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# Book Reviews

## TURNING TO GOD: BIBLICAL CONVERSION IN THE MODERN WORLD

**David F Wells**

Carlisle: WEF/Paternoster 1997 (first edition 1987) 148pp £7.99 pb
ISBN 1-900890-06-2

All Christians need a clear understanding of conversion because it is the only way we enter the family of God. Indeed, without conversion, Christianity is no longer belief in Christ's substitutionary work and grace is no longer the unmerited and unalloyed work of God. It follows that attempts by the social gospel movement on the one hand, and the world religion movement on the other, to invalidate the evangelical view of conversion, are attacks on the cross of Christ.

The objective element of conversion (what God has done for us) is always the same, and is also what gives Christian conversion its unique character. The subjective element, however, can and does vary significantly; but neither the fact of different experiential paths to Christ, nor Wells' helpful distinction between 'insider' and 'outsider' conversion imply different religion roads to Christ. 'Insider' conversion refers to those who have a substantial set of beliefs before coming to Christ, while 'outsider' conversion denotes those who have little or no prior knowledge. The treatment of 'insiders' deals with Paul's conversion and children coming to Christian faith. While converts from Islam and Judaism do share some beliefs basic to the Christian faith, they cannot be treated as 'insiders' because Christian conversion is an assault on intricately related concepts of community, identity and nationhood. The same is true for Hinduism and Buddhism, although their fuzzy-set thinking presents special obstacles to Christian understanding and response. The West has now become sufficiently alienated from Christian values that such 'outsiders' come to faith in stages, after more rather than less preparation for the gospel.

Conversion has been understood differently by the church through the ages, and recent developments present a danger to the gospel. Through the Awakening, there was a shift in the understanding of conversion from a *life* of change to a *moment* of change, which together with the recent phenomena of television and the displacement of truth by mood, has conspired to form a

modern message so at variance with the biblical gospel that the cross is obscured: 'When the cross is clearly in view so, too, is the truth that only God can save us; when personal experience is dominant then the truth that only God can save us is not... what remains is simply a sinner who was clever enough to get what he or she wanted from God' (p 144).

*Turning to God* is the written-up account of a WEF theological consultation on the nature of conversion held in 1985, and first published in 1987. It is not made clear how this second edition differs from the first, but the reissue of such a valuable little study is very welcome indeed.

ED MOLL

## THEOLOGY WITHOUT WEAPONS: THE BARTHIAN REVOLT IN MODERN THEOLOGY

Gary Dorrien

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2000 x+239pp No price pb
ISBN 0-664-22151-3

Karl Barth and his theology is once again at the centre of many theological discussions. Often treated with suspicion by Evangelicals, Barth's theology has continuing relevance as orthodox theologians take up his thought to fight various causes and battles.

In this work, Dorrien adopts a historical approach to explore the origins of Barth's theology, and to clarify the routes which it then took throughout modern theology. He writes in conversation with some of the best and most recent interpreters of Barth (for example, Hunsinger and McCormack), and for someone who is self-confessedly 'non-Barthian' (a term for which he provides some helpful clarificatory discussions) he is surprisingly adept at unpacking the Swiss theologian's thought.

The approach places Barth in the context of Ritschl and Herrmann, and then traces his development into a dialectical theology influenced by Kierkegaard. Dorrien explores not only contemporary theological challenges, but also the much deeper philosophical and sociological issues which shaped Barth's unique response. The nature of German Christianity, the varying theologies of Bultmann and Brunner, and the impact of Heidegger all come under the microscope. Finally, Dorrien traces the modern theological reaction against Barth, including

the works of Tillich, Thielicke, Niebuhr, Bonhoffer and Torrance.

This work is both timely in that it speaks into numerous contemporary debates regarding Barth and neo-orthodoxy, and also amazingly detailed. It is not a student introduction to Barth's theology or legacy, but rather it is a competent exposition of one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century. Even for Evangelicals who finally dismiss Barth, the challenge is to rightly understand him such that polemic is informed disagreement rather than opinionated reaction. This book will help that process.

TONY GRAY

**THE CHALLENGE OF JESUS**
**N T Wright**
London: SPCK 2000 x+163pp £9.99 pb ISBN 0 281 05286 7

The work of New Testament scholar N T Wright cannot have gone unnoticed by many. Originally publishing in articles and learned academic volumes, Wright has since launched on a monumental six volume project to explore Christian origins. The first volume, *The New Testament and the People of God*, received critical acclaim as it dealt with questions of theological methodology, historical criticism, and the background of the first century Palestinian world. The second volume, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, explored through the gospels the life and self-understanding of Jesus of Nazareth, and how he fitted into the expectations of the people of God. Wright has also become well known through his popular and devotional writings, and frequent media appearances. In the battle with the loony left of Jesus research, Wright is surely on the side of the saints, and members of the Jesus Seminar stand no chance in the face of his attack.

In this slim volume, Wright distils much of that academic work into a manageable chunk. Aimed at your average broad-sheet reader, this work is not dogged by technical discussion and heavy footnotes. The reader is made aware that such detailed work sits in the background and can be called upon when needed, but here Wright concentrates on presenting a sustained account of the person of Jesus, and forcing the contemporary challenge of such a figure to today's church and today's world.

The tone of the writing is both engaging and often confrontational – but the

latter is always done with the greatest charity, and the utmost desire to understand Jesus and his challenge better. He defends his reliance on historical issues, batting against those on the left and right who might view such work as either inconclusive or as a challenge to the sufficiency of Scripture. The Jesus that Wright describes is one who was firmly rooted in first century Judaism, and who wanted to reconstitute the people of God around himself rather than around the temple. Jesus was a prophet, and one who undertook the role of Messiah, an identity that led to the radical suffering of the cross and the overthrowing surprise of the Resurrection.

Tom Wright's work can often give rise to numerous negative reactions. Liberal scholars question his historical reconstruction, yet at the very least he gives great attention to an understanding that makes the best and simplest sense of the available data. Conservative scholars have questioned his reliance on the exile theme, his downplaying of eschatology, his 'humanizing' of Jesus, and other aspects of his work. Some unfairly dismiss all his writing because of related work on the new perspective on Paul and justification by faith. Yet at the heart of this book is an unrelenting stress on the centrality of the cross to the person and work of Jesus, and the call to follow this way of mission in our postmodern world. At times amusing, at times uncomfortable, this book is recommended for all who want to understand Jesus afresh, be challenged in their assumptions, and be caused to think through all their neatly worked out systems and plans.

TONY GRAY

**'HELL': A HARD LOOK AT A HARD QUESTION: THE FATE OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS IN NEW TESTAMENT THOUGHT**
**David Powys**
Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1998 xxii + 478pp £14.99 pb
ISBN 0 85364-831-X

The case for conditionalism, or for the annihilation of the unrighteous, has come more and more into focus in recent years within Evangelicalism. As John Stott stated his position tentatively in *Essentials*, and John Wenham robustly defended the conditionalist interpretation of hell, Evangelicals split as to the interpretation of the appropriate scriptural verses and images. Edward Fudge's work was for a long time the most developed conditionalist work, until now. Powys' book is based on his doctoral thesis and, after much

considered debate, makes the following conclusion:

> The tentative finding of this study is that the unrighteous will have no life after death, save possibly to be raised temporarily to be condemned. The unrighteous, whoever they prove to be, will find that God respects them in death as in life – true to their own choice they will have no part in the restored kingdom of God, indeed, severed from the source of life, they will be no more.

For those conservatives who wish to reject such a conclusion outright, caution must be exercised. For this is no dogmatic or simplistic statement. Rather, Powys, who has made himself conversant with a wide range of theological disciplines and issues in biblical studies, argues a strong and powerful case. After setting the scene with some historical theology, Powys investigates the Old Testament and inter-testamental background to the topic. At the close of the Old Testament Powys identifies four main categories of hope that were developing (against the simplistic understanding that the Old Testament has one single and continuous view of life after death). Similarly, he asserts that there was a mix of views in the non-canonical literature, and only one example of a belief in unending conscious torment for the unrighteous. In Palestinian literature, little support can be found for the beliefs of universal immortality or unending torment.

In the light of these findings, Powys turns to the New Testament evidence. Key to his understanding of the gospels is the contention that Gehenna, and its associated images, was used motivationally rather than informatively. The other images used imply rejection or destruction, rather than retribution. Similarly, he concludes that both the Pauline literature (where wrath has been misconceived as a future projection) and the Johannine literature (where the unrighteous fail to receive eternal life and instead meet with the second death) provide no support for unending torment.

In a review it is impossible to discuss each point. Powys forms a strong cumulative argument. Perhaps of fundamental importance are the hermeneutical questions involved (discussed at even greater length in his thesis). To what extent can we rely on non-canonical literature for interpretation? To what extent can we derive doctrine from passages which supposedly have a motivational character? And how far do we go in interpreting the details of images for the purposes of systematic theology? For those not interested in the

hell question, this work provides a fascinating case study for these and other questions. Nevertheless, all should be interested in this question. It is of vital imporance. And Powys has provided the strongest and most articulate defence of the conditionalist position written thus far. For this his book must be commended. And even for those of us who may disagree, Powys at the very least has made it clear beyond a doubt that there is a case to be answered.

TONY GRAY

**GOOD AND PROPER MEN: LORD PALMERSTON AND THE BENCH OF BISHOPS** **Nigel Scotland**

Cambridge: James Clarke 2000 272pp £40 hb ISBN 0-227-67946-6

The Palmerston bishops, frequently so-called, are often considered really to be Shaftesbury prelates, since the guiding hand in the dubiously religious Prime Minister's ecclesiastical appointments during the decade from 1855 to 1865 is said to have been that of his very religious step-son-in-law. Undoubtedly this was partially true and that explains the promotion of several leading Evangelicals, but, to vary the metaphor, there was at times another finger in the pie, namely, that of the Queen herself, possibly until his death in 1861 influenced also by the Prince Consort. And even after he died, it would seem that the failure to promote an Evangelical to follow Sumner at Canterbury in 1862 may have been in important degree due to her. Shaftesbury wanted Baring of Durham, but the moderate and colourless High Churchman, Longley, rare amonst the nineteenth-century occupants of St Augustine's chair in not having a long and pietistic biography written about him, was translated from York. Shaftesbury then tried to get Waldegrave of Carlisle to Bishopthorpe and failed yet again, having to rest content in the more limited success of ensuring that his *bête noir*, the most capable member of the episcopal bench, Samuel Wilberforce of Oxford, did not get there either. Instead, for his contribution to the replies to *Essays and Reviews* the Queen preferred in more senses than one that archetypal fence-sitting Evangelical, William Thomson, former Provost of Queen's, Oxford (a Queen's man in more ways than one) and at the time the transient Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol.

Nigel Scotland has had the privilege of access to the Shaftesbury papers at Broadlands and he makes good use of them in providing additional evidence both about what happened and of Shaftesbury's part in it, such as, for

example, when Tait got London in 1856, again it appears at the insistence of the Queen, with Shaftesbury arguing for Archdeacon Sinclair, a High Churchman but also, interestingly, as Shaftesbury describes him, 'a firm opponent of the Bishop of Oxford' – poor old Sammy Wilberforce again! The Broadlands papers also show Shaftesbury's concern to promote men who had experience in large parishes. The appendix of brief biographies (with some good reproductions of portraits, incidentally), sometimes unnecessarily repeated in the main text, shows how true this was. These summaries also corroborate the claim, amazingly coincidental even in that age of class distinctions, that no less than eight of the fourteen Palmerston bishops came from landed or otherwise influential families, amongst whom the five most decidedly evangelical hailed from the aristocracy.

In a series of chapters Scotland considers the bishops as pastors, leaders of their clergy and participants in the House of Lords debates as well as in their response to such important contemporary phenomena as the *Essays and Reviews* controversy and the Ritualistic movement, concluding with a chapter on the characteristics of 'Palmerstonian Episcopacy' which one has to say is a bit unbalanced in its excess of both before and after. The chapter on *Essays and Reviews* gives welcome attention to the most effective response to that volume and one often improperly underestimated in discussions of the matter, namely, *Aids to Faith*, edited by Thomson and including contributions by Ellicott and Harold Browne, two of the other Palmerston bishops, neither of them, however, despite some claims to the contrary, distinctly Evangelical. Scotland provides useful summaries of their articles. The anti-ritualism chapter has inevitably a lot of Tait, some interesting material relating to Ellicott, but is sadly thin on Baring who was the most aggressive scourge of the Ritualists. Nor does it tell us much about how Bickersteth handled the Leeds Anglo-Catholicism with which his predecessor Longley had waged such a lengthy battle.

This comment is all the more relevant because Scotland's strength lies in the information he has collected rather than in the use he makes of it. The book leaves the impression of diligent compilation, perhaps with a battery of detailed card-indexes, the contents of which are then drawn upon and set down, even to repeating the very same phrase or statement on several occasions (without trying I counted a dozen such, some within a few pages of each other). His industry is incomparable – he even tells how many times each bishop spoke in the House of Lords! The book is also marred by careless

mis-spellings, inaccurate punctuation, some misused words and a less than scintillating prose style. Furthermore, despite his wide reading, he seems to have ignored Georgina Battiscome's highly relevant biography of Shaftesbury and to be unaware of Bryan Hardman's fine and sadly unpublished 1965 Cambridge PhD thesis on this very subject. It is helpful to have Scotland's work, but it is not the definitive analytical study we still need to inform us about these bishops and their impact on the period.

ARTHUR POLLARD

## ANGLICAN RITUALISM IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN 1830-1910

**Nigel Yates**

Oxford: OUP 1999 45pp £60 hb ISBN 0-19-826989-7

The Church of England was transformed almost beyond recognition during the Victorian period, such that at the start of the twentieth century it was difficult to identify as the same Protestant Reformed Church of two generations before. This radical metamorphosis was largely due to the increasing prevalence of ritualism, studies of which have until recently been dominated by partisan polemics. Prominent ritualists such as Denison, Lowder, Mackonochie and Bishop King feature recurrently in Anglo-Catholic biographies, where they are given as saintly examples to emulate. Here at last Nigel Yates provides us with a much-needed scholarly reassessment of Victorian ritualism, 'deprived of its heroes and its villains, its martyrs and its victories' (p 8), without a one-sided theological agenda. He intentionally shifts the focus away from oft-repeated tales of famous men and famous churches, using less well-worn archives to present a broader vision of the impact of ritualism in average parishes across the British Isles.

Yates surveys the rapid spread of ritualist practices in the decades following the Oxford Movement, and the intense struggle between the English Church Union and the Church Association. He examines the reasons why Parliamentary legislation proved ineffective in controlling such innovations, and the ambiguous response of the bishops, influenced by an increasing Prime Ministerial bias towards promoting High Churchmen to vacant sees. Resulting secessions by advanced High Churchmen to Rome and by Evangelicals to mainstream nonconformist churches, with the establishment of the Free Church of England, are investigated. We also read of the impact of ritualism on non-Anglican churches in Britain, as well as parallel

developments overseas. The study reaches up to the campaigns of Kensit and the Protestant Truth Society, and concludes with a survey of the varied fortunes of Anglo-Catholicism in the twentieth century.

Yates' work is subtly revisionist. For instance, he illustrates that there were a number of pre-Tractarian movements where ceremonial was both significant and sometimes controversial, although Victorian ritualism went far beyond what was previously experienced. The common opinion that it was primarily clergy who supported advanced ritual, and primarily laity who opposed it, is shown to be 'a gross over-simplification' (p 152). Yates also concludes that the important Public Worship Regulation Act of 1874 was not in fact the total disaster in controlling ritualism that is often claimed. Likewise he explodes 'the myth of the ritualist slum priest' (p 287), arguing that their success was mainly in prosperous suburbs, and that non-ritualists did equally well in the slum districts.

This is an excellent and significant book, setting a new standard in ritualist studies. Its main drawback is the prohibitive price, but it deserves close attention.

ANDREW ATHERSTONE

ENGLAND'S LONG REFORMATION 1500-1800
Nicholas Tyacke
UCL Press 1998 347pp £35 hb ISBN

This volume of essays by a group of distinguished scholars attempts to suggest that there are advantages in studying the English Reformation in a much longer context than just the sixteenth century. The emergence of England as a Protestant nation, the essayists suggest, was not completed until much later than the close of the sixteenth century. This is reflected in the ongoing struggles between Catholic Anglicans and Puritans in the mid-seventeenth Century. The struggle for the 'Reformation' of manners also continued on into the seventeenth century. For these reasons, Patrick Collinson, one of the essayists, writes that the 'Long Reformation' should be seen as 'a series of responses to the constraints of a Reformation never wholeheartedly embraced and promoted by the centres and sources of ecclesiastical and political power'.

The individual contributions which were originally papers presented at the Neale Colloquium in 1996 are diverse and specialized and do not all fit

comforably with the volume's title. They nevertheless provide some fascinating and very detailed insights into the emergence of Protestantism in the sixteenth century and its establishment in the succeeding centuries. Significantly, Jonathan Berry in his chapter, detects a different kind of Protestantism in eighteenth century Britain which was not so wedded to the teaching of the earlier sixteenth century reformers.

Other contributions include those by Muriel McClendon, Christopher Marsh and Peter Lake and Michael Questier. McClendon shows that Norwich magistrates tolerated a good deal of religious diversity and showed a distinct unwillingness to enforce Tudor religious policies. Marsh gives us some detailed information about the Family of Love, an Elizabethan Sect with strong millennial aspirations and Lake and Questier demonstrate how both Puritans and Recusants saw prisons and their inmates as opportunities for proselytizing and evangelism.

Jeremy Gregory in the final essay assesses the advantages and disadvantages of viewing the Reformation in a long context. He notes on the one hand that both Catholic and Protestant historians are agreed that England was a Protestant nation by the end of Elizabeth's reign but yet on the other hand by the early years of the seventeenth century, Protestantism was receding in the face of Laudianism. He concludes by emphasizing that the ideal of a Protestant nation was 'always something to aim for, a process of becoming, rather than of being'.

This is a stimulating collection of essays which will be of particular interest to anyone with a specialized knowledge of the English Reformation.

NIGEL SCOTLAND

**CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT** **James A Borland**
Fearn: Christian Focus Publications 1999 184pp £9.99 pb
ISBN 185792448-7

One of the most controversial issues in biblical theology is the degree to which the Lord Jesus is present in the Old Testament. In this contribution to the 'Mentor' series, the Professor of Theology at Liberty Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia draws our attention to an important, but neglected factor: the so-called 'Christophanies'.

Borland studies the Old Testament incidents where God manifested himself in human form, and concludes that these were appearances of God himself. The old alternative acceptable to Evangelicals is that these were appearances of a created angel acting as God's representative. However, Borland shows that his view has little exegetical basis. First he looks at the appearances of the 'angel of the Lord' (although these are not limited to human-form theophanies). The 'angel' bore the name 'Yahweh', was spoken of as God, spoke of himself as God, and had divine attributes. Most importantly he accepted worship – unlike the angel of Revelation (Rev 22:9). Borland suggests that 'angel' or 'messenger' refers to his function, not his nature. He then looks at other 'human-form theophanies' and shows that these were God, not a created messenger.

Borland's next point is more controversial. He argues that we must accept the view, common among the ante-Nicene fathers and the Reformers, that it was the Second Person of the Trinity who appeared in human form (hence they are 'Christophanies'). The person and work of Christ most closely resemble the Christophanies. One wonders if Borland has disproved the more cautious view that human-form theophanies were simply appearances of God, and cannot be assigned to any one of the Persons. His argument rests partly on the assumption that 'Yahweh' refers specifically to the Father, not to the whole Godhead. Yet Borland's cumulative case is impressive; given the relationship between Father and Son revealed by Christ, the 'messenger' function seems most appropriate for the Logos. John 1:18 and 12:38-41 may offer positive support, and the relationship between the messenger and Yahweh (identified, yet distinct) seems very like that between the Logos and God in John 1:1. Borland is less convincing when he argues that human form was God's characteristic means of revelation in the Old Testament. In many of these passages there is no suggestion that a physical form was seen, and Borland seems to read too much into anthropomorphic language.

After answering the objection that God is by nature invisible, Borland turns to the theological implications of Christophanies. He argues that God revealed himself in a 'personal, visible manner' both to meet the immediate needs of individuals and to accomplish his plan of progressive revelation. Christophanies hold the work of Christ in the two testaments together, and prepare the way for the incarnation (Borland carefully distinguishes Christophany from true incarnation). Perhaps he should emphasize more

God's apparent will to conceal his identity. Here God's mercy and condescension in meeting individuals' immediate needs stand out. In this sense, Christophanies are a foretaste of the incarnation, although this can probably only be perceived in retrospect. Borland's reflections are intriguing and thought provoking, but I think that more work is needed to integrate the Christophanies into biblical theology.

The book concludes with three appendices. The first is on the history of interpretation, and the second refutes the view that Melchizedek was a Christophany. The third draws 'practical lessons' from five Christophanies; this was disappointing, as it did not escape the dangers of merely moralizing from the text.

The book is well argued, and clearly written, with good exegesis, and openly assumes the inerrancy of Scripture. I think Borland has established a strong case for believing that human-form theophanies were in fact the pre-incarnate Christ.

STEPHEN WALTON

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