

Queer Redemption

How queerness changes everything we thought we knew about Christianity

Charlie Bell

DARTON, LONGMAN & TODD

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REVIEW:

By The Rev'd Dr. Keven Hall



Dr Hall is a retired Anglican priest & Jungian analyst from New Zealand living and working in London

Queer Redemption: Dr Charlie Bell

Dr Hall writes in his review of this book that Bell believes gay people don't feel listened to in the church, not just to do with their sexuality, but about their personhoods. Not properly listened to by the majority in the Church of England, not properly listened to by its leadership

Bell sees his task as attempting to reach Christians and Christianity with how they can do better at meeting queer people 3-dimensionally. And, broadly speaking, to see how more of us can learn to live better with our complex, often difficult, psychologies and differences

He seeks to return the church to the irreducible core of the life of Christ by resurrecting the best of Anglican theological method, with his use of experiences of gay people as his point of reference. Essentially, that we are already children of

God by virtue of God's love, and whoever acknowledges this is already redeemed by God. In other words, our ontological states take precedence over our behaviours. In doing this he adds a 4th to Hooker's 3 sources of authority - Scripture, tradition and reason, the 3-legged stool - that of individual human experience

He challenges what he calls 'normativity', saying that 'queer people have been endlessly victimized and abused by a church they continue to love and serve', seeing normativity as 'seeking to displace Christ as Head of the Church . . . to lull us into a church of the comfortable . . .'

'Such a worshipped idol of normativity is perhaps the inevitable result of the Constantinian shift and Constantinian cultural Christianity', he writes

Hall sees a good example of this from Bell in that we live in a world where the varieties and practices of sex are very great (and always have been), yet heterosexual Christian people are not, in the words of the Bishop of Dover (quoted by Dr Bell): 'consigned to the outhouse'. 'So what is it about homosexual sex . . . that so upsets the Church?' she, and he, asks

In going about his task Dr Bell takes Scripture, exegeting to depth where necessary, as well as reason and tradition, seriously; he blasts the excessive use of thoughtless categorizations and generalisations in this debate; he challenges us to wonder why we don't talk more openly about all aspects of sex; and treats marriage and sacraments seriously in relation to all this

Broadly speaking he is ' . . . calling the church to a refinement of its life and purpose through a shedding of . . . cultural baggage that it has far too often baptised', looked at through the eyes of gay Christians who feel the church has monumentally failed to live up to 'loving neighbour as self' with respect of them

Hall sees this as a hard-hitting 200-page work of substantive theology and more, not always easy to digest, yet compellingly readable also, thought provoking in the way he works at drawing attention to the challenges Jesus posed, and poses, around learning to live radically with difference through freedom with responsibility

Readers will want to debate a number of different points in Bell's thesis. For example, the extent to which personal experience as a category is equatable with Hooker's three sources of authority, but this shouldn't distract us from the essence of his study

Keven Hall
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