

Converting into a New Reality: Social Constructionism, Practical Theology and Conversion

Srdan Sremac
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
srdjansremac@yahoo.com

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In this article, the author attempts to bring the practical theological conversion research into dialogue with the theory of social constructionism. Such an interdisciplinary approach to religious conversion shifts the attention from the intra-psychic religious experience of the converter to the contextual understanding of conversion phenomena. The author emphasises that the narrative-social-constructionist perspective enables a more complete interpretation of the conversion process. Furthermore, the author emphasises that the social constructionist approach to conversion research has its own perspective in the area of practical (empirical) theology as an interdisciplinary discipline. By using the postulates of social construction, the author believes that one should not reject the view that God is present in a conversion, nor that this should be questioned. Here, through

the social constructionist approach and in conversion research, there is an attempt to create a dialogue with other social sciences. Interaction between social sciences and theological empirical research opens the door to a holistic understanding of the conversion phenomena where all researchers are welcomed to give their contribution. In the end, it should be pointed out that conversion is not just pure social construction. The experience of conversion is above social construction. Social construction cannot comprehend the experience of conversion without a dialogue, first and foremost a dialogue with theology. In a word, the aim of this work is not to give a whole explanation by using social constructionism only, but to invite an area of social constructionism into a dialogue with a discourse of practical theology.

Key words: social constructionism, narration, practical-empirical theology, conversion, context, language

Introduction

The article elaborates on the social constructivist and practical theological perspective of conversion research. There has been much published on conversion from various theological perspectives. The question however is *how do these theological perspectives relate to a social constructivist understanding of conversion?* In traditional psycho-theological conversion research, most writings are rooted in a modernist discourse that promotes internal psychological processes of the individual's conversion experience. But most theologians of conversion fail to address the element of identity and experience, which is grounded among participants mainly through social discourse. They rather focus on the individual's relationship with God. Consequently they do not take into account wider social, cultural, political and historical contexts in conversion investigation.

From a constructionist perspective, such understanding of religious conversion fails to attend to the primarily relational and hermeneutical aspects of this phenomenon. Therefore, within the field of practical theology, as a multi-conversational discipline, the social constructionist framework to conversion research is a promising one. In this article I will attempt to bring the practical theological conversion research into dialogue with the theory of social constructionism. This is a shift of focus, from the intrapsychic experience of converts to a more contextual-communal understanding of the conversion phenomena. Methodologically this means that a social constructionist perspective, particularly its emphasis on the importance of narrative, is able to describe and interpret the processes of conversion phenomena.

It is evident that today social constructionism is an emerging social-scientific theory. In the last several years there has been a rapidly growing body of publications with the term »social constructionism«. Many scholars within the field of practical theology hold to some form of social constructionism.¹ Likewise, social constructionism is an important concept in narrative conversion research and theory.² The social constructionist theorists stress the histori-

¹ Cfr. C.A.M. HERMANS, Social Constructionism and Practical Theology: An Introduction, in: C.A.M. HERMANS, G. IMMINK, A. DE JONG, J. VAN DER LANS (eds.), *Social Constructionism and Theology*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. vii-xxiv; Ruard R. GANZEVOORT, Wysiyg, Social Construction in Practical Theology, *Journal of Empirical Theology* (2002) 15, (2) 2002, 34-42.

² Ulrike POPP-BAIER, Conversion as a Social Construction: A Narrative Approach to Conversion Research, in: C.A.M. HERMANS, et al. (eds.), pp. 41-61; Hetty ZOCC, Paradigms in Psychological Conversion Research: between social science and literally analysis, in: Jan N. BREMMER, Wout J. VAN BEKKUM and Arie L. MOLENDIJK (eds.), *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion*. Leuven: Peeters, 2006, pp. 41-58; Peter G. STROMBERG, *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

cally developed and culture-specific nature of the objects of study. And they emphasize the role of discourse in constituting these objects as historically and culturally contingent. From the perspective of conversion research this means that converts learn to use a certain religious language in the context of certain social relationships – especially in the context of the religious reference group they have joined.³ In view of this, a self, specifically a religious-self, cannot exist independent of its social context.⁴ That is to say, conversion processes do not occur solely within someone's private realm, but they take place in the midst of the members of a social and religious community.

Therefore, a social constructionist theory can be integrated in conversion studies in order to examine how a specific individual uses language and social relationships to create and reconstruct meaning in their conversion stories. This way, from a practical theological perspective, conversion becomes a topic for interdisciplinary study. It means that practical theological discourse of conversion involves an academic dialogue with other social sciences. These other disciplines are best seen as vital partners for the analysis of the conversion phenomenon. The fact that conversion is not merely a theological category but also a sociological and psychological category opens doors for multi-conversational approaches to conversion research.

In the first part of this article, I will provide a brief introduction to social constructionism. In the second part, the narrative approach will serve as the key concept for the theory and methodology of conversion research. In the conclusion I will evaluate the social constructionist approach in light of the practical theological conversion research. I will argue that both approaches to conversion are helpful and cannot be easily dismissed. I will also show how the social constructionist perspective makes the dialogue between social sciences and practical (empirical) theology possible.

The Theory of Social Constructionism

Social constructionism as an approach to social science draws its influence from a number of disciplines, including philosophy, sociology and linguistics, thus making it multidisciplinary theory. Since social constructionism as a scientific theory is a work-in-progress there is no »fixed doctrine« by which it is defined. However, social constructionists share some common presumptions about the nature of social reality and the way to analyze social reality in order

³ Ulrike POPP-BAIER, Conversion as a Social Construction: A Narrative Approach to Conversion Research, in: C.A.M. HERMANS et al. (eds.), pp. 41-61, 58.

⁴ Elizabeth W. OZORAK, Culture, Gender, Faith: The Social Construction of the Person-God Relationship, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (2003) 13 (4), 250.

to reveal its cultural and social dynamics.⁵ In general »social constructionism emphasizes the historicity, the context-dependence, and the socio-linguistically constituted character of all matters involving human activity«. ⁶ Thus, the major focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived social reality. This social construction perspective proposes that meaning emerges from the shared interaction of individuals within society. From this point of view, human behavior and understanding are seen as an active process of construction and interpretation in which people together attempt to define the nature of their particular social situations.⁷ In distinction from the epistemology of the natural sciences that assumes a more fixed, stable and external reality, in social constructionism, reality is seen as an ongoing and dynamic process. Therefore, the notion that reality is not »out there« waiting to be perceived by our objective senses but rather interpreted by us, as a function of our cultural habits is one of the major foundations of social constructionism.⁸ As Swinton notes: »The meaning and definition of reality is therefore flexible, and open to negotiation depending on circumstances, perception, knowledge, power, structures and so forth«. ⁹

One of the first theorists of social constructionism was probably George Mead with his book *Mind, Self and Society*.¹⁰ In his work he developed the so-called 'symbolic interactionism,' the view that people construct their identities through everyday social interactions. Perhaps the most classic source about the social constructionism is the book *The Social Construction of Reality* by Berger and Luckmann.¹¹ They demonstrate how a variety of processes such as socialization, institutionalisation, habitualization and so on, consolidate what we have together constructed into »realities« which have »a being independent of our own volition«. ¹² Like many constructionists today they describe these processes as being dependent on language.¹³ The main emphasis of Berger and Luckmann is that we experience everyday reality as something fixed that is »taken for granted« within society. This notion reveals the fact that our

⁵ Chris HERMANS, *Social Constructionism and Practical Theology: An Introduction*, in: C.A.M. HERMANS et. al. (eds), vi- xxiv, vi.

⁶ Fiona J. HIBBERD, *Unfolding Social Constructionism*, New York: Springer, 2005, viii.

⁷ John SWINTON and Harriet MOWAT, *Theology and Qualitative Research*, London, SCM Press, 2006, 36.

⁸ Vivien BURR, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*, 1995, London, Routledge, 1995.

⁹ John SWINTON and Harriet MOWAT, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London: SCM Press, 2006, 36.

¹⁰ George H. MEAD, *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1934.

¹¹ Peter BERGER and Thomas LUCKMANN, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1966.

¹² BERGER and LUCKMANN, 1.

¹³ BERGER and LUCKMANN, 34-46.

knowledge of reality is actually constructed socially through human activities. Accordingly, all human knowledge is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations. However, Berger and Luckmann state clearly that they are not dealing with the philosophical questions of what reality is, but insist that they are engaged in the »empirical discipline of sociology« with its »concrete problems«.¹⁴

After Berger and Luckmann, Kenneth Gergen is the primary developer and one of the most influential theorists of social constructionism. For Gergen social constructionism is the »full-blown successor project«¹⁵ that is replacing empiricist and rationalist human sciences whose foundations have been shaken. He proposes and summarizes five suppositions that appear to be central to many current constructionist analyses:

1. *The terms by which we account for the world and ourselves are not dictated by the stipulated objects of such accounts.*

2. *The terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are socially derived products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people.*

3. *The degree to which a given account of world or self is sustained across time is not principally dependent on the objective validity of the account, but relies on the vicissitudes of social process.*

4. *Language derives its major significance from the way in which it is embedded within patterns of relationship.*

5. *None of the propositions making up the social constructionist web are candidates for truth.*¹⁶

There are a few major points to be highlighted based upon these Gergen summarizations. The first supposition says that we take a critical stance towards our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world. It cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be. Therefore, there are no taken-for-granted principles, or ontological certainties from which we must begin the task of articulating the world.¹⁷

The second supposition says that the ways in which we commonly understand the world, its categories and concepts are historically and culturally specific. Therefore, for most constructionists, according to Gergen, »descriptions and explanations of the world are not driven by 'what there is', »but

¹⁴ BERGER and LUCKMANN, 14.

¹⁵ Kenneth J. GERGEN, *Realities and Relationships*, Cambridge, University Press, 1994, 24.

¹⁶ Kenneth J. GERGEN, *Realities and Relationships*, Cambridge, University Press, 1994; Kenneth J. GERGEN, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, London, Sage Publications Ltd, 1999; Kenneth J. GERGEN, Social Construction and Practical Theology: The Dance Begin, in: C.A.M. HERMANS et. al., 6-11.

¹⁷ GERGEN, in: HERMANS et al., 14.

rather, have their origins in human relationship«. ¹⁸ Important are those relations in which linguistic meaning is achieved. To achieve intelligibility is actually to participate in a pattern of social coordination or a cultural tradition. ¹⁹

The third supposition is that our knowledge is constructed through daily interaction between people. According to Gergen the social constructionist movement »begins in earnest when one challenges the concept of knowledge as mental representation«. ²⁰ Therefore, according to constructionists, our ways of understanding the world are a product not of objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other. As Gergen has recognized knowledge is seen not as something that a person has, but as something that people do together, thus »languages are essentially shared activities«. ²¹ Here language and all other forms of representing the world are rooted in relationships. In this view, the study of knowledge becomes the study of »the performative use of language in human affairs«. ²²

The fourth supposition is that social constructionism, especially in the field of psychology, proposes that reality, human identity, meaning, and values is negotiated socially through conversation and other types of communication. These aspects of the self are understood as knowledge of self and world emerge when people construct, share and correlate experiences through participation in discourse. As a result, the locus of knowledge is not in the minds of single individuals, but in the collectivity. In this view, an individual may be composed of »multiple selves« created and maintained through social interactions in different contexts and through participation in diverse communities of discourse. ²³ This means that the way people think, the very categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning for them, are provided by the language that they use. Therefore, language is an interactive process, not a passive receiving or preexisting truth. As Richard Rorty puts it:

Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not... The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves

¹⁸ GERGEN, in: HERMANS et al., 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Keneth J. GERGEN, The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology, *American Psychologist*, (1985) 40, 270.

²¹ *Ibidem.*

²² *Ibidem.*

²³ Kenneth J. GERGEN, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary life*, New York, Basic Books, 1991.

with a language, causes us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that.²⁴

In the social constructionist approach we cannot objectively know reality; all we can do is to interpret experience. Thus, the fifth supposition says that there are no universal answers to the question that are »the right one«. Consequently, the social constructionists see the term »truth« as a discursive integer, acquiring its meaning from particular traditions of usage. According to social constructionists, what we regard as »truth« is a product not of objective observation of the world, but of the social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other.²⁵ Therefore, objective truth and validity are to be replaced by social process and practical reasoning. This means that, from this perspective, all ways of understanding reality are historically and culturally relative.

Gergen's main premise, in summary, is this: reality exists independently of our linguistic representations of reality. As a result, the discourse determines our understanding of the world, so that content and communication cannot be separated. Of course, language is an important medium through which we understand and represent reality. Because what would someone's conversion be without that person's description of it? But, as Hermans notes »this does not mean that we can reduce reality to words (embedded in relationships and practices)«. ²⁶ The fundamental question here for practical (empirical) theology is this: Is reality only socially and historically constructed? And if so, does that view lead to relativism? Hermans argues that we can avoid this danger if we distinguish between that which we refer to when speaking and the statements we construct about that which we refer to. Or in other words distinguishing between »ontological objective« and »epistemological subjective«. ²⁷ Therefore the whole of social reality, even though it is given in linguistic categories, cannot be reduced only to language. In other words language cannot be the total explanation of social reality. It is important to highlight that constructionist views are not necessarily anti-realist and they do not necessarily lead to relativism. As Ganzevoort recognized, social constructionism does not deny the reality of phenomena, but shifts attention from ontological to conversational interpretation. ²⁸ Therefore, social constructionism is an epistemological, not ontological theory; »it does not make claims about the nature of private expe-

²⁴ Richard RORTY, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 5-6.

²⁵ Vivien BURR, *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*, London: Routledge, 1995, 4.

²⁶ Chris A. M. HERMANS, *Social Constructionism and Practical Theology: An Introduction*, in: C.A.M. HERMANS et al. (eds.), xvi.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Ruard R. GANZEVOORT, »The Social Construction of Revelation« *International Journal of Practical Theology* 8(2), 2006: 1-14.

rience of physical reality but about the process of expressing and making sense of private experience with physical reality«. ²⁹

Social Constructionism and Practical Theology

Having laid out the theoretical framework, it is now possible to see what some of social constructionism's implications are for practical theology and particularly for conversion research. As Johannes van der Ven correctly recognized, Gergen's approach allows little scope for reflection on religion in his social constructionism. ³⁰ I must add that even in Gergen's article *Social Construction and Practical Theology* we can barely find a clear connection between theology and religion. Nevertheless social constructivism applies to religion in at least two ways. This means that a religion can be viewed as a kind of *collective* and *cultural* framework that shapes the entirety of life and beliefs. ³¹

First, religion is itself *collective*. For example, in Eastern Orthodox Christianity a reference to being the body of Christ is not just a figure of speech. The liturgy and Eucharist is seen as the essence of Christian life where Christ is present among the community of believers. Thus spiritual community or togetherness (Russian *sobornost*) means conforming oneself to the truth in community rather than truth's being subjective to the individual. Such understanding of religion as being collective is especially significant in the context of conversion research. To speak of the social construction of conversion is to focus on the human dimension of conversion, where conversion is seen as a kind of naturalization into collective. From the constructionist perspective faith is not something that people hold individually, rather faith is held by religious communities. This process of naturalization into group language plays a crucial role in shaping one's beliefs. ³² Unquestionably, to be converted necessarily means to enter the community at some level. There is a causal relationship between a person's conversion and the community where this happens; the community is both the context and the cause for the process of conversion. Therefore, conversion happens not without the community, but within. Here we can benefit from Kallenberg's social constructionist defini-

²⁹ Duane R. BIDWELL, *Real/izing the Sacred: Spiritual Direction and Social Constructionism*, *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* (2004) 14 (1), 59-74, 63.

³⁰ Johannes A. VAN DER VEN, *Social Constructionism and Theology: A Dance to be Postponed*, in: C.A.M. HERMANS et. al. (eds.), 304.

³¹ W. Elizabeth OZORAK, *Culture, Gender, Faith: The Social Construction of the Person-God Relationship*, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 13 (4), 2003, 252-253.

³² George A. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1984, 30-45; Paul HOLMER, *The Grammar of Faith*, New York, Harper & Row, 1978.

tion of conversion. He puts it in this way: »conversion is the emergence of a new mode of life occasioned by a self-involving participation in the shared life, language, and paradigm of the believing community«. ³³ Rambo affirms this when he said: »All conversions (even Saul's on the road to Damascus) are mediated through people, institutions, and groups«. ³⁴ Therefore, there is no true conversion apart from community.

The second application of social constructivism to religion is the *culture* itself. Here the main questions for conversion research are the following: Are there variations in conversion narratives among different social groups and contexts? Are similar patterns and themes present that characterize conversion stories no matter what the social context? For example, although Evangelical Christianity provides the same »born-again« discourse, conversion narratives can be quite different in a European from an African context. Many theorists agree equally that conversion narratives are, to some extent, culturally and historically contingent. They are constructed differently according to context. Therefore, understanding why people construct conversion narratives differently, even when they use the same »canonical language«, involves investigating historical, cultural, and social factors. One of the main values of a properly elaborated constructionist theory is that it specifies more clearly just how specific concepts and categories come to be constructed in their specific context. ³⁵ In this sense, early clarification of conversion meshes nicely with contemporary consideration. For example, Coe spoke of »self realization within a social medium« ³⁶ as defining conversion. According to Coe, the process of conversion occurs within a social medium or context. Spilka and his colleagues have shown that »in religious conversion this entails a religious framework within which the transformed self is described, acts, and is recognized by others«. ³⁷

After this short review we can ask some critical questions relating to the relationship between conversion research and social constructionist theory. For example, what can we do with this understanding of reality? Undoubtedly, the social constructionist perspective raises a variety of questions with implications for conversion research as well. For example, how can the conversion researcher engage the idea that conversions occur and create interaction

³³ Brad J. KALLENBERG, Conversion Converted: A Postmodern Formulation of the Doctrine of Conversion, *The Evangelical Quarterly* (1995) 67 (4), 362.

³⁴ Lewis R. RAMBO, *Understanding Religious Community*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993, 1.

³⁵ Steven ENGLER, Two Problems with Constructionism in the Study of Religion, *Revista de Estudos da Religião* (2005) 4, 30.

³⁶ George A. COE, *The Psychology of Religion*, Chicago, University Press, 1916, 152.

³⁷ Bernard SPILKA, Ralf, W. HOOD, Jr., Bruce HUNSBERGER and Richard GORSUCH, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, New York: The Guilford Press, 2003. (third edition), 345.

between people within a religious community rather than in an individual's relationship with God? How can one deal with claims of the authors who primarily understand conversion as a linguistic construction rather than the result of the religious experience of individuals? Should priority be given to religious experience in conversion phenomena or to social process? In what ways might God participate in the conversion process, and what is the role of God in the social construction of conversion? Does the social constructivist approach change the traditional understanding of conversion phenomena? Does its perspective challenge a traditional theological doctrine of conversion? Even though these critical questions are important I will not attempt to answer them all due to the limitation of this article. The aim of this article is more modest. As has already been mentioned, I will try to understand the phenomena of conversion by incorporating a social constructionist perspective and seeing what the benefits of it are for conversion studies.

Social constructionism has had a surge of interest in narrative theories. Therefore attention should also be placed on the narrative perspective of social construction and conversion research.

A Narrative Perspective

The temporal dimension of narrative is certainly the most complex and the hardest to do justice within such a short review. After a period in which positivistic and statistical approaches have been dominant, in the last several decades, we can notice a rise of narrative methods in many social sciences. A number of scholars have already argued that academic paradigms have shifted, allowing for a turn to narrative. Also, in practical theology efforts have been made to study religion from a narrative perspective.³⁸ Bearing in mind that theology and religious experience are communicated primarily within stories, this narrative emphasis can be very useful for practical theology.³⁹ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard correctly recognize that »by using the fundamental human category of story, which is the primary language of human experience, the process of reflection is able to tap into some of the richest sources of insight we have available«. ⁴⁰ Needless to say, that in all religions, narratives have been used to emphasize a point, to force an encounter with truth and meaning. Some scholars argue that individually lived religion as well as a religious

³⁸ Ruud R. GANZEVOORT (ed.), *De praxis als verhaal. Narrativiteit en praktische theologie*, Kampen, Kok, 1998.

³⁹ John SWINTON and Harriet MOWAT, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, London: SCM Press, 2006, 31.

⁴⁰ Paul BALLARD and John PRITCHARD, *Practical Theology in Action*, London, SPCK, 1996, 128.

collective shape can be understood as a narrative structure. The interaction between individually lived religion and the religious traditions can be the subject of the research and thus can be analysed through narrative methods.

As noted previously, constructionists have been particularly engaged in the study of discourse: the ways in which meanings are generated, sustained, or disrupted in relationships. A number of social constructionists theorists have already argued for the narrative turn in our understanding of the self. Kathy Weingarten writes:

In the social constructionist view, the experience of self exists in the ongoing interchange with others ...the self continually creates itself through narratives that include other people who are reciprocally woven into these narratives.⁴¹

Many theorists find it useful to view individual identity in terms of narrative construction. Narrative theory assumes that human beings shape and comprehend their lives by telling stories. Story has a mediating role in human experience; »it is mediation between man and the world, between man and man, between man and himself«.⁴² Therefore, the fundamental premise of the narrative approach is that people make sense of their lives by giving it a narrative form. In fact, narratives organize and give meaning to human experience. Whenever any event occurs in our lives, be it a small event or traumatic event, it does not become an experience to us until language is attached to the event and it is given meaning. This means, therefore, that the connection of language to an event is an automatic process and all perception and experience is structured in a narrative way. Thus, stories or narratives are expressions of the human experience. In other words, an explanation is a form of storytelling. When people tell stories, essentially they bring order and direction to their lives. It is a framework of interpretation that serves to understand and create the meanings we find in our forms of life. Undoubtedly we create meaning and identity through the use of narratives. As we already mentioned, our identities themselves are understood to have a narrative structure.⁴³ Moreover, some of the theorists claim that such a complex construction as human identity – the self in time – can only exist as a narrative construction.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kathy WEINGARTEN, *The Discourses of Intimacy: Adding a Social Constructionist and Feminist View*, *Family Process* (1992) 30, 289.

⁴² Paul RICOEUR, *Life: A story in search of a narrator*, in: M.C. DOESER and J.N. KRAAY (eds.), *Facts and Values: Philosophical Reflections from Western and Non-Western Perspectives*, Dodrecht, Mertinus Nijhoff, 1987/1991, 431. [Reprinted: in: M.J. VALDES (ed.), *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991].

⁴³ Paul RICOEUR, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 152.

⁴⁴ Jens BROCKMEIER and Donal CARBAUGH (eds.), *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001.

Therefore, narrative form can be defined simply as a structure of meanings related to human experience, in which factual or fictional events are seen as parts of a plot that attempt resolution. When we talk about the narrative theory, attention should be placed on the events and time. The narrative mode anchors itself to the specific time and place of the event. People's actions make sense only if they are situated in a context of past actions, and if they are connected to the future ones. Here we can benefit from Hayden White's straightforward description of the distance between a narrative and the events themselves: »The reality of these events does not consist in the fact that they occurred but that, first of all, they were remembered and, second, that they are capable of finding a place in a chronological ordered sequence«. ⁴⁵ In line with this it would be helpful to follow the consideration of Paul Ricoeur concerning the narrative function of the so-called plot. We might describe plot simply as movement toward some end or completion. Ricoeur defines the act of plotting as an integrative process, which provides the dynamic identity of a narrated story. It is a synthesis of multiple events or incidents with the complete and singular story. He argues that a notion of the plot is fruitful because its basic characteristic is intelligibility. Ricoeur defines the plot as the »intelligible unit that holds together circumstances, ends and means, initiatives and unwanted consequence«. ⁴⁶ Thus the plot of narrative »grasp together and integrates into to one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole«. ⁴⁷

In line with Ricoeur, Gergen defines narratives as »forms of intelligibility that furnish accounts of events across time. Individual action[s]... gain their significance from the way in which they are embedded within the narrative«. ⁴⁸ Gergen believes that intelligible narrative generally meets certain criteria: 1) it has an established, valued, endpoint; 2) the events recounted are relevant to and serve the endpoint; 3) the events are temporally ordered; 4) its characteristics have a continuous and coherent identity across time; 5) its events are causally linked and serve as an explanation for the outcome; and 6) it has a beginning and an end. ⁴⁹ Therefore people's lives can be seen as meaningful only when the events of their lives become structured as a unique story. This unique story or central story of one's life is called the personal narrative. In

⁴⁵ Hayden WHITE, *The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality*, in: W.J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *On Narrative*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, 19.

⁴⁶ Paul RICOEUR, *On Interpretation*, in: *From Text to Action*, London, Athlone Press, 1991, 4.

⁴⁷ Paul RICOEUR, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 2, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1985, x.

⁴⁸ J. Kenneth GERGEN, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994, 224.

⁴⁹ *Idem*.

order to make sense of one's life, a personal narrative must be constructed or adopted.

Likewise conversion stories can be understood as intelligible narratives or life stories, a special form of autobiographical narrative. Popp-Baier argues that we can view conversion stories as »self-narratives structured by the plot of the communicative model of conversion«. ⁵⁰ That implies, according to her, »a decisive change in the life of the story's implicit author as a main issue in this kind of story«. ⁵¹ Therefore, the act of conversion is presented as the moment of rupture that marks the end of the old and the beginning of the new. If we examine the ways in which the experience of conversion is described, we see that converts are constantly involved in the redefinition of their autobiography and self-identity in light of new experience. Likewise, recovering addicts' converts also reinterpret the meaning of their past in order to bring it into line with their understanding of the present and their new religious identity.

When converts tell their testimonies, they use these testimonies as explicit models for the proper way to construct and analyse their own past. Sharing testimonies help them make sense of their past and attain control over life. It is a central »technique of the self«⁵², and the principal mode of creating new identity and collective belonging.

The evangelical program for conversion has at its heart a narrative imperative. Rambo notes that in evangelicalism, the reconstruction of one's biography is a central element in the converting process. Biographical reconstruction and the resulting narrative give new meaning to a person's definition of self, identity, relationship, God and meaning of life. ⁵³ Therefore, it is *biographical reconstruction*, or re-narrativization of one's life, where the subject actively reinterprets past experience of self-conceptions from the vantage point of the present in such a way as to change the meaning of the past for the subject. ⁵⁴ More importantly, though, conversion narrative is not only about accounting of the past experience, but refiguring the self in a schema of long-term action. Consequently attention should be placed on the role of language and rhetoric in conversion research.

⁵⁰ Ulrike POPP-BAIER, Conversion as a Social Construction: A Narrative Approach to Conversion Research, in: C.A.M. Hermans, et al., pp. 41-61, 50.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² Ruth MARSHALL, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2009.

⁵³ Lewis R. RAMBO, Theories of Conversion: Understanding and Interpreting Religious Change, *Social Compass* (1999) 46 (3), 265.

⁵⁴ David SNOW and Richard MACHALEK, The Convert as a Social Type, in: R. COLLINS (ed.), *Sociological Theory*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1983, 266.

Narrative Conversion Research

The term conversion may be discussed in relation to a variety of disciplines, including biblical studies, history, theology, anthropology, sociology and psychology of religion. Conversion is a word that is simple to define, but has a broad application. Basically, it means *turning around*, hence *change*. Rather than asking what conversion is, Snow and Machalek suggested that the more constructive question to ask might be »what is it that changes when someone converts?«⁵⁵ Despite differences of opinion over the nature of conversion, there is one underlying assumption upon which most scholars would seem to agree, and that is how conversion involves a radical change in a person's perspective. Snow and Machalek have recognized that: »the notion of radical change remains at the core of all conceptions of conversion, whether theological or social scientific.«⁵⁶ Therefore, almost all theorists believe that a change of a self lies at the heart of the experience. At the beginning of the last century, William James said that in conversion, »a self hitherto divided... becomes unified.«⁵⁷ Conversion for Coe was an intense and abrupt self-realization.⁵⁸ Johnson is of the opinion that in every conversion process there is a crisis. He is convinced that authentic religious conversion is the outcome of crises.⁵⁹ Recent scholars have placed a similar emphasis on self-transformation in their description of conversion. Thumma speaks of »core identity construct,«⁶⁰ Snow and Machalek of a »universe of discourse,«⁶¹ Berger and Luckmann of a »symbolic universe,«⁶² Travisano of an »informing aspect of one's life and biography« or the »pervasive identity,«⁶³ Heirich of a »root reality« or of one's sense of »ultimate grounding.«⁶⁴

⁵⁵ SNOW and MACHALEK, The Convert as a Social Type, in: R. Collins (ed.): *Sociological Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983, 259-289, 265.

⁵⁶ David SNOW and Richard MACHALEK, The sociology of conversion, *Annual Review of Sociology*, (1984) 10, 169. 167-190.

⁵⁷ William JAMES, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004 (1902), 171.

⁵⁸ George A. COE, *The Psychology of Religion*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1916, 152.

⁵⁹ Paul, JOHNSON, *Psychology of Religion*, New York, Abingdon Press, 1959, 117.

⁶⁰ Scott THUMMA, Seeking to be converted: An examination of recent conversion studies and theories, *Pastoral Psychology* (1991) 39, 185-194.

⁶¹ SNOW and MACHALEK, 1983, 265.

⁶² Peter BERGER and Thomas LUCKMANN, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1966.

⁶³ Richard V. TRAVISANO, Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations, in: G P STONE and H A FABERMAN (eds.), *Social Psychology through Symbolic Interaction*, Ginn-Blaisdell, Waltham, Massachusetts, 1970, 600.

⁶⁴ Max HEIRICH, Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories of Religious Conversion, *American Sociological Review* (1977) 83, 653-680.

Current psychological and sociological literature particularly devoted to the phenomenon of conversion has begun shifting away from causes and consequence of conversion and the stages of the conversion process, which have occupied most researchers' attention in the last thirty years,⁶⁵ to the more recent narrative approach. As mentioned earlier, the linguistic narrative perspective is becoming prevalent in contemporary research on conversion, since Snow and Machalek's first attempt to introduce a focus on language to the study of conversion.⁶⁶ With this new »linguistic turn«, social, scientific and practical (empirical) theological conversion research has received new movement that creates a place for the new interdisciplinary approaches. Conversion from this narrative point of view involves new perspectives in conversion research.

The conversion researcher usually confronts a variety of conversion accounts. These various accounts exist because of the linguistic frameworks within which conversion is understood and described. Concentrating on the narrated life, narrative conversion theorists consider conversion stories primarily as speech acts, and analyze their structural/formal, rhetorical features and connection with the wider socio-cultural context, including the specific religious tradition of the convert.⁶⁷ Thus, our principal research interest is discourse analyses and its application for conversion research. Potter and Edwards define discourse as »...talk and texts, studied as social practices«, and they regard it as »...the prime currency of interaction«.⁶⁸ According to Potter and Wetherell discourse analyses »...is concerned with the way people collectively construct versions of the world in the course of their practical interactions, and the way these versions are established as solid, real, and independent of the speaker«.⁶⁹ Discourse research asks the question »how it is done?« or more precisely, in the context of conversion research, the questions are how conversion events are described and how cognitive and emotional states are attributed.

⁶⁵ John LOFLAND and Rodney STARK, *Becoming a World-saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective*, *American Sociological Review* (1965) 30, 862-874; John LOFLAND and Norman SKONOVD, *Conversion Motifs*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (1981) 20 (4), 373-385; David SNOW and Cynthia L PHILIPS, *The Lofland-Stark Conversion Model: A Critical Reassessment*, *Social Problems* (1980) 27, 430-437.

⁶⁶ SNOW and MACHALEK, 1983.

⁶⁷ Hetty ZOCK, *Paradigms in Psychological Conversion Research: Between Social Science and Literally Analysis*, 2006, 55.

⁶⁸ Jonathan POTTER and Derek EDWARDS, *Discursive Social Psychology*, in: Peter W. ROBINSON and Howard GILES (eds.), *The New Handbook of Language and Social Psychology*, Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2001, 104.

⁶⁹ Jonathan POTTER and Margaret WETHERELL, *Social Representations, Discourse Analyses, and Racism*, in: Uwe FLICK (ed.), *The Psychology of the Social*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, 143.

Narrative conversion investigations primarily understand conversion as a linguistic construction of self-performance whose focus is on interiority enacting in various forms processes of »giving account of oneself«. ⁷⁰ Authors such as Snow and Machalek (1984), Staples and Mauss (1987) and Stromberg (1993) focus on the 'lived life' and acknowledge a close connection between the conversion testimony and the biographical experience, and intend to show the socio-psychological functions that conversion testimonies fulfill in the biography. ⁷¹ Staples and Mauss, ⁷² drawing on the work of Snow and Machalek, argue that biographical reorganization is the marker of conversion, which involves a change in one's 'universe of discourse'. It means that a person's communication language (i.e. words, symbolic interaction) undergoes a radical change as a result of the conversion experience in order to make sense of self and the world. ⁷³ Obviously Staples and Mauss take a functionalistic approach to language and argue that conversion narrative is not a reflection of some underlying change in consciousness, but a tool to achieve self-transformation. They view conversion as a process, therefore, this process »is fundamentally one of self-transformation; that self-transformation is achieved primarily through language; and that the convert plays an active role in his or her own self-transformation«. ⁷⁴ Therefore, conversion is a process whereby a new universe of discourse is used to reflexively change the self.

The American anthropologist Peter Stromberg follows Staples and Mauss' approach of conversion. In the book *Language and Self-Transformation*, he starts with an assumption that conversion accounts are not a reliable source of information about past events and experiences, but rather the proper subject of study themselves. Conversion, he proposes, is an ongoing process of identity formation and reality constitution that is intimately reflected in the language and discourse style of the conversion narrative and its »performance« as a form of religious ritual activity in the present. He emphasizes, »it is through the use of language in the conversion narrative that the process of increased commitment and self-transformation take place«. ⁷⁵ Therefore, Stromberg's study looks at the performance of conversion narratives and argues that the performance itself is central to efficacy of the conversion. Because of this, he

⁷⁰ Judith BUTLER, *Giving Account of Oneself*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2005.

⁷¹ Hetty ZOCC, Paradigms in Psychological Conversion Research: between social science and literally analysis, in: Jan N. BREMMER, et. al., *Paradigms, Poetics and Politics of Conversion*, Leuven, Peeters, 2006, 55-56, 41-58.

⁷² Clifford STAPLES and Armand MAUSS, Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow and Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, (1987), 26 (2), 133-147.

⁷³ *Idem*, 135.

⁷⁴ *Idem*, 146.

⁷⁵ Peter G. STROMBERG, *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, xi.

assumes that religious discourse represents ongoing efforts to resolve certain deep emotional conflicts and ambivalences in the converts' lives and consequently to transform themselves. For him, conversion is the process whereby a symbolic language serves as a link between a believer's deep emotional concerns and a larger community. Therefore, Stromberg's main concern is how the symbol system used within a particular tradition can give the convert a sense of self-transformation, and how self-understanding is constructed in the larger society of which converts are a part.⁷⁶

Stromberg attempts to explain these transformative effects of conversion built upon two root distinctions. First, he distinguishes between the *referential* and the *constitutive* functions of language as a component part of human communicative behaviour. He is of the opinion that we must resist the constant temptation in our culture to regard the important and foundational referential aspects of language use, the linkage of common associations to familiar symbols, at the expense of the constitutive function of language, where language use, a mode of activity, actually creates the context of meaning. Therefore, people's choices in language usage always depend upon their relationships as it manifests in a particular context. In other words, the meaning of the communicative behaviour depends on the social context. In a similar vein, James Day argues that »language arises and is meaningful in and because of relationship, and there is no place outside the social realm where it could function«. ⁷⁷ Stromberg argues that when converts share their testimonies they use a type of speech that always comprises both the referential and the constitutive forms of communications.

Second, Stromberg distinguishes between two further subclasses of communicative behaviour relative to conversion narratives: *canonical* and *metaphorical* language. Canonical language, which in Stromberg's method is essentially referential, is »the most certain and unquestionable of meaning«. ⁷⁸ Canonical discourse, which refers to certain religious context of meaning, becomes meaningful in a broader sense by linking canonical language directly with individual experiences.⁷⁹ This means that the conversion narrative is a practice through which converts seek to establish some connection between the language of their particular religious community and their own immediate situations. Stromberg argues that it enables verbal expression of previously inaccessible desires while deepening the commitment to faith. In this sense the conversion narrative constitutes the narrator's self-transformation. Metaphorical language in Stromberg's approach is about unfamiliar word usage

⁷⁶ *Idem*, 4.

⁷⁷ James M. DAY, *Speaking of Belief: Language, Performance, and Narrative in the Psychology of Religion*, *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* (1993), 3 (4), 215.

⁷⁸ STROMBERG, 12.

⁷⁹ Ulrike POPP-BAIER, 57.

undertaken to define the novel or mysterious. In developing the conversion narrative, the *canonical* becomes constitutive (i.e. meaningful); it becomes anchored in the details of the convert's personal drama, and the *metaphorical* comes to be referential, »interpretable«.

Popp-Bair argues that according to this perspective, conversion is not seen as a single occurrence in the life of an individual. Using the social construction framework she argues rather that, »it concerns a gradual procedure in which subject attributes meaning to their experience in a social context«. ⁸⁰ Therefore, the convert's task is to assimilate and to accommodate the familiar language to the new religious language.

When we talk about narrative approach to conversion attention should be also placed on the social context and identity of converts. Ulrike Popp-Baier follows Kenneth Gergen's ⁸¹ relational view of self or identity proposes the description of conversion as »religious communication through the ongoing construction and performance of self-narratives as products of social interchanges – informed, sustained, and restricted by the respective religious group's canonical language«. ⁸²

In this social constructionist framework, she suggests three methodological steps for analysing conversion narratives:

1. *We look at conversion narratives as dependent on a structured discourse. That means that we should examine the respective canonical religious language providing a certain structure and topics for conversion narratives.*

2. *We investigate conversion narratives as rhetoric by considering the use of religious language in these narratives as a means of achieving certain social effects.*

3. *We have to realize that conversion narratives are always constructed in the context of particular social interaction.* ⁸³ The meaning in conversion stories always depends on these processes. Therefore, conversion stories reflect the cultural models of conversion prevalent in a particular faith community. It certainly is the case that the beliefs, values, identity and even behaviour of individuals change when they are converted to a new group. Some theorists call this process a resocialization. From this perspective, the convert internalizes social meanings and canonical language, reinterprets them, and, in turn, responds back to the religious community. According to Wilson, »the convert learns a language and a life-style which become a part of him[her]self as he

⁸⁰ Ulrike POPP-BAIER, 51.

⁸¹ Kenneth J. GERGEN, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1994, 185.

⁸² Ulrike POPP-BAIER, 52.

⁸³ Ulrike POPP-BAIER, 53.

takes on a new definition of his own individuality and personality and of the social collectives in which he participates«. ⁸⁴

Undoubtedly Staples and Mauss, Stromberg and Popp-Baier are right when they claim that self-transformation is possible by new language discourse which allows the convert to interconnect previously conflicting areas of their life. Also, their claim that conversion is a process that happens (at least in part) through the very act of telling one's story is true as well. But despite a basic philosophical agreement with the authors to whom I have previously referred, I would suggest that their approach could be unintentionally reductionistic in theological matters. To put it differently, their approach leaves no room for the spiritual dimension in a conversion process. From a theological point of view it is unacceptable to bracket divine agency in a conversion phenomenon. David Yamane puts this powerfully when he notes that religious experiences lead to biographical reconstruction of one's life, »because they are *epiphanies*«. ⁸⁵ The self-transformation, which results from life-changing conversion experiences, is a narrative accomplishment. ⁸⁶ Language has an important role in the self-transformation process but it is not the only source of transformation in a convert's life.

Conclusion

In this article I tried to bring the social constructivist perspective into dialogue with practical theological conversion research. The narrative approach served as the key concept for theory and method in conversion research. There is one major question to be raised based upon this review: How can we reconcile theological and social constructionists' perspectives in the conversion investigation? Obviously, theological talk of conversion corresponds to true *epiphanies* in conversion phenomena. On the other hand, the social constructionists perspective holds that discursive and social relations mediate talk of conversion. Is it possible to be both a realist and a constructionist in conversion research? This is possible indeed, as far as one affirms that God is an active agent in the conversion process. Using a social construction framework we do not need to reject the claim that God works in conversion nor do we have to question it. In a social constructionist approach we try to bring conversion studies into conversation with other social sciences. The

⁸⁴ Brian WILSON, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1982, 119.

⁸⁵ David YAMANE, Narrative and Religious Experience, *Sociology of Religion* (2000), 61 (2), 185.

⁸⁶ YAMANE, Narrative and Religious Experience, *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2), 2000: 171-189, 186.

interaction between social sciences and theological empirical research creates a place for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of conversion in which all researchers are invited and engaged in new contributions. Thus practical theology might help develop a criterion for evaluating conversion experience and bring an interdisciplinary cooperation to the critiques of conversion. I hope that engaging the social constructionist perspective as a conversational partner may contribute to the complexity of conversion investigation. Only in this way can a fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue contribute to conversion research.

But I must also deny that conversion is only a social construction. Conversion experience transcends social construction, and social construction cannot grasp conversion experience without a theological dialogue in the first place. In a word, the aim of my article is not to give a total explanation by means of social constructionsim alone. My aim is to invite social constructionism as a framework in dialogue with practical theological discourse. Finally, the realisation that to a certain extent conversion is a social construct may help people deal with this construction in a critical and reflective manner, especially in the context of fundamental religious groups. Therefore, the social constructionist perspective can help us to make other choices.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Ian HACKING, *The Social Construction of What?*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, 1999, 58.

Srđan Sremac

*Obraćenje u novu stvarnost: socijalni konstrukcionizam,
praktična teologija i obraćenje*

Sažetak

U radu autor pokušava dovesti u dijalog teološko istraživanje obraćenja s teorijom socijalnog konstrukcionizma. Ovakav interdisciplinarni pristup religijskom obraćenju preusmjerava pozornost s individualnog unutrašnjeg (religijskog) iskustva obraćenika na kontekstualno razumijevanje fenomena obraćenja. Autor naglašava da narativno-socijalno-konstrukcionistička perspektiva omogućuje cjelovitiju interpretaciju procesa obraćenja. Nadalje, autor naglašava da socijalno-konstrukcionistički pristup u istraživanjima obraćenja ima svoju perspektivu u području praktične (empirijske) teologije kao interdisciplinarne discipline. Koristeći se postavkama socijalne konstrukcije, autor smatra da ne treba odbacivati stanovište da Bog djeluje u obraćenju, niti da to treba dovoditi u pitanje. Socijalno konstrukcionističkim pristupom ovdje se pokušava u istraživanju obraćenja uspostaviti dijalog s ostalim društvenim znanostima. Interakcija između društvenih znanosti i teoloških empirijskih istraživanja otvara prostor za holističko shvaćanje fenomena obraćenja u kojem su svi istraživači dobrodošli da daju svoj doprinos. Na kraju treba istaknuti da obraćenje nije puka socijalna konstrukcija. Iskustvo obraćenja nadilazi socijalnu konstrukciju. Socijalna konstrukcija ne može pojmiti iskustvo obraćenja bez dijaloga, na prvom mjestu s teologijom. Jednom riječju, cilj ovog rada nije pružiti cjelovito objašnjenje, koristeći isključivo socijalni konstrukcionizam nego pozvati djelokrug socijalnog konstrukcionizma u dijalog s diskursom praktične teologije.

Ključne riječi: *socijalni konstrukcionizam, naracija, praktična-empirijska teologija, obraćenje, kontekst, jezik*

Preobrazba mentaliteta

Preobrazbe mentaliteta toliko su duboke da stojimo pred društvom koje je u prekidu sa svojim prošlim običajima, shvaćanjima i standardima. I kako da se kršćani postave pred tako dubokim promjenama? Valadier¹ sumnja da se sve smije svesti samo na uočavanje fragmentacija i prekida danas. U njihovoj pozadini stoje velika očekivanja zadovoljavajućih globalnih odgovora. O tome primjer pružaju sekte koje nude lake globalne odgovore koji, koliko god bili stupidni, ostaju za mnoge privlačni. Nevjerojatno je s kolikom naivnošću mnogi prihvaćaju takve jeftine gotove odgovore. S druge strane, naši suvremenici traže danas nešto više i drukčije od velikih intelektualnih sinteza. Oni očekuju praktičnu mudrost koja bi im pomogla u radu, odmoru, odnosima s drugima i u osobnoj psiho-fizičkoj ravnoteži. To traženje tumači privlačnost što je imaju orijentalne mudrosti koje ne nude dogme, nego načine boljeg življenja. No može li to ponuditi i kršćanstvo? Ne postoji li nesporazum oko toga što se danas očekuje od religije: gotovo »terapeutsku« mudrost sposobnu da pruži ravnotežu, sreću i unutarnji sklad ili što drugo? U prošlim društvima došlo je do mješavine raznih kulturnih tradicija i kršćanstva. No kad su te tradicije odumrle, za mnoge kršćanstvo postoji samo kao niz rituala i dogmi. Valadier ne vidi zašto kršćanstvo ne bi bilo danas sposobno pružiti na kreativan način mnogo više od toga. Uostalom, vjera u Boga koja se ne bi očitovala u konkretnim gestama bila bi potpuno aspraktna. Nekad je postojao mnogo razvijeniji aspekt celebracije života i društvenih odnosa koji smo izgubili udaljavanjem od njega kad smo naime zadržali samo kostur moralne rigidnosti zaboravljajući da je nekad naizgled prisilno okruženje sadržavalo i vrlo radostan, spontan i solidaran život.

Iz članka: Ivan Supičić, Okrenuti stranicu, *Nova prisutnost, časopis za intelektualna i duhovna pitanja*, II/1, 2004, 18-19.

¹ Franc. isusovac Paul Valadier, prof. na Filozofskom fakultetu Centra Sèvres u Parizu, autor mnogobrojnih knjiga o kršćanstvu, među kojima su *Nietzsche i kritika kršćanstva* (1974), *Crkva pod optužbom* (1989) i *Kršćanstvo budućnosti* (1999).