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PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN THE
CATHOLIC CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS*

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ABSTRACT

The study deals with a religious conversion of members of the Catholic Charismatic movement. This movement is characterised by the integration of those aspects of spirituality, which stem from traditional religious life as well as from the spirituality of new religious movements. The consensual qualitative research was used for analyses of thirty stories of personal conversions from the members of this movement. The stories were described in a public bulletin, published by the movement. They were analysed in regard to the precedents of conversion, course of conversion and the consequences of conversion in personal life. The results of analysis showed that the typical process of religious conversion in this movement is preceded by some contact with religious issues in childhood and experiencing some problem in the period before conversion. The conversion is stimulated by meeting a religious person and attendance at prayer meetings, which lead to the experience of God's presence, and a cognitive insight into religious matters. Consequences of conversion include radical changes in spiritual life, increasing subjective well-being, improving social life and solving the antecedent problem. The results are discussed with regard to the previous theories and research on religious conversion as well as their limitations originating from the nature of the data.

For many religiously minded persons, conversion is the most important step in their spiritual and religious development. The proportion of such people who experienced conversion is estimated between 30 and 40 percent (Kuczkowski, 1998; Paloutzian, Richardson & Rambo, 1999). An extension of conversion and its psychological significance

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in personal life was the reason for interest in this phenomenon in early years of psychology of religion (e.g. Starbuck, 1901; James 1930/1902). During these days, ongoing attention to this phenomenon is related mostly to study of new religious movements, which, having short or no tradition, see conversion as the only one way for new members to join their group. Up to now, a great deal of research on religious conversion using the psychological as well as sociological perspective has been accomplished (see Paloutzian, Richardson & Rambo, 1999; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger & Gorsuch, 2003, for review).

Process of religious conversion in psychological research

Many studies were trying to identify factors that can induce the probability of experiencing conversion. One such factor, most frequently mentioned and researched, which radically raises the probability of conversion, is experience of some sort of tension or stress prior to conversion (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). This stress can include depression, a sense of sin, confusion, disturbance of self-esteem, doubts, addictive behaviour etc. Conversion is then an effort to resolve a problem resulting from stress and an attempt to avoid the emotional turmoil accompanying tension. Conversion involving such a kind of problem and its solution is sometimes considered prototypical, and is included in almost all typologies of conversion. Meadow and Kahoe (1984) termed it crisis conversion, Allport (1960) described it as conversion awakening accompanied with a striking crisis following a traumatic event, and Vergote (1966) specified it as conversion solving a personal problem. Appropriately, Pargament (1997) formulated a coping perspective on conversion, when he considered a convert as someone experiencing a great difficulty in life. Trying to deal with the situations, he or she is seeking for a change of self and a way of living, following to conversion.

Among specific kinds of stress or problems related to conversion, stress-laden childhood or family stress is often mentioned. Paloutzian, Richardson and Rambo (1999), when dealing with the question of a predisposition to convert, emphasised that people who experienced some difficulties during the childhood or adolescence were particularly prone to conversion because they had personal or behavioral needs that were not satisfactorily met. The most known theory which pays attention to this factor is the theory of attachment which lays emphasis on the relationship between the infant and his or her pri-

mary caregiver or attachment figure (Kirkpatrick, 1997). The caregiver provides a sense of safety and support for the exploration of the environment. According to the caregiver's character, an infant develops an attachment style which influences his or her emotion, cognition and behaviour throughout the whole life. The most common patterns of attachments are *secure* (infant is confident about caregiver's availability and responsiveness), *insecure-anxious* or ambivalent (infant is uncertain about caregiver's availability and responsiveness) and *insecure-avoidant* (infant is not at all confident about caregiver's availability and responsiveness). In his extensive research on attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1997; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990), Kirkpatrick showed that people with insecure-anxious or insecure-avoidant attachment are more likely to experience religious conversion than people with secure attachment. It seems that for people with an insecure pattern of relationships, a new relationship with God can serve as a source of safety and responsibility.

Socially oriented theories of conversion tend to focus more on social influence as an important factor in the conversion experience. Especially research on new religious movements and cults proved an impulse for formulating the "brainwashing model" (e.g. Long & Hadden, 1983). According to this view, cult members use coercive means, deprivation and overstimulation to exercise control over the minds of potential members. These means can include various brainwashing tactics such as social isolation, programming with the cult beliefs, loud music or drumming, long-term meditation etc. On the other hand, a more favourable "social drift model" suggests that people convert gradually, even inadvertently through the influence of social relationships which they develop with members of some religious group. First emphasised by Lofland and Stark (1968), later analysed by Long and Hadden (1983), this approach gives saliency to affective bonds and connections growing between potential and the old members. Through friendship, attending cult rituals, spending time with the old members, a person becomes more deeply associated with a cult and also adopts a belief system and way of behaviour. Although approaches stressing social forces deserve attention, too strong an emphasis on social forces in the process of conversion can lead to the opinion that conversion is a consequence of external social pressure or psychological forces operating upon the person. Several authors (e.g. Richardson, 1985; Dawson, 1990) rejected this view and posited a more active, meaning-seeking movement of a subject, who

employs his or her will in deciding to convert. They see converts as seekers involved in active and rational searching for a new kind of belief and behaviour, which could bring a benefit to their life.

Considering several aspects of the conversion process, Lofland and Skonovd (1981) distinguish 6 “motifs” for conversion. Intellectual conversion is characterised by low social pressure, medium temporal duration and level of affective arousal. Mystical conversion can be described as accompanied by no or little social pressure, short duration and high level of affective arousal. Low social pressure, long duration and low level of affective arousal is typical of Experimental conversion and medium social pressure, long duration and medium affective arousal of Affectional conversion. Both Revivalist and Coercive conversion are characterised by high social pressure and level of affective arousal, but short duration occurs in Revivalist and long duration for Coercive conversion. Adopting beliefs and then starting to participate can be assigned to Intellectual and Mystical conversion, on the other hand, first participation and then adopting beliefs can be found in the rest of the motifs.

Also other factors inducing a probability of conversion have been reported. Capps (1990) as well as Kay and Francis (1996) emphasise a sense of sin as an important factor preceding a conversion experience. Meadow and Kahoe (1984) also underlined further factors, for example, a certain religious background of converts, making an encounter with a religious solution of problems more plausible, higher suggestibility of converts, presence of paranormal and abnormal signs etc. To organise a vast number of variables and situations involved in the process of religious conversion, complex stage models have been proposed. Among such models, we may mention Rambo’s seven-stage model outlining seven stages of conversion (Rambo, 1992, 1993):

- 1) Historical, religious, social cultural and personal *context* of conversion
- 2) *Crisis* in life of potential convert
- 3) *Quest*, which includes an active agency on the part of the convert in his or her predicament
- 4) *Encounter* with a new religious or spiritual option
- 5) *Interaction* between convert and advocate(s) of new religious or spiritual options, which can include building new relationships, adopting new beliefs and attending rituals
- 6) Making a *commitment*, deciding to become a real member of a new religious community (may involve initialising rituals such as baptism)

- 7) Experiencing *consequences* of conversion, including consolidation of new identity and commitment, as well as assessing the effect of a new religious option on the convert's life.

Rambo emphasises that individual factors and stages are not universal, unidirectional or invariant, but rather interactive, multiple and cumulative over time. The model has stimulated further research and also development of psychometric measure for assessing the religious conversion experience (Kahn & Greene, 2004).

Psychologists and other social scientists discuss the consequences and impacts of religious conversion. Many studies on conversion and mental health (e.g. Meadow & Kahoe, 1984; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998; Paloutzian, 1981) offer a more positive approach, and suggest that conversion is followed by positive impacts. There is a significant increase of well-being and positive emotions such as happiness, joy, calmness, release. Many converts also shift their sense of responsibility, quality of their relationships, self-esteem etc. Several researches have documented that impact of conversion includes such positive consequences as termination of drug use, decrease of psychotic symptoms and suicidal thoughts, less distress, less fear of death, greater purpose in life etc., which led Kilbourne and Richardson (as cited by Paloutzian, Richardson & Rambo, 1999) to compare the effect of conversion to that of psychotherapy. On the other hand, negative consequences observed after conversion involve non-critical passivity, storm and stress, self-doubts, addiction to a religious leader or other members of the group, family disruption etc. Witztum, Greenberg and Hasberg (1990) reported about persons converting to orthodox Judaism, who were patients of the mental health centre. Although for some of them, the initial effects of religious change on their psychiatric symptoms were positive, for a time, some of them experience onset or recurrence of mental illness. These contradictory findings give a reason for distinguishing two kinds of conversion: progressive and regressive (Maloney, 1990) or healthy and unhealthy (Meadow & Kahoe, 1984). Progressive or healthy conversion leads to a positive impact and integration of convert, regressive or unhealthy conversion results in a negative outcome and dependency.

Specificity of the Catholic Charismatic Movement

Catholic Charismatics (sometimes referred to as Catholic Pentecostals) are a special religious group of people who can be characterised

mainly by their integration of the aspects of spirituality stemming from traditional religious life, as well as from the spirituality of new religious movements. They belong to the Catholic Church and are committed to all Catholic teaching including the authority of the pope or veneration of the Saints. However, under the influence of renewing Pentecostal streams in Christianity, their spirituality involves a redefinition of understanding of Christianity and Catholicism, with special accent on a personal relationship with God, orientation toward the Holy Spirit and His gifts, searching for the Baptism of the Holy spirit etc. Besides attending traditional masses, they meet in small or large prayer gatherings, where they use special gifts of Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, prophecy, gift of healing etc. As the charismatic movement is of a rather recent date in the Catholic Church, research reports focused on this special group are sparse. Regarding conversion among Catholic Pentecostals, Heirich (1977), in his earlier studies, investigated converts to the Catholic Pentecostal movement in relation to conversion theories. He found that the most influential factors of probability of conversion to Pentecostals were frequent mass attendance before encountering the movement, having Pentecostal friends, or introduction to the movement by a teacher, spiritual adviser etc.

Goal of Research Study

The goal of the present study was to investigate the whole conversion process of converts to the Catholic charismatic movement from the background of converts through experiencing conversion to the influences on convert's lives.

Research question

According to the goal we set down the following research questions:

1. What are the main components of the conversion process in converts to the Catholic charismatic movement?
2. Which factors inducing the probability of occurrence of conversion are typical of this group of converts?
3. What is the personal experiencing of conversion for the converts?
4. What are the consequences of conversion in the converts' personal life?

Method

To answer these research questions, we decided to use the modified qualitative method called The Consensual Qualitative Research—CQR (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997). The method was primarily developed for examination of inner complex experiences that are difficult to be studied by quantitative methodology.

Consensual analysis stems mainly from the grounded theory approach and it emphasises qualitative research with more researchers discussing the nature of the data and reaching a consensus on categorisation. The value of a team in research work lies in a minimalization of the subjectivity of researchers and provision of a broader perspective of data. Researchers analyse the data independently prior to mutual discussions as a prevention of a possible influence of group-think. The other important attributes of this method (Knox, Hess, Petersen & Hill, 1997) are as follows:

- a) The method works with words and not numbers,
- b) the small number of cases are studied intensively,
- c) context of the whole case is used for understanding of the parts of experience,
- d) the process is inductive, theory is formulated as a result of the contemplation of data and not prior to it,
- e) the process compounds of dividing the stories into domains (thematic areas), creating basic ideas (short summaries) for all the data in each domain for each individual case, and developing categories and subcategories within each domain for all cases by means of cross-case analysis.

Team of Researchers

The main author and co-author of this study formed the research team in this study. The team of researchers consisted of two psychologists—male and female. As to professional psychological orientation—Peter Halama is a personality psychologist with interest in psychology of religion and Júlia Halamová is a social psychologist with prior research experience in qualitative analysis and with consensual qualitative method.

Research Sample

To answer the research question, we decided to analyse accounts of conversion of people participating in the Catholic Charismatic

movement. The source of the stories was a bulletin, which by the Catholic Charismatic movement in Bratislava, Slovakia. Besides information on various activities of the movement, spiritual articles, etc., the bulletin also carries narratives by movement members who converted to the movement. They should serve as testimonies for incidental readers or as encouragement for other members of the movement. All the accounts published in the years 1999–2002 were collected, and a total of 30 conversion descriptions were analysed. Because of the nature of the data, we had no other demographic information about the authors of the accounts except that retrieved from the texts. According to this, there were 16 men and 14 women, ranging in education from basic to university degrees.

Procedure

Firstly, all the accounts were fed into the computer. Next, the authors independently divided the texts into three domains concerning the temporal sequence: antecedents to conversion, course of conversion and consequences of conversion in personal life. This step was followed by a discussion during which a consensus about splitting the text into domains was reached. After that categories and sub-categories describing consistencies and variations in the research material were set up for the first ten cases randomly selected. When the consensus about them was reached, the next ten cases were analysed with regard to the categories created. The categorisation was revised when needed. The remaining ten cases were analysed with special focus on the stability of categories in a sample. Lastly, a working model of conversion was made according to the number of cases involved in individual categories and the time succession of the categories.

Results

The qualitative analysis yielded 3 domains, 22 categories and 143 subcategories by consensus of the researchers. Seven of the categories described what happened before conversion, 11 the course of conversion and 4 the consequences of conversion.

The first domain—Antecedents of conversion—refers to everything, that preceded the conversion and consists of the 7 categories. Family background describes the converts' recollections of their childhood and primary family and deals with positive experience such as "*I had a very good childhood, full of love and peace, our parents lived for us*" or

with negative experience such as *“There were no peace and love in our family, parents often quarrelled.”* Most of the subjects felt the need to express themselves concerning their religious background, that means how they perceived their primary contacts with religion. This category was divided into the following subcategories: atheist family, very formal and weak religious education in family, religious family, education in a different faith, influence of other persons in childhood either by grandparent or priest, restricted religious life due to totalitarian regime. The following example illustrates this category: *“I grew up in a traditional catholic family. You know, on Sunday at the church, but I didn’t have personal faith”, “My parents didn’t attend the church, because they were afraid that we would not be accepted for high school.”* The next category was named Religious life before conversion with three main subcategories. One of them, External religiosity, applies to church-going because of external motivation, hypocrisy or faith based on custom. This subcategory may be represented by a statement *“I was connected to the church only because of friendship with my peers”*. Another subcategory is called Personal problem with faith for example *“I was a faithless believer, always vexed by doubts” “More or less I was afraid of God, of His demands”*. Apart from fear of God, Church and experiencing doubts, it comprised of perception of God as distant, strangeness or uselessness of faith, not liking commands, naive faith or generally negative attitude towards faith. The subcategory Positive manifestation of faith refers to some occasional spiritual or religious experiences before conversion that were regarded as positive. Here also falls a sentence: *“At that time I was engaged in evangelisation activities, and I thought that I am marvellous.”* Nearly half of the subjects saw their previous life as sinful for instance: *“I started life without any rules—we almost never lacked alcohol and drugs during our entertainment.”* Before conversion the majority of converts experienced some Problematic Issues in their lives either some loss e.g.: *“My mother died of cancer, it was a hurting loss”*, addiction, financial, health, relationship or psychiatric problems *“Strong feelings of nothingness ruled me again. I tried to commit suicide”*. The Prevailing Mental state prior to conversion was some kind of negative feeling mostly depression, loneliness, misery, meaninglessness or wandering e.g. *“I felt loneliness, emptiness, purposelessness and especially fear. I was afraid of Y2K problem and end of the world.”* Only two persons mentioned also some positive feelings e.g. *“I was successful in my university study.”* The last category prior to conversion was Searching for answers and solutions of problems for instance *“I*

started to practise yoga, I pursued jogging, but my will was unsuccessful My inner unrest led me to searching—philosophy, science, history, Eastern religions etc.” More detailed results of a qualitative analysis of conversion antecedents can be seen in table 1. In this table, categories and subcategories are sorted according to the frequency of their occurrence in the data.

The second domain was the Course of conversion. Interestingly, in the category Encountering a faith-minded believer, we found equally represented the subcategory Contact with believer who was a close relative or friend *“My sister when coming back from Bratislava, talked to me about prayer meetings and close relationship with God”* and Encountering unknown believer *“At the esoteric festival I was given Psalms by a woman.”* In the next category called Attending religious meeting we inserted important experiences from such meetings e.g. *“He invited me to their meeting and I was impressed when they were praying.”* Experiences of not knowing how to help oneself and so turning to God for help fall into the category Calling to God for help e.g. *“I started to cry for help, because I felt that I was not able to change myself.”* After turning to God, converts report deep Experience of God, either his presence *“I experienced God standing next to me. He literally hugged me and I felt his love.”* or tangible concrete answers for the calling *“He started to make small miracles—a string of “accidents”. He gave me people and opportunities, where I could receive answers to my questions.”* Typical for most converts was to have a Sudden experience of understanding and insight into religious relations *“I was given a grace to know, how God loves me and Jesus is alive and present in the Eucharist.”*

A further category was termed Dealing with sin, which contains experience of sinfulness, confessing own sins or experience of forgiveness e.g. *“I noticed that almost against my will, I was proceeding to confession, when I was totally open and I confessed everything. I experienced marvellous relief.”* Some of the subjects also had an Experience of healing *“He touched my temperature, pain of head and throat, and I went home healthy.”* Nearly a third of the research sample had Experience of

Table 1 Results of the qualitative analysis of conversion—antecedents of the conversion. In brackets, number of people mentioning this category or subcategory is provided.

Religious life before conversion (24)
personal problems with faith (17)
fear of God, Church (6)
saying conventional prayers without understanding (6)
needlessness of faith or Church (5)
experiencing God as distant (5)
negative attitude towards faith (4)
strangeness of faith or Bible (3)
experiencing doubts (3)
rejecting the faith of commandments and prohibitions (2)
childish, naive faith (1)
positive manifestation of faith (15)
receiving Sacraments (9)
commitment to local church life (4)
interest in information about faith (4)
occasional desire for God (3)
occasional spiritual life (3)
occasional experience of God's love (2)
occasional addressing by Bible (1)
external religiosity (10)
double-faced faith (9)
church-going only because of relationships with peers (4)
church-going because of social pressure (4)
church-going because of parents and in their company (1)
Religious background (20)
very formal and weak religious education in family (7)
religious family (6)
atheistic family (5)
restricted religious life due to totalitarian regime (3)
influence of other person in childhood- grand parents (3)
priest (2)
education in different faith (1)
Problematic Issues (17)
problems in relationships (9)
emotional or physical hurting from other person (4)
psychic hurting to other person (4)
in marriage and partnership (4)
in family (2)
addiction (6)
alcoholism (2)
smoking (2)

Table 1 (*cont.*)

drugs	(1)
food	(1)
sex	(1)
medicaments	(1)
person	(1)
loss	(6)
partner separation	(5)
death of near relatives	(3)
abortion	(2)
deception of a friend	(1)
psychiatric problems	(6)
suicidal tendency	(3)
depression	(3)
neurosis	(1)
health problems	(5)
financial breakdown	(1)
Mental state	(20)
negative feelings	(20)
depression	(8)
wandering and questing	(8)
loneliness	(7)
feelings of misery	(7)
meaninglessness	(6)
inner emptiness	(5)
suffering	(5)
fear	(4)
apathy	(3)
shame	(3)
restlessness	(3)
feelings of inadequacy	(3)
concerns for future	(2)
despair	(2)
hopelessness	(2)
feelings of guilt	(1)
regret	(1)
stressfulness	(1)
positive feelings	(2)
happiness	(2)
successfulness	(2)
Sinful life	(14)
unrestricted fun with abuse of drugs	(9)
sexually profligate life	(6)
without specification	(2)
deception in business	(1)
vandalism	(1)



Table 1 (cont.)

Family background (9)
negative (5)—alcoholism of parent (1)
positive (4)
Searching for answers and solutions to problems (9)
different spiritual approaches, Eastern philosophies (4)
yoga (3)
occult practises and Satanism (3)
science (2)
communicating with other people (2)
sport (2)

gradual conversion accompanied with struggles with old sins and difficulty to change, *“I was afraid to give everything to Jesus.”* Commitment to Jesus and confession of faith meant that people decided to give up control of their lives and to follow what Jesus wants them to do e.g. *“Several months after that event I committed my life to Jesus and decided to love and obey Him.”*

Converts reported an Important touching experience, too *“In the evening I was impressed by the TV transmission named Apocalypse. After that I switched off the TV and sat in the dark room. The thoughts of God went spinning in my head.”* One of the converts also noticed a Negative reaction of the neighbourhood to conversion *“My parents and siblings said that I had gone mad.”*

All categories and subcategories of the second domain sorted according to frequency are presented in table 2.

The third domain was Consequences of conversion in personal life. All the converts reported some Changes in religious life. Falling into this category is Creating a close relationship with God *“From that moment I have one more Friend. I feel his love in my heart.”* Experiencing life as marvellous due to God’s love *“God makes marvellous things in my life.”*, Giving up sinful life *“I stopped smoking, drinking, I left the unruly life.”*, Changes of spiritual life *“I started to live with God intensively, I decided for Him, I started to read the Bible, praying and my prayers became a pleasure to me.”*, Attendance and close involvement in life of religious community *“The Lord sent me people with whom I established a community, where I learned to pray and to love my brothers and sisters.”*, Engagement in religious activities *“The Lord gave me work for him—courses, evangelisation etc.”*, Deeper insight and understanding of religious relations *“I grasped that He loves me and the other people.”* The majority of converts

Table 2 Results of the qualitative analysis of conversion—Course of conversion. In brackets, number of people mentioning this category or subcategory is provided.

Encountering a faith-minded believer (25)
believer was unknown (13)
believer was familiar (12)
talking about faith and God (18)
invitation to religious meeting (11)
praying for the convert and his/her problems (8)
touched by believer's life (6)
offering religious literature (5)
appeal to a commitment to Jesus (2)
invitation to receiving the Sacraments (2)
appeal to praying (1)
Attending religious meeting (21)
touched by activities at a meeting (8)
touched by mood at a meeting (6)
experiencing strong experience (6)
encountering an important person (2)
Experience of God (21)
experience of God's presence (15)
simple feelings of God's presence and his love (10)
through inner voice (3)
experience of his communication through dream (1)
through Sacraments (1)
answer to crying (9)
through the events (4)
through the Bible (2)
through another person (2)
through prophecy (1)
Sudden experience of understanding and insight into religious relations (17)
Calling to God for help (11)
Experience of gradual conversion (9)
accompanied by struggles with old sins and difficulty to change (7)
accompanied by doubts and fear (3)
Dealing with sin (9)
experience of sinfulness (8)
confessing one's own sins (5)
experience of forgiveness, of relieving (3)
Important touching experience (8)
reading the Bible (3)
event (2)
touched by religious broadcasting, literature (2)
personal engagement in evangelisation (1)
Experience of healing (7)
physical (5)
mental (2)
Commitment to Jesus and confession of faith (8)
Negative reaction of neighbourhood to conversion (1)



also mentioned Successful dealing with problematic issue “*He made me free from addiction to medicaments. The problems are present and will be present, but I am not alone to solve them anymore.*” Half of the subjects stated Improvement in mental life “*Depression disappeared from my life, I do not feel any inner loneliness anymore. I started to respect people, to see their positive aspects, I improved my relationship with parents and forgave many people.*”. The last category was Changes in social life “*The Lord led me to Bratislava, where I found work, accommodation and hundreds of friends.*” For detailed results of the qualitative analysis see table 3.

According to the number of cases involved in individual categories and the temporal sequences of the categories, we made a working model of conversion, which is usual in Catholic Charismatics. Categories with a very small number of people were not included in the model.

Table 3 Results of the qualitative analysis of conversion—Consequences of conversion in personal life. In brackets, number of people mentioning this category or subcategory is provided.

Changes in religious life (29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> creating relationship with a personal God (16) experiencing his love (12) experiencing his closeness (5) experiencing God as answering and supporting (5) experiencing friendship (1) changes of spiritual life (12) heightening frequency of spiritual activities (prayer, reading Bible) 10 experiencing spiritual activities as fulfilling and satisfying (5) experiencing life as marvellous due to God’s love (7) attendance and close involvement in life of religious community (6) giving up sinful life (5) deeper insight and understanding of religious relations (5) engagement in religious activities (2)
Dealing with problematic issue (16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> antecedent problem is solved (11) change of view of problem, experiencing God’s help when facing the problem (8)
Improvement in mental life (15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvement of well-being (14) improvement of social virtues (7), learning to forgive (3)
Changes in social life (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving social life (6) engagement in pro-social activities (3)

Family background was likewise excluded from the model because no relationship between the sort of family background and presence of specific categories was found. The working model is presented in Figure 1.

The first component of the model is a formal, weak or no religious education, a statement the most frequently mentioned with regard to religion in childhood. This is resulting in external religiosity, personal problems with faith and sinful life. Experiencing some problematic issues induces negative feelings and consecutively, unsuccessful searching for solution of problems. It seems of importance, that most of the people were searching for solutions in spiritual and philosophical trends, thus suggesting that they were open to spiritual change or solution of the problem, even more so when we consider another component of the model—calling to God for help. Encountering a believer, who stimulates subsequent progress in the process of conversion, appears one of the most important components of the model, and it starts the very process of conversion. The next component—attendance at religious meetings—stimulates experiencing of God's presence, and also provides the first solution or hope in a problem. Emotional experience is followed by a cognitive shift, when the convert comes to a sudden insight into and understanding of religious relations. Some of the converts can experience some kind of doubts, fear or struggles with their new position and demands, but this state is followed by their confession of faith and commitment to Jesus, which helps them to overcome these problems. We may assume this step to be very important for those facing these feelings, because it determines whether the process will continue or not. There is also the probability that some of the converts do not come through this step and get back to their old beliefs and way of life. The confession of faith and commitment to Jesus end the very process of conversion as such and convert starts to experience the consequences of his/her conversion. The first and most frequent outcomes of conversion are changes in religious life, which especially include creating a personal relationship with God and radical changes in spiritual life. An important component of conversion is a solution of a preceding problem, viz. experiencing both getting over it or getting support in it. Positive changes in well-being and social life conclude the entire model.

Although we suggested the usual order of elements in the model, we consider the model as flexible and adaptable. Individual steps

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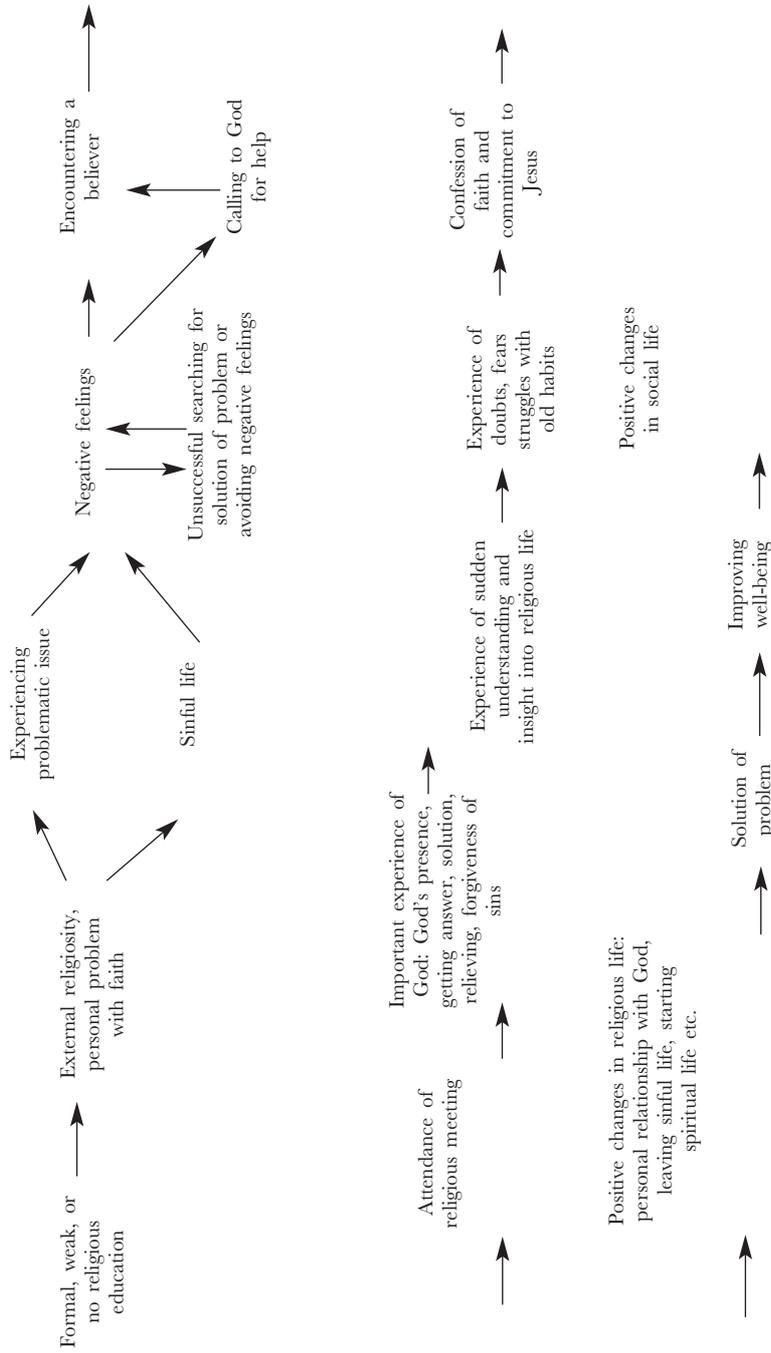


Figure 1 Working model of religious conversion in Charismatic Catholics

can be altered or skipped. In the process of conversion in a concrete person, his or her own course needs not to include all the elements in the model. For example a person with no religious background can convert without the first two steps (weak religious education and personal problems with faith) and can start directly with problematic issues. Therefore our model provides a wider framework for understanding the process of conversion in the Catholic Charismatic movement, and it aims at being more general and abstract rather than concrete and specific.

Discussion

Let us consider the results of this research from the viewpoint of the theories presented in the theoretical part of our study. Our results are in agreement with previous studies on conversion which found the presence of problems, stress, and tension at the time preceding conversion as the most significant factor inducing conversion (e.g. Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1998). 17 converts mentioned the presence of some serious problem, traumatic event or difficulty and 20 experienced negative feelings at that time. Conversion reduced or resolved these difficulties as evident from the converts' description of conversion outcomes. 15 experienced a greater or lesser improvement in mental life, 16 reported solving or experiencing support in their problematic issues. It can be said that the consistent presence of this factor in research studies of conversion makes the coping perspective on conversion the most plausible and valid theory of conversion.

As regards the assumptions that stress-laden childhood or family stress raises the probability of conversion (e.g. Paloutzian, Richardson & Rambo, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 1997), our research has yielded ambiguous results. In our sample, 9 converts spoke of their family background including emotional frame and parental approach. 4 of them described their family as having a positive and 5 a negative emotional framework. These numbers give no support to a prevalence of intensive family stress during childhood and adolescence among converts, thus suggesting that religious conversions may occur not only in people with a stress-laden childhood, but also in those with a relatively happy family and loving parents. However, until now, we can only speculate on different patterns of conversion in these groups of people, e.g. sudden and turbulent in people with a negative family background, and slow and calm in those with positive

family background. In our sample, no relationship was found between the sort of family background and presence of specific categories. This is the reason, why family background has not been included in the working model. But the validity of our consideration is questioned by the fact that 21 converts did not mention any aspects of their family emotional background. Further research on the relationship between the course of conversion and the manifestations of family background or parental approach (e.g. in the sense of secure-insecure attachment) could support or disprove these assumptions.

Our results give more support to socially oriented theories. The category Encountering a faith-minded believer was found in almost all cases (27), which makes it the most inducing factor of conversion in our sample. Contact with a faith-minded believer, usually a member of the movement, who introduces the convert into a religious group or into a different way of spirituality, seems to be the key element in the process of encountering and interacting with a new spiritual option. We should also take into account the fact that in 13 cases the introducing person was very close to the convert (relative, close friend etc.). Therefore, the social drift theory (Long & Hadden, 1983) emphasising the importance of affective bonds between a member and a convert in the process of conversion seems to be appropriate for understanding this interaction and influence. On the other hand, searching for different spiritual or secular options to solve the problem found in 9 cases, justifies the opinion emphasising the searching activity of the subject (Dawson, 1990).

As evident, many of the theories mentioned at the beginning are consistent with our research results. However, the factors emphasised in these theories do not act independently, but rather in mutual interaction, as suggested in Rambo's seven-stage model presented earlier (Rambo, 1992, 1993). Our research showed good applicability of Rambo's analytical model to the process of conversion in Catholic Charismatics. The description of religious education and nature of religiosity at the time before conversion given by converts, what assigns the religious *context* of conversion. Converts in our sample report both *crises* caused by problematic issues as well as *quest* for solutions and new spiritual options. *Encounter* with new spiritual options is represented mainly by contact with a faith-minded person, usually a member of the movement. *Interaction* between convert and new spirituality is realised mainly through attending religious meetings. Converts in our sample make their *commitment* especially

through the confession of faith and pledge to Jesus, and finally, strong *consequences* of conversion in personal life are described. However, our results suggest that significant experience of God's presence or activity is of great importance for most of our converts. Rambo's model does not specifically include this factor, his stages of encounter and interaction deal almost exclusively with the activity of the advocate. The question is, whether these kinds of experience are the components of conversion in general (support to it is given by Meadow & Kahoe, 1984), or whether they are present only in a specific religious group (e.g. the Charismatics), which can be possibly characterised as "experiential". Further research with special focus on this experience and its role in the process of conversion could answer this question.

Very surprising to us was the fact that not one of the converts mentioned the specific charismatic aspect of praying—speaking in tongues. They reported experiences very near to baptism in the Holy Spirit, however, without the other charismatic manifestations. It could not be said that these manifestations are not present in Catholic Charismatics, because they were mentioned in different relations (for example as the way of praying at religious meetings). But it seems that among Catholics, they do not have such importance as in protestant Charismatics. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not a necessary condition to be member, or be included in the Catholic Charismatic movement and can come after a longer time, or never. We think that it is caused by the influence of Catholic teaching about the Holy Spirit and Confirmation, which is different from Pentecostal spiritual teaching about baptism in the Holy Spirit. This could be an example of how the new Charismatic movement and traditional Catholic spirituality can interact and influence the attitudes and manifestations in Catholic Charismatics.

Finally, we need to mention some limitations of this research. A serious one is the nature of the research material. The accounts of the conversions were collected from a bulletin, and not from the converts themselves. There was no possibility to ask explanations for any unclear or vague statements or expressions, as would be possible in an interview. Another limitation derives from the intent of the accounts in the bulletin. As stated, the accounts were written as testimonies for incidental readers and other members of the movement. Therefore, we can assume a certain tendency on the part of the converts to reformulate or reinterpret their understanding of con-

version process and factors acting in it. This tendency of converts is observed in general, and it is a frequent reason for criticism of conversion studies using self-reporting and retrospective methods. Snow and Machalek (1984) emphasise that converts have a tendency to reinterpret their stories according to their newly acquired beliefs, which can detract from the validity of their self-reporting data. Also in the Catholic Charismatics, there can be expected the specific beliefs on the “normal” course of conversion and its usual consequences. Such a normative model can cause certain bias in reporting one’s own account of conversion in the way meeting this model and being accepted and approved by the movement community. Some aspects of the conversion process can be unstated in the accounts construed by converts and some aspects can be enhanced in order to meet the criteria of normative model or to address possible new members. Therefore the research material contained the movement-approved accounts of conversion. However, what suggests that analysed accounts are not only an adjustment of personal story to the prescribed normative schema is the richness and variability of the data obtained from the research material. Although it is possible to identify some common features, the individual accounts varied in their contents, the way of organising the individual elements into the whole story or in other features. The diversity of subcategories, which is the result of converts’ extensive descriptions of their stories, can point to a variety of conditions and settings in which conversion can be experienced, and therefore be beneficial for a better understanding of religious conversion in this specific context as well as in general. However, there is a question about negative elements of the conversion process and its negative consequences. In our sample only about ten people mentioned such problems in their stories during the conversion process, and not a single one mentioned any negative consequences. According to Meadow and Kahoe (1984), negative states such as storms and stress, doubts, struggles could be considered as not rare following conversion. Lack of these negative consequences in research data could be attributed to the distortion resulting from the aim of the accounts published in the bulletin. This notwithstanding, it is methodologically difficult to explore negative consequences of conversion in converts when they have adopted an optimistic view of their conversion and have been integrated into a new religious group with the normative model of conversion, neglecting possible negative consequences. These difficulties

could be possibly overcome by in-depth interviewing with special focus on possible negative aspects of conversion or other problematic issues, which are implied by our results.

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