



Notice for the PhD Viva-Voce Examination

Ms Mary Varughese, Registration Number: 1344204, PhD Scholar at the School of Psychological Sciences, Education and Social Work, CHRIST (Deemed to be University) will defend her PhD thesis at the public viva-voce examination on Friday, 21 November 2025 at 2.00 pm in Room No. 044, Ground Floor, R & D Block, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru – 560029, Karnataka, India.

Title of the Thesis : Trauma During and After Religious Conversion: A Phenomenological Study

Discipline : Psychology

External Examiner - I : Dr Watinaro Longkumer
Associate Professor
St Joseph University
Virgin Town, Ikishe Model Village, Chümoukedima
Nagaland - 797115

External Examiner - II : Dr Anish K R
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Rajagiri College of Social Sciences (Autonomous),
Rajagiri P.O, Kalamassery
Cochin - 683104, Kerala

Supervisor : Dr Tony Sam George
Professor (Former)
School of Psychological Sciences, Education and Social Work
CHRIST (Deemed to be University)
Bengaluru - 560029
Karnataka

Co-Supervisor : Dr Varghese K J
Professor
School of Psychological Sciences, Education and Social Work
CHRIST (Deemed to be University)
Bengaluru - 560029
Karnataka

The members of the Research Advisory Committee of the Scholar, the faculty members of the Department and the School, interested experts and research scholars of all the branches of research are cordially invited to attend this open viva-voce examination.

Place: Bengaluru
Date: 14 November 2025


Registrar (Academics)

ABSTRACT

Religious conversion is the process of leaving previously held sacred beliefs associated with one religion in favor of adopting a distinct set of beliefs from another religious tradition. Among many other reasons for conversion, this process could begin as a personal quest to find meaning in life or it could be a response to a vision or miracle that occurs to a person. The aim of this research is to understand the trauma that a religious convert could face during and after the process of conversion by using the phenomenological perspective. In this research, trauma has been defined both as found in the DSM V as an overwhelming one-time event or events (as evidenced in PTSD) and as developmental traumas that “occur over time and gradually affect and alter a person’s neurological system to the point that it remains in a traumatic state” (Hensley, 2009, pg. 5). The latter could be referred to as small-t traumas.

To achieve the purpose of the study, the Qualitative Research method was chosen to enable a deeper examining of the thought processes and meaning making mechanisms involved in responses to circumstances that cause trauma for the religious convert. Within the methodologies available the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used.

Snowballing Convenience Sampling Method was used to identify participants for the study. The main criteria for inclusion were that the participants would have had to be identifying as Christians for 5 years (Christians were chosen for the research to keep the scope of the study more specific) or more, should be citizens of India, and residing in Bangalore at the time of the interview. For each participant, two to three in-depth interviews were conducted that were an hour long.

India does not look favorably on religious conversion as indicated by the anti-conversion laws advocated by several Indian states. This leads to religious converts being misunderstood and sometimes ill-treated both within the community they live in and families they belong to. Results from this study indicate that trauma is present in religious converts. There are four major themes that emerge in this study.

The study identifies three key issues. First, trauma resulting from religious conversion is not unidirectional; it extends beyond the individual convert, affecting those in their social and cultural milieu, which, in turn impacts the convert. Second, a cultural trauma is experienced and articulated by those affected by the converts’ decision, reflecting broader social and communal disruptions. Third, this cultural trauma gives rise to what the researcher terms “cultural guilt” in the religious convert.

Keywords: *Trauma, Religious Conversion, Culture.*

Publication:

1. Mary Varughese – Religious Conversion and Cultural Trauma. International Journal For Religious Freedom. **IJRF** 17.2 (2024) | doi.org/10.59484/SHIU4034 | 67–80