience is Christian assurance (*lux securitatis*), supported by his mother's joy.²⁸ The fact that Augustine finishes his account with a doubtful use of theological language (referring to God as exclusively the subject of the action of conversion, *convertisti enim me ad te*²⁹), need not detain us.

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We must now relate the conclusions we have so far reached on the subject of conversion in the New Testament, to the theology of the New Testament as a whole.

It will first be necessary to examine the place of repentance in conversion. The literal meaning of *μετάνοια* refers primarily to an intellectual activity. But its use in the New Testament implies a change of mind which is positive as well as negative, and which involves the personality of the individual as a whole. In the Q passage, Matthew 12: 39-42=Luke 11: 29-32, the repentance of the man of Nineveh is described by Jesus as a response to kerygma; and the obvious interpretation of the "sign of Jonah" in terms of the ministry of Jesus Himself, is that He embodies a proclamation demanding repentance. This is precisely the pattern of the initial stages of conversion illustrated in the paradigm of Acts 2: 37ff., already mentioned: repentance follows the reception of the word. And the repentance involved contains a positive as well as a once-for-all aspect; it is a "return" to the source of salvation, as Pierre Bonnard has reminded us, in the case of the Baptist's preaching of repentance, which derives its real meaning from the biblical idea of covenant

itself, and is something totally different from mere "remorse".³⁰ When Peter instructs Simon Magus to repent of his mercenary wickedness (Acts 8: 22), or when the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to refrain from re-laying a "foundation of repentance from dead works" (Heb. 6: 1), the "conversion" implied is certainly negative. But in the context of evangelical preaching, the demand shades over already into the positive *issue* of repentance.

For this reason it is not surprising that repentance and conversion are linked together in an early speech of Peter (Acts 3: 19, μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε), and in Paul's summary of his preaching to the Gentiles, in his defence before Agrippa (Acts 26: 20, μετανοεῖν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ τὸν Θεόν). In the same way, repentance is associated in the New Testament with factors belonging to the process of conversion: faith (Mk. 1: 15; Acts 20: 21), forgiveness (Acts 5: 31), knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 2: 25), and new life (Acts 11: 18). Repentance, then, is the particular response of the individual to the eschatological crisis ushered in by the incarnation, in which the sinner recognizes his need to "turn to the Lord", so that the veil over his mind may be lifted (2 Cor. 3: 16). In this respect it is a notable characteristic of the *start* of a Christian life. But repentance also belongs to every part of Christian experience. Itself a gift of God (*cf.* Acts 11: 18), the dynamic obligation of repentance is a standing pointer to the paradox of grace. It cannot be the work of a moment, any more than conversion itself.

This leads us to our next consideration, the relation between conversion and baptism. The gift of repentance, baptism, and the coming of the Spirit are inseparable in the New Testament theology of conversion. John the Baptist preaches a "baptism of repentance" as a sign of the dawning rule of God (Mk. 1: 4); and he promises a baptism with Holy Spirit (verse 8). After the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles preach repentance and baptism (Acts 2: 38). And when the Holy Spirit has been "poured out even on the Gentiles" who accompanied Cornelius (Acts 10: 44f.) the astonished comment of the Jerusalem church is: "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11: 18). The connection is anything but formal. The activities of repentance and baptism are positive and prospective in character; both depend upon the agency of God the Holy Spirit, and both express a total reorientation of the individual's life in a Godward direction. They are both, in fact, focal expressions of the entire conversion process which occur within it.

We are very familiar with the impossibility of dissociating, on the New Testament showing, the experimental and sacramental aspects of baptism. Bishop Stephen Neill, in his volume on *The Interpretation of the New Testament* (1964), emphasizes the fact that admission to the churches of what he terms "early Catholicism" was "by faith and baptism"; and he points out the contrast existing between the New Testament situation and so much contemporary Protestantism in Europe.³¹ Whatever interpretation may be given to baptism, then and now, does not alter the fact that without it a believer did not enter the primitive community of faith. "The New Testament knows nothing

of membership in the Church by faith alone, without the accompanying act of obedience and confession."³²

This is the significance, surely, of the case-histories from Acts which we have examined. All the five individuals concerned, like those who hear the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 41), express their conversion and commitment in baptism. In this way, in one respect at least, their conversion and commitment are completed; and also in this way they become incorporated into the Christian community, with its marked characteristic of *κοινωνία* (Acts 2: 42). To ask therefore whether Paul became a Christian on the road to Damascus, or at his baptism itself, is a wrong way of posing the problem. Chronologically Paul's divine encounter, his Christian commitment, and his baptism, occur at different moments;³³ but theologically these are inseparable. Baptism is, as always in the New Testament, an articulation of something much larger than itself.

What happens in baptism, then, that makes it relevant to this discussion? Pauline sacramentalism, at least, implies a distinction between "outward" and "inward", but not a division.³⁴ The rite of baptism, therefore, and the "obedience to the faith" it expresses (Rom. 1: 5) belong to the same process. The practice and significance of baptism, as Professor C. K. Barrett says, are rooted in the eschatological events of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Rom. 6: 3-11).³⁵ We may add that it is itself an eschatological reply to the announcement of God's judgment and salvation. Man's part in baptism consists of repentance (Acts 2: 38), faith (Col. 2: 12), and a completely new spiritual orientation (Rom. 6: 11). But these actions are entirely responsive. Because of the work of God in Christ, it is possible through baptism and by faith to receive forgiveness (Acts 2: 38), renewal (Tit. 3: 5), incorporation into Christ (Rom. 6: 5), grace to live the new life (Rom. 6: 22), and the gift of the Spirit (Acts 2: 38).³⁶

Baptism in the New Testament, therefore, is not merely one step in the line of conversion. As a genuine means of grace, it *is* conversion. We have already seen that it includes all the elements that belong to the conversion paradigm of Acts 2: 37ff.: response to the word preached, repentance and faith, and the gifts of forgiveness and the Spirit. Far from being sensitive to the "outwardness" of baptism and "inwardness" of conversion, or to the possible dispensability of the sacramental activity, the New Testament gives us the franchise to be thoroughgoing sacramentalists. In this capacity, our task is to insist that, as a sacramental focus, baptism (at least) expresses precisely the same elements of Godward movement as typify conversion *in toto*.

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It has already been maintained on New Testament grounds, none the less, that the subject of conversion is the convert. To say that baptism is conversion, therefore, and to clarify the parallel between baptism and conversion in terms of man's response to God, still does not take account of the part played by God Himself in the action as a whole. It is here that we shall be forced to examine the relation of regeneration³⁷ both to baptism and conversion. For in the first place, as John Baillie's posthumous monograph on *Baptism and Conversion*

(1964) makes clear, baptism is "inseparably connected with regeneration" in the New Testament;³⁸ though we are presented throughout with the fact, and not the mechanics, of the association. In this way, the baptismal action is related to the twin poles of man's conversion and God's regeneration; it makes plain the constant biblical truth, that man converts but God renews.

It is important that the two motions of conversion and spiritual re-creation should not be confused, as they seem to be throughout Bishop Joost de Blank's essay *This is Conversion*.³⁹ Conversion is man's process of turning; and at some point in the turn God regenerates and gives eternal life (2 Cor. 5: 17; Rom. 6: 23). But both actions are normally expressed and conveyed in the focus of baptism, when the total movement of conversion and the precise moment of regeneration, whether consciously or not, coincide and become articulated. Rebirth in Christ, that is, involves inward *and* outward, God's part *and* ours, regeneration *and* conversion, Spirit *and* water (Jn. 3: 5).

Before we leave the subject of conversion and regeneration, it will be useful to examine three related New Testament concepts. The importance in Acts of the kerygma, preached by the agent of conversion and received by the person who converts, has already been noticed. It is not surprising, therefore, that the verb ἀκούω is also used to describe the initial stages of the process of conversion. The presence of evangelistic activity can be referred to as "hearing the word of the Lord" (Acts 13: 44; 19: 10). Similarly, the correct response to the evangel is represented as "hearing", in the sense of "receiving" or "believing" the word. The conversion of Cornelius and his companions is described simply as an illapse of the Spirit on those who "heard the word" (τοὺς ἀκούοντας τὸν λόγον, Acts 10: 44); and the report of this event at the Jerusalem council associates "hearing the word of the Gospel" with belief (Acts 15: 7). Evidently Luke's normal way of narrating conversion in Acts is to say that companies or individuals "believed (on the Lord Jesus Christ)";⁴⁰ and in this way ἀκούω and πιστεύω become virtually parallels. So again, when Paul is at Corinth, the brief record of the conversion of Crispus is followed by a note that "many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized" (Acts 18: 8). Here we have a complete triad: "hearing-faith-baptism". Finally, when Paul during his imprisonment at Rome turns in despair from the Jews to the Gentiles (Acts 28: 25ff.), he interprets this strategic move as a fulfilment of prophecy (Is. 6: 9f. once more). The Jews "hear" without understanding, and their ears are so "heavy of hearing" that they cannot (or perhaps, do not) turn to the Lord for healing. The apostle therefore looks optimistically in the direction of the Gentiles, convinced that they will "listen" (verse 28).

The transition to the concept of *obeying* the word is a natural one, provided by language as well as theology, since ἀκούω and ὑπακούω are close in form and meaning. Numbers of Jerusalem priests are described as becoming "obedient to the faith" (Acts 6: 7). Paul regards the purpose of his apostleship as the encouragement of "obedience to the faith" (Rom. 1: 5); and he sadly admits that,

although hearing is impossible without preaching, Israel as a whole has not been obedient (οὐ πάντες ὑπήκουσαν) to the good news which *has* been preached (Rom. 10: 16). The apocalypse of Christ at the ἔσχατον, to take one further example, will involve vindication for the faithful, but vengeance for those who "do not obey the Gospel" (2 Thess. 1: 8). The thought of "obedience" is thus a possible New Testament description of conversion; and it is closely related to the alternative descriptions of "hearing" and "receiving" the word of the Gospel. And clearly baptism is never far removed from these three expressions, since it is the normative New Testament focus of the audition, reception, or obedience which has already taken place. But like baptism itself, all three are seen to contain a further, dynamic dimension. To hear, receive, or obey the word, and to express this fact sacramentally, carries future as well as present implications. A discussion of the relevance of this dynamic to our subject will bring us to the final section of our study, the completion of conversion.

But, in passing, thirdly, it will be relevant to consider the place of the mind in New Testament conversion, since we noticed the presence of intellectual activity (however rudimentary in form) in four out of the five illustrations from Acts. There are certainly no scriptural grounds for claiming that the content of the πίστις which a man exercises when he turns to God (*cf.* Mk. 1: 15; Acts 16: 31, *al.*) is purely, or even primarily, intellectual.⁴¹ But this does not alter the fact that the mind has a part to play in conversion. Paul describes the unbeliever as one whose mind (νόημα) is hardened or blinded (2 Cor. 3: 14; 4: 4); and, conversely, he finds the total attitude of the Christian epitomized in the "renewed mind" (νοῦς) which results when the natural νοῦς is transformed by the Spirit (Rom. 12: 2). The fresh orientation of conversion can be described, indeed, in terms of an intellectual renewal. When Paul exhorts the readers of Ephesians to work out existentially the spiritual implications of being in Christ, he recalls the basis of their Christian experience in language which rings with intellectual overtones: "You did not so learn (ἐμάθετε) Christ!—assuming that you have heard (ἠκούσατε) about Him and were taught (ἐδιδάχθητε) in Him, as the truth (ἀλήθεια) is in Jesus" (Eph. 4: 20f.). And even when the writer goes on to draw out the moral implications which these words naturally contain, he places the injunction, "be renewed in the spirit of your minds" (verse 23),⁴² between the two stages of the familiar paranetic pattern, "put off . . . put on" (verses 22 and 24); so that this kind of intellectual reorientation and renewal becomes a representative, if not an indispensable, part of the conversion process.

This survey of the theology of conversion in the New Testament, finally, will not be complete without some reference to the relation between conversion and sanctification. On the basis of linguistic evidence, it was earlier maintained that the "turn" of New Testament conversion normally denotes a process which is complete and unrepeatable. On the other hand, baptismal incorporation into Christ, which draws this process together, is linked in the New Testament with sanctification (1 Cor. 6: 11), both individual (2 Tim. 2: 21) and

communal (Acts 20: 32). Christian holiness or sanctification always contains an element of incompleteness; and it is possible to maintain that in the same way baptism and conversion (both of which relate to the area of spiritual experience denoted by the verb ἀγιάζειν and its cognates) are also incomplete. In one sense they have taken place, but in another they still need to be made complete. The demand from the convert is that he should turn to God; and, after the event, the process—of whatever length—can be described (as it is by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1: 9) in terms of a completed action in the past. Yet the converted Christian is also called to *be* converted; he is baptized, but needs to express the significance of this status experimentally (Rom. 6: 3ff.); he is called ἄγιος, but needs to *become* ἄγιος (Col. 1: 22f.).⁴⁸ The biblical principle, *ecclesia renovanda quia renovata*, has repercussions for the individual that bear strongly on our subject.

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The total context of conversion now becomes apparent. The illustrations of conversion from Acts already surveyed indicate the presence of events leading up to and away from the event. In each case the convert is prepared, and in each case there is subsequent evidence of his conversion. The occasion described is in fact one of many; so that we are not compelled to regard it as an isolated event, unrelated to the history of God's covenant relationship with man. The intimate association of baptism with conversion in the New Testament is a sufficient reminder of this truth. For in baptism the believer enters the divine ἐκκλησία, and takes his place as a member of the commonwealth of Israel and of the household of God. In this context the present and future tenses of salvation are prominent, as the newly converted Christian, who has already expressed his commitment in baptism, continues to express his commitment by sharing in the deep κοινωνία of the body of Christ, by receiving the διδαχή, and by meeting in the Spirit the demands of the new law of ἀγάπη.

The theology of justification by grace through faith, draws together in precisely the same way the total range of God's activity and man's response. As the dialectic of Luther, *simul justus et peccator*, makes plain, justification is a work of God's continuing grace, of which the righteous, like the converted, stand in constant need. But once more we must clarify our terms. The status of δίκαιος carries a two-fold reference, involving as it does the action of both God and man. And this double polarity is but another description of regeneration and conversion. The subject of conversion is man, whose response to God in faith (focused in baptism) is answered at one point by the divine work of regeneration or justification (also focused sacramentally). Both actions are complete *and* needing completion. They point indeed in the direction of the consummation, when the individual, the Church, and creation itself, find their ἀποκατάστασις in Christ; when all things are made new, and the dwelling-place of God is finally with men (Rev. 21: 3-5).

From the linguistic, illustrative, and theological evidence we have collated, it will be possible to draw some conclusions.

First, it is necessary on the New Testament showing to distinguish in this discussion between the terms "regeneration", describing a status, and "conversion", describing a process. Yet these two concepts can never be kept apart. There is a sense in which both are "status" words; that is, when the moment of regeneration coincides with the line of conversion. And there is also a sense in which both terms are "dynamic", since both point towards a τέλος which has not yet been reached. Conversion and regeneration belong together, then, just as baptism and commitment belong together; and of those four concepts, the second pair (baptism and commitment) are seen to express and convey both members of the first (conversion and regeneration). It is possible for all four, regarded as chronological "events", to coincide in time; though in practice the number of occasions when this happens is likely on all counts to be minimal.

Second, we have seen that conversion may be described as the work of man, encouraged and possibly (but rarely) effected by the agency of preachers. Regeneration, *per contra*, we have seen to be the work of God through and through. But (as again we have noticed) conversion may also be regarded as a response to the work of God, and its consistent source must indeed be understood to be God Himself. This is the pattern of Ephraim's cry to Yahweh: "Bring me back that I may be restored" (Jer. 31: 18; LXX, "turn me back and I will turn").⁴⁴ The divine initiative is also manifest in our five illustrations of conversion in Acts, since it is the Spirit who joins Philip to the Ethiopian, Jesus who reveals Himself to Paul, an angel of God who appears to Cornelius in a vision, the Lord who opens Lydia's heart, and (quite possibly) divine intervention that brings the jailer to the point of commitment. The division between conversion and regeneration, therefore, which may be correctly maintained on the grounds of linguistic usage, must not be allowed to obscure the radical truth of the *gratia Dei*.

Third, if the distinction between "process" and "status" is to be carefully maintained, where conversion represents the line (shorter or longer), and regeneration a point on the line, at what moment, if any, is it possible to say, "I am converted", or "I am regenerate"? Here, of course, we are face to face with the well-known difficulties which arise when the eternal impinges, or is made to impinge, on the chronological. It also raises in an acute form the issue of Christian assurance. But in the face of these major points of debate, the New Testament makes it perfectly clear that a line *can* be drawn. It is to be drawn before and after the moment at which a man can say, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8: 15), and include in that cry of dependence all the distinctively Christian categories that the New Testament allows. In this case it is possible to claim to be converted and regenerate with as much boldness, and perhaps as much hesitation, as it is possible to claim to be married.

Fourth, one question, of practical as well as theological import, may still linger in our minds. How essential is conversion? Is it possible for me to be a Christian without being converted? We are probably weary of reminders that there is no archetypal conversion "experience"

to which we must all submit, though no doubt this was what Dr. Field had in mind when he spoke of the arrogance of those who claim to be converted. This reminder is none the less relevant to the present stage of our discussion. The five case-histories from Acts suggest that even on so small a canvas the experience of conversion can be painted with considerable variety. Those of Paul and Cornelius are spectacular; those of Lydia and the Ethiopian far more restrained; that of the jailer more "sudden" than any. If the question is, "Must I have a conversion *experience*?", in the sense in which that term is usually understood, the answer on New Testament grounds is surely in the negative. But if the question is, "Must I be converted?" or "Must I be regenerate?", the answer on the same grounds is (*pace* Dr. Field) unequivocally in the affirmative.⁴

Finally, the need to be converted certainly formed part of the apostolic kerygma, and conversion was an evident characteristic of the primitive Church. Furthermore, this appeal was made to men as total and responsible personalities, in the context of a community which became the family of the new converts. Preaching in this way for conversion and therefore rebirth, and the addition daily to the Church of new men in Christ who are being saved, should surely characterize with at least equal clarity the life and witness of the Christian Church today.

REFERENCES

¹ F. Field: *Notes on the Translation of the New Testament (Otiom Noviscense, Pars Tertia*; Cambridge, 1899), pp. 250f. I owe this reference to Dr. C. F. D. Moule.

² Cf. also Zech. 1: 3, where man's return is balanced by a "return" on the part of Yahweh.

³ J. I. Parker: article "Conversion", in *The New Bible Dictionary* (London, 1962), p. 251a.

⁴ Cf. Jonah 3: 6ff.; 2 Ki. 23: 25; 2 Chr. 33: 12f.; Ps. 22: 27.

⁵ W. Barclay: *Turning to God* (London, 1963), pp. 18ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 15ff.

⁸ Mt. 13: 14f.; Mk. 4: 12; Jn. 12: 40; Acts 28: 26f.

⁹ Acts 26: 28; 14: 15; 1 Thess. 1: 9.

¹⁰ Lk. 1: 16f. and James 5: 19f. are exceptions. The grammar of Acts 26: 18 makes the subject of τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι uncertain.

¹¹ This is even true of the "return" of Peter to which Jesus refers (Lk. 22: 32).

¹² In 2 Cor. 3: 16f., Κύριος is identified as Πνεῦμα.

¹³ Cf. J.-Ph. Ramseyer: article "Repentance", in *Vocabulary of the Bible*, ed. J.-J. von Allmen (ET, London, 1958), pp. 357ff.

¹⁴ W. G. Kümmel: *Man in the New Testament* (ET, London, 1963), pp. 18ff.

¹⁵ For a discussion of this topic with reference to the speeches in Acts, see my article "The Christology of Acts", in *Expository Times*, LXXIII, 12 (September, 1962), pp. 358f.

¹⁶ A. Seeberg: *Der Katechismus der Urchristenheit* (Leipzig, 1903); M. Dibelius: *From Tradition to Gospel* (ET, London, 1934); C. H. Dodd: *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (2nd edn., London, 1944) and *According to the Scriptures* (London, 1952); A. M. Hunter: *Paul and his Predecessors* (2nd edn., London, 1961).

¹⁷ C. F. Evans : " The Kerygma," *Journal of Theological Studies*, N.S., VII, 1 (April, 1956), pp. 25-41.

¹⁸ C. F. Evans : *loc. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁹ Cf. D. E. H. Whiteley : *op. cit.*, pp. 9f.

²⁰ The LXX of Ex. 4 : 31 uses the same verb (ἐπισκέπτομαι) in a similar, though less " final ", sense.

²¹ N. Perrin : *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London, 1963), pp. 160ff.

²² It is not unusual for what is obviously the experience of conversion to be described in Acts as " receiving the word " (cf. 8 : 14 ; 11 : 1 ; 17 : 11).

²³ Other witnesses, including \aleph^* B, read (λόγος) τοῦ Θεοῦ at 16 : 32.

²⁴ Clearly the chronological precision of this stage cannot be pressed.

²⁵ Cf. Acts 8 : 26.

²⁶ Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21, gives us evidence that *explicit* confession of faith formed an integral part of the baptismal rite in the early Church.

²⁷ Augustine : *Confessions* 8. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ P. Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Saint Matthieu (Commentaire du Nouveau Testament)*, Paris, 1963), p. 32 and n. 3.

³¹ S. C. Neill : *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London, 1964), p. 188, italics his.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ The moment of Paul's commitment is in any case uncertain.

³⁴ Cf. D. E. H. Whiteley : *op. cit.*, pp. 170-3.

³⁵ C. K. Barrett : *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, 1957), pp. 129f.

³⁶ There is, however, no regular New Testament pattern for the direct association of baptism with the gift of the Spirit.

³⁷ The term παλιγγενεσία as such is almost non-existent in the New Testament ; but the concept of " renewal " is everywhere apparent.

³⁸ J. Baillie : *Baptism and Conversion* (London, 1964), p. 17.

³⁹ Joost de Blank : *This is Conversion* (London, 1957).

⁴⁰ Cf. Acts 4 : 4 ; 8 : 13 ; 11 : 17 ; 14 : 1, *al.*

⁴¹ Cf. W. Barclay : *op. cit.*, pp. 53ff.

⁴² Or, following NEB, " you must be made new in mind and spirit ". The Greek is tantalizingly obscure.

⁴³ The tension is marked in this passage. Paul reminds his readers that they have been reconciled to God in order to be " presented as holy " to Him (Col. 1 : 22) ; but the character of this holiness is related *tout court* to their future life and conduct as Christians (verse 23).

⁴⁴ Here השב (to cause to return) and שוב (to return) are both translated in the LXX by ἐπιστρέφω.

⁴⁵ Cf. J. Baillie, *op. cit.*, pp. 104ff.