Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve. By Richard V. Peace. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 397 pp., $25.00.

The strength of this book is its weakness.

Its strength is that it belongs to the breed of books that attempts to bring several disciplines to bear on some important subject or other. Peace is the Robert Boyd Munger Professor of Evangelism and Spiritual Formation at Fuller Theological Seminary. In large part his book is a NT study by a man with a background in psychology and whose job description is professor of evangelism.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first, Peace studies the conversion of Paul as recorded in Acts. From this he infers three essential characteristics of Christian conversion: insight, turning, and transformation, all succinctly summarized in Acts 26:18. In the second part of the book, Peace turns from the dramatic conversion of Paul to the nurtured conversions of the Twelve, as recorded in Mark's Gospel. They gradually come to understand Jesus in his roles as teacher, prophet, Messiah, Son of Man, Son of David, and Son of God. For Peace, these represent a six-step process of conversion in Mark that becomes the organizing principle of Mark's Gospel. Part III links the first two parts into a synthesis that Peace uses to evaluate various contemporary modes of evangelism, finally preferring what he calls "process evangelism," with its emphasis on spiritual journey, over "encounter evangelism," which underscores sudden conversion.

Here and there this mingling of Biblical and psychological reflection yields interesting and provocative results. But I regret to say that the mingling of disciplines is the weakness of this work as well. The handling of the Biblical material is so spotty, and sometimes so methodologically uncontrolled, that the results are frustrating.

Quite apart from the focus on Paul's conversion in the brief accounts in Acts, without seriously attempting to integrate what Paul himself writes about his conversion and about such matters as the work of the Spirit in conversion, Peace insists that Paul's conversion is paradigmatic for all Christian conversion, without seriously wrestling with unique elements. Moreover, elements of Peace's analysis seem more tied to the demands of the psychological model than to the text, e.g. "*The texts insist that what triggered Paul's turning was the sudden insight into himself which came as a result of his dialogue with Jesus*" (p. 45, emphasis his). Is that really the emphasis of the text? Gal 1:15–16, "was pleased to reveal his son in me" (NIV), is taken to be an assertion of Paul's "inner experience of Jesus" (p. 85). Well, maybe. But Paul uses *en emoi* not uncommonly to mean something like "with respect to me"; see, for instance, the use of exactly the same expression at the end of Galatians 1. Here as elsewhere Peace proceeds by mere assertion, without serious evaluation of the stances he takes. He is so enamored with Krister Stendahl's famous 1963 essay that he plays down the

role of a guilty conscience in conversion (pp. 27–29). He may be right in the case of Paul's conversion. But he seems unaware of the stringent responses to Stendahl, and in any case he does not follow Paul's own theological argument about how we ought to connect guilt and sin to the cross (as in Romans 1–3). From the fact that the verb *šûb* ("turn" or "return") is used more than 1,000 times in the OT—most of these referring to the people of Israel "returning" to their God—Peace infers (with Witherup) that conversion is not a missionary activity of getting converts to a religion. Similarly in the NT, the focus is on discovering who Jesus is, not changing religions (p. 28). At a certain level, this is right. But it is right precisely because those who are called to "turn" or "return" in the OT are already part of the covenant community; those who discover who Jesus is in the NT are either Jews who in consequence read their Bibles rather differently than they had, or pagans who are certainly changing religions (even though changing religions *per se* is not precisely the focus). Nevertheless, the antithesis is too neat, and the put-down of missionaries unconscionable.

The treatment of Mark, I fear, is worse, though it would consume too much space to detail the charge. Peace's analysis of the text is part of one current tendency in Markan studies to analyze this Gospel for patterns of discipleship. Not for a moment am I denying that there are things to be learned about discipleship in Mark. But the purpose of the Gospel of Mark is not to give us a psychological profile of normative conversion or normative discipleship. Rather, it is to tell us things about Jesus and the gospel and the dawning of the kingdom. Moreover, the sad fact is that if you focus endlessly on discipleship, you rarely produce disciples; if you focus on all the texts have to say about Jesus—who he is, what he has done, what he demands—then by God's grace you produce disciples.

The last chapter, too, has insights, but too much of its argumentation proceeds by way of caricaturizing antithesis. In short, what begins as potentially a strong and really useful book turns out to be disappointing and misleading.

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