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## Editorial: Conversion: Interdisciplinary Perspective

Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ

**Abstract:** For more than a year now conversion has been a hot topic of discussion in India. Newspapers and news magazines have been devoting a lot of space to it. Several people have openly expressed their opposition to conversion, especially to Christianity. Some even raised the question: Is not the Christian community using its educational activities, health services and social involvements to win converts? Others have come out in support of the Christian missionaries and showed their appreciation of the remarkable service the Church is rendering to the people of India. A few have even suggested that the opposition to conversion is politically motivated and that those who are vehemently opposed to conversion have a hidden agenda.

**Keywords:** Conversion, Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Religious Harmony, Converts

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Conversion  
Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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## *Contents*

Editorial .....	3
Letting the Converted speak. . .	
Towards an Emic Approach to Conversion .....	5
<i>John D'Mello</i>	
Tribes, Conversion and Sangh Parivar .....	23
<i>Virginus Xaxa</i>	
Conversion: Psychological Perspective .....	37
<i>Jose Parapully, SDB</i>	
Conversion: Legal Perspectives .....	51
<i>P.D. Mathew, SJ</i>	
Hindu Missionaries and Conversion .....	65
<i>Antony Mookenthottam, MSFS</i>	
The Muslim Attitude to Conversion .....	75
<i>Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui</i>	
Conversion: The Buddhist Way .....	81
<i>Rosario Rocha, SJ</i>	
Conversion: Turning or Returning?	
The Biblical Background of a Controversial Concept .....	87
<i>Rui de Menezes, SJ</i>	
Conversion in Mission History .....	101
<i>Jacob Kavunkal, SVD</i>	
Conversion in Church Documents .....	115
<i>Julian Saldanha, SJ</i>	
Conversions: The Gandhian Critique and Our Response .....	121
<i>Subhash Anand</i>	
Conversion: Christian Perspectives .....	141
<i>Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ</i>	
The Challenges to Christian Mission Today .....	161
<i>Consolidated Report of a CCBI Consultation</i>	
Bibliodrama: A Modern Body-Mind Hermeneutics .....	169
<i>Peter Erlenwein</i>	
Book Reviews .....	181

## ***Jnanadeepa*: Pune Journal of Religious Studies**

***Jnanadeepa*** (=“Light of Wisdom” pronounced as *Jñānadīpa*) is a biannual interdisciplinary journal of religious studies from an Indian Christian perspective. It is closely associated with Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth: Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, Pune 411014, India.

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## Editorial

For more than a year now conversion has been a hot topic of discussion in India. Newspapers and news magazines have been devoting a lot of space to it. Several people have openly expressed their opposition to conversion, especially to Christianity. Some even raised the question: Is not the Christian community using its educational activities, health services and social involvements to win converts? Others have come out in support of the Christian missionaries and showed their appreciation of the remarkable service the Church is rendering to the people of India. A few have even suggested that the opposition to conversion is politically motivated and that those who are vehemently opposed to conversion have a hidden agenda.

It is against this background that this issue of *Jnanadeepa* has chosen to deal with the topic of conversion. By treating the issue in an interdisciplinary manner we hope to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of religious conversion in our country.

There are three articles which deal with conversion from the perspective of the social sciences – sociology, psychology and anthropology. They are meant to shed light on the facts regarding conversion (how many are really being converted?) and the explanations as to why people get converted to Christianity. Since those who support conversion and those who oppose it have very different explanations, it will be very helpful to let the converted speak. This is precisely what the paper by an anthropologist does, as he is himself a tribal Christian.

Closely related to this is the article which discusses conversion from a legal point of view. It deals with Article 25 of the Constitution of India which confers on all persons the right “freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.” There is some doubt about the meaning of “the right to propagate” one’s religion. Does it include the right to convert another person to one’s religion? The article sheds light on this question.

Historically, the followers of practically all religions have been engaged in the work of winning new adherents to their faith. Hence, we have included in this issue articles dealing with the theory and practice of conversion among the Hindus, the Muslims and the Buddhists. Because of the recent controversies it was thought necessary to have several articles on Christianity and conversion. One paper develops the biblical perspective on conversion, while another deals with the understanding of conversion in mission history. A third inquires into how the documents of the magisterium of the Church view conversion. A fourth article suggests a rethinking of the whole issue in the context of India today.

Since Mahatma Gandhi seriously had reflected on the question of conversion and taken a clear stand on it, it was thought useful to study his views in depth. They can help us in our efforts to rethink our position. An article is devoted to it.

There are two new features in this issue. The first one is the report of a Consultation organised by the Commission for Proclamation of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India (LR). This Consultation dealt with the Challenges to Christian Mission Today. Many points discussed in the Consultation are closely related to the issue of conversion.

The other one is a paper on bibliodrama which is a holistic way of approaching texts/traditions. It is based on the conviction that a purely intellectual/academic way of dealing with texts/traditions is inadequate.

It is hoped that the articles in this issue will stimulate a lively discussion of the issue of conversion. In the situation of our country today, we need to develop an understanding of and attitude to conversion which will promote peace and harmony among the followers of various religions and contribute to national integration.

Kurien Kunnumpuram, SJ  
Editor