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The change of conversion and the origin of Christendom

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connecting with our post-modern culture. To assist, Kysar's final chapter "Sowing the Seeds" provides application and stimulation for preaching, teaching and visioning. Through paradoxes and tensions, Kysar shows us a way to help the person in the pew hear the gospel and, in hearing the gospel, hear the call.

Stumbling in the Light will be a valuable addition to an advanced homiletics course reading list, but its true benefit will be discovered in the pulpit as we image the old, old story in a new, new way. Get it, savour it, use it – it's that kind of book.

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The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom

Alan Kreider

Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999

126 pages, \$16.95 Softcover

As one fascinated by the patristical period of Church history, I was immediately pleased to discover Alan Kreider's compact volume. Kreider lays out an ambitious thematic study of the early church fathers focusing on the subject of *conversion* as an activity of the Christian community. His thesis takes a different spin on the controversial topic of "Christendom": unlike many scholars who place the sole blame upon the "Constantinian Revolution" for the "degradation" of Christianity into "Christendom" (generally understood as *caesaropapism* – the church and state become one), Kreider traces the development of the "Christendom" socio-political reality through changes in how the church has gone about converting people.

Kreider briefly considers writings by such fathers as Justin Martyr, Cyprian of Carthage, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, as well as Augustine, Volusian, and Caesarius of Arles. He focuses on writings in which these fathers discuss their own "conversion" experiences, as well as catechetical and homiletical writings that deal with the problem of converting the masses (or of converting those already nominally Christian to a higher morality). His historical consideration of the "conversion of Constantine" and the subsequent favouring of the church in early Byzantine society is fair-minded, but contains no particular surprises in its analyses (Kreider holds to the current critical hypothesis of the "Constantinian Revolution," for the most part, at least as being the beginning of the problem, if not its ultimate cause). Kreider's concern is that the new status of Christianity

following the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E. led to a change in the practice of conversion from a mission-orientation to an "established church" model, with all the well-known abuses and failings that follow such a model.

As director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture at Regents Park College, Oxford, Kreider holds to the traditions of solid, well-documented scholarship. Interestingly, though, he tries to marry careful patristical scholarship with the fast-paced, "tract"-like writing style of the American conservative evangelical tradition. This is not surprising, perhaps, since the book is part of a series entitled "Christian Mission and Modern Culture," which has received support from the Institute of Mennonite Studies. The book seems aimed at a popular readership, and for the most part, its writing style is lucid and engaging. The final chapter contains a series of short paragraphs identifying the negative aspects of the "Christendom" model of ecclesiology, and ends with a passionate plea that modern Christians look back to the early church for hints on how to rediscover a positive missiology.

Kreider's book is potentially useful for several things. It would make a fine supporting text to a course on mission studies. It is also a good, basic introduction to early church history and the writings and personalities of some of the more notable church fathers. As a pastor, one might use this book as a resource for an adult study group that is interested in outreach and mission within the congregation. It is accessible in its style and presentation of material, without being facile in its analyses.

The book's flaws arise more from its admitted limitations: it is not a particularly strong contribution to patristical studies, but it was never intended to be that. Some of the historical assumptions, currently very popular in Protestant circles, could be challenged on scholarly grounds. For some contemporary Christians involved in ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, the focus on *conversion* as a principal duty of the Christian community might be a little off-putting. All these things considered, the book is still worth reading in that it provides a fresh perspective on the ongoing problem of the Church in the world, with some interesting ideas on where we all might look for a restored sense of ecclesiology and mission.

Andrei S. P. Brennan

The Monastic Community of St. Silouan the Athonite

Canadian Archdiocese, The Orthodox Church in America