

Gareth Atkins, *Converting Britannia: Evangelicals and British Public Life, 1770–1840* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2019), pp. 329. ISBN 978-1-78327-439-0. doi:[10.1017/S1740355321000048](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355321000048)

Evangelicals have always been excellent networkers, building a web of global relationships and influence to further their gospel causes. In this important monograph, Gareth Atkins demonstrates that the late-Hanoverian evangelicals in the Church of England, in the age of William Wilberforce, Hannah More and Charles Simeon, were perhaps the best networkers of all. As much as the Victorian hagiographers liked to claim that their fathers and mothers in the faith stood independent of worldly methods like patronage, and were often excluded from the establishment, Atkins demonstrates that the opposite was the case. Indeed, this volume could have been alternatively titled, *Establishment Evangelicalism*. These men and women were content to use all available means to advance their ambitions, and although they were at the forefront of innovation and entrepreneurship they also took ‘full advantage’ of older Hanoverian social and political structures. To a later reformist generation, patronage had the stench of nepotism and corruption, and therefore was erased from the pious record. But through voracious research in surviving private papers, Atkins reveals in a sequence of fascinating case studies the obsessive evangelical ‘pursuit of power’ and their desire to achieve nothing less than ‘institutional take-over’ (pp. 12–14). Evangelical networks were embedded throughout the corridors of power. In the City of London, they bound together financiers and merchants, in a world where mutual trust and raising credit were critical to success. ‘Guineas and godliness seemed almost interchangeable’ (p. 104), and businessmen and marketeers joined forces to help evangelical philanthropic and missionary enterprises reach their global potential. In the Colonial Office, evangelicals also exercised ‘significant clout’ (p. 167), exploiting their connections to extend their control over appointments throughout the British Empire. A similar strategy was apparent in the East India Company and the Royal Navy, where they were ‘consummate insiders’ (p. 179), leveraging their patronage networks and their family trees to great advantage. Atkins persuasively illustrates this ‘symbiosis’ (p. 223) between evangelicalism and the establishment, with wonderfully fresh detail and incisive commentary. The old picture of Hanoverian evangelicals as embattled and reactionary critics is decisively dismantled. These godly manipulators in fact held ‘disproportionate influence’ (p. 246) over establishment institutions, controlling the tone of public discourse even while they forged wider political coalitions to promote their agendas. Atkins goes further and challenges the Victorian nostalgia – which still shapes the currently scholarly literature – for a Hanoverian golden age when evangelical giants walked the land. For 150 years, standard historical periodizations have posited a sharp break around 1833, the year that Wilberforce died and the *Tracts for the Times* were born. The 1820s or 1830s are often seen as signalling the decline of the Clapham Sect (itself a misleading construct), and the eclipse of Georgian moderation by aggressive and apocalyptic Victorian extremism. Yet Atkins helpfully problematizes these common assumptions, emphasizing the continuity between the

Hanoverian evangelicals and their successors. It is a carefully nuanced, insightful study, with delightful prose and minute observation, which should change the way in which Anglican evangelical history is henceforth written.

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Richard Harries and Stephen Platten (eds.), *Austin Farrer for Today: A Prophetic Agenda* (London: SCM Press, 2020), pp. xiv + 256. ISBN: 9780334059448 (pbk).
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Austin Farrer's thought may be viewed as an unfolding of Paul's assertion that 'We have the mind of Christ'. Or, to situate this text in a true 'Farrerian' light, we might gloss, 'We *have been given* the mind of Christ'. This givenness of finite nature as already graced, or as Farrer might put it, 'packaged' with the fundamental orientation towards the infinite opens key perspectives on his seminal contributions both to his time and ours. In metaphysics, Farrer offers a modified Blondelian-Thomism that paves the way for a unitive substantial philosophy of matter; in ethics and ontology, a concept of divine-human double-agency vis-à-vis the personalism of John Macmurray; in biblical studies, a 'consolidation' hermeneutic that permits literary craft, sacramental typology and form-criticism to speak on the same plane as it would have for the Cappadocian fathers; in preaching, the development of a unique format that spontaneously combined prayer, poetry and the exploration of some of his own major philosophical positions, transforming the mundane – perhaps Farrer alone could successfully liken the Holy Spirit to a genie in a bottle for a Pentecost sermon – by casting it dialectically into relation with the infinite.

This volume, edited by Harries and Platten, offers detailed explorations into all of these 'offers'. As editors, they have done an admirable job delivering the thesis of Farrer's prophetic – that is, anticipatory – standing towards important trends in the various academic cultures in which his peculiar genius fermented. Throughout the volume a mosaic coalesces: gospel as literary product (pp. 18, 33); neo-Thomist personalist metaphysics (pp. 54-55); voluntarism and Anglican ethics (p. 61); denial of Irenaean pedagogical providence in theodicy (p. 79); the possibility of a reformed analytical (doctrinal) theology as a counter to logical positivism (pp. 84, 96); conceiving the Holy Spirit as the 'ground' of the human heart as in the *Surnaturel* debates (p. 149) – Farrer commands all these position with an ingenuity and independence that later thinkers would retrace, often unknowingly. Marilyn McCord Adams, for instance, addressed horrendous evils in a manner similar to that of Farrer, and as Leigh Vicens argues in this volume, while she does so with a more satisfying conclusion about intimacy with the divine as consolation, their approaches are mirror images of one another (pp. 78-79).

But prophets do more than anticipate the future. In a bid for a people to heed their message, they recapitulate the past. To cast previous events and words into new light, they discover piercing metaphors to aid comprehension, and, as Farrer would