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Conversions and Transformations: Missiological Approaches to Religious Change

Title: *Christians of Maghreb Origin (CMO) in France and French Evangelical Protestant Churches (FEPCs): the role of social, cultural and religious values on conversion and affiliation processes*

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Abstract:

Religious conversion, as argued by proponents of both active agent and passive agent models, is understood to be both a personal and private experience as well as a collective and social one. As such, conversion is both a religious and a cultural phenomenon resulting from a complex, multivalent process. Furthermore, in that conversion is not simply an independent, individualized act, but rather an irreducibly social one, the process of conversion implies a re-orientation of personal identity (identity re-construction) which emerges from the vocabulary and explanatory scheme of the group into which the convert affiliates.

In the case of the people of Maghreb origin living in France, conversion often involves tradition-transition from Islam to an evangelical expression of Christianity. Despite the perceived cost to social and religious capital that comes with the departure from the prevailing religious tradition, tradition-transition conversion persists. To understand how tradition-transition conversion affects the identity (re)construction of these migrants it is essential to understand the dynamics of the conversion process. A recent qualitative investigation into the conversion and affiliation experiences of Christians of Maghreb Origin (CMO) has identified a range of social, cultural and religious values which contribute to the conversion and affiliation process. Through the use of the Cultural Value System (CVS) model which enables a non-normative comparison of cultures based on underlying cultural values, the role of identified social and cultural values on conversion and affiliation can be approximated. From the outcomes of this analysis together with additional contribution from conversion narratives of the CMO, the Relational-Experiential Conversion Model for CMO in France has emerged to provide a better summary explanation of the process of conversion-affiliation as an outcome of the interaction of certain social, cultural and religious values and their effect on religious norms.

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