This paper has a limited intention. By revisiting two classic treatments of the twentieth century and one more recent publication, it seeks to reassess the significance of conversion for mission studies. All three of the works have addressed the psychology of Christian conversion and, in doing so, have provided their readers with insight into the psychological impact of the Christian message on human personality and culture, whether within a broadly Christian cultural context or as a catalyst for change and transformation in primary fields of mission, those areas where in Paul's terms the missionary is preaching Christ "where he has not been named."1

Before examining these treatments further it may be as well to define what is, and what is not, to be considered. First, there is no attempt to deal with conversion as it appears in other religious traditions, though, for example, in our times Westerners are being drawn to Islam and Buddhism and will give an account of "conversion" to these faiths which may well bear resemblances to what is described by our authorities. Secondly, conversion is not used as a term denoting change of denominational allegiance, as if to describe a Methodist who becomes a Roman Catholic. The subject is specifically conversion to Jesus Christ.

Such Christian conversion has its roots in the New Testament era, with the earliest accounts being given by Luke in Acts, those of Saul of Tarsus (given three times by Luke, presumably to emphasise its importance), Cornelius (given twice), the Ethiopian treasurer and eunuch, Lydia and the keeper of the jail at Philippi.2 In the cases of Saul and the jailer these are explicitly conversions to the risen Christ and calls to action. So, Saul asks: "Who are you Lord?" and the reply is: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting ... go into the city and it will be shown you what you must do," and the jailer asks: "What must I do to be saved?" and receives the answer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved with all your house."3 Cornelius is urged by Peter to trust in the crucified and risen Christ in order to receive the forgiveness of sins.4 While the idea of turning or returning to the Lord was common in the Old Testament (the Hebrew verb transliterated shub has 1,050 occurrences5 and is taken up in the 39 uses of the verb epistrephēin in the New Testament, as also in the use of metanoein in the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus, describing in both
cases a change of mind or direction and allied in Jesus' preaching to a call to recognise the advent of God's kingdom, what differentiates Christian conversion is that the turning is towards the person of Christ. So, Lesslie Newbigin defined it as "the inner turning of the heart and will to Christ"; but, in doing so, he is anxious to show that, as in the initial experience of Jesus' disciples in his earthly ministry, there remain three constituents to the experience: (1) a personal relation to him, (2) a visible community, (3) a pattern of behaviour. "The inner turning of the heart and will," he wrote, "must neither be separated from, nor identified with, membership in the visible community and commitment to the pattern of behaviour." The call to repentance and faith is a call to "turn round in order to participate in this new reality," that is, the kingdom of God, and is "a commitment to action."

I. William James

While the New Testament showed little interest in the psychology of conversion, with the emphasis, as Newbigin pointed out, on action rather than on experience, the three twentieth century treatments here have all focused on this aspect. William James (1842-1910) was a philosopher who taught at Harvard. He was the elder brother of the novelist Henry James. They were sons of a father who had been strongly influenced by the Swedish theosophist Swedenborg. William James belonged to the school known as "pragmatism," which has been defined as "the doctrine that the test of the value of any assertion lies in its practical consequences." This gave him a natural interest in conversion, for conversion may be thought to provide empirical evidence that ideas have identifiable effects. In his work Pragmatism of 1907, James argued that "true ideas are those that can be corroborated and verified ... an idea is made true by events." The work by which William James is best remembered is his Varieties of Religious Experience of 1902, the Gifford lectures at Edinburgh, which one day were to cause Karl Barth some difficulty when invited to give them, for they are required to be given on "natural religion." The ninth and tenth lectures are specifically devoted to conversion, although the rest of the book has a good deal of material which relates to it. His treatment has been fairly criticised as highly individualistic: James' case studies are of individuals in North American or European contexts and relate to their personal experiences. There is little here of the second constituent noted by Lesslie Newbigin, as essential to Christian conversion, relationship to the visible community, although changes in behaviour get due recognition. James' distinction between the "once born" and the "twice born," which he borrowed