

## Original Research Article

# Theological Understanding of Conversion from Luke 13:7-14 and Acts 2:14-38 and its Missiological Imperatives for African Christian Missions

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**Abstract:** The thrust of this paper is a theological understanding of conversion which comes from text-driven biblical preaching and its missiological imperative for Christian missions in Africa. The study adopted a descriptive approach to discuss conversion as it relates to missions from Lukan perspective in two passages; Luke 13:7-14 and Acts 2:14-38 noting that conversion and fulfillment of the Great Commission is central and critical to these texts. Inferences drawn from brief expositions of the two texts revealed that conversion is the need of everyone and authentic proclamation of the Gospel is important for true conversion to take place. It is also inferred that true conversion coming from repentance and having faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour should reflect in a new way of life or transformation evident in simplicity and care for others. The study submitted that it is imperative for contemporary church in Africa to understand conversion as necessary to rid the nations of different menace including corruption, ungodly leadership and poverty. It is also imperative for the church in Africa to proclaim the gospel capable of resulting into conversion and transformation by engaging in expository text-driven biblical preaching, lifestyle evangelism, and demonstrating the power of God through signs and wonders. The delivery of the word of God must be accompanied with effective exposition of the biblical text through preaching to stir the heart of the hearer to true conversion.

**Keywords:** Conversion, Lukan, Missions, Preaching, Text-Driven, Transformation.

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## INTRODUCTION

Conversion and its cognate, repentance are vital concepts in New Testament hermeneutics for the Christian life. It is also central to missions as it marks the genesis of a journey to becoming a member of the church, the Body of Christ, hence the fulfillment of the goals of missions; soul-winning and church-planting. In the early Christian traditions, Augustine of Hippo, and Martin Luther, the Reformer believed that conversion is to occur with dramatic changes resulting into transformations going by the experiences of the likes of Paul the Apostle [1]. As a result, conversion has

somewhat been associated with finding an escape route out of some unbearable sin and guilt [2]. In contrast to such psychological view of conversion, however, social scientists have provided an understanding of conversion from a more socio-scientific point of view. Following this approach, conversion has been taken to mean a situation wherein a person radically switches his or her belief, behavior, and allegiance from one religious community (say Judaism) to another (Christianity) [3].

In response to the various approaches, Joel B. Green, argues that giving careful attention to the narrative of Luke-Acts provides a significant rethinking

<sup>1</sup> J.E. Power, "Conversion and Call of Paul," in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, Daniel G. Reid (ed.), 216-224 (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 221.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1993), 5

about the nature of Christian conversion [4]. In these biblical texts, Luke sets forth the life of Jesus and the mission of the early church within the broader framework of the history of Israel [5] Therefore, this paper attempts a presentation of theological understanding of conversion as it relates to missions from Luke-Acts by examining two passages; Luke 13:7-14 and Acts 2:14-38. It is believed that the two texts are fundamental to understanding Lukan theology of conversion since both texts relate to missions. The paper adopts the descriptive research design, consulting relevant literature on the concept of conversion and Christian missions as it relates to the two texts.

### Conceptual understanding of Conversion, Missions, and Missiology

The Bible describes conversion with several words. The Old Testament uses the Hebrew word *nacham* (Jer. 8:6) and *shub* (Joel 2:13) which means “to be sorry”, or “to regret”, or “to turn back”, or “return” [6]. This implies that conversion is associated with a feeling of regret and a decision accompanied with action to desist from such. In the New Testament the two words which indicate conversion are *epistre*, *fw* (*epistrepo*), or “to turn”, or “to convert” (as in Luke 1:16-17) [7] and *metanoe*, *w* (*metanoeo*), or “heartfelt repentance” (as in Acts 2:38) [8]. Thus conversion, in the biblical-theological interpretation affirms a turning away from all that is detestable to God.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, conversion was attributed to the three sacraments of baptism, penance, and confirmation. D.G. Bloesch notes that baptism is a means of receiving the remission of sins while penance is that which a person must resort to for sins committed after baptism [9]. Penance is from the Latin *poenitentia* translated from the Greek word *metanoia* meaning, repentance or conversion. It is a designated form of service for confession and absolution [10] in order to mitigate the harshness of the

temporal penalties of sins [11]. However, with the dawn of the Reformation, conversion assumed a new theological interpretation. Reformation theology recognized conversion as “human response to regeneration, the infusion of new life into the soul” [12], Thus, conversion is a spiritual experience that is dependent empowered and directed by the grace of God.

Conversion therefore, is both divine and human initiated, implying that the eternal purpose of God is working in human and causing an individual to respond to divine provision of grace. Consequently, conversion is to be recognized as the work of God in the life of a person for reconciliation to God and for complete transformation [13]. This transformational dimension of conversion is what explains the biblical foundation for missions or the commitment to the great commission mandate of making disciples of all nations imperative. Missions therefore is a task that is not limited to the proclamation of the good new but also requires persuading men to repent and be converted when they have believed the gospel [14].

Missions has a strong ethical tone of conversion demanding for transformation by accepting commitment to serve God and obey His covenanted laws for justice, love, mercy and humility. The call for radical change of personal allegiance and to embrace a range of ethical commitments entails rejecting oppressions and embracing good deeds through having compassion and integrity.

### Missions

The word “missions” comes from the Latin *mitto* which is a translation of the Greek word *apostello* meaning, to send [15]. The implication of this is that missions entails the idea of departing the comfort of the fellowship of other believers for the purpose of engaging with those who have not heard the Gospel or

<sup>4</sup> Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), 17

<sup>5</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 61.

<sup>6</sup> D.G. Bloesch, “Conversion,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Walter A. Elwell (ed.) 296-297 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1984), 296.

<sup>7</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Greek Testament Commentary NIGTC*, I. Howard Marshall, and W. Ward Gasque (eds.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The Paternoster Press William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 58.

<sup>8</sup> Bloesch, 296.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 296.

<sup>10</sup> Absolution is the authoritative declaration of the forgiveness of sins in response to confession. It is based on the interpretation of Matthew 16:19 that the power to

“bind or to loose” sins was conferred on Peter by Jesus. See, David Kennedy, “Forgiveness,” in *Christianity: The Complete Guide*, John Bowden (ed.), 470-477 (London: Continuum, 2005), 473.

<sup>11</sup> David Kennedy, “Forgiveness,” in *Christianity: The Complete Guide*, John Bowden (ed.), 470-477 (London: Continuum, 2005), 473;

<sup>12</sup> Bloesch, 296.

<sup>13</sup> S. McKnight, “Conversion,” in *Dictionary of Mission Theology* John Corrier (ed.) (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 71.

<sup>14</sup> Richard D. Love, “Conversion,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* A. Scott Moreau (ed.) 231-232 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 231.

<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel Oladapo Aremu Ajani, “The Kingdom of God and its Missiological Imperatives for the Contemporary African Christian Mission,” *Oghomoso Journal of Theology (OJOT)*, Vo. XII, 2007, 122.

received Christ yet. Although missions may be described as an intentional effort to lead others to the saving faith in Jesus Christ, Scott Moreau *et al.*, affirm that missions is broader, and refers to “everything the church is doing that points toward the kingdom of God” [16]. On the extensive scope of Christian missions, David J. Bosch noted that “Christian missions gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as it was portrayed first in the story of the covenant people of Israel and then, supremely in the birth, life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth” [17]. Thus, missions begin with members of the Body of Christ or the Church, seeking for others that they may also develop familial relationship with God.

Given this assertion, missions is hereby defined as a deliberate effort of Christians or the church to be loyal disciples of Christ by being obedient to the great commission of proclaiming Christ as the only Saviour, entreating the sinner to salvation and discipleship through their conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Missiology

The term missiology refers to the formal academic study of all aspects of missionary enterprise. It is a branch of Christian theology that seeks to look at the world from the viewpoint of a commitment to the ideals of Christian faith [18]. Inherent in missiology is the study of the person and nature of the triune God, the created world and the church, as well as the interactions among the three [19]. This position may further be buttressed by the definition of Johannes Verkuyl and quoted by Ezekiel O. Ajani that missiology is the “study of the salvation activities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit throughout the world, geared towards bringing the kingdom of God into existence” [20]. In the light of this definition, the concerns of missiology as categorized by Moreau *et al* are: identity of the nature of mission, the goal of missions, and the means or methods of missions [21]. God initiates and owns

mission by His nature of love, the goal of bringing the human back to God is fulfilled in Christ who also commissioned the Church to spread the good news to all people in missions by the Holy Spirit.

A more comprehensive definition of missiology is from Allan Tippett. He defines missiology as the “academic discipline or science which researches, records, and applies data relating to the biblical origin, the history, including the use of documentary materials, anthropological principles and techniques and the theological base of Christian mission” [22]. The products of the research thus become tools for the effective communication of the gospel to the non-Christian which may lead to their conversion and planting of churches. Collaborating this view, Ajani also defines missiology as the “science of missions; the study of doing missions with interest in its history, theology, strategies, methods and implementation with the intent of fulfilling the great commission and enhancing the kingdom of God” [23]. It thus appears that missiology expresses as God in mission bringing the church in missions to communicate the good news of salvation through every activity it performed on behalf of God to the world to establish the purpose of God for humankind.

### Theology of Conversion in Luke 3:7-14 and Acts 2:14:38

The centrality of conversion in Luke-Acts is established by many scholars [24]. Locating conversion

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Series, 2020. Retrieved from <https://ebooks.aiu.ac.ke/show/1072/pdf> on 12/01/23

<sup>22</sup> Allan Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1987), xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Ajani, 123.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, Joel B. Green did an exclusive work on Conversion in Luke-Acts. (Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), 1-325.). Thomas Finn detects twenty-one conversion accounts in the Acts of the Apostles and claims that “conversion is the major theme in Luke’s second volume.” (Thomas M. Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997): 27). Also, Charles Talbert finds ten accounts of conversion in Acts” (Charles Talbert, “Conversion in the Acts of the Apostles: An Ancient Auditor’s Perceptions,” in *Reading Luke-Acts in its Mediterranean Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 135.). Guy Nave also maintains that repentance is “a keynote of the message in Luke-Acts,” and the book of Acts is “full of conversion stories” (Guy Nave, *Repentance in Luke-Acts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 3.). While Beverly Gaventa eschews any conversion pattern in Luke-Acts, the author however devotes over half of her important study of “aspects of conversion in the New Testament” to the Lukan narrative. (Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New

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<sup>16</sup> A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 17.

<sup>17</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> A.S. Marianne, “Missiology,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Walter A. Elwell (ed.) 780-783 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1984), 780.

<sup>20</sup> Ajani, 123.

<sup>21</sup> A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. Encountering Mission

within the frame of missions from Luke 3:7-14 and Acts 2:14:38 reveal five main factors; which are first, the theocentric nature of the texts. In the Luke, the announcement of the angel, Gabriel on the ministerial role of John was to go before, and prepare the people for the advent of the Lord. The theocentric nature of conversion here shows how John began his presentation of the gospel; "A voice of one calling in the wilderness... And all people will see God's salvation" (3:4-6, NIV). Similarly, in the Acts of the Apostles, the address of Peter to the Jerusalem audience shortly after the descent of the Holy Spirit like a flame of fire bears the words "Repent, therefore, and turn to God" (Acts 3:19, NIV).

Secondly, embedded in both texts is the unequivocal response of the audience, "What shall we do?" (Luke 3:10,12, 14; Acts 2:37). Third, both texts represent the powerful preaching of the Word, leading to the invitation for conversion. The fourth evidence is that both texts indicate that conversion is the appropriate human response to God's revelation and condition for Salvation. The fifth factor is that the two texts bear the voice of different categories of persons either by profession or by nationality, all in anticipation of the same need for God. Thus, the Lukan introduction of John the Baptist and his ministry and the interpretation of the Pentecost experience by Peter in Luke 3: 7-14 and Acts 2:14:38 are pivotal for understanding Lukan theology of conversion.

### Introduction to Luke-Acts

The tradition of the church holds that Luke authored the third Gospel and the book of Acts. He is said to be a Gentile, a physician and a companion of Paul the Apostle [25]. The two-volume was addressed to Theophilus, referred to as the "most excellent." Based on the phrase, "most excellent" some have indicated that Theophilus is a proper name which refers to some type of Roman official since Paul also used the same title for Felix and Festus (Acts 23:26; 24:3 and 26:25) [26]. Also, there is a view that Theophilus was a good friend of Luke, possibly a wealthy patron who

probably was responsible for the publication of Luke-Acts [27].

Moreover, based on the etymological meaning of the name Theophilus meaning "Lover or Beloved of God" suggested that the book was addressed to the Christian. Given the explicit emphasis concerning the Gentiles and the purpose of the Book, one could envision a wider audience of Gentiles, Jews and unbelievers. While Luke's Gospel presents the detail works and teachings of Christ primarily those critical for understanding the way of salvation from Jesus' birth to his ascension, the sequel records the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the missions of the early Christians [28].

### Brief Exposition of Luke 3:7-14

The goal and purpose of John in this text is to prepare a people for the coming Messiah (Luke 3:4; 17). In line with this goal, John preached repentance as the only means of getting into the kingdom of God. The text, Luke 3:7-14 may be divided into two sections, which are Verses 7-9 and Verses 10-14.

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:7-9).

These verses present the prophetic preaching of John on the coming wrath of God. Here, John uses the imagery of the day of the Lord, the nearness of the judgment of God upon all nations to call for true repentance [ 29 ]. He condemned his audience by referring to them as gennh, mata evcidnw/n, meaning that which is born of vipers, an allegorical use of poisonous snakes in Israel with deadly venom affecting the respiratory system and destroying the red blood cells [30]. This metaphor describes the ways of life of

Testament," *OBT 20* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 52-129.).<sup>24</sup> Joel B. Green, *Conversion in Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2015), 1-325.

<sup>25</sup>Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke: Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament*, Mikeal C. Parsons, Charles h. Talbert, and Bruce W. Longenecker (eds.) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: BakerAcademic, 2015), 5.

<sup>26</sup>Robert J. Cara, "Luke." In *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, Michael J. Kruger (ed.). (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2016), 96. See also Danny McCain, *Notes on Acts of the Apostle* (Bukuru, Jos: Africa Christian Textbooks, ACTS, 2001), 17.

<sup>27</sup>D.A Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1992), 117.

<sup>28</sup>Kenneth Barker, (ed.), *The NIV Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1985), 1533; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Dynamic* (Colorado Spring: Cook International, 1988), 12.

<sup>29</sup>Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50 Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Moises Silva ed. Vol. 1. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), 299.

<sup>30</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke: The New American Commentary an Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture NIV Text* Vol. 24, David S. Dockery

the Pharisees and Sadducees characterized by self-righteousness and unbelief and capable of bringing death and destruction to life.

The emphasis here is that baptism and holy living cannot be separated. It is expected that authentic conversion experience must affect life for godly conduct. Further in this section of the text, John warned that the claim of being children of Abraham by covenant is not adequate to escape the judgment of God unless this is accompanied by conversion. Leon Morris asserts that "Jews were apt to think that God would ultimately be kind to them based on the merits of Abraham if they had none of their own" [31]. In clearing this ambiguity, John reminded his hearers that in the Day of Judgment, everyone would stand as an individual before God. Therefore, it is imperative for every individual to recognize their need for repentance.

I. Luke 3: 10-14:

10 "What should we do then?" the crowd asked. 11 John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." 12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" 13 "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them. 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely-- be content with your pay." (Luke 3:10-14, NIV)

In these verses, John presents the response of the crowd as well as his detailed exposition on what true repentance entails. The phrase "what shall we do" suggests that the hearers of John have been touched by the message and they were seeking a relationship with God. John emphasizes in Verses 10-14 that repentance means not only being sorrowful for sins, but also having attitude accompanied by noticeable change of behavior [32]. John demands specific actions from the wealthy, the tax collector, and the soldier as a mark of their turning to God. The rich are to share with those who do not have (Vs.11); the tax collectors should not collect more than what the law requires (Vs. 12), and in Verse 14, the soldiers are not to intimidate or accuse falsely but to be contented with their wages.

### Brief Exposition of Acts 2: 14-38

The miraculous coming of the Holy Spirit forty days after the Ascension of Jesus Christ is a significant event in the life of the early church missions

(ed.). (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1992), 132.

<sup>31</sup> Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary* Revised ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 105.

<sup>32</sup> Craig L. Bloomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos* (Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2006), 28.

recorded in Acts Chapter 2. This experience provides "a dramatic confirmation for the divine origin and truth of disciples' message and the ministry of the early Christians" [33]. In verses 40 of Chapter 2, Luke records Peter's interpretation of the Pentecost experience. Similar to that of John as earlier discussed, the speech of Peter can be divided into two main parts; of verses 16-21, and verses 22-36. The introduction is verses 14 and 15, while the conclusion is in verses 37-40 [34]. Each section is as hereby discussed;

Verses. 14 -15:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! (Acts 2:14-15)

In addressing the dilemma of the onlooker, Peter raised his voice and declared; the word "declared" (avpefqe, gxato) is from the root avpofqe, ggomai, which means to speak out, or declare with reference to inspiration [35]. Mikeal C. Parsons maintains that "it is the same word used to describe the inspired speech that the Spirit gave to the believers who were speaking in other tongues, and its effect is not only to underscore the speech of Pentecost as divinely inspired, but to also stress that Peter's interpretation of the event is likewise authoritatively inspired" [36]. Thus, the address was directed at Judeans and all who live in Jerusalem. The implication of this is that for the proclamation of the word of God to be effective, it must rest on the divine inspiration and must also be preached to all people.

Verses 16-21:

16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' (Acts 2:16-21)

<sup>33</sup> Bloomberg, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Parsons, *Acts: Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament*, Mikeal C. Parsons, Charles H. Talbert (eds.). (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 41.

<sup>35</sup> "avpefqe,gxato" in Bibleworks 7 Microsoft Incorporated

<sup>36</sup> Parsons, 41.

Here Peter quoted from the prophecy of Joel in Joel 2: 28-3:3. This lay a foundation for his preaching. This quotation is not only significant for those present but also for the disciples as it helps them to “understand that the gospel will eventually go to Gentiles as well” [37]. By implication, the gospel is sent to others outside of the current sphere and location.

Verses 22-36:

**22** "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. **23** This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **24** But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. **25** David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. **26** Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, **27** because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. **28** You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." **29** "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. **30** But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. **31** Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. **32** God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. **33** Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. **34** For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand. **35** until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." **36** "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:22-36, NIV)

These verses are the heart of the message of Peter. His argument is that if the last day implicit in the prophesy of Joel has come, then the Messiah must have appeared, and this in the person of Jesus Christ [38]. Peter organizes his argument by quoting from the Scriptures to which some of his audience were familiar. He explains that God had made the Crucified Jesus both

Lord and Christ and Has raised Him to be the only One to whom all must call for salvation.

Verses 37-40:

**37** When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" **38** Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off-- for all whom the Lord our God will call." **40** With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." (Acts 2:37-40, NIV)

Upon hearing the sermon of Peter, the crowd was cut to the heart. Being “cut to the heart” or *katenu,ghsan th/ kardi,a*( indicates that the heart of individual present was pierced by the Word of God which Peter proclaimed and this provoke the statement “what shall we do?” This question according to Craig S. Keener “concerns what is required for Salvation” [39]. Responding to the question of the audience, Peter specifies two things that must be done; to repent and then be baptized. Repentance, a turning away from sin and to God, is essential for salvation and is needed by those who have heard the Word of God, who knew the prophecies but are going along a different direction and away from God [40]. Repentance must precede baptism which, according to Kenner, was a sign of conversion to Judaism and is normally reserved for pagans. Thus, by calling for repentance and baptism, Peter invites his audience to give a public and radical testimony and not a private, non-committal demand for salvation with no condition [41].

#### **Inferences from Luke 3:7-14 and Acts 2: 14:40**

The two texts; Luke 3:7-14 and Acts 2:14-40 indicate that conversion in Luke-Acts is a process that involves essential actions from which a number of inferences can be drawn. First, both passages reveal that authentic gospel proclamation is necessary for true repentance to take place. The preaching of John in Luke 3:7-14 and that of Peter in Acts 2: 14-40 reveal that God proffer repentance as the principal way to deal with the problem of sins and a means by which forgiveness of sins might be received and for gaining eternal life. Repentance is, therefore “both the content

<sup>37</sup> Bloomberg, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Bloomberg, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2012), 971.

<sup>40</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *Acts: Chapters 1-14* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 39.

<sup>41</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Second edition (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2014), 324-325.

and the appropriate response to kingdom preaching” [42].

A second import is that true repentance should produce a lifestyle of radical simplicity and care for the need of others. This is decisively emphasized in Luke 3:7–14, where John identifies the markers of repentance in especially socioeconomic terms for the crowd, the tax collectors, and soldiers; and in Acts 2:42–47, the message of Peter emphasizes economic fellowship and hospitality as typical correlates of conversion. Green affirms that “turning” is aimed at a transformation of day-to-day patterns of thinking, feeling, believing, and behaving [43]. Following the same line of thought, Darrell L. Bock avers that true repentance in practical terms is not just about ascetic lifestyle or a particular feeling of remorse, neither is it in mere partaking in some religious rites, nor in some form of mere mental acknowledgement, rather, it is in responding to God and being just in relationship with fellow humans beings [44].

The third significance of the two texts for a theological understanding of conversion in Luke-Acts is that the hearing of God’s word ought to generate curiosity and elicit decision which in turn informs faith. The speech and sermons of John and Peter indicate that appropriate response to the good news is to repent and be baptized. Keener alludes that the answer of John and Peter to the question of how to be saved “infuse the content of conversion in Luke with special meaning that is, faith in Jesus Christ” [45]. Thus, it is evident from Luke-Acts that what informs Luke understanding of faith is repentance. For Luke, genuine faith in Jesus as Lord requires an acknowledgement of the Lordship of Jesus which translates to making an adjustment on what He demands.

The final deduction from the exposition of the passages under consideration is that conversion is the need of everyone. Both John and Peter preached their messages to multitudes comprising people of different status and ethnic backgrounds. While John spoke to multitude mostly comprising of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Luke 7:7-8), the audience of Peter were people from all nations of the world (Acts 2:9-11).

### Imperatives for Christian Missions in Africa

Africa is a society having religion as major factor in social, political, economic, and cultural expressions of life. Although a continent generally believed is marked for enhancement and transformation

of Christianity globally [46], many African nations are saddled with various challenges including poverty, corruption and ungodly leadership. With nine countries out of seventeen most corrupt nations of the world in the sub-Sahara Africa [47], conversion to result in transformation is a necessity. From the above discussion, it is clear that the church in contemporary Africa has crucial roles to play in leading people to repentance. Amongst other identifiable roles, this paper highlights the following as imperatives for the church

Preaching as catalyst for Conversion: Preaching in the contemporary African church needs to move from topical to expository or text-driven, which honors the truth of the Scripture as given by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The goal of preaching ought to aim at discovery of the God-inspired meaning through historical-grammatical-theological investigations and interpretations. Daniel Akin et al emphasize that engaging and compelling proclamation of the Gospel with illustrations inspired by the Holy Spirit would help the preacher to explain the interpretation of biblical text to effect conversions and changed lives [48]. This was exemplified in the preaching of John and Peter as seen from the two texts considered. If people will be convicted of sins, and request for what must be done to be saved, the interpretation and communication of biblical texts should represent the substance, structure, and the spirit of the chosen text [49].

The substance of a text is the meaning embedded in the text and can only be discovered when a preacher seeks to understand what the text means by studying the text in its original language, and employing all the available exegetical tools. While, the structure speaks of how a biblical author arranged the word, phrases, clauses and sentences to present the truth, the spirit of the text has to do with the genre; didactic, epistolary, poetry, and parable. All these must be considered to arrive at the intended meaning of the author which is to be communicated in the contemporary language by the preacher.

<sup>46</sup> Kwame Bediako, “Africa and Christianity on the Threshold of the Third Millennium: The Religion Dimension” in *African Affairs* (2000), 99: 3030.

<sup>47</sup> Obaji M. Agbiji and Ignatius Swart, “Religion and Social Transformation in Africa: A Critical and Appreciative Perspective” in *Scriptura*, 114, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script> on Oct. 8, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis and Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Robby Gallaty and Steven Smith, *Preaching for the Rest of Us: Essentials for Text-Driven Preaching* (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Academic, 2018), 25.

<sup>42</sup> Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 975.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, Green, 3

<sup>44</sup> Bock, 315.

<sup>45</sup> Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 975

Lifestyle Evangelism: Missions in the contemporary African society demands an “insider movement.” Insider movement, according to Rebecca Lewis, is

any movement to faith in Christ where the gospel flows through preexisting communities and social networks, and where believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible [50].

This means that evangelism is the primary focus in missions. It then must entail proclamation of salvation in Christ to nonbelievers, announcing forgiveness of sins, calling people to repentance and developing faith in Christ, and inviting them to become living members of the earthly community of Christ, which is the church and to begin new life in the power of the Holy Spirit [51]. Thus, Christian missions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be left to the pastor and few church workers only. It is essential for those who have accepted salvation in Christ to invite others who are yet to do so to come to salvation in Christ as well. This is what M. David Sills refers to as applying marketing philosophy [52]. What is being enjoyed by someone out to be shared with others so they can also benefit. One fact that is evident from the theological understanding of conversion in Luke-Acts is that conversion is both personal and social. This means that while conversion basically connotes a change in the relationship with God, it also has to do with a change in the attitudes toward other people.

Bloesch notes that conversion “is a spiritual event with far-reaching social implications. It entails accepting Christ not only as Saviour from sins but also as Lord of all life” [53]. Therefore, the Christian must adopt a lifestyle that is in agreement with the life of Christ who not only gives people a blessed assurance for all eternity but also provides reliefs for their physical and material needs.

Power Evangelism: The role of the Holy Spirit in missions cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, for the church in Africa to lead people to conversion, power

evangelism approach needs to be considered. Power evangelism is “a presentation of the gospel that is rational but also transcends the rational” [54]. It is to explain the kingdom of God with the demonstration of the power of God through the working of the Holy Spirit. It is clear from the book of Acts that the very first thing that arrested the onlooker was the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit. The nature of all human and specifically African, is such that requires demonstrations of the supernatural through miraculous deeds in matters of religion and faith. Kalu Ogbu emphasizes on the power of God and His word to provide ability to resist the power of evil forces and empower the church in Africa to offer enormous hope extending from religion to the society [55].

Similarly, John Wimber asserts that the making of obedient disciples who are fully formed into the church or the Body of Christ is almost impossible apart from the Holy Spirit and power of God [56]. Thus, if the church in Africa will be involved in authentic missions, Christians and indeed preachers must be fully connected with the source of absolute power, the Holy Spirit. The invitation for conversion entails posing a challenge to the negative domain of evil, sin, and injustice of which there would be a counter reaction in opposition to the kingdom of light. The Holy Spirit will provide the power for victory.

## CONCLUSION

This study has focused on the theological understanding of conversion in Luke-Acts and its missiological imperatives for the contemporary Africa Christian Mission. An attempt was made to define and elucidate on conversion, missions, and missiology. Also, a brief exposition of two passages, one from the gospel according to Luke and the other from Acts of the Apostle was carried out to fully decipher the theology of Luke on conversion in the two documents. Conversion in Luke-Acts is not just about being sorrowful for sin but a phenomenon that is accompanied by a change of behaviour emanating from effective biblical preaching. It is a spiritual event with concrete evidence and far-reaching social implications.

Reliably, strong teachings of the word of God from theological, ethical and missiological perspectives

<sup>50</sup> Rebecca Lewis, “Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities. Insider Movements: The conversation Continues,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 24:2 (summer 2007), 75.

<sup>51</sup> Bosch, “Evangelism: Theological Currents and Cross-currents Today,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (July 1987), 98-102, 100.

<sup>52</sup> M. David Sills, “Mission and Discipleship,” in Bruce Riley Ashford (ed.) *Theology and Practice of Mission* (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Academic, 2018), 187.

<sup>53</sup> Bloesch, 297.

<sup>54</sup> John Wimber, “Power Evangelism: Definitions and Directions,” In C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer (eds.) *Wrestling with Dark Angels*, 13-42 (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1990), 29.

<sup>55</sup> Kalu Ogbu, “Globalization & Religion: The Pentecostal Model in Contemporary Africa” in Kalu, W, Wabimko, N and Falola, T. (eds.) *African Pentecostalism: Global Discourse Migrations, Exchanges, and Connections, The Collected Essays of Ogbu Uke Kalu*, Vol.1: 57-183.

<sup>56</sup> Wimber, 22.

will bring the desired transformation expected through the church in Africa to the society. Thus, the contemporary church in Africa has the obligation of presenting the gospel by engaging in expository text-driven biblical preaching, lifestyle evangelism, and by demonstrating the power of God through signs and wonders. This is a challenge for every believer who desires to be true disciple of Christ and ready to bring about converted disciples with whom transformation can take place in Africa.

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