conversion of religion

by Raja Oloan Tumanggor

The Conversion of Religion in Psychological Perspective

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Abstract. This study discusses the meaning, causes (motivation) as well as the process of religious conversion and how it affects the behavior of a person who reviewed from the perspective of the psychology of religion. The goal is to develop a theoretical concept of the understanding, the causes and the process of religious conversion from a psychological aspect. Religious conversion is a process that leads to the acceptance of a religious attitude. This process can occur gradually or suddenly. It is clear religious conversion includes a change of belief coupled with a change of behavior and relationship to the social environment. Religious conversion plays an important role in behavior change, then the religious conversion can usually be put into three categories, namely conversion (which is) the intellectual, moral and social. With the methods of literary study (library research) the author underlines that firstly, theoretically there are varying shades of understanding religious conversion depends on a theoretical basis adopted. Secondly, the issue of religious conversion is not solely guided by spiritual factors, but it has causative factors which are multi-dimensional, such as intellectual factors, mystical, affective, etc. Third, the process of religious conversion also varies depending on the causes. There is a convertible model that departed from a sociological and theological perspective. Fourth, religious conversion also brought influence to change behavior and personality. People who convert experience positive feelings such as happiness and peace.

Keywords: Religion conversion, conversion motive, conversion model, behavior changing

Introduction

Human religious experience has been talked about for decades. Sociology, anthropology, philosophy, theology and other fields of study have reviewed this kind of phenomenon. The psychology of religion is a special field in psychology that focuses mainly on religious experiences. An important issue of religious experience is religion conversion, which is a term given to a kind process to accept religious attitude (Thouless, 1992). Etiologically, the word "conversion" comes from the Latin word, "*conversio*", which means remorse, move and changes. Then English use conversion that means either a change from one condition, or a change from one religion to another. Thus it can be concluded that religious conversion means remorse, religion change, attitudes change toward religious teachings or following a religion (Jalaluddin, 2000). From psychological point of view, religious conversion mean as the changing of certain mental synthesis to the brand new one. Mental synthesis here means the awareness of a certain faith which the "warmest" place in one's personality (Dister, 1983). Every human certainly wants a good life. Unfortunately, some people are anxious as they do not fully believe in their faith and are looking for more comfortable one.

And then there is the question about cause factors of religious conversion. Do people convert their religion purely due to spiritual factors or other reasons? How do they convert religion? Does the conversion affect one's behavior and personality? This article is intended to describe comprehensively the meaning, cause factors and the process of religious conversion and its affect to human behavior and personality.

Religious Conversion

Religious conversion is an interesting topic in the field of psychology of religion and the definition, cause factors and the process of it is not clearly known yet and it might affect one's behavioral change and personality (Paloutzian, 2005). Religious conversion is certainly related to religion. And what is religion? One of many definitions of religion says that it is intuitive understanding for the fulfillment of appearance, in which humans experience personal relation with God (Wagner, 2001).Therefore, religion experienced by humans regarding the relationship with God as lived by them (Dister, 1988). This definition is suitable however only with theistic religion either monotheistic or polytheistic. While the non-theistic religion such as Hindu, they think "The Divine" has no personality. Therefore Thouless's definition of religion is clearly applied to the phenomenon and it says that religion is a kind of attitude toward the world. And this attitude refers to broader environment than the world which limited by time and place (Thouless, 1992).

Religious conversion usually associated with spiritual transformation. The two terms are relatively close in their meanings, so it needs to be clearly distinguished. Those who convert religion may experience spiritual transformation, but the ones who do the latter are not necessarily converting religions. Therefore, spiritual transformation is more abstract than religious conversion. Spiritual transformation is more about conventional religious expression and when put in the context of certain religions this process may be called classical religious conversion. On the other hand, spiritual transformation commonly expressed in unconventional religious manners and frequently against the previous religious beliefs (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2009).

In the field of religion psychology, religious conversion thought by the experts as a radical conversion. This term stresses more on intrapersonal process. The early experts on religion psychology such as Cutten (1908) and Pratt (1920) in Hood, Hill and Spilka (2009) stressed that this term tends to Protestan understanding like the Paulus PERTOBATAN to Damascus as a main example of all kinds on conversion. Redefining conversion as a radical self-change is very much influenced by Paulus's conversion. Travisano, as cited by Hood, Hill and Spilka (2009) define conversion as radical reorganization of identity, meaning and life.

There are also some other experts who think conversion as religious term where God has special place. For instance, Rambo (1995) mentioned conversion as a self-change by God power. And Paloutzian (2005) show meaning system that comes along with conversion, especially the meaning expressed in classical spiritual language. Most empirical studies on religious conversion have criterions for conversion analysis: firstly, conversion is a kind of inner change. Secondly, the change is not only about maturation, but it is a process (sudden process or gradual one). Thirdly, the change is radical. Fourth, this new existence is considered "higher" than before. So, religious conversion is identified as self-realization or self-organized, where one found new-self (Hood, Hill and Spilka, 2009).

There are some changes in the conversion process which need to be identified carefully. Psychologists often focus their attention to personality changes and this make them see conversion as religious identity change that affect to personal change. They stress it more on individual change. And this is suitable to the latest understanding that religion is personal, so is conversion.

Is religious conversion an active or passive behavior? Sociologist James T. Richardson in Zock (2005) argues that there are two different paradigms are evolving in social science research on conversion, namely: the passive and active paradigms. Passive paradigm based on the conversion of the convertible model in the style of Paul in the Christian world (cf. Acts. 9). Scientific and religious views are mixed up in this passive paradigm. While active paradigm developed in new religious movements and see the conversion as an active search for meaning. The following shows the paradigm conversions by James T. Richardson (in Zock, 2005): Paradigm passive, deterministic, individual, emphasizes the emotional factor, static, however radical, and faith following the first new behavior. While the active paradigm of conversion is more active, gradual (volitional), involving the social environment, rational, dynamic, and behavior following first then faith.

The passive paradigm conversion is seen as a passive act. Conversions come suddenly and occur due to outside forces that cannot be controlled. So this view is deterministic. People cannot play an active role in the conversion process. In general, the conversion of this model emphasizes personal experience / individual that is full of emotion, strong and irrational. Conversion occurs suddenly and radically changes individuals. There is a clear separation between the before and after conversion. Finally, the transformation of faith to follow the transformation of behavior / actions.

While, the paradigm actively developed since the 1960s. This paradigm departs from the active role of man in a convertible. So in this current paradigm of conversion is seen as a process of the search for meaning. Conversion is understood as a gradual process in which more dominant a self-determination rather than a determination by outside forces. In general, the social aspect is emphasized in this paradigm particularly environmental influences and personal contacts that are personal. The consequence of the gradual suppression aspect of this is that the conversion is not seen anymore as an emotional event, but as a rational process by which individuals are looking for ideas, people, groups and rites accordingly. Conversion becomes more dynamic. Personal experience and try out a pattern of religious life. At the end of the conversion characteristics of this model is that the transformation is seen as a religious act as something that follows faith (Zock, 2005).

Several years later, Richardson (in Zock, 2005) developed a paradigm of active - passive concerning the conversion by adding two distinction between 'the people' (Intraindividual) with 'between individuals' (interindividual level of analysis), due to the characteristics of the focus on the issue of 'the people' no longer exclusively belong to the paradigm of passive, and vice versa characteristic attention to the social context is not just exclusive to the current paradigm. Thus, an understanding of the conversion can be classified into four models paradigm, a paradigm that is active but in an individual (Intraindividual), active but are between individuals (interindividual), passive and passive individual among individuals.

When considered from various viewpoints of research on religious conversion, gained the impression that the psychology of religion is more influenced by other disciplines. Quite influential eg conversion model developed by Rambo (1995), which integrates understand the theoretical and empirical findings from different disciplines such as social sciences (psychology, anthropology, sociology), missiology and theology. Research could focus on various aspects of the conversion process. Two trends can be seen in the current research. First, the most attention directed at the relationship between conversion and mental health. Second, the conversion studied in the broader context of the construction of identity, particularly from the perspective of narrative. Conversion theme and mental health is approached through some theoretical perspectives such as attachment theory, personality theory, neural psychology and cognitive psychology (which saw the conversion as a reorganization of cognitive structure). On the one hand, the research focuses on existing vulnerability factor in the conversion of such emotional distress, negative life events, childhood unhappy. On the other hand the psychological effects of conversion were also investigated. Conversion Rate in a health perspective quite varied.

One important point in the study of conversion is a conversion narrative emerging research with narrative trends in the social sciences in general and in particular the theory of identity. Narrative has an important role in the construction of identity. Identity is seen as a story of self-disclosure construction. Living history is seen as a biographical construction in which life events are interpreted and given meaning. Linguistic narrative perspective becomes important in the present study regarding the conversion. By hearing and reading about the conversion, converters introduced to religious groups, faith and behavior. By telling the story of conversion, people can adjust to the specific conversion model and use it as a means to reconstruct the events of life. Zock (2005) describes the characteristics of a biographical narrative paradigm is as follows: active, gradual (volitional), involving the social aspects of culture, are emotional at once rational, dynamic, experienced a lifelong process, and there is interaction between faith and behavior.

The paradigm of understanding the conversion narrative biographical above is an elaboration of an individual active paradigm. Converters seen as an active individual who is looking for live and self-transformation through a model of religious culture that is expressed in the conversion story. Attention must depart from the physical and social problems as a determining factor in the conversion, to the

individuals who are actively grappling with the problem in the construction of identity, using a conversion model of religious groups as an integrative element. Thus, the conversion becomes less refers to the age factor, but rather the history of one's life. Conversion may be at once emotional and rational. In principle the conversion include all functions of humanity (Zock, 2005).

After seeing a diverse understanding about religious conversions along with a variety of paradigms that arise regarding the understanding of religious conversion, the question that arises is whether that be driving (motive) people do conversions?

Causes of Religious Conversion

Some expert disagree in determining the factors that encourage people to religious conversion. The experts involved in the discipline of science each argue that religious conversion caused by factors which tend to be dominated by the disciplines they pursue. The theologians argue that the factors that encourage religious conversion are divine guidance. Supernatural influence plays a major role in the process of religious conversion. While sociologists argue, religion is driving the conversion of social influence. Interpersonal relationships is both religious and non-religious, the influence of routine and recommended / propaganda of family, religious leaders, organizations and leaders hobby can be an impetus for the conversion. While psychologists argue that encourage religious conversion is the psychological factor is both internal and external (Jalaluddin, 2000). Let us examine each in more depth.

From the various factors that push people to do conversions can be concluded that (1) religious conversions occur because of a power soul master center one's habits so that in itself appears a new perception in the form of an idea that blossomed on a steady basis, (2) conversions may occur due to a crisis or a sudden (Jalaluddin, 2000).

Among the few who study the conversion of the movements of spiritual or spiritual transformation, the emphasis on gradual conversion process has resulted in an empirical phenomenon. Some researchers have tried to construct a classification of the types of conversions. One classification system that connects models of classic and contemporary, the model of psychological and sociological classification system of Lofland & Skonovd (1981). Both of these experts drafted to accommodate the conversion motif phenomenological validity of a conversion experience holistically. They feature the motif of six conversions, and five main dimensions that relate to each motif. Typology Lofland & Skonovd (1981) allows a variation in the conversion without falling to the dichotomy. It allows a distinction between basic objective phenomenon, which is indicated by the fifth dimension. This typology also takes into account the subjective element of conversion (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009).

Motives conversions by Lofland & Skonovd (1981) in the Hood, Hill, & Spilka (2009) are (1) the motives of intellectual (intellectual), (2) the motives mystical (mystical), (3) the motives experience (experimental) (4) motif affectional (affectional), (5) the resurrection motif (revivalist), (6) the motive force (coercive). While the fifth dimension associated with such motives are: (1) the level of social pressure (degreee of social pressure), (2) the length of time (temporal duration), (3) the level of affective arousal, (4) the content of affective (affective content) and (5) the effect of change in behavior and beliefs (belief-behavior sequence of change).

A more detailed description of the six motifs conversions by Lofland & Skonovd are as follows: (1) intellectual Motif include intensive study on a religion, with books, reading, television, internet and other media that enable interpersonal contact. Social pressure is usually avoided and trust precedes inclusion in the community. (2) The motive mystical conversion is a type of model of a 'road to Damascus' as experienced by Paul. It happened suddenly and dramatically and might be associated with a dream or vision (vision). (3) The motive experience (experimental) include an active search on the various options of different religious, where the potential convert examine whether a religion really 'work' and gain what they have learned. Motif take place gradually and in a long time and involvement in the community following the belief / faith. (4) The motive afeksional includes a creation of direct and personal relationship with members of a religious group for a certain time, so for people who are potential converts to give an experience

loved and accepted. (5) Motif resurrection is a type of conversions that occur in group meetings revival (revivalists). This motif using the edification of the masses and a high emotional level is raised to accept the conversion. (6) The motive force is a type of conversion that includes brainwashing (brainwashing), coercive persuasion and mind programming. Although many new religious movements accused of using this method, but in fact this model has been in place for decades.

Buxant, Saroglou, & Scheuer (2009) on the other hand see that religious conversions are now driven by motives of personal growth (self-growth) and the need for replacement (compensatory needs). Indeed, an important change has occurred in the psychology of religion, especially the study of the conversion of the old model which changed suddenly, passive, and emotional to a new model that is more active, gradual and rational. But there still no evidence to suggest that many people who convert to different religious groups have experienced a crisis of personality and is driven by the search for solutions to problems and weaknesses associated with the system sense, confidence, and control themselves, and want to achieve peace emotional and relational. In the context of the humanistic tradition accepted as the conversion process of spiritual transformation that includes a positive change in a person's system of meaning, value, purpose, self-definition, and purpose in life. In general, the perspective of the hierarchy of needs Maslow's model, religion and spirituality is not only related to the immediate needs (deficiency needs) but also self-actualization needs.

Buxant, Saroglou, & Scheuer (2009) finally came to the conclusion that some of the things that motivate a person to do the conversions, are as follows: First, an appreciation for the beauty and greatness (appreciation of beauty and excellence). This refers to the ability to find, recognize and enjoy the goodness of the physical and social world. Here also includes openness to the aesthetic including religious experience, ritual and mysticism. Second, the opens mind to the future generations and the world at large. It is expressed in various ways, such as education, social responsibility, concern for people and the environment. Third, realizing the potential fully covering the movement toward a new way of thinking, feeling and acting; creating new challenges and strive to make it happen. Existential wellbeing can also be a driving forces someone to perform conversions. So the conversion process for events that is important in their lives. Fourth, people who do conversions driven by the need for understanding (need for cognition). So they grapple with a variety of questions on issues of moral and existential. Perhaps the motive is in line with the conversion of intellectual motives that were raised by Lofland & Skonovd. From the multifarious motives do conversions certainly have an impact on a person undergoing the process of religious conversion. How does the process of religion conversion?

The Process (Model) of Religious Conversion

Lofland & Stark (1965) in Inaba (2004) shows that the conversion process is also known as convertible models. Conversion model which they set an important step in recognizing the new paradigm for understanding the conversion by focusing on the process of the conversion. According to the conversion model by Lofland & Stark converters must experience into seven steps: (1) experiencing a pressure (tensions) acute and long, (2) is in the perspective of problem solving religious meaning: the prospective conversion of seeking solutions to the problem of religious being faced. Mareka be people looking for satisfaction with the system of religious meaning. (3) generate self-designation as a religious seeker (seekership), (4) find movement or cult in a turning point (turning point) in life. This is the first step of the possibilities that are situational change a candidate for conversion into the actual conversion. The turning point is the situation where the obligations and actions reduced old and new engagement is possible. (5) an obligation affective (affective bond) is formed by one or more people who convert, meaning that there is a development in people who convert and experience the presence of some positive response, emotional, and interpersonal. (6) attachment outside the cult no longer exists (weak extra-cult attachments), and (7) those who convert opened to a more intensive interaction (intensive interaction) into an adherent active and dependent.

When the stages 1, 2 and 3 above is referred to as predisposing conditions (predisposing conditions) inherent in the potential / candidate conversion, while steps 4, 5, 6, and 7 are the possibility of situational amend a candidate for conversion to those who convert are actual. From the seventh conversion process it appears that the conversion is seen as a function of the interaction between the environment and personal and social environment. So no wonder Lofland & Stark defines conversion as a process whereby a person to replace belief with another belief.

While Vergote (1967) in Dister (1983) is a phenomenological distinguish the process of converting it into five models: (1) conversion for revival-movement: the nature of this type is the pressure in distress morally. It is assumed as the importance of the mandate of safety for the person concerned. The person wish to be relieved of his moral distress. Already touched by the affection, the conversion gets high intensity, but on the other hand nature is fragile; (2) conversion as a way out of distress. There are times when people see religion as a way out for all the hardships of life. In religion obtained a recognition that hitherto obtained from each other and the surrounding environment. In this type conversions people initially are in a situation of frustration. In the obtainment of religious values replacement values. However, a time when religious demands arise, he suffered another disappointment. So this type requires that people go through purification affective long enough. (3) conversion gradually. In this type of faith principle grow slowly like a seed sown will grow gradually. There is a stage of development where the individual must recognize himself as a new man. In this type of whole synthesis of old mental collapse and be replaced with a new mental synthesis. (4) conversion for a dramatic experience. People can only deeply shaken because of a dramatic thing. This experience makes all value once believed to be fragmented and now surrenders to God as the only value that is still standing. Because of this dramatic experience of people then realized that the man ultimately has no power over his life. But be aware that the effects of this dramatic experience is often temporary. The new dramatic events bear fruit if accepted personally by those who seek the truth. (5) conversion for religious experience. Conversion presupposes the experience of religion / religious then determine the meaning of personal consent. Divine reality pushing himself to human beings. Divine Presence of human experience through various signs like love. Religious influence in this model is decisive.

Meanwhile, to describe the existing situation in the process of religious conversion should be noted seven-step conversion which was introduced by Rambo (1995). According to him, the first phase that needs attention is the context (contex) historical, religious, social, cultural and personal conversion. Second, the crisis (crisis) in the lives of people who will convert. Third, the quest (quest), which becomes an active agent in a difficult situation. Fourth, the meeting (encounter) with a new spiritual options. Fifth, interaction (interaction) among those who convert to the new spiritual companion option, which can build a new relationship, and adopt new beliefs and conduct rituals. Sixth, make a commitment (commitment), decided to become a real member of a new religious community, which may be preceded by certain rituals such as baptism. Seventh, suffered the consequences (consequences) of the conversion, which includes the consolidation of identity and a new commitment, as well as apply the effect of a new spiritual options in the lives of those who convert. Rambo stressed that individual factors are not universal, but more interactive. This model has stimulated further research and also help the development of psychometric measurement to examine the experience of religious conversion.

Differences in the process of conversion among the experts above can be understood because of differences in their scientific backgrounds. Lofland & Stark create a model for the conversion starting from a sociological perspective, while Vergote and Rambo departing from the reflections of religion and theology. But there are similarities conversion process models Lofland & Stark and Rambo in seven stages and all stages of experiencing a period of preparation, the peak stage and anticlimactic.

The Religious Conversion and Personality and Behavior Change

Does religious conversion led to behavior and personality change? Paloutzian et. al. (1999) in their research prove that some aspects of personality seemed changed following the conversion of religion and some do not. Therefore, religious conversion does not always result in a total change of the whole

personality (Paloutzian, 2005). But based on the theory of system of meaning developed by Paloutzian related to religious conversion, the conversion of religious and spiritual transformation that happens to a person is due to a difference in the lives and there is no doubt in a person's good about values as well as the teachings of their religion. This makes building a new meaning, which then lead to changes in the things that are connected to the system of meaning that doubted it. From this process of religious conversion that occurred (Nelson, 2009).

Meadow & Kahoe (1984) in Page Show & Lacna (2011) states that people who convert to experience positive feelings such as happiness and peace. They also undergo a change in mental health such as confidence, free from a sense of anxiety and depression. Paloutzian et al. (1999) have focused on research whether there is a personality change after the conversion. They came to the conclusion that change is possible only reveal the change in the properties in a manner consistent with the new religiositasnya, not on personality traits fundamental change, for example, five major properties (the big five traits). However, Piedmont (2001) found a significant change in all dimensions of the Big Five, namely declining neuroisme, increased extraversion, openness, approval and awareness in people who undergo psychotherapy in drug rehabilitation program. Since running program of spiritual intervention, Piedmont berkayakinan that the same change can occur also in religious conversion. To underline its change what happens in a person after a religious conversion, Paloutzian et al. (1999) using a three-level model of personality. The first level consists of the basic traits and temperaments that generally operate on the specific context. The second level is the adjustments characters such as personal goals, values, self-definition that operates in specific situations and is contextual. Finally, the third level is the personal identity, narrative, meaning and self-definition global. If the first stage does not influenced by conversion, however, there are a lot of evidences shows that people changes at second stage and third regarding to religion conversion. People that converting changes a lot in self-priding, self-believing and self-confident also life understanding (Zinnbauer & Pargment, 1998).

Stout & Dein (2013) examined the relationship between religious conversion and transformation from a systems perspective of meaning. By doing an interview with a group of evangelical Christians English (British Evangelical Christians) who experience a 'rebirth' they dig what changed in the personal level when someone converts? By adhering to the theory Paloutzian et al (1999) who said that that changed in one who convert are goals, values, attitudes, beliefs, and identity; not to its essentials. The global aspects of personality that is affected by the conversion. Paloutzian (2005) also underlines that there is a link between the personal aspects that shows change of spiritual transformation with religious conversions. And components of the religious meaning system that includes goals, attitudes, beliefs, values, self-definition. Spiritual transformation occurs after some element of doubt, feeling depressed or the impetus for change. Doubts occur when the circumstances of life occurred not in line with the beliefs and expectations. The outcome of this process is the transition from one trust to another trust, or changing from no religion become religious. Stout & Dein research results (2013) in line with the theory Paloutzian (2005) that put that key elements for each conversion includes the element of doubt, pressure or motivation for the changes. For many informants there is a sense of chronic dissatisfaction with himself and his life. After the conversion they feel accepted by God and the other members of the community. They find themselves limited, so conversion has brought them to a dramatic change in themselves. Values and goals of their old view is no longer significant. This study also indicates that the conversion is not always caused by life crisis, but more because of the crisis of identity. Big change expressed by informants includes attitudes, values, goals, and self-definition. So there is a change in the system of meaning.

Conclusion

Conversion religion is an important topic in the psychology of religion, is also the focus of a wide range of social science disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, theology and others. Therefore, to break down the sense of religious conversion cannot be separated from an interdisciplinary discussion of the various branches of the social sciences. Religious conversion is a process that leads to the acceptance of a religious

attitude that could take place gradually or suddenly. Religious conversion also often coupled with spiritual transformation, because the people who do the conversions could certainly undergo a spiritual transformation. There are many experts who provide definitions regarding religious conversion in accordance with the scientific background. But the difference in perspective it must be seen in order to clarify and enrich the religious conversion itself. When a psychological perspective view of religious conversion that focuses on personality change, then sociologists look at how much social influence in religious conversion. Diversity paradigm in understanding religious conversion also becomes richness and signals a change point of view of religious conversion in accordance with the times.

It turned out that religious conversion is not only constituted by one motive only. There are a variety of motives people perform religious conversion. It was started from the intellectual to the mystical motive or affection. Likewise motive or even experience no element of coercion can happen in religious conversion. But be aware that not only factors that make people perform religious conversion, but also involve the need for growth. On the basis of this motif then people experience a process. That is the motive had an impact on the process of how a person experiences a religious conversion. On this there are diverse opinions of experts. Again, this version differences should be seen as an asset, because of differences in their scientific backgrounds. See for example the sociological dimensions of a religious conversion begins with the presence of a pressure (tensions), which resulted in the religious problem to be solved. In the search process in the individual arrived at a turning point (turning point) touches up aspects of his affections, so that it can escape from the pressures and leave the cult long to get into the new cult. While scholars of religion or theology sees the start of conversion is the need to observe the historical context of religious, social and cultural someone who is experiencing a crisis. Then the people who have experienced this crisis came to a search and thanks to the persistent efforts were able to find the right path. The right choice was made people converts and establish intensive interaction to be able to make a commitment to the new choice.

After going through several stages in the process of converting the experts agreed that some aspects of personality seemed to change following religious conversion. Converters experiencing a positive feelings such as happiness and peace. In fact, they also undergo a change in mental health such as confidence, free from a sense of anxiety and depression. In sociological eye glass converters undergo a spiritual transformation as a result of change of meaning systems. In other words, people who convert will experience a change in terms of goals, values, attitudes, beliefs and identity.

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