CHAPTER 6

Findings and Analysis of Ordinary Conversion

6.1 Introduction

Personal testimonies are the foundation upon which my practical-theological model of Pentecostal conversion is built and as such the following chapter marks the epicentre of this study. Having explored the practice and teaching surrounding conversion within the Lighthouse Christian Fellowship, in this chapter I present the findings of 30 in-depth testimony interviews, conducted with members of the congregation. As well as forming the empirical basis of the model, the findings presented here offer insights into the following research questions:

1. How do ordinary Pentecostals tell and interpret their conversion experiences?
2. What is believed to happen to, and what is gained by the convert when they become a Christian?

I begin by introducing the specific data collection and analysis methods used during the interview stage of the research project. I then separate my findings into three categories; firstly, the main themes which arose from the interviews, secondly, the respondents’ reflection upon their language about God and finally, the role attributed to the Holy Spirit in the lives of the respondents.

Verbatim quotations are provided throughout each stage in order to clearly ground my analysis within the experiences and reflections of respondents. I have aimed to present their experiences and beliefs in their own words as far as possible and according to the themes which arose from my analysis of the interview data.

Importantly, these interviews reveal a broader understanding of conversion at ground level as more than just the initial decision to become a Christian, although this decision is allocated a distinct significance. The findings also point to the limitation of viewing Pentecostal conversion purely in terms of stages and the importance of instead identifying overarching theological themes which run throughout believers’ testimonies. The most recurrent of these overarching themes were: regeneration, identity and destiny. It is these themes which identify the beliefs about God and theological experience surrounding Pentecostal conversion.
6.2 Interview Methods

Prior to in-depth interviews I conducted four focus group interviews with different Life Groups at LCF. These groups were made up of between four and ten people and took place in each group’s usual meeting place. Focus groups consisted of seven open questions, which were designed to encourage discussion between the group members. I facilitated discussion by asking additional questions where necessary to engage other members of the group but a core of seven questions remained the same for all groups. The purpose of these interviews was to engage respondents in discussion about conversion at each of Rambo’s different levels in order to gauge their language and understand more about the congregation’s means of attracting and nurturing new believers. The results of these discussions then informed my approach to the in-depth interviews which followed.

For the in-depth interviews I used a semi-structured life story approach, as I wanted to hear people’s testimonies first hand and allow them space to describe their walk with God. This gives respondents the chance to place their conversion experiences within their whole life context and allows for discussion of backsliding and their continued Christian journey rather than focusing on the moment of decision. It is the transcripts of these in-depth interviews which were analysed to identify the ordinary theology of Pentecostal conversion for this study.

6.2.1 Participants

In-depth interview participants were recruited and interviewed between September 2012 and February 2013 using a variation of “snowball” sampling.

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1 Typically these were members’ homes or church buildings.
2 See Appendix 1 for the focus group interview questions and structure. The questions were not asked in the order presented by Rambo. Rather I chose an order which best followed a typical narrative structure and would be less likely to interrupt the flow of the discussion.
3 Snowball or “chain” sampling identifies respondents based on the recommendations of people (see Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A New Sourcebook*, second edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994) p. 28; cited in Creswell, J. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998) p. 119). The first round of respondents was recruited from people who had consented to be contacted from the focus group interviews. I did not feel that these respondents were at any advantage or disadvantage to those who had not attended focus groups as they people had referenced their stories in the group sessions but had not gone into any detail or depth and all respondents were given the same information. The first group were then asked to recommend others from the congregation for interview (snowball sampling). This method initially