STUDIA PATRISTICA

VOL. LXXVII

Papers presented at the Seventeenth International Conference
on Patristic Studies held
in Oxford 2015

Edited by
MARKUS VINZENT

Volume 3:
Becoming Christian in the Late Antique West
(3rd-6th Centuries)

Edited by
ARIANE BODIN, CAMILLE GERZAGUET and
MATTHIEU PIGNOT

PEETERS
LEUVEN – PARIS – BRISTOL, CT
2017

The Shipwrecks and Philosophers: The Rhetoric of Aristocratic Conversion in the Late 4th and Early 5th Centuries[1]

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Abstract

In this study the literary aspects of the conversion to Christianity are discussed. The research has been based on the letters of Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridon, Augustine of Hippo, and Paulinus of Nola. As we know, letters were a very effective medium of the early Christian public relations, for they were vastly copied, read aloud in the circles of noblemen and highly influential in creating the symbolic sphere. The form and style of communication *e.g.* the metaphors used in trumpeting the new noble Christian can give us insight not only into the art of rhetoric but also into the epistemological ramifications, imaginary schemes that constituted thinking of the aristocracy in times when Christian life became an attractive choice. The goal of this study is to present the detailed picture and systematization of the various modes in which conversion was treated as a literary theme in the correspondence of the studied period. The article focuses on two different literary phenomena: 1. The rhetoric of persuading to conversion; 2. The literary descriptions of famous aristocratic conversions. It shows that in the analyzed letters[2] two types of metaphors prevailed: those presenting conversion as avoidance of danger, specifically of shipwrecking or falling into slavery, and those painting the image of the converted as a true philosopher. It should be also noted that I make one generic exception to comment briefly on the exceptional case of the self-persuasion of Hilary of Arles that we find in hagiography.

Definitions, methods, hypothesis

For all we know the term 'conversion' as used here is a metaphor in itself. The exhortation to Christian conversion is – as we learn from the gospels – essentially metaphorical. However the conversion metaphors do differ depending on the moment in time and space. We know for instance that in early

[1] I was enabled to convey the research for this paper by the grant no. 2012/05/B/HS2/04106 of the Polish National Science Centre. I would also like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their kind and helpful remarks and corrections.

[2] Augustinus, *epp*. 26; 132; 137; Hieronymus, *epp*. 60; 66; 77; 108; Paulinus Nolanus, *epp*. 5; 8; 16; 38; *carmen* 10; Ambrosius, *ep*. 6,27. The letter of Ambrose mentions conversion of Paulinus, therefore it had to be included in my analysis, but it lacks any metaphors of conversion.

Studia Patristica LXXVII, 75-90.

Modern England there was a preference for medical metaphors and that there was reason to it, *i.e.* the emerging modern scientific culture.[3] Scholars have researched the metaphors of conversion in the cultures of Yup'ik natives of Alaska,[4] in modern Spanish drama,[5] and among Norwegian missionaries in Northern Cameroon[6] or Pentecostal communities in Eastern Europe.[7] Although some papers on the accounts of Christian conversions in antiquity have been published, we are not in possession of a thorough study of conversion metaphors in early Christianity.[8] This article will not accomplish this goal either; its aims are, as the title suggests, more modest.[9]

When one ponders the definition of the concept of conversion, an astonishing coincidence occurs; one that may be irritating for some scholars. It seems that we do need and use metaphors even if we try to define conversion. Here are some examples that prove this observation.

> By conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right.[10]

> Conversion is a type of passage that negotiates a place in the world. Conversion as passage is also quest, a quest to be at home in a world experienced as turbulent or constraining or, in some particular way, as wanting in value.[11]

[3] Helen Smith, 'Metaphor, Cure, and Conversion in Early Modern England', *Renaissance Quarterly* 67 (2014), 473-502.

[4] Ann Fienup-Riordan, 'Metaphors of conversion, metaphors of change', *Arctic anthropology* 34 (1997), 102-16.

[5] Leslie Levin, *Metaphors of Conversion in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Drama* (Tamesis, 1999).

[6] Tomas Sundnes Drønen, *Communication and Conversion in Northern Cameroon: The Dii People and Norwegian Missionaries, 1934-1960* (Leiden and Boston, 2009), Ch. 3: 'Like a Labyrinth is his Life – a Missionary Discourse on Conversion', 71-89.

[7] J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, 'Your Body Is a Temple: Conversion Narratives in African-Led Eastern European Pentecostalism', *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009), 1-14.

[8] And these studies focus on the literature of 2nd and 3rd centuries: Anne Pasquier, 'Itinéraires de conversion dans le christianisme ancien', *Cahiers d'études du religieux. Recherches interdisciplinaires* 9 (2011), <http://cerri.revues.org/869>; Jakob Engberg, '"From among You are We. Made, not Born are Christians": Apologists' Accounts of Conversion before 310 AD', in Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Maijastina Kahlos (eds), *Continuity and discontinuity in early Christian Apologetics* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 49-78; Brigitte Bøgh (ed.), *Conversion and Initiation in Antiquity: Shifting Identities – Creating Change* (Frankfurt am Main, 2014), 77-99.

[9] Comparable to those pursued in this analytical studies, although their titles may be misleadingly general: Charlotte Köckert, 'The Rhetoric of Conversion in Ancient Philosophy and Christianity', *SP* 62 (2013), 205-12; Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, 'La conversión como metáfora espacial: una propuesta de aproximación cognitiva al cambio cultural de la Antigüedad Tardía', *Ilu. Revista de Ciencias de las Religiones* 10 (2005), 63-84.

[10] Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford, 1933), 7.

[11] Diane Austin-Broos, 'The Anthropology of Conversion: An Introduction', in Andrew Buckser, Stephen D. Glazier (eds), *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion* (Lanham MD and Oxford, 2003), 2.

I would choose as a starting point a very simple proposition of Lewis R. Rambo: 'There are many different experiences of salvation and no one way is mandatory. Stated starkly, conversion is what a faith group says it is'.[12] The most intriguing question for me is how did Roman aristocrats of the fourth and early fifth centuries understand conversion? To answer this question, we should listen to the ancients. The analyzed material proves that conversion is intrinsically linked with metaphors. I surmise that decoding the metaphorical language of the ancient narratives on conversion will lead us to the very fundaments of the understanding of conversion. The reasons for that are quite simple. We have come to realize throughout the last forty years or more that metaphor is not a mere ornament of language, rather: 'metaphors provide a window into people's underlying conceptions of the social world'[13] as a crucial element of the linguistic image of the world.[14] We can call them cognitive tools. But just as archeologists can infer from the tools used in craftsmanship about their users, so my analysis of the metaphors of aristocratic conversion will bring us closer to the conceptual and axiological system and shared beliefs about the social world of leading citizens.

I would like to bring into play one important passage from the famous book of Alasdair MacIntyre proving the narrative turn in the humanities:

> When someone complains – as do some of those who attempt or commit suicide – that his or her life is meaningless, he or she is often and perhaps characteristically complaining that the narrative of their life has become unintelligible to them, that it lacks any point … The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest.[15]

I will reverse this observation for the purpose of the present study. My hypothesis is that the conversion stories and the exhortatory letters persuading to conversion aim at giving non-Christian addressees, readers, and listeners tools to rewrite their stories as more attractive and true narratives than the ones they have been using. Metaphors are among the most important of these tools.

I chose the texts from the late fourth and early fifth centuries because it was the time when 'a movement from the description of various people or things as Christian to the concept of free-standing religious and cultural entity that could

[12] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven CT, 1993), XIV.

[13] Mark J. Landau, Brian P. Meier, Lucas A. Keefer, 'A Metaphor-Enriched Social Cognition', *Psychological Bulletin* 136 (2010), 1045-67, 1046.

[14] The literature on the subject is vast, but I am especially indebted to: Michael Osborn, 'Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 4 (1967), 115-26; George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980); Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, Lorena Pérez Hernández, 'The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor: Myths, Developments and Challenges', *Metaphor and Symbol* 26 (2011), 161-85; Raymond W. Gibbs Jr, 'Evaluating conceptual metaphor theory', *Discourse Processes* 48 (2011), 529-62.

[15] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame IN, 1984), 217-8.

be named Christianity did take place'.[16] The letter of Ambrose to Sabinus sets us exactly *in medias res*. It is 395 AD and the empire is *de iure* Christian. Ambrose, reflecting on Paulinus' and Therasia's conversions, says: 'What will our leading citizens say when they hear this? It is unthinkable that a man of such family, such background, such genius, gifted with such eloquence, should retire from the Senate and that the succession of so noble a family should be broken'.[17] The awkwardness of such a decision might have been made more understandable if presented in persuasive rhetoric. But the testimony of Ambrose proves that one would have needed a very powerful tool or set of tools to reshape those cognitive frames into the ones more open to even the possibility of conversion.[18] In 412 AD Jerome wrote a letter to Principia mentioning the ascetical conversion of Marcella somewhere in the sixth or seventh decade of the fourth century:[19]

> At that time no great lady in Rome knew anything of the monastic life, nor ventured to call herself a nun. The thing itself was strange and ignominious and the name was commonly accounted ignominious and degrading.[20]

I chose to analyze the letters because the epistolary genre was better suited than any other sort of literature to serve the goal of bringing a change of attitude among the *proceres viri* – leading citizens as Ambrose calls them.[21] First,

[16] Catherine M. Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the late Roman world* (Philadelphia, 2008), 1.

[17] Ambrosius, *Epistulae* 6,27,1, ed. Otto Faller, CSEL 82.1 (Vienna, 1968), 180: *Haec ubi audierint proceres uiri, quae loquentur? Ex illa familia, illa prosapia, illa indole, tanta praeditum eloquentia migrasse a senatu, interceptam familiae nobilis successionem: ferri hoc non posse*. English translation: Ambrose, *Letters* 1-91, trans. Mary Melchior Beyenka, The Fathers of The Church 26 (Washington, D.C., 1954), 144.

[18] Although Ambrose is a good source on the thought habits of Roman aristocracy one should remember that he was situated on 'the margins of Roman elite', see Neil McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkley, Ca., 1994), 31-7, 37.

[19] Marcella, born a Christian, rejected to remarry after 358, and only later (but before 382) decided to practice 'house asceticism', see Michele R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 167-8. On domestic asceticism in Rome see Kim D. Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008), 96-102. On the role of Marcella, her Aventine circle and Jerome's sixteen letters to her in the process of his self-legitimization, see A. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford and New York, 2009), 68-98, esp. 93-4, where Cain analyzes letter to Principia as an example of 'Hieronimyzation' of Marcella.

[20] Hieronymus, *Epistulae* 127,5, ed. Isidor Hilberg, CSEL 56.1 (Vienna, 1996), 149: *Nulla eo tempore nobilium feminarum nouerat Romae propositum monachorum nec audebat propter rei nouitatem ignominiosum, ut tunc putabatur, et uile in populis nomen adsumere*. English translation: *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. F.A. Wright, Loeb Classical Library 262 (London and New York, 1963), 449.

[21] The definition of Catherine Chin may be too radically sociological for some historians of literature: Catherine Chin, *Grammar and Christianity* (2008), 149: 'in antiquity the genre of letter

letter exchange was an important part of social transactions between elite Romans.[22] There had existed a very long tradition of disputing *in absentia* through letters that served the purpose of creating and sustaining the bonds of familiarity and/or friendship between aristocrats. It was more than a need: it was part of a ritual, and we frequently hear that both correspondents refer to the letter writing as to an *officium*.[23] Such a correspondence may be fruitfully interpreted as part of the ritual of hospitality involving the gift-exchange where letters could be considered as sophisticated gifts.[24] Secondly, *epistulae* were more immediate than any other medium because of the tradition of copying them and reading them aloud during meetings. As Jennifer Ebbeler put it: 'It is not an overstatement to suggest that elite Romans such as Cicero and Symmachus never composed a letter without thinking about the possibility that it would circulate publicly, whether by their own choice or by someone else's'.[25] It shows that the adequacy of the epistolary genre to change the pattern of thought among the aristocracy was – we have to admit – relatively high.

The theme of conversion occurred mainly in laudatory letters. The epistolary laudations were mostly written as consolations after the death of a celebrated Christian aristocrat and as such may obviously be read as a remote *laudatio funebris* with all its variegated panegyrical and biographical layers. These were the occasions where the accounts of conversion[26] were knitted into the fabric of a *vita*. However, we also encounter a narrative on Paulinus' and Sulpicius' conversions in the letter of Paulinus addressed to Sulpicius. As they are both well established authorities their correspondence is not a private one in any modern sense of the word. The second epistolary subgenre in which metaphors of conversion are frequent is exhortatory. These are the letters in which Christian writers strive to persuade the pagan aristocrat to convert. The reader needs to be reminded that I have not only analyzed the letters that celebrate or exhort conversion to Christianity but also those that address conversion to Christian ascetic life, for I see in those stories only a difference of quantity and not of

writing was fundamentally an exercise in the creation of shared ideological space', but there is truth in that observation.

[22] On this very often discussed subject see *e.g.* Jennifer Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians. Correction and Community in Augustine's Letters* (Oxford and New York, 2012), 20-3 with the bibliography in the footnotes; M.R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy* (2002), 52-4, 213.

[23] This theme has been explored by Catherine Conybeare, *Paulinus Noster: Self and Symbols in the Letters of Paulinus of Nola* (Oxford and New York, 2000), 24-6.

[24] Nathan D. Howard, 'Gifts Bearing Greekness: Epistles as Cultural Capital in Fourth-Century Cappadocia', *Journal of Late Antiquity* 6 (2013), 37-59.

[25] J. Ebbeler, *Disciplining Christians* (2012), 21.

[26] I use the terms 'account of conversion' and 'narrative on conversion' interchangeably. The former was usefully defined by Jakob Engberg as 'a description of how, why, under what circumstances or with what consequences a person became a Christian', see Jakob Engberg, '"From among You are We"' (2009), 50.

quality. It is especially vivid in Jerome's letters to Heliodorus (*ep*. 60), Julian (*ep*. 118) or Principia (*ep*. 127).[27] In Jerome's eyes only a monk or a nun is to be considered a true Christian. Thus conversion to ascetic life is understood as a perfect or full Christian conversion.[28]

Shipwrecks, slavery, and other dangers

In the first place I will analyze metaphors presenting conversion as avoidance of some kind of a disaster or something unpleasant. In eight of the fourteen analyzed texts the process of conversion is presented as liberating oneself from the danger of some pending disaster – most often shipwrecking or slavery. Life as sea-travel is a common enough metaphor in many cultures of many ages, from the *Book of Widsom* 5:10: 'Life is like a ship that passeth through the waves: when it is gone, the trace thereof cannot be found' and *Odyssey*, through the Old English *Seafarer* to Rod Stewart's 'I am sailing', or even to an exhaustive movie metaphor in 'The Life of Pi'.[29] Besides, the ancients knew that a sea voyage if not to shipwrecking may lead to enslavement – the history of Caesar and the pirates, Greek romances are among our sources[30] – and at times one leads to the other. For the aristocrats the dangers of the sea were especially important as the most-wealthy Romans traveled frequently to their estates spread around the Mediterranean and a few of them owned private trade fleets.[31] The dangers of the sea were considered as real by late antique elites

[27] It should be noted that each of these letters belongs to a different literary genre: *Ep*. 60 is a consolatory letter to Heliodorus on the death of Nepotian, his nephew; *Ep*. 127 is eulogy of Marcella addressed to Principia; *Ep*. 118 is simultaneously a consolation and exhortation addressed to a wealthy Dalmatian, Julian. Julian's dead wife occurs only in very brief remarks of Jerome, as the main goal of this letter is to persuade the addressee to become a monk.

[28] The reaction of Jerome on Jovinian's teachings dismissing the idea of *gradus meritorum* only corroborates these observations.

[29] Therefore it may be called – after Michael Osborn – an 'archetypal metaphor', that is a metaphor that has a very wide-spread use, that is very rarely changed through time and space, grounded in common experience and associated with basic human motivations. For the details, see Michael Osborn, 'Archetypal Metaphor in Rhetoric: The Light-Dark Family', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 4 (1967), 115-26. In the realm of late antique Christian writers it is Ambrose who uses this image frequently, particularly often in the context of moral teaching concerning *praeparatio mortis*, see Ambrosius, *De bono mortis* 8,35, 4,15; *id*., *De excessu fratris Satyri* 2,4. This pessimist tone is also discernible in Jerome's expression *mare huius saeculi*, occuring 17 times in his (mostly exegetical) works, which is not absent in Augustine's writings (6 occurences).

[30] Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 1-2; Achilles Tatius, *Leucippe and Clitophon* III, 1.

[31] See *e.g*. M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce AD 300-900* (Cambridge, 2001), 83-91; B. Sirks, 'Supplying Rome: Safeguarding the System', in E. Papi (ed.), *Supplying Rome and the Empire: the Proceedings of an International Seminar Held at Siena-Certosa di Pontignano on May 2-4, 2004, on Rome, the Provinces, Production and Distribution. Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary series no. 69*, Journal of Roman Archaeology (Portsmouth R.I., 2007), 173-8, 176-8.

and evoked strong emotions as we learn from one letter of Paulinus who describes a storm and the perturbations it brought on the owner of the trade vessel.[32]

The risk of becoming a slave was not that high, however it was a very strong symbolic call and a part of a cultivated philosophical tradition, especially the Stoic one. Every educated man contemporary to Paulinus of Nola must have heard that according to the Pythagoreans and Plato the soul lived in the jail of the body enslaved by its drives. He or she probably have read what Seneca wrote to Lucilius in the famous *Epistula* 47, namely that if we were to look at the basic conditions of a sheer existence of every human being we are all slaves, and that the worst kind of slavery is the voluntary one.[33] This is a theme also present in the ethical teachings of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, for whom the existential, moral or, as some call it, metaphorical slavery was a much more important issue than the real-life, legal slavery.[34] To liberate oneself, to cease being a slave of the *saeculum* was present even before Augustine developed the concept of *saeculum*. The noblemen were obviously familiar with this tradition, hence the metaphor of conversion as avoidance of slavery had deep roots and could also evoke good associations and vibrant emotions. The Christian authors built their narratives with an eye on those emotions.

To present examples from the analyzed correspondence, the decision of Fabiola to become a consecrated widow and give away her properties is described by Jerome in the metaphorical frame of avoiding the disaster of secular life as a wife, as we can read in her eulogy addressed to Oceanus and meant as a reading for the Roman elites: 'Did she forget her sorrows in the midst of happiness, and determined after being shipwrecked to face once more the dangers of the main?'[35] Although in the narrow sense this shipwrecking

[32] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 49. However it is hard to discern the symbolical or literary layers of this story from the facts. On this and the motivations behind this letter, see Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola, Life, Letters and Poems* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999), 188-91.

[33] Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 47,1, ed. Otto Hense (Leipzig, 1938), 137: *Libenter ex iis, qui a te veniunt cognovi familiariter te cum servis tuis vivere: hoc prudentiam tuam, hoc eruditionem decet. 'Servi sunt'. Immo homines. 'Servi sunt'. Immo contubernales. 'Servi sunt'. Immo humiles amici. 'Servi sunt'. Immo conservi, si cogitaveris tantundem in utrosque licere fortunae…*, *id.*, *Epistulae morales* 47,17, *ibid.* 141: *'Servus est'. Sed fortasse liber animo. 'Servus est'. Hoc illi nocebit? Ostende quis non sit: alius libidini servit, alius avaritiae, alius ambitioni, omnes spei, omnes timori. Dabo consularem aniculae servientem, dabo ancillulae divitem, ostendam nobilissimos iuvenes mancipia pantomimorum: nulla servitus turpior est quam voluntaria.*

[34] Epictetus, *Discourses* IV,1; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* II, 2. On discussion of this motive, see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge and New York, 1996), 16-22; Peter Hunt, 'Slaves in Greek Literary Culture', in Keith Bradley, Paul Cartledge (eds), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume 1, The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge, 2011), 23-37, 44-5.

[35] Hieronymus, *Epistula* 77,6, ed. Isidor Hilberg, CSEL 55 (Vienna, 1996), 42: *Scilicet in die bona malorum oblita est et post naufragium rursum temptare uoluit pericula nauigandi?* English translation: *Select letters of St. Jerome* (1963), 323.

refers to the disaster of her marriage, clearly the decision to avoid shipwrecking implies a broader meaning of conversion to ascetic life. This metaphor is very neatly linked with the first sentence of this paragraph treating the theme of Fabiola's second marriage, where Jerome depicts himself while writing on this subject using a related imagery: 'I have lingered long in describing Fabiola's penitence, and my barque has grounded in shallow waters; but I wished to open up a wider and unimpeded field for her praises'.[36] That leaves a reader or listener with a picture of Fabiola leaving these shallows as the author of her *praise* will continue to tell the story of her new Christian life as a safe and vast sea that is void of the danger of being stuck in shallows or shipwrecking.

Similarly, Paulinus of Nola in his exhortatory letter addressed to the young aristocrat and aspiring poet Jovius is construing a very metaphorical narrative on the state before conversion as tossing on the sea of this world. He admits that he cannot understand why the young man is so blind as to not see that Christian faith is a secure port that provides a tossing ship with an admirable protection (*salus*).[37] Next, he compares the situation of a talented nobleman before conversion to the one of Ulysses seduced by Sirens, exemplifying 'enticing desires and alluring vices'.[38] To escape the dangers of this world, which indeed is a stormy sea, we should strip off possessions as the dunk or wet clothes on a leaking boat, search for and hold on to the wooden plank of refuge.[39] Here Paulinus uses again the word salvation (*salus*) and its derivative salutary (*salutaris*) playing on its double connotation: saving oneself from danger of any sort, and reaching the safe port of faith, *i.e*. becoming one of the saved by Christ. This *salus* in the ears of the listeners (the letters were often read aloud), must have resonated in association with the *salum istius mundi*,

[36] Hieronymus, *Epistula* 77,6, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 55 (1996), 42: *Diu morati sumus in paenitentia, in qua uelut in uadosis locis resedimus, ut maior nobis et absque ullo inpedimento se laudum eius campus aperiret*. English translation: *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, 323.

[37] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 16,6, ed. Wilhelm Hartel, CSEL 29 (Vienna, 1894), 119: *admodum miror, cur in ueritate perspicua diuini muneris ita uolueris caligare, ut mirabilem illam navis iactatae salutem et euidentibus signis procuratam nostrae rei diuinitus terra marique custodiam fortuitis euentibus dederis tantamque occasionem diuinae praedicationis effuderis*.

[38] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 16,7, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 121: *Nam et uoluptatum pestifera dulcedo patriae nobis obliuionem facit, cum homini deum, qui est patria omnium communis, oblitterat, et inlecebrae cupiditatum illam Sirenarum fabulam ueritate cladis imitantur*. English translation: Paulinus of Nola, *Letters* 1-22, transl. P.G. Walsh (Washington, 1966), 159.

[39] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 16,8, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 122: *Atque utinam uel nudis nobis ex istius mundi salo liceat euadere, si in tempore isto, quo in fragilitate corporea, et possessionum lubrico tamquam in nauigii fatiscentis infida compage fluitamus, exuere nos ad enatandum inpedimentis angentibus quasi uestibus madidis et fidem salutarem, qua in uirtute Christi Dei uexillo crucis nitimur, quasi tabulam perfugii meminerimus inuadere, ut de rebus fluentibus spem solidam comparemus et de noxia cupiditatum materia aliquid ad innocentiam salutemque rapiamus*.

creating an additional effect both aesthetically and semantically.[40] There is also a metaphorical play with the association of the wooden *tabula perfugii* with the wooden cross of Christ. Not only do both share the same *causa materialis* but also *causa finalis* – they are in fact tools serving the purpose of saving men floating on the 'salt surge of the world'.[41] The careful choice of words and metaphors may be proven by another testimony. In his exhortatory letter to Licentius,[42] the son of Romanianus, Paulinus again presents a persuasive image of the world of a young aristocrat as full of various threats. Conversion to Christian life, especially to monastic life or ordained ministry may save one from such risks. The secular career is here metaphorically called *lubricum* – something slippery, uncertain but also hazardous, dangerous, just as being a rich man in the letter to Jovian (*lubrica possessionum*).[43] In the letter to Licentius Paulinus calls it *durae lubrica militiae*.[44]

This sea metaphor of conversion and of the state before the conversion as tossing on dangerous waters of this world had an after-life in Gaul. For example, Faustus of Riez in his second letter to Ruricius of Limoges congratulates him on his conversion, which he describes as turning his prow to the port of religion after the tempests of his life.[45] And in a dramatic sequents of events, saint Geneviève of Paris helped Celinia – a girl already engaged – to convert to the ascetic life. The early sixth century *Vita* says that the saint saved the girl from shipwrecking or contagion of this world.[46] But this tradition seems to be still alive till at least the end of nineteenth century. Thérèse of Lisieux wrote: 'I seem to be lost like a little boat without a pilot, at the mercy of the

[40] Paulinus is not the first to use this interplay between *salus* and *salum* in the account of conversion and he may refer here to Cyprianus, *Ad Donatum* 3, ed. Manlio Simonetti, CChr.SL 3A (Turnhout, 1976): *Ego cum in tenebris atque in nocte caeca iacerem cumque* ***in salo iactantis saeculi*** *nutabundus ac dubius uestigiis oberrantibus fluctuarem uitae meae nescius, ueritatis ac lucis alienus, difficile prorsus ac durum pro illis tunc moribus opinabar, quod* ***in salutem*** *mihi diuina indulgentia pollicebatur, ut quis renasci denuo posset ut que in nouam uitam lavacro aquae* ***salutaris animatus****, quod prius fuerat, exponeret et corporis licet manente conpage hominem animo ac mente mutaret.*

[41] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 16,8. English translation: Paulinus of Nola, *Letters* 1-2 (1966), 159.

[42] Augustine was also corresponding with this young aristocrat. As the testimony of Augustinus, *Epistula* 32,3 shows, Paulinus and Augustine were also exchanging their opinions on Licentius and tried to join forces in persuading him to convert.

[43] See footnote 36 above.

[44] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 8,3, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 48.

[45] Ralph W. Mathisen, *Ruricius of Limoges and Friends: A Collection of Letters from Visigothic Gaul; Letters of Ruricius of Limoges, Caesarius of Arles, Euphrasius of Clermont, Faustus of Riez, Graecus of Marseilles, Paulinus of Bordeaux, Sedatus of Nîmes, Sidonius Apollinaris, Taurentius and Victorinus of Fréjus* (Liverpool, 1999), 97.

[46] *Vita Genovefae virginis Parisiensis,* ed. Bruno Krusch, *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici et antiquiorum aliquot*, MGH SS rer. Merov. 3 (Hanover, 1896), 227: *Sic itaque predicta puella ab huius mundi naufragium uel contagione liberata usque in consummationem in abstinentia et castitate perseuerauit.*

storm-tossed waves'; 'Instead of the howling wind, a gentle breeze was swelling my sails, and I thought I had already reached harbour'.[47]

To return to the letter to Jovius, and the above mentioned complexity of its metaphorical dimension, the image of conversion as avoiding the danger of staying or becoming a slave are also present in it. Paulinus suggests that to convert means to liberate oneself from the submission to demons and from error.[48] One may find a much more refined version of this metaphor in Paulinus' letter to Sulpicius Severus. Paulinus presents his own conversion and compares it humbly to the conversion of his Gallic noble friend. Sulpicius is the one who was more courageous, more vehement and determined. Whereas Paulinus descended gradually from *tumultus fori* and *strepitus mundi* Sulpicius did it at once.[49] A very important context in this praise is the breaking free from the shackles of blood and body, and the yoke of sin.[50] By blood Paulinus apparently understands the family connections. As we know, his father did not applaud Sulpicius's decision to convert. Hence, Paulinus links this metaphor with another one that we already know, namely the sea metaphor. Sulpicius has left his father in a small vessel tossing on the uncertain waters of this world. As it happens in Paulinus[51] – conversion means also the avoidance of the *tumultus* and *strepitus* – not a disaster really but quite an unpleasant aspect of

[47] Thérèse de Lisieux, *The Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux*, trans. by Michael Day (London, 1951), 74-5.

[48] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 16,9-10, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 123.

[49] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 5,4, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 27.

[50] *Ibid*. 5,5-6, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 28: *Tu frater dilectissime, ad Dominum miraculo maiore conuersus es, quia aetate florentior, laudibus abundantior, oneribus patrimonii leuior, substantia facultatum non egentior et in ipso adhuc mundi theatro id est fori celebritate diuersans et facundi nominis palmam tenens, repentino impetu discussisti seruile peccati jugum et letalia carnis et sanguinis uincla rupisti. neque te divitiae de matrimonio familiae consularis adgestae, neque post conjugium peccandi licentia et caelebs iuuentas ab angusto salutis introitu et arduo itinere uirtutis in mollem illam et spatiosam multorum uiam revocare potuerunt. … exemplo apostolorum relicto patre in nauicula fluctuante, scilicet in huius uitae incerto cum retibus rerum suarum et inplicatione patrimonii derelicto Christum secutus. nec minoris domesticis opibus ingenii facultatis laudem ab hominibus non accipiens et inanis gloriae sublimiter negligens piscatorum praedicationes Tullianis omnibus e tuis litteris praetulisti. Confugisti ad pietatis silentium ut euaderes iniquitatis tumultum.*

[51] See *e.g*. Paulinus Nolanus, *Carmen* 10 to Ausonius, 33 and 165-8. For the Latin text and its multilayered interpretation see Charles Witke, *Numen Litterarum: The Old and the New in Latin Poetry from Constantine to Gregory the Great* (Leiden, 1971), 42-74. Ausonius, a former teacher of Paulinus, who later held highest imperial offices, is called here his father. Paulinus tries to explain and justify his decision to reject the *saeculum* and enter the ascetic ranks in this sophisticated poetic letter. Mentioning *tumultus* and *strepitus* in *carm*. 10 Paulinus obviously refers also to the experience of his teacher who left in 366/367 his *otium* in Bordeaux for a more troublesome and nine times bigger imperial city of Trier. Among his many new *negotia* as the teacher of Gratian, Ausonius was rather astonished to be included in military expeditions, which are the epitome of *tumultus* and *strepitus*, see H. Savin, *Ausonius of Bordeaux. Genesis of a Gallic Aristocracy* (London and New York, 1993), 101-18.

the traditional *negotium*. Already Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny were complaining about their public obligations in a very similar way, and strived for a time and place to exercise their spirits.[52] We can also trace similarities between Pliny's or Seneca's letters and those of Christians analyzed here in linking *otium* with silence that provides with moral, philosophical or literary refinement.[53] Paulinus formulates his praise in reference to this tradition in order to prove that silence is connected with traditional virtue of piety, whereas *tumultus*, uproar, leads to unfairness, unreasonableness.

Augustine evoked the images of liberation and avoidance of slavery in his exhortatory letter to Licentius. It is of special importance here, because Augustine twists the formula in it. He admits that Christian wisdom also forces a yoke upon the convert, but it is only temporary and leads to eternal freedom, whereas the yoke of this world is equally burdensome or more and, what is worse, leads to eternal slavery. To avoid this danger of eternal slavery Licentius should convert and study the Scriptures instead of classical literature.[54] The same paradoxical rhetoric is used by Paulinus in his letter to Aper. He mentions Aper's loss of prestige among the well-to-do and his degradation decrease in worldly status as causes of Aper's sufferings, but according to Paulinus these are only the appearances of the slavery because in conversion Christ leads us secretly to triumph. There is an individual dimension in the usage of metaphors in this letter. Paulinus refers to Aper's high official post as provincial governor metaphorically describing his withdrawal from duties: 'You have been thrust down from the seat of wicked power to be placed on the throne of peace and justice'.[55] This individualization leads even to a sort of a mockery. Conversion – as it seems – may also lead to the avoidance of the dangers of obesity: 'where now is the fat bull's neck of yours … how has it become so obedient and thin under the yoke of Christ since the groaning of your conversion began?'[56] Playing still with Aper's name he describes his conversion as a change from a strong and ferocious boar (*aper*) of this world to the patient and humble lamb

[52] See Roy K. Gibson and Ruth Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge and New York, 2012), 175.

[53] See Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 68,6; Plinius Minor, *Epistulae* 1,9.

[54] Augustinus, *Epistula* 26, 2. See also *id*., *Epistula* 137,1-4.

[55] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 38,8, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 331-2: *Destructus es a superbo, adsumptus in humilem: depositus ab iniqua potentiae sede, ut in pacis atque iustitiae solio locareris, inanitus es a diuite, ut diteris in pauper, et ab illa superuacuae distentionis saturitate uacuatus es, ut ueris piae paupertatis bonis implearis esuriens iustitiam. Vbi nunc tu ille es aliquando terribilis uel pro tribunalibus advocatus, uel in tribunalibus iudex? Vbi tua illa ceruix tunc uerius, ut nunc de te mentitus es, tauri pinguis? quomodo facta est docilis ac tenuis in jugo Christi, ex quo conuersus ingemuisti, et beneplacitum est in te Deo sicut super uitulum nouellum? Deposita ceruice tauri fractus es in mansuetudinem bouis illius, qui agnouit possessorem suum. Beati oculi eorum, qui haec in te Dei mirabilia conspiciunt, etsi illi miserrimi, qui uidentes non uident*. I follow this English translation: Paulinus of Nola, *Letters 23-51* (1999), 192.

[56] See footnote 52 above.

(*agnus*) of God. Obviously externally Aper is still a boar (*aper*), stupid and dumb – and that is how this world sees him (*saeculo*).[57] He recreated himself with the pasture of both Testaments to become the lamb of God in disguise. It is not impossible that Paulinus refers here to *Matt*. 7:15 and to the image of a wolf in sheep's clothing. Paradoxically Aper is now the one who is a lamb in boar's clothing.[58]

The philosophers

Another common metaphor in the analyzed letters is the one equating conversion with finding the true wisdom, in other words the one describing the convert as a true philosopher. Augustine in his exhortatory letters to Volusianus presents conversion metaphorically as becoming armed or equipped with Christian doctrine to save or liberate oneself and others. He also uses many metaphors to describe Christian doctrine as philosophy. Already in the introductory *Letter* 132 Augustine draws the opposition between philosophy and rhetoric resembling the one known from Plato's dialogues, especially from *Phaedrus*.[59] At the end of this very short letter he insists that he and Volusian continue their philosophical exchange through letters, not during live disputes, which may also hint at a famous passage in *Phaedrus*.[60] Augustine, however, reverses the argument of Socrates, and is on the same page with Theuth. Disputes through a written medium are more apt for busy people, they avoid the risk of being dominated by an audience interested in the spectacle and emotions rather than ideas, they can always be renewed, and they are more apt for the lights of doctrine.[61] This choice of written over oral is only fitting for the main aim of

[57] But in fact he has changed from the evil boar of the woods known from *Psalm* 79, to the good one from the cornfield of God. Thus he might use the skills of a boar to turn them against this world, whereas internally he already belongs to the sheepfold of God.

[58] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 38,9, ed. W. Hartel, CSEL 29 (1894), 332: *Quis daret mihi pennas sicut columbae, et uolarem ad te et in conspectu tuo conloquioque requiescerem, in uoce exultationis et confessionis epularer, uidens te non te et uidens ex leone uitulum, uidens in apro Christum, nunc uersa ferocitatis aut uirtutis uice aprum saeculo, agnum Deo. Non enim iam de silua sed de segete aper es, quia bonis disciplinarum fructibus opimaris et in fruge uirtutum tibi pastus est.*

[59] Plato, *Phaedrus* 259-9.

[60] Plato, *Phaedrus* 274b-275d.

[61] Augustinus, *Epistula* 132,1, ed. Alois Goldbacher, CSEL 44 (Vienna, 1904), 80: *magis enim hoc forte adjuuante domino potero quam praesens talia loqui te cum non solum propter occupationes uarias et meas et tuas, quoniam non, cum mihi uacat, occurrit, ut et tibi uacet, uerum etiam propter eorum inruentem praesentiam, qui plerumque non sunt apti tali negotio magisque linguae certaminibus quam scientiae luminibus delectantur. Quod autem scriptum habetur, semper uacat ad legendum, cum uacat legenti, nec onerosum fit praesens, quod, cum uoles, sumitur, cum uoles, ponitur.*

Augustine in this particular correspondence, as he tries to persuade Volusianus to read Scripture, because it is sincere and solid.[62]

In his second letter to Volusianus, *Letter* 137, itself a response to *Letter* 135, Volusianus' answer to the *Letter* 132, Augustine develops the metaphor of Christian faith as philosophy. He mentions the profundity of Scripture, the great depth of wisdom of Christian doctrine, and doctrine being cloaked with many shadows of mysteries. Christian teaching is presented here in the language of Neoplatonic and Stoic philosophy.[63] It is a fairly well-known feature of early Christian apologetics in general and Augustine's writings in particular, hence I would just like to point at one of its aspects, namely that it is in itself a very persuasive message for the philosophizing aristocrats.[64] If the bishop manages to convince them that Christianity is a more refined and truthful philosophy, and that a convert is a better, closer-to-the-truth philosopher, they might listen. Similarly, in his letter to Licentius Augustine encourages his addressee to convert presenting this process as putting on the sweet shackles of wisdom. He also builds upon the oppositions between truth/words, wisdom/rhetoric so widespread in this context, and seasons it with references to the classical literature not unlike Paulinus of Nola and Jerome of Stridon.[65]

This mode of equating conversion with finding true philosophy is also present in the above analyzed letter of Paulinus to Jovius. Paulinus exhorts the young aristocrat to convert building a very complex metaphor. He asks him to raise his mind to the height of wisdom, that is, to seek Christ. However, he admits that Jovius is prevented from the higher vision of heavenly things by the clouds that lie between, namely his way of thinking, and his style of eloquence:

> You need not abandon your inner philosophy, if only you season it with faith and religion, when it is joined with them, employ it more wisely that you may be God's philosopher and God's poet, wise not in seeking God but in imitating him, learned in

[62] *Ibid*. 79: *sincera enim et solida res est nec fucatis eloquiis ambit ad animum nec ullo linguae tectorio inane aliquid ac pendulum crepitat*.

[63] It is worthwhile to compare *e.g*. Augustine's ontological and Christological remarks in this letter with the Stoic idea of *krasis*, see N.J. Torchia, 'Stoics, Stoicism', in A.D. Fitzgerald *et al*. (eds), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids MI, 1999), 816-20, 817, and Neoplatonic analogies of God to light or to sound. R.J. O'Connell, 'Ennead, IV,4 and 5 in the Works of Saint Augustine', *Revue des études augustiniennes et patristiques* 9 (1963), 1-39, proved they were obvious in *Confessiones*, but they are also vivid in *Letters 137* and *187*.

[64] I could not agree more with Rebecca Lyman's observation concerning earlier period: 'In the second century Christian "orthodoxy" therefore could replace "philosophy" as a universal system because it could occupy many of the same cognitive and authoritative spaces, even if it explicitly attacked the culture and religion of traditional *paideia*. This is not a transformation of "Hellenism" by "Christianity", but a reconfiguring within the culture itself as a means of understanding universality and identity', Rebecca Lyman, 'The Politics of Passing. Justin Martyr's Conversion as a Problem of "Hellenization"', in Kenneth Mills, Anthony Grafton (eds), *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (Rochester NY, 2003), 34-54, 48.

[65] Augustinus, *Epistula* 26,2.

manner of life rather than in tongue. Be a Peripatetic for God and a Pythagorean as regard the world. Preach the true wisdom that lies in Christ.[66]

Paulinus adds a conventional reference to classical tradition: 'Don't be a lotus eater with empty literature'.[67] Jovius, just as Licentius, is a young gentleman with philosophical interests pursuing poetic laurels and both bishops try to make the most of these ambitions so exemplary to many Roman aristocrats. Conversion as a choice of true wisdom revealed to the convert by God, opposed to the vane rhetoric and stupid wisdom of this world, occurs in Paulinus' praise of Sulpicius too.[68] Yet, also Aper's decision to convert – a man without artistic ambitions as far as we know – is applauded by Paulinus as the 'apprehension of truth', embracing 'the fullness of wisdom'.[69]

Jerome uses these semantics, as ever, with a touch of originality. Writing to Heliodorus about the life and death of his nephew Nepotian he mentions that after conversion the young monk has managed to make his heart into a library of Christ.[70] Also in his *Letter* 66 to Pammachius, Jerome exhorts his addressee to become more than a philosopher of this world. The real conversion, he states, is equal to becoming *comes virtutum*. In this multilayered metaphorical exhortation he introduces the figure of a captive woman *i.e.* philosophy of this world. To convert to ascetic life means to 'cut off her alluring hair, that is to say, the graces of style, and pare away her dead nails. Wash her with the nitre of which the prophet speaks, and then take your ease with her and say: "Her left hand is under my head, and her right hand does embrace me". Then shall the captive bring to you many children; from a Moabitess she shall become an Israelitish woman'.[71]

[66] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 16,6-7: *Nam animi philosophiam non deponas licet, dum eam fide condias et religione; conserta utare sapientius, ut sis dei philosophus et Dei uates, non quaerendo sed imitando Deum sapiens, ut non lingua quam uita eruditus tam disseras magna quam facias. Esto Peripateticus Deo, Pythagoreus mundo. Verae in Christo sapientiae praedicator et tandem tacitus uanitati*. English translation: Paulinus of Nola, *Letters 1-22*, 157-8.

[67] *Ibid.*: *Perniciosam istam inanium dulcedinem litterarum quasi illos patriae oblitteratores de baccarum suauitate Lotophagos, ut Sirenarum carmina blandimentorum nocentium cantus euita*. It also matches the representation of the not-yet-converted aristocrat as an Ulysses on his way home, which I mentioned earlier.

[68] Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistula* 5,7.

[69] *Id.*, *Epistula* 38,1-7.

[70] Hieronymus, *Epistula* 60,10, ed. Isidor Hilberg, CSEL 54 (Vienna, 1996), 561: *Pectus suum bibliothecam fecerat Christi*. It is a pity that J.H.D. Scourfield does not comment on this phrase in his thorough commentary *Consoling Heliodorus: A Commentary on Jerome Letter 60* (Oxford, 1993).

[71] Hieronymus, *Epistula* 66,8, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 54 (1996), 657-9: *Plus debet Christi discipulus praestare quam mundi; philosophus gloriae animal et popularis aurae atque rumorum uenale mancipium est. Tibi non sufficit opes contemnere, nisi Christum sequaris. Christum autem sequitur, qui peccata dimittit et uirtutum comes est. … sin autem adamaueris captiuam mulierem, id est sapientiam saecularem, et eius pulchritudine captus fueris, decalua eam et inlecebras crinium atque ornamenta uerborum cum emortuis unguibus seca. Laua eam prophetali nitro et*

To end my analysis I will use one generic exception that proves that not only letters but also hagiographies celebrating lives of famous converts (esp. to the ascetic life) were using the metaphorical language to present the theme of conversion. Honoratus of Marseille in the *Vita Hilarii* 4-5 focuses on the moment of conversion of his hero. It is presented as a multi-layered metaphor built from resources of classical education and Christian literature and refers to the experience of the higher classes.[72] Hilary himself, in a sort of a dramatic *soliloquium*, depicts his decision to convert as part of a process of rhetorical preparation (*inventio*) to *deliberatio*.[73] *Genus deliberativum* was precisely defined as persuading oneself rather than others.[74] The saint uses judicial terms to highlight that there is neither time nor place for hesitation, and there will be no room left for *relatio* or *recursus* before the question is put on the scales of justice.[75] Philosophical arguments based on the analysis of cardinal virtues – as we learn – are decisive for this decision-making process.[76] He also underlies his philosophical and legal skills reasoning *a minori ad maius* that if he had used them before in less worthy circumstances, he is all the more obliged to use them in this case of the highest value.[77] This process involves consideration of proper definitions of the virtues that are read through Christian Scripture. The goal of life, it occurs eventually, is to gain the eternal life in heaven, to run up to the Creator, and to be recruited into the *militia Christi*. This imagery fits well the ambitions of the members of imperial elites. At least since Julius Caesar and Cicero it has been obvious for Roman aristocrats that it is not irrelevant

tunc requiescens cum illa dicito: sinistra eius sub capite meo et dextera illius amplexabitur me et multos tibi fetus captiua dabit ac de Moabitide efficietur Israhelitis. English translation: W.H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W.G. Martley, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series,* Vol. 6, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds) (Buffalo, 1893), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001066.htm>.

[72] See two fine pieces of analysis of this passage: Przemyslaw Nehring, 'Czy retoryka może pomóc w monastycznym nawróceniu? Przypadek Hilarego, biskupa Arles', *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 58-59 (2010-2011), 169-78; Peter Gemeinhardt, *Das lateinische Christentum und die antike pagane Bildung* (Tübingen, 2007), 292-3.

[73] Honorat de Marseille, *La vie d'Hilaire d'Arles*, 4, ed. Samuel Cavallin, introd., trans. and notes Paul-André Jacob, SC 404 (Paris, 1995), 96: *Ilico in eius pectore novae cogitationis fluctus exaestuat; suscitantur altercantium diversa inter se consilia voluntatum. … In suscipienda igitur caelestis militiae tirocinia excitatus talia secum ipse deliberat: 'In studiis saeculi constituti nonnumquam suadendi deliberatione suscepta iusta ab iniustis, utilia ab inutilibus, perpensa salubriter examinatione discrevimus…'*

[74] Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum siue Originum libri XX*, 2,2,4, PL 83 (Paris, 1850), col. 125C: *suasoria eget alteram personam, deliberatiua interdum et apud se agit.*

[75] Honorat de Marseille, *La vie d'Hilaire d'Arles*, 4 (1995), 96-8: *Grandi maturitate tractanda sunt, in quibus ad portum paenitendi nec relatio superest nec recursus. Aequitatis lance cuncta pensanda sunt, quae utilitatis pondere mensuram suppleant in libra iustitiae.*

[76] *Ibid.* 5-6, 98-100.

[77] *Ibid.* 4, 96: *Nonnumquam humanis auribus blandientes speciem iustitiae oratoriae artis venustate celavimus: hic quid agendum est, ubi causa vertitur salutis aeterne, ubi status animae et infinitorum caelorum est pensanda securitas?*

for Roman military and political leaders to 'study arts and humanities'. Here we find a metaphor built on three fundamental elements of a desired public career: a military leader, a lawyer/public servant, a philosopher/writer. To become a Christian means the same as to become a perfect Roman: to unite all three in one exemplary life of a *conviva caelestis*. For such an achiever heaven will become a huge *triclinium* – a place for traditional *cena*.

Conclusions

The truth of Nock's observation, 'the receptivity of most people for that which is wholly new (if anything is) is small',[78] is corroborated by many studies in sociology and psychology on the acceptance of change and the resistance to new ideas.[79] As Christianity was something new, using metaphors – hence, remaking the existing words, phrases and images, reinterpreting them – was a great persuading strategy and can partly explain the success of Christianity. The metaphors of conversion eased the shock, relieved the tension, made the new more familiar and acceptable. Many of those metaphors consisted of images evoked from both classical and sacred writings, providing the aristocrats with a persuasive bridge between the two worlds and separate traditions. They presented conversion in the context of their everyday experience, referring to the most actual fears, expectations, drives: you will avoid a disaster, you will find ease from *negotium*, you will become a true philosopher, a free member of a perfect family or state, you will not lose your inheritance but gain a new far more respectful one. In my view it is pointing at the struggle and the capacity of Christian writers to overcome the epistemological difficulty of considering Christianity as something little less than barbarism, to create a new kind of collectivity, of imagined community – the metaphors serve exactly this purpose. We may surmise that metaphors are not only intrinsically bonded with talking about conversion, they are also welcomed by the addressees of the call, that they were in fact not mere tools, but they shaped the experience, they evoked or created the ideas. We do not have to get involved in the tedious discussion about the relation between the language and the world, because we know that Saint Anthony had been converted through the ears, and Augustine's *tolle lege* proves the same. Words created the new Christian world.

[78] A.D. Nock, *Conversion* (1933), 9.

[79] See *e.g.* Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change* (New Haven CT, 1953); Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (New York and London, 1994).