

The Conversion of Paul in the Light of the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

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Abstract

Paul's influence on Christian teaching and practice cannot be underestimated. Several times his teaching is quoted to support certain Christian practices even in African Christianity today. However, the conversion of this Christian giant is hotly contested. This article discusses this topical issue of the conversion of Paul from being a zealous persecutor of the Christian church to being a zealous Christian himself. New Testament scholars have argued over whether Paul's conversion was gradual or sudden or whether he, in fact, had a conversion. The article looks at the topic from a psycho-social perspective. Using the theory of cognitive dissonance, it argues that Paul must have had a psychological struggle within himself for a long time until he accepted the Christian religion on his way to Damascus.

Introduction

Recent New Testament scholarship has seen a growing use of the social sciences as interpretative tools. Different social scientific models have been used by different scholars; the sociology of knowledge, social history, functionalism, conflict theories just but to mention a few. This use of the social sciences in New Testament interpretation has been met with mixed feelings. Some scholars have found the models handy.¹ Others have, however, found problems with the whole idea of using the social sciences to interpret the New Testament.² This article is particularly influenced by what we consider to be J. Gager's successful application of the theory of cognitive dissonance to analyse the origins of Christianity.³ The article

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1. For example, J. Gager, *Kingdom and Community* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1975), J Stambaugh and D. Balch, *The Social World of the First Christians* (London: SPCK, 1986) and J. H. Elliot, *What is Social Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
 2. See K.W. Whitlam who discusses some of the shortcomings that some people find in the method, 'The Social World of the Bible' in Barton, J (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 35-49.
 3. J. Gager, *Kingdom and Community* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc; 1975).

therefore attempts a reconstruction of the conversion of Paul to Christianity using this theory.

The Conversion of Paul

Paul's contribution to the spread of Christianity and the development of its doctrine cannot be underestimated. The New Testament shows us that the man whose writings contribute much to our understanding of early Christianity was once a great persecutor of the young church (Galatians 1: 23, Philip. 3:6). How then did it come that the persecutor turned into a zealous Christian whose teachings still form the basis of Christian morality? This conversion is very important in Christian history, as F.F. Bruce writes,

No single event, apart from the Christ event, has proved so determinant for the course of the Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul.⁴

Yet, the New Testament provides us with very little and tenuous information on the circumstances surrounding this Christian giant's conversion. Furthermore, the little information provided by the New Testament sometimes is contradictory. For example, the book of Acts presents the conversion as something that was sudden. On his way to persecute Christians in Damascus for believing in Christ, something he considered to be a result of being "disastrously misled," according to J. Murphy-O'Connor,⁵ Paul is converted and within a week, he starts preaching the same Christ he was persecuting others for preaching and believing in (Acts 9:1-22). However, a comparison of Acts with what Paul says in his letters barely supports such a sudden conversion. In the letters, Paul does not make any reference to a sudden conversion. He does not even talk of conversion, but describes his life changing experience as a 'call'.⁶ Therefore, the application of a socio-psychological method may help us to understand the complex conversion/call experience of Paul.

4. F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 75.

5. J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 77.

6. This is the position taken by K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 7-23; J.D. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1990) and E. Freed, *The Apostle Paul, Christian Jew* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1994), but J. McRay thinks, "There are indications that Paul underwent a full conversion in the normal sense of that term: he stopped persecuting the followers of the faith he now embraced, he experienced the washing away of his sins (Acts 22:16), he became an ardent disciple of Jesus of Nazareth (Galatians 2:20), he gave evidence of genuine repentance by asking Jesus 'What will you have me to do?' (Acts 22:10), *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 47.

Rationale for a Psychological Explanation of Paul's Conversion

As F. Prat points out, Paul's domain in making arguments is psychology.⁷ This is mainly seen in his theological arguments, where he rarely uses nature. Instead of using nature, Paul uses psychology. Prat says the environment in which Paul grew up would make one expect him to make wide references to nature in his arguments. Tarsus was a very beautiful city with palm trees, snow crowned mass of the Taurus Mountains and a smiling and significant panorama. However, these had no effect on Paul's imagination. His figures of speech are drawn, not from the sight of the physical world and activities, but from the outward manifestation of human life. For example, in his argument for justification through faith and not the law, Paul does not give examples from the physical world, but to the duties of a slave master (Galatians 3: 18) and to marriage laws (Romans 7: 1-2). Thus, as Paul is so much influenced by psychology, a psychological analysis of his conversion can probably help us in the absence of enough historical material to reconstruct his conversion. I suggest here the theory of cognitive dissonance.

The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

The theory of cognitive dissonance is a brainchild of a psychologist whose name was Leon Festinger. Festinger first applied this theory together with H. W. Riecken and S. Schachter in 1956, before he clearly defined it. He defined it in the following year in a book he called, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. To understand the theory, we must first define the term 'cognition' from which we have the word cognitive. Cognition means any knowledge, opinion, belief about the environment, about ourselves, about someone or even about one's behaviour.⁸ From his studies of the human psyche, Festinger observes that all human beings strive for consistency within their cognitions. He notes that whenever there is inconsistency in a human being's mind, the human being experiences an unpleasant state. This unpleasant state is what he calls dissonance. Therefore, we can define cognitive dissonance as inconsistency in cognition, just as Baron and Byrne define it as,

a state, which occurs within us whenever one cognitive element present in our thought implies the opposite of another cognitive element also present.⁹

7. F. Prat, *Theology of Paul* (London: Burbs and Oates, 1964), 13.

8. L. Festinger, *A theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (California: Stanford University press, 1957), 3.

9. R.A. Baron and D. Byrne, *Social Psychology* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc, 1984), 51.

Cognitive dissonance is caused by a number of factors. It is important for us to discuss a few of these before we look at how cognitive dissonance may have affected Paul's conversion. One way by which cognitive dissonance arises is when one is involved in an action which causes logical inconsistency. J.L. Freedman and others give an example of a person who believes that all lions are yellow.¹⁰ They say if such a person sees a black lion, surely this will cause inconsistency in his cognitions. Another cause of cognitive dissonance is attitude-discrepant behaviour or counter-attitudinal behaviour, as D.O. Sears and others call it.¹¹ A good example of a person who can suffer dissonance this way is a pacifist who hates wars and all kinds of violence. If such a person becomes a soldier, voluntarily or through forced compliance, the person will suffer from cognitive dissonance. This is because his/her duty will now be discrepant with his or her attitude to war. The person will now be expected to fight or even kill, an action he/she did not like before.

Cognitive dissonance can also be a result of the disconfirmation of a firmly held expectation. A good example will be of a person who believes that the world will end on a given date. If the date comes and the world does not end, dissonance is produced in such a person. Another example is of a person who believes that whatever he believes in is superior to any other beliefs. If such a person comes across a belief that attracts him, cognitive dissonance definitely arises. Another behaviour, which almost always arouses dissonance, is making a decision. Where an opinion must be formed and a decision taken, "some dissonance is almost unavoidably created between the cognition of the action taken or those opinions or knowledge which tend to point to a different action."¹² Festinger also talks of what he calls 'momentary dissonance'.¹³ Such a type of dissonance occurs when new events happen or new information becomes known to a person. This will then create a momentary dissonance with the knowledge which the person previously had. For example, a person may decide to go for a picnic confident that the weather will be fine. If it starts raining, the knowledge that it is now raining is dissonant with the person's confidence in a sunny day and with his/her plan to go for a picnic.

Thus, in a nutshell, cognitive dissonance arises when a belief one has is disconfirmed, when there is inconsistency between beliefs and also when there is inconsistency between beliefs and actions. It also arises from an

10. J.L. Freedman *et al*, *Social Psychology* (California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Coy, 1987), 343.

11. D. O. Sears *et al*, *Social Psychology* (Mexico: Prentice-Hall International, 1991), 160.

12. L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 1.

13. L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 4.

inconsistent action. Now when a person suffers from cognitive dissonance, the person will seek ways of reducing or eliminating it. As Festinger says,

Cognitive dissonance always gives rise to activity oriented towards reducing or eliminating the dissonance.¹⁴

Thus, just as one will seek to eliminate hunger when hungry, the person suffering from cognitive dissonance will seek ways of eliminating or reducing it. Like hunger, the greater the dissonance, the more pressure there is to eliminate or reduce it. Just as there are many causes of cognitive dissonance, there are also many ways of reducing it.

One way of reducing cognitive dissonance is by reducing the importance of dissonant elements.¹⁵ There are many ways of doing this. One is to undervalue an unchosen choice. The other is by adding consonant elements. For example, our pacifist who becomes a soldier might reduce the dissonance by convincing himself that defending his country and his people is more important than his previous pacifist beliefs.

Dissonance caused by the disconfirmation of expected events can be reduced or removed in a number of ways. A study by Festinger and others in 1956 showed that when disconfirmation of expected events happens, the people would conclude that the expectation was somewhat incorrect but the basic idea was correct.¹⁶ Festinger and others studied the Lake City people, a group of people who had predicted the destruction of the world on a December 21. The group even made extensive preparations for the event. When the date finally came and nothing happened, the group suffered a lot of cognitive dissonance. One would expect that the group disbanded, but surprisingly, it did not. J. Gager says,

Instead of the group ending their low level of proselytism, they intensified it.¹⁷

It seems proselytism reduced their dissonance. But how did this proselytism reduce their dissonance? Scientific studies by psychologists have shown that proselytism reduces dissonance because it involves preaching and making converts to the group. Thus, the more they proselytise, the more the number of people who join the group. The group will now say, "If more and more people can be persuaded that the system of belief is correct, then clearly, it must after all be correct."¹⁸ This will reduce cognitive dissonance.

14. L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 70.

15. J.L. Freedman *et al*, *Social Psychology*, 346.

16. L. FESTINGER, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, 70.

17. J. Gager, *Kingdom and Community*, 40.

18. J.Gager, *Kingdom and Community*, 39.

Besides proselytism, cognitive dissonance arising from the disconfirmation of expected events can be reduced by rationalisation. Gager defines rationalisation as revisions of the original belief or of views about the disconfirming event.¹⁹ For example, the people of the Lake City, rationalised the disconfirmation of the event by saying that the day of the destruction of the world was not put off, but because of their sake, the day had been postponed. So, they continued saying the world would soon come to an end.

We have now seen how cognitive dissonance arises and how it is reduced, let us now look at how the theory of cognitive dissonance can be used to reconstruct the conversion of Paul.

Cognitive Dissonance and the Conversion of Paul

As already indicated, cognitive dissonance can be caused by logical inconsistency, and this can also be seen in Paul's experiences. The proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth as a Messiah, for example, must have caused cognitive dissonance in his mind. Paul, as a Jew, shared Messianic hopes of a political Messiah who would not only conquer their colonial masters, the Romans, but the whole world. The Messiah, therefore, was not supposed to die in the hands of his enemies like what happened to Jesus. To the Jews, Paul included, Jesus was therefore a messianic claimant, who, as typical with Galileans, wanted to rise against the Roman government. In religious terms Jesus was a blasphemer, so his death on the cross suited him. Logically, his death meant the end of his existence. But on the road to Damascus, Paul saw Jesus (1Corinthians 15:7) and heard him saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:5) All this must have caused cognitive dissonance in Paul's mind. There was logical inconsistency here, how can a dead man be seen and heard speaking? As M. L. Soards says,

A Messiah who died by crucifixion, cursed under the law, was irreconcilable with the law that issued the curse.²⁰

But by combining his vision of Christ and his experience of the holy deaths of such men as Stephen (Acts 7:55-60), if we accept this Lukan account, Paul accepted Christ probably as a way of reducing the dissonance he was suffering from.

A psychological analysis of Paul's conversion can also show that he was converted to Christianity probably because of attitude-discrepant behaviour. Paul's mind seems to have been divided, torn between the demands of the

19. J.Gager, *Kingdom and Community*, 39.

20. M. L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 22.

law and, to his own conscience, between what he wanted to do and what he actually did. His attitude-discrepant behaviour can be seen in what he says in Romans 7:15, "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." This verse has received various interpretations,²¹ but as F. J. Foakes-Jackson has said, the verse is of great psychological interest.²² It is possible that Paul was not describing his situation as a Christian, but was describing what he felt during his pre-Christian days, particularly when he was persecuting Christians. He was probably thinking of the period when he was a zealot for the law, a situation in which he felt some Jews were in. This argument is based on verse 25 where Paul appears to be thanking God for rescuing him from this attitude-discrepant behaviour: "Thanks be to God in Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin." To argue the above point further, let us try to make a reconstruction of Paul's life before he became a Christian.

Helmut Koester has said,

It is difficult to imagine that Paul's primary profession before conversion was that of an itinerant persecutor of Christians.²³

He suggests that Paul was probably a Hellenistic missionary. This is likely so because studies have shown that Diaspora Judaism paved the way for Christian missionary proclamation of the gospel.²⁴ The Hellenistic Jews, of which Paul was one, must have been engaged in preaching to gentiles. It seems the law was the key to this missionary activity. This can explain why Paul persecuted Christians. He probably saw them as a threat to the law and so needed a nip in the bud. Soards even suggests that Paul's statement, "If I still preach circumcision ..." in Galatians 5:11, must be referring to his Jewish missionary days. But what we know from our social world is that, "... when a man's zeal becomes most ardent, doubt may begin to institute itself."²⁵ Thus, doubt must have started in Paul's mind because he probably saw that despite his persecution of the Christians, the church continued growing in leaps and bounds. He saw that he was fighting against God, thus, doing the very thing he hated (Romans 7:15). To remove the dissonance, Paul had to accept Christianity.

21. Going back to Augustine, the debate has mainly been on who Paul meant by *ego* (I). See J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books Publishers, 1988), R. Morgan, *Romans* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) and D. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

22. F.J. Foakes-Jackson, *The Life of Saint Paul* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1931), 93.

23. H. Koester quoted by M.L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul*, 20.

24. M.L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul*, 22.

25. M.L. Soards, *The Apostle Paul*, 22.

Paul's dissonance was also probably caused by the disconfirmation of what he strongly believed in. We have seen that before he became a Christian, Paul was zealous for the law (Galatians 1:14). This is supported by the fact that Paul was a Pharisee (Phillipians 3:5). Pharisees were known for being zealous for the law. They were so zealous for it that they wanted all people to observe even laws which were meant for priests. Also, if we take the Lukan account that Paul studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem, we can conclude that he was a trained rabbi.²⁶ Thus, if we accept that Paul studied under Gamaliel, then he must have been very zealous for the law. It seems, however, the strong belief in the law started to shake because of his experiences of the resilience of the Christians when he persecuted them. As A.H. McNeile says,

Paul's mind began to be torn into two by inward debate as to whether his strict Pharisaism were after all the ideal of life.²⁷

The tearing of the mind surely shows cognitive dissonance at work. His belief in the law as the source of salvation was beginning to be disconfirmed. It seems then that Romans 7:15 reveals the struggles against Paul's lower nature which had begun to trouble him before he became a Christian.

Though not mentioning the phrase cognitive dissonance (not surprisingly since the concept had not been articulated yet), J. Klausner has also made very interesting observations on the struggles in Paul's cognitions.²⁸ He says while Paul was travelling to Damascus to persecute Christians, he thought deeply and was possessed by an unstable temperament concerning the Christians and their Messiah. Remembering the teaching of the Christians and with his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and expectations of the Messiah, Paul must have asked himself, "Why should it be impossible for one who has been disgraced and crucified to be the Messiah?" By this time it is likely that Paul knew much about Christianity. The fact that he

26. This position is rejected by a number of people who think Acts does not have historical data since some of its claims are rejected by Paul in his letters, for example in Galatians 1:23 where Paul says he was not known by the churches in Jerusalem (See E. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*). I am persuaded to accept the Lukan account on the basis of Paul's intense knowledge of rabbinic methods of interpreting scripture. It is this evidence that modern scholars like M. Hengel, G. Ludemann and C.J. Hemmer have used to make renewed claims that Luke's work is to be seen as based on material of some historical worth (See I.H. Marshall, *New Testament Guides: Acts of the Apostles*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 85-91). After all, a lot of what Luke said about Paul is confirmed by Paul himself in his letters.

27. A.H. McNeile, *St Paul: His Life, Letters and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: University Press, 1925), 12.

28. J. Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1943), 320.

persecuted Christians proves that he knew their beliefs.²⁹ Acts says he had also seen the deaths of martyrs like Stephen who asked for the forgiveness of their persecutors. Going by what R. M. Grant notes, this had an influence on Paul's conversion. Grant notes that many converts to Christianity or any other religion, mention the constancy of martyrs as leading to their conversion. Therefore, probably with such thoughts on a long and tiresome journey, Paul saw a vision which gave a final blow to his doubt. The vision finally disconfirmed his strong belief in Pharisaism as the ultimate goal in life. The question which he had concerning Judaism and Christianity was brought to an end. From then on he realised that the coming of Christ had put an end to the function of the law (Romans 10:4) and that he was supposed to preach the gospel without the law among the Gentiles. This again shows that Paul's conversion could have been a result of cognitive dissonance.

We have seen that dissonance caused by the disconfirmation of beliefs or events can be reduced through proselytism. We can also see that Paul did the same when he finally accepted Christianity. Acts tells us that after his conversion in Damascus he started preaching Christ there. He later left Damascus when the Jews there were planning to kill him. His letters also confirm this (2 Corinthians 11:32-33). However, in the letters Paul says he escaped to Arabia (Galatians 1:17), not to Jerusalem as Acts says. Be it as it may, it is likely again that the period in Arabia was spent preaching.³⁰ Thus, Paul's preaching in Damascus and/or Arabia and the subsequent missionary journeys for the rest of his life could be ways of reducing cognitive dissonance through proselytism.

Paul also reduced his dissonance through rationalisation. As we have seen, Paul strongly believed in the Jewish law. But when he left Judaism and became a Christian, he did not throw away the law into the dustbin as it were, instead, he gave it a new interpretation. This reinterpretation of scriptures to suit one's new situation is a method of reducing dissonance called rationalisation. Some people have explained this reinterpretation of scriptures as a characteristic of scripturally based communities. Although this may be true, it is worth noting that A. F. Segal says,

The process of reinterpretation of ancient texts in the face of new experiences shows cognitive dissonance at work.³¹

29. J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) argues strongly to show that Paul knew a lot about Jesus because of his Pharisaic background. He writes, "While there may be some hesitancy in determining what Paul knew of Jesus while still a Pharisee, there can be no doubt as to what he thought of the Christian faith," 77.

30. See J. Murphy O'Connor's argument, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 77-78.

31. A.F. Segal, *Paul the Convert* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990), 297.

Thus, Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance is significant for a study of the conversion of Paul because it helps us to investigate Paul's strategies for reducing cognitive dissonance. In his reinterpretation of the law, Paul no longer saw the importance of keeping it because he now believed that the coming of Christ had put an end to the function of the law (Galatians 3:15). Thus, Paul's exegesis can be seen as one of the best examples of cognitive dissonance at work. As Segal would put it,

First century Bible interpretation, whether it be midrash, pesher, typology or allegory, is at once a mechanism for reducing dissonance.³²

For Paul, the process therefore reformed the Pharisaic world into one that is consonant with Christianity. Thus, the exegesis demonstrated the truth the Christian message would observably serve to reduce his dissonance.

One aspect of cognitive dissonance is that the strength or magnitude of the new belief structure will be directly proportional to the difficulty or strength of the conversion experience. Psychological studies have shown that people who are paid a small amount to make a counter-attitudinal statement will later agree more with the statement than people who have been paid a large amount to do the same thing. For example, if you pay someone 5 cents and another \$70 to lie that bananas are dangerous to health, the one paid 5cents will tend to agree with the statement more than the one paid \$70. This is because the person who has been paid \$70 is justified to lie for he/she has a great reward. She/he will justify him/herself by saying, "I know that I was lying, but I am justified because I got a lot of money for an easy task." It can therefore be true that, Paul, who went from one religion to another and who, from what we have said above, obviously had a strong and difficult conversion experience for no ready benefits, except the 'benefit' of being an apostle, would have a greater chance of developing a greater commitment to the new community and a greater chance of revaluing his past. Thus, Segal is right when he says,

The stronger and more difficult the conversion experience, the stronger and more difficult it will be to dissuade the beliefs held.³³

This is seen in Paul's commitment to Christianity. After his conversion, Paul therefore became so attached to the new religion. To reduce the dissonance created by such a move, he embarked on a missionary career for the rest of his life, travelling through many parts of the world making converts. It can be argued therefore that by converting more people to Christianity, Paul developed more and more interest in the new religion

32. A.F. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 28.

33. A.F. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 299.

basing on the belief that, "If more and more people can be persuaded to join the belief, then the belief must after all be true."

That Paul's conversion was a result of cognitive dissonance is also supported by the fact that conversion is a decision making process. Now, wherever one is to choose one from two choices, cognitive dissonance cannot be avoided. In fact, Segal defines cognitive dissonance as, "... the state of mind of any subject going through a decision making process."³⁴ Before his conversion, Paul had two antithetical religious groups (Judaism and the emerging Christian religion) from which he was to choose one. As a Jew, Paul believed in Judaism, but as G. Bornkamm correctly points out, at one time, it seems Paul started realising how shaky the religious foundations of his faith and practice were.³⁵ Also, because he was more and more dissatisfied with his efforts to comply with his high ideals and strict demands of law, one can say he started deciding between keeping on with his religion and accepting Christianity. Later, Paul accepted Christianity, but to finally do away with the dissonance caused by the process of decision making, he started devaluing Judaism as a religion. What Paul says about the law and his people explains this. In fact, Sholem Asch, a Jew interviewed by F.C. Grant, asked how Paul took such an attitude towards his religion and his own people by asking, "Can he have been really a Jew and shared the Jewish way of life and faith? Was he ever a Jew observing the Sabbath festivals of the Jewish year, the lection and prayer of the synagogue, the food regulations and so on?"³⁶

As F. C. Grant concluded, here one must fall back upon the findings of religious psychology for a clue to Paul's conversion, its antecedents, its course and results.³⁷ This religious psychology can explain Paul's attack of the Jewish law and customs by explaining this as a way by which Paul was reducing cognitive dissonance which he had suffered during the decision making process. Thus, like any other convert, "He now adhered to what once he had burned and burned what once he had adhered to."³⁸

Before we conclude, a look at recent findings on conversion can help to strengthen the argument that Paul's conversion should be seen in the light of the theory of cognitive dissonance. These recent studies have shown that there are factors which influence conversion.³⁹ The first factor is that converts

34. A.F. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 297.

35. G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 23.

36. F.C. Grant, *Roman Hellenism and the New Testament* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 140.

37. F.C. Grant, *Roman Hellenism and the New Testament*, 140.

38. F.C. Grant, *Roman Hellenism and the New Testament*, 140.

39. The factors are discussed in detail by F. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 289.

converting from the effects of cognitive dissonance experience a tension or a dissatisfaction. In Paul, the tension can indeed be seen in his struggles against Christianity before he was converted. The second factor is that the tension or dissatisfaction must be interpreted within a religious perspective. In the case of Paul, we can say the tension was a result of God's mysterious soteriological plan as Paul says; "O! the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and inscrutable his ways!" (Romans 11:38). It can also be seen that the reasons why he fought Christianity were religious and so it can be argued that his dissatisfaction was religious.

The third factor is that the interpretation of the tension must be given by persons who perceive themselves as active religious seekers. In the study of Paul's conversion, this can be seen in Paul's zeal which made him to proceed beyond many of his own age (Galatians 1:14). Thus, Paul must have been an active religious seeker.

Conclusion

This article has set to argue that Paul's conversion, among other factors, could be a result of cognitive dissonance. His zeal for Judaism, his persecution of Christians and the extensive missions he carried out after conversion, may have been ways of reducing cognitive dissonance. Our conclusion is therefore that Paul's conversion could be a result of cognitive dissonance. Obviously, there are many ways by which the complex conversion and/or call experience of Paul can be explained apart from cognitive dissonance suggested here.

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