2016

The Lived Experience of Conversion in the Broader Context of Experience of Faith Formation: A Phenomenological Study of Third- and Greater-generation Seventh-day Adventist Young Adults

Edyta Jankiewicz
Andrews University, edyta@andrews.edu

ABSTRACT

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION IN THE BROADER CONTEXT OF
EXPERIENCE OF FAITH FORMATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
OF THIRD- AND GREATER-GENERATION SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST YOUNG ADULTS

by

Edyta Jankiewicz

Chair: Tevni Grajales

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION IN THE BROADER CONTEXT
OF EXPERIENCE OF FAITH FORMATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
STUDY OF THIRD-AND GREATER-GENERATION SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST YOUNG ADULTS

Name of researcher: Edyta Jankiewicz

Name and degree of faculty chair: Tevni Grajales, Ph.D.

Date completed: March 2016

Problem

While the New Testament Scriptures describe the characteristics of first-

generation conversion, they do not describe how the children of believers come to

Christian faith. Moreover, while there has been considerable empirical research on

conversion, very little of it addresses conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith.

As a result, many second- and greater-generation Christians may feel that the term

"conversion" does not describe their spiritual experiences. The purpose of this study was

to describe the lived experience of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith from childhood.

Method

This study adopted a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. The sample for this study included Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) young adults who had grown up within an SDA family and faith context, who were at least third-generation SDA, and who were currently members of SDA faith communities. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with fourteen participants, who were asked to describe both their formational faith experiences as well as their conversion experiences. A hermeneutical approach to analysis was then implemented; this involved weaving codes and categories together with ideas generated through analytic memo writing, and then organizing them into recurring themes.

Results

Across the 14 interviews, the experiences of both *faith formation* and *conversion* were identified. From the pattern of overlapping themes that emerged from data analysis, the experience of faith formation can be described as a dynamic process that integrates the intellectual, affective and behavioral domains of life that is facilitated by community and that necessitates personal choice. Within this broader context of experience of faith formation, the participants in this study experienced conversion, which they described as a gradual, ongoing process, facilitated by multiple significant moments or events that occurred across the course of their lives. This process involved movement toward integration of childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences in both the

intellectual and affective domains, and was accompanied by behavioral choices

that resulted in greater congruence between the intellectual, affective and

behavioral domains of faith.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that third- and greater-generation believers

experience conversion as a gradual process of change in the intellectual, affective and

behavioral domains that in many ways parallels the experiences of first-generation

believers; however, whilst for first-generation Christians these are *new* experiences, those

who have grown up within the context of faith experience conversion as an integration of

formational and later experiences, frequently resulting in a less dramatic experience.

These findings provide second- and greater-generation believers with a framework for

understanding their spiritual experiences, as well as with a language for articulating a

conversion narrative, both of which may facilitate a more authentic faith.

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION IN THE BROADER CONTEXT OF
EXPERIENCE OF FAITH FORMATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
OF THIRD- AND GREATER-GENERATION SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST YOUNG ADULTS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Edyta Jankiewicz

March 2016

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF CONVERSION IN THE BROADER CONTEXT OF
EXPERIENCE OF FAITH FORMATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
OF THIRD- AND GREATER-GENERATION SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST YOUNG ADULTS

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by

Edyta Jankiewicz

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

_____   _____
Faculty Advisor,   Director of Ph.D. (Rel. Ed) Program
Tevni Grajales   John Matthews
Professor of Research Methodology

_____   _____
Kathleen Beagles   Dean, SDA Theological Seminary
Associate Professor of   Jiri Moskala
Religious Education

_____
Cheryl Doss
Adjunct Professor of
Religious Education

_____   _____
James Estep   Date approved
Professor of Religious Education
Lincoln Christian University

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to my husband, Darius. There are no words to adequately thank him for his unfailing belief in my ability to complete this task and for his willingness to support and encourage my work in so many ways. Without his unconditional love and faith in me, this research would never have been undertaken, let alone completed. And thank you also to my daughters, Caitlin and Ashley, for their understanding of my preoccupation and distractedness. I hope that reading the stories embedded in this research may one day facilitate understanding of their faith journeys.

Finally, I give thanks to God, who daily gave me life and strength to continue on this journey toward a clearer understanding of His grace.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Foreword

The Scriptures are replete with instructions for adults to nurture the faith of

children (Deut. 6:5; Isa. 38:19; Prov. 22:6). The Scriptures do not, however, suggest that

faith is a natural outgrowth of parental nurture; rather, faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8-

10), a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9). Furthermore, the Scriptures imply that even those

individuals nurtured in faith must be "born from above," (John 3: 3,8), an experience that

has come to be equated with conversion. The New Testament describes conversion in the

lives of first-generation Christians as a "definite and discernible turning" from a life

without Christ to a life committed to Him (Knott, 1982). It does not, however, describe

how those who have been nurtured in Christian faith experience conversion.

The problem of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith has been

described as the tension between formation and transformation (Haughton, 1978). The

goal of formation is to encourage an environment that facilitates optimal spiritual

development; however, "no amount of careful formation" can produce transformation

(Haughton, p. 25), the goal of which is "a total personal revolution" (Haughton, p. 23).

In fact, Crysdale (1990) suggests that "good formation may be an obstacle to

transformation," as it may prevent recognizing one's need for conversion (p. 32). This

tension is reflected in the debate about faith development theory among Christian educators. James Fowler's (1981) structural-developmental model of faith has provided the dominant theoretical framework for faith development research (Fowler, 2004; Santrock, 1999); however, Christian educators have questioned whether the reality that Fowler termed "faith" is compatible with a Christian understanding of faith. For Fowler, faith is a universal developmental structure, "a generic human phenomenon" that is shaped by one's environment (Fowler, 1981, pp. 5, 33), whereas the Christian understanding is that faith is a divine gift.

This tension is also reflected in the way different evangelical denominations have approached children's faith formation. In a study of evangelical Protestant children's ministry curricula, Scottie May concluded that most denominations adopt one of two approaches to children's ministry: either a "nurture" approach, or a "conversion" approach (May, 1990). Historically, the contradistinction between these two approaches developed within the context of nineteenth century New England Calvinism (Moran, 1983). Calvinists, proponents of the conversion approach, insisted that all church members, including those who had grown up in a Christian family, should be able to recount a distinctive conversion experience (Mullin, 2002). Reacting to this approach, New England pastor and theologian Horace Bushnell suggested that children could be nurtured in faith, and thus "grow up Christian, and never know [themselves] as being otherwise" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 65).

Today, most Christian educators tend to favor a nurture approach to children's faith formation (Estep, 2002). Advocates of this approach "may acknowledge gradual

conversion experiences, but a 'turning point' is not expected" (May, 1993, p. 44). The conversion approach, however, continues to be part of contemporary educational practice in some denominations, particularly within the Southern Baptist Convention (Estep, 2002). Faith communities that adhere to a conversion approach emphasize the sin and "lostness" of the child, and thus the need for a conversion experience, a "definite, memorable point in time when an intentional choice is made" (May, 1993, p. 41). Although these two approaches have been described "as if on a continuum with conversion on one end and nurture on the other," (May, 1993, p. 35), the debate regarding childhood faith formation has tended to be "polarized between the conversionists and the nurturists" (Estep, 2002, p. 186). While he cautions against such polarization, Estep highlights the differences between the extremes in the nurture and conversion perspectives, as outlined in Table 1.

More recently, Kevin Lawson (2006) proposed a "combined approach" to children's faith formation (p. 115), suggesting that both the conversion and nurture approaches have strengths that can be utilized and weaknesses that need to be addressed. According to Lawson, the conversion approach tends to pressure children to respond to emotional invitations, often resulting in responses based on a desire to please adults, rather than the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In contrast, the nurture approach may assume that children come to an understanding of their need for grace through participating in the life of the church and the Christian family, when, in fact, they may just be going through the motions out of a desire to please the adults in their lives, rather than a genuine understanding of personal sin and their need of forgiveness. The

combined approach advocated by Lawson appears to address the weaknesses, while

utilizing the strengths, of both the conversion and nurture approaches. It begins with

nurture that encourages children to love and serve God, and then, as children grow older

and reach the "age of accountability" or age of "discernment and responsibility,"

provides opportunities for them to recognize their personal sin and need for grace (p.118-

19).

Table 1

Differences Between Conversionist and Nurturist Approaches

Conversion	Nurture
Evangelism	Education
Point in time	Process
Personal sin	Original sin
Non-sacramental	Sacramental
Believer's baptism	Infant baptism
Supernatural	Natural
Crisis Experience	Developmental
Decision/Choice	Learned behavior
Theological basis	Psychological basis

Adapted from Estep, 2002, Childhood transformation: Toward an educational theology of childhood conversion and spiritual formation. p. 199.

Background of the Problem

Although there has been considerable empirical research on conversion, very little

of it addresses conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith. There are, however, two

studies that have some relevance to the present study. The first, a seminal study of the spiritual experiences of those nurtured in faith (May, 1993), compared qualitative data gathered from adults who had come to faith in Christ as children through either the nurture approach or the conversion approach. May concluded that, regardless of which approach they experienced, all subjects but one made similar declarations of personal faith; however, subjects who experienced the conversion approach tended to speak "more negatively" of their current Christian experience than did those who experienced the nurture approach. Furthermore, only those subjects who had experienced the conversion approach had undergone personal crises or rebellion, and only those subjects who had experienced the conversion approach used words such as "fear, guilt and scared" to describe their childhood experiences (p. 148).

More recently, in a phenomenological study that examined the conversion experiences of Baptist children, Sanders (2009) discovered that all the children interviewed had experienced conversion by eight years of age. This study appears to indicate that children growing up within a contemporary conversionist context experience conversion as a gradual process at a young age, which is born out of a desire to be in relationship with God and the community of faith, rather than out of a sense of personal sinfulness and the need for forgiveness. Furthermore, in contrast to the classic conversionist approach of nineteenth century Calvinism, none of the churches within this study had an overt strategy for evangelizing young children, and children's exclusion from the body of Christ prior to conversion was not overly emphasized.

Having reviewed the literature, I was unable to locate any empirical studies that focused on the question of *how* adults who were nurtured in faith as children experience conversion.

Statement of the Problem

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) denomination does not have a clearly articulated position on the question of how children come to faith; however, from Table 1 it is evident that our theology and practice of children's ministry does not fit neatly into either a conversion or nurture perspective. The SDA emphasis on nurture has been guided primarily by Scripture as well as by the writings of Ellen White. Furthermore, because the Scriptures do not address the subject of child conversion, SDA practice has tended to be influenced by Ellen White, who asserted that it was not "necessary to know the exact time when [children] are converted" (White, 1898/2005, p. 515). In contrast to an extreme nurturist position, however, SDA's reject a purely Augustinian notion of original sin, and thus practice non-sacramental infant dedication and believer's baptism. Furthermore, the SDA attitude toward the last four areas of divergence (i.e., supernatural vs. natural, crisis vs. developmental, decision vs. learned behavior, and theological vs. psychological basis) is more reflective of a both/and rather than an either/or position.

Thus, the SDA understanding and praxis of children's faith formation appears to be a synthesis of the nurture and conversion approaches. This appears to be consistent with the Scriptures, which instruct parents and faith communities to nurture the faith of children (Deut 6: 5; Prov 22: 6), and yet imply that even those individuals nurtured in faith must be converted or "born from above" (John 3: 3,8). Because the Scriptures do

not describe *how* the children of believers come to Christian faith, many second- and greater-generation Christians "feel distant or alienated from their own experience because it does not fit the pattern of what they believe a conversion should look or feel like. This leads them to wonder whether their experience is legitimate" (Smith, 2010, p. 3).

My interest in conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith is personal. As a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, I was nurtured in faith from my earliest years, was baptized as a young teen, and have identified as a Seventh-day Adventist all my life; however, as I never experienced a "distinctive and discernible turning away from sin and lostness" toward "righteousness and redemption" (Knott, 1982), I used to wonder if my experiences constituted being "born again." Although I gradually came to accept that my spiritual journey was not like the many conversion stories that I had read about, I often wished I had a more dramatic testimony to share. And although my faith continued to change and grow through my early adult years, I was never sure that my experiences could be defined as "conversion."

This question of conversion in the context of nurture emerged again in my thinking after I became a mother and committed myself to sharing faith with my children. Regularly, I saw evidence of the Spirit's working in my daughters' young lives and marveled at their beautiful, uncomplicated faith. For example, at an outdoor baptism in Fiji, my five-year old daughter responded to a call for baptism by running across the grass from where she was playing with friends and standing, alone, by the presiding pastor. Following this commitment, she regularly asked when she could be baptized. At age seven, while sitting on the swings in our lush Fijian garden, she instructed her

younger sister on "how to invite Jesus into her heart." This was a significant experience in my younger daughter's life, one that she still occasionally recalls as the moment she accepted Jesus. To me, these and many other experiences were signs of God's grace in their young lives, and I was filled with joy to see their budding faith.

There was, however, one experience that left me with some unanswered questions. As a homeschooling mother living in a developing country, I frequently reviewed online resources offered to Christian homeschoolers. On one occasion, I encountered an article that claimed to empower parents to "feel confident in leading their children to Christ." Given my interest in and commitment to nurturing my children's faith, I downloaded and read the article; however, rather than feeling empowered, I felt disquieted. The article emphasized the importance of helping children understand their sinfulness and need for grace, and instructed parents to pray "the sinner's prayer" with their children, which would enable them to experience a discernible moment of "being saved" or "being born again." Although I knew that an SDA understanding of children's faith formation did not emphasize the importance of a "discernible moment" of turning away from sin toward God, I wondered if maybe I had omitted something important in my children's faith formation. My children had been part of God's family from birth, and despite their immature understanding of sin and repentance, I saw evidence of their growing love for Jesus and desire to follow Him. But how did their experience of gradual growth in faith fit with Jesus' teaching on "birth from above"?

As part of my studies for the PhD in Religious Education, I had the opportunity to explore this question of spiritual nurture and conversion in several term papers. The first

was a study on the theology of children and childhood, and the second, a study on the concept of Christian nurture in the writings of Horace Bushnell. Ultimately, my husband and I collaborated on these papers, and they were published (See Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2011 and 2013). I also wrote a term paper comparing the writings of Horace Bushnell and Ellen White on the subject of Christian nurture. Through this study, I understood that while Ellen White emphasized the need for spiritual nurture, she also believed that even those individuals who had grown up with faith needed to experience conversion. I was, however, still left with an important, unanswered question: if children grow up with faith, with the security of belonging to the family of God, *how* are they to experience conversion?

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand *how* SDA young adults who have grown up within SDA homes and faith communities experience conversion.

General Methodology

This study will utilize a phenomenological approach to qualitative research, which best lends itself to understanding individuals' lived experiences. Phenomenology attempts to understand *how* individuals experience a certain concept or phenomenon. It is an attempt to describe the meaning that the individuals ascribe to the lived experience, in order to "grasp the very nature" or essence of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177).

Assumptions

My philosophical world-view is Judeo-Christian. As a result, my assumption is that the experience of "birth from above" is possible in the lives of those who have grown up within a faith-based context. Furthermore, my assumption is that the Holy Spirit works in individuals' lives, even when they are unaware of His presence and work. I am also assuming that the participants in this study articulated their experiences honestly. My world-view and these assumptions have influenced the way in which I approached this research project.

General Research Question

The primary question that this research seeks to address is: How do SDA young adults who have grown up within SDA families and faith communities experience conversion?

Theological/Theoretical Framework

A theological/theoretical framework will be used to discuss the findings of this study. The theological presupposition implicit in developing the research question for this study was the New Testament teaching that conversion or "birth from above" is an essential part of Christian experience, even in the lives of those who have grown up in the context of a forming faith. Furthermore, a theological framework will also be used to discuss the findings of this study. The two theologies that are pertinent to this study are, first, a theology of Christian faith formation and second, a theology of Christian conversion. These are outlined in chapter 2.

As this was an exploratory study of a phenomenon that had not been completely conceptualized in prior research, a theoretical framework was not used to guide the research design; however, a theoretical framework will be used for discussing the findings of this study. Three theories were chosen for this purpose: the model of Christian faith formation proposed by Jonathan Kim (2010), which provides a framework for understanding holistic faith formation; a model of Christian teaching proposed by William R. Yount (2010); and the differentiated faith model proposed by Balswick, King and Reimer (2005), which provides a framework for understanding conversion as a supernatural experience that occurs within the context of psychosocial development. A brief overview of these models is provided in chapter two.

Potential Significance

This study will provide data that may help third- and greater-generation SDA's understand and articulate their conversion experiences, as well as help SDA pastors, religious educators and parents understand and support the process of conversion in the lives of those growing up in the context of faith. Furthermore, this study has the potential to provide data that will motivate further study of the SDA approach to faith formation in the lives of third- and greater-generation believers.

Limitations and Delimitation of the Study

Limitations

The first limitation of this study relates to the fact that conversion and growth in faith are the result of divine initiative, an aspect of their experience of which participants may not have been aware, and thus may not have appeared in their narratives.

The second limitation of this study relates to the subjectivity of the participants. This research included childhood and adolescent experiences, as remembered by young adults. Participants' understandings of faith, as well as their retrieved memories of childhood faith, was the starting point for this study; thus, I have accepted the memories of participants as their lived realities.

The third limitation of this study relates to the subjectivity of the researcher. As a fourth-generation SDA Christian, I recognize that my beliefs, experiences and values may have influenced my ability to be objective, and thus may have shaped both the narratives and my interpretations; however, I believe that the disadvantages of my subjectivity are outweighed by the advantages that my experiences bring to this research project, particularly with regard to the epistemological assumptions of qualitative research, namely, the need for the qualitative researcher to minimize the "distance" between him/herself and those being studied (Guba and Lincoln, 1988, p. 94).

Delimitations

To reduce variability while simultaneously encouraging descriptions from individual participant's unique perspectives, this study was delimited to Caucasian SDA young adults aged between twenty five and forty years of age who grew up within an

12

SDA family and faith context, who were at least third-generation SDA, and who have continued to be members of SDA faith communities.

Definition of Terms

Seventh-day Adventist (SDA): The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Protestant denomination in the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition.

Domain: The New Oxford American Dictionary defines the term domain as "a specified sphere of activity or knowledge." In this dissertation, the terms "domain" and "sphere" are used interchangeably.

Intellectual Domain: Reflects the cognitive or rational sphere of life and in this dissertation denotes knowledge of God.

Affective Domain: Reflects the emotional sphere of life and in this dissertation denotes experience of God.

Behavioral Domain: Reflects the behavioral sphere of life and in this dissertation denotes the actions that result from knowledge and experience of God.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2 outlines a theological and theoretical framework, as well as overviews the literature that addresses research on conversion. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative methodology used to collect and analyze the data for this study. Chapter 4 describes the findings that emerged from the process of data analysis. Chapter 5 provides a summary, a discussion of findings, as well as final reflections.

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theological/theoretical framework for an SDA understanding of, first, Christian faith formation and second, conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith. As this was an exploratory study of a phenomenon that had not been completely conceptualized in prior research, a theoretical framework was not used to guide the research design; however, a theological/theoretical framework was needed for understanding the results of this study. To provide a framework for understanding Christian faith formation, the following were examined: faith formation in Scripture; a brief overview of theologians' understandings of faith formation in Christian history; and a social science understanding of faith formation, seen through the lens of the theories proposed by Jonathan Kim (2010), William R. Yount (2010), and Balswick, King and Reimer (2005). To provide a framework for understanding conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith, the following were outlined: a biblical understanding of conversion; a brief overview of the theology of conversion in Christian history; and a social science understanding of conversion, based on research on conversion.

Christian Faith Formation

The first purpose of this section was to examine theological perspectives on

Christian faith formation. Accordingly, conceptions of faith formation in Scripture and

Christian history were examined, and a SDA understanding of faith formation was

outlined. The second purpose of this section was to discuss theoretical perspectives on

Christian faith formation. The theories proposed by Jonathan Kim (2010), William R.

Yount (2010), and Balswick, King, and Reimer (2005) were considered most relevant to

the current study.

Theological Perspectives on Christian Faith Formation

Faith Formation in Scripture

Faith formation in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is replete with the theme of adult responsibility to guide and

nurture children's faith. In Genesis, God asserts that He has chosen Abraham, "so that he

will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing

what is right and just" (Gen. 18: 19). This theme is repeated throughout the Old

Testament. In the ordinary tasks of "sit[ting] at home" and "walk[ing] along the road,"

parents are to teach their children to love God (Deut. 6:5). During annual feasts and

when encountering sacred monuments, parents are to tell their children of God's mighty

acts of kindness for His people (Exod. 12: 26, 27; Exod. 13:8; Lev. 23: 43; Joshua 4:23).

Over and over, adults are reminded to "tell their children about [God's] faithfulness"

(Isaiah 38:19) and "the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord" (Psalm 78:4); and to teach

children in "the way [they] should go" (Proverbs 22: 6), so that they may know what is

"right and just and fair" (Proverbs 2: 9). Furthermore, in addition to responsibility for

their own children, the Old Testament also instructs adults to care for "the fatherless" or

"orphan" children (Exodus 22: 22-24; Deut. 14: 28-29). This "human obligation" is

grounded in God's promise to execute justice and mercy to the most vulnerable members

of society (Brueggemann, 2008, p. 399; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2011; Deut. 10:17-

18; Hosea 14:3; Psalm 10: 14, 17-18; 68: 5-6; 146: 9).

Central to an Old Testament understanding of nurture in 'the way of the Lord' is

the divine command, given to the children of Israel through Moses, known as the *Shema*:

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with
> all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These
> commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on
> your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along
> the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your
> hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your
> houses and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

This passage outlines several themes that are foundational to an Old Testament

philosophy of children's faith formation; first, the foundation for faith is knowledge of

"the nature of God through what He had done and what He required in the law" (Gower

and Wight, 1987, p. 79); second, faith is not intended to be a "separate entity from the

rest of life," but rather, is to be "interwoven" with the ordinary tasks of everyday life

(Burkhart, 2013, p. 38); third, parents are to teach their children "diligently," which

requires "seizing every teachable moment . . . over and over again" (p. 41); and fourth,

teaching children the faith means helping them to "love God with their whole being –

'their heart, their soul, and their might'" (p. 39), which entails an intellectual knowledge

of God, a relationship with God, and obedience to God (p. 39-45).

Faith formation in the New Testament

This last theme is repeated in the New Testament when Jesus states that "the first and greatest commandment" is summed up in the words, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37-38). Furthermore, the admonitions of the Old Testament to guide and teach children in the way of the Lord are also repeated when fathers are instructed to "bring [their children] up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The educational process prescribed in this passage, however, has "a specifically Christian character" (Gundry-Volf, 2001, p. 57), and implies that parents are to teach their children the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to help them "shape their lives in accordance with it" (Lincoln, 1990, p. 408).

Faith Formation in Christian History

Throughout Christian history, children's faith formation was not considered worthy of serious theological consideration. In fact, reflection on children and their faith formation was often considered "beneath" the work of theologians, and thus relegated "as a fitting area of inquiry" only for those directly involved in the education of children (Bunge, 2004, p. 93; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2011). There have, however, been notable exceptions, i.e., theologians whose perspectives on children's faith formation have contributed valuable insights on the spiritual nurture of children. Although it is beyond the scope of this brief overview to adequately outline the thoughts of each of these theologians, I will attempt to provide a brief summary of key themes that have important implications for a Christian understanding of children's faith formation.

Faith formation in the Post-Apostolic Church

John Chrysostom (349-407), a bishop in the Eastern Church, provided a "virtually unique contribution" to a Christian understanding of children's faith formation (Guroian, 2001, p. 63). Chrysostom asserted that the task of Christian parents was a sacred responsibility, which he likened to the work of artists. He wrote,

> To each of you fathers and mothers, I say, just as we see artists fashioning their paintings and statues with great precision, so we must care for these wondrous statues of ours. Painters when they have set the canvas on the easel paint on it day by day to accomplish their purpose. Sculptors, too, working in marble, proceed in a similar manner; they remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking. Even so must you proceed. Like the creators of statues so you give all your leisure to fashioning these wondrous statues for God (Chrysostom, c. 399/1967, p. 96).

As artists work, "day by day to accomplish their purpose," so parents have the task of "fashioning" their children's characters, the goal of which is the restoration of the image of God in their children. Chrysostom wrote,

> Let us bring them [our children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Great will be the reward in store for us, for if artists who make statues and paint portraits of kings are held in high esteem, will not God bless ten thousand times more those who reveal and beautify His royal image (for man is the image of God)? When we teach our children to be good, to be gentle, to love their fellow men, to regard this present age as nothing, we instill virtue in their souls, and reveal the image of God within them (Chrysostom, c. 400/1986, p. 71).

Chrysostom understood that sin had weakened the image of God in humanity; however, he believed that, through the initiative of God in Jesus Christ, the image of God could be healed and restored through the interaction of both "grace and human striving" (Guroian, 2001, p. 68). Parents, he believed, could participate in this "synergy of human and divine wills," and help heal and restore the image of God in their children. Although Chrysostom did not suggest that God could not use other means to save the children of

unfaithful parents, he appears to have implied that faithful parents could play a "salvific" role in the lives of their children (p. 69).

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a contemporary of Chrysostom's, did not have strong opinions on the faith formation of children; however, his views on infants and original sin became a watershed for the Christian understanding of the nature of children (McGrath, 2007, p. 18-19), and thus must be mentioned. Whereas the patristic writers of the early second century appear to have looked to Jesus' teachings for their understanding of children, thus highlighting their innocence (Estep, 2008), Augustine firmly rejected any form of innate innocence of newborn human beings and insisted that "the sin of Adam was the sin of the whole human race" (Neve, 1946, p. 141). Consequently, although they were physically incapable of doing harm, infants were sinful from birth. Not only did infants inherit sinful tendencies; they also carried personal moral guilt for Adam's transgression, i.e., original sin, and thus could not be considered innocent. Accordingly, baptism was necessary to remove the guilt of sin and to confirm the infant's status as part of God's family i.e., the church (Augustine, c. 400/1953; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2011).

Faith formation in the Medieval Church

Augustine's teachings on original sin and infant baptism "formed and informed, transformed and deformed" attitudes towards children's faith formation (Stortz, 2001, p. 79). By the fifth century, infant baptism was widely practiced; and by the eleventh century, the Medieval Church not only emphasized the need for infant baptism, but also, "preying on parental fears of their children's eternal damnation, had introduced baptismal

regulations, including penance and monetary fines for infractions" (Jankiewicz and

Jankiewicz, 2011, p. 221; Orme, 2001). Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1224-

1274), however, attempted a more "middle-of-the-road position" on the doctrine of

original sin (Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2011, p. 222). Furthermore, while he did not

have strong views on children's faith formation, his thought set a "historical precedent"

for a developmental understanding of children, and thus must be mentioned (Traina, 2001,

p. 129).

Aquinas attempted to harmonize Augustine's doctrine of original sin with a more

optimistic, Aristotelian understanding of children. Thus, while Aquinas accepted the

official Augustinian position of original sin, he viewed children as having "potential for

spiritual growth, with the aid of grace" (Chambliss, 1987; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz,

2011; Traina, 2001, p. 106). Accordingly, Aquinas understood human life to develop in a

series of stages across the life span; childhood as a unique developmental stage within the

life span; and children as "still growing into [their] humanity" (Traina, 2001, p. 130).

Thus, Aquinas' "legacy" was that he provided a "theological justification" for the

developmental understanding of children and childhood that became normative many

centuries later (p. 129).

The Protestant reformers' conceptions of
faith formation

Unlike Aquinas, the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century rejected

Aristotelian influences upon Christian theology and attempted a return to a more

Augustinian understanding of childhood (Strauss, 1978). For example, John Calvin (1509-1564) wrote,

> Even infants bear their condemnation with them from their mother's womb; for, though they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their own iniquity, they have the seed enclosed within themselves. Indeed, their whole nature is a seed of sin; thus it cannot be but hateful and abominable to God (Calvin, 1536/1960, p. 1311).

While Calvin occasionally spoke positively of children, more frequently he portrayed God as "wondrously angry toward them" (Calvin, 1536/1960, p. 557).

Similarly, Martin Luther (1483-1546) also believed that infants were evil from birth and affected by "irreversible egoism" (Strauss, 1978, p. 33). Accordingly, he supported the practice of infant baptism on the grounds that children were born infected with original sin, and thus needed "the grace of this sacrament as urgently as other human beings" (Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2011, p. 223; Trigg, 1994). In practice, however, Luther viewed children as "tractable, open to suggestion and receptive to mollifying influence" (Strauss, 1978, p. 34). Accordingly, he emphasized the need for parents to implant "religious and moral impulses" in their children (35), ultimately resulting in Luther's unique perspective on children's faith formation (Strohl, 2001).

While the church viewed the vocation of priests and monks as a "religiously superior or more spiritual" occupation other work, Luther emphasized the priesthood of all believers (Luther, 1520, p. 399), resulting in his view that the work of parents was "an equally significant exercise of that priesthood" (Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2011, p. 224; Lazareth, 1960). Consequently, Luther emphasized the importance of parental nurture of children's faith, which he believed was part of Christian discipleship, for in contributing to their children's faith formation, parents were serving as "apostle and bishop" to their

children. He wrote, "There is no greater or nobler authority on earth than that of parents over their children, for this authority is both spiritual and temporal" (Luther, 1522, p. 46). "Indeed," he concluded, "for what purpose do we older folks exist, other than to care for, instruct, and bring up the young" (Luther, 1524, p. 464).

Another unique perspective on Christian nurture came from Anabaptist reformer Menno Simons (1496-1561), whose thought on children developed within the context of debate over infant baptism. Simons asserted that infant baptism gave parents a false sense of assurance regarding their children's salvation, resulting in their being "raised without the fear of God," and thus living "without faith and new birth, without Spirit, Word and Christ" (Simons, c. 1540c, p. 570). Instead, he asserted that God's grace covered all children, regardless of their baptismal status, and that baptism was a voluntary commitment that could only be made once a certain level of understanding and maturity had been attained. He wrote,

> Little ones must wait according to God's Word until they can understand the holy Gospel of grace and sincerely confess it; and then, and then only it is time, no matter how young or old, for them to receive Christian baptism . . . If they die before coming to years of discretion, that is, in childhood, before they have come to years of understanding and before they have faith, then they die under the promise of God, and that by no other means than the generous promise of grace given through Christ Jesus. And if they come to years of discretion and have faith, then they should be baptized. But if they do not accept or believe the Word when they shall have arrived at the years of discretion, no matter whether they are baptized or not, they will be damned, as Christ Himself teaches (Simons, c. 1540a, p. 241).

Although Simons acknowledged that children were born with a tendency to sin, "inherited at birth by all descendants and children of corrupt, sinful Adam," a tendency that "is not inaptly called original sin" (Simons, c. 1540c, p. 563), he appeared to have

made a distinction "between a *nature* predisposed toward sin and actual *sinning*, disallowing the former to obliterate childhood innocence" (italics in text) (Miller, 2001, p. 201). Accordingly, he asserted that although children inherited original sin, they were innocent "as long as they live[d] in their innocence," and "through the merits, death, and blood of Christ, in grace," they were "partakers of the promise" (Simons, c.1540d, p. 708); thus, children who died "before coming to the years of discretion" died "under the promise of God." Accordingly, until children were spiritually mature and able to make a voluntary choice for baptism, the grace of Christ covered their sinful nature (Simons, c.1540a, p. 241; c.1540d, p. 707).

While Simons believed that it was God's grace that enabled the voluntary choice for faith (Miller, 2001, p. 209), he nevertheless emphasized the importance of the parental role in guiding their children toward this decision, exhorting parents to "watch over their [children's] salvation as over [their] own souls" (Simons, c.1540b, p. 951), lest through parental "negligence [their children] depart from the true path, die in their sins, and so perish at last in their unbelief" (Simons, c.1540e, p. 389). Consequently, "theological anxiety abounded" among the early Anabaptists (Miller, 2001, p. 210), and the early Mennonites feared that "their own salvation would be imperiled or lost if their children went astray" (Wenger, 1956, p. 390).

Faith formation in the post-Reformation era

German Pietist August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) embraced an Augustinian understanding of human depravity, which included a belief in the sinfulness of children; however, he nevertheless believed that the Holy Spirit could influence the hearts of

young children more easily than the hearts of those adults who had not had a good upbringing (Bunge, 2001). Francke devoted much of his life to the needs of children through the establishment of both schools and orphanages; thus his views on the spiritual nurture of children developed within the context of educational philosophy and reform. For Francke, the purpose of education was developing "genuine piety and true Christian wisdom," which required a holistic approach that developed intellectual ability and Christian character, as well as practical skills and knowledge that could be used in the service of others (p. 260).

Francke offered many practical guidelines for the spiritual nurture of children, including suggestions regarding faith practices such as praying, singing hymns and Bible reading, particularly emphasizing the love of God rather than the threat of His punishment; providing good examples of godliness through personal piety; providing a high level of monitoring in order to avoid exposure to negative influences; and treating children with "gentleness and sweetness" rather than "strictness and harshness" (Bunge, 2001, p. 266). Although Francke did not address developmental issues in a direct or "systematic" way, he appears to have been "attuned" to the developmental needs and abilities of children, frequently offering practical suggestions for interacting with children at different stages of development (p. 269). Furthermore, although Francke emphasized the importance of the parental role, he recognized that the task of parents was difficult, and thus he asserted that the nurture of children "must be a cooperative effort between church, home, and school" (p. 270).

Similarly, English theologian John Wesley (1703-1791), the founder of

Methodism, also appears to have accepted the notion of original sin (Willhauk, 1992, p.

123), which he understood as an inherited "corruption of nature" that affected "all

mankind." Thus, he believed that "even infants" needed to be "born again" (Wesley,

1817, p. 340-341), as even the "holiest parents beg[a]t unholy children, and [could] not

communicate their grace to them as they [did] their nature" (Wesley, 1817, p. 340);

however, Wesley also believed that divine grace was at work in children's lives from the

very beginning of their lives, enabling them to respond to Him (Scanlon, 1969). Thus, it

appears that Wesley's understanding of original sin was "in dynamic tension" with his

belief that God was at work in the lives of children (Stonehouse, 2004, p. 140).

Moreover, while Wesley affirmed and practiced the baptizing of infants, he also believed

that each individual still needed to experience conversion or new birth (Wesley,

1756/1872, p. 188-189; Willhauck, 1992), which he considered possible even in the lives

of young children (Wesley, c.1746/1991, p. 123; Willhauck, 1992). Accordingly, Wesley

emphasized the Christian nurture of children, devoting much of his efforts to establishing

Methodist schools, his primary concern being that children might grow up knowing God.

He also urged other Methodist preachers to either regularly spend time with the children

in their congregations or give up their pastorates (Heitzenrater, 2001).

Furthermore, while Wesley never had children of his own, he had much to say to

parents on the subject of children's faith formation. He conceded that the children of

faithful parents sometimes chose to reject the ways of God; however, he believed that this

was rare; that more often than not, this outcome was the result of neglectful parenting.

Thus, he exhorted parents to "restrain [their children] from evil" from early childhood, "not only by advice, persuasion, and reproof, but also by correction;" and to teach and instruct them "*early*, from the first hour that [they] perceive reason begins to dawn," as children, he believed, were able to grasp "truth . . . far earlier than we are apt to suppose" (Wesley, c.1783/1986, p. 336). He instructed parents to teach their children in ways that were appropriate to their level of understanding; to reprove and correct with "mildness" and "kindness;" and to remember that "[w]hen the Holy Ghost teaches, there is no delay in learning" (p. 339-340), i.e., that parents were not alone in their task, but that God's Spirit was also at work in their children's lives (Willhauck, 1992).

Faith formation in the New World

Puritan revivalist preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) also emphasized the importance of intentional nurture of children's faith. Influenced by both Augustine and Calvin, Edwards embraced the notion that newborn infants were born with the stain of original sin, and thus were "infinitely more hateful than vipers" in the eyes of God (Edwards, 1742, p. 394). He preached a harsh message of both "infant damnation and childhood depravity" (Brekus, 2001, p. 303), deliberately trying to frighten children into repentance; and deliberately trying to frighten parents into becoming better parents, suggesting that if they neglected to nurture their children's faith, they would "spend the rest of their lives in terror" that their children would be damned to hell (p. 322). Although his followers attempted to preserve his theology, Edwards' harsh message was ultimately "softened" by a variety of forces, including a society affected by the Enlightenment, as well as a church impacted by the writings of Horace Bushnell (p. 324).

In his classic text, *Christian Nurture* (1861)*,* Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) outlined his vision for children's faith formation within the context of everyday life in a Christian home, which he described as a "gradual awakening of the soul to God," and which resulted from the relationship between parent and child (Bendroth, 2001, p. 353; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013). He wrote,

> The operative truth necessary to a new life, may possibly be communicated through and from the parent, being revealed in his looks, manners and ways of life, before they are of an age to understand the teaching of words; for the Christian scheme, the gospel, is really wrapped up in the life of every Christian parent and beams out from him as a living epistle, before it escapes from the lips, or is taught in words (Bushnell, 1847/1975, p. 14-15).

This process, Bushnell believed, began at a very early age. He wrote: "where and how early does the work of nurture begin? . . . The true, and only true answer is, that the nurture of the soul and character is to begin just when the nurture of the body begins" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 233).

Bushnell appears to have understood that children's faith developed through much more than "propositional teaching," and that it began to be formed prior to the acquisition of language (Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013, p.107). Thus, he suggested that many parents never "brought their minds down close enough to an infant child" to recognize that an infant could learn much before "it has come to language and become a subject thus of *instruction*" (italics in text) (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 15; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013). Furthermore, he recognized that children were "developing beings with unique needs" (Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013, p. 107). Thus, Bushnell asserted that as children matured, "the matter of religious instruction" needed to be adjusted to the "the age and capacity" of the child (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 75; Jankiewicz and

Jankiewicz, 2013). Parents, he believed, should teach their children about God "through

the example of their own lives, providing instruction only as appropriate" (Jankiewicz

and Jankiewicz, 2013, p. 107). Bushnell wrote:

> [T]hey should rather seek to teach a feeling of doctrine; to bathe the child in their own feeling of love to God, and dependence on him, and contrition for wrong before him, bearing up their child's heart in their own, not fearing to encourage every good motion they can call into exercise; to make what is good, happy and attractive, what is wrong, odious and hateful; then as the understanding advances, to give it food suited to its capacity, opening upon it, gradually the more difficult views of Christian doctrine and experience (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 39).

Thus, Bushnell believed that "infantile nurture" should gradually progress to "a child's

nurture," and then "a youth's nurture – advancing by imperceptible gradations, if possible,

according to the gradations and stages of the growth, or progress toward maturity"

(Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 233; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013). Bushnell's sensitivity

to the developmental needs of children also propelled him to launch "the most notable

attack" upon the "long-established" practice of "breaking the will" of a child (Greven,

1977, p.168). He wrote,

> This willfulness, or obstinacy, is not so purely bad, or evil, as it seems. It is partly his feeling of himself and you, in which he is getting hold of the conditions of authority, and feeling out his limitations. No, this breaking of a child's will to which many well-meaning parents set themselves, with such instant, almost passionate resolution, is the way they take to make him a coward, or a thief, or a hypocrite, or a mean-spirited and driveling sycophant . . . it is not to break, but to bend rather, to draw the will down . . . to teach it the way of submitting to wise limitations, to raise it into the great and glorious liberties of a state loyal to God (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 244-45).

While Bushnell recognized the need to teach children respect for authority, he also

recognized that the way in which "breaking the will" was practiced was based on a

misunderstanding of the child's developmental limitations and did not result in positive outcomes.

Bushnell also emphasized that Christian nurture consisted of more than parental teaching, i.e., he believed that it was the "powerful unseen bonds" (Bendroth, 2001, p. 354) between family members, or "the organic unity of the family" (Munger, 1899, p. 67), which most powerfully contributed to the faith formation of children. To describe this "organic unity," Bushnell used an Old Testament passage, which portrayed an idolatrous family:

> The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto other gods, that they may provoke me to anger (Jeremiah 7:18).

For Bushnell, this passage illustrated the organic unity of the family. The entire family was worshipping the queen of heaven, who received their worship as the "joint product" of the family. In the same way, families took "a common character, accept[ed] the same delusions, [and] practice[d] the same sins" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 90). The "manners, personal views, prejudices, practical motives, and spirit of the house" created an "atmosphere which pass[ed] into all and pervade[d] all, as naturally as the air [children] breathe[d]" (p. 94). Indeed, according to Bushnell scholar Margaret Bendroth, Bushnell considered both sin and salvation as "thoroughly intergenerational process[es]," which he believed were "taught and transmitted" through family interactions (Bendroth, 2001, p. 362; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013).

Bushnell was "not always systematic or clear" in the way he explained human nature and original sin (Bendroth, 2001, p. 361), and thus scholars struggle to clearly

articulate his views (See, for example, Adamson, 1966; Cross, 1958; Smith, 1955).

While it would appear that Bushnell accepted that sin was a universal human problem, he

considered sin to be the result of intergenerational interactions rather than inherited guilt

(Bushnell, 1861/1979; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013; Smith, 1955). He wrote:

> The sin of no person can be transmitted as a sin, or charged to the account of
> another. But it does not therefore follow, that there are no moral connections
> between individuals, by which one becomes a corrupter of others (Bushnell,
> 1861/1979, p. 101-02).

Accordingly, he interpreted Scripture's pronouncement that God "visit[ed] the iniquities

of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation" (Exodus 34:7) as

evidence that parental sin "propagate[d] itself in the character and condition of their

children," usually requiring "three or four generations to ripen the sad harvest of misery

and debasement" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 39). Thus, while Bushnell did not accept that

sin was "imputed from one generation to the next," his belief in the organic unity of the

family meant that children could not avoid the effects of parental sin (Bendroth, 2001, p.

361; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013).

Furthermore, Bushnell believed that salvation could also be taught through family

interactions. Pointing to the faith of Timothy, whose faith "first lived in [his]

grandmother Lois and in [his] mother Eunice" (2 Tim. 1:5), Bushnell wrote:

> Not that, in the bald and naked sense, it had descended thus through three
> generation. But the apostle conceives a power, in the good life of these mothers,
> that [sic] must needs transmit some flavor of piety. In like manner, God is
> represented as 'keeping covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his
> commandments, to a thousand generations;' which, if it signifies anything,
> amounts to a declaration that he will spiritually own and bless every succeeding
> generation, to the end of the world, if only the preceding will live so as to be fit
> vehicles of his blessing; for it is not any covenant, as a form of mutual contract,
> which carries the divine favor, but it is the loving Him rather, and keeping His

commandments, by an upright, godly life, which sets the parents on terms of friendship with God, and secures the inhabitation of his power (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 38).

Thus, children who grew up in pious homes "inherited clear spiritual advantages" (Bendroth, 2001, p. 355). Even as children matured into adulthood, "the motherly and fatherly word" could continue to influence them, providing the "core of all spiritual understanding in their character" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 367). In fact, Bushnell's belief in the importance of the home, particularly "the near salvific power" of the Christian mother (Bendroth, 2001, p. 358), resulted in his belief that faithful Christian nurture would almost certainly result in children becoming faithful Christians (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 289; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013).

Accordingly, Bushnell urged Christian parents to "make a thorough inspection of their morality itself, to find if there be any bad spot in it," which might "fatally corrupt" their children (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 263), as well as have eternal consequences for parents (Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013). He wrote: "And be not surprised if these children when they meet you before the Judge of your and their life, have a more severe witness to give against you than if you had merely neglected their bodies" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 86). Despite the fact that many of Bushnell's theologically conservative contemporaries were critical of his theology, accusing him of naturalism (Hewitt, 1991), the wider society in which he lived and worked was increasingly influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's perspectives on the inherent "goodness" of children (Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013, p. 110); thus, Bushnell's views ultimately shaped mainline Protestant understandings of children's faith formation (Bendroth, 2001).

Faith formation in the writings of Ellen White

Ellen White's prolific writings on the subject of children's faith formation included guidance for parents, whose influence she considered most significant, particularly in the early years, as well as guiding principles for Christian teachers and pastors who ministered to children. Although it is beyond the scope of this brief overview to summarize all of Ellen White's major thoughts on spiritual nurture, I will attempt to outline the key themes in her writings that are important to constructing a theology of faith formation. Central to Ellen White's understanding of children's faith formation was her understanding of the classic theological questions of human sin and divine redemption; thus, to understand her views on faith formation, it is first necessary to briefly examine the theological framework within which these views developed.

Ellen White did not espouse a purely Augustinian understanding of original sin; however, she believed that while human beings had originally been created in God's image, "[t]hrough sin the divine likeness was marred, and well-nigh obliterated" (White, 1903/2002, p. 15), resulting in a nature with "a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, [they] cannot resist" (p. 29). In His grace, however, God had not left humanity "without hope" and had devised "the plan of salvation" (p. 15). It was only through God's grace, which Ellen White insisted was "the free gift of God in Christ," that humanity could be saved (White, 1964/2003, p. 83). She wrote,

> Since we can be saved only through the grace of God, which is a free gift, why is it that man will, to his own hurt, lift himself up in pride and take glory in himself for his supposed good works? The divine favor, the grace of God bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ, is too precious to be given in exchange for any supposed meritorious work on the part of finite, erring man (White, 1895, p. 65).

32

Ellen White, however, also believed in God's "sanctifying" grace, the grace that "transforms and sanctifies" human life; the grace that works in our lives "to change and mold us into [God's] image" (Tyner, 2006, p. 221). Through the power of sanctifying grace, "the soul, paralyzed by sin, the darkened mind, the perverted will" can be "invigorate[d]" and "restore[d]" (White, 1903/2002, p. 29). While Ellen White considered "justifying" grace to be a free gift of God, she believed that "sanctifying" grace (Tyner, 2006, p. 222) required human "[c]o-operation" with the power of Christ (White, 1903/2002, p. 29). She wrote, "[God's] grace is given to work in us to will and to do, but never as a substitute for our effort. Our souls are to be aroused to cooperate" (White, 1973, p. 111). It was in this process of co-operation between "divine grace" and "human effort" (White, 1888, p. 673) that Ellen White saw a role for spiritual nurture or "all educational effort" (White, 1903/2002, p. 29), for it was through this process that the image of God could be restored in humankind. She wrote,

> To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized – this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life (White, 1903/2002, p. 15).

Furthermore, for Ellen White, "true education" was holistic, i.e., it had "to do with the whole being," resulting in "the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers," thus preparing individuals "for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (White, 1903/2002, p. 15).

White believed that "[t]he system of education established in Eden centered on the family," as it was "from the Father that the children of the Highest received

instruction." This original plan was adapted following the Fall of humankind; now, Christ was "the great teacher" of humankind and "He [had] ordained that men and women should be His representatives." Accordingly, "the family" was to be "the school," and "parents" were to be "the teachers" (White, 1903/2002, p. 33). In the early years of a child's life, "no other influences count[ed] so much as the influence of the home" (p. 283). Thus, it was vital for parents to recognize that their work was "a sacred trust," for "[a]s a twig is bent, the tree is inclined;" and children, who were like "young trees," were to be "tenderly trained" (White, 1954/2002, p. 18), for God expected parents to "guard and tend carefully the garden of their children's hearts" (White, 1964/2001, p. 200). Too often, White warned, young children were "left to *come up* instead of being *trained up* [emphasis in text]" (White, 1854, p. 45).

White recognized that children's faith was formed by more than propositional teaching; that it was through the ordinary interactions of daily life that parents "connect[ed] their children with God" (White, 1954/2002, p. 48); that "[t]he looks, the tone of voice, the actions, all ha[d] their influence" upon children (White, 1902/1948, p. 50). Ideally, White believed that these daily interactions between children and parents would "bind the hearts of the little ones to them by silken cords of love," thus beginning to teach them about the love of God (White, 1954/2002, p. 86). She wrote:

> Day by day the law of love and kindness must be upon [parents'] lips. Their lives must reveal the grace and truth that was seen in the life of their Example. Then a sanctified love will bind the hearts of parents and children together, and the youth will grow up established in the faith and rooted and grounded in the love of God (White, 1954/2002, p. 66).

Furthermore, as children learned to obey their parents "because they love[d them]," they were learning the "first lessons in the Christian life," for the parents' "love represent[ed] to the child the love of Christ, and the little ones who [learned to] trust and obey their [parents were] learning to trust and obey the Saviour" (White, 1898/2005, p. 515).

Although White considered both parents responsible for the task of nurturing their children's faith, she suggested that the mother's role was incomparable. She wrote, "The king upon his throne has no higher work than has the mother" (White, 1964/2001, p. 231). The mother's role was unique, for it was she who had the opportunity to form the child's character during the earliest years, a time of "great susceptibility and most rapid development" (White, 1903/2002, p. 275), and it was in these earliest years, while the child's "mind [was] most susceptible to impression, either good or evil" (White, 1913, p. 132), that the "foundation [was] laid" (White, 1954/2002, p. 194). The father, White believed, was to be a source of authority and discipline; however, White entreated fathers to "[c]ombine affection with authority, kindness and sympathy with firm restraint," so that through "friendship" with their children, they might "be a strong influence for good" in their lives (White, 1905/2003, p. 391-92; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013).

Consistent with her understanding of the human need to voluntarily choose God, White emphasized the need for parents to mold the child's will. Children needed to "understand the true force of the will," to see "how great [was] the responsibility" involved in the divine gift of choice. Thus, parents were to guide and mold the will of their child, rather than break it; for "in the battle of life," children would need strength of will (White, 1903/2002, p. 289). Authoritarian parenting might produce outwardly

obedient children, much like "well-drilled soldiers;" however, White believed that

children trained in this way would ultimately "lack strength and steadfastness," once "the

control cease[d]" (p. 288). She wrote:

> A child may be so disciplined as to have, like the beast, no will of its own, his
> individuality being lost in that of his teacher. Such training is unwise, and its
> effects disastrous. Children thus educated will be deficient in firmness and
> decision. They are not taught to act from principle; the reasoning powers are not
> strengthened by exercise (White, 1954/2002, p. 39).

Thus, although children were to respect the judgment and guidance of adults, they were

also to be encouraged to make choices, based on "reason and principle," so that, with

increasing maturity, they would have the confidence to "think and act for themselves"

(White, 1885, p. 132-33). Ultimately, the goal of parental guidance and nurture during

these earliest years was to develop the child's "capabilities and powers," in order that

they might become the "human agencies through whom the divine influences [could] co-

operate" in later life (White, 1923, p. 263). In this task, however, parents were not alone;

rather, they were "labourer[s] together with God" (White, 1894, p. 692).

Toward an SDA Understanding of Faith Formation

An SDA understanding of children's faith formation, based on Scripture and

influenced by the writings of Ellen White, draws on the following traditions: first, in its

holism, it is Biblical; second, in its emphasis on the restoration of the image of God

through the co-operation of divine grace and human effort, it is in the tradition of John

Chrysostom; third, in its affirmation of parenting as a Christian discipline, it is Lutheran;

fourth, in its understanding of human (and thus childhood) sin, as well as the need for a

mature, voluntary commitment to faith, it is in the Anabaptist tradition; fifth, in its

36

recognition that children's faith formation requires the effort of home, church and school, it is in the tradition of Francke; sixth, in its consideration of children's developmental needs, it is both Thomistic and Bushnellian; seventh, in its emphasis on the need to guide rather than break the will of a child, it is Bushnellian; and finally, in its acknowledgement that the Spirit of God is at work in children's lives from the beginning of life, it is Wesleyan.

Theoretical Perspectives on Christian Faith Formation

The purpose of this section was to provide theoretical perspectives on Christian faith formation. Accordingly, the following theories were selected: Kim's (2010) model of Christian faith formation; Yount's triad of life model of Christian teaching, and Balswick, King and Reimer's (2005) model of faith formation.

Kim's Model of Christian Faith Formation

Jonathan Kim (2010) suggests that faith is formed within the context of intellectual development; accordingly, he proposes a model of faith formation that integrates both Jean Piaget's (1970, 1972) stage model of intellectual development and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of intellectual development. Piaget asserted that human beings have an innate tendency to make sense of their experiences in the world by organizing them into cognitive structures or schemes, in order to maintain balance or equilibrium between old and new information. This occurs through the process of adaptation, which involves the following: first, assimilation, which requires interpreting new experiences so that they fit with old information; and second,

accommodation, which entails adjusting existing information so that it fits with new experiences. Through this process of organization and adaptation, human beings are able to create new cognitive structures that facilitate organization at increasingly higher levels, ultimately resulting in the development of intelligence. Piaget identified the following stages of cognitive development: *the sensorimotor stage* (birth to age 2), a stage in which learning is limited to immediate experience through the senses; *the preoperational stage* (ages 2-7), a stage in which thinking becomes symbolic, i.e., immediate experience is replaced by concrete symbols; *the concrete operational stage* (ages 7-11), a stage in which logical thinking about concrete objects develops; and *the formal operations stage* (ages 11-15), a stage in which abstract thinking emerges (Wadsworth, 1989).

In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky (1978) suggested that social interaction, rather than adaptation, is the primary source of intellectual development, as it is only through the process of internalizing social interactions that thinking is able to develop (Frawley, 1997). Thus, intellectual development is dependent on the sociocultural context of the individual (Tudge, 1990). According to Vygotsky, this is at least partly due to the fact that language, which is acquired through social experiences, provides the tools for thinking, as well as for reflecting on thinking, thus resulting in the development of higher cognitive functions (Eggen and Kauchak, 2007). Furthermore, rather than occurring in stages, Vygotsky suggested that cognitive development is a continuous process that occurs within the context of three "zones": first, the *actual developmental level*, which represents an individual's actual level of development; second, the *level of potential development*, which represents an individual's potential ability; and third, the *zone of*

proximal development, which represents the amount of assistance that an individual needs to be able to move from actual to potential level of development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 84-91). In other words, the zone of proximal development represents "the amount of influence that significant others can have on intellectual development" (Kim, 2010, p. 76).

Kim (2010) suggests that faith formation is interconnected with intellectual development because faith consists of *belief* and *trust*, both of which are related to the intellect, i.e., *belief* is "an intellectual recognition and acceptance of the truth" of Scripture, which in turn produces *trust* or "confidence in and reliance on" that which we believe to be true (p. 80). Thus, while faith is a gift of God, "a loving work of the Holy Spirit," it also requires a foundation of knowledge. Accordingly, faith is formed through "the dialectic fusion between spiritual (i.e., supernatural) and intellectual (i.e., natural) forces." Consequently, an understanding of intellectual development can provide a framework for understanding faith formation (p. 81).

Kim asserts that neither Piaget's nor Vygotsky's theory adequately explain the relationship between faith formation and intellectual development, but that insights from both theories provide a way of understanding the process of faith formation more fully. When faith formation is viewed primarily through a Piagetian lens, the obtainment of intellectual knowledge about God is seen as the primary component of faith, resulting in a spiritual life that over-emphasizes conceptual knowledge, "as if Christianity was a theory to be studied" (Kim, 2010, p. 83). In contrast, when faith formation is approached primarily from a Vygotskyan perspective, relational context and praxis knowledge are seen as the primary components of faith, resulting in an over-emphasis on perceptual

knowledge at the expense of intellectual knowing. Holistic faith formation, contends Kim, requires both conceptual and perceptual knowledge. Although, "philosophically speaking," Piaget's and Vygotsky's positions are "antithetical," Kim suggests that they can be considered "two distinct yet harmonizing modes of reasoning" that are "dialectically related and complement one another" (p. 88). Thus, in the process of faith formation, conceptual knowledge is "comprehended" rationally, while perceptual knowledge is "apprehended" relationally (p. 90), resulting in the formation of a faith that is "not a mere intellectual or perceptual experience but both"; i.e., a "holistic engagement of the mind and heart" (p. 89).

Yount's Triad of Life Model of Christian Teaching

William R. Yount (2010) suggests that human life is "reflected" in three major learning theory systems (p. 335): cognitive learning theory, which emphasizes the intellectual domain of learning; humanistic learning theory, which focuses on the affective domain of learning; and behavioral learning theory, which emphasizes the behavioral domain. Yount suggests that these three "psychological spheres" (p. 336), reflective of the domains of learning first identified by Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956), provide a holistic perspective not just for learning but also for all of human life, including the spiritual life. Because the Triune God is "Rational, Personal, and Active," the spiritual life of human beings, who are created in His image, is also "rational, personal, and active," and can be pictured as "three intersecting circles – the Triad of Life" (Yount, 2010, p. 335). While Yount's focus is holistic Christian teaching, this triad also provides insight for understanding holistic faith formation.

The "thinking circle," or intellectual domain, represents clear thinking and understanding of truth about God, as outlined in Scripture (Yount, 2010, p. 336). The "feeling and valuing circle," or affective domain, represents emotional and subjective experience of God (p. 337). And the "doing circle," or behavioral domain, represents "action-oriented obedience" (p. 338-339). Yount suggests that the "ideal" of this triad is when "all three circles are the same size, and all three intersect equally;" however, this "ideal" is found only in Jesus. Thus, "[w]ere we to draw the Triad depicting Him, we would see all three spheres perfectly overlapped, forming a seamless, single whole" (p. 336). Unfortunately, as "[e]very person tends toward one of the three spheres of the Triad," in human life this triad is often unbalanced, resulting in distortion (p. 339).

When there is an overemphasis on thinking, i.e., on Bible knowledge and doctrinal understanding, at the expense of feeling and doing, the result can be both "cold intellectualism" and "spiritual pride" (Yount, 2010, p. 340). When there is an overemphasis on feeling/valuing, i.e., on what the Bible "*means to me*" (emphasis in text), at the expense of thinking and doing, the result can be "little or no difference in the way we think or live;" or even worse, openness to "emotional manipulation, deception, and delusion" (p. 341). When there is an overemphasis on doing, i.e., on action-oriented obedience, at the expense of thinking and feeling/valuing, the result can be "ritual," i.e., "simply going through the motions," ultimately leading to discouragement (p. 342). To avoid these distortions, it is important for the Christian teacher to learn to "strike a balance *over time*" (emphasis in text) (p. 343), which is both "frightening and difficult," as it requires "intentional effort" (p. 344) to provide "learning experiences that touch all

three spheres, without overemphasizing any one of them" (p. 343); however, it is only a "triadic" approach to Christian teaching, as reflected in the life and ministry of Jesus (p. 344), that provides a "holistic perspective" (p. 334).

Balswick, King and Reimer's Model of Faith Formation

The model of faith formation proposed by Balswick, King and Reimer (2005) integrates both James Fowler's (1981) faith development theory (FDT) and James Loder's (1981) theory of transformation. Fowler's FDT, which has provided the dominant theoretical framework for faith development research for over thirty years (Parker, 2010), suggested that faith develops linearly, i.e., in predictable stages, and that it is shaped by the process of socialization. Fowler's structural-developmental model, which draws on other developmental theories, including Erikson's (1968) theory of personality development, Piaget's (1970) theory of cognitive development and Kohlberg's (1976) theory of moral development, identifies the following stages of faith development: stage 0, *primal faith*, a pre-verbal stage of infancy in which the capacity for hope and trust are developed, thus providing the foundation for faith; stage 1, *intuitive-projective faith*, a stage of early childhood in which children respond intuitively and emotionally to the faith of their parents; stage 2, *mythic-literal faith*, a stage of middle and late childhood in which children begin to reason in concrete ways, and thus to interpret the stories of their faith traditions in literal ways; stage 3, *synthetic-conventional faith*, a stage that generally emerges in adolescence that is characterized by conformity to the beliefs and values of external authority; stage 4, *individuative-reflective faith*, a stage generally associated with the transition to adulthood that involves reflecting on the values

and beliefs that were accepted thus far and consciously choosing one's faith commitments; stage 5, *conjunctive faith*, which does not usually emerge until middle adulthood, and which is characterized by growing ability to embrace the ambiguities of faith, as well as openness to others' perspectives; and stage 6, *universalizing faith*, a stage rarely achieved that is characterized by ability to transcend one's belief systems and thus relate without condescension to anyone at any stage and from any faith, as well as by a commitment to social justice (Fowler, 1981; 2004; Parker, 2010).

Because Fowler defined faith as the way in which individuals respond to the transcendent, "as perceived or grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition" (Fowler, 1981, p. 9), he viewed faith as a universal developmental structure, "a generic human phenomenon" (p. 5). Consequently, among the criticisms of FDT has been the question of whether the reality that Fowler described as faith is compatible with a Biblical understanding of faith. This has resulted in a variety of alternatives to and adaptations of Fowler's model (see, for example, Downs, 1995; Gillespie, 1988; Westerhoff, 2000). James Loder (1981, 1989) proposed an important alternative, suggesting that faith development is not only non-linear, but that it often involves radical transformation. For Loder, this transformation is "not one's own initiative but the initiative of the Holy" (Loder, 1989, p. 103). Thus, whereas Fowler saw faith development as the result of socialization, and therefore embedded in psychosocial development, Loder viewed faith development as the result of human participation in the work of the Holy Spirit, and thus independent of psychosocial development (Loder, 1998, p. 72).

Loder proposed that spiritual transformation occurs in five predictable phases: first, *conflict,* which begins the search for resolution in a given context; second, *interlude for scanning*, a conscious or unconscious time of examining the problem and its potential solutions; third, *insight* or "intuition, or vision, which appears on the border between the conscious and unconscious, usually with convincing force," and which provides new understanding and thus resolution (Loder, 1989, p. 38); fourth, *release and redirection of energy*, which occurs as a result of the new insight, and which leads to a re-patterning of the original conflict; and fifth, *interpretation and verification*, which is a search for congruence between the original conflict and the new insight (Loder, 1989). By suggesting that spiritual development involves radical transformation that is distinct from other areas of development, Loder's theory of transformation provides a way of talking about divine intervention in human development.

Balswick, King, and Reimer (2005) proposed a model of faith formation that acknowledges both Fowler's and Loder's contributions. Central to this model is the biblical teaching that it is God who begins the "good work" of faith and transformation (Phil. 1:6), i.e., that it is God who initiates faith, which is a divine gift (Balswick et al., 2005, p. 268). Thus, like Loder's theory of transformation, this model "acknowledge[s] the life-altering power of God's presence" and recognizes that developmental theories do not provide "the language or tools" to describe how the Holy Spirit works to bring about transformation, including conversion; however, like Fowler's faith development theory, this model also affirms that psychosocial development impacts faith formation (p. 276). In other words, while faith formation may be influenced by psychosocial development,

God can also bring about supernatural transformation that cannot be explained in purely developmental terms (p. 275).

According to this model, faith grows as a result of the "interactions between the individual and their multiple contexts;" thus, there is no "one path" to spiritual growth (Balswick et al., 2005, p. 277). Consequently, the formation of faith is not linear, but rather, "multi-dimensional and multi-directional" (p. 279), influenced by psychosocial development, context, as well as divine intervention. To illustrate, Balswick et al. use a "Wernerian spiral made of several strands" to depict the various aspects of human development that impact faith development. This spiral "ascends through . . . nested spheres," which represent the various contexts of family, school and religion, within which faith develops. Finally, a "thunderbolt" is used to depict "potential divine intervention," which can "interrupt and reorder" the process of human development (p. 283). The authors suggest that the goal of faith formation is "differentiated" faith, which is characterized by a reciprocal relationship with God, i.e., "intimacy with God," without sacrificing "the particularity of the individual" (p. 275).

Christian Conversion

The first purpose of this section was to examine theological perspectives on conversion. Accordingly, conceptions of conversion in both Scripture and Christian history were examined, and SDA understandings of conversion were outlined. The second purpose of this section was to explore theoretical perspectives on conversion. Thus, the literature of research on conversion was reviewed, and early research on

conversion, as well as research on attachment theory and conversion, were considered

pertinent to the current study, and thus were outlined.

<div align="center">Theological Perspectives on Conversion</div>

Conversion in Scripture

When reflecting on a Biblical understanding of conversion, it might be tempting

to begin with New Testament conceptions of conversion. After all, it is in the New

Testament that we find Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus regarding new birth; and it is

in the New Testament that we find what many consider the "prototype of Christian

conversion – the conversion of Paul" (Gaventa, 1986, p. 3). However, New Testament

conceptions of conversion developed within the context of Old Testament

understandings; thus a study of Biblical perspectives on conversion must begin by

exploring conceptions of conversion in the Old Testament (Witherup, 1994).

Conversion in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the concept of conversion is portrayed primarily through

two Hebrew verbs: *niham*, which means, "to regret" or "be sorry; and *shubh,* which

means, "to turn," "return" or "repent." Of the two words, *shubh* is "theologically" more

important to the concept of conversion, as it is used more frequently to describe "human

repentance or turning away from sin" (Witherup, 1994, p. 8)*. Shubh* is a verb that

"implies movement," and in its' most frequent usage, it denotes a physical turning, such

as returning to "a point of departure;" however, it is also used in a theological sense,

particularly in the prophetic literature, where it is used to describe "turning from evil"

and "return[ing] to God," particularly in the sense of returning to an "original relationship" with God (Soggin, 1997, p. 1315). The following passage is characteristic of the Old Testament call to both "turn" and "return": "Let the wicked forsake their ways, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that He may have mercy on them" (Isa. 55:7; see also Jer. 3:22; Ezek. 18:30, 32; Hos. 14:2; Joel 2:12-13).

A technical study of the word *shubh*, however, does not adequately portray Old Testament conceptions of conversion, as the Old Testament describes conversion using a "*panoply of images, expressions and metaphors* (italics in text)" (Witherup, 1994, p. 17). These include images of the rending of hearts ("Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord your God, Joel 2:13); of scarlet becoming white ("Though your sins be as scarlet, they will be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they will be as wool." Isa. 1:18); of cleansing ("I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities" Ezek. 36:25); and of the transplanting of hearts ("I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit in you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts" Ezek. 36: 26) (Witherup, p. 9-17).

Throughout the Old Testament, conversion is the outcome of divine initiative, for it is God who calls human beings to "turn" or "return" to their covenantal relationship with Him. Thus, the call to conversion is often portrayed as a "*collective* (italics in text)" call to God's chosen people (Witherup, 1994, p. 17). Furthermore, the call to conversion in the Old Testament is frequently depicted as "an *ongoing process* (italics in text)" of "*re*turning (italics in text) to what was formerly known," rather than a call to turn to "something totally new" (p. 18). In addition to the collective call to conversion, the Old

Testament also describes the conversion experiences of individuals, whose experiences are characterized as "abrupt right-about-face" turning (Mulder, 2012, xv). The experience of Isaiah is characteristic of the conversion experiences of Old Testament individuals: "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple . . . And I said: 'Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips . . . yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!'" (Isa. 6: 1-5)

The basic components of Isaiah's experience, which include insight initiated by God, followed by conviction of sin, forgiveness and a new life of mission and service, are evident in almost every individual Old Testament conversion experience (Mulder, 2012). The conversion of David also follows this basic pattern, i.e., it is not until the word of God comes to David through the prophet Nathan that David admits his sin and pleads for forgiveness; and although God's pardon comes with a punishment, David ultimately accepts the will of God (2 Sam. 12: 1-23).

Thus, in summary, conversion in the Old Testament is portrayed as the movement of repentance and turning away from evil, as well as returning to the covenantal relationship with God, which occurs as a response to divine initiative, and which leads to joy and new life.

Conversion in the New Testament

The Hebrew word *shubh* was translated *epistrepho* in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In classical Greek literature, this word was used to denote "turning of the soul to piety or the divine;" and it was "via the LXX" that this word passed from the secular Greek "into the vocabulary of the New Testament"

(Laubach, 1975, p. 354). Similarly to the Hebrew verb *shubh*, the Greek word *epistrepho* has both "a secular meaning of turning, returning, turning away," as well as a "theological meaning of conversion (p. 355). One passage that is illustrative of the theological use of *epistrepho* is found in Acts 14:15: "Turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea and all things in them" (See also Acts 26:18; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Pet. 2:25). Significantly, when the word *epistrepho* is used, "the emphasis is on what one turns to," i.e., God, rather than what one is turning away from (Mulder, 2012, p. 348).

A second Greek word that is important to the New Testament concept of conversion is the noun *metanoia*. This word is rarely found in classical literature, and was used to denote "a change of mind" (Heikkinen, 1966, p. 4). In the LXX, it is used only in the verb form, *metanoein*, to translate the Hebrew word *niham*, which means, "to be sorry" or "to regret" (Goetzmann, 1975, p. 357). In the New Testament, however, the noun *metanoia* appears to have a "distinctive meaning," and "is discerned first and foremost" in the context of John the Baptist (Peace, 1999, p. 350), in the Gospel of Mark: "And so John appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4).

Scholars suggest that, from this context, *metanoia* can be "understood as the equivalent for the Hebrew *shuv* [*shubh*]," in the tradition of the "great prophets, who appealed to Israel 'to turn,' or 'to return,' to true obedience to the covenant" (Heikkinen, 1966, p. 4). Thus, whereas the translators of the LXX used *epistrepho*, New Testament writers felt that *metanoia* "correctly captured the prophetic sense of the word" *shubh*

(Peace, 1999, p. 350). Furthermore, in contrast to *epistrepho*, which emphasizes what one is turning toward, *metanoia* also "looks at the past, at that from which [one] has turned," (p. 348) and describes a turning "from the direction in which [one was] going to its opposite" (Heikkinen, 1966, p. 5).

Thus, from this brief study of the two Greek words used to express the concept of conversion in the New Testament, it is evident that the meanings of *epistrepho* and *metanoia* are in many ways similar to the Old Testament concept of conversion expressed through the Hebrew word *shubh*, namely, a turning away from sin and turning or returning to relationship with God and a righteous life. Similarly to the Old Testament, however, a lexical study of these words does not adequately portray New Testament conceptions of conversion, as the New Testament records many narratives about conversion and utilizes many different images to describe conversion, all of which provide a much broader understanding. It is beyond the scope of this brief literature review to adequately explore all of these; thus, only a brief overview of the work of several biblical scholars who have examined conversion in the New Testament is outlined below.

Beverly Roberts Gaventa (1986), who writes from a Presbyterian perspective, suggests that the concept of conversion in the New Testament can be examined by using a typology of conversion, and that there are at least three types of conversion described in the New Testament. The first, *alternation*, is a "relatively limited form" of personal change (p. 12) that does not require "rejection of the past" (p. 10). Gaventa suggests that the conversion experiences of both the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius are examples of

alternation. The Ethiopian eunuch's experience did not involve "rejection of past thought or action," but was, rather, "a logical consequence of earlier choices" (Acts 8:27-28). Similarly, Cornelius was "a devout man," whose conversion was part of "his previously established faithfulness" (Acts 10: 2, 4). In other words, these conversion experiences were part of "a natural development" of past choices, rather than a radical break with the past (Gaventa, 1986, p. 148).

The second type of conversion, a *pendulum-like conversion*, is "a radical change in which past affiliations are rejected" and a "new commitment and identity" is embraced (Gaventa, 1986, p. 12). Gaventa suggests that Luke's account of Paul's conversion in the book of Acts is an example of this type of conversion, as Paul "swings from violent opponent of the church to its loyal disciple" (p. 148). A second example of pendulum-like conversion is found in the New Testament imagery of "birth from above" and "new life," which portrays a complete "break" or disconnect between the believer's past and present life (p. 149). The third type of conversion, *transformation*, is a "re-cognition" rather than rejection of the past, and involves a radical change in the way one understands and interprets God and the world (p. 11). Gaventa suggests that in his letters, Paul describes his own experiences of reinterpreting rather than rejecting his ties with Judaism (see, for example, Romans 9), which have taken on "a different meaning because of a new set of circumstances" (p. 149). She concludes that, despite the differences in type, conversion always brings "new life," "a transformed mind," "a new community," and "a new perspective" (p. 152).

Roman Catholic theologian Ronald D. Witherup (1994) suggests that the New Testament uses "diverse imagery" to portray conversion (p. 21), and thus he proposes a variety of metaphors to depict New Testament conceptions of conversion. These include "following Jesus," i.e., the choice to become a disciple, in the Gospel of Mark (p. 22-29); "bearing good fruit," i.e., the righteous life of discipleship, in the Gospel of Matthew (p. 30-43); "prodigal children of a prodigal God," a metaphor for the personalization of conversion, in the Gospel of Luke (p. 44-56); "from blindness to sight," which describes not only Paul's conversion but several others', in the book of Acts (p. 57-73); and "from darkness to light," a metaphor for the "gradual process of growth and in*sight*" (italics in text), in the Gospel of John (p. 74-87). Witherup (1994) concludes that conversion in the New Testament, first, is focused on relationship with Jesus Christ; second, is frequently "an ongoing process" (p. 109); third, results in "an experience of *newness* (italics in text)" (p. 109); fourth, transforms "the mind, the body, the heart, and the spirit" (p. 110); fifth, is accompanied by baptism; and sixth, results in the desire to share Christ with others.

Gordon T. Smith (2001), who writes from an evangelical perspective, suggests that there are four "distinctive models of conversion" in the New Testament (p. 107), which, when considered together, provide what he considers the "essential elements of a Christian conversion" (p. 108). The first model of conversion comes from the Synoptic Gospels, where the key elements of conversion are, first, belief in Jesus Christ as "one sent from God," which leads to repentance of sin (p. 110); second, a radical renunciation of previous commitments; third, a call to re-orient one's life to the service of Christ, which for some entailed remaining in their occupations, whereas for others it involved

leaving their work and taking on new work; and fourth, joy, which is "an inherent consequence" of conversion (p. 112).

Smith (2001) suggests that a second model of conversion in the New Testament is found in the book of Acts, which provides a significantly different conception of conversion, as it describes conversion in the context of the nascent Christian church. The key elements of conversion in Acts include, first, belief in the identity of Jesus as Christ, followed by repentance; second, baptism and assurance of forgiveness; third, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is central to conversion in the book of Acts; and fourth, assimilation into communal life.

A third New Testament model of conversion comes from the Pauline epistles, where the key elements of conversion are, first, identifying with the life, death and resurrection of Christ, which becomes the most significant part of one's life; second, a "transfer of allegiance," which implies "a distinctly volitional element," and involves a choice away from a life of sin toward a life of righteousness and obedience (Smith, 2001, p.118); third, water baptism, which signifies identification with Christ as well as transfer of allegiance; fourth, experiencing faith, which results in the good works that are the fruit of faith; fifth, reception of the Holy Spirit, which results in "assurance of one's new identity in Christ;" and sixth, "incorporation into the family of God" (p. 119).

According to Smith (2001), a fourth distinct New Testament model of conversion is found in the Gospel of John, where the key elements of conversion are, first, belief in Jesus, which includes an "*intellectual* component (italics in text)" (i.e., understanding Jesus and His work), an "*affective* dimension (italics in text)" (i.e., joy and peace) (p.

53

121-122), as well as a "*volitional* dimension (italics in text)" (i.e., turning from darkness to light); second, reception of a new life "from above," which involves experiencing the "regenerating grace" of the Holy Spirit (p. 122); and third, being born of both the Spirit and water (p. 123), which is "an allusion" to water baptism (p. 124).

Based on these four distinct models of conversion in the New Testament, Smith (2001) suggests that there are seven elements of a "good" conversion. These are, first, belief, the "intellectual" element (p. 138); second, repentance and turning away from sin to righteousness, the "penitential" element; third, experiencing trust and forgiveness, the "affective" element (p. 139); fourth, "commitment, allegiance and devotion," the "volitional" element; fifth, "water baptism," the "sacramental" element (p. 140); sixth, receiving the Holy Spirit, the "charismatic" element; and seventh, incorporation into the community of faith, the "corporate" element (p. 141).

Although Smith (2001) stresses that each of the seven components is an essential part of conversion, no New Testament passage "lists all seven elements;" rather, one or more of them can often be assumed (p. 144). Furthermore, although each one of them is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, not all of the elements are "of the same 'kind.'" The first two, the intellectual and penitential components, are central to the New Testament conception of conversion (p. 146), and together with the affective and volitional components, can be considered the "internal actions" of the believer (p. 157); whereas the last three, the sacramental, charismatic and communal components, are "external realities" that support and enable the process of conversion (p. 146). Smith suggests that this "multifaceted" model of conversion, which attempts to consider all that

the New Testament teaches about conversion (p. 154), provides insight into the "radical change" that occurs in the life of a believer as a result of conversion (p. 155).

In a later publication (2010), Smith affirms these seven components of conversion as "essential to making a Christian conversion truly Christian" (p. 118). He also offers further insights for a New Testament understanding of conversion, particularly the notion that a theology of conversion must be consistent with a biblical understanding of Christian soteriology, as salvation is the work of God "in the world through Christ and by the Spirit" (p. 22), whereas conversion is the "human response" to the saving initiative of God (p. 21). New Testament conversion narratives, particularly in the book of Acts, underscore "the priority of divine initiative;" however, they also draw attention to human "openness" to God and recognition of personal "need" for Him (p. 49). Thus, while the New Testament does not suggest a "one-to-one correlation" between human agency and the saving grace of God (p. 21), or that conversion is ever "meritorious," (p. 31), it is also erroneous to dismiss "human agency" in the process of conversion, and suggest, "It is all God" (p. 21).

Thus, in summary, both the Old and New Testaments portray conversion as the human response to the initiative of God, resulting in turning away from sin and turning toward God and a righteous life. The New Testament, however, offers several further unique perspectives on conversion: first, the focus of conversion in the New Testament is belief in the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God; second, the New Testament underscores the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of conversion; third, the New Testament describes different types of conversion; fourth, the New Testament provides

greater insight into the holistic nature of conversion; and fifth, the New Testament

connects repentance and conversion with water baptism.

Conversion in Christian History

Like much of Christian theology, understandings of conversion changed across

the centuries of Christian history, and different eras in the history of the Christian church

contributed diverse perspectives on conversion. Although it is beyond the scope of this

literature review to provide a comprehensive survey, the following is a brief overview of

the concept of conversion in Christian history.

Conversion in the Post-Apostolic Church

Much of what is known about the concept of conversion in the second century of

Christian history is from the *Didache*, a compilation of teachings that originated in a

community of Christian Jews between 50 and 150 AD. From this document, it is evident

that conversion was understood as a process that began with an extended period of

instruction in the "two ways" – the way of life and the way of death – that ultimately

required a "clear choice" (Finn, 1997, p. 148) to turn "from one way of life to another" (p.

147). Rites of initiation into Christian community, including fasting, baptism and

communion, followed this intentional choice.

The *Apostolic Tradition*, a third-century document, outlines a journey of

conversion that became more fully developed in the fourth century and that ultimately

consisted of four stages. Stage 1, evangelization, began with informal contact between a

Christian and a potential believer and ended when that individual requested further

instruction, which led to Stage 2, the catechumenate. This stage, which could last for

three to five years, was a process of socialization in the Christian way of life that

emphasized moral rather than doctrinal teaching. Stage 3, which emphasized doctrinal

teaching, began once the person was considered to be living according to Christian values

and ended with baptism and anointing with oil. Stage 4 consisted of a brief post-

baptismal period of instruction in the meaning of the rites of baptism and communion

(Kreider, 1999). Thus, by the fourth century, conversion had become a complex and

prolonged process of both learning and ritual, whereby an individual "passed from an old

way of life to a new way" (Finn, 1992, p. 3).

Conversion in the Medieval Church

        The concept of conversion in the Post-Apostolic Church was ultimately impacted

by the fourth–century conversion of Constantine, as well as the adoption of Christianity

as the official religion of the Roman Empire. As Constantine and his successors used

both incentives and force to encourage conversion to Christianity, the Christian church

grew rapidly, transforming the catechumenate. By the end of the fourth century, it was

possible to become a Christian without being catechized, without turning from one's old

way of life to a new way, without being converted. Although conversion was considered

"a good thing" for all Christians, by the fifth century it had become a requirement only

for clerics and the religious (Kreider, 1999, p. 80-81); and the idea of conversion came to

be equated not with turning from "a non-Christian to a Christian life," but with turning to

a monastic life (Harran, 1983, p.31). Over time, monasticism came to emphasize

conversion as a daily process, a turning to God "time and again," through the daily rhythms and rituals of prayer, study and work (Williams, 1979, p. 115).

While the monastic movement emphasized conversion as a lengthy process of individual spiritual transformation, the gradual "Christianization of Europe" occurred through forced corporate or communal conversions of pagan societies, i.e., as Christianity spread throughout Europe and Christian kingdoms were established, Christian rulers came to see themselves as responsible for the conversion of the kingdom's enemies, "as part of either a policy of defense or expansion." Thus, conversion of a kingdom's enemies "became a matter of foreign policy. The missionary and the warrior traveled and worked together in the process of both extending Christ's kingdom and that of the king" (Muldoon, 1997, p. 5). Consequently, conversion came to represent an exchange of one set of beliefs for another, thus becoming equated with "a transfer of loyalty" rather than any kind of "inner transformation" (p. 101). It was not until the Protestant Reformation that the nature of conversion was re-evaluated, and the forced communal or corporate conversions condemned (p. 9).

The Protestant reformers' conceptions of conversion

Martin Luther's understanding of conversion developed in reaction to the monastic vision of conversion. His experience of living as "a monk without reproach" and yet feeling as "a sinner before God" created "an extremely disturbed conscience," resulting in a lack of assurance of salvation (Luther, 1545, p. 336). It was not until Luther began to understand the "passive righteousness" offered by God through faith that he felt he had been "born again" (p. 337). Thus, central to Luther's experience of

conversion was turning "from works righteousness to reliance on faith" (Harran, 1983, p. 190). Accordingly, his personal experience as well as his anthropological pessimism informed his conception of conversion, which he understood as internalizing the truth of justification by faith alone. It is important to note, however, that for Luther, "by faith alone" did not mean that a sinner was justified "on account of" his or her faith; rather, justification was *received* by faith, which he understood as trusting that God had provided everything that was needed for justification.

Thus, in the process of conversion, "God is active, and humans are passive," as even faith is a gracious gift from God (McGrath, 1998, p.188). In other words, the classical Lutheran position was that conversion was the experience of recognizing one's status of being saved by grace. Reformed theology, informed by the thought of Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin, conceptualized faith and conversion in a similar way to Luther, although with greater emphasis on predestination, i.e., they stressed that justification could only be by grace if it was unconditional and irresistible; thus, only those predestined for salvation could experience conversion. Likewise, the English Protestant reformer Thomas Cranmer understood justification by faith and conversion in a way that was very similar to Luther, Zwingli and Calvin (Olson, 1999).

The Anabaptist reformers also viewed salvation as a gift from God received by faith; however, in contrast to the Magisterial reformers, most Anabaptists also emphasized the subjective experience of conversion or "new birth," which they considered the human response to the saving initiative of God. This experience involved "turning in a new direction," which was defined by repentance and a new commitment to

Christ (Dyck, 1995, p. 52), enabling even those nurtured in faith from childhood to consider themselves "first generation" believers (p. 42). Furthermore, although very few Anabaptists believed in the possibility of sinless perfection, they emphasized the gradual process of sanctification, a growth in "holiness and Christ-likeness, an overcoming of sin by grace," as a result of the new birth and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (p. 52). Due to ongoing persecution, however, the impact of Anabaptist thought on Protestant theology was limited (Olson, 1999).

Conversion in the post-Reformation era

As Protestant theology splintered during the post-Reformation era, the concept of conversion also came to be understood in a variety of ways by different individuals and groups. Jacob Arminius' understanding of conversion developed within and in reaction to Reformed theology, although in some ways the groundwork for his thinking had been laid by the Anabaptist reformers (Olson, 1999). Although Arminius was "in complete agreement" with the central Protestant tenet of justification by grace through faith (Arminius, 1629/1986, p. 695), he rejected the Reformed notion that grace was unconditional and irresistible, extended only to those predestined for salvation. Rather, he believed that justification by faith was an unearned gift that God extended to everyone; however, he emphasized that God does not "compel" humans to choose faith; rather, because God created human beings as "rational Creatures," they are free to either accept or reject the gift of faith (Warne, 1742, p. 75). Thus, conversion involved actively choosing to accept God's justifying grace. Arminius stressed that conversion did not constitute good work; rather, it was prevenient grace, "the convicting, calling,

enlightening and enabling grace of God" (Olson, 2006, p. 35), that enabled the human will to cooperate with God, in order to recognize personal need for salvation and accept God's justifying grace, resulting in conversion (Olson, 1999).

The Pietist movement, advanced by Johann Arndt, Philipp Jakob Spener, August Hermann Francke and Nikolaus Ludwig van Zinzendorf, arose within and in reaction to Lutheran theology (Olson, 1999). The major conviction of the Pietists was that the "reformation of doctrine" begun by Luther needed to be accompanied by a "reformation of life" (Brown, 1978, p. 83). Although they affirmed Luther's conception of salvation as an unearned gift, the "objective work of God," they believed that Lutheran theology had a tendency to neglect the "subjective" experience of God (Olson, 1999, p. 475). Thus, Pietism focused on personal piety, which began with a definite conversion experience that included recognition of one's sinfulness and need for grace (Campbell, 1991). Similarly to Anabaptist and Arminian understandings, this experience required "conscious decisions of repentance and faith," and was "accompanied by feelings of sorrow, trust and joy," followed by the gradual process of growth in Christ-likeness; however, while they affirmed the Protestant principle of salvation by grace through faith, the Pietists tended to emphasize the experience of conversion in a way that ultimately "overshadowed justification" (Olson, 1999, p. 487).

The Puritan and Methodist movements, while espousing very different theologies, both arose within the context of post-Reformation Anglican theology. The earliest Puritans were English Calvinists who sought to complete the task of purifying the church that had been initiated by the Protestant Reformation; thus, their efforts were aimed at

abolishing unbiblical traditions and practices associated with Roman Catholicism (Olson, 1999). The Puritans were particularly opposed to the "formal religion" of the English church (Noll, 2003, p. 53); thus, despite their emphasis on predestination, they advanced the concept of a more "heartfelt," "personal" and "internal" faith (p. 54). Accordingly, they came to stress the experiential component of religion, particularly a personal experience of conversion (Noll, 2003; Tipson, 1975).

Similarly to the Puritans, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, also sought to renew Anglican theology. Also similarly to the Puritans, Wesley emphasized the experience of conversion; however, in contrast to the Calvinist Puritans, Wesley's theology was "thoroughly Arminian." Thus, while he affirmed the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, he also emphasized the need for human response to God's saving initiative through conversion (Olson, 1999, p. 512), which he defined as "a thorough change of life and heart from sin to holiness; a turning" (Wesley, 1790). Although Wesley believed that the conscious choice of conversion was necessary in order to be a "real Christian" (Olson, 1999 p. 514), it was not meritorious, as it was enabled by God's prevenient grace (p. 515), which Wesley termed "preventing" grace (Wesley, c.1732/1986, p. 207), and which he believed was extended to every human being from the beginning of life (Scanlon, 1969, p. 100-01).

Furthermore, Wesley viewed justification, new birth and sanctification holistically. He wrote, "At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, *sanctification* begins. In that instant we are '*born again*' (emphasis in text)" (Wesley, 1750/1986, p. 158). Thus, justification, which brings about "relational" change (Oden,

2012, p. 231), is "intimately woven together" with the experience of new birth (p. 219), while sanctification, which results in "behavioral" change, follows (p. 231). Accordingly, while justification restores us to the "*favor* of God (emphasis in text)," through sanctification we are restored in the "*image* of God (emphasis in text)" (Oden, p. 232). This does not, however, occur through human effort, for "faith alone . . . is the sole instrument by which grace works goodness in human life" (Olson, 1999, p. 515). Thus, while "justification is God's action *for us in the Son*, new birth is the inauguration of God's action *in us through the Spirit* (emphasis in text)" (Oden, 2012, p. 232).

Conversion in the New World

Despite their significantly different understandings of grace and free will, Puritanism and Methodism both influenced conceptions of conversion in the new world (Olson, 1999). The English Puritans who migrated to New England embraced the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, and thus the notion that one's status was determined by God before birth and could not be changed. Determining this status became the great preoccupation of New England Puritans, and their solution was to look "within one's inner life." Individuals, including children, were considered members of the elect only when they were able to recount a conversion experience, which they viewed as evidence of "elements of saving grace within" (Mullin, 2002, p. 30). Consequently, in addition to confessing orthodox Calvinist beliefs, potential members, including second-generation believers, were required to provide a detailed account of a personal conversion experience that entailed "contrition, repentance, belief, trust, and assurance of forgiveness" (Olson, 1999, p. 499). Those second-generation believers who could not give evidence

of a conversion experience could not qualify for communion or full church membership (Ferguson, 1973).

A distinctive conversion experience was also important in the Methodist Episcopal Church, an early expression of Methodism in America. The denomination, which emphasized Christian piety, was characterized by worship services that were often emotional and demonstrative, and that frequently included both personal testimonies and conversion narratives (Bangs, 1839). Facilitating a conversion experience became the "central task" of the Methodist circuit-riding preachers. For Methodists in the new world, conversion involved three stages: first, an awareness of personal sin and its consequences; second, a renunciation of sin and expression of allegiance to Christ; and third, a commitment to the lifelong process of sanctification through holy living (Teasdale, 2012, p. 97). Preachers attempted to create "a crisis situation," requiring listeners to choose between a life of sin, which ultimately led to eternal damnation, and accepting Christ's forgiveness and the promise of eternal life (p. 98). This "crisis conversion," which consisted of radical repentance resulting in assurance of forgiveness and salvation, was then followed by an invitation to church membership, "a means of engaging in the process of sanctification" (p. 99).

As evidenced above, a distinctive conversion became an important part of religious experience in both the Calvinist and Arminian expressions of American Protestant faith. By the time of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, revivalist preachers had come to insist on a "dramatic, instantaneous conversion experience" (Hewitt, 1991, p. 129). Within this context, Horace Bushnell, a New

England pastor and theologian, who reacted to both the Calvinist understanding of predestination and to revivalist methodology, advanced an important new conception of conversion. Although Bushnell assumed that children might "experience conversion at some point in early life," he did not see that this needed to be "a sudden, cataclysmic event;" rather, he saw conversion as a "gradual awakening of the soul to God" (Bendroth, 2001, p. 353) that could occur almost imperceptibly. God, Bushnell asserted, "may be doing as glorious a work in the soul, when there is but a very gentle, or almost no excitement of feeling" (Bushnell, 1847/1975, p. 137). Furthermore, regarding second-generation believers, Bushnell insisted that children could "grow up Christian, and never know [themselves] as being otherwise" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 65). While Bushnell did not assert that all children could be nurtured into faith, he believed that everyday life, within the context of the Christian home, could form a child's faith in such a way that "no conversion experience [was] necessary, but only the development of a new life already begun" (pp. 372-73).

Some of Bushnell's theological peers were critical of what they saw as a scaled down and overly optimistic understanding of conversion, suggesting that Bushnell had essentially discarded the notion that children were born sinners, thus encouraging them to "believe in the 'delusion' of their own righteousness" and to underestimate their need for conversion (Bendroth, 2001, p. 360). While Bushnell did not deny that sin was a universal human problem, he was "not always systematic or clear in his explanation[s]" of either human sin or the need for supernatural grace in the process of conversion (Bendroth, 2001, p. 361; Jankiewicz and Jankiewicz, 2013; Mullin, 2002); consequently,

65

scholars continue to struggle to clearly articulate his theology of conversion (Adamson, 1966; Berryman, 2009; Cross, 1958; Smith, 1955; Weigle, 1888).

In summary, therefore, by the early nineteenth century, a distinctive conversion experience in the lives of both first- and greater-generation believers had come to be considered essential to religious faith in both the Calvinist and Arminian traditions. In contrast, Bushnell suggested that conversion, particularly in the lives of those nurtured in faith, could occur both gradually and almost imperceptibly.

Conversion in the writings of Ellen White

Ellen White's thoughts on conversion developed within the early nineteenth-century theological milieu of New England, i.e., within the context of the classical theological questions of grace and free will, as well as the debate over conversion as dramatic and instantaneous as opposed to gradual. Given her Methodist Episcopal background (White, 1915), White's understanding of conversion and salvation were Wesleyan. Thus, while she affirmed the need for human response to God's saving initiative, she also emphasized the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, central to which was her understanding of human sin. She wrote,

> Man was originally endowed with noble powers and a well-balanced mind. He was perfect in his being, and in harmony with God. His thoughts were pure, his aims holy. But through disobedience, his powers were perverted, and selfishness took the place of love. His nature became so weakened through transgression that it was impossible for him, in his own strength, to resist the power of evil (White, 1892/1977, p. 17)

On their own, human beings are helpless to overcome the effects of sin. "Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort . . . are powerless. They may produce an

outward correctness of behavior, but they cannot change the heart" (White, 1892/1977, p.

18). Without the initiative of God's grace, "all human effort is unavailing" (White,

1923/1962, p. 538) and human beings are forever doomed (p. 166). Fortunately, in the

"matchless gift of His Son," God made provision for life (White, 1892/1977, p. 68).

Through His death on the cross, Christ provided both pardon for sin and restoration to

God:

> Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and
> temptations such as we have met. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now
> He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to
> Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then sinful as your life may have been, for
> His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your
> character, and you are accepted before God just as if you had not sinned (White,
> 1892/1977, p. 62).

Furthermore, God also provided His Spirit, without whom "the sacrifice of Christ would

have been of no avail," for it is the Holy Spirit that "makes effectual" what Christ did for

humanity on the cross (White, 1898/2005, p. 671). It is through the work of the Holy

Spirit that Christ can become real to human beings, and live in their hearts (White,

1958/2006, p. 251); by the "transforming agency" of the Holy Spirit that human beings

can experience conversion, becoming "new creature[s]" (White, 1898/2005, p. 391).

Thus, conversion is not a natural process, "a modification or improvement of the old;"

rather, it is a supernatural transformation, "a new life altogether," brought about by the

power of God (White, 1898/2005, p. 172).

This does not, however, mean that human beings play no role in their conversion.

Although White asserted that "[h]uman effort avails nothing without divine power," she

also declared that "divine effort" is "to no avail" without "human endeavor" (White, 1917,

p. 487), because God gives human beings free will, and thus never forces them to choose

Him against their will (White, 1892/1977, p. 44). White declared,

> God has given us the power of choice; it is ours to exercise. We cannot change
> our hearts, we cannot control our thoughts, our impulses, our affections. We
> cannot make ourselves pure, for God's service. But we can choose to serve God
> (White, 1905/2003, p. 176).

Thus, the human component of conversion is the choice to "come to Christ,"

central to which is repentance, defined as "sorrow for sin and a turning away from it"

(White, 1892/1977, p. 19). Genuine repentance, however, is more than just sorrow over

the suffering that sin brings; it is "sorrow for the sin itself," without a desire to escape its'

"judgment" (White, 1892/1977, p. 21). Without genuine repentance, there is "no

conversion" (p. 20); however, the choice to repent "is beyond the reach of our own power

to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ . . . We can no more repent without the

Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ" (p. 22).

Thus, divine initiative is always foremost, for "repentance comes from Christ as truly as

does pardon" (White, 1898/2005, p. 175). It is the power of Christ, "an influence of

which [the individual is] unconscious," that draws the human response (p. 23). This

power, however, is not irresistible; "the sinner may resist . . . may refuse to be drawn . . .

but if he does not resist he will be drawn . . . to the foot of the cross in repentance" (p. 24).

Regarding the question of *how* individuals experience conversion, "the Spirit of

God operates differently with different individuals" (White, 1891, p. 56); thus,

> All conversions are not alike. Jesus impresses the heart, and the sinner is born
> again to new life. Often souls have been drawn to Christ when there was no
> violent conviction, no soul rending, no remorseful terrors. They looked upon an
> uplifted Saviour; they lived. They saw the soul's need; they saw the Saviour's
> sufficiency and His claims; they heard His voice saying, "Follow Me," and they

rose up and followed Him. This conversion was genuine, and the religious life was just as decided as was that of others who suffered all the agony of a violent process (White, 1946, p. 287-88).

Not only did White assert that conversion need not be dramatic in order to be genuine, but she suggested that conversion could be "imperceptible." She wrote:

> A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place of his conversion; yet this does not prove him to be unconverted . . . Though the work of grace is silent and imperceptible, it may be fully as effective as when its operations are more apparent (White, 1886, p. 97).

Speaking to the voice of her many contemporaries, who insisted on the need for dramatic, instantaneous conversion, White wrote,

> Some have lived in sadness for years, waiting for some marked evidence that they were accepted by God . . . They are waiting for that peculiar change that they have been led to believe is connected with conversion. After a time some of these do receive evidence of their acceptance with God . . . And they date their conversion from that time. But I have been shown that they were adopted into the family of God before that time. God accepted them when they became weary of sin, and having lost their desire for worldly pleasures, resolved to seek God earnestly (White, 1946, p. 286).

Throughout her writings, Ellen White uses the term "conversion" to describe a variety of spiritual experiences. These include, first, the distinctive moment of radical transformation that is generally equated with conversion, as in the experience of Dionysius the Areopagite; second, acceptance of new theological ideas that results in changed "thinking or acting or both," as in the experience of Saul of Tarsus; third, rededication to God after going astray, as in the experience of Simon Peter; and fourth, daily turning to God, ideally the experience of every Christian. Significantly, the common element in each of these different experiences is human turning to God, in response to divine initiative (Guy, 1955, p. 8-9). The outcome of this turning is

69

transformation, "a change in the heart," resulting in "[n]ew thoughts, new feelings, new purposes" (White, 1899, p. 469). In other words, the transformation wrought through conversion is holistic, effecting change in the intellectual, affective and behavioral spheres of life.

Children can also experience conversion, as even in the earliest years "young children may have correct views of their state as sinners and of the way of salvation through Christ" (White, 1954/2002, p. 491). Moreover, just like adults, children can make the choice for God; however, particularly in the lives of children who have been nurtured in faith, the experience of conversion can be a gradual, almost imperceptible process. Thus, "in working for the conversion of our children, we should not look for violent emotion as the essential evidence of conviction of sin. Nor is it necessary to know the exact time when they are converted" (White, 1898/2005, p. 515). Moreover, White emphasized that, even after conversion, it is possible for children to "lose faith and courage" (White, 1900/1948, p. 94), which may indicate her understanding that childhood conversion is based on an immature conception of sin, forgiveness and salvation, and that ongoing nurture is needed for childhood faith to grow and eventually mature into adult faith.

In summary, therefore, Ellen White insisted that human beings have no power to regenerate themselves. Conversion is not a natural process; rather, it is a supernatural transformation, brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit. Although conversion is wrought by the power of God, it requires a freely chosen human response, central to which is turning to God while turning away from sin; however, even this choice is

70

enabled by the power of God. Conversion can be experienced in a variety of ways, including a dramatic moment of radical transformation, a change in theological understanding, a rededication to God following a period of backsliding, as well as the ongoing experience of daily turning to God. In the lives of those who have been nurtured in faith, conversion can occur gradually and almost imperceptibly. The outcome of conversion is holistic transformation.

Toward an SDA Understanding of Conversion

An SDA understanding of conversion, based on Scripture and influenced by the writings of Ellen White, can be considered to be within the broader context of the following traditions: first, in its emphasis on repentance, its affirmation of different types of experiences, as well as its emphasis on the holistic nature of conversion, it is Biblical; second, in its call for ongoing, daily turning to God, it is monastic; third, in its affirmation of justification by grace through faith, it is firmly within the Protestant tradition; fourth, in its emphasis on prevenient grace, as well as human free will and the need for human response, it is Arminian; fifth, in its emphasis on holistic transformation, it is Wesleyan; and sixth, in its affirmation of gradual conversion experiences, it is Bushnellian.

Theoretical Perspectives on Conversion

The purpose of this section was to examine theoretical perspectives on conversion. Much has been written on this topic, and it is beyond the scope of this study to review all of the research literature in this area. Thus, in searching for articles, the following initial

criteria were used: first, only primary sources were selected; and second, only peer-reviewed journals were searched.

Early Research on Conversion

Conversion has been the subject of both theoretical and empirical study in the discipline of psychology since the late nineteenth century. Early conversion research, which represents the empirical studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was influenced by the religious milieu of the time, particularly Protestant revivalism. Consequently, although these early researchers, who used a theological framework to study conversion, recognized that conversion could be either sudden or gradual, they were particularly interested in sudden, intense conversion experiences (Richardson, 1985; Spilka, Hood and Gorusch, 1985). The earliest published study (Starbuck, 1901), which used a questionnaire to examine mental states associated with conversion, concluded that conversion was preceded by a crisis, which was subsequently resolved through conversion. Similarly, William James, who studied first person, verbatim accounts of sudden, intense conversion experiences, concluded that, through the experience of conversion, "a self hitherto divided" became "unified" (James, 1902/2010, p. 177). Later researchers of the early twentieth century concurred with Starbuck and James on the outcome of conversion as "unification of a divided self" (Paloutzian, 2014, p. 213); however, although their primary focus was also sudden conversion, they considered gradual conversion important (Coe, 1916; Paloutzian, 2014; Pratt, 1920).

The results of early research on conversion can be summarized as follows: sudden conversions, which tend to occur in middle or late adolescence, are generally experienced

emotionally, and result in a sense of release from sin and guilt, leading to new life; gradual conversions, which tend to occur in late adolescence or early adulthood, are generally experienced in the intellectual sphere, and result in a sense of new meaning and purpose (Spilka et al., 1985). In addition to these early categories of sudden and gradual conversion, Scobie (1973, 1975) proposed an "unconscious" category, which he suggested was the experience of those who could not identify a time when religion was not a part of their lives. The discipline of psychology, however, considers this an outcome of "religious socialization," rather than of "conversion" (Spilka et al., p. 210); and current definitions distinguish between the experience of conversion, which implies the ability to "identify a time before which the religion was not accepted and after which it was," and the experience of "arriving at a point of belief through the process of socialization and other developmental mechanisms" (Paloutzian, 2014, p. 211).

Attachment Theory and Conversion

Considering the objective of this dissertation, which is to describe the conversions of those nurtured in faith, most contemporary conversion research is not relevant to this study. The one exception is research that explores the effect of parental nurture on conversion and religious development. Most of these studies have used attachment theory as a theoretical framework. First proposed by John Bowlby, attachment theory asserts that a powerful attachment forms between an infant and the primary care giver during the first year of a child's life, creating within the child internal working models of both self and others (Bowlby, 1969). Later work by Ainsworth and colleagues suggests

that different patterns of attachment develop as a consequence of different styles of parent-child interactions.

A secure pattern of attachment results when parents are consistently responsive, whereas inadequate parental care results in insecure patterns of attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall, 1978). Bowlby suggested that the attachment that developed between an infant and his/her primary care givers was not only of critical importance to the young child, but that it was foundational to all human development, as it affected human beings "from the cradle to the grave" (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129). Bowlby's assertions were confirmed by later studies, which found that similar patterns of attachment were identifiable in older children, as well as in adults, and that early attachment patterns influenced relationships throughout the life cycle, including one's relationship with God (Goldberg, 1991).

In a seminal study in the area of attachment theory and religion, Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) suggested that attachment theory provided a powerful theoretical framework for studying the psychology of religion. This study, the first to compare childhood attachment patterns with religiosity, concluded that certain predictions could be made regarding childhood attachment and religiosity: first, that adults with an insecure childhood attachment pattern would be more religious as adults, but only if their parents were not religious; and second, that adults with an insecure childhood attachment pattern were more likely to experience sudden religious conversions. The authors suggested that, on the basis of their findings, it appeared that individuals with an insecure childhood

attachment pattern who were religious often turned to God in an effort to compensate for their insecure parental attachment.

Two years later, Kirkpatrick wrote a paper in which he suggested two rival hypotheses regarding childhood attachment patterns and religiosity (Kirkpatrick, 1992). The first, the compensation hypothesis, suggested that, just as children with insecure attachment patterns with their parents sometimes sought attachment elsewhere, so adults with insecure attachment patterns often turned to God as a substitute attachment figure, thus compensating for their insecurity. In contrast, the correspondence hypothesis suggested that people's early attachment patterns corresponded with their later attachments, including their attachment to God, i.e., a secure attachment to parents would correspond with a secure attachment to God in later life, whereas an insecure attachment to parents would correspond with a similarly insecure attachment to God. Since that time, much of the empirical research in the area of attachment theory and religion has, in some form or another, attempted to test the validity of Kirkpatrick's hypotheses.

The first major attempt to test these hypotheses supported the compensation hypothesis, in that individuals with insecure attachment patterns turned to God as a substitute attachment figure, thus compensating for their insecurity, resulting in emotionally based religiosity. Regarding the correspondence hypothesis, the results of this study indicated that only a secure attachment was linked to adoption of parental religious values, whereas insecure attachment patterns with religious parents were likely to result in rejection of parental values (Granqvist and Hagekull, 1999).

A study by Granqvist (2002), which was both cross-sectional and longitudinal, again supported the compensation hypothesis and the correspondence hypothesis in cases of secure attachment only. In an attempt to explain why the correspondence hypothesis applied only in cases of secure attachment, Granqvist went on to propose a two-level correspondence hypothesis, which suggested that socialization based religiosity within the context of a secure attachment occurred at two levels. At the first level, a secure attachment pattern provided the conditions necessary for social learning of parental standard. Thus, in cases of secure attachment patterns, children would be likely to adopt their parents' religious values and practices if their parents were religious, or no religious beliefs if their parents were not religious. At the second level, a secure attachment resulted in positive concepts of self and others, which corresponded with positive concepts of God.

In an effort to test the validity of both the compensation hypothesis and the revised two-level hypothesis, Granqvist and Kirkpatrick (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 11 cross-national questionnaire studies in the area of childhood attachment patterns and religious conversion. The conclusions of this study were as follows: first, the two-level correspondence hypothesis, i.e., that secure attachment resulted in socialization-based religiosity, was the most statistically common pattern; and second, the compensation hypothesis, the compensation hypothesis tends to apply if an insecure pattern of attachment is present. Many studies since that time have tended to support these conclusions (see for example Cassiba, Granqvist, Costantini, and Gatto, 2008; Dickie, Ajega, Kobylak, and Nixon, 2006; Granqvist, Ivarsson and Broberg, 2007;

Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2007; Granqvist, Ljungdahl and Dickie, 2007; Reinert and Edwards, 2009; Ringel, 2008). These studies provide evidence that parental nurture influences subsequent religious development.

Summary

The objectives of this chapter were two-fold. The first objective was to provide a framework for understanding the experience of Christian faith formation. Accordingly, both theological and theoretical perspectives on Christian faith formation were explored. As evidenced above, an SDA theology emphasizes holistic faith formation and recognizes that this requires the effort of home, church and school. The model of Christian faith formation proposed by Jonathan Kim and the model of Christian teaching proposed by Yount provide a framework for understanding holistic faith formation; and the differentiated faith model proposed by Balswick et al. provides a framework for understanding the divine component of conversion within the context of faith formation.

The second objective of this chapter was to provide a framework for understanding the experience of conversion within the lives of those nurtured in faith. Accordingly, both theological and theoretical perspectives on conversion were explored. As evidenced above, an SDA theology emphasizes justification by grace through faith, while affirming human free will and the need for human response, which is enabled by prevenient grace. Within this context, conversion is understood as a turning from sin and turning to God, which can be experienced as a single moment or as a gradual process. Conversion can also denote the ongoing, daily turning to God that is part of Christian life and that results in holistic transformation. While spiritual nurture can provide an

environment that contributes to the formation of a holistic faith, even those individuals nurtured in faith must ultimately make a voluntary choice for God.

The theoretical perspectives on conversion that were pertinent to this study were, first, early research on conversion; and second, contemporary research on attachment theory and conversion. Early research on conversion suggested that conversion could be experienced either suddenly or gradually. Although a third type, an unconscious experience of conversion, was also evident in some later research, this type of experience has come to be considered an outcome of religious socialization, rather than conversion per se. Contemporary research on conversion and attachment suggests that parental nurture influences subsequent religious development.

CHAPTER THREE

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Scriptures are replete with instructions for adults to nurture the faith of

children; however, the Scriptures imply that even those individuals nurtured in faith must

be "born from above," (John 3: 3, 8), an experience that has come to be equated with

conversion. Most empirical research on conversion has focused on the experience of

change in religious affiliation; thus, the experience of conversion in the lives of those

nurtured in faith has been poorly conceptualized. The purpose of this phenomenological

study was to understand *how* SDA young adults who grow up within an SDA home and

faith community experience faith and conversion.

Overall Approach and Rationale

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, as well as its goal to understand "the

inner experience of participants," a qualitative research approach was adopted (Corbin

and Strauss, 2008). More specifically, a phenomenological approach, which attempted to

understand how people experience a certain concept or phenomenon, was utilized.

Traditionally, phenomenological research involves in-depth interviews resulting in

narrative accounts of the participants' lived experiences, which are then analyzed in order

to generate findings. "Although all qualitative research is phenomenological in the sense that there is a focus on people's experience, a phenomenological study seeks to understand the *essence* or *structure* of a phenomenon" (Italics in text) (Merriam, 2002, p. 93). Thus, phenomenological research is an attempt to "enter that dialogue, and eavesdrop, as it were; to listen in," (van der Mescht, 1999, p. 3, cited in Merriam, 93.), in order to "grasp the very nature" of the phenomenon (van Mannen, 1990, p.177).

The *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Embree, 1997) identifies seven unique approaches to phenomenology; however, the two approaches that guide the majority of phenomenological research are descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology (Creswell, 2007; Lopez and Willis, 2004; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). Thus, it is these two approaches that will be highlighted in this discussion. Historically, phenomenology draws on the philosophical tradition, particularly on the writings of German mathematician and philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), whose insights gave rise to both a complex philosophical tradition and a method of inquiry. Today, Husserl's approach to phenomenology is known as descriptive phenomenology (Benoist, 2003; LeVassueur, 2003; Maggs-Rapport, 2000), and is based on several Husserlian assumptions. First, Husserl asserted that the lived, or subjective, experiences of individuals have value and should be the object of research. Furthermore, Husserl believed that the meaning of these lived experiences could only be understood by direct interaction between the researcher and the object of research (Husserl, 1900/1970).

Second, Husserl believed that in order for the researcher to objectively describe the phenomenon of study, he or she must consciously and actively seek to strip away

prior experiential knowledge and personal biases by employing the process of bracketing, which involves holding in abeyance personal ideas and preconceptions while listening to and reflecting on the experiences of participants. Husserl believed that through the process of bracketing, the researcher could gain insight into the features of the lived experience that were common to all who share the experience. Identifying these common features, which Husserl referred to as universal essences or eidetic structures and which represent the true nature of the phenomenon under study, makes a generalizable and scientific description possible (Lopez and Willis, 2004; Luft, 2003; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). The last central tenet of Husserl's descriptive approach to phenomenology was his belief that human beings are free agents who are responsible for influencing their environment and culture. The impact of the environment, however, on lived experiences and individual freedom was not central to Husserl's thought (Lopez and Willis, 2004; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007).

Throughout the twentieth century, Husserl's approach to phenomenological research was modified and further developed by subsequent scholars, including Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty (Moran, 2000). The work of Heidegger, a student of Husserl, gave rise to what is known today as the hermeneutic, or interpretive, approach to phenomenology (Cohen, 1987; Draucker, 1999). The philosophical assumptions of Heidegger's hermeneutic approach differ from Husserlian descriptive phenomenology in two fundamental ways. First, central to Heidegger's (1962) thought was the concept of *"lifeworld"* or the human way of *"being-in-the-world"* (Lopez and Willis, 2004). Thus, in contrast to the descriptive phenomenological

approach, hermeneutic phenomenology goes beyond describing the essence of lived experience, and attempts to situate experience in relation to the broader context of the individual's life (Campbell, 2001; Lopez and Willis, 2004; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007).

Second, in contrast to Husserl, Heidegger (1962) asserted that not only is it impossible to strip away prior experiential knowledge and personal biases, it is not desirable, because researcher knowledge can contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Lopez and Willis, 2004). Thus, in hermeneutic phenomenology, an understanding of the phenomenon is cogenerated through a blending of the researcher's knowledge of the phenomenon, which may include the use of a theoretical orientation or conceptual framework, as well as the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007).

In summary, therefore, descriptive phenomenology focuses on describing universal essences of the lived experiences of participants. It is generally more suited to research that aims to describe phenomena that have never been studied, or that have been incompletely conceptualized in prior research (Beck, 1992; Lopez and Willis, 2004; Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald, 1988). In contrast, hermeneutic phenomenology includes an interpretive process, in which the researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experiences in relation to the broader context of the participants' lives. A hermeneutic approach is appropriate when the context of the participants lived experiences is examined, and understanding is generated through the dynamic interplay between researcher and participant (Benner, 1994; Draucker, 1999; Koch, 1995; Parse, 1999).

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to guide this study because the experience of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith can best be understood within the wider context of their formative faith experiences, i.e., within the broader context of their lives; and because I believed that my interest in and understanding of children's faith formation could contribute to interpreting the meaning of participants' lived experiences in relation to the broader context of their lives.

Sampling

Rather than attempting to provide conclusive answers to previously raised questions, qualitative research methodologies attempt to provide in-depth understanding of little-known phenomena, and to raise questions that guide further research. Furthermore, in contrast with quantitative methodologies, qualitative research does not seek to provide generalizable results, but rather, "to elucidate the particular, the specific" (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Thus, rather than using random sampling strategies, qualitative methodologies use "purposeful sampling," which involves selecting a limited number of participants based on their ability to "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). Thus, purposeful sampling leads to selecting "information rich cases . . . from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

Although Creswell (2007) identifies 16 different purposeful sampling strategies, he states that only a "narrow range of sampling strategies" is suited to phenomenological research (p. 128). Of the purposeful sampling strategies outlined by Creswell, only two

were appropriate for this study. First, criterion based sampling, which involves selecting "cases that meet some criterion," is central to a phenomenological study, as it is essential that all participants have experienced the phenomenon under study (p. 127). Thus, the sample for this study included only SDA young adults who grew up within an SDA family and faith context, who were at least third-generation SDA, and who continue to be members of SDA faith communities. Second, homogenous sampling, which involves selecting similar cases, provides focus and reduces variability while simultaneously encouraging descriptions from individual participant's unique perspectives, thus facilitating the goal of understanding the essence of the phenomenon under study (p. 127). Accordingly, in order to facilitate similarity, only Caucasian young adults between the ages of 25 and 40 were included in this study. Both male and female participant were included, not in order to examine gender differences, but in order to hear both male and female voices.

Regarding size, Dukes (1984) recommends 3 to 10 participants for a phenomenological study, whereas Polkinghorne (1989) advocates studying 5 to 25 individuals. In contrast, Wolff (2002) suggests that the answer to the size question does not lie in "some externally sanctioned number, but inside the one who embodies the research process." Rather than "deciding" on a certain number of participants, the researcher must "engage in self-reflection" during the process of data collection, in order to "recognize" when the "description is in the process of ending" and the "thematization" or "reduction" is beginning (Wolff, p. 117). Accordingly, as the data collection and analysis for this study progressed, and as the major themes began to emerge, data

collection was discontinued. The final number of participants included in this study was fourteen.

Data Gathering Methods

This phenomenological study was based on the assumption that the lived experiences of individuals can only be understood by direct interaction between the researcher and the object of research, i.e., the participants (Husserl, 1900/1970). Thus, the data for this research were collected through "intensive" or "in-depth" interviews (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25), which were conducted in Berrien Springs, MI, between the months of March and August 2014. The goal of these interviews, which entailed "entering the participants' worlds" (Charmaz, p. 19), was gathering "rich data" that were "detailed, focused and full" and that "reveal[ed] participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (p. 14). This process facilitated deep exploration of lived experiences by allowing participants to reflect on their lives "in ways that seldom occur in everyday life" (p. 25). Establishing rapport early in the interview, as well as assuming an active listening role throughout the interview process, facilitated the gathering of rich data for this study. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to look for leads that would elicit rich data, as well as to be alert to the "nuances of meaning and process," which were often more evident in the emotions that accompanied the retelling of events than in the words themselves (Charmaz, p. 34).

In qualitative research, intensive or in-depth interviewing can either be "*structured*," in which the questions are created by the researcher and do not change during the process of interviewing; "*semi-structured*," in which the researcher begins

with some questions but is open to adding to or replacing these with questions that emerge during the research process; or "*unstructured*," in which the researcher begins only with a general research focus, and allows questions to develop during the interview process (Glesne, 2011, p. 102). This study adopted a semi-structured approach to interviewing, which involved a tentative "best effort" (p. 103) at creating meaningful questions, using them during the during the pilot study, and remaining open to adapting them throughout the research process, depending on whether or not they resonated with the participants, and thus generated rich data.

Semi-structured interviewing involves "open-ended but directed" questioning. The open-ended questions used in this study allowed participants to tell their stories in unanticipated ways, thus facilitating detailed descriptions of lived experiences that were not forced into pre-conceived categories; however, questions were sufficiently directed, in order to generate data that was congruent with research goals (Charmaz, 2006, p. 28). The initial questions used in this study, some of which have been adapted from Charmaz (2006), were as follows: Can you tell me what "faith" or "having faith" means to you? Beginning wherever you like, tell me about the experiences you think shaped your faith. Can you tell me what you understand by the word "conversion?" Have you experienced something that could be considered conversion? If so, can you describe that for me? Is there anything else you think I should know about your experience of faith or conversion? Is there anything you would like to ask me?

After approval from Andrews University's Institutional Review Board, individuals who met inclusion criteria were approached and asked to participate. At the

beginning of the first interview, participants were advised that the researcher might need

to meet with them at least one more time. Also at the first interview, informed consent

was discussed in detail. This included the following elements: first, the purpose of the

study was outlined; second, the voluntary nature of participation in the study was

emphasized, and participants were assured that they could stop the interview process or

withdraw from the study at any time, without any explanation; third, the potential risks of

participating in the study were explored with each participant, particularly the emotional

consequences of reflecting on their faith journey; and fourth, the strategies for

maintaining confidentiality were explained, i.e., together with the researcher, each

participant chose a pseudonym for the research, which was then used in the transcripts,

and participants were assured that only the researcher would have access to the recorded

material, which would be stored electronically. Participants were also assured of the

opportunity to review a narrative of the interview transcript, for the purpose of

clarification and validation. After participants signed the informed consent form (see

Appendix A), recording of the interview commenced.

Each interview was recorded and then transcribed verbatim, resulting in a total of

172 pages of single-spaced type. For details of interview times, as well as the number of

transcript pages/words generated from each interview, see Appendix B. The original

proposal for this study included the step of reconstructing a "narrative" of the

participant's experience, which was to be "derived from the transcript" (Caelli, 2001, p.

278). This step was utilized with the first seven interview transcripts, and involved

reading the transcript several times, deleting both the questions and the material deemed

irrelevant to the phenomenon of interest, followed by reconstructing a narrative in chronological order, using the participant's own words. Sections that needed further clarification were highlighted, and the participants were given the narratives to read, as well as asked to clarify highlighted sections. Of these seven initial narratives, which were given to participants for review, only two were ever returned, and these with only minimal changes. The remaining participants did not engage meaningfully with the narratives, i.e., several months passed without responses, despite emailed reminders. Consequently, the two narratives that had been reviewed by participants were used as part of the raw data; however, the other five narratives were discarded, and the verbatim transcripts were considered the raw data. Furthermore, the subsequent interviews were transcribed verbatim, but the step of creating narratives from the verbatim transcripts was abandoned. Thus, the final data for this study included two narratives that had been reviewed and returned by participants, as well as twelve verbatim interview transcripts. Data analysis procedures were then applied to this data.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data analysis begins with coding, which is done both during and after the data collection process. Although coding is "not a precise science" that follows a specific blueprint, and although coding is only the first step, "the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis" (Caelli, 2001, p. 4), the "excellence" of qualitative research ultimately depends upon the "excellence of the coding" (Strauss, 1987, p. 27).   Coding begins with reading and re-reading the interview transcript in order to obtain an overall understanding of the big picture, and then breaking

the transcript down into small units of data, either sentences or paragraphs, and assigning

a code, i.e., a "word or short phrase," to each portion of data, which captures the essence

of that data (Saldana, 2011, p. 3).

Although many authors describe coding, this study drew on the coding methods

described by Saldana (2011), which are divided into two categories: First Cycle coding,

which represents initial coding of data, and Second Cycle coding, the goal of which is to

identify themes or categories from the First Cycle codes. Although Saldana describes

seven categories of First Cycle coding methods, he states that one coding method may

suffice, or that two or more may be needed, depending on the goals of the study, as well

as the complexity of the phenomenon of study. This study utilized the First Cycle coding

method known as Initial Coding, which involved assigning detailed codes to each line or

sentence of data that reflected the participants' lived experience. Initial Coding is an

open-ended approach; thus, the codes proposed during Initial Coding were considered

"tentative and provisional," and intended as a "starting point . . . for further exploration"

(Ibid, p. 81). According to Lichtman (2006), most qualitative studies generate between

eighty and one hundred Initial Codes (p. 164). In this study, the number of initial codes

generated *per interview* ranged from ninety-six to four hundred and sixty-three (see

Appendix B for details).

Throughout the process of First Cycle coding, analytic memos were also written.

These were for the purpose of reflecting on the coding process, as well as about the

patterns or categories that were emerging from the data (Saldana, 2009, p. 32). This

process of reflecting on and writing about the "deeper and complex meanings" within the

data (Saldana, p. 34), described as "a conversation with ourselves about our data" (Clarke, 2005, p. 202), was intended to evoke "understanding" of the phenomenon under study (Weston et al., 2001, p. 397). In hermeneutic phenomenology, this process is known as writing "interpretive summaries" and identifying "emerging themes" (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 177). Appendix C provides selected examples of both Initial Coding and analytic memo writing generated through this process. Most qualitative researchers rarely "get coding right the first time;" thus First Cycle coding methods were implemented *within* each interview transcript more than once, in order to refine the codes (Saldana, 2009, p. 10). Appendix D provides selected examples of how the Initial Codes were refined through this process.

Following this process of First Cycle coding and memo writing, Second Cycle coding methods were implemented *across* the coded data (Saldana, 2009, p. 149), i.e., interview transcripts were compared and analyzed "as a group," for the purpose of grouping similarly coded data into categories (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 177). The Second Cycle coding used was Focused Coding, which represents searching for recurrent and salient codes identified through Initial Coding and then clustering these together into categories. These were then woven together with the ideas generated through analytic memo writing, and organized into recurring themes (Saldana, 2009, p. 155-156). This process of Second Cycle coding represents the goal of hermeneutic phenomenology, which is to generate an understanding of the phenomenon from a "blend of the researcher's understanding" and "participant-generated information" (Wojnar and

Swanson, 2007, p. 177). This process generated a total of one hundred and thirty nine

Second Cycle codes and fifteen categories.

At this point, the initial research questions were reevaluated and subsequently

revised. The questions that this research originally sought to address were: "How do

SDA young adults who grew up within an SDA family and faith community experience

spiritual nurture?" And "Considering their early experiences of spiritual nurture, how do

they experience conversion?" In the course of data analysis, however, it became apparent

that, in answering the questions regarding their childhood experiences of spiritual nurture,

participants described their experiences in terms of people and events, rather than in

terms of their inner experience of these. Furthermore, when these data were analyzed,

the themes that emerged were similar to those identified by previous research. Thus, the

shared themes that emerged from these data will not be discussed.

Accordingly, the original research questions were revised. The primary research

question became, "How do SDA young adults who grew up within an SDA family and

faith context experience conversion?" And, in order to provide an understanding of the

broader context of this experience, the secondary research question became, "How do

SDA young adults who grew up within an SDA family and faith context experience faith

formation?" These modified research questions informed the subsequent data analysis

process, i.e., only those statements that were considered significant to these questions

were coded and categorized. Appendices E and F provide selected examples of

statements considered relevant to these research questions, along with their related First

and Second Cycle codes. NVivo software was then utilized to organize the interview

data, i.e., all of the interviews were downloaded to NVivo, and the codes and categories identified through Second Cycle coding were applied to the data. Appendix G provides a list of final Second Cycle codes with their corresponding themes, as well as the frequencies with which they occurred.

Role of the Researcher

As the sole method of data collection for this phenomenological study consisted of in-depth interviews, the quality of the findings was largely dependent on the ability of the researcher to conduct the interviews in an unbiased way. As a fourth-generation SDA, there was potential for my own experience to influence the integrity of the research. To avoid this, I used a semi-structured interview format, which maintained continuity between interviews, thus minimizing personal bias. Furthermore, while the data collection and analysis process contributed to a deeper understanding of my own conversion experience, during each interview, I attempted to set aside my own experiences and conduct the interview in such a way that the "participant's perspective" regarding the phenomenon was able to "unfold as the participant view[ed] it," rather than as I viewed it (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 101). This required "conveying the attitude that the participant's views [were] valuable" (Marshall and Rossman, p. 101) through "superb listening skills," as well as skillful "question framing, and gentl[e] probing" (p. 102). My professional experience as a physical therapist for fourteen years, as well as my experiences as a mother for sixteen years, contributed to my ability to bring these skills to the interview process. Furthermore, my ability to conduct the interviews in ways that reflected the participants' perspectives was enhanced by conducting the data

collection and data analysis prior to completing a review of literature pertaining to conversion and faith formation. This contributed to my objectivity throughout the research process.

My religious education perspective, however, did generate an element of subjectivity during both data collection and initial data analysis that was problematic, i.e., as one of my original research questions addressed the experience of childhood spiritual nurture, my inclination as a religious educator was to, first, unnecessarily probe for the effects of the environment during the data collection, and second, unnecessarily code sections of interviews that related to environmental influences rather than the lived, inner experiences of participants. This ultimately required re-evaluation and revision of the original research questions, as outlined above; however, it wasted time during both data collection and analysis, as well as created an additional element of confusion in the inherently chaotic process of qualitative data analysis.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis processes, a number of validation criteria were implemented. The standards most frequently used for evaluating quantitative research are *validity,* which reflects the degree to which a quantitative measurement "really measures what it purports to measure" (Warner, 2008, p. 862), and *reliability,* which refers to the "consistency of measurement results" (p. 830). Because qualitative research is based on different assumptions than quantitative research, the terms *validity* and *reliability* have generally been considered incompatible with the underlying presuppositions of qualitative research. Some method of evaluating the

validity of qualitative research is needed, however, in order to prevent qualitative

researchers from constructing theories that do not represent the reality of the phenomenon

and individuals studied (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Thus, in recent decades,

qualitative researchers have suggested numerous alternative perspectives and terms to

articulate qualitative validation criteria (for examples, see Creswell, 2007).

This study adopted the perspective proposed by Whittemore et al. (2001), which

is a synthesis of the validation criteria suggested by numerous scholars, and is

conceptualized in terms of primary and secondary criteria, as well as techniques for

demonstrating validity. Primary criteria are considered indispensible to all qualitative

research, as they address the validity threats of researcher bias, not attending to

discrepant data, not considering alternative interpretations, and inaccurate portrayals of

participants' lived experiences. Secondary criteria provide additional "benchmarks of

quality" (p. 529) and can be utilized more flexibly, dependent on the research question

and design of the study. Primary validation criteria, the secondary validation criteria

applicable to this study and the techniques that were used to demonstrate validity in this

study are discussed below.

The first primary criterion for ensuring validity is *credibility*, which refers to

accuracy of interpretation of the meaning of the data, i.e., does the analysis represent the

reality of the study participants' experiences, "external to the investigator's experience"

(Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 530). The second primary criterion, *authenticity*, is related to

credibility and refers to the researcher's attempt to maintain the "authenticity of the

person" or phenomenon, within an interpretive context (Whittemore et al., p. 530). This

requires the researcher to recognize the "subtle differences in the voices of others" (Whittemore et al., p. 530.). The third primary criterion for ensuring validity is *criticality*, which refers to the need to be self-critical in one's approach to data analysis. Closely linked to criticality is *integrity*, the fourth primary criterion, which reflects the need for interpretation that is grounded within the data, while valuing the subjectivity of the interpretive process.

In this study, issues of credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity in this study were addressed in the following ways: first, the researcher monitored her own subjective perspectives and biases by keeping a reflective journal throughout the research process; second, the researcher engaged in prolonged involvement with participants, i.e., the data was obtained through in-depth interviews; third, the researcher searched for and discussed divergent findings; fourth, interpretations were checked recursively against the data, to both validate findings and explore rival explanations; and fifth, findings are presented humbly, in recognition of the subjective element within qualitative research. The researcher also attempted to utilize "member checking" (Whittemore et al., p. 533), i.e., the first seven interviews were transcribed verbatim and then given to participants, in order to check that the narrative was a description of participants' lived experiences; however, as outlined in the Data-gathering Methods section, above, this step was not successful and was ultimately abandoned.

The secondary criteria that are relevant to and that were utilized in this phenomenological study are explicitness, vividness and thoroughness. *Explicitness* relates to the researcher providing an audit trail, i.e., a conscientious record of

investigator-generated data, which enables the reader to follow the methodology and interpretations of the researcher. *Vividness* involves presenting data in such a way that the reader can experience and understand the essence of the phenomenon, and is achieved through vivid and detailed presentation of rich data. *Thoroughness* refers to adequate sampling and data collection, as well as comprehensive analysis, resulting in convincing answers to the research question and, in phenomenology, an in-depth exposition of the phenomenon under study.

In summary, therefore, in this study, attention was given to the validation criteria outlined above throughout the research process, and research findings are presented in such a way that readers can assess the quality of the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand how SDA young adults who grow up within an SDA home and faith community experience conversion. A hermeneutic or interpretive approach to phenomenology was utilized, i.e., the broader context of the participants lived experience was examined, and understanding of the phenomenon was cogenerated through a blending of the participants' descriptions of their lived experience and the researcher's interpretations of these. The data for this study were gathered through semi-structured interviews of fourteen SDA young adults aged between twenty-five and forty. The data were then analyzed using a combination of coding and analytic memo writing. Prior to outlining the themes that emerged from the data, a brief description of participants is provided.

The Participants

Each of the 14 participants in this study grew up within an SDA family, and had at least one parent who was a third-generation SDA. All of them had at least an undergraduate college education, and most were pursuing or had completed graduate

degrees. Two of the participants had attained terminal degrees. Throughout this chapter, a pseudonym will be used to describe each participant's experiences.

At 25, Daniel was one of the youngest participants in this study. A child of European immigrants, Daniel grew up within a close-knit, extended family and immigrant faith community, and his parents, grandparents and church members were all a significant part of his childhood experience of faith formation. He attended public schools during his elementary, high school and undergraduate college years, and his experience of being "different" in this context has been a significant part of his faith journey. Recently married, Daniel is working on a graduate degree in religion.

Mary, also 25, grew up within an SDA family who, having been hurt by their local church, withdrew from church membership during her early childhood. During these years, her family continued to identify as SDA and attempted to teach their children the faith; however, for Mary, this felt inadequate, and she repeatedly begged to go to church. Mary's family gradually began attending church again, where Mary soon assumed leadership roles. Recently married, Mary is currently pursuing a graduate degree in religion.

At 29, Belinda was also one of the younger participants in this study. Growing up in a committed SDA home and loving church family, Belinda dreamed of becoming a pastor. She was devastated when she came to understand that her church was not overly supportive of women in ministry, but decided that she could live out her desire to serve God through teaching ministry. Recently married, Belinda is a teacher currently pursuing graduate studies in education.

Mark, 31, grew up in a loving pastoral family, where he experienced faith as part of family life. He experienced a vibrant personal faith as a child, which waned slightly during his teenage years. As a young adult, a pivotal experience helped him recognize that his chosen career path was not aligned with his faith-driven worldview, ultimately leading to a vocational change. Currently both a husband and father, he is employed as an Adventist educator.

Hope, 31, grew up in a troubled family; and although her parents were SDA, the family dynamics were not supportive of positive childhood faith experiences. Her faith, however, was nurtured and encouraged by caring teachers and mentors. She feels called to minister to hurting families, and is currently pursuing graduate education in religion.

Leah, 31, grew up with SDA parents who were highly committed to furthering the mission of their church; and service to her church, as well as outreach within her community, were a significant part of her childhood faith experiences. The experience of a loving church family was also significant to her childhood faith. She is currently pursuing a graduate degree in education, and service to her church and community continues to be an important part of her faith commitment.

Abel, 32, grew up in an SDA family, and attended SDA schools and churches. Although he understood, intellectually, the tenets of Adventist Christian faith, his childhood picture was of a distant God and he struggled to believe. A nominal Adventist throughout his teen and early young adult years, it was not until his late twenties that he embraced a more vibrant faith. Married with one child, Abel is currently employed as an Adventist educator, a vocation he sees as an opportunity to serve others.

Dale, also 32, grew up with committed SDA parents and grandparents who were a significant part of his childhood faith. After completing a college degree, he obtained a well-paid job in the private sector. Through a series of experiences, however, he felt God calling him to serve in Adventist education. He is married with two young children, and he loves his work with students, which he sees as a daily opportunity to share Christ.

Also 32, Andrew lived with his father after his parents divorced. His father taught him the faith; however, it was by observing the life of his non-Christian stepfather that, at a young age, Andrew came to recognize the value of Christian faith. As a scientist, he continues to have many unanswered questions about faith; however, through observing the natural world, and through the experience of fatherhood, he continues to recognize the value of faith, which he hopes to share with his children as they grow.

Joe, 34, grew up in a pastoral family where faith was integrated with family life, and his family opened their home to both orphans and strangers. Having grown up with great admiration for his pastor-father, Joe was naturally drawn to pastoral ministry and struggled to determine if he had been called. A significant part of his faith journey has been a personal experience of calling to ministry, resulting in a strong sense of vocation, even in the face of an early divorce. Recently re-married, Joe is pursuing graduate studies in religion.

Joseph, 36, grew up in an SDA family who practiced their faith in a country where Christian faith was forbidden. In his early teens, he came to live in the US with non-Christian relatives, resulting in a waning of his faith; however, his faith was revitalized some years later, when his parents came to the US and the family began to

attend church together. As a young adult, he came to recognize that his profession was not always congruent with his faith. At the same time, he began to experience a desire to share his faith with non-Christian friends and family. He is currently pursuing a graduate degree in religion.

Joshua, also 36, was born into an SDA family; however, his parents divorced during his early childhood. His young adult years were characterized by many intellectual questions, and although he continued to be part of an SDA faith community, he struggled to hold on to faith. His faith was ultimately revitalized through a number of spiritual experiences, and today, Joshua is beginning to not only identify with the SDA faith again, but also to see that there might be ways for him to serve in his faith community.

Paul, 38, experienced faith in the context of his nuclear family during his earliest years; however, after his parents divorced during his childhood, his life was characterized by loneliness and a lack of emotional support, resulting in a period of depression and loss of faith. Through the support of a caring mentor, Paul was gradually able to find his way back to faith, ultimately encountering the Gospel. He is currently married and pursuing a graduate degree in religion, with a desire to help others learn what he has learned.

Alan, 40, grew up with SDA parents who were a significant part of his childhood faith experiences. He has completed graduate degrees in both education and religion, and is currently serving in pastoral ministry.

Findings of Data Analysis

This study sought to understand how SDA young adults who grow up within an SDA home and community context experience conversion. From analysis of data, it became evident that *experience of conversion* occurs within the broader context of *experience of faith formation*, and thus experience of faith formation and experience of conversion could be described as one phenomenon. For the purpose of clarity, however, the themes that emerged from the *experience of faith formation* and *experience of conversion* questions will be described separately. Furthermore, because faith formation is the broader context within which conversion is experienced, the lived experience of faith formation will be described first.

Experience of Faith Formation

Analysis of data corresponding to the lived experience of faith formation resulted in seven major shared themes.

Dynamic

The young adults in this study did not experience faith formation as something that was attained at some point in their lives and then remained unchanged. Rather, faith formation was experienced as changing over time. As Joshua explained, "I think [faith] has meant a lot of different things to me throughout my life thus far." These changes are partly developmental, i.e., experiences of faith formation when "very young" change with time and maturity. Allan described these developmental changes in this way:

> When you think about your cognitive development, that probably allowed for the growth in the ability to conceptualize abstracts, and as that became more real, just

as emotional development occurs, which I think it continues to occur (laughs), it's not just until you're a young adult, um, it continues to occur.

The ongoing developmental changes that occur in young adults' lives inevitably change the ways in which they experience the forming of their faith. As Andrew explained, "I went through years of just reconstructing my faith from a childlike faith. And I'm still reconstructing it. It's not like it ever becomes completely developed." Thus, the expectation appears to be that faith will remain dynamic over the life span.

Faith also changes because faith can be "difficult." Several young adults in this study spoke of having grown up within the context of a scientific worldview, in which "we rely on what we see and hear and smell and taste and touch." In contrast, faith is "the opposite of that," i.e., "the proof isn't there," and "when you don't have those tangible proofs," "it's challenging . . . to actually experience faith." Consequently, faith can be "an up and down thing" that "fluctuates every day or every few days (chuckles) or every month." As Hope explained, "There's times when [faith] is easier than others, you know, cause there are always life experiences that make a person question, you know, where is God, and why is all of this going on." Thus, sometimes faith "falters" and "is not always perfect." Sometimes it feels "like, God I am really struggling today to feel your presence with me."

For others, the dynamicity of faith is experienced in the ongoing process of learning to live according to the will of God; of "wanting to go off in this direction," and being guided back by God; of "learning how to walk with God" while "stumbl[ing] all the time." As Daniel explained,

I feel like I've made so many mistakes in my past, I've learned from some of them, and there's still mistakes that I'm making now that I need to learn from . . . And I think that's the process of faith; that we're meant to be *becoming*."

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experience the formation of their faith as dynamic because it develops in the context of their changing cognitive and emotional development; because the challenge of belief in the absence of proof makes faith fluctuate; and because faith involves the ongoing process of learning to walk with God.

Communal

The words of John Donne, "No man is an island, entire of itself," articulate the profound truth that human beings thrive within the context of community. From the experience of the young adults in this study, it is evident that human faith is formed and is more likely to flourish within a communal context than in isolation, and many of them see the faith community as "incredibly important."

For all the participants in this study, the earliest experiences of faith formation are intertwined with faith communities. For many, it was their parents who were the most important source of faith community in the early years. Joseph, who lived his earliest years in a country where Christians were persecuted, recalled: "My community of believers was my mom, dad, sister, and grandma." When he was separated from his family in his early teenage years and became "a lone ranger in a secular world," his faith "waned." It was not until he was re-united with his family and a wider community of faith that his faith was revitalized. Similarly, Alan shared that because he "never went to

Adventist schools," what he "got" in terms of faith community was from his parents. For him, "no one else stands out."

Two of the participants were pastor's children for whom family and the faith community were interconnected. Mark recalled: "My mother was always with us, we were always together, as a family, doing ministry events, which, my father doing youth ministry . . . We were all in it together, and it was fun." Joe described his experience in a similar way: "My father was the pastor (laughs) so family and church sort of meld together . . . separating church and family is kind of difficult."

Leah's parents were also very involved as lay leaders in their church, so her formational faith experiences were also interconnected with the wider faith community. She stated,

> I also was blessed to be raised in a very small church, um, a very loving church family, and they were actually interested in, like, getting the children involved at an early age, which I think was very good, because that helped me feel like I wanted to go to church . . . Church was a good place to be, in that the people there, they were very loving and nurturing, you know, and they would always ask us about stuff and we used to do stuff with them.

For those participants whose formational faith experiences within the family were not so positive, the wider faith community became particularly important. Paul, whose parents divorced and then abandoned him in early childhood, recalled that teachers at the Adventist schools he attended were particularly important to his formational experiences of faith. He shared,

> Teachers can sometimes step in when the parents are not there. I'm sure that's a big takeaway from all of this too. That if something goes wrong in the home, which today happens a lot, teachers have a huge impact. Huge impact. They don't always know until later, but when they care, when they sit down and listen, take time, when they teach, help you understand, that makes a huge impact. And

105

so, that was definitely the case for me. In terms of why I am here. Obviously, it's the grace of God, His reaching through. And I was open. But why was I open? So those teachers, those people, huge impact.

Similarly, Hope, who described her home life as "pretty turbulent and negative in a lot of aspects," spoke of "caring mentors" at church and at the Adventist school who were a "big part" of her formational faith experiences.

Three participants experienced life outside the context of the faith community, and thus had a unique appreciation for its value. Mary remembered that although she "grew up in the church," when she was in the second grade her parents "chose to withdraw from the church family" due to being hurt by church members. For the next five years, the family attempted to keep the faith at home; however, Mary desperately wanted to be part of the wider faith community. She explained,

> I'd always think about church, and wonder about it, and want to go to church, want to be involved, always read my Bible and really want to understand. And I think my parents tried to share with me a lot. But, for whatever reason, it wasn't feeding me enough, and I remember just asking my parents, can we please go to church, can we please go to church?

Similarly, Andrew also experienced life outside the faith community during his childhood. When his parents divorced, his mother moved away and re-married outside the faith. Through interactions with his non-Christian stepfather, Andrew came to understand how different life outside the faith community was. He shared,

> It helped me see how people that don't go throughout their day-to-day life with faith interact with one another. And one of the first things that I recognized fairly early is that there's, um, in people that don't have their lives guided by faith or church, they don't have the same kind of community. And if they have community, it's built around something more artificial, um, you know, a sports team or a bar, or, I mean, people find community. But I don't think they experience the same kind of community that we, um, get the benefit of experiencing in, especially, the Adventist church. What you start to recognize is

106

that you form friends within a church like this that are stronger than you could form anywhere else, and maybe it's a cultural bond, but you find that around the world you have people that would do anything for you. And so I, you know, I recognized as a kid even that I felt very safe in that culture and whether I had some qualms with the church, um, I always appreciated that.

Abel, who grew up within the context of a supportive faith community that included family, school and church, spent several years pursuing higher education in several different contexts where he formed many non-Christian friendships. After several years, he recognized that the community of faith in which he had grown up had been "exceptional." He stated,

> It's hard to understand if you don't have it yourself. But it's the relationships, the community of faith, that's second to none. I've lived overseas, and I've lived in places in the United States, and those relationships aren't there. It isn't how well you relate to someone; they're just not there outside of church.

Several participants shared that their faith communities continue to be a significant part of their faith experience. Joshua described his experience as follows:

> There's been times in my life when I felt alone, when I felt it was just me and God, and I think for me now, it feels like it's connected with the people in my life, like it's not just me and God, it's me and God and the people that God has in my life, that I've been gifted with.

He went on to explain that his faith community had been a "miraculous gift of God," as it was in the context of "community and sharing" that his faith "started to rebuild," at a time when it was almost "lost." In a similar vein, Belinda spoke about the importance of community at a time when her faith was tested. She shared,

> I had friends and family and co-workers that were really supportive and praying with me and for me and for my family, all of the time. So I never let go and said, no God, forget you, because you are allowing this to happen. But I may have if I didn't have that community of faith that helped lift me up. So afterwards I saw, or maybe it wasn't my faith that got me through but the faith of others that kept my faith.

Daniel spoke about the ongoing importance of community in "confirm[ing]" his faith commitments. He explained,

> When I see that my faith is being confirmed, that someone else is also seeing Scripture in the same [way] that I am, then it helps my experience. I don't know, it confirms that what I believe, it's not just me. There are other people who also see things the way that I see things.

Similarly, Abel shared that although communal worship experiences were "not beneficial" to him, the role of the wider faith community had helped him to "make it as an Adventist." He stated: "Personally, I have a tendency to question everything. Because I have this tendency, it's really good for me to be around people who strengthen rather than weaken my faith. And that's a conscious effort, a conscious decision." Joseph also recognized that the faith community provided ongoing support for his faith journey. He shared,

> Throughout my journey, I have learned that I can't walk with God on my own. We cannot walk with God alone. We need a community, whether family, friends, or the church. We need that community of believers that can extend its hand when we doubt and when we stumble.

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experienced the formation of their faith as communal because community is the formational context for earliest faith experiences, as well as an ongoing source of meaningful human connection and a prevailing source of strength in the faith journey.

Intellectual

For the young adults in this study, faith includes "cognitive belief," i.e., an intellectual assent to a certain "belief structure." Faith requires at least "some knowledge" or "enough" knowledge, for without a "foundation of truth" or " belief," "what are you

placing your faith in?" "Who [are you] believing in?" Thus, a well-grounded faith

requires a certain level of intellectual reasoning. As Belinda described,

> I put my faith in God, that there is a God who is in control, who loves me, as
> opposed to faith in natural law without God . . . I've thought a lot about what it
> would be like to put my faith in humanity or my faith in science alone without
> God. And whenever I have followed those thoughts to their logical end, it's clear
> that life is pointless without God . . . Putting your faith in only the world as it is,
> which just sort of leads to nothing and pointlessness and to me, I can't reconcile
> that.

Central to the intellectual component of faith is knowing "who God is and what He is

like;" "knowing His character and learning what He's really like;" "learning to know

God;" "understand[ing] what God is like;" learning about "God's character;" and trying

to understand "who God really is and why He does what He does." In addition to

shaping their understanding of God, the cognitive or intellectual component of faith also

contributes to young adults' understanding of themselves in relation to God. As Joshua

described,

> There's an aspect of my experience of God, which is in my mind, my thoughts . . .
> The sense of, you know, who I am. And then there's the sense of who I'm not.
> I'm not God (laughs), so there's the sense of that which isn't me, which I don't
> understand, that's beyond.

Andrew echoed this concept of human limitation in relation to God, stating, "The more I

study the more I realize I don't know. And just that knowledge is very humbling."

Others also spoke of recognizing their "limitations" and "sinfulness."

For all of the young adults in this study, the Bible is their source for

understanding the character of God. As Daniel explained,

> If we didn't have God's word, and if we didn't have what he promised that he
> would do for us . . . then what would we have faith in? Because we wouldn't

know what God is like; what he says he will do; the way that he sees the future turning out.

Joe described his experience similarly. He stated: "Trusting that God is who is recorded in the Bible; who he says he is; that he has done things that he says he's done, so therefore he will do the things he says he will do."

Furthermore, not only did these young adults look to Scripture as their source of knowledge about God, they also value the contribution of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. For some, Adventist beliefs were central to their understanding of God. As Joe explained,

> I think that the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church are the clearest picture of who God is. And they fit together, I mean, it's a whole picture. You take out one part, and the other parts don't make sense any longer.

Belinda expressed a similar thought. She stated,

> Things that I believe as a Seventh-day Adventist just sort of describe God's character, and so, what I believe doesn't change anything about God but just sort of puts some, I don't even know what the word is, I guess puts some sort of handholds for me as a human to sort of grab onto, to help me to understand what God is like . . . Everything that I believe specifically as a Seventh-day Adventist sort of shows a different aspect of God's character and helps me to better understand him.

For several participants, the "truth" of Adventist doctrine was important to the intellectual component of their faith, i.e., because they had examined SDA doctrine and found it to be "exactly right," they were able to "100% believe that way" and considered the Adventist denomination the "right church." Others shared that although "Adventists have been pretty good stewards of the Bible" who have "done a straightforward job of trying to interpret what it means," Adventist doctrine was not that important to them.

Reflecting on his own post-modern understanding of the world, Abel thoughtfully explained,

> In terms of the 28 fundamental beliefs, I couldn't care less. I know them and I could recite them to you, but I am so post-modern that a lot of these beliefs are defined by other people, and [therefore] might be unique to that person at that particular time.

However, he recognized that Adventist doctrine had provided a way of life, which was very important to him. He stated,

> Most Adventists wouldn't be able to tell you the 28 fundamental beliefs, so why are they important? There is a certain structure that somehow has been reduced out of them, and that structure is the Adventist way of life. And I very much value that . . . I know I'm not a traditional Adventist, but I love Adventism.

Some shared that they continued to "struggle with different aspects of faith [and] belief" and described themselves as falling "somewhere in the spectrum of what Adventists believe." However, even those young adults who expressed ambiguity about some of the SDA fundamental beliefs stated that they "do believe what Adventists teach," that they were "committed to Adventism as a way of life and a belief structure," and that they "overall . . . believe as an Adventist believes."

It is evident that, for the majority of the young adults in this study, the process of faith formation has required a certain amount of wrestling with the cognitive or intellectual component of their faith. There was, however, one young woman who had not truly engaged intellectually with her faith. Although she had done some "study on [her] own and [her] own thinking sometimes," making her beliefs "more personal to [her], a little bit" and her "faith [her] own, a little bit," her beliefs were more normative than intellectually examined. She stated,

All the things that I learned when I was younger and believed to be true, and I still believe them to be true now that I am older . . . I've never been one that's like always constantly challenging, like, oh is this really true, you know? Are you sure that this is true (laughs), you know? I'm just like, yes, you know, the Bible says it, this is what I have been taught to believe, you know, and this is what I feel comfortable believing. It has made me, you know, happy in my life and comfortable in my life . . . I have this thing that I think is true and I'm not having to worry about that, you know? So that's kind of a good thing too, yeah. I'm not constantly worrying about, you know, is the Adventist church the right church and is God really in heaven, you know?

Thus, in summary, for the majority of participants in this study, intellectual knowledge is foundational to the formation of faith, as "faith and knowledge are closely tied together." Most consider their knowledge about God and human life to be founded on Scripture, although they also consider SDA interpretations of Scripture to be helpful. With the exception of one participant, most had examined the beliefs that had been transmitted to them, resulting in varying degrees of intellectual assent to the beliefs of the SDA church.

Affective

For the young adults in this study, the formation of faith is not only intellectual; it is also experienced in the affective domain. As Joseph stated, "Faith is belief in something that we don't see, but we experience." Central to this affective aspect of faith is the concept of "relationship and a trust in [God]." Almost all participants used these terms, "relationship" and "trust," to describe the affective component of their faith. As Joshua explained, "relationship with God is . . . like, you *know* someone [and] from that knowing comes a trust." Similarly, Hope shared that "staying in [her] relationship with God" required "knowing God enough [to] know He's trustworthy." For Joe, the

112

"dynamics" of relationship with God are similar to human relationships, as "any time more than one person is involved . . . trust . . . comes into play," as "you're relying on someone else." Belinda described the process of learning to trust God as similar to the process of learning trust in human relationships. She stated,

> I think trust in God is the same thing as trust in a person, except more difficult maybe, because you cannot see God in a physical form. But, you know, I trust right now that that my husband is where he said he was going, and I cannot prove that he's there but I'm going to take him at his word that that's what he is doing. And I think that God shows us that he loves us in so many ways and we know that we can trust him if we pay attention to that. But it's not always easy. And, you know, sometimes we have doubts in what our friends and family and loved ones say and do, and our trust waivers, maybe. But I think it's the same with God. I think that trust is a big part of faith. I know he's there; that's by faith; and I believe that he is doing what he says he's doing. And that's the trust part I guess.

Similarly, Dale also felt that his human relationships are helping him to learn to trust God. He explained,

> I make a huge connection between, sort of, the relationships I have now with my children and my wife and others, as sort of a smaller, little model of how it is with Christ. The more my wife and I grow together, the more we trust each other, the more (*pauses*). And I see that with my kids as well. As they grow, when I'm telling them, hey, this is what you need to do, as they start to understand that, or as they trust me and build that relationship, I see how that influences how they react to me trying to guide them. And then I see, man, I see my children react negatively to that, I understand why they can't have this candy or this toy, this whatever it is, and I'm like, boy, I am like that. I see how God is showing me in my relationship with him, And I think that builds my relationship with him, and I see a push and pull in my relationship with God, where sometimes I am like, I don't understand why you're doing this to me God. And my kids say the same things to me. Why are you doing this to me daddy? And then I'm like wow I am doing the same thing with God.

But, as Belinda explained, learning to trust God is "more difficult . . . because you cannot see God in a physical form." But, she concluded, "God shows us that He loves us in so many ways," and trust is easier "if we pay attention to that."

Trust in God includes "trusting that God can take care of you and has your best interest;" that He is "someone I can rely on, and someone who I can see is working on my behalf;" that He "is a friend . . . and, just like a good parent, He wants the best for me." As Daniel explained,

> I just feel like God is a daily part of my life personally . . . It's just a constant awareness that God is there and that he is on my side . . . I feel like God is always there with me . . . When I wake up God is there, when I put my head to sleep, I know that God is there.

As outlined in Theme 3, above, trust in God is partly intellectual, because, as Joe shared, having "a clear picture of who [God] is," knowing that "God is love," makes it "easier to trust Him, . . . [which] strengthens the relationship;" however, as Hope explained, although learning to trust God is "partly, like, intellectual . . . even more, it's experientially learned." As Dale shared,

> I am able to trust partly because of how I have seen him lead in the past . . . I feel like I've been led by the hand by God, and it makes me trust him in terms of my faith experience more because of that . . . I actually see him lead and I say, Wow!

It is trust that forms the foundation of a relationship in which "I don't hesitate to tell Christ about my problems or what I'm thinking, or anything like that." Furthermore, trust creates a safe place for not only "talking, spilling out my heart and my feelings and my frustrations to God," but it also forms the foundation for "this awesome sort of personal thing between me and God where we can hash things out." Trust enables "learning to have that dialogue with Him" and creates confidence that God is "okay with" my questioning or lack of understanding, "as long as I'm talking with him about it." As Hope explained,

It's not being afraid to bring the good and the bad to God instead of just, here is my nice little perfect self; that's what I want God to see. I mean, He sees the good and the bad anyways, but just not being afraid to come to Him, whether I'm angry or upset or really sad, or whatever it is that I'm feeling, and knowing that He accepts me that way.

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experienced the formation of faith in the affective domain primarily as a "relationship with God," based on "trust," which ultimately leads to "rely[ing] on God rather than yourself."

Integrated

For the majority of participants in this study, the intellectual and experiential components of faith were integrated, i.e., they "don't separate them," but rather, faith is "both cognitive and experiential;" "the intellectual and the experiential are tied together;" faith is "partly, like, intellectual, but even more, its experientially learned;" faith is acquired "by evidence," as well as "just by sense;" faith is experienced "logically as well as just that gut feeling that I have that's not very logical, that's just feeling;" faith is in the "mind and heart;" one must both "know" and "feel" faith. As Alan explained, "it's about my personal relationship with God, *and* it's about what I believe about Him and the Bible . . . It's both cognitive and experiential, relational." He went on to explain: "The relationship [with God] is core . . . [but] I couldn't actually put aside the belief side, even the belief in doctrines and those kinds of things; I couldn't separate those from my faith."

Similarly, for Mark, "faith includes a cognitive belief in who God is and what He is like, but [also] an experiential relationship." He stated,

I don't adopt, either cognitively or experientially, this bifurcation. I don't simply believe, or simply experience, I think both of them are detrimental to go to one extreme or the other, um, in my experience I've tried to keep them united. To me,

being somebody who is probably more naturally inclined to the cognitive side, I still don't see the bifurcation, because to me, what I do on the cognitive side, when I study about God, that becomes a worshipful experience . . . so its not as if I'm studying some kind of abstract entity or abstract thoughts. I'm learning about the person whom I love, whom I'm in relationship with.

In other words, faith involves a nuanced interplay between intellect and experience, for the process of learning *about* God leads to a knowledge *of* and love *for* God. Paul described his experience in a similar way. He shared,

I love above anything the God who has given us all this, because, um, I recognize that I'm a sinner who deserves to die. I shouldn't be living, I shouldn't be breathing, I should be, um, sin is destructive, sin deserves death, sin is against the nature of God, and yet He has made a way of escape.

Thus, the experience of love for God occurs in the context of intellectual knowing.

Daniel also described his experience of acquiring knowledge about God, which in turn enhances his experience of faith. He explained,

Sometimes even when I'm reading things that aren't inspired, so to speak, and I'm reading an article about worship or about baptism and the Lord's supper . . . It just, you know, makes me think back on the Bible as well, what it was like, with Jesus as he broke the bread, and it just makes me feel like God is near when I reflect on things that He has done in the past history or in his life . . . [and] when I read and study, the Lord's supper is enriched.

This interplay between intellectual and experiential components of faith is also evident in the process of learning to trust God. As Joe described,

When you have a clear picture of who [God] is, it's easier to trust Him, it's easier to believe, and it strengthens the relationship . . . because you're trusting that God is who is recorded in the Bible, who He says He is, that He has done things that He says He's done, so therefore He will do the things He says He will do.

Thus, for many of the young adults in this study, intellectual knowing enhances their affective experience of faith.

A second way in which intellect and experience are integrated in the faith of these young adults is by the reverse process, i.e., affective experiences can confirm intellectual knowing, particularly belief in the existence of God. As Belinda explained,

> Whenever I've tried to ignore my faith and make a decision for another reason that sort of disagreed with what my faith was telling me to do, it has never turned out well. And, you know, so it's just another piece of evidence to help me know that what I believe is true.

For Joshua, it is his experience of the "created world" that has strengthened his faith. He stated,

> There were many years when that's pretty much all that I had, when I went out into nature. The beauty. There's just something profoundly beautiful, and the creativity. And there's just a sense, like a presence, that just is there, like a peace, and a deep sense of wellness, when I'm around living things, you know, which, you know, I believe that God is, has created and is among. And, so there's something that's very tangible to me when I'm stopping to just be close to the natural world. There's something just deeply alive. That's real. And that's been a source of that stability when whatever I'm thinking or wrestling with, that kind of gets set aside. Because it's very difficult to tell what's real, you know, when you're thinking about the transcendent, it's, like, this is just all in my head. But when you stop to be by, you know, a flowering bush, and you see the insects doing their thing, and the, you know, it's, it's real, and uh, I can feel something profound in that experience. Because it's stepping outside of myself; it's not just an abstraction.

Andrew expressed a similar experience. He stated,

> I think that God's creation is one of the largest contributors to my faith . . . When you see how amazing the living cell is, or just walking through the woods and looking at the trees and flowers, that there was creation. And it's kind of nice, because to me it's evidence of creation.

In addition to the world of nature, Andrew's experience of fatherhood had also helped to confirm his faith. He explained, "I have (two children), and there is just something about having your own kids that helps you realize that there is more to life than just something that happened out of the blue."

117

Thus, the experience of becoming a parent has helped him to recognize that human life has meaning beyond that offered by a naturalistic worldview. Furthermore, as he is learning to love his children, he is learning to understand God's love for humanity. He stated,

> I have to think that I look at [my children] with as much love and appreciation, or similar kind of love and appreciation that God looks at his children. So when I, the way that I love my kids, if that is how God loves his children then, um, I think we're in a good place, because I can't imagine a greater love. You can't, as you know, you can't imagine a love being as strong. You don't really know what it's going to feel like until you have it, and the love for your kids is something you can't explain.

Similarly, Abel's experience of becoming a father has helped him to understand the love of God, and particularly, the sacrifice of Christ. He explained,

> I think had I not had my son, I would have never been able to understand why Christ came. It was very difficult for me to understand. But because [I now] understand the love that a parent has for a child, I get that. I get that now. So, I very much value it, the sacrifice. It was necessary.

Thus, for some of the young adults in this study, experience contributes to intellectual understanding of God, and thus affirms belief.

A third way in which intellect and experience are integrated in the faith of these young adults is in their attempts to understand their experiences in view of the knowledge they have from Scripture. As Daniel explained, when "your experience [does not] coincide with" knowledge from Scripture, "our first response should be to go back to Scripture." Abel described his thought processes when evaluating impression in a similar way. He stated,

> Whenever a person feels impressed to do something, I think they must personally turn to Scripture to see if it's based on the Lord's teachings. This is tough. Honestly, I tend to think down the line: what are the end results of these actions?

118

And, is this thought coming from a foundation of love? Personal experience? Culture?

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experienced faith formation as integrating intellect and experience because intellectual knowing enhances affective experience; because affective experiences confirms intellectual beliefs; and because affective experiences are evaluated in the light of intellectual knowledge.

Behavioral

The young adults in this study experienced faith formation not only in the cognitive and affective spheres, but also in the behavioral aspect of their lives, i.e., faith shapes the way they live. Faith involves "believing in what you think is true and letting it affect your life." It "really impacts the way I live my life;" it "forms a lot of components of [my] life;" it "shapes our lives;" it "really involves all of life; my faith involves all aspects of my life;" and "it's like a steadying force in my life." Thus, faith is not "separate from other parts of [my] life," but rather, it "is all tangled up into all the parts of my life." As Abel explained,

> [Faith] requires a certain amount of action. You can believe in something, but so what? You actually have to have some kind of commitment to that belief structure. That's what I would say is faith to me. Because I believe in God, I live my life according to that."

Faith forms interactions with other people. As Andrew described, faith "defines what is good," and "what is good kind of structures your morals." He continued,

> Once you come to the point that you believe [God] is a loving creator, I think that you have to recognize that that creator, if he is indeed loving, has to love all of his creation. And to me, that can't help [but] define how he would want those that he has created to treat one another. So to me, [faith] kind of forms a structure of morals.

119

Thus, faith has "some role" in "any significant interactions," particularly "relationships with people and how you interact with them." Similarly, Joe explained that faith influenced "the way I interact with others; it shapes those relationships." Belinda described her experience similarly. She stated,

> Faith really impacts the way I live my life. Almost every decision I make is shaped in one way or another by faith . . . If I know God is real and I trust that what He says is true and I believe that He is love and He is also absolute, then I know that there are certain things that I need to do to live my life as a person of faith. And so I try to have, I try to live a life that reflects that belief in God. I try to speak to people as though God is real. I try to do things that honor God; say things that honor God . . . and also point people to Him, because if I believe that He is real and that my life is better by knowing Him, then I have to believe that other people's lives will be better by knowing.

In addition to shaping interactions with others, faith also impacts decision-making and value formation. Faith is experienced "almost daily, with decisions that I make;" it impacts "the decisions I make, the shaping of my world view, the things that are important;" it "affect[s] the choices that we make, and the relationships that we have." As Belinda described, "I try to make sure that my decisions are based on what I know to be true." For many of the participants, it is Scripture that provides the foundation for decision-making. As Abel explained,

> Because [God] has given us a conscience, because He has given us the Bible, because He has given us Jesus Christ, He has given us a road map for how He wants us to live. And I think that road map is the best way to live.

In addition to Scripture, "Seventh-day Adventist life-style principles" also impact value formation and decision-making, as there is a "certain structure that somehow has been reduced out of [SDA beliefs], and that structure is the Adventist way of life," which

entails "a slightly apart way of living, a kind of living in the world but not of it." As

Leah described,

> I don't go out drinking or dancing or partying, or do drugs, or even wear jewelry, or, you know, there's certain clothes that I don't wear, certain things that I don't like to listen to or watch, you know. And also, I'm not married yet, I'm still single, but I would really like to find an Adventist life partner (chuckles).

Many values are shaped early in life and do not require much thought, because, as

Andrew explained, if you grew up in the Adventist faith, you grew up with "an over-

riding guiding principle" that shaped your life, and "like it or not, you're immersed in

that culture," and so "it kind of forms the things that [you are] comfortable with."

Belinda described it this way:

> Sometimes I don't even think about it, just because I think habit shapes the way that you live more than faith does. And maybe faith shaped the original habits. I've always been raised in and lived in the faith-based culture of Adventism, so some of my lifestyle choices are probably more cultural and habitual than even faith related, I mean, they're faith related, but, you know what I'm saying? I don't necessarily think, because of my faith I do this but I think originally they came from [faith].

Thus, some decisions are simple, either because the principles were integrated early in

life and thus became habitual, or because clear guidance for these decisions is provided,

either in Scripture or in Seventh-day Adventist teachings. Some choices, however, are

more complex, and the answers not so easily accessible. Mary described how, in such

situations, it is the habitual reading, rather than the directives, of Scripture that influenced

her thought processes and thus helped her to make faith-based decisions. She explained,

> In my mind, Bible study will help, and I think if I go to the Word I can find answers. But as I learn more about God, and as I learn more about the Bible, I don't always think of them as answers as much as information. And I suppose subconsciously that information affects my answers, definitely, the way I philosophically think through processes. But just the other day I had a big

decision to make and praying about it was a no-brainer, but then I was like, maybe I should go look in the Bible for an answer. And I was kind of like, where would I look? I don't know. I was just like, I'll open it up and I often don't, well, that's interesting information, but it doesn't help my situation. But then again, sometimes reading Scripture will bring to my mind some experience that's not present, that's in the past, or that somebody else is experiencing, and I see, oh, that's pretty clear, like, how you would act in this situation. So, it can be a part of the solution, but it isn't always, in the moment of stress.

At times, allowing faith to guide decision-making requires submission of one's own will to that of God's will. As Dale explained, sometime a particular life choice can feel "like this is not my decision;" yet faith enables one to say, "but I'm going to trust God on this."

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experienced the formation of their faith in the behavioral domain when they allowed faith to form their relationships, values and decision-making.

Choice

For the young adults who participated in this study, faith is experienced as "a choice;" as "a decision;" as "a conscious decision;" as "choosing Him" as opposed to "choos[ing] to reject Him;" as "choosing to allow Him" to lead in our lives. This is a choice "which every person has to [make]," because "everybody has to decide for themselves what they actually believe in." For Belinda, faith is a "choice" because it requires believing "something without all of the hard proof being there, without having evidence. I mean, there is evidence, but it's not conclusive." Because faith requires "choosing to believe and knowing something even though I cannot see the evidence," it "is not easy;" however, she considers it "a lot more meaningful and mak[ing] a lot more sense to put your faith in God as opposed to something that is not supernatural." Dale

described his experience similarly. He stated: "I can't scientifically test it. I can't prove

anything. But I still say, God, I believe in you and I'm going to follow you, even if I

can't see with my own eyes." However, unlike Belinda, he does not consider the choice

for faith as "difficult." Rather, he thinks it "amaz[ing]" that human beings have the

freedom to make this "faith decision." He stated,

> It amazes me how God, He doesn't just come down and prove Himself to the
> world. He wants us to trust Him because we want to have a relationship with Him,
> versus, Hey! There's no doubt! There's this big sign in the sky that God wrote
> using stars that says, I'm God! Follow me! And so, I think that's the beauty of
> God allowing us to truly believe in Him with faith.

Andrew also values the "free will and choice" that human beings have with regard to

faith. He shared,

> For whatever reason, God wanted to have a bunch of beings that chose to love
> him and not that he created to love him, which is kind of an interesting scenario.
> So, he made it harder on himself. But I can appreciate it.

This worldview helps him "interpret the bad things that happen on earth." He shared,

> It helps me get through day-to-day life and those tragedies and sad events that
> happen, because I think it's the only way you can have an environment of free
> will. And, you know, for there to be good and things that are pure there has to be
> wickedness, there has to be, you know, it can't just be a utopia if we're in this
> great battle between good and evil. That's not to say that it doesn't frustrate me
> frequently, that it has to be that way.

For Abel, the choice for faith is "an intellectual experience," "a logical decision," based

on "experience and exposure to God working in my life and the lives of my family and

friends." Despite this choice, however, he continues to have many questions. He shared,

> I find God to be mysterious. Sometimes he is distant; at others very close. I can't
> explain why He answers some prayers and not others as a loving God . . . I am
> frustrated with not being able to explain who God is.

But, despite these unanswered questions, he went on to ask,

> Is it worth it to throw God out because you can't understand who he is, and He appears distant much of the time? Answer: no. There are so many benefits to God and the community He provides us with. Besides, the times when He is near are enough to get me through the hard times.

Therefore, he concluded, "I am willing to abide my lack of clarity with faith." Faith as a choice is, thus, experienced in the intellectual sphere of life, in that it begins with the choice to believe, despite incomplete understanding or evidence.

A second way in which faith entails a choice is in the affective sphere, i.e., faith leads one to choose to see life circumstances and events through the lens of "God working in my life." When describing how God had led in her life, Belinda concluded,

> That's how I choose to see it . . . I could look at those things and say it's just coincidence or, you know, I've been wired to do these things and, you know, maybe it was my self preservation or maybe it was my desire to, you know, help the human race, or whatever, that is innate. But that's not where I put my faith. So I think, you know, it's just choosing to believe and . . . acting as though God is real and He loves me.

Dale also shared that his experience of following God's leading is a choice. He stated,

> As you become an adult and you deal with various difficult circumstances, um, it's more of a challenge and I think you have to decide whether you will trust God or not . . . I think it comes down to that choice. He gives us that option . . . I think that's a huge factor, the choice.

A third way in which faith is experienced as a choice is in the behavioral sphere, i.e., faith is experienced as freedom to make choices about the ways in which faith will form one's life. As Hope explained, faith results in

> [being] willing to make changes, you know, if something is getting in the way of your relationship or if you feel like the Bible or God is speaking to you, this is not helpful for you or you know this would really bring us closer, and making choices to turn from those things that are not helpful and turning to the things that will.

For Mary, the freedom to decide how faith will impact the behavioral sphere of her life is particularly important. She explained,

> Often I feel impressed that I really do know what is the best decision here, but I need to somehow be convinced of it, and so I guess part of that peace is finally convincing me, or making it so I no longer need to be convinced of something, because it has now become what I have chosen, what I choose to do, on my own.

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experience faith as a choice in the intellectual domain, through the choice to believe; in the affective domain, through the choice to see God's leading in the events and circumstances of life; and in the behavioral domain, through the freedom to choose how faith will form life.

The Essence of Experience of Faith Formation

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experienced faith formation as dynamic or changing. This was because their faith was formed in the context of their cognitive and emotional development over the course of their changing young lives; because the challenge of belief in the absence of proof makes faith fluctuate; and because the forming of faith involves the ongoing process of learning to walk with God. They also experienced faith formation as communal, because, as children of believers, their earliest faith experiences occurred within the context of family and faith community; because their faith communities continue to be an ongoing source of meaningful human connection; and because their faith communities contribute to the strengthening of their faith.

The majority of participants in this study also experienced faith formation in the intellectual domain, and they consider both Scripture and SDA interpretations of

Scripture as foundational to their faith; however, they also experienced faith formation in the affective domain. This was experienced primarily as growth in relationship with God. Furthermore, they experienced faith formation as integrating intellectual and affective experiences because intellectual knowing enhanced affective experience; because affective experiences confirmed intellectual beliefs; and because affective experiences were evaluated in view of intellectual knowledge. They also experienced faith formation in the behavioral sphere, primarily in their relationships, values and decision-making. Finally, the young adults in this study experienced the forming of their faith in terms of a choice in the intellectual domain, through the decision to believe; in the affective domain, through the choice to see God in the events and circumstances of their lives; and in the behavioral domain, through the freedom to choose how faith will form life.

Thus, for the young adults in this study, the essence of the *experience of faith formation* has been of a dynamic process that has integrated the intellectual, experiential and behavioral domains of life. This process, which has been facilitated by community, has necessitated personal choice. It is within the context of the experience of faith formation that the participants in this study experienced conversion. Thus, it is to a description of their lived *experience of conversion* that we now turn.

Experience of Conversion

Analysis of the data corresponding to the lived experience of conversion resulted in four major shared themes.

Process

For the young adults in this study, conversion is *not a single turning point.*
Rather, their experience of conversion can be described as a *gradual process* that is
facilitated by multiple significant moments. Furthermore, rather than having a definite
beginning or ending, their experience of conversion is *ongoing*. Each of these sub-
themes will be described as part of the first theme, i.e., conversion as *Process*.

Not a single turning point

In contrast to the sudden conversion experiences that have been described in
earlier studies, the young adults in this study did not experience conversion as a "turning
point" that occurred at just one moment in time. When asked how they experienced
conversion, most participants appeared somewhat uncertain about how to phrase their
response, seeming almost apologetic that their experience was "not a one moment;" no
"dramatic moments;" no "individual time;" "no big things;" "no exciting transition point;"
"no one piece [that] was the magic moment;" no "specific time when I made a decision;"
no "key moment that was, like, wow!" Daniel, who up to this point had spoken very
articulately about his faith experiences, responded in this way:

> For me, conversion, I don't know [pauses]. There are instances where I felt that
> God was closer, more distant, you know . . . I'm trying to think of portions where
> I felt that I was converted, but I don't know if I can [chuckles] . . . I don't feel like
> a had one moment where it was, like, this is it. I've had a few moments, you
> know, here and there and stuff.

He went on to explain that "even though [he] believe[d] that conversion can be a point in
time to some people, as is evident in [the Apostle] Paul's life," this was not his
experience. Daniel's uncertainty was mirrored in Joseph's voice as he explained,

127

Often I ask, "When was I converted?" Was it when I began praying [in early childhood]? Or when I was baptized? We often ask people to share their testimony and many times we hear incredible stories of God's miraculous work in their lives. Although He has worked wonderfully throughout my life, I am not sure that I can truly pinpoint an exact time when I accepted Him in my life as my God.

This sense of uncertainty was also evident in Leah's response:

I don't think I've ever had a major conversion . . . It's always been just like, you know, faith has always been something very important to me, and something I've been willing to do and live and accept. So, I don't know.

Similarly, Alan also began somewhat hesitantly. He shared,

I guess I can never pinpoint any clear conversion time (pauses) because there was never a time when I was purposefully heading away from God. There was never a time when I was not intending to serve God, come to know Him better. I certainly grew in my appreciation of Him, so that deepened my commitment; but I don't really remember any big time where I thought, "Wow! Up until now I was not saved, and now I am," you know? Many people have conversion experiences because they were walking in an opposite direction, and that is, that conversion experience is where they say, no, I'm throwing my life in with God. You know, that is really important, but I can't pick that up [in my own life].

Despite his initial uncertainty, however, as he reflected on his experience, Alan was able to articulate that his inability to identify a clear turning point was related to the fact that he had grown up in an environment that was supportive of faith.

Several participants seemed to have reflected on their conversion experiences earlier, i.e., prior to the interview for this study, and were comfortable with the fact that, due to their childhood faith experiences, their conversion experiences did not entail a major turning point. As Mark shared, "[conversion] was not, for me, a momentary experience . . . I can't pinpoint a time when I was converted from not having faith to having faith." Joe's experience was similar. He explained, "God has always been a part of my life. I can't remember a time when, you know, before anything . . . [God] was just

always there." In the same way, Belinda was able to recognize and articulate that her

early experiences had impacted her conversion. She shared,

> I didn't have any one pivotal experience that shaped faith in my life. I have
> always been in a situation where faith has been a big part of my life because my
> parents are people of faith in God and so they raised me to have faith in Him.
> And so I don't ever remember not talking about Him as if He was real.

Furthermore, she had reflected on the term "conversion" and had concluded that its'

implication of a turning point was not helpful to people like herself. She explained,

> Sometimes conversion terminology, sometimes it means people are afraid to share
> their story, because they don't have a story. And I spent a lot of time feeling like
> that, because there are lots of opportunities in academy and college to share big
> testimonies like that; but if you don't have a story like that, then it's difficult to
> find something to share . . . There're a lot of people like me that don't have that
> moment in time when they were struck blind by God, you know, because it's hard
> to put a finger on it. I think probably people like me don't always share their
> stories, because there isn't a big story to share.

It is evident that most of the young adults in this study construe the term

"conversion" in the way that it is traditionally understood, i.e., they recognize that the

term implies a turning point; a moment of change from not having faith to having faith.

None of them, however, described their experience of conversion in terms of just one

turning point.

Gradual

Having reflected on the fact that their conversion experiences were not

characterized by a sudden moment of change, the young adults in this study went on to

describe their conversion experiences as "kind of gradual;" "a very slow and gradual

thing;" "not a whole new thing" but "kind of like a natural progression;" "kind of the

thing that's always there" but that "grow[s] and change[s] over time;" "a progressive

journey;" and "definitely a process." As Daniel explained, "Conversion for me . . . felt like [it] was more of a process rather than a point in time." Similarly, Belinda shared that she "can't really think of any big thing; it's been kind of gradual." Alan's experience was also similar. He shared that, for him, conversion did not include "flashes of lightning or anything big, but just filling in, building on the pattern" that had been established early in his life. Likewise, Mark explained that although he had "many of those kinds of highs that you have at Week of Prayers and those kind of things that were relatively fleeting," it "was more of the steady kind of growing and understanding God personally" that he had come to understand as his conversion experience.

In the same way, when describing his conversion, Joe emphasized that his experience involved a process rather than a point in time. He shared,

> [Conversion] is the process of developing that relationship with God, so with some people, that relationship is a sudden transition and growth. And with other people, it's kind of the thing that's always there, like our relationship with our parents. But even those grow and change over time. And I think our relationship with God is the same. I mean, our [adult] relationships with Him are not the same as they were when we were seven or eight, but they are no less real then or now. And I think that's just as much conversion as people who, you know, meet God in prison and leave a life of crime.

Mary also described her conversion as a gradual process. After relating a number of significant spiritual experiences during her teen and young adult years, she surmised,

> It was just a progression of experiences that led to realizing that my own plans for my life are really not going to get me where I want to go, only doing what God wants me to do, and letting Him be in charge of my life is going to bring me full satisfaction and fulfillment . . . I felt like it was such a progressional (sic) type of a conversion.

Thus, in Mary's experience, conversion was a gradual process facilitated by a number of significant experiences in her spiritual journey.

Facilitated by multiple significant experiences

     This theme of a gradual process facilitated by significant spiritual experiences characterized the conversions of all the participants in this study. Repeatedly, they spoke of "little 'aha' experiences along the way;" "important milestones;" "lots of little things;" "multiple little 'aha' moments;" "all these little things that add up over time;" "tent pole moments;" and "a whole bunch of things coming together," which had contributed to the process of conversion in their lives. As Mark explained, conversion for him was not "momentary," but rather, "there were many experiences" that contributed to his conversion. Similarly, Leah explained that conversion had "kind of happened multiple times" for her; that "conversion in [her] life ha[d] been a series of little mini events." Alan also shared that although he "can't really look back at an individual time," there were "significant events" that "influenced [him] positively . . . like a conversion, if you like." However, in contrast with Leah, who described her conversion as a series of individual "mini-conversions," Alan sees the significant spiritual experiences in his life as part of a process in which each experience builds on the next. He explained:

> [These experiences] kind of clarified in my mind, that yes, this was what I was doing, and I remember telling God, "I'm yours." But I'd already done that before, and meant it at the level I understood it . . . Getting baptized was sort of like the natural thing to do, not because everyone else was doing it, because my friends who were younger than me had already been baptized, um, but just, it was always what I knew I wanted to do as I grew up. But it wasn't a huge event . . . It was just a recognition of a commitment that I'd continually been making, as my understanding had grown . . . Another time was not so much an event, but I (pauses) um (pauses) I was reading through Desire of Ages. I was in high school, I forget how old I was, but, probably sixteen, seventeen, um, maybe eighteen, and I got to the section of the book on the crucifixion. I still remember that really (pauses), it impacted me; really moved me. I was impressed again with how much Christ had done for me. So it was a time of, I'd call it re-commitment, 'cause I'd already been baptized.

For the majority of participants in this study, conversion was a relatively smooth, gradual process that was facilitated by multiple significant moments. Some participants, however, described their conversion experiences in ways that can only be defined as more turbulent; however, despite the unevenness of these experiences, this same theme of conversion as a gradual process facilitated by multiple significant moments is also evident in their experiences.

Paul's experience is one such example. While faith was central in Paul's early childhood, his middle childhood and early adolescent years were characterized by considerable family turmoil, resulting in a profound sense of personal and spiritual inadequacy. This ultimately led him to give up on faith; however, when given the opportunity to attend a Christian college, he decided he would give faith "one more try." Through his experiences there, he had what he called "this kind of turning point" that "felt like . . . somewhat of a conversion experience," which "open[ed him] up to God." He described this experience as follows:

> It started to slowly dawn on me, like, yeah, that's pretty convincing . . . so I started to come around. This was sort of this initial saying, okay . . . this isn't the full thing yet . . . but this was saying, I said to myself, we were not meant, we're not created to live without God. This is the huge recognition. That this kind of life I'm trying to live is futile. It's not just that I don't feel good; it's just something completely absurd about trying to live as a created being without acknowledging your Creator, and really giving your life to Him. So I was kind of broken down, and that would've been my initial conversion, if you will. But again, it's not until years later, I'm there, but not really there. Does that make sense? . . . A first step . . . but not really having a full commitment, not really embracing of everything . . . It's more like, He's there, He's real, but it wasn't, it's hard to describe, it wasn't quite there yet. But there is a start.

Paul described his experiences of the subsequent years as "[I was] there but [I was]n't, you know? It's hard to describe. [I was]n't in that fully trusting committed way that I

feel like [I am] now." And although he was baptized during this time, he says "this [was]n't the full thing yet." Throughout this time, he continued to study the Scriptures, and gradually "the implications [of his study] beg[a]n to dawn on [him], over time." This resulted in another "turning point. But it start[ed] to grow," resulting in his being "really converted." Thus, his conversion experience can be described as a gradual process facilitated by moments of significant insight, which he terms "turning points."

Joshua's conversion is another example of a more uneven or turbulent experience, which can nevertheless be seen as a gradual process facilitated by multiple significant moments. Joshua's faith was nurtured by both his family and faith community and was thus a central part of his life in childhood. Despite some family turmoil in late childhood and early adolescence, he "really experienced faith being [his] own" during later adolescence and he began "leading spiritually" at the academy where he attended. He described this as "very real and really beautiful . . . a beautiful time." In young adulthood, however, Joshua experienced several years of questioning his faith, which ultimately led to "the death of [his] faith." He shared,

> My own faith, it felt like it just collapsed . . . it was just like I woke up one day and I was just like, I don't know if I can believe in God, you know. I don't know if this is really real.

Over the next few years, his faith was "re-built" by a number of significant spiritual experiences and gradually continued to "grow." When asked how he understood conversion, and which of his experiences he would consider part of his conversion, he responded as follows:

> I definitely think [conversion] is a multi level thing. It's not just something that happens once . . . I think it can't be separated from, like, ultimately it's not

133

separated from a person and their theological state, and the things that have brought them thus far. It's not like this Zap and then everything is different, because all the moments I've seen in my life, there's reasons [for them].

Thus, it is evident that, despite the uneven trajectory of his faith journey, Joshua considers his conversion a "multi-level" process that has been facilitated by "all the [significant] moments" in his life.

Abel's experience was very different to both Paul's and Joshua's; however, this same theme of conversion as a gradual process facilitated by multiple significant experiences also defined his conversion. Although Abel grew up in a nurturing Adventist environment, his early life was characterized by a lack of faith. Throughout his teen and early young adult years, he would have "God conversations with [his] friends" and he "went to church occasionally;" however, he was "pretty much God-less at that point." Over the next few years, this began to gradually change. Although "there were never any lights, there were never any fireworks," there were a number of significant experiences that gradually led him to become more "open" to God. Having reflected on these experiences, he thoughtfully concluded,

> When I think [of a] conversion experience, I think of being visited by an angel; going on a mission trip; emotional highs. And then you're convinced! For me, it was a very slow process: this is the way I want to live; this is who God is; and this is who I think He wants me to be. Was it a conversion experience? Yeah, it might have been my 21st century conversion experience.

Interestingly, Abel had always thought of conversion in terms of a significant "turning point" or "moment in time" experience; however, after reflecting on the gradual process of change in his life, which had been facilitated by significant spiritual experiences during "the last ten years," he concluded that his experience "might have been" a

134

conversion. Furthermore, he recognized that his experience was ongoing. As he

reflected on the significant changes he had made in his life as a result of his conversion,

he shared that he was still "kind of nervous about this;" that it was an ongoing challenge

to trust that a life with God would be "a better life."

Ongoing

This theme of conversion as an ongoing process was also evident in other

participants' descriptions of their conversion experiences. After describing the many

experiences that had facilitated his conversion, Joseph's concluding words reflected the

ongoing nature of his experience. He shared, "There have been a few important

milestones . . . but God has been working and speaking with me in between these

milestones as well." Mary's experience also reflected the ongoing nature of conversion

in her life. After describing several experiences that had contributed to her conversion,

she stated: "I felt a turning point in my maturity . . . things that characterized me

completely changed. So part of me wants to label that my conversion experience as well.

But I've grown even more since then too."

Belinda's observations on the ongoing nature of her conversion were particularly

thought provoking. With a small smile on her face, she shared, "My conversion started at

the beginning of my life." She viewed her parents' efforts to shape her worldview, which

began "from the first day that [I] open[ed my] eyes," as "helping to . . . start that

conversion . . . from the beginning." Furthermore, her conversion was "still continuing."

As she is learning "to maintain focus on" God, and as she is growing in her

"understanding of Him," this "is helping [her] to have more conversion in [her] life."

Thus, for Belinda, conversion is intertwined with the ongoing challenge of the Christian

life. This theme was also evident in Leah's experience. She shared,

> Every time that brings me closer to God or something happens to make me think,
> you know, or that God shows Himself or, like when He answers prayers . . . or
> somebody speaks to me and makes me think, yeah, that's something I really
> should be doing more . . . Sometimes when I feel God reaching out to me or I feel
> somebody speaking to me and making me want to reaffirm my faith and my
> relationship with God . . . they're like little mini-conversions for me.

Thus, the experiences that Leah considers "mini-conversions" are essentially what others

might consider the ongoing spiritual experiences that are a part of daily Christian life.

This theme was echoed in Daniel's words when he stated, "I feel like you can experience

God in a special way every day." Alan articulated this same theme of conversion as an

ongoing, daily experience particularly well. He shared,

> There's times when the appreciation of God's grace, you just get a bit
> overwhelmed by it when you realize how far short you're falling, um, that you
> haven't made it as far along (laughs) in this journey as you'd hoped to by this
> age . . . I was filling in a survey just last week, and it asked about conversion, and
> I thought, I was probably converted again this morning, you know, in my
> devotional time, because it had been a, it had been an important devotional time
> for me that day, you know, and I came away refreshed . . . you know, it's almost a
> daily thing . . . [I] read through Steps to Christ just recently, and you know, going
> through that is like a re-commitment, re-conversion experience, because you're
> brought face to face with 'What is repentance?' again, you know? 'What is
> conversion?' again, and your need for daily conversion experience.

Similarly, Dale also emphasized that conversion "has to be a sort of daily thing." He

went on to explain,

> I see [conversion] as a turning. And it's a constant turning away from me to
> Christ. And I think every moment that I have is an opportunity for conversion,
> for turning and looking toward my own interests or looking toward Christ . . .
> Choosing [God] on a daily basis, to me, that's what conversion is. It's not a one
> moment, even for those people who have this big, stars in the sky, you know,
> firework explosion of faith. Those people can lose it just as easily over time if it's

not a daily thing. So, for me, conversion is about, Christ, today I want to walk with you.

In summary, therefore, rather than a single turning point, the young adults in this study experienced conversion as a gradual, ongoing process facilitated by multiple significant moments.

Integrates Intellectual Knowledge

For the young adults in this study, the intellectual domain of faith was central to their childhood experience of faith, as evidenced by the emphasis on "believing," "what I believed," "enough knowledge," "knowing enough," and "understanding" in early childhood. As Alan explained, "in early days, faith was simply believing." Similarly, Leah shared that "all the things that [she] learned and believed to be true" during her childhood were "a big part of [her] faith." This intellectual knowledge was acquired during childhood through "morning and evening worships," "family devotional time" and "family worships;" through "Bible stories," "Bible studies," being "taught from the Bible at an early age" and "reading" and "reflecting on" Scripture;" through "conversations about faith all the time;" as well as through SDA church and school attendance. Some participants in this study described the intellectual domain of their childhood faith experiences in positive terms. These participants described the intellectual component of their conversion in different terms to those whose childhood faith experiences were either deficient or distorted in the intellectual sphere. Thus, the experiences of these two groups of participants will be described separately.

The participants in the first group experienced guidance in processing the knowledge that they acquired from a variety of sources. For example, Alan shared that his parents helped to "correct some of the misconceptions" that he "automatically" picked up "by listening to others." He explained,

> We'd talk at home and there was just a constant that God was . . . never a harsh punishing God, watching for you to do something wrong, so that He could discipline you. That was never the picture that we got . . . [They were] just making sure that, as we grew up, that our understanding of God was not of some harsh, dictatorial God.

Similarly, Mark's father helped him to process the books that he was "reading," and he and his father "had some very strong conversations" about some of his reading, to ensure he knew that "theologically we didn't agree on everything" that he read; and to ensure that he knew that "we believed other things." Dale also recalled that his "Mom taught [him] early on [to] really look at things for [him]self," rather than accepting what others said without questioning. He shared,

> Even when I was too young to really understand what the sermon was about, my Mom was always like, look up what the pastor says to make sure that's what the Bible says. Always, you know, always look at it for yourself and read the verses.

Furthermore, for the young adults in this first group, the intellectual component of faith during childhood centered on learning about "God's character;" on developing a "picture of who God is;" on learning that "God is real," "God is love," and God is "someone who cared for me and loved me." For Mark, the intellectual component of his childhood faith experiences "stimulated his mind in ways . . . that are still impacting [him] now." He shared with some emotion,

To me everything was wonderful; everything was good. All these pictures of God, whether they came from CS Lewis or Narnia or Your Story Hour . . . God was just wonderful and beautiful.

The young adults in this first group described the intellectual component of their conversion as a relatively uneventful process of ongoing cognitive assent to the knowledge they had acquired during childhood, or as a gradual growth in understanding during the adolescent and young adult years. For Mark, the intellectual component of his faith "made sense" and thus he "never rebelled" as an adolescent. Similarly, Daniel explained that in adolescence he "agreed with everything" he learned in earlier life, through both family teaching and "Bible studies with the pastor;" and that when he "met a whole bunch of young people" who believed as he did at a youth convention, it "was a further confirmation of what [he] had believed." Joe's experience was similar. He explained,

> There were never any times where I felt like, you know, this is what my parents believe, that separation, because it was what I believed also. I think that's probably why as a teenager I didn't question it, because I never viewed it as my parents' beliefs vs. my own.

Even in the face of traumatic personal events, he "never questioned who God was or . . . His character." Rather, he drew on his knowledge of God from "the Bible stories," and it was these "that got [him] through" difficult times. For example, as he faced the dissolution of his first marriage, it was the story of king Saul that he found particularly helpful. He explained,

> The fact that God had chosen king Saul, and I don't think he chose King Saul to teach Israel a lesson. Here, this is what you want! You'll regret that (chuckles)! But when there are relationships, both sides can change. And so, if that can happen to the God of the universe, how can we think that it's not going to happen to us?

Thus, "it was good to have the strong foundation" of Biblical knowledge.

Dale shared that his conversion involved a certain degree of *owning* the intellectual component of faith that he had acquired in childhood. For him, because of the centrality of "the Bible early on," it "was not really ever as much a question [of] do I really believe in this . . . as much as making it real;" of determining that "it's not just a bunch of stories, it's not just what I've always heard;" of recognizing "that [it's] about Christ who lives," and "then really, having that really, really settle in." He shared: "I think there comes a point where everybody has to decide for themselves what they actually believe in . . . This is one thing that I feel strongly about, that you need to look at things for yourself."

For Dale, this occurred during his late teenage years, when he "became a counselor at camp." He explained,

> Being in charge of these young kids and, sort of, sharing God . . . [and] my faith with young people. Sharing then became a solidifying factor for me, because I had a really, you can't just say it if you don't believe it, you know, to really share it with others. I don't think you can do that without understanding. So it forced me to really look at it again for myself. And studying the Scriptures and saying okay how, where do I come down on this?

For Dale, this process of owning the intellectual component of faith has continued to be an ongoing process. He stated,

> There are certain areas of prophecy; for example, where I question . . . I still wrestle sometimes with that sort of thing. And I think that's good. When we stop, and we just accept what's handed to us, I think that's a problem.

Belinda's conversion has also included an ongoing growth in intellectual knowledge, particularly in coming to understand that conversion "is not about perfection," but rather,

that "it's about love;" i.e., that "love for people" is "more important" than "being perfect."

She concludes that this growth in understanding is "the big thing that [she has] learned

and that is helping [her] to have more conversion in [her] life."

The second group of participants in this study described childhood faith

experiences that were either deficient or distorted in the intellectual domain. Accordingly,

a growth in intellectual understanding was central to their experience of conversion.

Joseph described his childhood faith as significantly deficient due to growing up in a

country where Christian faith was forbidden, and where "faith-based resources" were

"limited." He explained, "We had one Bible that was in [our language], but written in a

different dialect and not easy to understand. I tried reading it a few times, but I really

couldn't understand much." His grandmother's "incredible stories of [God's]

deliverance," "stories from her own life," as well as several key "stories from the Bible"

were the primary source of Joseph's "faith and knowledge of God;" and although he

came to see God as "someone who could do amazing things, beyond what we are capable

of doing," his intellectual understanding of God was very limited. He shared,

> We were exposed to the concept of the Sabbath, and Jesus as someone very
> special who died for us . . . Grandma always mentioned Jesus' name, so I began to
> think that this person Jesus was of importance . . . but His dying for us didn't
> make a lot of sense at a young age.

Joseph's faith "waned" in early adolescence, but was re-vitalized in late adolescence

through participation in "a Bible study class," which helped him to "understand" and

"know God more." He shared,

> The Bible study classes helped me to make more sense of Scripture, where I could
> see that it wasn't just emotional. It wasn't just the stories that I had heard. There
> was more. There was also a cognitive component . . . I began to understand why

God exists, why He works in our lives, how He works in our lives, and what salvation means, rather than God just being awesome and doing incredible miracles.

This growth in intellectual understanding, particularly coming to understand "Adventist doctrines and prophetic writings," was an important "milestone" in his conversion experience; however, it was not until he understood God's grace, "that God really accepts us the way we are, [that] it finally clicked," and he decided to be baptized. Even after his baptism, however, Joseph's intellectual understanding continued to grow as he studied the Scriptures, and he had "another profound experience, shortly after [his] grandmother passed away." He shared,

> I struggled during that time, asking God to help me better understand life and death issues. The quest led me to a deeper and more sincere study of God's word and continual prayer. I knew about the resurrection of the just when Jesus would return, but that was not helping my pain. I continued to ask God for help. One morning, about three weeks after she had passed away, I was studying and praying before heading to the office. I wanted to know more; to better understand why we lose loved ones. While reading 1 Thessalonians 4, it was as if Paul's words jumped off the page and entered my heart and my mind. I had read them before, but not like this. That morning I believed with my whole heart and mind that death is just temporary; that I would see grandma again. I truly believed that death was not forever.

Mary also described her intellectual understanding of God as somewhat deficient in childhood. Her family had been hurt by the church, and they "chose to withdraw from the church family" during her childhood years. During this time, they "still claimed that faith," and her "parents tried to share with [her] a lot;" but "for whatever reason, it wasn't feeding [her] enough." This deficiency "spurred [her] to be interested in the Bible," particularly "things like Daniel and Revelation." Most of her learning was done on her own, however, and thus she grew up "knowing enough about faith but not having all of

the elements." Consequently, she absorbed "the idea" that faith was about "the culture of Adventism . . . [the] dressing well for church . . . having that persona of a good Adventist family." Furthermore, she "came away with" a "very works, legalistic mentality." She shared with some agitation,

> I never understood properly, like, the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of Christ, and therefore the understanding of humanity and what we do. And so, like, when I talk about my selfishness and . . . I am a horrible person kind of attitude . . . And I keep thinking, like, I've got to fix this. I've just got to fix this. I've got to get perfect . . . That has made me look back on all my childhood and be like . . . Why didn't you help me understand that? Because that could change the whole way I beat myself up.

 "Get[ting] rid of [her] idea of what faith really is," or 'un-learning' her childhood intellectual understanding has been a significant part of her conversion experience, particularly, beginning to "really understand, really, the work God does on our behalf . . . [and] what part we play . . . has been huge" in her conversion experience. She shared,

> [This] has totally transformed, just in the last couple months, like, the way I view myself . . . recognizing the limitations that I have, and realizing that the true essence of grace and forgiveness is the fact that we can't do it and we have to just say, I can't do it. And so I need you to forgive me, and having to daily ask for forgiveness, like, that has never really hit me in quite the same way . . . I still realize I need to change, [but] even if I did everything perfectly, I would still need a Savior because I am separated from Him.

"It feels like" she is understanding the Gospel "for the first time." And although "it's still fresh" and she is "not implementing it" yet in the way she hopes to, just "know[ing] this information," that she "can't fix" herself, has "been peaceful and relieving."

Paul also described a childhood understanding of God that was limited by difficult family circumstances. In early childhood, his mother "did some very good things," like taking him "to church every Sabbath, going to Sabbath School," and reading Bible stories

with him; however, following a divorce, his understanding of God was shaped primarily by "reading," which he did "by [him]self." He recalled sadly,

> [There was] not enough reinforcement in the home, where the parents try to shape the thinking, and not just to read the books, but how to read the books. See, you don't skip over certain things . . . I know that I would just sort of hastily, superficially read over things about atonement and cross and grace. I would zero in on all the other things about our obedience and so on . . . This is [the] problem of being self-taught, in a sense, where, I'm reading this stuff, like when the Ethiopian says, how can I understand unless somebody explains it to me?

Consequently, by late childhood, Paul had "turned into somebody who wanted to do what's right; and that was good. But [he] didn't have any assurance. [He] actually didn't understand the Gospel at all." Central to his conversion has been the long process of 'un-learning' this part of his childhood intellectual understanding. He explained with conviction,

> I finally became converted [when] I understood that I was a sinner saved by grace and I always would be. And that Jesus is my Savior, you know, and that I can have joy and peace because it's His righteousness that God sees and not mine. Fig-leafed, feeble, filthy-rag righteousness (laughs). I mean this is why we can be happy Christians. You can't be if you don't know that. And it's changed everything. I feel so much better about everything than I ever have before. It doesn't mean there're no problems in life. It doesn't mean that I am fully sanctified because I understand justification; but it does mean that my sanctification can have the right context and that sanctification is about love; loving God for what he's done, and loving people because of what He's done.

"Understanding the truth" about the Gospel has been "key" to Paul's experience of conversion, as "that affects everything else;" however, despite the inadequacy in his "foundational knowledge," Paul acknowledged that having faith "in [his] thinking" from childhood was "a great blessing," as "at least" he had "something there to come back to."

144

Joshua described a childhood understanding of faith that was distorted by the church he attended, where the "flavor of Adventism" was "very fundamentalist, very rigid and sectarian." He explained,

> The culture of the church was very closed . . . and there was a lot of this sort of talking about people, the other Christians, like they're not really Christians; literally like they worship a different Jesus, a false Jesus, because they don't keep the Sabbath . . . It [was] a very bounded community.

Although this "didn't feel right" to Joshua, and he "would look at other people" and "wonder how all the other people, how do they magically become part of us," "it just kind of seeped in," and he "didn't really question it" and thus "believed it was true."

Consequently, when Joshua found himself questioning aspects of SDA doctrine during late adolescence, his theological questioning created a sense of great "turmoil." With some agitation, Joshua shared,

> I suddenly found myself feeling like I didn't fit, because I couldn't believe X, Y and Z about some esoteric thing. It felt esoteric to me . . . You have to believe such and such about such and such to be called an Adventist, and I'm like, so now I'm not part of the community any more? I don't fit, because I think about this differently? . . . The nice, clean bounding of the community from my childhood, you know, who's in and who's out, I'm on the out, you know. That bounding, which, because of my personality and my, maybe the way my faith was formed, I don't know. I find myself, its very stressful, very stressful experience.

Throughout his early young adult years he continued to have "this brewing dissonance" about Adventism. He shared,

> I had lots of very negative feelings about Adventism . . . and for me, that was faith. Faith was linked to Adventism. And so I had negative feelings about Adventism . . . And if it's programmed in, that who's in and who's out, and what's out is false, when you want to stay in, but you don't fit in, then you must be out.

Ultimately, "the neat Adventist paradigm" that he had grown up with came "unraveled" in his mind; "it was like the cognitive part of [his] faith died" and he was "starting with a blank slate." During the next several years, as he interacted with "a diverse community of faith," he recognized that the things within Adventism that had "repulsed" him, particularly its' "boundedness," were a part of every faith community. He explained: "Things that I had been revolted by are not a part of Adventism, per se; they're a part of human relations to community. It's like this in every church, these issues." This recognition "really helped [him] with reconstructing the cognitive part of [his] faith;" helped him "put the pieces together;" helped him to see that "God has used this church," and that "God has something to say through our church." As he is beginning to "identify" with the Adventist community again, he still has questions that are "not completely resolved. There is still dissonance;" however, he is coming to terms with the fact that "it may never be." He explained,

> These things don't necessarily all resolve. And that may not be the point. We live in tension, and our tensions are different even from one another. But that's, like, how do we continue on in faith and what it means to be followers of Christ? And people who look for an Advent, you know? (Laughs) Who keep a day of rest? How great is that?

For Joshua, this growth in intellectual understanding has been "profoundly re-vitalizing" to his experience, because conversion "can't be separated from . . . a person and their theological state."

Abel's experience was unique among the participants in this study, because despite a faith-promoting environment of family, school and church, faith "just wasn't a

part of [his] life," and he was "always very doubting, an agnostic, for most of [his early] life." He explained,

> I understood, on a theoretical basis, who God was; He was God the Father, Creator of the universe. I understood the salvation story. I understood the Adventist message, and why it was important. I could recite all of that and tell you why it was important. But it just wasn't a part of my life. God wasn't a part of my life . . . I knew what they wanted me to believe, but I didn't believe it.

In young adulthood, while living "a very God-less way of life," Abel and his wife began to talk about having a child, which led him to think about what he wanted for his child. As he observed the lives of the secular people around him, he recognized that they were "wildly successful, but they [were] not happy; they [were] miserable. They were extremely narcissistic. They didn't have that care for [their fellow] man." As he recognized the dissonance between these secular values and the "values that [he] had been raised with, the church, the educational system and the family, it didn't really mix." He explained,

> It was just weird, these irrational thoughts in my mind about why I was doing certain things. And finally, it got to the point when [pauses] there's value in this! Why am I not being a part of this? Even though [church] makes [me] feel uncomfortable, and its boring and dull sometimes, and these people don't make any sense, it's still a better way of life than what I'm seeing here . . . I didn't want that. I wanted out of that as soon as possible. I don't want anything to do with this. I don't want my child being raised in this. I don't want my child to live like the kids down the street. I didn't want that at all.

For Abel, this recognition, which he described as "an intellectual experience . . . based on fact rather than some sort of emotion," was the first step in his conversion, resulting in his "opening up to God a lot more."

Thus, in summary, for the young adults in this study, conversion included an intellectual component. Those whose childhood faith experiences gave them "enough

knowledge" about God described the intellectual component of their conversion experience as a smooth process of either ongoing cognitive assent to or gradual growth in childhood knowledge. In contrast, the participants whose childhood faith experiences resulted in either a deficient or distorted picture of God described conversion as a process that included a significant intellectual component. Thus, from the descriptions of all the young adults in this study, conversion can be seen as a process that integrates childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences in the intellectual domain.

In addition to these intellectual experiences, however, several participants described experiences that appeared to be beyond their intellectual understanding. When describing his desire to "wak[e] up extra early" in order to spend time with God, Daniel stated, "I don't know why [that happened]." Similarly, when describing an experience of "opening [her] heart . . . to God," Hope stated, "I don't know why, I couldn't put into words why that happened." In a similar way, when describing his experience of re-evaluating his life, Abel said, "It was just weird, these irrational thoughts in my mind." These words seem to imply that these experiences were outside the realm of intellectual understanding, and may be indicative of divine initiative in the process of conversion.

Integrates Affective Experiences

For the young adults in this study, childhood faith included varying degrees of affective experience. Some participants described childhood faith experiences that included a significant affective component, centered on *personal* experiences with God. Others described *family* and *communal* faith experiences during childhood that resulted in positive affective experiences of faith and a positive childhood picture of God. Others

still described childhood faith experiences in which the affective component of faith was either negative or absent. These three groups of participants described the affective component of their conversion experiences in somewhat different terms; thus, the experiences of these three groups of participants will be described separately.

Two young adults in this study described personal faith experiences in childhood that included a significant affective component. Joseph grew up in a country where Christian faith was forbidden and "faith-based resources" were "limited;" thus, it was "stories" and "prayer" that were central to his childhood faith experiences. This resulted in a picture of God that included a significant affective component. He shared: "God was someone who could do amazing things, beyond what we are capable of doing, . . . [Someone] bigger and greater than our human power. [God] was fascinating and attractive to me." Regarding his childhood experience of "prayer," Joseph shared,

> [It] fascinated me . . . I thought it was great that we could directly communicate with God. I enjoyed praying growing up, . . . [and] for me, faith began with prayer. I talked to God, not seeing Him . . . Somehow I sensed that He was also listening, even though I could not see Him . . . [and] I prayed constantly . . . When I did not know what else to say to God, I would repeat requests to Him and words of gratitude.

Mark also shared that the affective domain was an important part of his childhood experience of faith. For Mark, it was "reading" and "prayer" that were central to his childhood faith; however, his reading "wasn't academic. It was devotional." He shared,

> All of this reading to me was experiential. It wasn't just, you know, I didn't know any abstract questions, I wasn't getting them from anywhere. I was just wanting to know about God, who I didn't view as an abstract entity, but as a person. So, to me, all of those experiences were experiential.

He explained that some of what he read "was fiction," which was "very powerful, kind of imaginatively," as "some of the connections" that he made in his mind through this process "helped expand [his] imagination for who God is, outside the box, and to think of the relationship." Consequently, for "as long as [he] can remember, [he] thought God was awesome; God was wonderful." Regarding prayer, Mark explained that he "had what [he] would consider a very strong prayer life for a child." To illustrate, he described the following example:

> I remember, I don't know how, but I remember being impacted by the story of Solomon, what he prayed for, and [I remember] praying for this kind of understanding. I remember a few moments of praying and feeling like God was really responding, not audibly or speaking, but just . . . (became somewhat emotional and apologized).

As evidenced above, both Joseph and Mark described childhood faith experiences that included a significant affective component, and that resulted in a positive picture of God accompanied by a strong personal connection to God through prayer. When describing their conversion experience, neither of them emphasized the affective domain. For Joseph, conversion included "walking closer with the Lord" and a more "intentional" prayer life, whereas Mark shared that he "never left [his] relationship with God," even though his faith was "kind of dormant" during adolescence. Thus, for these two young adults, the affective element of conversion did not entail a major change in the affective domain, maybe because their childhood faith experiences included a significant, *personal* affective component.

In contrast, the majority of young adults in this study described *family* and/or *communal*, rather than *personal*, faith experiences that included a positive affective

component. Joe shared that God was "a part of everything [his family] did;" thus "God

has always been a part of [his] life," and he "can't remember a time when" He was not.

Daniel also grew up with the "constant perspective that God was always with [him]." He

shared,

> [My mother] would always lead us to prayer and tell us that we can always rely
> on God, and that He is always with us. And whenever she sent me away to go to
> Sabbath School or go to school or something, just, remember God is with you
> today, something like that . . . [That's] probably the reason why I feel that God is
> with me every time.

Furthermore, he grew up with an awareness of God's constant presence in his daily life.

He explained,

> I was often asked . . . how was school? How was God leading you through
> school? And that was a blessing, now that I look back on that, asking the child on
> how they have experienced God; you know, I did well on my exam today; God
> really helped me. It's something that confirm[ed] it . . . in my mind, as I was
> growing up . . . I just felt like God was there with me . . . And it wasn't a sense of
> that God is with you in a condemning [way] . . . I viewed him as a friend.

For Alan, family faith practices were also central to the affective sphere of his childhood

experience of faith. He explained,

> [My parents] looked at ways of making [family devotions] interesting for us . . .
> [And] the way we spent Sabbath as a family, um, often an afternoon at the beach,
> Sabbath nature walks, you know, and I really, really enjoyed those. They were a
> great, great way to spend Sabbath, you know, out at the ocean, even in the winter
> time, on the beach, closing Sabbath watching the sun set over the waves, and
> singing together. Those are probably the most positive memories that linger.

For Mary, it was also Sabbath memories that were a significant part of her affective

childhood faith experiences. She recalled,

> I remember as a little girl growing up . . . there's this feeling on Sabbath, and I
> can't quite articulate it, with the right music, which is always ingrained in you,
> like, Sabbath music; [and] people around you that you feel comfortable with, the

warm clean house, because its always clean on Friday night. And just the restful, go to church, come home, routine.

Belinda also shared that her family "always tried to make worship and Sabbath fun, so that we enjoyed it," as well as teaching her "a lot about nature . . . about enjoying Creation." She shared,

> They just always talked about God . . . It was just really part of life, it wasn't really separate . . . I don't ever remember not talking about Him as if He was real . . . It was just a part of life.

Dale shared that his grandparents' "amazing miracle stories" made faith "real" during "those young, formative years." Similarly, Joshua's "family's stories" from their years as missionaries, of their "helping people and God doing miraculous things to help people through" them, was where he saw "the real experience of following God [and] what that looked like." After Joshua's parents divorced, his mother "reading through the Bible" with him; "singing certain hymns . . . like, 'Will Your Anchor Hold,'" which were "really spiritually, like, connecting;" and reading through "the Narnia stories" together were all significant affective experiences. He remembered these experiences as "a sort of clinging . . . to God when your world is coming undone."

For Daniel, the way in which his parents related to him was also part of his affective experience of faith during childhood. He explained,

> I could talk to my father about religious things . . . questions like why does God do this, you know, or how old is God . . . I forget exactly all the answers, but my dad was patient with me and tried to answer everything . . . and I always felt that I could ask my parents anything. They were never too condemning.

Similarly, Alan also recognized that '"the way [his parents] treated [him]" was a significant part of his affective childhood faith experience. He explained,

Life was on the whole pretty settled, pretty good. There was never any fear that Mum and Dad were going to bust up or anything like that . . . [And] there was never any real reason for us to feel angry towards them. We were only ever treated pretty much as we deserved, you know. They weren't perfect, you know, but they did a pretty good job . . . I guess I never felt that God was unfair because I never thought that my parents were unfair. And I've come to see the importance of our parents on our image of God, you know. What we see in them as we're younger is what we see in God . . . [And] they were there for us. There was time . . . Their availability, their presence, both of them. All that impacted me in ways that I'm probably not even aware of . . . Maybe that availability of my parents, perhaps that helped me to see God as more available. I never really put that together [before].

In addition to positive family experiences, some participants shared that their church family was also part of their affective experience of childhood faith. Leah shared that she grew up with "a loving church family," where church members were "very loving and nurturing," as well as "interested" in the children; thus, "church was a good place to be." In a similar way, "church was happy" for Daniel, and "church life," as well "life with [his] parents, was great."

Thus, in summary, for the young adults described above, *family* and/or *communal*, rather than *personal*, experiences were central to their affective experiences of childhood faith. Accordingly, for these participants, conversion was defined by a growth in *personal* affective experiences with God, and for many of them, conversion was "intimately connected to relationship;" or "the process of developing [a] relationship with God;" or "a real relationship with God;" or "a personal relationship with Christ as my Lord;" or "just having that relationship;" or "deepen[ing] the relationship;" or "strengthen[ing] the relationship;" or "re-affirm[ing] my relationship with God;" or "feel[ing] closer to God and like He's really there;" or "drawing closer to God;" or "opening up to God;" or "openness to God;" or "opening my heart, you know, to God."

As one participant said, "It's a relationship. That sounds [like I'm] not saying a lot, but it's true." Belinda shared that, for her, conversion included the recognition of her need to "spend more time with God" and "just trying to maintain focus on Him." For Joe, conversion was "the process of developing that relationship with God." He shared,

> It's kind of the thing that's always there, like our relationship with our parents; but even those grow and change over time. And I think our relationship with God is the same; I mean, our relationships with Him are not the same as they were when we were seven or eight. But they are no less real then or now.

Alan described a similar experience. "Whereas in the early days faith was simply believing," in adolescence, "the importance of believing in someone who you know, the importance of relationship" grew. He explained,

> I don't think it was ever not there, but there was another step, that I would have a relationship with God. And to know the person you've believed in, the basis of faith actually being a relationship, more than just the definition of belief.

In reflecting on his conversion, he shared that there were many affective experiences that helped him "really deeply sense" God's love; "times when the reality of what Christ had done for [him] really sunk in." These had helped him "grow in [his] appreciation of Him" and thus "deepen[ed his] commitment" to God. Over time, "the importance of the relationship ha[d] grown," and he had come to "value the relationship side of [his] faith more." Daniel also shared that it was during adolescence that he "just wanted to give all [his] life to God;" that he "just felt [his] need to be like Christ;" and that he "felt a great need" for time with God. For Joshua, this experience of growth in the affective component of faith, which occurred in the context of "sharing and praying" with "a group of peers" during adolescence, was when he "first really experienced faith being [his] own." He explained,

> That's where I started to feel like, like I *felt* faith. Before it was, like, just being a part of this group of people; and then this was, like, about me and God and these other people; like, it was in relationship with a bunch of other, of my peers, that I felt you know, a connection to God . . . It was a very angsty time for me, you know, very emotionally turbulent, but then its like sharing this emotional turbulence with God and with your peers at the same time, so then it kind of opens up something . . . It was like this thing that was very real and really beautiful.

Dale also described his experience of growth in the affective component of faith as the process of "mak[ing] it your own;" the process when faith "become[s] real for you," which in his experience was "intimately connected to relationship" with God; to "mak[ing] a decision on whether [you] want to have a real relationship with Him or not." This process, Dale explained, is sometimes "harder for those of us who have always been in the church." In contrast to a new convert, who is "like a poor person who has discovered a feast," and for whom Christ "is like this treasure trove," "the person who has always lived [with the] wealth of Scripture" can "become immune, to a certain extent. We harden; de-sensitize." Furthermore, relationship with God is sometimes difficult, "because we don't see Him . . . So, to really genuinely feel" a connection with God is a "challenge;" however, there had been many significant moments in Dale's life where he had "seen God work in amazing ways;" moments where he had "actually seen Him lead." These moments, which were like "tent poles in [his] life that [he] can lean on, and look back on and say, this is how God has led [him]," resulted in a "solidification" of his "relationship" with God. This theme of relationship with God being strengthened by looking back and seeing His leading was central to the experiences of participants in this group; and when reflecting on their conversion experiences, many of them recounted many positive events that had taught them to "trust" and "rely on God."

However, in addition to being able to look back and see God's leading in the positive events of life, trust in God was strengthened for many of these participants through experiences of personal suffering, i.e., difficult circumstances and events also helped them "learn to better rely on God" and "learn to trust Him," which "really solidified" and "strengthened" and "deepened" their "relationship with God." As Joe explained, when we think about relationship with God, "we try to focus on the positive" events; however, in his life, it was the "hardest thing that [he] had ever experienced or been through" that helped him to learn that the "only way to get through it was to rely on God." Leah also shared that the times when she had to face "really bad situation[s]," where she "really ha[d] to trust God," were "like little mini-conversions for [her]." For Mary, it was the "heartache" of a failed love relationship that "spurred [her] toward a relationship with God . . . [and that] helped [her] look to Christ as [her] love." In a similar way, for Dale, it was through learning to trust God through the trials of life that he learned to have "a real relationship" with God. He explained,

> As you become an adult and you deal with various difficult circumstances, um, it's more of a challenge; and I think you have to decide whether you will trust God or not . . . If I hadn't gone through [those experiences] I wouldn't be here today. I wouldn't be the same person. I wouldn't have, I guess, what you would call a real relationship vs. depending on, oh yeah, this is what I've always believed in . . . And those [difficult] experiences, as a whole, influence how I think about faith and how I trust God in the future . . . [And] now, looking back on when I did trust Him and follow where I felt He was leading me, to look back and see, it's like this beautiful picture that to me was chaos at the time.

Thus, in summary, for the young adults whose childhood faith experiences included positive *family* and/or *communal* faith experiences in the affective domain, conversion

was defined by a growth in *personal* affective experiences with God, primarily defined as growth in relationship with God.

In contrast, three young adults in this study described their childhood faith experiences as inadequate or negative in the affective domain. Abel shared that despite growing up in an Adventist family, and attending both Adventist schools and church, his childhood faith experiences were not overly positive. In his family, "there wasn't too much religious structure;" and although they "tried" family worship, "it just didn't work for them." He explained forthrightly,

> We really didn't find [it] beneficial. It was the same thing, over and over again: God is love; don't treat others poorly; God performs miracles; a little kitten got saved when some kid prayed for it. How many times do you need to hear these things before they become meaningless? Some people don't need to hear it again and again. They got it the 1000th time.

Although his family attended church, Abel "never liked going to church" as a child, and "never really got a blessing out of church." And although school was "most important" to his childhood faith experiences, because school taught him "values," and "provided structure" as well as "community," i.e., "relationships with [his] friends," he also had some negative emotions about his school experiences. He shared,

> I went to Adventist schools, and then Adventist colleges. But I [would] look around at the people in the community and I [felt], you are [a leader], but you are just a mess! I don't respect you! You're really not that intelligent! You don't have a concept of God that I like at all! And you are telling me to be a Christian? You're telling me to be like you? Why would I want to be like you? You are just a mess! And if this is your concept of God, who you worship, why would I want to be a part of that? That was a very difficult thing for me.

Accordingly, his childhood faith was "unfelt," and his picture of God was that of "a distant God." He shared,

> I knew what they wanted me to believe, but I didn't believe it. I didn't feel it . . . [Faith] just wasn't a part of my life. God wasn't a part of my life. [I] would pray when [I] went to bed, but [I] didn't live it; [I] didn't feel it.

Consequently, for much of his adolescence and young adulthood Abel considered himself "agnostic."

Paul also described childhood faith experiences that were both inadequate and negative in the affective domain. In his earliest years, his mother "did a lot of good things," and "Adventism, for [him] was in the blood, so to speak;" however, his parents abandoned him after they divorced, and Paul was raised by a great-aunt, who was emotionally unavailable and who "never talk[ed] about things very much." He explained,

> I mean, how was your day? No. [Pauses] It was just, you go to school, you come back, you eat and watch TV, and go outside and play once in a while. I mean, I was just, I was on my own pretty early.

Furthermore, his aunt had "a little bit of a legalistic streak," and her faith "didn't exude a lot of joy." This was "reinforced" by the Adventist school he attended, which was also "very legalistic, you know, you get a check by your name, you have to stand against the wall, and all that kind of stuff (laughs);" as well as by "the church where [he] went" with his aunt. By early adolescence, Paul had "turned into someone who wanted to do what [was] right," and yet he "had no assurance." He explained,

> [While my friends] were going crazy with the girls, and all this kind of stuff, I had this really sensitive conscience, and I was, like, no, I'm not going to do any of that. But if I even laughed at a joke, I would thrash myself for the rest of the day. And I just found that I was not sinless. I was not 100% following everything all of the time. And so, the more I saw that, that I wasn't, the more I said, you know what? This isn't working. I can't do this. And so I threw it all out. I said, I don't believe in God anymore. I don't believe in anything anymore.

By late adolescence, his "aversion" to faith and "skepticism" about God was "digging in."

He shared,

> I called myself a deist, because I felt like God isn't interacting. And that, some of that, was personal. In other words, what is He doing with *me*? I don't *feel*. And by the way, looking back, I would have to say, some of that probably had to do with the lack of *people* being there, you know what I'm saying? Like you have no persons that are there, and then you feel like God isn't there . . . I was saying that I'm a deist, you know, God created and then just left us alone. So that's where I was.

> Hope also described her "home life" as "pretty turbulent and negative in a lot of

aspects." Her father was "very angry and controlling," and "used his authority in an

abusive way at home." Her mother, on the other hand, "was negative and kind of

emotionally dependent on" her. Furthermore, Hope's family "didn't have family

worship," thus they "didn't really teach" her about God, although they "went to church

once a week," which was "about the extent" of their intentionality in sharing faith with

her. This impacted her affective experience of faith in a negative way. She shared,

> I think there's more damage by watching and seeing someone, for example, I feel like they're saying, we're going to church, I'm a Christian and then seeing them counteract, kind of like do opposite in their actions, um, it's very damaging. It would have been almost better if they had not been church goers, because then they're not saying that I'm a Christ follower and I'm reflecting Christ, but I'm really not. And I know that none of us a perfect, but there's a difference between having weaknesses and messing up, and having a habitual trend toward these other behaviors that I do on a regular basis, and I'm not moving toward changing those.

Despite "caring mentors" in her church and school community, who "really believed and

cared about" her and had "a positive impact" on her life, in adolescence she began "to be

very resistant toward spiritual things." She explained,

> I felt that being in church and being in church school all the time, I felt like it was being crammed down my throat. And so, I might not have been an outward rebel,

but I was definitely rebelling in my heart. And there was a wall, and it wasn't necessarily something I put there consciously, but there was a wall that was getting in the way.

For Abel, Paul and Hope, conversion involved 'un-learning' some of their childhood faith experiences. Abel and Paul both asserted that their conversions occurred largely in the intellectual domain; however, both of them described a significant affective component to their conversion experiences. As described above, the first step in Abel's conversion was the "intellectual experience" of recognizing that he did not want a secular lifestyle for his child, which resulted in his "opening up to God a lot more." He shared,

> Previously, I told myself I didn't need Him . . . [But now], it was like, I've seen this for the last ten years, and I've felt this way for the last ten years; lets talk about this. And so, God and I, I just opened my heart up and I said this is enough. Where are we now? I've been running for a long time.

Furthermore, becoming a father was an affective experience that contributed to his understanding of the Gospel. He shared,

> Had I not had my son, I would have never been able to understand why Christ came. [It was] very difficult for me to understand . . . But because [I now] understand the love that a parent has for a child, I [now] get that. I get that now. So, I very much value it, the sacrifice.

And although it was "not easy" for Abel to be baptized, particularly as he had "friends who don't understand who God is or even want to," his baptism was a significant affective experience. He shared with some emotion,

> I was baptized because I wanted to accept the blood of Christ as my own. I wanted to show Christ whose side I was on. I wanted to show the community of people I'm surrounded by whose side I had chosen. I wanted to set an example to those around me. I sobbed when I was baptized. I didn't think it would feel as good as it did. What a relief it was! . . . I am relieved I am baptized. I feel comfort from it.

Of his current faith experience, Abel says,

> For me, Christ is God. Christ is a friend . . . I don't hesitate to tell Christ about
> my problems or what I'm thinking, or anything like that. And I know, just like a
> good parent, He wants the best for me . . . I know I'm not a traditional Adventist,
> but I love Adventism and want more people to have the peace and joy it has
> brought me.

For Paul, conversion also involved 'un-learning' some of his formational experiences;
and although this occurred largely in the intellectual domain, he also described a
significant affective component to his conversion experience. As described above, Paul's
conversion was the result of finally coming to understand the Gospel. This process was
facilitated by a mentoring relationship with a college professor in young adulthood.
When faced with difficult spiritual questions, this professor "wasn't threatened, [and] he
wasn't defensive," which Paul thought was "pretty cool." He shared,

> I asked him some of the questions that everybody asks, you know. Now I look
> back, and I'm, Oh, you know, roll my eyes! But at the time, you know, *I'm
> asking questions!* But you know, there's stuff, there's serious questions that we
> do need answers, you know, things like the violence in the Old Testament. Why
> does this happen? This disturbs people. Why did He do this?

This professor not only provided "strong answers" to Paul's questions, but for the first
time in his life, Paul had someone to process his faith with. As Paul explained,

> When I started talking to him about the Bible, some of this stuff [worked itself
> out], you know? . . . We talk about listening and psychology and all that, they
> always talk about how, when you listen well, people figure things out as they're
> talking. Some of this happened. When I'm listening to myself, I am like, okay
> (laughs).

This relationship, which was "such an important influence at that crucial time," gradually
"open[ed him] up to God." He explained,

> I said to myself, we were not meant, we were not created, to live without God.
> This is the huge recognition, that this kind of life I'm trying to live is futile. It's

not just that I don't feel good; there's just something completely absurd about trying to live as a created being without acknowledging your Creator, and really giving your life to him. So I was kind of broken down.

This "first step" in his conversion helped Paul to recognize that God is "there" and "He's real." He decided to "get baptized," which was a "very powerful" experience. With some emotion in his voice, Paul shared,

> One thing I've always sensed since I got baptized, I know that this is not just me making it up, because I never had this before. Whenever I feel the Holy Spirit interacting with me and talking to me, God calls me, he says, 'My son' . . . I never had that before and I really like that (laughs) . . . Particularly when you don't have a lot of the father part [i.e., biological father not part of life]. So that's huge! That's huge! I have that all the time and it's very powerful to me that He does that.

Of his current faith experience, Paul says,

> I love above anything the God who has given us all this . . . the fact that God would accept me on the basis of what Christ has done, . . . because I recognize that I'm a sinner who deserves to die. I shouldn't be living! I shouldn't be breathing! . . . You want to know what faith means? (Laughs) . . . It means everything!

Hope's description of her conversion was somewhat less emotive than the experiences of both Abel and Paul; however, her conversion journey began in the affective domain. Although there was "no one piece" that was the "magic moment" in her conversion, she did experience a "moment of realization," which she considers "a piece" of her conversion experience. She described this experience as follows:

> I just remember being kind of struck with, there's an emptiness, there's something missing here; and sort of opening my heart, you know, to God. And I don't understand; I couldn't put into words why that happened. I'm glad it did, but its not like any of my other circumstances had really changed.

This experience, which was like a first step in her conversion, made her "willing to open, and like consider . . . grow[ing] towards God . . . mov[ing] forward instead of blocking it."

162

Later experiences helped her to 'un-learn' some of "the lies about God's character" that she had absorbed, that "God doesn't really care about [her] and [that] He's absent;" and she described her current experience as "learning to know God enough that [she] know He's trustworthy," and "learning . . . to stay in that relationship and walking a journey with Him."

Thus, in summary, for the young adults in this study, conversion included varying degrees of affective experience. For the two participants whose childhood faith experiences included a significant *personal* affective component, conversion did not involve a significant change in the affective domain. For the majority of participants, who described positive *family* and/or *communal* affective faith experiences but no *personal* affective faith experiences in childhood, conversion involved significant growth in a *personal* experience with God, i.e., growth in personal relationship with God. For the three participants who described childhood faith experiences that were deficient or negative in the affective domain, conversion involved a more significant affective component than the other young adults' experiences. Thus, from the descriptions of all the young adults in this study, conversion can be seen as a process that integrates childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences in the affective domain.

Transformational

Because faith involves "believing in what you think is true and letting it affect your life," the young adults in this study shared that their conversion experiences also included a behavioral component. The English word *conversion* originates from the Latin *conversio(n-)*, or *convers-*, which means *turning* or *turned around* (New Oxford

163

American Dictionary); and it is in the behavioral domain that the participants in this study

experienced conversion as a "turning." As Hope explained

> The theological [definition of conversion] is the turning around. But I think, um, a less theological term is just having that relationship and having it be at a level with God where you're willing to make changes, you know, if something is getting in the way of your relationship or if you feel like the Bible or God is speaking to you, this is not helpful for you or, you know, this would really bring us closer, and making choices to turn from those things that are not helpful and turning to the things that will. So it is a turning, kind of.

For Hope, this "turning" was the outcome of growth in both the intellectual and affective

domains. This was also the experience of other young adults in this study, i.e., as they

experienced growth in their understanding of and relationship with God, a

transformational "turning" in the behavioral domain followed. For the participants in this

study, conversion included both *past* experiences of "turning" away from specific

behavioral choices, as well as *ongoing* "turning" from sin and self; thus, these two

experiences will be described as two sub-themes.

Past experiences of transformational turning

Daniel was one participant who described transformational "turning" away from

specific behavioral choices in the past as part of his conversion experience. For Daniel,

conversion was "a whole bunch of things coming together," resulting in his decision to be

baptized. "Around that time," he began "waking up extra early" so that he would have

time for personal devotions before going to school. He did not recall "what it was that

led [him] to that point;" however, he remembered that he "just wanted to give all [his]

life to God;" that he "just felt [his] need to be like Christ;" and that he "felt a great need"

for time with God. It was also at this time that he "started feeling conviction" regarding

his behavior. He explained,

> The way I was behaving in school was different to the way I would behave at home . . . my language at home would be different. So it was almost like I was living two lives . . . I knew that swearing was not being like Christ . . . [and I became] convicted that that part of my life was wrong . . . And so I really wanted help with that . . . I just started feeling like I know that God can help me.

As he started "reading and praying in the morning," he "felt like God was near . . . more

than [he had] before," and his "language problems disappeared." "Along the same time"

he also became convicted about a need for change in his television viewing habits. He

explained,

> Some of the things I'm watching on TV I really shouldn't be watching, like, not everything was bad, but even things that weren't necessarily bad were still taking away my time . . . So I decided that if I make myself busy doing other things, I won't have . . . enough time to watch TV. And then I would go to bed and I would go, yes! Another day! (Laughs) I made it another day!

Whereas at the beginning he was "almost addicted to television, . . . by the end of the

second month [he] really [did]n't care any more" about the programs he was "missing out"

on. This experience, which Daniel considered "one of [his] conversion experiences,"

began with a "turning" toward God in the intellectual and affective domain, resulting in

intentional actions to "turn" away from behaviors that were not congruent with his faith.

Mary was another participant who related transformational experiences of

"turning" away from specific behavioral choices in the past as she "turned" toward God.

She explained,

> [In adolescence] I just started to care more and more [about God] . . . and as I grew and matured [in faith], I began to, like, tick off things, like, drop the things that weren't appropriate behavior. I started to realize that I needed to be more in line with God's will for me, and I started actually making that happen.

One example was Sabbath observance. "Even when" she had "considered [her]self to be a very good Adventist," she had "always justified" competing in equestrian riding events on the Sabbath; however, in her senior year of high school, Mary "came to a point" where she chose to turn away from this. She shared,

> I just felt like the Sabbath is really important to God, and it should be important to me; important to the point where I choose not to do my own will on the Sabbath. And that senior year I decided I wasn't going to that event, and I wasn't then going to qualify for state fair, for my last opportunity. It was a big deal to me, to let that go, and yet when I let it go . . . when I chose not to do that, all on my own, it was a huge step in me, like, feeling like I can choose to let go of my own selfish opportunities.

Another example was in her choice of reading materials. She explained,

> I was really big into Harry Potter; loved Harry Potter . . . [And] one Sabbath afternoon, I wanted to read Harry Potter, but I just felt like it really wasn't something God wanted me to do. I just felt convicted that I shouldn't be reading it . . . What was a real breaker for me was to ask God to take away the desire for it, because I was so wrapped up in it that it was an addiction . . . I made the decision to just put it away, and what was the big thing, I wasn't going to buy the last book in the series . . . and I said, just take away the desire to do that. And He did! I've never felt the same, like, attachment to the book. I've never read the last book. I've never watched another movie, ever since. And that was just huge; that God would follow through; that when I made the right decision, He would give me that peace of mind.

The most difficult "turning" away that Mary experienced involved a choice she made in the context of an engagement. She shared,

> I started to notice that I was becoming addicted to this [fiancé] of mine, in a similar way to the Harry Potter and to the horses, in that I was allowing my time and my energy to be spent more on him than on God.

She consulted with a college professor, who suggested she might consider postponing her marriage. She shared: "That was one of those situations where I didn't want to do it, but I felt like it probably was the right thing to do; like God was speaking through this

166

professor to me." When she shared this decision with her fiancé, suggesting that they

needed to "spend more time with" God, he broke off the relationship, leaving her "feeling

so absolutely hurt [and] rejected." This experience, however, "really spurred [her]

toward a relationship with God." She shared,

> It was like that first love all of a sudden, where the only thing that got me through every day was just reading my Bible. And I remember passages from the Bible. I would take them to class. I remember sitting in class not caring about what the teacher was saying. I was crying, because I was so emotionally heartbroken, but I was reading my Bible and finding such peace . . . [And that] really helped me to look to Christ as my, I guess, my love. And that is what became the theme of my life, of the many years of singleness, before I found the person I married.

This experience, which she considers "part of [her] conversion," became "a turning point

in [her] maturity." She explained: "So many things in my life, like my behavior, like,

very flirtatious behavior, very frivolous, just many of the things that characterized *me,*

completely changed." These transformational past experiences, which Mary considered

part of her conversion, involved back-and-forth "turning" toward God, resulting in

intentional action to "turn" away from behaviors that were not congruent with her faith,

which then resulted in a further "turning" toward God.

Mark, who "never rebelled" and "never left [his] relationship with God,"

experienced a transformational "turning" in the behavioral domain, which he considered

"kind of a conversion experience." During college, he had "all kinds of plans to enrich

[him]self" through his planned career path; however, this was when "9/11 happened."

He explained,

> It was very impactful for me, because it symbolized what I was doing, [i.e.], the World Trade Center. I was doing economics. I was doing an internship with a prestigious financial firm . . . It became very clear to me very quickly, that this was not the purpose of whatever gifts I had been given . . . I had had these kind of

misgivings leading up to that. Is this really what I'm supposed to be doing? . . . I knew that God had given me some gifts, but I didn't earn those (laughs,) and so they weren't for me . . . So this was very much a cognitive dissonance with me, with how I was going to spend my life. It wasn't going to be fulfilling . . . [then], right after 9/11, I remember people talking about how this was a good opportunity to sell life insurance because people are thinking now about dying. And I'm going (makes a face and laughs) what?! And the person I was supposed to work for, he wanted me to call people, on 9/11 in the afternoon, and I said I'm not calling anybody today. And he said, we're not in New York; they're not going to hit us here today! And I said (laughs) that wasn't the reason . . . This confirmed my suspicions, (laughs) what really matters to people, and it wasn't what really mattered to me.

These experiences helped Mark to recognize that his "time pursuits" were not congruent with his faith commitments. He explained,

It wasn't that my worldview had changed at all. It was just that there was a disconnect between my worldview and . . . my priorities. So what I was doing wasn't for the most part outside the bounds of my worldview. But it wasn't driven by my worldview.

This recognition ultimately led to a transformational choice to "shift back" and pursue a Seminary education. He said of this experience,

It could be described as kind of a conversion experience. But it certainly wasn't conversion to God. I was church-going and believing. But it was a life-altering kind of [experience], and it changed everything about where I am, career wise, and everything else.

Mark's conversion included "turning" from more secular pursuits toward a vocation that was more congruent with his intellectual and affective faith commitments. Several other participants echoed this theme of "turning" in the area of vocational choice. When relating his conversion experiences, Dale described his choice to move from a lucrative career in the private sector to employment in Adventist education. To Dale, this experience of "turning" felt like God "yank[ing his] head in a different direction, because [he] didn't want to do" what God was asking him to do. He explained,

168

I truly felt God was saying, 'I want you to go this way,' when I didn't want to go that way . . . And I was like there's no way I'm doing that . . . I was thinking, Not going to happen! But I prayed about it, and I started thinking about it, and I could not shake the feeling like I'm supposed to do this. And it was the first time that I felt this, And I was like that's weird, it's uncomfortable, I feel like, I don't feel like doing this . . . But I could not shake that feeling, I don't know, it was just, like . . . it really felt like, this is not my decision, but I'm going to trust God on this, and I said yes.

Dale's experience of "turning," against his own desires, was similar to Hope's experience. She shared that she had had "a very strong sense of God calling" her to ministry, but that initially this "felt like [she] was going to be put in this box that [she] didn't fit in," and that "Seminary was probably lowest on [her] list of things to do;" however, "over a process," as "God made it clear that was where [she] was supposed to be . . . then [she] quit fighting it." Similarly, Daniel also described a past experience of "turning" in his choice of vocation. He explained,

I felt like . . . God wanted me to go into pastoring but I was like, uh uh, I'm going to go into medicine and I'm going to help people and I will witness to them there and that's how I will work for you God. So put this thing about ministry aside. And so I was like there is no way I'm going to do that.

Despite ongoing attempts to ignore the "impression" of God's call on his life, he ultimately experienced what felt like "God speaking to [him]" through a number of circumstances, which helped him to recognize that "maybe [he] shouldn't be running away from it." He described his experience of "submitt[ing]" to the will of God as follows:

I didn't know what the future would bring, [but] I trusted God and I loved him and I basically submitted; . . . if this is really what God wants me to do then I will go along with it . . . [And] I felt peace that I was walking in the will of God.

Similarly, Joshua shared that he experienced God's call on his life as "this insane thing" that "didn't make sense," and that he "didn't want to" do. He described his experience as "surrender[ing]" to the will of God. He shared,

> I didn't understand how this could turn out good for me to do this. So it was scary but I . . . said okay, I will do what You want me to do . . . It was another moment of, like, surrender to God.

Abel also related that his conversion also included a past experience of "turning." As described above, Abel experienced "turning" toward God in both the intellectual and affective domains. This was accompanied by a "turning" in the behavioral domain, i.e., as Abel came to recognize that he no longer wanted a "God-less" life, and as he began "opening up to God," he recognized that the "commitment [he] wanted, . . . the life [he] wanted to lead," was different to the "extremely narcissistic" way of life he saw all around him. Although he was "offered a six-figure salary," Abel chose to accept a job offer in Adventist education. He explained: "You actually have to have some kind of commitment to [your] belief structure . . . Because I believe in God, I live my life according to that. And for me, a life of service is a life of education." Today, Abel's faith "provide[s] a certain value structure and . . . a slightly apart way of living, a kind of living in the world but not of it," which is "a powerful concept" that he finds "very appealing." Central to this "way of life" is the way he relates to others. He shared with conviction,

> It's about treating your fellow man in a certain way. It's about making assumptions about people, the assumption being that they are a son of God or a daughter of God, and therefore need to be loved in that way.

Thus, Abel's conversion can be defined as "turning" away from a narcissistic, secular lifestyle, followed by "turning" toward a life characterized by love for and service to others.

Thus, in summary, many of the participants in this study described transformational *past* experiences of "turning" as part of their conversion. These included "turning" from specific behavioral choices, as well as a "turning" in their vocational decision-making.

Ongoing experiences of transformational turning

In addition to *past* experiences of "turning," the majority of young adults in this study related that their conversion included an *ongoing* transformational "turning" away from sin and self and "turning" toward God. For many participants, this experience of ongoing "turning" or "turning away" included the experience of "surrender;" or "surrendering your life to God;" or "a surrender to the Lordship of God." As Dale explained,

> I still find myself wanting to go off in [my own] direction and He, you know, kind of guides me back . . . [Conversion] is a constant turning away from me to Christ; and I think every moment that I have is an opportunity for conversion, for turning and looking toward my own interests or looking toward Christ.

Thus, for Dale, conversion is an ongoing "turning" away from self and "turning" toward God. This theme is also reflected in Joshua's experience of "surrender," which he "still" experiences. He shared,

> In my experience, [conversion] is a surrender to the Lordship of God. That has been the main experience, as I look back on it . . . In the past I have experienced it [that way]; and I still do. There's [still] moments of like, you know, You are Lord, and I accept You into my heart.

For Abel, whose conversion experiences motivated a major vocational shift "only two years ago," the ongoing nature of his experience was evident in his being "kind of nervous about" the choice he had made. He explained,

> My personality makes me extremely anxious and worried about everything. I make less than half of what I would in the private sector . . . I'm nervous I won't be able to give my son the life I was given growing up. I'm nervous I won't be fulfilled in my career. I'm nervous that handing my life to God will leave me disappointed, not necessarily by God but by the church . . . Call it lack of faith, if you'd like, but even Old Testament prophets got frustrated when their life's work looked wasted to them.

His ambivalence was also evident when he stated, "this life is *probably* [emphasis supplied] much better than what is outside." These sentiments appear to be reflective of the ongoing nature of Abel's experience of "turning" and surrender to God. Mary also described her experience of conversion as ongoing surrender. She explained,

> [Conversion] is a full dedication . . . when I consciously surrender everything . . . [and go] from doing [my] own thing to consciously striving to do God's will for [my] life, and to be for Him rather than for [my]self, which, of course, I'm still struggling with.

Mary's current experience of "turning" away from sin and self is centered on "the way [she] treat[s] people sometimes." She explained,

> I'm very perfectionist[ic], but I'm also very controlling; and when I don't have control of my environment, or the people around me are very irritating to me in some way or another, I tend to lash out in sarcasm or demeaning ways. And so that's where I feel like God is constantly reminding me that I need to grow, and I need to constantly surrender what I think is appropriate and take upon a more caring and humble spirit. So, that's where I still feel like, (chuckles) I'm realizing to *let go of self* [emphasis supplied] and to put others first, in my current conversion experience.

This ongoing experience of "let[ting] go of self" has been painful for Mary. She shared somewhat sadly,

When my personality gets riled . . . I just find myself, like, being shamed by the selfishness that I am, and who God wants me to be . . . how I interact with other people [is] very . . . selfish. I want it done this way! So I'm going to make you do it this way! Even if it's in a request, but then also, its like, I have the right way! And so, it's a very arrogant attitude. And I know it. And so then that causes me to plummet into feeling self-worth (pauses) lessen.

As she has come to recognize her personal sinfulness, she has experienced not only

sadness and loss of self-worth, but also doubt and discouragement in her faith experience.

She explained,

For me a huge sign of whether or not you're truly converted, you're truly all in for Christ, is that you will grow; you will change. And so when things aren't changing, and I'm feeling like, man, years I've been struggling with this, you know, attitude, or this particular like sin or whatever it is. I'm, like, it's not getting better. Maybe that means I'm not fully surrendering over to God.

However, despite the fact that learning to "let go of self" has been difficult, it has also

been a profound source of experiential learning about sin and grace, because recognizing

that she is unable to "fix" her character defects has helped her to experience repentance

and confession in a new way. She shared,

[I'm] realizing that the true essence of grace and forgiveness is the fact that we can't do it and we have to just say, I can't do it. And so I need you to forgive me, and having to daily ask for forgiveness, like, that has never really hit me in quite the same way . . . Like, I act out toward a fellow classmate, and I feel really bad afterwards, because I was really rudely sarcastic to them, and I'm, like, I have to make up for this somehow. I have to fix it. But in the end, like, no, you apologize to the student, apologize to God, and, like, that's all you can do. And just having that lack of control over making a situation better is something I am working on just accepting.

This new understanding, i.e., that she is not personally able to atone for her sin, is also

changing the way she relates to others when they sin against her. She continued,

Because . . . I demand excellence from all of the people around me and myself, when I realize I can't give the excellence, and I have to come to God and just say I'm sorry. My husband comes to me and says I'm sorry, or the student who acts

173

out in such a ridiculous way, in my mind, I just have to realize I need to be like I want God to be for me when I act out. And so, like, allowing my husband to say sorry and completely forgive without really seeing every aspect of what he could have done better . . . and just forgive, and like, let go, at times. So that's what I'm working on now (chuckles).

These experiences are part of what Mary describes as her experience of "conversion currently happening today." A similar theme of repentance and ongoing surrender to God while "turning" away from sin and self is evident in Alan's experience. He explained,

> The reality is that I still follow in my own ways, way too much of the time . . . realizing that I'm not living according to the way God wants me to . . .[And] I've found myself doing things that I would interpret as rebellious; but never intentionally . . . It's never been about turning my back on God. There was never that intention. It's probably more about some weakness in my own character, rather than defiance.

This recognition of ongoing personal sin in his life has helped him to recognize his need for ongoing "repentance" and "re-conversion." He explained,

> On a regular basis I have to reaffirm that, actually, no, my life is with God, even though I have this tendency to do it my own way. I have to reaffirm that . . . [And] the need for daily conversion comes out of, you know, the awareness of messing up . . . [And although] I always intended to live my life for Christ, I can't say I always have. And that's where re-conversion [is necessary], you know? It's almost a daily thing . . . [I] read through *Steps to Christ* just recently and, you know, going through that is like a re-commitment, re-conversion experience, because you're brought face to face with 'What is repentance?' again. You know, 'What is conversion?' again, and your need for daily conversion experience.

Thus, a significant part of these participants' experience of conversion in the behavioral domain has been the *ongoing* experience of "turning" away from sin and self and "turning" toward God. For Daniel, this experience has been accompanied by the desire to grow in Christ-likeness. He explained,

Even though [I] may fall sometimes, I never get discouraged, because I know that's the opportunity to come again before God, to ask for forgiveness, you know. Like Proverbs says, the righteous man will fall . . . but he gets up every time . . . and I thank God that [I] always see the need to keep getting up, to keep doing better, to striving and trying to, as best as [I] can, try to reflect Christ.

This theme of wanting to "reflect Christ," of a desire for "character growth" or "growth in Christ-likeness," of God "transforming my heart" or "changing [and] working on my heart," was also a part of many participants' experience of "turning." As Joe explained, "as [my] relationship [with God] deepens, . . . [it] fills me with the desire to be more like Him and to share who He is with everyone around me." Belinda's perspective was unique in that she equated conversion with transformational character growth. She shared: "I think that the way that I really think of conversion is just being changed to become more, like, to have my character shaped more like God's character." She went on to explain that although "a huge turn-around" can "happen sometimes," like in the experience of "Saul" who "became Paul," even in this case, it was about "his character being shaped to become more like God's character." She recognized that this was not the "conventional understanding" of conversion; that "the term conversion is used to refer to some kind of big change, like, I'm living my life for myself and now I'm living my life for God;" however, she was very comfortable with concluding with the words, "but that's what I think." In Belinda's experience, "conversion started at the beginning of [her] life." She explained,

Everything that you do is shaped by your worldview; and your worldview is shaped from the first day that you open your eyes. And having people that are helping to shape your worldview [makes it] a lot easier to start that conversion, that growth in character, from the beginning.

Although Belinda recognized that her early experiences have shaped her "habits," which in turn "shape the way that [she] lives," she also recognized that "there are definitely parts of [her] character that are not like God's character and [she] see[s] the need for change;" thus, for her, conversion is "still continuing." She shared,

> These things change gradually and they change more when I spend more time with God and they change less when I spend less time with Him. It's just trying to maintain focus on Him and understanding that, above all, God is love.

Thus, in summary, the young adults in this study experienced conversion in the behavioral domain as a transformational "turning." Many described *past* experiences of "turning," which included "turning" away from specific behavioral choices, as well as a "turning" in their choice of vocation. In addition to these *past* experiences, however, the majority of young adults in this study also related that their conversion included an *ongoing* transformational "turning," which they experience as *turning away* from sin and self through repentance and confession, as well as *turning toward* God by surrendering their will to His and in their desire to grow in His likeness.

The Essence of Experience of Conversion

The young adults in this study, who grew up as children of believers, experienced conversion as a gradual, ongoing process that occurred across the course of their lives, rather than as a single turning point or a process with a definite beginning and ending. This process, which was facilitated by multiple significant moments or events, began in the intellectual and affective domains. As outlined above, most participants described childhood faith experiences that were either (1) deficient or distorted in the intellectual

sphere; (2) positive but not personal in the affective sphere; or (3) negative/absent in the affective sphere.

For those whose childhood faith experiences were deficient or distorted in the intellectual sphere, a growth in intellectual understanding was foundational to their experience of conversion. For those whose childhood faith included positive affective *family* and/or *communal* experiences but no *personal* experience with God, conversion included a process of growth in a personal relationship with God. And for those whose childhood faith experiences were either negative or absent in the affective sphere, conversion included significant affective experiences. This process can be described as an integration of childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences in both the intellectual and affective domains, respectively.

For most participants, however, this process of growth in both the intellectual and affective domains occurred, to a greater or lesser degree, concurrently. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of this process. In the diagram, the shaded area labeled "Integration" represents a combination of both adequate intellectual understanding and a *personal* affective experience of faith. Only one participant, Mark, described childhood faith experiences that integrated both of these.

In contrast, for those young adults who described their childhood experiences as deficient in some way, conversion can be seen as a movement toward integration of both adequate intellectual understanding and a *personal* affective experience. For example, Joseph's childhood faith included a *personal* experience of God, but was deficient in the intellectual domain. Consequently, a growth in intellectual understanding was central to

177

his conversion; however, as his intellectual knowledge of God increased, so did his affective experience of faith.
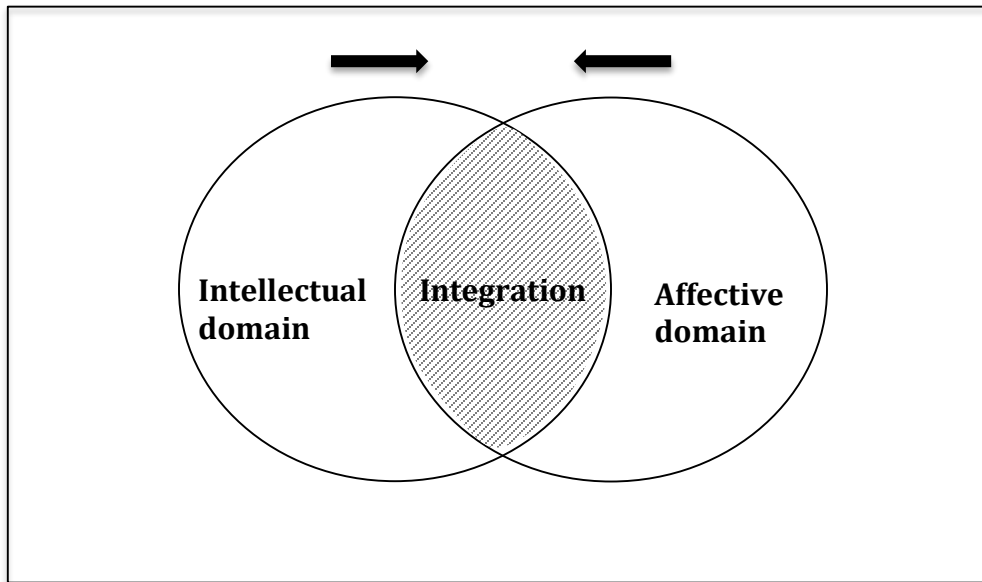
Figure 1: Conversion as Integration in the Intellectual and Affective Domains

Another example is Paul, whose childhood faith experiences were distorted in the intellectual sphere as well as negative in the affective domain. For Paul, as for Joseph, conversion began with growth in intellectual knowledge, ultimately leading to an affective experience of faith. Hope's childhood faith experiences were similar to Paul's, in that they were both distorted in the intellectual sphere and negative in the affective domain; however, in contrast to Paul's experience, Hope's conversion began in the affective domain, ultimately resulting in growth in her intellectual understanding of God.

In contrast with these three examples, many participants' childhood experiences included a relatively adequate intellectual understanding of God, as well as a positive family and/or communal affective element of faith. These young adults described conversion as gradual growth or "owning" of the intellectual component of their childhood faith, as well as gradual growth in a *personal* affective experience with God. Despite these differences, however, each of these participants described their conversion in ways that can be defined as a gradual movement toward integration in the intellectual and affective domains.

In addition to this process, the *experience of conversion* for the young adults in this study also included a transformational component, which they experienced as a "turning" in the behavioral domain. This experience of transformational "turning" included *past* experiences of "turning" away from specific behavioral and vocational choices, as well as *ongoing* experiences of "turning" away from sin and "turning" toward God, ultimately resulting in greater congruence between faith commitments in the intellectual and affective domain, and choices in the behavioral domain. It is important to note, however, that for the young adults in this study, this transformational "turning" occurred as a result of integration in the intellectual and affective domains, as described above.

As mentioned above, Mark was the one participant whose childhood faith experiences had included both adequate intellectual understanding and *personal* affective experiences. Accordingly, when describing his conversion, it was the

179

transformational experience of "turning" in his choice of vocation that he considered the most significant component of his conversion. In contrast, Paul was the one participant who described an attempt at behavioral "turning" at a time when he still had significant deficits in the intellectual and affective domains. This ultimately resulted in a period of discouragement and loss of faith, and it would be some years before Paul was "really converted," which was the result of growth in intellectual understanding, initially, followed by growth in the affective domain. In contrast to Paul, Mary related transformational experiences of "turning" in the behavioral domain at a time when she still had some significant deficiencies in intellectual understanding; however, unlike Paul, Mary had had positive family faith experiences during childhood and had begun to experience a personal relationship with God. Thus, her transformational "turning" in the behavioral domain occurred within the context of growth within the affective domain, despite some ongoing deficits in intellectual understanding.

Thus, from the experiences of the young adults in this study, it would appear that at least some degree of integration in the intellectual and affective domains is necessary for transformational "turning" in the behavioral domain. Furthermore, the "turning" that these young adults experienced in the behavioral domain resulted from their desire for greater congruence between their intellectual and affective faith commitments and their behavioral choices. In Figure 2, the dark shaded area symbolizes this process of movement toward congruence between all three domains of faith.
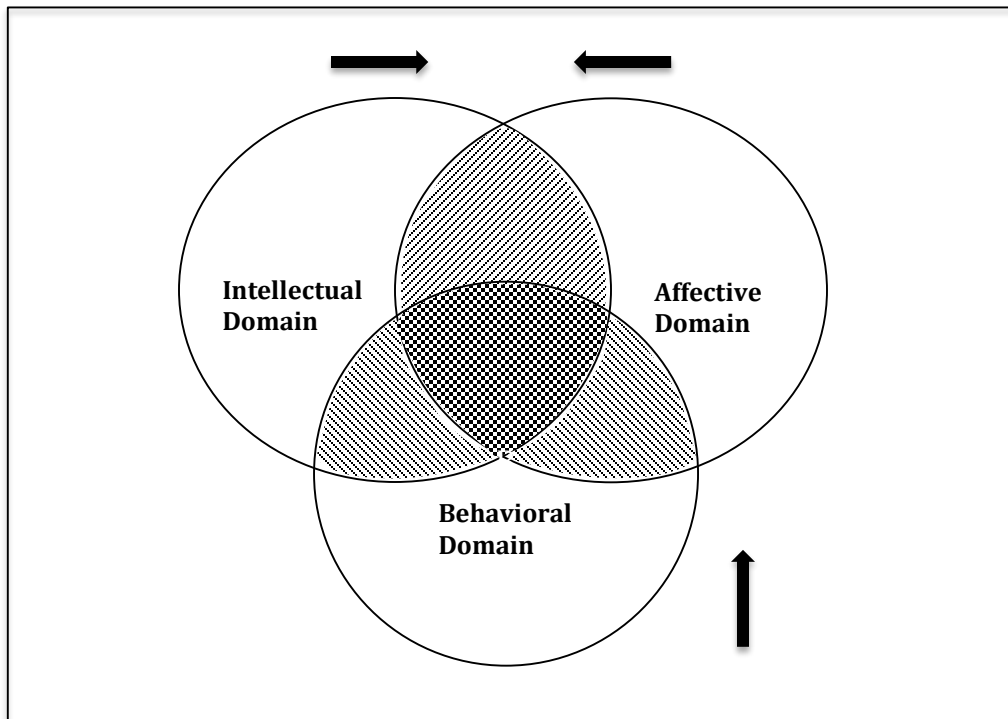
Figure 2: Conversion as Integration in the Intellectual, Affective and Behavioral Domains

In summary, therefore, the young adults in this study experienced conversion as a gradual, ongoing process facilitated by multiple significant moments or events. This process is a movement toward integration of childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences in both the intellectual and affective domains, i.e., if childhood faith experiences did not include both adequate intellectual understanding and *personal* affective faith experiences, the process of conversion is a movement toward rectifying these deficiencies. For the young adults in this study, some degree of integration in the

intellectual and affective domains was necessary before transformational "turning" in the

behavioral domain could occur. This process of "turning" resulted in greater congruence

between the intellectual, affective and behavioral domains of faith.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

Summary

Introduction

The Scriptures depict a tension between the need for nurturing children's faith (Deut. 6:5; Isa. 38:19; Prov. 22:6) and the need for new birth or conversion, even in the lives of those nurtured in faith (John 3: 3,8). The Scriptures do not, however, describe *how* those nurtured in faith experience conversion. Consequently, most Protestant Christian denominations have adopted one of two approaches to children's ministry: either a "nurture" approach, which begins with infant baptism and is followed by spiritual nurture that does not expect a discernible conversion; or a "conversion" approach, which emphasizes personal sin and a distinctive point-in-time conversion experience, followed by believer's baptism (May, 1990).

The SDA denomination does not have a clearly articulated position on the question of how children of believers come to faith; however, SDA theology and practice of children's ministry does not fit neatly into either a conversion or nurture perspective, but rather, tends to be more reflective of a "combined" approach, which begins with nurture that encourages children to love and serve God, and then, as children grow older, provides opportunities for them to recognize their personal sin and need for grace

(Lawson, 2006), and to make a conscious, voluntary commitment through baptism. This approach may be due to an inherent awareness of the tension between spiritual nurture and conversion implied in the Scriptures.

Seventh-day Adventist theology has always emphasized the holistic vision of spiritual nurture described in the Old Testament *Shema*, which instructs adults to teach children to love God with all their "heart," "soul," and "strength" (Deut. 6: 4-9), and which is echoed in Jesus' first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37-38). This teaching of Scripture is also highlighted in the writings of Ellen White, who asserts that "true education" is holistic, i.e., that it has "to do with the whole being," resulting in "the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers," (White, 1903/2002, p. 15). Thus, the SDA denomination has always emphasized holistic spiritual nurture that addresses the intellectual, affective and behavioral spheres of faith.

At the same time, however, SDA theology has taught the need for the "turning" of conversion that is implicit in both the Old Testament Hebrew word *shubh* (Soggin, 1997, p. 1315) and the New Testament Greek word *metanoia*, which can be "understood as the equivalent for the Hebrew *shuv* [*shubh*]" (Heikkinen, 1966, p. 4), as well as implied in the new birth imagery (John 3:3, 8). Nevertheless, SDA theology has recognized that "not all conversions are alike" (White, 1946, p. 287), as "the Spirit of God operates differently with different individuals" (White, 1891, p. 56). Thus, the term "conversion" has been understood to describe a variety of spiritual experiences, ranging from the distinctive moment of radical transformation that is generally equated with conversion to the daily turning to God that is part of the Christian journey; however, the common

element in each of these experiences is human turning to God, enabled by the grace of God and in response to divine initiative (Guy, 1955, p. 8-9). Furthermore, the common outcome of these experiences is transformation, "a change in the heart," resulting in "[n]ew thoughts, new feelings, new purposes" (White, 1899, p. 469). In other words, the transformation wrought through the experience of conversion is holistic, effecting change in the intellectual, affective and behavioral spheres of life.

Thus, the SDA approach to children's ministry has tended to be guided by the conviction that parents are to "guard and tend carefully the garden of their children's hearts" (White, 1964/2001, p. 200). Despite careful nurture, however, children also need to be "converted" (White, 1900/1948, p. 94), although it is not "necessary to know the exact time when they are converted" (White, 1898/2005, p. 515). Accordingly, in nurturing their children's faith, most SDA families do not expect a memorable, point-in-time conversion in their children's lives. Nevertheless, because the Scriptures teach the necessity of being "born again" or "born from above" (John 3:3,8), at some point in their Christian journey most second- and greater-generation SDA's are confronted with the need for conversion in their lives. But how does one experience conversion if one has always been part of the family of God? Because the Scriptures do not directly address this question, many second- and greater-generation Christians "feel distant or alienated from their own experience because it does not fit the pattern of what they believe a conversion should look or feel like. This leads them to wonder whether their experience is legitimate" (Smith, 2010, p. 3).

Research on conversion in the discipline of psychology has not contributed to an understanding of this experience. Although conversion has been the subject of both theoretical and empirical study since the late nineteenth century, very little of it has addressed the subject of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith. In fact, while conversion research has described both *sudden* and *gradual* conversion experiences, the experience of those who cannot identify a time when religion was not part of their lives has been considered an outcome of "religious socialization" rather than "conversion" per se (Spilka et al., 1985, p. 210). Consequently, second- or greater-generation conversion experiences have not been included in contemporary conversion research (Paloutzian, 2014; Paloutzian, Murkin, Streib and Röbler-Namini, 2013; Spilka et al., 1985). As a result, very little is known about this type of religious experience. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand *how* those who had been socialized in Christian faith experience new birth or conversion.

<center>Methodology</center>

Overall Approach and Rationale

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, as well as its goal to understand "the inner experience of participants" (Corbin and Strauss, 2008), a qualitative research approach was adopted. More specifically, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to qualitative research was utilized. Phenomenology seeks to *describe* the lived or subjective experiences of individuals and is based on the assumption that these experiences have value and thus should be the object of research (Husserl, 1900/1970; Merriam, 2002). In contrast to a purely descriptive approach to phenomenology,

<center>186</center>

hermeneutic or *interpretive* phenomenology goes beyond describing lived experience and attempts to situate experience in relation to the broader context of the individual's life (Campbell, 2001; Lopez and Willis, 2004; Wojnar and Swanson, 2007). Furthermore, it is based on the assumption that researcher knowledge can contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon under study (Lopez and Willis, 2004).

Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology includes an interpretive process, in which the researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experiences in relation to the broader context of the participants' lives. Accordingly, a hermeneutic approach is appropriate when the broader context of the participants lived experiences is examined, and when the goal is to generate understanding through the dynamic interplay between researcher and participant (Benner, 1994; Draucker, 1999; Koch, 1995; Parse, 1999). This study adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, based on the assumption that the experience of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith could best be understood within the broader context of their formative faith experiences; as well as the assumption that researcher knowledge of children's faith formation could contribute to interpreting the meaning of participants' lived experiences in relation to this broader context.

Sampling

Participants for this study were selected through "purposeful sampling," which involved selecting a limited number of participants based on their ability to "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). The purposeful sampling strategies considered appropriate for this study were "criterion-based sampling" (p. 127), which involves selecting participants

who have experienced the phenomenon under study; and "homogenous sampling," which involves selecting similar cases, thus reducing variability while simultaneously encouraging unique perspectives (p. 127). Accordingly, participants in this study were all SDA young adults who grew up within an SDA family and faith context, who were at least third-generation SDA, and who continue to be members of SDA faith communities.

In order to facilitate similarity, only Caucasian young adults between the ages of 25 and 40 were included in this study. Both male and female participant were included, not in order to examine gender differences, but in order to hear both male and female voices. Rather than pre-deciding on a certain number of participants, data collection was discontinued when the descriptive process began to end, and the "thematization" or "reduction" process began, i.e., when new data no longer contributed new themes (Wolff, 2002, p.117). The final number of participants interviewed for this study was fourteen, all of whom had at least an undergraduate college education and most of whom were either pursuing or had completed graduate degrees.

Data Gathering Methods

This phenomenological study was based on the assumption that the lived experiences of individuals can only be understood by direct interaction between the researcher and the participants (Husserl, 1900/1970). Thus, the data for this research were collected through "intensive" or "in-depth" interviews (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25), the goal of which was "entering the participants' worlds" (p. 19) in order to gather "rich data" that were "detailed, focused and full" and that "reveal[ed] participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (p. 14). After

approval from Andrews University's Institutional Review Board, individuals who met

inclusion criteria were approached and asked to participate. Interviews, which lasted

between 50 and 90 minutes, were conducted in Berrien Springs, MI, between the months

of March and August 2014.

 After obtaining informed consent, each participant was asked to verbally respond

to the following questions: "Can you tell me what faith or having faith means to you?

Beginning wherever you like, can you tell me about the experiences you think shaped

your faith? Can you tell me what you understand by the word conversion? Have you

experienced something that could be considered conversion? If so, can you describe that

for me?" Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, yielding 166 pages of

single-spaced type. The original proposal for this study included the step of

reconstructing a narrative of the participant's experience from the transcript, following

which the narratives were to be reviewed by participants for the purpose of validation;

however, only two participants reviewed and returned their narratives. Accordingly, this

step was ultimately abandoned, and the final data for this study included the two

reviewed narratives as well as twelve verbatim transcripts.

Data Analysis Procedures

 This study drew on the data analysis methods described by Saldana (2009), and

began with reading and re-reading the interview transcript in order to obtain an overall

understanding, followed by initial coding, which entailed breaking the transcript down

into small units of data, either sentences or paragraphs, and assigning a code, i.e., a "word

or short phrase," to each portion of data, which captured the essence of that data (Saldana,

2009, p. 3). These initial codes were considered "tentative and provisional," and intended as a "starting point . . . for further exploration" (p. 81). Because most qualitative researchers rarely "get coding right the first time" (p. 10), these coding methods were implemented *within* each interview transcript more than once, in order to refine the codes. The number of initial codes generated *per interview* ranged from ninety-nine to two hundred and sixty seven.

Throughout the process of initial coding, analytic memos were also written. These were for the purpose of reflecting on the coding process, as well as about the patterns or categories that were emerging from the data (Saldana, 2009, p. 32). This process of reflecting on and writing about the "deeper and complex meanings" within the data (p. 34), described as "a conversation with ourselves about our data" (Clarke, 2005, p. 202), was intended to evoke "understanding" of the phenomenon under study (Weston et al., 2001, p. 397). In hermeneutic phenomenology, this process is known as writing "interpretive summaries" and identifying "emerging themes" (Wojnar and Swanson, p. 177).

Following this process of Initial Coding and memo writing, coding methods were implemented *across* the coded data (Saldana, 2009, p. 149), i.e., interview transcripts were compared and analyzed "as a group," for the purpose of grouping similarly coded data into categories (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 177). NVivo software was then utilized to organize the data, i.e., the interviews were downloaded to NVivo, and the identified codes and categories identified were applied to the data. Categories were then woven together with the ideas generated through analytic memo writing, and organized

into recurring themes (Saldana, 2009, p. 155-156). This process represents the goal of hermeneutic phenomenology, which is to generate an understanding of the phenomenon from a "blend of the researcher's understanding" and "participant-generated information" (Wojnar and Swanson, 2007, p. 177).

Issues of Trustworthiness

The validation criteria proposed by Whittemore et al (2001) were applied in order to attain methodological rigor. Thus, issues of credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity in this study were addressed by keeping a reflective journal throughout the research process in order to monitor subjective perspectives and biases; by conducting in-depth interviews; by searching for and discussing divergent findings; by recursively checking interpretations against the data; and by presenting findings humbly, in recognition of the subjective element within qualitative research.

Reflections on the Research Process

The most significant difference between the proposed and actual research methodology was the lack of participant validation of the raw data through reading and responding to the narratives derived from the interview transcripts. I initially assumed that this lack of engagement by participants was due to time constraints; however, on further reflection, I suspect that it may have been caused by the high level of vulnerability with which they had related to me during the interview, and that reviewing the narrative or even reflecting on the interview process may have resulted in discomfort or even regret at the level of disclosure during the interview. This was evident in the response of one of

the two participants who did review the narrative and asked that parts of it be removed. Although the recordings were all very clear, and thus I believe the transcripts were a faithful representation of the interviews, I wonder if some participants may have had further insights into their experience after having had some time to reflect on the interview process, the memories they had retrieved and the experiences they had talked about. This represents a significant limitation of this study.

A change in one of the original research questions represents an additional difference between the proposed and actual research methodology. As this was an exploratory study, the initial research questions were somewhat tentative, and it was only through the messy process of data collection and analysis that I realized that the broader context for *experience of conversion* in the lives of those nurtured in faith was *experience of faith formation* rather than experience of spiritual nurture or experience of religious socialization, for it was the gradual forming of faith that was the broader context of the inner experience of the participants. The research process would have been much smoother if this had been clear in my mind from the beginning.

Additionally, as this study represents my first experience of analyzing more than one interview transcript, I did the initial coding by hand and then again in NVivo, which extended the data analysis process considerably and created some frustration for me; however, when writing about the findings, NVivo provided easy and time-efficient access to coded interview data. If I were doing this research again, I would only read the transcripts through several times to get an overall feel for them, and then do the coding in NVivo.

Summary of Findings

Analysis of data resulted in seven major shared themes that describe the *experience of faith formation* and four themes that portray the *experience of conversion*. Although the primary research question pertained to the *experience of conversion*, for the participants in this study, the *experience of faith formation* is the broader context within which conversion was experienced; thus, the lived *experience of faith formation* will be described first.

Experience of Faith Formation

Dynamic

Faith formation is experienced as dynamic because it develops in the context of changing cognitive and emotional development, and thus it "continues" to change throughout the life span, never being "completely developed." The formation of faith is also experienced as dynamic because the challenge to believe in the absence of proof makes faith "fluctuate" and "falter." Furthermore, faith is formed through "learning how to walk with God" while "stumbl[ing] all the time," which is an ongoing, dynamic process.

Communal

Faith formation is experienced as communal because community is the formational context for earliest faith experiences. For many, family is the first "community of believers;" however, Christian "teachers" and "caring mentors" also form part of the wider faith community, particularly when "parents are not there." Faith

formation is also communal because relationships in the faith community are "second to none," providing meaningful human interactions that are "just not there outside of church." These relationships "strengthen" faith commitments, and provide support "when we doubt and when we stumble."

Intellectual

Intellectual knowledge is foundational to the formation of faith, because "faith and knowledge are closely tied together." Central to the intellectual component of faith is understanding "who God is and what He is like," as well as knowing "who I am . . . and who I'm not." This intellectual component of faith is primarily founded on Scripture, without which "we wouldn't know what God is like." Most had examined the intellectual component of their faith, and although some continue to "struggle with different aspects of faith [and] belief," most "believe what Adventists teach," because SDA beliefs provide "the clearest picture of who God is," and thus they are "committed to Adventism as a way of life and a belief structure."

Affective

Affective experiences are central to the formation of faith because faith is "belief in something that we don't see, but we experience." Central to the experiential aspect of faith is "relationship with God" or "knowing God;" and "from that knowing comes a trust" in God, trusting "that He is doing what He says He's doing." This is "the same thing as trust in a person, except more difficult maybe, because you cannot see God in a physical

form;" and is "partly, like, intellectual . . . [but] even more, it's experientially learned."

Learning to trust God ultimately leads to "rely[ing] on God rather than yourself."

Integrated

Faith is formed "both cognitive[ly] and experiential[ly];" both "logically as well as [by] that gut feeling that I have that's not very logical, that's just feeling." For many, intellectual knowledge *about* God enhances experience *of* God, because "[w]hen you have a clear picture of who [God] is, it's easier to trust Him, it's easier to believe, and it strengthens the relationship." For others, affective experiences in the "created world," such as "see[ing] how amazing the living cell is" or experiencing "the love that a parent has for a child," confirm "belief" in and facilitate "understanding" of God. Affective experiences, however, are evaluated in the light of intellectual knowledge, to determine if they are "based on the Lord's teachings."

Behavioral

Formation of faith is experienced in the behavioral domain because faith requires "commitment to [one's] belief structure" and thus "a certain amount of action." Faith provides a "road map [for] the best way to live," because it "defines what is good" and "what is good kind of structures your morals," and thus faith shapes "relationships with people and how you interact with them." Furthermore, because faith provides "an over-riding guiding principle" that "forms the things that [one is] comfortable with," it frequently shapes "lifestyle choices [that] are probably more cultural and habitual than even faith related;" however, sometimes faith also forms choices that feel "like this is not

my decision" and thus require "trust[ing] God." Accordingly, the formation of faith results in "a slightly apart way of living, a kind of living in the world but not of it."

Choice

The formation of faith requires "choice" in the intellectual sphere because it requires "choosing to believe" something "without all of the hard proof being there; without having [conclusive] evidence." Although this sometimes makes faith "difficult," it is also "amazing" that God didn't "just come down and prove Himself to the world," but rather, that He "wanted to have a bunch of beings that *chose* to love him." Faith is also formed through "choice[s]" in the affective sphere because it leads believers to "choose" to see life circumstances and events through the lens of "God working in my life," and thus "acting as though God is real and He loves me." Faith is also formed through "choice[s]" in the behavioral sphere because it leads to "making choices to turn from those things that are not helpful and turning to the things that [are]." The fact that "[God] gives us that option," the freedom to "choose," "on my own," is "a huge factor" in the formation of faith.

The Essence of Experience of Faith Formation

For the young adults in this study, the *experience of faith formation* is a dynamic process that integrates the intellectual, affective and behavioral domains of life. This process, which is facilitated by community, necessitates personal choice. It is within the broader context of *experience of faith formation* that the participants in this study experienced conversion.

Experience of Conversion

Process

Conversion is not "a point in time" experience that includes "flashes of lightning or anything big;" rather, it is "a very slow" and "gradual process" that is facilitated by "a progression of experiences," which are like "multiple little 'aha' moments." For many, conversion is a relatively smooth process that involves "just filling in, building on the pattern" established early in life. For others, the process of conversion is more uneven, and includes times of "giv[ing] up" on faith or "death of faith," followed by a long process of "rebuil[ding]" of faith; however, despite the uneven, "multi-level" nature of these experiences, conversion is still described as "definitely a process," facilitated by multiple "significant moments" or "turning points" rather than one "key moment that was, like, wow!" Furthermore, conversion is not a process with a definite beginning or ending, but rather, is "still continuing" or "currently happening today." Conversion is "almost a daily thing," "a sort of daily experience" of "constant[ly] turning away from me to Christ" and "choosing [God] on a daily basis."

Integrates Intellectual Knowledge

Conversion integrates early childhood "understanding" of God with knowledge learned later in life. For many, learning during childhood centered on understanding "God's character;" on developing a "picture of who God is;" on learning that "God is real," "God is love," and God is "someone who cared for me and loved me." Those participants who considered their formative experiences to have given them a positive picture of God, as well as "enough knowledge" about Him, described the intellectual

197

component of their conversion experience as a smooth process of either ongoing

cognitive assent to or gradual growth in childhood knowledge, resulting in belief

becoming their "own."

In contrast, some described their childhood faith experiences as "limited" and

"not having all of the elements" due to a lack of resources or parental guidance or as

"very fundamentalist, very rigid and sectarian." These experiences resulted in either a

deficient or distorted picture of God. Accordingly, conversion required a significant

corrective component of either augmenting childhood knowledge or 'un-learning' some

elements of childhood understanding, resulting in a more biblical understanding of God,

particularly "understanding the truth" of the Gospel, i.e., "really understand[ing], really,

the work God does on our behalf" and "that Jesus is my Savior, you know, and that I can

have joy and peace because it's His righteousness that God sees and not mine."

Integrates Affective Experiences

Conversion integrates childhood experience of God with later affective faith

experiences. Some participants described significant personal experiences with God

during childhood, particularly "a very strong prayer life" or "enjoy[ing] praying growing

up . . . talk[ing] to God, not seeing Him . . . sens[ing] that He was also listening, even

though I could not see Him . . . [and] pray[ing] constantly." These participants did not

describe their conversion in terms of significant change in the affective domain, although

the experiential component of faith continued to be important to them. In contrast, the

majority of participants described *family* and/or *communal* faith experiences that included

a positive affective component, but no significant *personal* experience with God during

198

childhood. These participants described conversion in terms of significant growth in a *personal* experience with God, i.e., conversion was "intimately connected to relationship" or "the process of developing [a] relationship with God" or feeling "a connection with God;" not that "it was ever not there, but there was another step." Through these experiences, faith became "felt" and "real" and "own[ed]."

In addition, several participants described family faith experiences during childhood that were either deficient or negative in the affective domain, resulting in a faith that was "unfelt," and a picture of God as "distant," "not interacting" or "not there" or "absent," and who "doesn't really care." For these participants, conversion began with significant affective experiences of recognizing "emptiness" or "something missing," resulting in "opening up to God" or "open[ing] my heart" to God. Furthermore, these participants described their conversion experiences in significantly more emotive terms, including "sobb[ing]" at baptism, as well as the "love" and "peace" and "joy" that knowing God has brought to their lives.

Transformational

Conversion is transformational as it leads to "making choices to turn from those things that are not helpful and turning to the things that [are]." This "turning" is the outcome of growth in both the intellectual and affective domains, i.e., as understanding of God grows, and as relationship with God develops, transformational "turning" in the behavioral domain follows. This transformational "turning" includes both *past* and *ongoing* experiences. *Past* transformational experiences were described as "turning away" from time pursuits not congruent with faith commitments, "turning away" from

relationships not supportive of relationship with God, and "turning toward" vocational choices characterized by service to Christ and the furthering of His kingdom. *Ongoing* transformational experiences were described as "turning away" from sin and self, or "let[ting] go of self," which requires ongoing "repentance" and "re-conversion;" and "turning toward" God in "surrender" or "surrendering your life to God" or "surrender[ing] to the Lordship of God," which is accompanied by a "desire to be more like Him" or "to have my character shaped more like God's character." It is through this *ongoing* transformational turning that conversion is "still continuing" or still "currently happening today."

The Essence of Experience of Conversion

The third- and greater-generation SDA participants in this study experienced conversion as a gradual, ongoing process, facilitated by multiple significant moments or events, that occurred across the course of their lives, rather than as a single turning point or even as a process with a definite beginning and ending. This process involves movement toward integration of childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences in both the intellectual and affective domains, respectively, resulting in both adequate intellectual understanding and a *personal* affective experience of faith. Only one participant described childhood faith experiences that integrated both adequate intellectual understanding of God and *personal* experience with God. All other participants described childhood faith experiences that were deficient in one of these; thus, the process of conversion can be seen as a movement toward rectifying these deficiencies.

Furthermore, some degree of integration in the intellectual and affective domains was necessary before the transformational "turning" normally equated with conversion could occur. This process of "turning" resulted in greater congruence between the intellectual, affective and behavioral domains of faith. Figure 3 is a visual representation of this process of movement toward congruence between all three domains of faith.

The young adults who participated in this study had all been nurtured in faith; thus, their conversion experiences occurred within the broader context of *experience of faith formation*. As evidenced above, many of the themes that emerged from analysis of the *experience of faith formation* data were also evident in the *experience of conversion* data, with two exceptions. Whereas participants described *experience of faith formation* in communal terms, this theme was not evident in their descriptions of *experience of conversion*. This may reflect the personal or individual nature of conversion. Furthermore, whereas they described *experience of faith formation* in terms of choice, this theme was not evident in participants' descriptions of *experience of conversion*. This may be a whisper of divine initiative and grace in the process of conversion.
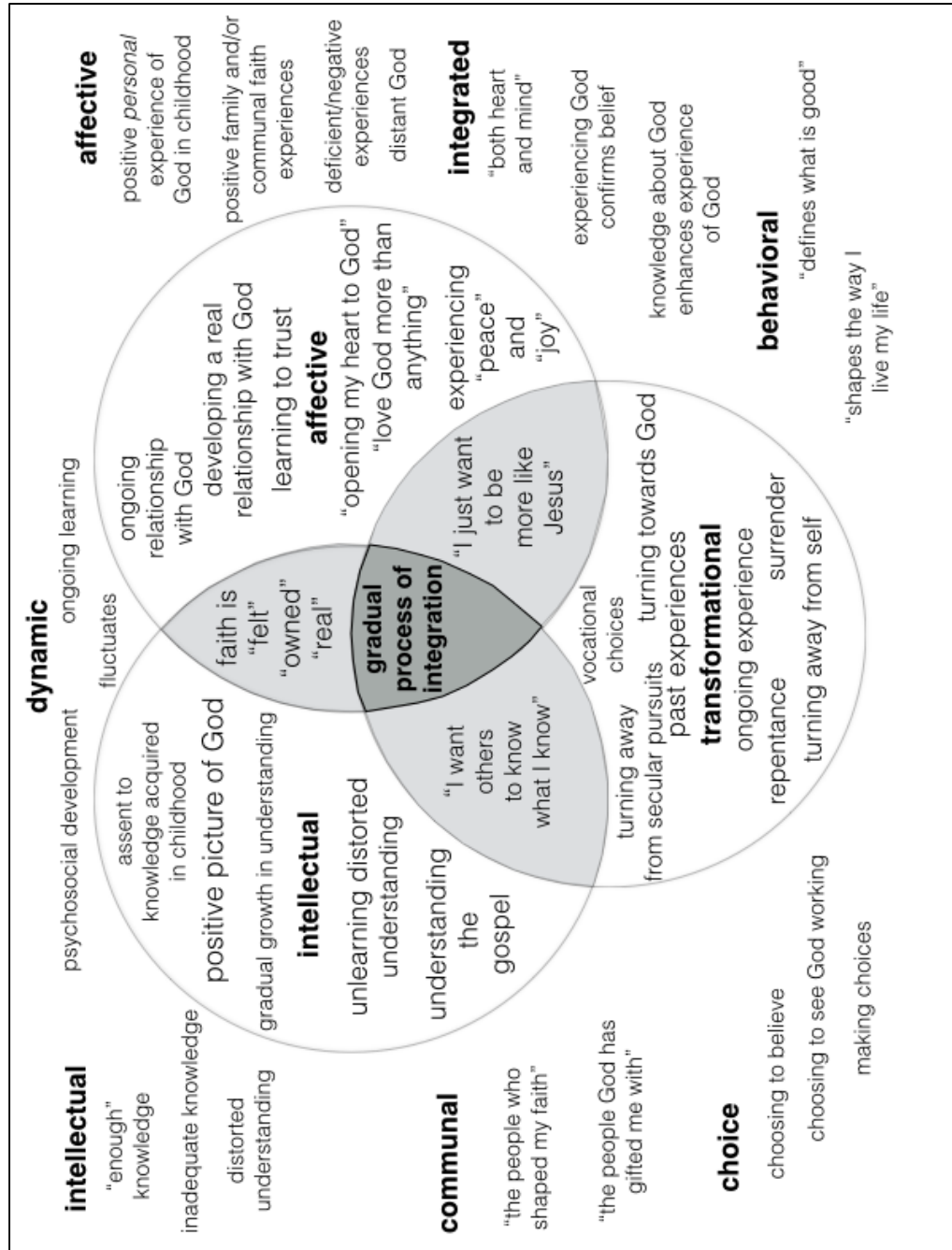
Figure 3: Experience of Conversion Within the Context of Experience of Faith Formation

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this discussion is to explore the findings of this study within the context of theological/theoretical foundations and literature on conversion; and to outline the primary contributions of the findings. For the purpose of clarity, the *experience of faith formation* and *experience of conversion* were analyzed and described separately; however, the emphasis of this study was conversion. Accordingly, this discussion will focus on the *experience of conversion*, while acknowledging that, for second- and greater- generation Christians, conversion occurs within the broader context of, and thus is intertwined with, the *experience of faith formation*.

Conversion is a Dynamic Process

The participants in this study experienced faith development as a dynamic process that occurred within the changing context of their cognitive and emotional development, resulting in a faith that "continues" to develop throughout life, "not just until you're a young adult;" a faith that is never "completely developed." Thus, the expectation appears to be that faith will remain dynamic over the life span. This is consistent with Balswick, King and Reimer's (2005) model of faith development, which affirms the contribution of James Fowler's faith development theory and thus recognizes that psychosocial development impacts faith development. Balswick et al's model (2005), however, also affirms the contributions of James Loder's transformation theory, and thus recognizes that a transforming moment of "divine intervention" can "interrupt and reorder" the process of psychosocial development (Balswick et al., p. 283). The young adults in this study described their conversion experiences as facilitated by significant moments that

interrupted and reordered their spiritual journeys, ultimately leading to transformation; however, in contrast to Balswick et al's model, which uses a "thunderbolt" to depict the moment of divine intervention (Balswick et al., p. 283), none of the participants in this study experienced a "key moment" or "individual time" or "specific time" that they equated with a distinct and discernible conversion.

Throughout much of Protestant Christian history, conversion was understood as a point-in-time event. For the Magisterial Reformers, conversion was equated with the moment of recognizing one's status of being saved by grace (Olson, 1999). Similarly, the Anabaptist Reformers emphasized the subjective experience of conversion, defined by repentance and a new commitment to Christ (Dyck, 1995), while Jacobus Arminius equated conversion with an active, freely chosen decision to accept God's justifying grace (Olson, 2006). These traditions impacted the two major strands of Protestant theology in the New World, i.e., Puritanism and Methodism, both of which emphasized the need for a distinctive, point-in-time conversion experience (Mullin, 2002; Teasdale, 2012). In contrast, both Horace Bushnell and Ellen White suggested that conversion did not necessitate a distinctive point-in-time experience (Bushnell, 1847/1975, 1861/1979; White, 1886).

Many Christian traditions, however, have continued to emphasize the need for identifying a definite "point of departure for the rest of Christian life" (Smith, 2010, p. 18). Consequently, because many second- and greater-generation Christians do not experience conversion in this way, they "do not have a language" for describing their spiritual experiences (Smith, 2010, p. 6). As one participant in this study explained,

Sometimes conversion terminology, sometimes it means people are afraid to share their story, because they don't have a story. And I spent a lot of time feeling like that . . . if you don't have a story like that, then it's difficult to find something to share . . . There're a lot of people like me that don't have that moment in time when they were struck blind by God, you know, because it's hard to put a finger on it. I think probably people like me don't always share their stories, because there isn't a big story to share.

While some second- and greater-generation Christians may not be able to articulate their conversion experiences because they have never consciously appropriated the faith they have been socialized in, many others have significant spiritual experiences but mistakenly believe that conversion must be a punctiliar experience. A young adult who participated in this study is one such individual. Despite experiencing a gradual appropriation of his faith, he is unsure about the legitimacy of his spiritual experience. In response to a question about his understanding of conversion, he replied,

Well, I don't really know. Um. Huh. (Long pause). Does conversion happen when you get baptized? I don't know (laughs). But I'm not baptized, and sometimes I've thought that that must be when conversion happens. I don't think there's ever been a point in my life when I think like, you know, I'm now converted. I kind of wish it would be that way. Seems like everyone else has that in their lives (laughs) . . . People who have that, it would be an emotional high to me to just feel like there's that black and white moment . . . [But] I never really thought I got there. Um, (long pause), I didn't, I never wanted to (pause) express, I sort of feel like an expression of conversion is baptism, and um, I just never really felt like I was there yet. And um, I didn't want to do it under any falsehoods, because everyone else was doing it . . . Maybe it's still coming.

Unfortunately, this misunderstanding of conversion is not uncommon. As Ellen White observed, "[s]ome have lived in sadness for years, waiting for some marked evidence that they were accepted by God . . . for that peculiar change that they have been led to believe is connected with conversion" (White, *Ev*, p. 286). The Scriptures, however, do not teach that a distinctive conversion experience is the only way to God.

As Beverly Roberts Gaventa (1986) suggests, the New Testament describes at least three types of conversion experiences, one of which she terms "alternation," and which does not involve a radical "rejection of past thought or action," but rather, is " a logical consequence of earlier choices" (p. 12). Similarly, Ellen White suggests that while "[a] person may not be able to tell the exact time or place of his [or her] conversion," this does not suggest that they are "unconverted," as "the work of grace" can be "silent and imperceptible" (White, 1886, p. 97).

Some contemporary evangelical authors also recognize that a dramatic, point-in-time conversion is not the experience of most Christians. As theologian James Packer (1989) observed, conversion is "best understood if viewed as a complex process" (p. 22). Similarly, Gordon Smith (2010) asserts that "[m]ost, if not all, conversions are actually a series of events – often a complex development over time, perhaps even several years" (p. 6). In fact, a British study of first-generation conversions concluded that most people experience conversion as a gradual process extended over several years, the average time taken being four years (Swindon, 1989, p. 25).

In contrast, while the participants of this study also experienced conversion as a gradual process, they did not describe their conversion experiences in terms of a definite beginning and ending. As one participant in this study explained, "There are instances where I felt that God was closer, more distant, you know . . . I'm trying to think of portions where I felt that I was converted, but I don't know if I can." Another young adult had a similar experience. He shared: "I guess I can never pinpoint any clear conversion time (pauses) because there was never a time when I was purposefully

heading away from God. There was never a time when I was not intending to serve God, come to know Him better."

Furthermore, rather than describing their conversion experiences in terms of a period of time in the past, the young adults in this study considered conversion to be a process that was "still continuing" or "currently happening today," as they considered the ongoing, daily process of turning to God as a component of their conversion. As one participant explained,

> [Conversion] is a constant turning away from me to Christ. And I think every moment that I have is an opportunity for conversion, for turning and looking toward my own interests or looking toward Christ . . . Choosing [God] on a daily basis, to me, that's what conversion is.

This characteristic of conversion, particularly in the lives of those nurtured in faith, appears to be consistent with Scripture, which portray conversion in the Old Testament primarily through the Hebrew verb *shubh*, which means to "turn," "return," or "repent." In its' most frequent usage, *shubh* denotes a returning to "a point of departure," or a "return[ing] to God," particularly in the sense of returning to an "original relationship" with God (Soggin, 1997, p. 1315). As Witherup (1994) has observed, the call to conversion in the Old Testament is frequently depicted as "an *ongoing process* (italics in text)" of "*re*turning to what was formerly known (italics in text)," rather than a call to turn to "something totally new" (p. 18). As one young adult explained,

> I was filling in a survey just last week, and it asked about conversion, and I thought, I was probably converted again this morning, you know, in my devotional time, because it had been a, it had been an important devotional time for me that day, you know, and I came away refreshed . . . you know, it's almost a daily thing.

207

Unsurprisingly, this understanding of conversion was not emphasized in either the New Testament or the earliest decades of the Christian church, where the thought leaders were all first-generation converts to Christianity, either from Judaism or from the Hellenistic religions, who wrote primarily for first-generation Christian readers (Knott, 1982). While the ongoing nature of conversion was retrieved by monasticism, which emphasized conversion as a daily process of turning to God through the daily rhythms of prayer, study and work (Williams, 1979), the monastic vision ultimately lost sight of justification by faith, resulting in a lack of assurance of salvation.

The Magisterial Protestant reformers, who attempted to retrieve the truth of justification by faith alone, came to equate conversion with the experience of recognizing one's status as saved by grace, and thus described in "past-tense language" (Smith, 2010, p. 3). While many Protestant thinkers, particularly the Anabaptists and the Pietists, emphasized the need for ongoing turning to God, it was John Wesley who articulated a holistic vision of conversion that included an affirmation of justification by grace through faith, a need for human response to God's saving grace through new birth, and the need for ongoing turning toward God through sanctification. Thus, for Wesley, justification, new birth and sanctification were "intimately woven together" (Oden, 2012, p. 219). He wrote, "At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, *sanctification* begins. In that instant we are '*born again*' (emphasis in text)" (Wesley, 1750/1986, p. 158). The experience of one of the participants in this study reflects a Wesleyan understanding of conversion. She explained, "Conversion is just being changed to become more like [God]; to have my character shaped more like God's character." And

having been nurtured in faith "from the first day that [she] open[ed her] eyes," she believes that "conversion started at the beginning of [her] life."

Ellen White, whose understanding of salvation was also Wesleyan, used the term *conversion* to describe a variety of spiritual experiences, including the daily turning to God (Guy, 1955). The participants in this study were nurtured in the SDA faith and thus perhaps influenced by both Wesleyan and Ellen White's conceptions of conversion. Accordingly, while they used past-tense language to describe some elements of their conversion experiences, their descriptions of conversion also included the ongoing, daily experience of turning to God that is part of the Christian journey.

Conversion Integrates Heart and Mind

In the Old Testament, God instructs His people that they are to love Him with all their "heart" and with all their "soul" and with all their "strength" (Deut. 6:4-9). Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus reiterates this message in the "first and greatest commandment" when He states: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22: 37-38). Evidently, God's ideal for human faith is a faith that integrates both the heart and the mind. Throughout Christian history, many Christian thinkers have also emphasized the need for the formation of a holistic faith, i.e., a faith that integrates both intellectual and affective components (see, for example, White, 1903/2002; Yount, 2010). But how does such a faith develop?

Unlike James Fowler, who viewed faith formation from a developmental perspective, Jonathan Kim (2010) asserts that the development of holistic faith can best be understood through the lens of intellectual development. More specifically, he

suggests that integrating both Piaget's stage model and Vygotksy's sociocultural theory of intellectual development provides a framework for understanding faith formation that engages both the heart and the mind. Kim contends that when faith formation is viewed primarily through a Piagetian lens, intellectual knowledge *about* God is seen as the primary component of faith, resulting in a spiritual life that over-emphasizes conceptual knowledge. In contrast, when faith formation is approached primarily from a Vygotskyan perspective, relational context and praxis knowledge are seen as primary, resulting in an over-emphasis on perceptual knowledge. Holistic faith formation, contends Kim, requires both conceptual knowledge, which is "comprehended" rationally, and perceptual knowledge, which is "apprehended" relationally (Kim, 2010, p. 90).

The participants in this study described their faith as "both cognitive and experiential." As one participant explained, "it's about my personal relationship with God, *and* it's about what I believe about Him and the Bible." Intellectual knowledge about God, founded primarily on Scripture, is foundational to their faith. As another young adult explained,

> If we didn't have God's word, and if we didn't have what he promised that he would do for us . . . then what would we have faith in? Because we wouldn't know what God is like; what he says he will do; the way that he sees the future turning out.

However, they also experience faith affectively, central to which is the concept of "relationship and a trust in [God]." One participant explained, "relationship with God is . . . like, you *know* someone [and] from that knowing comes a trust." Furthermore, they described their faith as bi-directionally integrating both intellectual and affective

experiences, i.e., intellectual knowledge enhances their affective experiences, and affective experiences confirm their intellectual beliefs.

For most of the young adults who participated in this study, this integration of the mind and heart is reflective, at least to some degree, of their formative faith experiences. In other words, the spiritual nurture that most participants experienced during childhood included some degree of conceptual knowledge about God, which they learned rationally, as well as some degree of perceptual knowledge of God, which they learned relationally. As one young woman explained, "[Faith] was just really part of life. It wasn't really separate . . . I don't ever remember not talking about [God] as if He was real . . . It was just a part of life." Most participants, however, experienced childhood faith formation that was at least somewhat lop-sided or deficient in either the intellectual or affective domains, or both. It was within this context that they experienced conversion. Accordingly, their conversion experiences included, in varying degrees, an integration of their formational faith experiences in both the intellectual and affective domains.

In the intellectual domain, many of the young adults in this study described their childhood experiences in terms of "enough" or "adequate" knowledge about God. These individuals' descriptions of the intellectual component of conversion can be described as the experience of ongoing cognitive assent to or gradual growth in intellectual knowledge about God, as well as a gradual appropriation of the truth of God's grace, a truth they had always understood but that was never truly "real" or their "own" until conversion. In contrast, those participants whose childhood faith experiences resulted in either a deficient or distorted picture of God described a significant corrective component in the

intellectual domain as part of their conversion experience. Central to this corrective

experience was the process of "underst[anding] that I was a sinner saved by grace and I

always would be;" of "really understand[ing], really, the work God does on our behalf;"

i.e., of understanding the truth of justification by grace through faith. One participant

explained her experience in the following way:

> I never understood properly, like, the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of
> Christ, and therefore the understanding of humanity and what we do . . . [This
> new understanding] has totally transformed, just in the last couple months, like,
> the way I view myself . . . recognizing the limitations that I have, and realizing
> that the true essence of grace and forgiveness is the fact that we can't do it and we
> have to just say, I can't do it. And so I need you to forgive me, and having to
> daily ask for forgiveness, like, that has never really hit me in quite the same
> way . . . I still realize I need to change, [but] even if I did everything perfectly, I
> would still need a Savior because I am separated from Him.

Why would these young adult SDA Christians struggle to understand this truth?

Seventh-day Adventist soteriology is in the Wesleyan tradition. Some scholars

suggest that Wesley did not articulate his theology of salvation clearly and that he used

the term *conversion* inconsistently (see, for example, Knight, 2001). Others, however,

recognize that, although Wesley may not have articulated his views clearly, he viewed

justification, new birth and sanctification holistically, i.e., that in Wesley's understanding,

justification and new birth, enabled by prevenient grace, were intimately woven together,

and that sanctification, also enabled by God's grace, followed (see, for example, Oden,

2012). Ellen White also espoused this holistic view of salvation, and thus wrote not only

about "the grace that saves and justifies," but also about "the grace that transforms and

sanctifies." She did not, however, always clearly identify "which type of grace" she was

referring to (Tyner, 2006, p. 221). This has resulted in the suggestion that, like John

Wesley, Ellen White was not always consistent in her understanding of the grace of God, as well as the misunderstanding that she advocated "a salvation by grace plus works" (p. 224).

The participants in this study who described understanding the truth of justification by grace through faith as a significant part of their conversion had grown up in homes where the writings of Ellen White were emphasized from a young age, and had grown up with this misunderstanding, i.e., that salvation was by grace plus works, thus missing out on the joy of the truth of salvation by grace alone. This was particularly true for one young man, who did most of his reading "by [him]self." He recalled sadly,

> [There was] not enough reinforcement in the home, where the parents try to shape the thinking, and not just to read the books, but how to read the books. See, you don't skip over certain things . . . I know that I would just sort of hastily, superficially read over things about atonement and cross and grace. I would zero in on all the other things about our obedience and so on . . . This is [the] problem of being self-taught, in a sense, where, I'm reading this stuff, like when the Ethiopian says, how can I understand unless somebody explains it to me?

Consequently, by late childhood, he had "turned into somebody who wanted to do what's right; and that was good. But [he] didn't have any assurance. [He] actually didn't understand the Gospel at all." In many ways, this element of conversion in the lives of those participants who came to understand the truth of God's grace parallels the experiences of first-generation Christians, who encounter, understand and own the life-changing truth of the gospel, resulting in "a fundamental change of mind" (Smith, 2001, p. 158). While their experiences may not have been as dramatic as some first-generation conversions are, they did experience an un-learning of false beliefs they had grown up with, resulting in a radical transformation in their intellectual understanding of the truth

213

of God's grace. As one participant explained, she "feels like" she is understanding the

Gospel "for the first time;" and although "it's still fresh" and she is "not implementing it"

yet in the way she hopes to, just "know[ing] this information," that she "can't fix" herself,

has "been peaceful and relieving." Similarly, another young man explained that

"understanding the truth" of the Gospel has been "key" to his experience of conversion,

as "that affects everything else." He shared,

> I understood that I was a sinner saved by grace and I always would be. And that
> Jesus is my Savior, you know, and that I can have joy and peace because it's His
> righteousness that God sees and not mine: fig-leafed, feeble, filthy-rag
> righteousness. (Laughs). I mean this is why we can be happy Christians. You
> can't be if you don't know that. And it's changed everything. I feel so much
> better about everything than I ever have before.

Smith (2001) asserts that, based on a New Testament understanding of conversion,

both intellectual and affective elements are necessary for a "good" conversion (p. 138);

and that while the intellectual component provides the "anchor" (p. 160) or "conceptual

framework" for the conversion experience (p. 167), affect brings "integration – whole-

person integrity and unity" – to the experience (p. 167). This reflects the conversion

experiences of the young adults in this study, who described an integration of their

childhood experiences not just in the intellectual domain, but also in the affective domain.

For some, it was experiences in the affective, rather than intellectual, domain that

facilitated their understanding and appropriation of truth about God. As one young man

explained,

> I have (two children), and there is just something about having your own kids that
> helps you realize that there is more to life than just something that happened out
> of the blue . . . I have to think that I look at [my children] with as much love and
> appreciation, or similar kind of love and appreciation that God looks at his
> children. So when I, the way that I love my kids, if that is how God loves his

children then, um, I think we're in a good place, because I can't imagine a greater love.

Another participant had an experience that was similar. He shared,

> Had I not had my son, I would have never been able to understand why Christ came. [It was] very difficult for me to understand . . . But because [I now] understand the love that a parent has for a child, I [now] get that. I get that now. So, I very much value it, the sacrifice.

For others, it was the experience of developing a relationship with God that dominated their descriptions of conversion in the affective domain. While the majority of participants described positive family and/or communal affective childhood faith experiences, a personal relationship with God was not a central part of their experience during childhood. During adolescence and young adulthood, these individuals described affective experiences with God that facilitated growth in their personal relationship with God, which was defined by a growing assurance of His love and forgiveness, a recognition of God's good will toward them, and learning to trust and depend on God rather than self.

For two participants whose childhood faith experiences were deficient or negative in the affective domain, the experience of conversion was significantly more emotive, and they included the word "joy" in their descriptions of conversion. As one young man shared,

> I was baptized because I wanted to accept the blood of Christ as my own. I wanted to show Christ whose side I was on. I wanted to show the community of people I'm surrounded by whose side I had chosen. I wanted to set an example to those around me. I sobbed when I was baptized. I didn't think it would feel as good as it did. What a relief it was! . . . I am relieved I am baptized. I feel comfort from it.

And of his current faith experience, he says,

> For me, Christ is God. Christ is a friend . . . I don't hesitate to tell Christ about my problems or what I'm thinking, or anything like that. And I know, just like a good parent, He wants the best for me . . . I know I'm not a traditional Adventist, but I love Adventism and want more people to have the peace and joy it has brought me.

For another participant, whose childhood experiences included significant family trauma and abandonment by his father, conversion included a sense of belonging to God as His "son." He shared,

> One thing I've always sensed since I got baptized, I know that this is not just me making it up, because I never had this before. Whenever I feel the Holy Spirit interacting with me and talking to me, God calls me, he says, 'My son' . . . I never had that before and I really like that (laughs) . . . Particularly when you don't have a lot of the father part [i.e., biological father not part of life]. So that's huge! That's huge! I have that all the time and it's very powerful to me that He does that.

This is consistent with the findings of many studies in the area of attachment theory and conversion, which suggest that individuals with insecure attachment bonds with their parents turn to God as a substitute attachment figure, thus compensating for their insecurity (See, for example, Cassiba, Granqvist, Costantini, and Gatto, 2008; Dickie, Ajega, Kobylak, and Nixon, 2006; Granqvist and Hagekull, 1999; Granqvist, Ivarsson and Broberg, 2007; Granqvist and Kirkpatrick, 2007; Granqvist, Ljungdahl and Dickie, 2007; Reinert and Edwards, 2009; Ringel, 2008). Of his current faith experience, this young man says,

> I can have joy and peace . . . [And] I love above anything the God who has given us all this . . . the fact that God would accept me on the basis of what Christ has done . . . I shouldn't be living! I shouldn't be breathing! . . . You want to know what faith means? (Laughs) . . . It means everything!

In contrast, two participants described positive family faith experiences that helped to shape a childhood picture of God as "just wonderful and beautiful" or "fascinating and attractive," as well as significant personal experiences with God, particularly through prayer. As one of them shared: "[Prayer] fascinated me . . . I thought it was great that we could directly communicate with God. I enjoyed praying growing up . . . Somehow I sensed that He was also listening, even though I could not see Him . . . [and] I prayed constantly." Similarly, the other young man "had what [he] would consider a very strong prayer life for a child." To illustrate, he described the following example:

> I remember being impacted by the story of Solomon, what he prayed for, and [I remember] praying for this kind of understanding. I remember a few moments of praying and feeling like God was really responding, not audibly or speaking, but just . . . (became somewhat emotional and apologized).

For these two young adults, conversion did not involve a significant affective component; rather, the relational component of their faith just continued to grow as their faith matured.

Smith (2001) suggests that the affective element of conversion includes experiences of finding "joy" in relationship with God (p. 169-70), "assurance" of God's love and forgiveness (p. 171), and learning "radical dependence" on God (p. 172). As evidenced above, the findings of this study suggest that the third- and greater-generation SDA believers who participated in this study described all of these experiences as part of their faith. For some, affect was a significant part of their childhood faith experiences; accordingly, their descriptions of conversion did not include important experiences in the affective domain. Others described their childhood faith experiences in terms of some

degree of deficiency in the affective domain; accordingly, these individuals described varying degrees of affective faith experiences during adolescence and young adulthood, which compensated for the deficiencies of their earlier experiences and which they considered part of their conversion. Thus, in many ways, the findings of this study suggest that the intellectual and affective components of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith are reflective of the intellectual and affective components of conversion in the lives of first-generation believers; however, rather than being entirely new experiences, as is the case for first-generation Christians, the experiences of second- and greater-generation Christians reflect an integration of childhood faith experiences with new faith experiences.

Conversion is Transformational

In the Old Testament, the concept of conversion is portrayed primarily through the Hebrew word *shubh*, which was used to describe "turning from evil" and "return[ing] to God, " particularly in the sense of returning to an "original relationship" with God (Soggin, 1997, p. 1315). A New Testament "equivalent" for the Old Testament *shubh* is the Greek word *metanoia* (Heikkinen, 1966, p. 4), which was used to describe turning "from the direction in which [one was] going to its opposite" (p. 5). Thus, both the Old and New Testaments portray conversion as turning away from sin and turning toward God and a righteous life. Similarly, in the *Didache*, one of the earliest post-canonical Christian texts, conversion was understood as a process that began with an extended period of instruction in the "two ways" (Finn, 1997, p. 148), the way of life and the way of death, which ultimately required turning "from one way of life to another" (p. 147).

Accordingly, in the earliest centuries of Christian history, conceptions of conversion included this component of transformational "turning," which included the radical change in behavior that was associated with a transfer of allegiance to Christ (see, for example, Kreider, 1999).

In the Medieval Church, this understanding of conversion became distorted by the monastic movement, which came to emphasize sanctification at the expense of justification by grace through faith, as well as by the corporate or communal conversions of this time, resulting in a loss of emphasis on the transformational turning that Scripture equates with conversion (Muldoon, 1997). The Protestant Reformation corrected these distortions; however, in reacting against the excesses of the monastic movement, the Magisterial Reformers ultimately came to equate conversion with the passive process of recognizing one's status as justified by grace through faith (Harran, 1983; Olson, 1999). In contrast, the Anabaptist Reformers asserted that conversion also involved "turning in a new direction," which was defined by repentance and a new commitment to Christ (Dyck, 1995, p. 52); however, due to ongoing persecution, the impact of Anabaptist thought on Protestant theology was limited (Olson, 1999).

Various post-Reformation groups and individuals attempted to retrieve the concept of turning toward a righteous life as part of conversion, including John Wesley, who defined conversion as "a thorough change of life and heart from sin to holiness; a turning" (Wesley, 1790); however, by the early nineteenth century, most Protestant traditions came to equate this "turning" with a dramatic conversion experience (Hewitt, 1991), which ultimately "spiritually disenfranchised" those children who had grown up

with faith and did not experience such conversions (Bendroth, 2001, p. 352). It was within this context that nineteenth-century theologian Horace Bushnell insisted that children could "grow up Christian, and never know [themselves] as being otherwise" (Bushnell, 1861/1979, p. 65), implying "that no conversion experience [was] necessary, but only the development of a new life already begun" (pp. 372-73).

Ellen White agreed that "[a] person may not be able to tell the exact time or place of his [or her] conversion" as "the work of grace is silent and almost imperceptible" (White, 1886, p. 97); however, in contrast with Bushnell, White assumed that even children nurtured in faith experienced conversion (White, 1898/2005, p. 515). This emphasis on both nurture and conversion may be due to her understanding of human nature as having "a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, [they] cannot resist" (White, 1903/2002, p. 29). Thus, while she emphasized the need for a holistic or "whole being" approach to the spiritual nurture of children (White, 1903/2002, p. 15), she also underscored the need for the new birth of conversion, which she understood as a supernatural transformation, "a new life altogether," brought about by the power of God (White, 1898/2005, p. 172).

While Ellen White recognized that "[a]ll conversions are not alike" (White, 1946, p. 28), using the term "conversion" to describe a variety of spiritual experiences, the common element in those experiences she defined as "conversion" was human turning to God in response to divine initiative (Guy, 1955, p. 8-9), i.e., the choice to "come to Christ." Central to this choice was repentance, defined as "sorrow for sin and a turning away from it" (White, 1892/1977, p. 19), resulting in "a change in the heart," resulting in

"[n]ew thoughts, new feelings, new purposes" (White, 1899, p. 469), i.e., effecting change in the intellectual, affective and behavioral spheres of life. In other words, while Ellen White emphasized the need for a holistic nurture of children, she also emphasized the need for the holistic transformation of conversion, initiated by the power of God. This appears to be consistent with the tension in Scripture, which instructs parents to teach children to love God with all their heart, soul, and might (Deut. 6:4-9), implying a holistic faith formation (Burkhart, 2013), while simultaneously emphasizing the need for new birth (John 3: 3, 8).

The findings of this study confirm this tension between nurture and conversion, i.e., even those participants whose childhood formative experiences included some degree of integration between the intellectual, affective and behavioral dimensions of faith still described experiences of transformational "turning," both *past* and *ongoing*, as part of their conversion. *Past* experiences included "turning away" from specific behavioral choices that were not congruent with faith while simultaneously "turning toward" God, as well as "turning away" from secular pursuits and "turning toward" vocations that were more congruent with intellectual and affective faith commitments. These experiences are reflective of the New Testament concept of conversion portrayed through the Greek word *metanoia*, which implies "look[ing] at the past, at that from which [one] has turned," (Peace, 1999, p. 348) and describes a turning "from the direction in which [one was] going to its opposite" (Heikkinen, 1966, p. 5).

Ongoing experiences included "turning away" from sin and self through repentance and confession, as well as "turning toward" God by surrendering the will to

His. This appears to be consistent with the Old Testament conception of conversion as "an *ongoing process* (italics in text)" of the "*re*turning (italics in text)" of God's covenant people "to what was formerly known," rather than a call to turn to "something totally new" (Witherup, 1994, p. 18). Furthermore, the participants in this study described their *ongoing* experience of transformational "turning" in terms of an *ongoing* desire to grow in Christ-likeness, which is more traditionally considered part of sanctification rather than conversion. This may be due to the fact that the participants of this study were nurtured in the SDA faith, and thus have a holistic conception of conversion.

Smith (2001) suggests that the New Testament conception of conversion includes both a *penitential* and a *volitional* dimension. He describes the *penitential* dimension of conversion in terms of repentance, which he defines as "remorse" over sin, as well as "a resolve to turn from sin out of genuine grief over sin." He writes,

> We will not appreciate the crucial place of repentance unless we take sin seriously. In fact we must begin with the assumption that conversion is necessary because of sin. For conversion to be authentic, then, there must be a confrontation with sin and turning from it. In repentance we acknowledge sin, receive forgiveness and repudiate sin. This is what makes conversion a *turning*; it is a turning from sin (italics in text)(Smith, 2001, p. 164).

In contrast, he suggests that the *volitional* dimension of conversion "incorporate[s] the will," which is expressed through both the desire and free choice to obey Christ as evidence of allegiance to Him, as well as through the reorientation of one's life to the service of Christ and the furthering of His kingdom. Interestingly, for the participants of this study, the *penitential* and the *volitional* dimensions of conversions, as described by Smith, were intertwined and both part of the experience of transformational "turning." Having known the experience of repentance and forgiveness from childhood, the

222

penitential dimension was not a dramatic experience of turning from a life of sin toward a life of righteousness; rather, it was part of an ongoing choice to "turn away" from sin and self and "turn toward" God.

Thus, in summary, the experience of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith can be understood as an ongoing process of integration in the intellectual, affective and behavioral domains. While most of the young adults in this study experienced faith formation in each of these domains to some degree, their conversion experiences complemented their formational experiences, resulting in a movement toward greater congruence among the three domains; however, as William R. Yount (2010) suggests, the "ideal," i.e., where "all three spheres [are] perfectly overlapped, forming a seamless, single whole," is found only in the life of Jesus (p. 336). Thus, the experience of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith can be considered somewhat reflective of the ongoing process of sanctification.

Future Research

This study provides a preliminary framework for thinking about conversion in the lives of SDA young adults nurtured in faith; however, due to the exploratory nature of this study, it leaves many questions unanswered: Do third- and greater-generation SDA young adults within different socio-economic or cultural groups experience conversion similarly? How does understanding and experience of conversion in the lives of third- and greater-generation SDA's change across the lifespan? How do third- and greater-generation Christians of other denominations experience conversion? Does the experience of second-generation believers differ significantly from the experience of

third- and greater-generation believers? Further research is needed to address these questions.

Final Reflections

The origin of the word 'conversion' is the Latin word 'convertere' (*con*-altogether + *vertere*, turn), and literally means to 'turn altogether' or 'turn around' (Oxford English Dictionary). Accordingly, in its theological sense, the term 'conversion' signifies 'an altogether turning around,' i.e., a punctiliar change in direction from sin and ungodliness to righteousness and a godly life, which is often equated with salvation (Smith, 2010, pp. 3-6). This description, however, does not fit the experience of many second- and greater-generation Christians, who have grown up within the family of God and thus have no experience of 'altogether turning around' from a life of sin and death to a life of righteousness and life. This leads many to question the legitimacy of their experience, and ultimately their salvation (Knott, 1982; Smith, 2010).

Bill Knott (1982) suggests that, for the individual nurtured in a faithful Christian home who has experienced confession, forgiveness and the assurance of salvation from a young age, the emphasis on a need for conversion is "justifiably troubl[ing]" (p. 13), as "[h]aving known repentance and pardon at every stage from infancy, from what sinfulness is [s]he now to turn? What change of direction is possible to [the person] who has only known a movement, albeit halting, toward the cross?" Knott recognizes that all believers must turn from their "inherent depravity as a child of Adam, from 'the grip of self-sovereignty;'" however, he suggests that if the individual "is conscious of no other inclination from which to turn" (p. 14), the call to conversion is "reduced to a simple

appeal to continue doing what [s]he has always done – seeking the forgiveness, love, and assurance of his Saviour" (p. 14-15). Accordingly, Knott suggests that the term "conversion" might be "too small a vehicle on which to convey the salvation history" of many second- and greater-generation Christians (p. 11); that using the same word to describe both the dramatic experiences of first-generation Christians and the experiences of those who have grown up in the family of God may overly "stretch the semantic range" of the term "conversion" (Knott, p. 11). He thus proposes alternative metaphors, such as "confirmation," "ratification" or particularly "affirmation," to describe the conscious, voluntary act of commitment to the Christian faith in which one has been raised (p. 17).

In contrast, Smith (2001) asserts that while conversion "is *not* the same" for second-and greater-generation believers as it is for first-generation Christians (italics in text)(p. 207), and while this experience may have "a different character" (p. 208), often being less "dramatic" or "flatter emotionally," "it is still a *Christian* conversion, a distinctive appropriation of personal faith in Christ" (italics in text) (p. 213). Furthermore, while Smith acknowledges that Scripture provides "no explicit teaching" on how second- and greater- generation believers come to faith (p. 208), he asserts that the elements of a first-generation conversion "are essential and will find expression" in the conversion experiences of second- and greater-generation believers, if their life in Christ is "to begin well" (p. 213). In a later publication (2010), however, Smith suggests that the language of conversion often "fails to appreciate the distinctive experience of second-generation Christians" (p. 13). He writes: "We do not know how to speak meaningfully about those who are coming to faith . . . We need a language that enables us to speak

225

meaningfully about our children's distinctive journey to faith in Christ" (Smith, 2001, p. 13-14).

Thus, it would appear that both Knott and Smith concur that a new language of conversion is needed for articulating the distinctive experience of conversion in the lives of those nurtured in faith; however, in contrast with Knott's suggestion that a metaphor other than "conversion" is needed to describe this experience, the findings of this study suggest that the experiences of third- and greater-generation believers are similar to the experiences of first-generation believers and should still be considered "conversion." This confirms Smith's (2001) assertion that the elements of a first-generation conversion, as outlined in the New Testament, "are essential and will find expression" in the experience of second- and greater-generation believers; however, while he acknowledges that the experience of those nurtured in faith may have "a different character" from the experience of first-generation converts (p. 208), he does not describe *how* they differ. In describing *how* third- and greater-generation believers experience conversion, this phenomenological study provides a framework or "language" for articulating this distinctive spiritual experience. To illustrate, I will describe how reflecting on my own spiritual experiences within the context of this framework has helped me understand and articulate my own fourth-generation SDA conversion experience.

My formational faith experiences were primarily in the intellectual and behavioral domains, and thus my early understanding was that faith consisted of correct doctrine and righteous behavior; however, while I had never been taught to expect a significant conversion experience, whenever I encountered Jesus' teaching on the need for new birth,

I wondered about the legitimacy of my faith experience. As a young teen, I was convinced of the truth of the SDA message and made the decision to be baptized. I remember expecting to feel different after baptism, as well as the disappointment when this was not so. I also remember expecting to feel something significant while participating in the Lord's Supper for the first time, as well as the disappointment when no great emotion accompanied this experience. Throughout my adolescent years, I responded to a number of altar calls, each time thinking that this might be the defining moment that I could equate with being born again, and each time coming away feeling no different. By young adulthood, I had unconsciously come to accept that faith, at least for me, was intellectual assent to correct doctrine accompanied by righteous behavior, and my focus shifted to the developmental tasks of learning to live independently, developing a career, and building a strong marriage.

While my husband was at Seminary, I again began to question my faith experience and resolved to take some classes that might help me fill in some blanks. I was particularly interested in soteriology, and took the *Salvation* class twice, from two different professors, in hopes that the different perspectives might be helpful. I remember this being a distressing experience, as the two perspectives were contradictory, one emphasizing grace and the other works. I came away from these classes more confused than enlightened, and decided that it might be best not to think too deeply about things that were obviously too difficult to grasp. It was not until after the birth of my two children some years later that I began to reflect on my faith in new ways. I became convicted of the importance of nurturing my children's faith, committing much time and

227

energy to research in the area of children's faith formation, as well as to sharing God with my children. Because I was not an accomplished storyteller, I had to rely on reading books to my children, gradually building a large library of children's Christian literature. Over time, I found myself crying as I read to my children. For example, the first time I read the children's Sabbath School lesson that described Jesus' death on the cross to my older daughter, I watched, dry-eyed, as she cried. Two years later, as I read this same story to my younger daughter, she watched as I cried. It was also at this time that I read Philip Yancey's *The Jesus I Never Knew* and *What's So Amazing About Grace,* both of which helped me to see God in new ways.

Over time, I came to understand that these experiences, as well as the very concrete experiences of loving and being loved by both my husband and my children, helped me to appropriate God's love for me. I came to think of these experiences as my very gradual conversion; however, I thought of this only in affective terms. Reflecting on the findings of this study has helped me recognize that I experienced an "altogether turning around" in the intellectual domain as well. I now understand that as I read children's stories about God to my children, my mental picture of God changed, and that through this experience, I slowly came to understand that the God I thought I believed in did not exist; that the God of grace described in Scripture, incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ, was beautiful beyond description. Furthermore, as I came to see the beauty of Jesus more clearly, I was able to see the many ways in which I was not like Him; that my sinfulness was much deeper than I had imagined, and that my righteous behavior truly was like "filthy rags." It was only as my mental representation of God changed that

I was able to see my need for grace; and as I understood and experienced God's grace, I slowly discovered a God who not only loved me unconditionally, but also a God whom I could love. Thus, it was only as I experienced corrective experiences in the intellectual domain that I was able to experience the affective component of faith. In other words, it was only as my formational faith experiences were integrated with new faith experiences, in both the intellectual and affective domains, that I was able to grow toward a faith that integrated both my heart and my mind.

Furthermore, as I've reflected on the findings of this study, I've also come to recognize many *past* experiences of "turning" in the behavioral domain, including "turning" from self-will to surrender, facilitated particularly by a call to missionary work; "turning" from self-reliance to radical dependence on God, facilitated particularly by my daughter's life-threatening illness in a developing country; and "turning" from my previous profession of physical therapy to studies in religious education, a discipline that seemed more congruent with my faith journey. I've also come to recognize that the time I spend with God each day creates *ongoing* opportunities for the Holy Spirit to further "turn" my heart and mind and soul "from" sin and self "toward" God; accordingly, together with one of the participants in this study, I can say, "I was probably converted again today." Thus, although I grew up within the family of God and have no experience of "altogether turning around" from a life without God to a life with God, my experiences constitute "an altogether turning around" in my understanding and experience of God. And although these experiences do not describe the "beginning" of my journey with God

(Smith, 2001), I believe they are more similar to than different from a first-generation conversion. Accordingly, I consider these experiences to be part of my conversion.

The ability to articulate a conversion narrative is an important part of Christian experience, as it "heightens our appreciation" of God's presence and work in our lives (Smith, 2010, p.159), and thus facilitates understanding of "the power and depth of God's mercy . . . personally and individually in *our* experience" (emphasis in text), rather than just "abstractly and theoretically" (p. 176). Furthermore, relating a conversion narrative can foster understanding of and appreciation for the many experiences and individuals that contributed to the formation of our faith, thus facilitating self-understanding (p. 159). As one participant in this study commented at the end of his interview,

> You know, maybe that's, maybe that availability of my parents, perhaps that helped me to see God as more available. I never really put that together [before] . . . Thanks for the opportunity to reflect on some of that. I don't do that very often.

Yet articulating a conversion narrative can be difficult for those who have grown up within the family of God. When asked about their understanding and experience of conversion, many of the young adults who participated in this study initially responded with words like "I don't know" or "I don't know if I can" or "Well, I don't really know. Um. Huh," followed by long pauses. Would it be reasonable to suggest that second- and greater-generation believers might embrace a more authentic faith if intentionally encouraged to reflect on their conversion experiences? But how do we do that?

The results of this study appear to indicate that, for those who have grown up in a faith context, reflecting on childhood understanding and experience of God may be an appropriate starting point for thinking about conversion. Furthermore, examining later

spiritual experiences within the framework of intellectual, affective and transformational elements may facilitate understanding and thus assurance of the legitimacy of one's experience. It may also identify any missing elements that need to be reflected on and addressed, which may in turn foster a more holistic faith experience. Accordingly, the results of this study not only confirm the importance of holistic (intellectual, affective and formational) Christian education in children's faith formation, but also suggest that a holistic, educational approach to ministry with third- and greater-generation adults may provide an environment in which the Holy Spirit can begin to address the deficiencies or distortions of our formational experiences, and thus to facilitate the "altogether turning around" of conversion.

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

Title of Research: Nurture and Conversion: A Phenomenological Study of SDA Young

Adults' Lived Experiences

Name of Researcher: Edyta Jankiewicz

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that you read the following

information, which describes the purpose and value of this study, as well as the possible

discomfort that you may experience.

Purpose of this Study: The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between

early faith formation experiences and later experience of faith. I believe that the results

of this study will provide valuable insights about the spiritual nurture of children.

Explanation of Procedures: Your role as a potential participant will be to take part in an

interview about your faith formation experiences, which usually takes an hour or so. The

interview will be either, digitally recorded by the researcher and later transcribed, or if

you are uncomfortable with this, I will make brief notes while you speak. The interview

will take place at a place that is mutually agreeable to both participant and researcher. A

second follow-up interview will allow you to read through and provide necessary

corrections to a summary of the interview. Participant's initials_____

Risks and Discomforts: There are no known risks that are anticipated from your

participation in this study. The only potential discomfort is that the interview involves

reflecting on your early life experiences, which can sometimes evoke both positive and negative emotions.

Confidentiality: The information collected during this research will be kept in a locked drawer throughout this project. No one other than the researcher will have access to any data that will identify your responses, and no names or other identifying information will be used in the data collection. All digital records and transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the study. The results of this study will be published in the form of a doctoral dissertation.

Withdrawal: Participation in this research project is voluntary. As a participant, you are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participating at any time.

Agreement: The signature below indicates that you have agreed to participate in this project, and that you have received of copy of this informed consent form.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Subject Name (please print)

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Interview Times, Number of Pages/Words Per Transcript, and Number of Initial Codes Per Participant

Participant	Interview time	Number of single-spaced pages in transcript	Number of words in transcript	Number of initial codes
Abel	48:56	6	3592	259
Alan	48:34	11	5120	155
Andrew	59:07	11	6782	210
Belinda	58:39	8	5733	272
Dale	59:26	10	7171	178
Daniel	2:04:18	19	14566	371
Hope	52:54	9	5551	137
Joe	42:10	4	1993	132
Joseph	1:26:49	14	8372	96
Joshua	2:01:56	15	10505	415
Leah	1:21:04	18	13489	463
Mark	1:01:20	10	6857	206
Mary	1:31:34	16	11135	258
Paul	2:09:51	21	14157	261

APPENDIX C

Selected Example of Significant Statements Regarding *Experience of Conversion* and Their Related Initial Codes and Analytic Memos

Analysis: Narrative	Codes	Memos
The textbook definition of faith is belief in those things unseen. I think it is a belief in things unseen, but it also requires a <u>certain amount of action.</u> You can believe in something, but so what? You actually have to have <u>some kind of commitment to that belief structure.</u> That's what I would say is faith to me. Because I believe in God, <u>I live my life according to that,</u> and for me, And <u>a life of service</u> is <u>a life of education</u>.	Action Commitment Life congruent with belief Life of service	**Faith includes "action" and "some kind of" a commitment to a belief structure, which leads to a particular way of life, namely, a life of service.**
Adventist beliefs provide a <u>certain value structure</u> and <u>a way of life</u> that most religions don't, in the United States [at least] . . . whereas Adventism provides <u>a slightly apart way of living, a kind of living in the world but not of it.</u> That is actually a very powerful concept in Adventism, <u>which I find very appealing.</u> So, the way I look at it is, you can live this life or you can live [that] life, and <u>this life is probably much better</u> than what is outside.	Values A way of life Apart way of life Very appealing Probably much better	**Faith provides a value structure that shapes the way life is lived, namely, a slightly apart way of life that is appealing.** **P*robably* much better than a life without faith implies ambivalence**
It's about <u>making assumptions about people,</u> the assumption being that <u>they are a son of God or a daughter of God,</u> and therefore <u>need to be loved</u>.	Assumptions Son of God Need to be loved	**Loving others, who are children of God, is central**

Selected Examples of Significant Statements Regarding *Experience of Conversion* and Their Refined First Cycle Codes and Analytic Memos

Analysis: Narrative	Codes	Memos
The textbook definition of faith is belief in those things unseen. I think it is a belief in things unseen, but it also requires a <u>certain amount of action.</u> You can believe in something, but so what? You actually have to have <u>some kind of commitment to that belief structure.</u> That's what I would say is faith to me. Because I believe in God, <u>I live my life according to that,</u> and for me, And <u>a life of service</u> is <u>a life of education</u>.	Action Commitment Life congruent with belief Life of service	**Faith forms life – shapes choices, includes service**
Adventist beliefs provide a <u>certain value structure</u> and <u>a way of life</u> that most religions don't, in the United States [at least] . . . whereas Adventism provides <u>a slightly apart way of living, a kind of living in the world but not of it.</u> That is actually a very powerful concept in Adventism, <u>which I find very appealing.</u> So, the way I look at it is, you can live this life or you can live [that] life, and <u>this life is **probably** much better</u> than what is outside.	Values A way of life Apart way of life Very appealing Probably	**Faith forms life – a life apart** ***Probably* implies uncertainty/ambivalence**
It's about <u>making assumptions about people,</u> the assumption being <u>that they are a son of God or a daughter of God,</u> and therefore <u>need to be loved</u>.	Assumptions about people Love for others	**Faith forms life – love for others**

Selected Examples of Significant Statements Regarding *Experience of Conversion* and Their Related First and Second Cycle Codes

Significant Statement	First Cycle Code	Second Cycle Code
Just knowing that God knew it all along, so I guess, part of the conversion was realizing how much I need to trust in Him, and I guess it was the heartache that really spurred me toward a relationship with God.	Trusting God	Learning trust
I think each of those tent pole moments I was telling you about was sort of a way of, do I trust God or not.	Trust God or not	Learning trust
I felt like I had somewhat of a conversion experience, at the very end, because even after these studies, I think about it now I'm back in my mind at that time, even after that, it opens me up to God.	Opening heart to God	Growth in relationship
Just those things deepen the relationship, and as the relationship deepens, I mean, it just, At least for me, fills me with the desire to be more like him and to share who he is with everyone around me.	Desire to be like Him Desire to share	Growth in Christ-likeness Desire to share
The way that I really think of conversion is just being changed to become more like . . . to have my character shaped more like God's character. So, to me, conversion is a very slow and gradual thing. I think that in a nutshell that's what it is: my	Be more like God	Growth in Christ-likeness

character being shaped to be more like God's character. That's what I think of. I don't know that that's the conventional understanding when people say conversion, but that's what I think.		
I just have to realize I need to be like I want God to be for me when I act out. And so, Like, allowing my husband to say sorry and completely forgive without really seeing every aspect of what he could have done better.	Be more like God is to me	Growth in Christ-likeness
So along the same time I was reading more spiritual, The Bible and spirit of Prophecy, I felt like some of the things I'm watching on TV I really shouldn't be watching, like not everything was bad, but even things that weren't necessarily bad were still taking away my time	Re-evaluating time pursuits	Time pursuits
It became very clear to me very quickly, that this was not the purpose of whatever gifts I had been given.	Re-evaluating time pursuits	Time pursuits
I was allowing my time and my energy to be spent more on Him than on God . . . because I was letting all my time to be spent with him, not really dedicating any time to spiritual growth	Re-evaluating time pursuits	Time pursuits
It's sort of this activation of things that cause shift, like you see things different. But I don't think that has to be like a total like you know	Multiple times	Aha moments

explosive kind of thing, It can be a, there's like multiple little aha moments		
Little 'Aha' experiences along the way, but no flashes of lightning or anything big, but just filling in, building on the pattern.	Multiple experiences	Aha moments
I guess I can never pinpoint any clear conversion time because there was never a time when I was purposefully heading away from God. There was never a time when I was not intending to serve God, come to know Him better. I certainly grew in my appreciation of Him, so that deepened my commitment, but I don't really remember any bug time where I thought, "Wow! Up until now I was not saved, and now I am." You know?	No single experience	No turning point
It was just a recognition of a commitment that I'd continually been making, as my understanding had grown.	Understanding grew	Growth in understanding
Understanding that above all, God is love, and that the more loving and accepting that I am to people, the easier it is to change every aspect of my character (chuckles). Because it all hinges on that.	Understanding that God is love	Growth in understanding
Also realizing the lies about God's character . . . like God doesn't really care about me and He's absent, and some of those pieces.	Understanding God's love	Growth in understanding

A lot of what I have had to get rid of in my idea of what faith really is. But, the idea of always dressing nicely for church, Sabbath lunch, you go to potluck, things like that, in my mind was faith.	Unlearning early formation	Growth in understanding

Selected Examples of Significant Statements Regarding *Experience of Faith Formation* and Their Related First and Second Cycle Codes

Significant Statement	First Cycle Code	Second Cycle Code
I had friends and family and co-workers that were really supportive and praying with me and for me and for my family, all of the time. So I never let go and said: no God, forget you because you are allowing this to happen. But I may have if I didn't have that community of faith that helped lift me up. So afterwards I saw, Or maybe it wasn't my faith that got me through but the faith of others that kept my faith.	Friends and family Community of faith	Community
When I see that my faith is being confirmed, that someone else is also seeing scripture in the same like that I am, then it helps my experience. I don't know. It confirms that what I believe. It's not just me. There are other people who also see things the way that I see things. There are other people who also want to lift up Christ.	Confirmed by others Other people	Community
And I think it has to do with other people too, it's connected. There's been times in my life when I felt alone, when I felt it was just me and God, and I think for me now, it feels like it's connected with the people in my life, like it's not just me and God, it's me and God and the people that God has in my life.	Other people	Community
My faith fluctuates every day or every few days (chuckles) or	Fluctuates	Dynamic

every month.		
And I'm not perfect at doing that, Because my faith falters, it is not always perfect,	Falters	Dynamic
I'm still on that journey, still learning how to walk with God and I stumble all the time	Still stumble	Dynamic
The way I live my life, you know, because of the principles of the seventh-day Adventist church, Especially the more conservative ones, you know, there are a lot of guidelines and a lot of things that I've always done and I've always thought were good things to do, And so that affects the decisions that I make	The way I live Decisions I make	Forms life
I just want to teach people about these things. I want people to feel the peace that I now feel . . . and to have assurance, that they can trust in Christ.	Desire to share faith	Forms life
If I know God is real and I trust that what he says is true and I believe that he is love and he is also absolute, Then I know that there are certain things that I need to do to live my life as a person of faith and so I tried to have, I try to live a life that reflects the belief in God. I try to speak to people as though God is real, I try to do things that honor God, say things that honor God	Live my life A life that reflects beliefs	Forms life
I still don't know why my dad had to die when he did, and that was one of those moments where I was so angry during that time, It was like why is everything, but I didn't stop trusting him.	Trust in God	Learning trust

[It's] not being afraid to bring the good and the bad to God instead of just, here is my nice little perfect self, that's what I want God to see I mean He sees the good and the bad anyways but just not being afraid to come to Him, whether I'm angry or upset or really sad, or whatever it is that I'm feeling, and knowing that He accepts me that way. And not trying to hide that.	Being real with God	Relationship with God
It's just a constant awareness that God is there and that he is on my side. He's not, he's there to help us in this life.	Constant awareness of God God is on my side	Relationship with God

APPENDIX G

Final Codes with Corresponding Themes and Frequencies

Experience of Faith Formation

Themes/Codes	Sources*	References**
Choice	13	35
Intentional action	1	3
Communal	5	10
Adult mentors	2	3
Adventist community	1	1
Community	5	8
Community support	2	3
Confirmed by community	1	1
Connected with people	1	1
Faith community	1	2
Significant people	2	8
Small group	1	1
Dynamic	8	23
Changing	1	2
Developing	4	6
Falters	2	2
Fluctuates	2	3
Growing	2	4
Keep getting up	1	1

Most days	1	1
Not easy	3	4
Ongoing	1	1
Ongoing learning	2	2
Progressive	1	1
Still stumble	1	1
Takes time	1	1
Affective	3	11
Experiential in childhood	1	4
God's providence	7	10
Impressions	3	6
Life circumstances	3	8
Not felt	2	3
Early prayer life	2	5
Relationship with God	12	42
Constant awareness	1	3
Dependence	2	4
God as Father	1	1
God as friend	4	5
God's guidance	1	2
Hope	1	1
Love	2	2
No fear	1	1
Son-ship	1	1
Trust	8	13

Unconditional love	1	2
Behavioral		
Forms life	7	18
Daily decision	2	2
Forms values	3	3
Habits of life	1	1
Identity	3	4
Lifestyle choices	2	3
Love for others	1	2
Sharing faith	3	3
Time commitments	1	2
Integrated	6	15
Evidence for God	2	5
Faith integrated with life	4	9
Integrated faith	1	3
Integrated in childhood	1	4
Knowledge + experience	7	9
Knowledge a foundation for experience	4	10
Lack of integration (childhood)	2	5
Trust based on knowledge	3	4
Intellectual	3	5
Certainty	2	3
Cognitive dissonance	2	2

Intellectual faith	2	4
Limited knowledge	1	4
Meaning	2	3
Natural law	1	1
No dissonance	3	3
Picture of God	6	8
Processing knowledge	2	8
Recognizing sinfulness	2	2
Scripture	4	10
SDA beliefs	8	10
Uncertainty	4	4

Experience of Conversion

Affective

Assurance of God's love	3	3
Experience leads to understanding	2	2
Experiential component	2	5
Growth in relationship	13	37
Heart and mind	1	1
Hurt by the church	2	3
Identity	2	2
Joy	2	4
Knowledge and experience	2	5
Learning trust	10	28
Not belonging	1	3
Opening heart to God	3	4

Owning faith	1	3
Relationship based on knowledge	1	1
Surrender	4	19
Understanding transforms experience	1	2
Intellectual		
Awareness of sin	3	10
Congruence	1	1
Formation provides foundation	6	15
Growth in understanding	9	37
Heart and mind	1	1
Knowing God	1	2
Knowledge added to experience	1	1
Knowledge provides foundation	2	4
Recognizing dissonance	2	2
Relationship based on knowledge	1	1
Unlearning early formation	3	16
Questioning beliefs	1	6
Uncertainty	1	1
Knowledge and experience	2	5
Understanding God's love	2	2
Understanding the Gospel	6	14
Understanding transforms experience	1	2
Process		
Aha moments	6	11
Always important	1	2

Doubt	1	2
Faith wanes	3	4
Gradual	6	14
Loss of faith	2	5
Multiple times	3	5
No turning point	7	22
Ongoing	8	27
Progressive	5	26
Rebelling	1	1
No memory of life before faith	1	1
Significant experience	10	23
Something missing	1	1
Transformational		
Convicted of need for change	2	9
Desire to share	2	2
Empowered to witness	1	1
Growth in Christ-likeness	4	4
Identity	2	2
Obedience	2	2
Re-evaluating time pursuits	4	10
Surrender	4	19

*   **Number of interviews in which this code was used**

**   **Total number of times the code was used**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adamson, W. R. (1966). *Bushnell rediscovered.* Philadelphia, PA: United Church Press.

Ahlstrom, S. E. (2003). *Theology in America: The major Protestant voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy.* Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: Assessed in the strange situation and at home.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Allen, H. C. (2008). Theological perspectives on children in the church: Anabaptist/believers church.   In H. C. Allen (Ed.), *Nurturing children's spirituality* (pp. 110-126). Eugene, OR: Cascade.

Anthony, M. J. & Benson, W. (2003). *Exploring the history and philosophy of Christian education: Principles for the 21st century.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel.

Arminius, J. (1629/1986). *The works of James Arminius*, v. 1. Trans. and Ed. J. Nichols and W. Nichols. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Augustine. (c. 400/1953). *Saint Augustine's confessions*. Trans. V. J. Bourke. New York: Fathers of the Church.

Balswick, J. O., King, P. E., & Reimer, K. S. (2005). *The reciprocating self: Human development in theological perspective.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

Bangs, N. (1839). *A history of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Barna, G. (2003). *Transforming children into spiritual champions: Why children should be your church's #1 priority.* Ventura, CA: Regal.

Beck, C. T. (1992). The lived experience of postpartum depression: A phenomenological study. *Nursing Research*, 41(3), 705-713.

Bemoist, J. (2003). Husserl and Bonzano. In M.T. Tymieniecka (Ed.), *Phenomenology world-wide. Foundations-expanding dynamics-life-engagements. A guide for research and study* (pp. 94-97). London, UK: Kluwer Academics.

Bendroth, M. (2001). Horace Bushnell's Christian nurture. In Marcia J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 350-364). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Benner, P. (1994). Hermeneutic phenomenology: A methodology for family health and health promotion study in nursing. In P. Benner (Ed.), *Interpretive phenomenology: Embodiment, caring, and ethics in health and illness* (pp. 71-72). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Berryman, J. W. (2009). *Children and the theologians: Clearing the way for grace.* New York: Morehouse.

Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals*. Handbook I: Cognitive domain. New York: David McKay.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss*. London, UK: Hogarth Press.

Bowlby, J. (1979). *The making and breaking of affectional bonds*. London, UK: Tavistock.

Brekus, C. A. (2001). Children of wrath, children of grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan culture of child rearing. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 300-328). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Brown, D. W. (1978). *Understanding Pietism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Brueggemann, W. (2008). Vulnerable children, divine passion, and human obligation. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in the Bible* (pp. 399-422). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Bunge, M. J. (2001). Education and the child in eighteenth-century German Pietism: Perspectives from the work of A. H. Francke. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 247-278). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Bunge, M. J. (2004). Historical perspectives on children in the church: Resources for spiritual formation and a theology of childhood today. In D. Ratcliff (Ed.), *Children's spirituality: Christian perspectives, research, and applications* (pp. 42-53). Eugene, OR: Cascade.

Burkhart, A. (2013). *Getting back to the root of Christian education: A historical analysis of the ancient Jewish educational system with implications for Christian education in the twenty-first century for children and youth ministries in Southern Baptist Churches.* Ed.D. Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC.

Bushnell, H. (1847/1975). *Views of Christian Nurture, and of subjects adjacent thereto (1847); a facsimile reproduction with an introduction by Philip B. Eppard.* Delmar, NY: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints.

Bushnell, H. (1861/1979). *Christian Nurture.* Reprinted from the 1861 edition published by Charles Scribner. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Caelli, K. (2001). Engaging with phenomenology: Is it more of a challenge than it needs to be? *Qualitative Health Research, 11*(2), 273-281.

Calvin, J. (1536/1960). *Institutes of the Christian religion.* Ed. J. T. McNeil. Trans. F. L. Battles, v. 20-21. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press.

Campbell, R. (2001). Heidegger: Truth as aletheia. In R. Small (Ed.), *A hundred years of phenomenology: Perspectives on a philosophical tradition* (pp. 73-89). Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Campbell, T. A. (1991). *The religion of the heart: A study of European religious life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.* Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Chambliss, J. J. (1987). *Educational theory as theory of conduct: From Aristotle to Dewey.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chrysostom, J. (c. 400/1967). *An address on vainglory and the right way for parents to bring up their children.* In M. L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and pagan culture in the later Roman empire* (pp. 85-122). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967.

Chrysostom, J. (c. 400/1986). *On marriage and family life.* Trans. C. P. Roth and D. Anderson. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis: Grounded theory after the postmodern turn.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coe, G. A. (1916). *The psychology of religion.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Cohen, M. Z. (1987). A historical overview of the phenomenological movement. *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 19*(1), 31-34.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cross, B. (1958). *Horace Bushnell: Minister to changing America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Crysdale, C. S. W. (1990). Development, conversion, and religious education. *Horizons, 17*(1), 30-46.

Dey, I. (1993). *Qualitative data analysis: A user-friendly guide for social scientists.* London, UK: Routledge.

Downs, P. (1995). The power of Fowler. In J. Wilhoit and J. Dettoni (Eds.), *Nurture that is Christian* (pp. 75-90). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Draucker, C. B. (1999). The critique of Heideggerian hermeneutical nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 30*(2), 360-373.

Duggan, L. G. (1997). 'For force is not of God'? Compulsion and conversion from Yahweh to Charlemagne. In J. Muldoon (Ed.), *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages* (pp. 49-62). Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health, 23*(3), 197-203.

Dyck, C. J. (1995). *Spiritual life in Anabaptism: Classic devotional resources*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.

Edwards, J. (1742). Some thoughts concerning the revival. In C. C. Goen (Ed.), *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (pp. 289-531). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972

Eggen, P. & Kauchak, D. (2007). *Educational psychology: Windows on classrooms*, 7th ed. Columbus, OH: Pearson Education.

Embree, L. (1997). What is phenomenology? In L. Embree, E. A. Behnke, D. Carr, J. C. Evans, and J. Huertas-Jourdes et al., (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of phenomenology*, (v. 188, pp. 1-10). Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity, youth and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Estep, J. R. (2002). Childhood transformation: Toward an educational theology of childhood conversion and spiritual formation. *Stone-Campbell Journal, 5*(Fall), 183-206.

Estep, J. R. (2008). The Christian nurture of children in the second and third centuries. In H. C. Allen (Ed.), *Nurturing children's spirituality: Christian perspectives and best practices* (pp. 61-77). Eugene, OR: Cascade.

Estep, J. R. (2010). Developmental theories: Foe, friend or folly? In J. R. Estep and J. H. Kim (Eds.), *Christian formation*: *Integrating theology and human development* (pp. 37-61). Nashville, TN: B&H Academic.

Fabry, H. J. (1992-1993). שׁוּב šûb. In G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry (Eds), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament* (v. 14, pp. 461-522). Stuttgart, Germany: Verlag W. Kohlhammer GmbH. Trans. D. W. Stott. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.

Ferguson, E. (1973). The half-way covenant: Church membership in Puritan New England. *Restoration Quarterly, 16*(1), 58-60.

Finn, T. M. (1992). *Early Christian baptism and the catechumenate: Italy, North Africa, and Egypt, message of the fathers of the church 6.* Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

Finn, T. M. (1997). *From death to rebirth: Ritual and conversion in antiquity*. New York: Paulist Press.

Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning.* New York: Harper Collins.

Fowler, J. W. (1990). Faith/belief. In R. J. Hunter (Ed.), *Dictionary of pastoral care and counseling* (pp. 394-397). Nashville, TN: Abingdon,

Fowler, J. W. (2004). Faith development at 30: Naming the challenges of faith in a new millennium. *Religious Education, 99*(4), 405-26.

Frawley, W. (1997). *Vygotsky and cognitive science: Language and the unification of the social and computational mind.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Gaventa, B. R. (1986). *From darkness to light: Aspects of conversion in the New Testament*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Gillespie, V. B. (1988). *The experience of faith*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*, 4th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Goetzmann, J. (1975). μετάνοια. In C. Brown (Ed.), *The new international dictionary of New Testament theology* (v. 1, pp. 357-359). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Goldberg, S. (1991). Recent developments in attachment theory and research. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 36*(August), 394-397.

Gower, R. (1987). *The new manners and customs of Bible times*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

Granqvist, P. (2002). Attachment and religiosity in adolescence: Cross-sectional and longitudinal evaluations. *Personality and Psychology Bulletin, 28*, 260-270.

Granqvist, P. & Hagekull, B. (1999). Religiousness and perceived childhood attachment: Profiling socialized correspondence and emotional compensation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 38*, 254-273.

Granqvist, P., Ivarsson, T., & Broberg, A. G. (2007). Examining relations among attachment, religiosity, and New Age spirituality using the adult attachment interview. *Developmental Psychology, 43*, 590-601.

Granqvist, P. & Kirkpatrick, L. A. (2004). Religious conversion and perceived childhood attachment: A meta-analysis. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 14*, 223-250.

Granqvist, P., Ljungdahl, C., & Dickie, J. R. (2007). God is nowhere, God is now here: Attachment activation, security of attachment, and God's perceived closeness among 5-7 year-old children from religious and non-religious homes. *Attachment and Human Development, 9,* 55-71.

Greven, P. J. (1977). *The Protestant temperament: Patterns of child-rearing, religious experience, and the self in early America.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Grislis, E. (1993). Menno Simons on conversion: Compared with Martin Luther and John Calvin. *Journal of Mennonite Studies, 11*, 55-75.

Guba, E. G. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1988). Do inquiry paradigms imply inquiry methodologies? In D. M. Fetterman (Ed.), *Qualitative approaches to evaluation in education* (pp. 89-115). New York: Praeger.

Gundry-Volf, J. M. (2001). The least and the greatest: Children in the New Testament. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 29-60). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Guroian, V. (2001). The ecclesial family: John Chrysostom on parenthood and children. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 61-77). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Guy, F. (1955). *An interpretation of the concept of conversion in the published writings of Ellen G. White.* MA Thesis, SDA Theological Seminary, Washington DC.

Halama, P. & Halamova, J. (2005). Process of religious conversion in the Catholic charismatic movement: A qualitative analysis. In J. A. Belzen, L. J. Francis, and R. W. Hood, Jr. (Eds.), *Archive for the psychology of religion* (v. 2. pp. 69-96). Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.

Harran, M. J. (1983). *Luther on conversion: The early years.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Haughton, R. (1978). Formation and transformation. In W. E. Conn (Ed.), *Conversion: Perspectives on personal and social transformation* (pp. 23-26). Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time.* Trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. New York: Harper and Row.

Heikkinen, Jacob W. (1966). A Biblical Study. In W. E. Norgren (Ed.), *The meanings and practices of conversion: Papers from the National Faith and Order Colloquium* (pp. 92-114). Indianapolis, IN: Council on Christian Unity.

Heitzenrater, R. P. (2001). John Wesley and children. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 279-299). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Henderlite, R. (1947). *The theological basis of Horace Bushnell's Christian nurture.* Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University.

Hewitt, G. A. (1991). *Regeneration and morality: A study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin and Horace Bushnell*. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing.

Husserl, E. (1900/1970). *Logical investigations*. Trans. J. N. Findlay. New York: Humanities Press.

Hyde, K. (1990). *Religion in childhood and adolescence*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press.

James, W. (1902/2010). *The varieties of religious experience with an introduction by Jaroslav Pelikan.* Distributed to the trade in the United States by Penguin Group, 2010.

Jankiewicz, D. & Jankiewicz, E. (2013). Horace Bushnell: Guided by his Wesleyan heritage. *Wesleyan Theological Journal, 48*(2), 93-111.

Jankiewicz, E. & Jankiewicz, D. (2011). Let the little children come: Toward a Seventh-day Adventist theology of childhood. *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, *49*(2), 213-242.

Jones, T. P. (2004). The basis of James Fowler's understanding of faith in the research of Wilfred Cantwell Smith: An examination from an evangelical perspective. *Religious Education, 99*(4), 345-357.

Jones, T. P. & Wilder, M. S. (2010). Faith development and Christian formation. In J. R. Estep and J. H. Kim (Eds.), *Christian formation: Integrating theology and human development* (pp. 161-207). Nashville, TN: B&H Academic.

Kim, J. (2010). Intellectual development and Christian formation. In J. R. Estep and J. H. Kim (Eds.), *Christian Formation: Integrating theology and human development* (pp. 63-97). Nashville, TN: B&H Academic.

Kirkpatrick, L. A. (1992). An attachment-theory approach to the psychology of religion. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion, 2*, 3-28.

Kirkpatrick, L. A. & Shaver, P. R. (1990). Attachment theory and religion: Childhood attachments, religious beliefs, and conversion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 29*(3), 315-334.

Knight, H. H. III. (2001). The transformation of the human heart: The place of conversion in Wesley's theology. In K. J. Collins and J. H. Tyson (Eds.), *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (pp. 43-55). Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

Knott, B. (1982). *The utility of a metaphor: Examining the relevance of 'conversion' to second-generation Christians.* Unpublished term paper, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University.

Koch, T. (1995). Interpretive approaches in nursing research: The influence of Husserl and Heidegger. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 21*, 827-836.

Kohlberg, L. (1976). Moral stages and moralization. In T. Lickona (Ed.), *Moral Development and Behavior* (pp. 31-53). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Kreider, A. (1999). *The change of conversion and the origin of Christendom.* Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press.

Laubach, F. (1975). ἐπιστρέφω. In C. Brown (Ed.), *The new international dictionary of New Testament theology* (v.1, pp. 353-355). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Lawson, K. E. (2006). In right relationship with God: Childhood conversion in evangelical Christian traditions. In K. M. Yust, N. J. Aostre, S. E. Sasso, and E. C. Roehlkepartain (Eds.), *Nurturing child and adolescent spirituality: Perspectives from the world's religious traditions* (pp. 108-121). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Lazareth, W. H. (1960). *Luther on the Christian home: An application of the social ethics of the Reformation.* Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press.

LeVasseur, J. J. (2003). The problem of bracketing in phenomenology. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(3), 408-420.

Lichtman, M. (2006). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, A. T. (1990). *Ephesians*. Word biblical commentary series, v. 42. Dallas, TX: Word.

Loder, J. E. (1981). *The transforming moment: Understanding convictional experiences.* San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row.

Loder, J. E. (1989). *The transforming moment*. Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard.

Loder, J. E. (1998). *The logic of the spirit: Human development in theological perspective*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lopez, K. A. & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(5), 726-735.

Luft, S. (2003). Husserl's notion of the natural attitude and the shift to transcendental phenomenology. In A. T. Tymieniecka (Ed.), *Phenomenology world-wide. Foundations-expanding dynamic-life-engagements: A guide for research and study* (pp. 114-119). London: Kluwer Academic.

Luther, M. (1520). The freedom of a Christian. In T. Lull (Ed), *Martin Luther's basic theological writings* (pp. 403-427). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005.

Luther, M. (1522). The estate of marriage. In W. I. Brandt and H. Lehmann (Eds.), W. I. Brandt (Trans.), *Luther's Works* v. 45 (pp. 11-49). Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962.

Luther, M. (1524). To the councilmen of all cities in Germany that they establish and maintain Christian schools. In T. Lull (Ed), *Martin Luther's basic theological writings*, 3rd ed. (pp. 456-474). Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2112.

Luther, M. (1545). Preface to the complete edition of Luther's Latin writings. In L. W. Spitz and H. Lehmann (Eds.), *Luther's Works* v. 34 (pp. 327-343). Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960.

Maddix, M. A. (2010). Spiritual formation and Christian formation. In J. R. Estep and J. H. Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (pp. 237-271). Nashville, TN: B&H Academic.

Maggs-Rapport, F. (2000). Combining methodological approaches in research: Ethnography and interpretive phenomenology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *31*(1), 219-225.

Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing Qualitative Research,* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

May, S. (1990). *Conversion or nurture of children: A survey and analysis of post-Bushnell, popular literature and current curriculum.* Unpublished document, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.

May, S. (1993). *Reflections on childhood religious experiences: Patterns of similarity and variability in perceptions of adults from three evangelical churches.* Ed. D. Dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.

May, S., Posterski, B., Stonehouse, C., & Canwell, L. (2005). *Children matter: Celebrating their place in the church, family, and community.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

McGrath, A. E. (1998). *Historical theology: An introduction to the history of Christian thought.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

McGrath, A. E. (2007). *Christian theology.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

McIntosh, L. D. (1969). John Wesley: Conversion as continuum. *Mid-Stream, 8*(3), 50-65.

Merriam, S. B. (2002). Phenomenological Research. In S. B. Merriam and Associates, *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 93-95). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, K. G. (2001). Complex innocence, obligatory nurturance, and parental vigilance: 'The child' in the work of Menno Simons. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 134-141). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. London, UK: Routledge.

Moran, G. (1983). *Religious education development*. Minneapolis, MN: Winston.

Mulder, J. M. (2012). *Finding God: A treasury of conversion stories*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Muldoon, J. (1997). Introduction: The conversion of Europe. In J. Muldoon (Ed.), *Varieties of religious conversion in the middle ages* (pp. 1-10). Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

Mullin, R. B. (2002). *The Puritan as Yankee: A life of Horace Bushnell*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Munger, T. T. (1899). *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian*. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.

Neve, J. L. (1946). *A history of Christian thought.* Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Noll, M. A. (2003). *The rise of Evangelicalism: The age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

Oden, T. (2012). *John Wesley's teachings, v. 2: Christ and salvation.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Olson, R. E. (1999). *The story of Christian theology: Twenty centuries of tradition and reform.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

Olson, R. E. (2006). *Arminian theology: Myths and realities*. Downers Grove, ILL: IVP Academic.

Orme, N. (2001). *Medieval children*. London: Yale University Press.

Packer, J. I. (1989). The means of conversion. *Crux, 25*(4), pp. 14-22.

Paloutzian, R. F. (2014). Psychology of religious conversion and spiritual transformation. In L. R. Rambo and C. E. Farhadian (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of religious conversion* (pp. 209-239). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Paloutzian, R. F., Murkin, S., Streib, H., & Röbler-Namini, S. (2013). Conversion, deconversion, and spiritual transformation: A multilevel interdisciplinary view. In R. F. Paloutzian and C. L. Park (Eds.), *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality,* 2nd. ed. (pp. 399-421). New York: Guildford Press.

Parker, S. (2010). Research in Fowler's faith development theory. *Review of Religious Research, 51*(3), 233-52.

Parse, R. R. (1998). *The human becoming school of thought: A perspective for nurses and other health professionals.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluative methods*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peace, R. V. (1999). *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the twelve*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Piaget, J. (1970). Piaget's theory. In P. Mussen (Ed.), *Carmichael's manual of child psychology*, 3rd ed. (v. 1, pp. 710-732). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Piaget, J. (1972). *The child and reality: Problem of genetic psychology*. New York: Grossman.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle and S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology* (pp. 41-60). New York: Plenum Press.

Pratt, J. B. (1920). *The religious consciousness.* New York: Macmillan.

Richardson, J. T. (1985). The active vs. passive convert: Paradigm conflict in conversion recruitment research. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *24*(2), 163-179.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Santrock, J. (1999). *Life-span development*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Scanlon, M. J. (1969). *The Christian anthropology of John Wesley.* Doctor of Sacred Theology dissertation, Catholic University of America.

Scobie, G. E.W. (1973). Types of religious conversion. *Journal of Behavioral Science,* 1, 265-71.

Scobie, G. E.W. (1975). *Psychology of religion*. New York: Wiley.

Simons, M. (c.1540a). Christian baptism. In L. Verduin (Trans.) and J. C. Wenger, (Ed.), *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956.

Simons, M. (c.1540b). The nurture of children. In L. Verduin (Trans.) and J. C. Wenger (Ed.), *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956.

Simons, M. (c.1540c). Reply to false accusations. In L. Verduin (Trans.) and J. C. Wenger (Ed.), *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956.

Simons, M. (c.1540d). Reply to Gellius. In L. Verduin (Trans.) and J. C. Wenger (Ed.), *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956.

Simons, M. (c.1540e). True Christian faith. In L. Verduin (Trans.) and J. C. Wenger (Ed.), *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956.

Smith, G. T. (2001). *Beginning well: Christian conversion and authentic transformation.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Smith, G. T. (2010). *Transforming conversion: Rethinking the language and contours of Christian initiation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Smith, H. S. (1955). *Changing conceptions of original sin*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Soggin, J.A. (1997). שׁוּב šûb to return. In E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Theological lexicon of the Old Testament* (v. 3. pp. 1312-1317). Trans. M. E. Biddle. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

Spielberg, H. (1982). *The phenomenological movement*, 3rd ed. The Hague, Nertherlands: Martinus Nijhoff.

Spilka, B., Hood, R. W. Jr., Hunsberger, B., & Gorsuch, R. (2003). *The psychology of religion: An empirical approach,* 3rd ed. New York: Guildford.

Starbuck, E. D. (1901). *The psychology of religion: An empirical study of the growth of religious consciousness*. London: Walter Scott.

Stonehouse, C. (2004). Children in Wesleyan thought. In D. Ratcliffe (Ed.), *Children's spirituality: Christian perspectives, research and application,* (pp. 133-148). Eugene, OR: Cascade.

Stortz, M. E. (2001). Where or when was your servant innocent? Augustine on Childhood. In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought,* (pp. 78-102). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Strange, W. A. (1996). *Children in the early church.* Carlisle, UK: Paternoster.

Strauss, A. L. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A. L. & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, 2nd. ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strauss, G. (1978). *Luther's house of learning: Indoctrination of the young in the German Reformation*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Streib, H. (2001). Faith development theory revisited. *The international journal for the psychology of religion, 11*(3), 143-158.

Strohl, J. E. (2001). The child in Luther's theology: 'For what purpose do we older folks exist, other than to care for . . . the young? In M. J. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 134-141). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Swanson-Kauffman, K. M. & Schonwald, E. (1988). Phenomenology. In B. Sarter (Ed.), *Paths to knowledge: Innovative research methods for nursing* (pp. 97-105). New York: National League for Nursing.

Teasdale, M. (2012). Evangelism and identity in early American Methodism. *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, *47*(2), 89-109.

Tipson, B. (1975). How can the religious experience of the past be recovered. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *43*(4), 695-707.

Traina, C. L. H. (2001). A person in the making: Thomas Aquinas on children and childhood. In M. J. Bung (Ed.), *The child in Christian thought* (pp. 103-133). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Trigg, J. D. (1994). *Baptism in the theology of Martin Luther*. New York: Brill.

Tudge, J. (1990). Vygotsky, the zone of proximal development, and peer collaboration: Implications for classroom practice.'' In L. C. Moll (Ed.), L. S. *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology* (pp. 155-172). Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tyner, S. (2006). *Searching for the God of grace*. Nampa, CA: Pacific Press.

Van der Mescht, H. (1999). *Poetry, phenomenology, and 'reality.'* Paper presented at the Conference on Qualitative Research, July 5-8, 1999, Rand Africaans University, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman, (Eds.) (A. R. Luria, M. Lopez-Morillas & M. Cole [with J. V. Wertsch], (Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wadsworth, B. J. (1989). *Piaget's theory of cognitive and affective development.* New York: Longman.

Warne, J. (1742). *The downfal of Arminianism: or, Arminius (who falsely calls himself a son of the Church of England) tried and cast, (and in him all his Adherents).* London, UK: T. Cooper.

Warner, R. M. (2008). *Applied statistics.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weigle, L. A. (1888). Introduction. In H. Bushnell, *Christian nurture.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Wenger, J. C. (1956). *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. L. Verduin (Trans.) and J. C. Wenger (Ed.), Scottdale, PA: Herald Press.

Wesley, J. (c.1732/1986). On working out our own salvation. In F. Baker and A. C. Outler (Eds.), *The works of John Wesley* v. 3 (pp. 199-209). Nashville, TN: Abindgdon, 1986.

Wesley, J. (c.1746/1991). Journal 6. In W. R. Ward and R. P. Heitzenrater (Eds.), *The works of John Wesley* v. 20 (pp. 1-148)*. Nashville, TN: Abindgdon Press.

Wesley, J. (1750/1986). The Scripture way of salvation. In F. Baker and A. C. Outler (Eds.), *The works of John Wesley* v. 2 (pp. 152-169). Nashville, TN: Abindgdon, 1986.

Wesley, J. (1756/1872). A treatise on baptism. In *The works of the Rev. John Wesley* v. 10 (pp. 188-201). London: Wesleyan Conference Office.

Wesley, J. (c.1783/1986). On family religion. In F. Baker and A. C. Outler (Eds.), *The works of John Wesley* v. 3 (pp. 334-346). Nashville, TN: Abindgdon, 1986.

Wesley, J. (1790). *The complete English dictionary, explaining most of those hard words, which are found in the best English writers: By a lover of good English and common sense* (The second edition.). London: printed and sold at the New-Chapel, and at the Rev. Mr. Wesley's preaching-houses in town and country.

Wesley, J. (1817). *The doctrine of original sin: According to Scripture, reason and experience, in answer to Dr. Taylor*. New York, NY: The Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States.

Westerhoff, J. III. (2000). *Will our children have faith?,* rev. and exp. ed. Harrisburg, PA: Moorehouse.

Weston, C., Gandell, T., Beauchamp, J., McAlpine, L., Wiseman, C., & Beauchamp, C. (2001). Analyzing interview data: The development and evolution of a coding system. *Qualitative Sociology*, *24*(3), 381-400.

White, E. G. (1854). Duty of parents to their children. *Review and Herald,* September 19, p. 45-46.

White, E. G. (1885/1948). *Testimonies for the church v. 3.* Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1886). The burning of the books on magic. *Signs of the Times*, Feb. 18, p. 97-98.

White, E. G. (1888). The co-operation of man with God. *Review and Herald*, Oct. 30, p. 673-674.

White, E. G. (1891). Results of the new birth. *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 30, p. 56.

White, E. G. (1892/1977). *Steps to Christ.* Washington, DC: Review and Herald.

White, E. G. (1894). Parents and children to be agents for God. *Signs of the Times*, September 10, p. 691-692.

White, E. G. (1895). The grace of God manifested in good works. *Review and Herald*, Jan 29, p. 65-66.

White, E. G. (1898/2005). *Desire of ages*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1899). The sanctifying power of truth. *Review and Herald*, July 25, p. 469-470.

White, E. G. (1900/1948). *Testimonies for the church v. 6.* Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press

White, E. G. (1902/1948). *Testimonies for the church v. 7.* Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press

White, E. G. (1903/2002). *Education*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1905/2003). *The ministry of healing.* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1913). *Counsels to parents*, *teachers and students.* Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1915). *Life sketches of Ellen G. White.* Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1917/2010). *Prophets and kings.* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1923). *Fundamentals of Christian education.* Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Assoc.

White, E. G. (1923/1962). *Testimonies to ministers and gospel workers.* Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press.

White, E. G. (1946). *Evangelism as set forth in the writings of Ellen White.* Washington, DC: Review and Herald.

White, E. G. (1954/2002). *Child guidance.* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.

White, E. G. (1958/2006). *Selected Messages v. 1.* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.

White, E. G. (1964/2001). *Adventist home.* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.

White, E. G. (1964/2003). *That I May Know Him.* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.

White, E. G. (1973). *God's amazing grace.* Washington, DC: Review and Herald.

Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research, 11*(4), 522-537.

Wilcox, P. (1997). Conversion in the thought and experience of John Calvin. *Anvil*, *14* (2), 113-128.

Willhauck, S. E. (1992). *John Wesley's view of children: Foundations for contemporary Christian education.* Ph.D. Dissertation, Catholic University of America.

Williams, R. (1979). *Christian spirituality: A theological history from the New Testament to Luther and St. John of the cross.* Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

Witherup, R. D. (1994). *Conversion in the New Testament*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.

Wojnar, D. M. & Swanson, K .M. (2007). Phenomenology: An exploration. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 25(3), 172-180.

Wolff, R. F. (2002). Self-Reflection: An essential quality for phenomenological researchers. In S. B. Merriam and Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 117-119). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Yeatts, J. R. (1993). Helpful but inadequate: A critique of the developmental paradigm. *Christian Education Journal, 13*(1), 49-60.

Yount, William R. (2010). *Created to Learn*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic.

Zinnbauer, B. J. & Pargament, K. I. (1998). Spiritual conversion: A study of religious change among college students. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *37*(1), 161-80.

VITA

Edyta Jankiewicz
10395 Range Line Rd.
Berrien Springs, MI 49103
Phone 269 473 1126

Education:

2010 - 2016	PhD (Religious Education) SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs MI
2001 - 2005	MMin (Family Life) Avondale College, Cooranbong, Australia
1996 - 1998	MA (Religion) – Incomplete SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
1983 - 1986	BASc (Physiotherapy) South Australian Institute of Technology, Adelaide, Australia

Professional Experience:

Fall 2012 - present	Adjunct faculty, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs MI
Sep. 1986 - Aug. 2000	Physical therapist

Publications:

2013	"Horace Bushnell: Guided by his Wesleyan Heritage." Co-authored with Darius Jankiewicz. *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Fall 2013

2011	"Let the Little Children Come: Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Childhood." Co-authored with Darius Jankiewicz. *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, 49 (2), Autumn 2011
2011	Review of Stonehouse, Catherine, and May, Scottie, Listening to children on the spiritual journey: Guidance for those who teach and nurture, Baker Academic, 2010. *Journal of Research in Christian Education*, 20, 232-236, 2011.
2011	"Are children born sinners?" *Memory, Meaning and Faith Blog,* May, 2011.
2010	"Ellen White and Family Life: My Journey." *Adventist World: An International Paper for Seventh-day Adventists,* December 2010.