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Conference Theme:
Conversions and Transformations:
Missiological Approach to Religious Change

AUTHENTIC CONVERSION:
becoming who we are created to be

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Abstract:

Conversion to Christianity in Australia today can be understood as resulting from non-Christians desiring, observing and experiencing genuine authenticity. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with recent converts to Christianity, this paper demonstrates first that religious conversion is fuelled by a desire for authenticity. Secondly, religious conversion is resourced by Christians who embrace and exhibit authenticity in their personal, social and spiritual lives. Thirdly, God enables authenticity to develop and flourish. Influenced by Charles Taylor and aspects of Trinitarian theology, the paper argues that this genuine authenticity is relational in nature: focusing not (just) on the self but also on relationship with God and significant connection with, and responsibility toward, others. This understanding rightly challenges the notion of authenticity as a narcissistic actualisation that prioritises the self over external relationships and responsibilities. When relational authenticity is sought and realised by converts, healthy transformation results. This transformation sees new converts 'becoming' the people they were created to be: unique persons who see their worth and their responsibilities in the light of their relationships with God and with others.

Lynne Taylor is a PhD candidate in theology at Flinders University of South Australia where she is using a methodology of grounded theory to investigate why people are becoming Christians in Australia today.

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