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delivered at the

International Coalition for Religious Freedom Conference on

"Religious Freedom and the New Millenium"

Tokyo, Japan May 23-25, 1998

Allow me to begin this address on the psychology of religious conversion by presenting some definitions of terms. Initially, let it be admitted that while we are primarily considering the issue of religious conversion, conversion is a more general term that applies to all changes that involve a transformation of opinion from one belief to another. For example, we might speak of conversion from being a member of the Democratic Party to being a member of the Republican Party in the United States. That would be a sad conversion, in my opinion. Or we might say that a person who was a long-haired, unshaven, unemployed guitar-playing hippie and is now a clean-shaven, business suit-dressed, computer salesman who lives in an upscale condo has gone through a conversion. Further, an auto enthusiast who has switched from purchasing a Volkswagen to buying a Toyota might be described as having been converted from German to Japanese carmakers.

The same word, conversion, applies to those who change their religious belief. For example, it is common to say that a person converted to Catholicism after marrying a spouse who is a member of that church, or it was said in America that Sammy Davis Jr., the late popular singer/dancer, converted to Judaism. The strategic point I wish to make is that while conversion is a term usually applied to religious change, it is in fact a more general term that stands for all significant life changes. More importantly, for our consideration at this conference, the psychological processes involved in religious and in other types of conversion do not differ.

Some writers have asserted that religious conversions result from a process variously called mind control and/or brainwashing. But little or no evidence exists to support such a presumption. For a review of this research you might look at Dick Anthony's dissertation. However, in all fairness, the senior author I referred to, Margaret Singer, has generalized her presumption to claim that mind control and/or brainwashing is involved in all conversion decisions, especially those which persons later come to regret. That is an important caveat. Most people don't think of conversion as involving brainwashing or mind control until they reflect on it after the fact and decide they didn't like what they decided to do.

In litigation with which I am acquainted, Singer inferred these processes were at the core of individuals' decisions to become Snap-On Tool dealers or defraud the U.S. government. If you are interested in that litigation I can tell you about it. It was outlandish. Nevertheless, my

assumption in this address is that the process of social influence involved in religious and all other changes of opinion and belief are the same and that they do not include any unique features unless the conversion situation included physical confinement and/or bodily threat. Across all fields of conversion, very few, if any, situations do include these conditions, and where such abusive examples of social influence exist, they are by no means limited to religion. In fact, labels such as undue influence or coercive persuasion might better be applied in our day to day techniques of product advertising than to religious evangelization.

Thus, I subsume the term conversion under the more general term social influence and contend that the psychological processes involved are the same for the techniques used as well as the decisions that are made. In this address I will attend primarily to the way that conversion decisions are made rather than the influence techniques that are used. But it should never be forgotten that, for me, the decision of a Muslim to become a Moonie is no different than the decision to change from using an electric typewriter to using a computer.

The second clarification I should like to make pertains to my definition of religion. Since religious conversions are our primary concern, I assume that religious conversions are different not in the psychological processes involved but in the content of the decision. As William James said so many years ago, "religion is the feelings, acts and experiences of individuals in relation to that which they consider divine." Take note of the last phrase, "in relation to that which they consider divine." This statement is both simple and profound. It delimits the field of interest to which the term religion applies. Religious conversion implies some sort of relationship with divinity. Vocational conversion implies some sort of relationship with jobs and/or professions. Artistic conversion implies some sort of relationship with aesthetics. Culinary conversion implies some sort of relationship with new foods. James implies that to be called religious a person should be interacting with a divine reality. Quite apart from the question of whether that reality exists or not, religious actions are based on this presumption.

Now lest you hurriedly say there are some religious decisions that are not related to the divine, a more contemporary clarification of this understanding of religion was suggested by a writer in 1961 name Lemeret. He proposed that religions are (1) people gathered together around (2) a transempirical idea. I like this definition. It has been called a substantive empirical approach. The value it has is that it delimits the substance or content of religion and can be seen by all observers. In other words, it is empirically verifiable as a social group. It is an elaboration of James' understanding; through the use of the term transempirical it allows for nontheistic groups, such as Buddhism or Scientology, to be included but retains the idea that the core idea of a religion goes beyond anything that can be verified by the five senses.

Of course, this definition says little about the inner motives that provoke conversion to a new or a different religion. It merely helps us to distinguish religious from other conversion behaviors and helps us to denote religious behavior when we see it. The inciting motivations provoking religious behavior in the first place have been clearly stated by Yenger. He suggested that religion addresses the need to answer three things in life: mysteries, tragedies, and circumstances.

This definition presumes that whenever religious behavior occurs, it can be assumed that the religion is attempting to deal with life's mysteries, the meaning of life, the meaning of death, tragedies, the disruptions of life, and/or circumstances, the situations in which people find themselves. Mysteries refer to the overarching meaning of life. Tragedies refer to the losses, disappointments, and disruptions of life; circumstances refer to the limiting and confining situations in which people find themselves. Religion provides both constructive and compensatory energy for life in the face of these imponderables. In other words, religion will help make sense of those situations; it will also give the energy to supersede them.

It could be presumed that all persons face these issues. But we need to face the fact that not all persons deal with these issues religiously, in the sense that they do not identify with a group whose identity is shaped around a transempirical belief. This leads to my final assumption, namely, that there is no such thing as unmotivated behavior. Where identification with a "religious" group occurs, it can always be assumed there are motives underlying the behavior. These motives are the three needs that I mentioned earlier: the need to deal with mystery, tragedy, and circumstance. Some groups (for example, Southern Baptists in the United States) use the term to refer to the born-again decision expected of every church member during adolescence. But the term more often implies a decision to align oneself with a new or different group than that to which one was socialized during childhood.

Religious conformity is the term that describes the decision to do what is religiously expected in one's culture, for example, in Japanese culture, to follow along with the Buddhist and Shinto way of seeing things. Or, in the culture with which I am most acquainted, American culture, to go through a confirmation class provided by the church of your childhood. That is religious conformity. While the motivation might appear different in conformity and in conversion, such a presumption can be easily dis-confirmed by asking the why question of born-again Southern Baptists, United Methodist conformance, or young people attending a Shinto shrine. All of these would answer the same way, regardless of whether that answer came from a yes answer to the invitation to accept Jesus as savior or from a memorization of answers in a church membership booklet, or simply to say I am following what my parents told me.

Each of these would report that they had made decisions relating to mystery and purpose, to tragedy and hope, to circumstance and consolation. You may want to challenge me on this, but I think that is true. And these answers would be similar to what converts to new or different religions might say in answer to the same why question. In other words, an adolescent young person who follows the religion of his childhood might be presumed by an outsider to simply be conforming, but they would never answer the question that way if you ask them, "Why have you done what you have done? Why have you joined this church or aligned yourself with this religion?" They would answer in terms of saying it provides meaning and purpose. Or it compensates for the tragedy of my life, or this or that.

It is quite understandable that cultures react with concern and suspicion when their members do not accept the approved answers to these basic needs. But it should also be admitted that increasingly we live in the modern world, in a pluralistic environment, where there are numerous options for answering these imponderable questions. And there will continue to be those among our young people who don't really meet the cultural stereotype of the acceptable ways to meet their religious needs. One size does not fit all, if it ever did.

In the remainder of this address I will recount the Lofton and Stark problem-solving model for conversion originally proposed in 1965 and report on its further developments since that time by the writing of an author named Lewis Rambo. The importance of the Lofton and Stark approach is that it was originally penned as an explanatory model for conversion to the Unification Church, a new religion at that time on the American scene. However, I am firmly convinced that the psychological sequence proposed in this model is foundational for religious conversion wherever it occurs. The value of Rambo's less sequential model is that it provides a model whereby individuals can enter the conversion process in a non-conflicted way.

As Bainbridge has observed, the Lofton and Stark model unites the tradition of strained theory and social influence theory in a creative manner. Their twofold sequence begins with the experience of dis-equilibrium, a personal strain and stress, and continues with contextualizing that experience within a group situation. That is, the influence of a social situation on the way in which an answer to the problem is found. These are called predisposing sets of circumstances that interact with a disposing event. The authors call these sets of sequential steps a stage of problem-solving model.

The conversion process begins with three predispositions: (1) an inclination to seek answers to the mysteries, tragedies, and the circumstances of life through religion and (2) a sense of an enduring frustration that (3) has not been met through one's present faith. These feelings prompt individuals to become religious seekers. They are oriented toward the kind of answers

that might come from a transempirical source. Notice how this fits with my earlier definition of religion and the needs that are met.

It is this mood that sets the disposing events and leads to religious conversion. A social encounter occurs in which seeking persons meet and interact with members of a religious group who have already found the answer to the questions being asked. Their inner predisposing attentiveness makes them susceptible to the external situational contingencies in a way that would not be true of those not asking those questions. Unification Church members in the San Francisco area met buses coming into the city and asked youth who looked lost and disoriented to supper, a method based on the assumption they would be open to religious answers to their predicament. This contact was followed by intense interaction between seekers and influences wherein religious answers were provided within consistent social support.

As the conversion process progressed, seekers were encouraged to engage in further study of the group's approach and to cut off their contact with those outside the group who might deplete their newfound approach. These actions solidified the group's understanding within the sequence of the experience of the seeker. Now at what point one could say that conversion has occurred is an unsettled issue. The question remains, at what point in the process could a person finally be said to be converted. A colleague and I constructed an ongoing model wherein conversion might be conceived as a continuing process, during which the seeker was never fully converted but is nevertheless increasingly incorporated into the religious group.

Let us turn, finally, to the conceptualization of Lewis Rambo. His approach, like that of Lofton and Stark, is a model that begins with a crisis. However, his model attends seriously to the truth that many in the modern world do not acknowledge a predisposing sense of frustration prior to the beginning of the conversion process. Lofton, in a 12-year follow-up to his and Stark's 1965 seminal article, also admits that this lack of strain does occur among many converts. Rambo contends that the strain may play a secondary role to the social context in which persons find themselves before they ever admit to the crises that lead them into the conversion process. The crisis may develop, therefore, by osmosis, as well as by personal experience.

This would accord with many in today's world who report that religious participation is based primarily on friendship and only secondarily on belief. Nevertheless, one is convinced that the conversion process is only partially complete until and unless social relationships go beyond friendship association and result in some transempirical answers to the imponderable questions of mystery, tragedy, and circumstance.

It is important to recognize, nevertheless, that all behavior, from birth to death, occurs within a social context. As psychologists we are never able to measure the absolute distinction between intelligence and achievement. By the time we are able to assess infants they have already interacted with their social environment to the extent that we cannot isolate innate ability from what they have achieved in their interrelationships. So it is with conversion. There is no such thing as a completely autonomous decision to accept one religion or another. Behavior always occurs in a social context, as Rambo forcefully has said.

As much as some theorists might like to presume, the idea of autonomous decisions is illusory. The social revivalist inducements to accept Christianity I grew up with in the American South are not different from the love bombing in the religious movements. As with commercial advertisements, the influence process does induce the need as well as meet it. The processes are always the same, but some groups use them more intentionally than others. The socially accepted forms of being religious in the societies of the world that engage in disapproval and social control of new religions exemplify the well-known theories of social accommodation and power struggles. They are attempting to protect their turf by projecting fault and pseudo-theorizing in the case of religious conversion. And such thinking had been declared personal opinion, not scientific reasoning, in the American courts.