

perform the same functions as war memorials and indicate degrees of belonging to political institutions (120–122 and 159–162).

While a more precise definition of war commemoration would have been helpful, this does not detract from Wright's central claim that selected pericopes from Samuel, Kings and Chronicles reflect political notions about nation, state, identity and belonging. Moreover, he gives important attention to the way in which political issues specific to Judah are addressed in the biblical texts. This makes sense since the annals of the predominant Northern Kingdom of Israel have been mediated through Judean textual traditions. Also convincing are his observations that genealogies confirm political status and the marginality of border towns foster commemorations addressing belonging. And Wright astutely notes that David, as the youngest of eight sons with little prospects of inheritance, had a compelling incentive to create for himself the kingdom of Judah through cunning ruthlessness. This engaging and well-written book contributes significantly to our understanding of the political dimensions of the formation and content of the David and Caleb narratives and will deservedly take its place in future scholarship on David and biblical politics.

***Religious Conversions in the Mediterranean World.* Edited by Nadia Marzouki and Olivier Roy. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, £54.62 Paper**

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For many years, conversion has served as a distinctly political tool. Through mass conversions — usually involving the use of force and violence — many leaders strengthened their governmental hegemony, which was based on unity of religious and political affiliation. In our times too, conversions on a huge scale are taking place — in South America (from Catholicism to Protestantism); in Europe (to Islam, or from Islam to Christianity); while in the United States there are continuous transitions between various religions in fairly large numbers. Do these conversions

resemble or differ from the traditional conversion pattern? The answer provided by the book *Religious conversion in the Mediterranean world* is that contemporary conversions differ radically from those that preceded them, and this difference reflects profound changes in modern religiosity and in the way it interacts with the political sphere.

This collection of essays discusses a number of fascinating and multi-faceted case studies of conversions on both sides of the Mediterranean, such as conversions from Islam and from Orthodox Christian denominations to Protestant Evangelism in Lebanon, Algeria, and Egypt (chapters 1–3, 5), as well as conversions to Islam, Judaism, and a variety of Christian denominations in Israel (chapter 4) and France (chapters 6–8).

The book's main thesis is that modern conversion's direction has changed: while in the pre-modern era conversion moved from marginal to dominant religions, today's converts are moving in the opposite direction: they are abandoning hegemonic religions in favor of minority religions that are socially marginalized. In the past, conversion processes were mostly accompanied by political gains, whereas now the process is apolitical and sometimes even anti-political. Thus, as Oliver Roy explains, from a vertical procedure reflecting authority, hegemony and power, conversion has become a horizontal move: "conversion(s) are ... disconnected from 'political domination' or at least political competition for domination, even if they all carry important political consequences" (176).

Moreover, modern conversion reflects not only defiance of the existing social order, but also of hegemonic religion which has become — from the converts' perspective — degenerate, rigid, and lacking in spiritual vivacity. It is not for no reason that converts in Algeria, Lebanon, and Israel prefer not to define themselves as "religious" but rather as belonging to the "fellowship of Jesus" and as "faithful," concepts which downplay religion as an Orthodox dogma and practice, in favor of intimacy and spirituality. These ideas of religious hybridity permeate even some of the missionaries themselves (Egypt and Sudan) who internalize that conversion is not a "clear-cut" development, but rather an ambiguous, blurry, partial process, which at times is even unknown to the believers themselves (chapter 5). Furthermore, since contemporary conversions have been disengaged from politics, most of today's missionaries no longer serve as agents transferring the supposedly high and advanced Western culture; rather, they deal with religious matters per se (179–183).

On a theoretical level, most articles explicitly tie changes in the patterns of conversion with general changes that have occurred within religion itself. Following Taylor, Berger, and Hervieu-le'ger, it has been argued

that conversion has moved into the private sphere as this is its appropriate place in our time. In this sense, the authors adopt a sophisticated interpretation of the famous secularization thesis: although religion has not sunk and disappeared in modern times, it did become a private matter. The modern era is characterized by religiosity which springs from individual choice and is essentially based on the idea that anyone can choose and shape his or her own faith and religious practice, with no connection whatsoever to the political sphere.

Yet the case studies illuminated in this book, as well as other cases omitted from it, also point to the plausibility of the opposite interpretation. The fact that all the case studies depict relatively esoteric shifts of relatively small numbers of converts proves that in the mainstream, religion and conversion continue to play a major political role, as they did in the past.

Indeed, numerous studies (such as, R. I. J. Hackett *Proselytization revisited: Rights Talk, Free Markets and Culture Wars*) have already indicated that the global religious resurgence and the intensification of the linkage between nationalism, ethnicity, and religion have led to governments' increased political involvement in their citizens' conversions. Many countries, such as Russia and India, have tightened the ban on proselytization in the last two decades in order to maintain the hegemony of their national religions, namely Orthodox Christianity in the Russian case and Hinduism in the Indian case. Other countries, especially in the Middle East, hampered or completely banned conversions from the religion of the majority to minor marginal ones.

Although these policies are supported by the religious establishment, they are driven mostly by politicians who stress that their motive is not merely religious but rather national, i.e., that they strive to protect authority of the state and nurture the traditional religion in order to preserve their collective cultural identity. The examples given in the book regarding black converts to Judaism, as well as Mormon converts in France (chaps. 6–8), show that even in one of the most secular countries in the world, converts are compelled to conceal their conversion from their immediate surroundings since it is viewed as a sign of alienation or even betrayal of the French culture.

The Israelis case ultimately illustrates this trend. Although the chapter dealing with Israel (chap. 4) lists several Evangelical Christian converts, the larger picture — and the more significant one — was completely missed in my opinion: in the last two decades Israel has turned into a state that openly and publicly encourages its non-Jewish citizens to convert to the Jewish religion. Following waves of mass immigration

that started in the early 1990s, the political leadership has established a conversion system for immigrants of Jewish descent who are not recognized as Jews according to the religious definitions. More than 80,000 people (!) have converted to Judaism through this state conversion project. This is a striking example of conversion moving from the margins toward the center, reflecting Israel's political objective of bringing state and religion together.

Had emphasis been put on this case, as well as on religious conversions of young people all over Europe to Islam or Christianity (another phenomenon that was not duly considered in the book), it could be seen that conversion still remains a distinctly political act, whether it expresses a desire to integrate into the dominant national community or a cultural minority's struggle for its place in the public sphere.

The broad range of case studies discussed in the book reveals, directly or indirectly, two opposite religious models that presently exist side by side. The first is based on the theory of the "privatization of religion," and the other on the theory of "public religion." The first stems from the assumption that religion nowadays is individualistic, resulting from free, independent, and autonomous choice. The second argues that even today, religion is still a matter of membership in a historical and national community. These two models are expressed by two types of conversions: one is based on independent free will; the second is influenced by a hegemonic religious power that still imposes on, or at least influences, many people to join it. The fact that the book reveals a variety of conversion processes proves that these two models exist simultaneously and are vying for the interpretation and application of modern religion in the political sphere.