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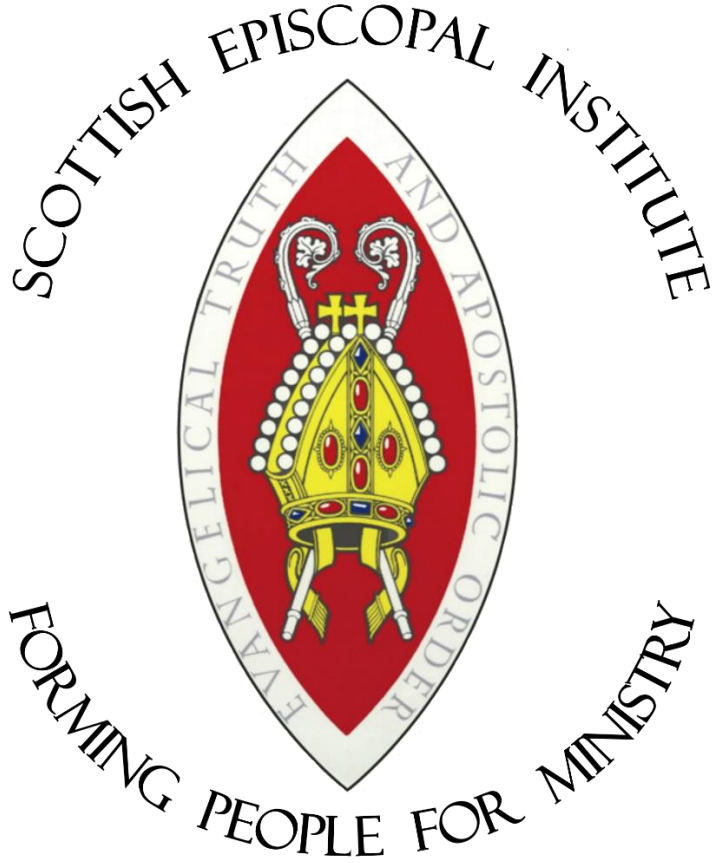

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Worship and Desire in the Anglican Tradition: Why This Matters in Contemporary Church and Culture

The Scottish Episcopal Institute Annual Lecture,
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Introduction:
the scriptural basis for prayer and worship, as motivated by desire

My very grateful thanks, first, for the honour of the invitation to give this annual lecture at the Scottish Episcopal Institute, and especially to Anne Tomlinson, Michael Hull and John McLuckie for supporting and responding to me on the day, and Aidan Strange for taking such good care of all the practical, online arrangements. I do thank you all.

I have chosen to speak to you tonight on the subject of '(Christian) desire and worship' — but why this topic, why this topic now, and what, fundamentally, do I mean by 'desire' to begin with? My interest, as I shall shortly show, resides first in outlining the particular moral and spiritual difficulties with which our topic ('desire') is larded in our contemporary culture — a culture of advertisement, the worldwide web, social media, the widespread availability of soft pornography, and the post-Freudian general presumption of the 'sexualization' of desire. What is perhaps less widely reflected upon is the equal thematic centrality of 'desire' (and cognate terms) as a topic in the biblical witness — its deep entanglement with the core theme of our relation to God in prayer and worship, and its significance *both* for understanding that fundamental longing for God in Godself, and for comprehending the distortions of the desiring faculty in the propulsion towards sin. In short, as I shall chart afresh tonight, 'desire' is a topic that lies crucially at the intersection of sin and salvation, and in order to think about it afresh *against* the blandishments of the hidden (secular) 'persuaders' of our culture, we shall need to probe some forgotten materials out of the tradition and also think afresh, and somewhat challengingly, about how ministers of the gospel, specifically, have the dangerous but creative task in worship – whether consciously or unconsciously — of educing and directing desire to God.

By 'desire' in this lecture, then, I shall mean the conative, motivational, longing core of the self, that is evident in the human from the very moment

of birth up to (and according to some patristic witnesses, such as Gregory of Nyssa, *beyond*) the gates of death. Desire in us 'stretches out in longing', as Nyssen puts it — and though its closeness, and entanglement with, conscious will and intellect is obvious (though admittedly somewhat mysterious and hard to explicate), desire as such may be seen as deeper and wider than them in the sense that it is vitally linked to bodily life and pre-dates speech (the newborn comes with the fundamental desire for human intimacy, warmth and nurture, for instance). It is manifested vibrantly, too, in those who through handicap have no speech, and it can also post-date speech in the dying — the dying person still *longs*, we might say. Desire, then, as Thomas Aquinas put it, is 'natural' to us, both in linking and mediating bodily and psychic needs and propulsions, and in connecting us — albeit obscurely — to God, our ultimate source and goal.[1] Desire, as both Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine[2] taught with complexity and sophistication in the early patristic era, although with different emphases, is also what goes *wrong* in sin — in terms of Genesis 3, the Fall is not merely an act of disobedience, but perhaps more significantly a corruption, or misdirection, or *misallocation*, of desire (see especially Gen. 3.6,16).

So desire is a category of core human selfhood, with widespread and ambivalent attachments towards which it is propelled, ranging from the divine and the good and the beautiful to the corrupt and the harmful and the sinful. It is how those two poles relate that will concern us in what follows.

But first, and by way of brief further introduction, I want to illustrate how deeply this theme informs the conception of worship and praise in the Old Testament (and especially in the Psalms), and how it also is more fundamental than commonly thought in the teaching of Jesus and of Paul, especially in relation to prayer.

Only consider, then, the core theme of 'longing' or 'desiring' or 'thirsting' for God throughout the psalm corpus: 'Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul for thee, O God; my soul thirsts for God, yea for the living God' (Ps. 42.1–2); 'Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you; my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever' (Ps. 73.25–26); or again, 'How lovely is your dwelling-place, O Lord of Hosts! My soul has a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God' (Ps. 84.1–2).

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[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, trans. by Richard J. Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[2] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. by R. S. Pine-Coffin (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

These are some of the most memorable turns of psalmic phrase, using a variety of Hebrew words to express longing, 'thirst' or desire, but the basic theme of desire for God drips from all the psalms, and would undeniably have been enshrined in Jesus's evident memorising of them. And despite Jesus's own seeming avoidance of 'eros' language in favour of 'agape' (a matter that was made hugely polemical in Anders Nygren's famous wartime text, *Agape and Eros*,[3] with 'eros' cast as the greedy grasping Platonic [or Pelagian] 'desire', over against Jesus' self-giving, grace-filled 'agape'[4]), it would be wholly misleading to cast Jesus's teaching as neglectful of desire in the wider sense we have just outlined. For what is his teaching on the kingdom if not at base the decision and choice always for what *really* matters before God, what is truly *deserving* of desire, if you like, for 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Mt. 6.21 and par.)? The pearl of great price, the treasure buried in the field, the lost coin or lost sheep — are not all these parables of the kingdom parables of choices and priorities in desire? Is not, indeed, the Lord's Prayer itself at base a modulator of desire, which puts God and his kingdom and his Holy Name *first* in the order of addressed requests, and then ranges everything else that is really important and desirable under that? More specifically, the author of Luke's gospel makes Jesus's final and most intense desire in his earthly life that of celebrating his own Passover and last Supper with his disciples: '(lit.) with desire I have desired to eat this Eucharist with you' (Lk. 22.15), '*epithumia epithumesa*'. The Eucharist then already becomes, according to Luke, the climax of longing in worship and unity, by Christ and with Christ — and thus, implicitly, we might say, it is already the place where desires are tested and sorted in relation to God-in-Christ. Jesus, on the night before he dies, gives us something very specific and practical to do to evince this testing.

It should not be as surprising at it might seem, therefore, that in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul brings together, in seemingly random association, all the problems of class and wealth and gender and sexuality (and quarrels and spite about them) at Corinth *precisely in connection* with his teaching on the Lord's supper. 'For I received from the Lord what I also handed onto you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread […]' (1 Cor. 11.23): the Last Supper narrative is inserted right into the discourse about the Corinthians' multiple squabbles. It is not far-fetched then, I put it to you, to read Paul's instructions on the Eucharist (as a site of potential

[3] Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1939).

[4] The semantic disjunction *in Greek* in relation to Jesus himself is here of course already misleadingly posed, given that Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and the translation of his teaching into Greek in the New Testament uses a wide range of terms for 'desiring', 'longing' and 'loving'.

condemnation as well as salvific grace) as precisely a teaching on the *ordering* of desires. By the same token, Paul's great exordium on Christian prayer in Romans 8 tells us the whole creation 'waits with eager longing' (Rom. 8.19, *he apokaradokia*, 'earnest expectation') for the appearance of the children of God. And since we do not rightly know what to 'ask for' (i.e., what best to desire in prayer), says Paul, it is the ecstasy of the Spirit, with 'sighs too deep for words' (note this is something deeper than verbal rationality) that must guide us in taking us to the Father through the sufferings and glory of Christ himself (Rom. 8.26).

The polemical disjunction made so influentially by Nygren between Platonic 'desire' ('eros') and Christian 'love' ('agape') then begins to look decidedly misleading. The multiple words used for desire or longing — or their cognates — in the Scriptures (between 20 and 30 in Hebrew, and several more in Greek) already complicate and blur that disjunction. No wonder, then, that so many of the early Fathers — amongst them Origen, the Cappadocians and Augustine, in the early centuries — did not see Platonism's and Neo-Platonism's teaching on eros as necessarily *inimical* to Jesus's teaching on agape, but rather in a mutually fecund critical relationship (as Nyssen put it, eros *is* 'love (agape) stretched out in longing'). And, as I have charted recently in the first volume of my systematics, *God, Sexuality and the Self*,[5] this marriage of biblical and Platonic thought, combined with early Christian commentaries on the Song of Songs, was ultimately to raise the notion of *divine* eros to a metaphysical principle in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*Divine Names*, IV)[6] in the late fifth century, with incalculable influence on later Western scholasticism and Eastern Byzantine thought, respectively. On this vision, what desire *is* is finally *in God* — that never-ceasing stretching out to scoop us up into it by participation and grace. In short, it is God in Godself who is the true source and goal of all human desires, when suitably purified and re-directed through grace from the effects of sin.

I have said this much by way of an initial theorising of desire, both semantically and biblically, and we shall return to these themes shortly. But I trust this has also given us sufficient evidence for now to indicate the centrality for Judaism and Christianity (and indeed also, by parallel formation, for Islam) of the key theological concepts of longing and desire, and to indicate how profoundly they are instilled in acts of prayer and worship. We must now go forward from here contrapuntally, however, into

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[5] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[6] Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. by Colm Luibheid (London: SPCK, 1987).

the very different world of the postmodern secular 'commodifications' of desire. I seek here not to demonise secular culture as such, as we shall see, but at the very least to indicate how subject we all are, even as Christian believers and practitioners, to the blandishments of that culture.

The commodification of desire in contemporary culture: sex, power, money and belongings

Only consider, first, as a slightly eye-opening emblem of the issues I seek to highlight under this rubric, an arresting article in a Saturday *Times* colour supplement of a few years ago.[7] Titled 'Boys, Sex and Consent in the MeToo Era', it describes in disturbingly matter-of-fact terms the normalization of pornography (as replacement for sex education) in the lives of young men and women (but especially men), both straight and gay, and the decline of 'courtship' in this latest generation of adolescents in favour of quick web-arranged 'hookups' purely for the hasty satisfaction of the sexual urge. (I cannot help commenting, as a feminist, that for this we should perhaps more accurately read for the hasty satisfaction of the *male* sexual urge.) The author of the *Times* article comments, 'A reliance on dating apps and social media as a way of meeting people means that you often have a fairly good idea of whether you are going to sleep with someone before you've even spoken to them. Which [the interviewee here], Dexter, laments. [As he puts it], "It's strange, because as soon as you've met, it's like 'OK, we've had a drink. Now let's go have sex'. There is no middle ground. I don't think our generation knows how to woo people any more"'. Another interviewee, Monty, describes how he 'enjoyed' a year of such regular promiscuity before sexually burning out, feeling fragmented and unsatisfied. Ultimately he deleted Tinder and his other social media sites from his iPhone, disgusted at the way that pornography and promiscuous sex had caused him to 'objectify' women and distance himself from them (and this, note, without any inputs from Christian critique). Moreover, the MeToo movement is complicating matters in this sexual arena, as the *Times* article goes on to explore — causing the ultimate cultural contradiction between mandated, normalised, promiscuity on the one hand and prurient threats of legal punishment on the other. Notably, mental health often quickly suffers in relation to all, or most, of those concerned, as this article also charts.

So what is at stake, and why is there no convincing theorising (certainly not within this *Times* article) about the nature of erotic desire itself, and its ultimate satisfactions? Our secular culture is not *devoid* of *good*,

[7] 'Boys, Sex and Consent in the MeToo Era', *The Times*, 23 June 2018: www.thetimes.co.uk/article/boys-sex-and-consent-in-the-metoo-era-rjzz96t96

desiring instincts, I insist, and this troubled article also dimly articulates such an intuition. But the problem is that there seems to be no moral compass to assess the choices, except insofar as liberal 'rights' thinking puts a certain break on the rampant masculinist hedonism which is otherwise everywhere valorised.

But here the crude sexualisation of desire in popular post-Freudian culture is not the only problem — we need to look more widely. For it is often not acknowledged that sexual desire is aroused and manipulated in a culture which ties many desires into its tether (for eroticism, as we have already noted, is wider and deeper than 'sex', something that Freud understood better than many of his later followers). Desire for wealth, power, status, material belongings and the denial of death are all entangled with those for sex in the weekend newspapers and the glossy magazines, as I cannot help noticing as I plough through them with a sort of fascination of my own each Saturday, often after celebrating the early Eucharist! — for yes, I too am subject to these blandishments, indeed am fascinated by them, as we all are. As James K. A. Smith illuminates in his two-volume study of desire and the kingdom,[8] our shopping malls have in a way become the new cathedrals, places where we go to wander in secular analogues to labyrinths, forgetful of time and responsibility, deliberately — albeit somewhat unconsciously — releasing ourselves from ordinary constraint, to buy and spend and own.

Or, when in contrast, rather than going out to shop we surf the web for desirable goods, our credit cards at the ready on the desk, we once more collude with the hidden persuaders who elicit, redirect and intensify our desires for a variety of goods. But this is not just a matter of *private* gratification, as it may seem as we strain over our laptops in the silent watches of the night — for that is at least half the delusion. As William T. Cavanaugh spells out unforgettably in his wonderfully Augustinian little book, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire*, all our consumer choices have wider political and economic implications. By the supposed 'free' choices we make for our own money (or our indebted lack of it) we buy into societies that either are, or are not, sustaining of freedom and justice in varying degrees. But these days all societies are in one way or another connected — despite the new British Brexiteer mentality to self-protect and isolate — making it impossible for us to wash our hands of what is going on on the other side of the world. As Cavanaugh puts it, prophetically, 'I […] present globalization *as a way of seeing*, an aesthetic, that configures space

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[8] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2009); James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2013).

and human subjects in peculiar ways. Implicit in my argument is the conviction that culture and economics are not autonomous spheres with no mutual effect. Economic relationships do not operate on value-neutral laws, but are rather carriers of specific convictions about the nature of the human person – the person's origins and destiny. There is an implicit anthropology and implicit theology in every economics' [my emphasis].[9] This remark by Cavanaugh about globalization as a 'way of seeing' is particularly prescient, for every choice in 'desire' is indeed an aesthetic *as well as* a moral choice. What we choose not to see (as we choose to buy) is what we learn, by repeated habit, *not* to see — the desirable consumerist object insidiously comes to replace the capacity to see the needy other at the end of the food and money chain. The grasping consumerism of so much affluent (or alas, not so affluent) life is thus curiously connected to the distanced objectification of the female body in now-normalised pornography, *and* to the blindness about 'racism' and its effects both at home and in the wider world.

Desire, then, is continually intensified by our consumerist culture, but to what end and to what satisfaction? For when our desires are diffused and un-unified in their direction and intent, we can no longer 'see' in the important sense that the early church spoke of in relation to so-called 'spiritual sensation' and its requirements — we need to *learn* to 'see' Christ and from the perspective of Christ. As Gregory of Nyssa wrote in relation to the parable of the sheep and the goats (Mt. 25), the deep irony here is that neither the righteous nor the unrighteous in this story yet recognise that they have, or have not, been serving Christ in the poor and the needy. Even the righteous grope forward, making the right choices but not yet aware that they are making them. Gregory of Nyssa's (admittedly unsystematic) theory of the development of 'spiritual sensation' thus involved a lifetime of the retraining of bodily and psychic desire *in order to see Christ* consciously in the face of the poor. And this, he taught, is by definition an erotic 'long haul' — a spiritual operation in grace and under the power of the Spirit.[10]

And this brings us to our next section. For if the secular manipulations of the commodification of desire according to ends which serve to fragment and divide are so often unconscious *even to the faithful in our time*, how can our prayer and worship become more consciously vibrant to the *undoing* of sinful desires and the redirection of desire to God-in-Christ?

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[9] William T. Cavanaugh, *Being Consumed: Economics and Christian Desire* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 59–60.

[10] Gregory of Nyssa, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans. and ed. by S. J. Herbert Musurillo (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995).

Charting the 'ordering' of desires:
the 'negative passions' and the crucible of prayer

Happily, we are not without classical resources to help us in this task, for the problem of 'sorting' and ordering of desires was a key element of desert spirituality from the time of the beginnings of monastic life in Egypt. And those theologians like Nyssen, who watched these developments admiringly from a different, and slightly removed, perspective in Cappadocia and Constantinople are as important, if not more so, for contemporary Christians who now seek to lead a life of ordered, 'agapaic'-cum-'erotic' desire, yet without necessarily eschewing marriage, sex and family. Indeed, Gregory of Nyssa's early text, 'On Virginity', [11] is — as I have argued elsewhere of late (in my book, *The New Asceticism*[12]) — remarkable, and indeed unique, for his time in insisting that well-conducted marriage in Christian terms is as good (or nearly as good) as well-conducted celibacy, such as his admired older brother Basil embraced. What these lifestyles have in common (over against *badly* conducted marriage and *badly* conducted celibacy) is not, according to Gregory, the *suppression* of desires and passions, but actually their *intensification in God*. Adjusting Platonic themes from the *Phaedrus* and other texts in late antique philosophy, Gregory can start to sketch here a vision of transformed desire in which bad passions can, over time, and in the power of the Spirit, be transmuted into good — the dark 'horse' of the *Phaedrus*, with all renewed energy, now pulls the chariot towards the heavenly goal. But his dark energy is thereby not lost, but redirected.

However, there are no short cuts to this transformation. It was a contemporary of Gregory's in the late fourth century (who may, or may not, have known him), Evagrius of Pontus, who systematised and theorised the early wisdom of the Egyptian monks in this period most extensively. And in his text 'On Prayer', later enshrined in the Eastern monastic collection, the *Philokalia*, [13] he spelled out the whole panoply of 'dark passions' (or 'thoughts', *logismoi*) that can and will assail the monastic as he/she goes deeper into the depths of the self and 'sees' for the first time the immensity of sin and self-deception that lies there waiting to be transformed in humility

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[11] Gregory of Nyssa, 'On Virginity', in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series, vol. 5 (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 343–71.

[12] Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[13] *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol 1, trans. and ed. by G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber & Faber, 1979).

and hope. The point is, first, that there is no such transformation without a commitment to a demanding, and necessarily disturbing, adventure in prayer — the devil does not like our progress, warns Evagrius, and will do anything to throw us off course. (Particularly effective here is his stirring up of *new* levels of lust and acquisitiveness.) But secondly, there is no going on *without* going down into these depths — this is true 'spiritual prayer', and it is the only way of purification, difficult and dangerous as it is: 'What is it that the demons wish to excite in us? Gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, and the rest of the passions, so that the intellect grows coarse and cannot pray as it ought'. [14] Thirdly, then, it is only by resisting these 'thoughts' and rationalizations that the Spirit can, through this great battle, be let in to do its work of purification and ecstasy into 'pure' or 'spiritual prayer', which also brings calming and soothing to the body.[15]

As the contemporary spiritual writer Martin Laird, OSA, so brilliantly expounds Evagrius for today (in *A Sunlit Absence*[16]), it is those 'thoughts' that always catch us; we spend our life on the back foot justifying in endless wordy recitations to ourselves why our negative passions are — in our case — wholly righteous, especially in relation to anger and blame of the 'other'. Progress is only ever made if we begin in the Spirit to exercise what Evagrius, following here the Stoics (but with a rather different evocation), calls 'apatheia'. This is a letting go in prayer into a form of 'dispossession' where the Spirit's ecstasy can take us to a new level of un-self-centredness and stillness. Hence, as Evagrius puts it, 'You cannot attain pure prayer while entangled in things and agitated by constant cares. For prayer means the *shedding of thoughts* [my emphasis]'.[17] It is the crucible of prayer, then, and only that crucible, that allows the possibility of the ordering and sorting of desires, both physical and psychic. This is where we begin to see that our sexual desires cannot be disconnected from that tether of all other desires, both sinful and good, and that it is desire for God that finally conjoins them all and draws them into progressive purification.

But this is a wisdom that I find to be largely lost in today's church at large — and I wonder if you do too? The seeds of the wisdom are of course all there in the New Testament (implicit already in the 'impossible' demands of the Sermon on the Mount to seek 'perfection', and then in Paul's recitation of the features of the competing desires and fruits of the flesh and of the spirit in Galatians 5, which gives us the 'programme' for transformation). But

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[14] 'On Prayer', p. 51.
[15] 'On Prayer', p. 63, citing again, unsurprisingly, Romans 8.
[16] Martin Laird, *A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness and Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[17] 'On Prayer', p. 71.

the monastic tradition, once freed from the fear of the imminent return of Christ, and goaded on by the imperial mandate of Christianity and the inevitable laxity in Christian practice that followed, rendered the teaching increasingly systematic and illuminating.

In the West, it was left to later synthesisers of desert wisdom with scholastic Thomism to supply yet more wondrous and demanding — but wholly *realistic* — accounts of the Christian way of desire and worship. Amongst these, the supreme Western cartographer of desire is undeniably the sixteenth-century John of the Cross, whose teaching on the 'dark nights' is — alas — still widely taken to be hostile to human affectivity and physicality, and of relevance only to contemplative élites. Nothing could be further from the truth. John himself taught that any Christian who even sets out on a relatively serious prayer life will quickly hit the so-called 'night of the senses', in which nothing seems to be meaningful anymore in relation to God, because positive prayer 'affects' have been withdrawn by God to test and purify our desire.[18] The point, teaches John, is that we are learning how to pray not for our own satisfaction but for *God*, and as this radical sorting of our desires begins to come into effect we feel all at sea and are sure that nothing is going aright. But this prayer is the crucible — the metabolic locus — of the transformation of *all* desires. And it is only by passing through this crisis that we begin to see how our physical desires (including our sexual desires) are vitally related, but in a subordinate mode, to our primary relation to God, such that eventually all will be returned to us affectively, rejoicing in union and in the Spirit. As John writes in Book 1 of the *Dark Night* (4.7), increased sexual attraction (not the opposite) is a potential sign of progress, albeit dangerous, in this transition into the 'first night', when prayer *appears* to go dead: 'Some spiritually acquire a liking for other individuals that often arises from lust rather than from the spirit. This lustful origin will be recognised if, on recalling that affection, there is remorse of conscience, not an increase in the remembrance and love of God. The affection is purely spiritual if the love of God grows when it grows, or if the love of God gives the soul a desire for God — if by growing in one the soul also grows in the other. For this is a trait of God's spirit: The good increases with the good since there is likeness and conformity between them […] Hence our Saviour proclaimed in the Gospel, *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit* [Jn 3.6]'. John of the Cross ends this remarkable passage thus: 'When the soul enters the dark night, all

[18] John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1991).

these loves are placed in reasonable order. This night strengthens and purifies the love that is of God, and takes away and destroys the other' (4.8).

In short, the late antique monastic Eastern wisdom about desiring 'thoughts', and the complex Carmelite counter-Reformation narratives of desire's transformations in God, together give us rich resources for 'sorting' our desires, and for seeking in grace to march in some coordination in the other direction from much of contemporary secular excitations of desire. Through these resources we find ourselves placing Jesus's ethical and spiritual demands within a framework of development within which his extraordinary parabolic demands of the kingdom are given new point — it is to a practice, a *habitus*, of desire that we are called, and one with no short cuts, no promises of easy or speedy resolution.

But that still leaves us with some questions about how this programme of transformation, with all its ups and downs and reversals in the life of grace, relates more specifically to the worshipping body of the church, and especially to the worship of the Eucharist. If it is 'ourselves, our souls and bodies' which we present at the Eucharist for Christic transformation, how are we to think of this liturgical act as participatory, corporately, in the great purification of desire that prayer itself bespeaks?

This is not a topic that has been to the forefront of Anglican thinking in every generation since the English Reformation, but in the way that it comes now to new significance, we do well to remind ourselves that there was a period within early Anglicanism when this was already a topic of burning interest — not insignificantly in times of political instability and economic uncertainty, as well as renewed fascination with the thought of the Fathers — that is, the very late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century. The theme of erotic desire's relation to our right standing before God runs deeply at this time through the 'Metaphysical' poets Herbert, Crashaw, Donne and, later, Milton, as a fine study by Ryan Netzley well illustrates afresh.[19] Only recall, as a supreme example of this trend, Herbert's wonderful 'Love (II)', which aptly sums up the message I have already tried to convey throughout this lecture, about the unification of desire and its relation to God in prayer and praise:

> Immortal Heat, O let Thy greater flame
> Attract the lesser to it; let those fires
> Which shall consume the world first make it tame,
> And kindle in our heart such true desires
> As may consume our lusts, and make Thee way:

[19] Ryan Netzley, *Reading, Desire, and the Eucharist in Early Modern Religious Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

> Then shall our hearts pant Thee; then shall our brain
> All her invention on Thine altar lay,
> And there in hymns send back Thy fire again.[20]

True desire for Herbert, comments Netzley, 'consumes lust in the same fashion as does Donne's 'fiery Zeale […] Which doth in eating heale' (from Donne's 'I am a little worlde').[21] But all these 'Metaphysicals', we need to remind ourselves, wrote in the train of Richard Hooker's remarkable exposition of the participatory meaning of the Eucharist in book V of his *Ecclesiastical Laws,*[22] published right at the beginning of the seventeenth century. As Timothy Squier points out (in a nice little article for *Liturgy*),[23] the language of participatory intimacy for the Eucharist was already alive and well in Hooker — it is just that we have largely forgotten it. Hooker, in his account of desire-filled sacramental energy, again gives us a vision of intra-divine activity in the Eucharist that re-bonds us into the mystical body and gives us all the energy of what we may call proto-erotic permeation: 'Participation', he writes, 'is that mutual inward hold which Christ hath of us and we of him, in such sort that each possesseth each other by way of special interest, property, and inherent copulation'.[24] In contemporary theology, Graham Ward (as Squier also shows) re-activates this Hookerian vision when he insists, in his *Cities of the Gods*,[25] that the desire evinced in the Eucharist is an expression of divine intimacy unique to itself. Within this circle of desire, individuals discover a communal unity which is unthinkable outside the special 'erotic' presence of Christ. Likewise, the contemporary French theologian Emmanuel Falque, working out of a very different philosophical tradition (post-Kantian, Husserlian and Heideggerian) can insist in his extraordinary book *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb*[26] that sexual desire of the jaded, postmodern, 'lost' sort — such as that evidenced in the

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[20] George Herbert, *A Choice of George Herbert's Verse*, ed. by R. S. Thomas (London: Faber & Faber, 1967).
[21] Netzley, p. 45. John Donne, 'I am a little worlde', in *Holy Sonnets* (Newton NJ: Vicarage Hill Press, 2014).
[22] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity and Other Works By and About Richard Hooker as Collected by John Keble*, ed. by R. W. Church and F. Paget (Ellicott City: Via Media Inc., 1994).
[23] Timothy Squier, 'Participation, Communion, and Desire', *Liturgy*, 20 (2005), pp. 67–73.
[24] Hooker, p. 245.
[25] Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (New York: Routledge, 2000).
[26] Emmanuel Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body and the Eucharist* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

Times article I earlier cited — can rediscover in the longing of the Eucharist a mysterious intimacy with which contemporary sexual desire needs to be reinvested. What is 'hidden beneath the veil', in Aquinas's terms in the Eucharist, both mystery and revelation, is what cynical modern sexuality has lost touch with, says Falque[27] — the inexhaustible offering of love in which human loves, too, can find their true meaning.

The minister as focus of desire: dangers and spiritual discernment

But wait a minute, you will say — and not without reason. Are we not in dangerous and uncharted territory here, where the possible confusion of sexual loves (often subject to self-delusion, or even to abusive behaviour) and the expression of eucharistic love and desire are easily confused? Well said, I say, and that is why this short last section of this lecture comes back to sound notes of caution about the moral and spiritual discernment required in any negotiation of the difficult nexus of human and divine desires that we have been trying to re-negotiate. Whereas Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, Thomas Aquinas and John of the Cross represent neglected arenas for reflection on the topic we have been charting, we do not find in them any extensive reflection on the problems of potential abuse, or the misuse of the ministerial role to further narcissistic or misguided projections. Yet the fact is that — once the nexus of desires I have been charting has been acknowledged in personal prayer — so too is the greater our understanding of how the priest or minister at the altar (or indeed in the pulpit) can be in receipt of desiring projections from the congregation, which must be approached with extreme care and self-knowledge. As such, this projection is normal and unavoidable — to stand 'in persona Christi' at the eucharistic altar or to speak His word from the pulpit is, as I have argued at some length elsewhere,[28] a responsibility not to be gainsaid. We who are priests cannot deflect it by improper self-effacement or embarrassment, any more than we should confuse it with our own personal charm or sexiness. As ministers of the gospel we become Christ's. No longer are we the world's plaything, no longer drawing attention to *ourselves* by cute clothing, self-referring gesture, or — at the other end of the spectrum — falsely self-abasing denials of our priestly role. The fact is that we find ourselves in this *necessarily* 'proto-erotic' zone, bearing the projections of others while at the same time knowing they are not *ours* — we are inevitably in the Christic, kenotic space where the negotiation of desire is taking place. Sometimes this will be more obvious to us than at other times, but we should always be aware of its huge dangers (there is the incipient possibility of abuse, however subtle, if we

[27] Falque, p. 163.

[28] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, chapter 2.

inappropriately manipulate this power), as well as of its curious and subtle power-in-the-Spirit, of which we should not intrinsically be afraid. The fact is that the Eucharist is, at its most efficacious, precisely the place in worship where Christ himself 'desires with desire' (see again Lk. 22.15), and so if anything in the unfolding logic of this lecture has legitimacy, it is our consciousness of that logic that at all times should have place in our eucharistic prayer. We are (all) *in via* to God, and the sorting of desire, so subtle, so profound and so powerful, is the graced process that we should expect and long to meet in our eucharistic worship, as indeed in all our prayer and praise.

Conclusions: *desire and its transformations in worship*

I now come to my conclusions. What then does all that I have covered in this lecture *mean* in practice? There remains much unfinished business, but let us recap the main themes I have covered tonight.

I have argued, first, that desire is integral to the life of prayer, because it is basic also to the fundamental condition of frail humanity (body and soul) in relation to God. Desire is also what fundamentally went awry in the Fall, and — through Jesus's own divine/human choices in Temptation and Passion, and indeed throughout his whole earthly life — was righted once more in his sacrificial death and resurrection. So when we ourselves come into that orbit of Christ's death and resurrection, and 'present ourselves, our souls and bodies' to him in daily prayer, praise and eucharistic observance, the battle of desires is ever renewed afresh. And the deeper we go into the adventure of prayer, worship and sacrament, the more we see that there is no escaping the darkness of our own distorted and misdirected desires, and the more we realise that they have to be brought into the transforming crucible of Christ's own graceful transformation of desire. As the Catholic anthropologist Victor Turner saw long ago, [29] it is in rituals of the profoundest sort that dark human forces are summoned, acknowledged, purified, and then *redirected* in their newly released energy for the moral goods of the whole community. It is a Christian form of this insight that inheres most deeply in eucharistic worship and devotion.

As for our Christian minister caught too in the creative nexus of their own desires, there is both danger and delight, as we also saw — danger, lest they falsely identify with the projection of longing that their congregation more or less unconsciously projects towards them, and delight, if by prayerful preparation and kenotic dispossession the minister is able to allow their own bodily deportment and gestures in the rite to signal that they only

[29] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*: *Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Cornell NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

act as they can through the power of the Spirit and 'in persona Christi'. This is neither play-acting nor false *identification* with Christ — it is a subtle making way to the working of the energies of Christ and his 'mystical body' that are put into practice in each efficacious act of eucharistic worship.

But whereas, as this lecture has charted, we have inherited much wisdom from the patristic, monastic, early Anglican and counter-Reformation Catholic traditions about the workings of prayer, worship and desire, the matter of our own *bodily* disposition in worship in this regard, whether as lay people or as priests, requires much more thought and insight than it currently garners in our theological colleges and faculties, and in our parishes. For we are all unconscious victims, too, of the *secular* 'commodification' of our desires, and live all too helplessly in that nexus of pressures and demands.

It is for that reason (the unfinished nature of this problem of desire) that I leave you tonight not so much with succinct conclusions but with challenging *questions* of considerable moment for our Church.

What *are* the sorts of necessary preparation (bodily, affective and ascetic) for acts of worship that will dispose priests, deacons and fellow-worshippers, through the grace and the power of the Spirit, to the effective transformation of desire-into-God? And how will this generation in the Church re-think this issue creatively afresh, for a culture constantly manipulated by social media, advertisements and pornography? I cannot think of a more pressing spiritual and moral question for the Church today (yes, even more pressing than money or buildings or congregational numbers!), and I hope that I have at least given you some seeds for thought about that problem in what I have offered you tonight.

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St Jerome and the Quest for the Holy Word[1]

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St Jerome is by any account one of the most skilled scholars and ardent ascetics in the history of Christianity. One could speak of him for hours and not scratch the surface of his scholarship, but one could not speak well of his scholarship for a second without reference to what he called the *versio vulgata*, and we call 'the Vulgate' — that is, his rendition of the Holy Word of God into Latin.[2]

I would make a modest claim — that the quest for the Holy Word of God is an ongoing one, as is the quest for the ascetical life. Times and contexts change, and languages also change. I would claim further that the quest for the Holy Word, or the Divine Logos, is primarily the quest for a Person, Jesus Christ, in the mystery of God, for Jesus is Revelation Himself, and secondarily it is the quest for the texts that embody God's own words and deeds. I would make this claim in three steps: first, that God speaks to us distinctively in the Holy Scriptures; second, that translations of the Holy Scriptures into other tongues are a boon of utility rather than a betrayal of meaning; third, that

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[1] This article is based on my Inaugural Lecture as the Pantonian Professor of Divinity. I gave the lecture on St Jerome's Day, Saturday 30 September 2023, at St Mary's Monastery, Kinnoull, in the presence of the Scottish Episcopal Institute community. A digital recording is available at https://sei.scot/resources/pantonian-lecture/ [accessed 22 February 2024]. Miss Kathryn Panton initiated trust deeds for the endowment of a 'Theological Institute' and a 'Professor of Divinity' in 1810. The Theological Institute has undergone many iterations, including Glenalmond College, the Edinburgh Theological College (Coates Hall), the Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church and now the Scottish Episcopal Institute. The Professorship of Divinity has waxed and waned in those iterations, eventually taking Kathryn's surname as a prefix. Among the requirements for the Professor is to give lectures to theological students. It is right and just to honour Miss Panton's legacy with an annual lecture in her name.

[2] The *versio vulgata* or 'common version' is a term that Jerome also used for the Latin translations prior to his own, which we now tend to call the *Versio Itala* or the *Vetus Latina* or 'Old Latin', a collection of Latin translations that Jerome probably used when crafting his own.

Jerome's quest for the Holy Word is a model for our continuing ministerial development insofar as Jerome sought to share Christ with others. It is Jesus who prays to the Father, saying, 'this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (Jn 17.3). Jerome sought to make Christ known by means of his talents, and we are called to do the same, even if our talents lie elsewhere.

The distinctive voice of the Holy Scriptures

It is the New York intellectual Lionel Trilling who speaks of literature as our species characteristic.[3] Trilling, the son of an English mother and a Polish father, was a non-practising Jew and was uninterested in religion per se. He probed the cultural, social and political implications of literature in the twentieth century, just as the sun was setting on Christianity's dominance in Western thought and mores. Yes, we are different to all other species that we know. As St Paul reminds us, 'All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of humans, another flesh of beasts, another of fish, another of birds (1 Cor. 15.39). Dolphins communicate by means of sound, beavers build dams and monkeys use twigs to root out insects. Only humans create literature. Trilling is spot on. Literature is our species characteristic. Perhaps it is the thing that makes us most like our Creator. It is God himself who made us in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1.26). It is God himself who forms us from dust and breathes his own breath into us (Gen. 2.7). And we know these things not by our own cleverness, but because God has revealed them to us in literature, in writing.

God wills to reveal himself distinctively in words. God is clear in Genesis that we are made in marked dissimilarity to the rest of creation. All creation is good, yet not all created things are equal in any sense of the term. Although there is much about signs and wonders in the Bible — the most obvious one being the sign of contradiction when the Second Person of the Trinity is incarnated, as St Simeon revealed to our Blessed Mother (Lk. 2.34; cf. Acts 28.22) — we know those events are miraculous through the Holy Scriptures. There is symmetry in that God does what God does by speech in the third and the third last verses of the Bible: Gen. 1.3 reads: 'And God said, "Let there be light": and there was light'; Rev. 22.19 reads: 'And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book'. God's speech and God's words frame God's Revelation.

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[3] See, among other works, Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1950).

The primitive church, the church of St Jerome, knows no doctrinal texts other than the Holy Scriptures.[4] Therefore, if you will, the species characteristic of nascent Christianity is the Bible. Holy Scripture's voice is distinctive not only in terms of literature, but also in terms of the unique revelation of God, in what God says and what God does. Thus my first claim — God speaks distinctively in the Holy Scriptures.

It is no surprise that Christians, then and now, should hang on every word. Indeed, because Jesus himself promised and prophesied that we should receive the power of the Holy Ghost and be His witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1.8), hanging on every word requires that the witnesses to the Word be in diverse tongues. As the Acts of the Apostles has it, the first witnessing of the church by those in the Holy Cenacle involved some mysterious translating. Those disciples preached to women and men 'who [were] bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language' (Acts 2.6). The Lord Jesus's prophecy had come to pass and was ongoing. To borrow imagery from the Psalmist (Ps. 19.3–4), the Word has gone out to all the earth, to the ends of the world, but it had not gone out in the original languages of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

The distinctive voice of the Holy Scriptures, of God, has been heard for two millennia. However, that distinctive voice is not confined to the Bible's original languages. One of those non-original languages is Latin. Jerome's ministry, which we recall today, was a quest for the Holy Word's voice to be heard in the best Latin he could muster. What is more, Jerome mustered some pretty good Latin! There is no limit to the praise we might offer Jerome in terms of the triumph that is the Vulgate, and we can be sure that it is the one book known throughout the Middle Ages, and a constitutive part of scholastic theology. Furthermore, to date the Reformation to the fourteenth century, at least in these Isles, is to recall that John Wycliff translated the Bible into our vernacular, English, from Jerome's Vulgate.

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[4] By 'primitive church', I aver to Lancelot Andrewes, 'One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period – the centuries, that is, before Constantine, and two after, determine the boundary of our faith' (*The Works of Lancelot Andrewes* [11 vols; Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology; Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1841–1854], v. 8, p. 90). See also Peter Doll, 'The Idea of the Primitive Church in High Church Ecclesiology from Samuel Johnson to J. H. Hobart', *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 65 (1996), 6–43: www.jstor.org/stable/42611756 [accessed 24 September 2023].

The utility of translation

It is St Augustine of Hippo who speaks of Jerome's revision of the Holy Scriptures as a *labor tam utilis* — 'a work so useful'. I began my first claim with a quote from Trilling, an American-born man whose mother was English. I have mentioned a Yorkshire man in Wycliffe — a dodgy thing to do in Scotland. Let me redeem myself with a quote from a Glasgow-born Scot and translator of Spanish literature called James Fitzmaurice-Kelly, who died a century ago, in 1923. Fitzmaurice-Kelly writes, not necessarily thinking of things biblical any more than Trilling did, that 'at all times and in all countries, translations have usually been produced for utilitarian purposes, and not from artistic motives'.[5]

What has that to do with Jerome and his quest? Well, Latin translations of biblical books were undertaken as early as the second century. They were undertaken sporadically and with mixed results. There is a plethora of reasons for this, but only two concern us. The first and most obvious is the availability of the source texts themselves. The second is the ability to translate them — that is, competency in the source language and the target language on the part of the translator(s).

As to the first reason, the replacement of scrolls and wax tablets with codices is coextensive with Christians' increasing demand for (hard) copies of the Holy Scriptures. In the first, second and third centuries, no one was likely to have had a 'Bible', the word itself coming from a Greek plural, *ta biblia*, meaning 'the books'. Even if such a (single) volume could have been cobbled together, it would have been unwieldy. By the third century there were certainly careful collections of biblical books. Perhaps the most famous in terms of Jerome was Origen's *Hexapla*, a critical edition of the Old Testament in Hebrew and Greek in six columns. The earliest collections of the whole Bible are the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century) and the Codex Alexandrinus (fifth century). We know these only in incomplete versions. Their own divergencies not only show the variation in the texts of the source languages, but they also cast into relief smaller and more manageable collections of the second and third centuries — for example, the New Testament, a collection of the Gospels, of which there were thousands of copies and translations. Nonetheless, these 'great codices' of the whole Bible, as it were, are of course in Greek. The Old Testament is that of the Septuagint, a collection of translations dating, again sporadically, from the third century BC, for the very utilitarian reason that those in the Jewish

[5] Robert Green, 'Translation', in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010), v. 27, p. 183.

Diaspora after the Babylonian Exile began to study and to worship in Hellenistic Greek rather than in Hebrew and Aramaic.[6]

As to the second reason, competency in the given languages brings us into brackish waters and back to Fitzmaurice-Kelly's reminder that translations are usually undertaken for utilitarian purposes rather than artistic ones. I would hasten to add that that does not at all mean that a translation is not artistic or even a piece of art. In terms of the Holy Scriptures, for instance, few would debate that Jerome's Vulgate and the King James Bible are works of art, even if they would debate their utility. Fortunately, we know one reason for Jerome's impetus to translation and his quest to get the Latin right, namely the dissimilar versions of his own day. It was at Pope Damasus's request that Jerome began to revise — I say 'revise' rather than 'translate' for a reason — the New Testament. But what I mean by New Testament is the so-called Old Latin version(s).

In extant biblical texts and in patristic quotations we see the inconsistency of the Old Latin, of which Augustine and Jerome and others were aware, and which Jerome speaks of not only as a *versio vulgata* per se, but as a *vitiosissima varietas*, 'a most vicious variety'. At one point, Jerome asks rhetorically, with reference to the Gospels, 'If anyone has the right version, which is it?'[7] Jerome went on to complete his work, including a fresh translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew, although his Vulgate was only gradually accepted because the people for whom Jerome was translating were already acquainted and comfortable with a variety of translations. As history would have it, the Roman Church officially accepted Jerome's Vulgate only in the sixteenth century, just as other Churches were abandoning it for the sake of vernacular translations. Even in terms of content, vis-à-vis the books of the Old Testament, Jerome is invoked by name in Article VI of the Articles of Religion. For Jerome had grudgingly — and rather poorly it seems — translated the Apocrypha from Greek with regard, as Article VI notes, 'for example of life and instruction of manners', but did not consider it Holy Scripture.[8]

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[6] The veracity of the 'Letter of Aristeas to Philocrates' notwithstanding, the Greek translation(s) of the Old Testament, as well as those translations that include some or all of the Apocrypha, take the moniker 'Septuagint' therefrom.

[7] 'St Jerome', in *Early Christian Biographies: The Fathers of the Church*, 15, ed. and trans. by Roy J. Defarrari (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press), p. 462.

[8] Jerome worked on the Septuagint's Psalter after translating the Gospels. He had a particular passion for the Psalms and translated the Psalter three

How problematic is a most vicious variety of translations? Well, think of the Lord's Prayer in the late twentieth and early twentieth century! Think of our own Scottish Episcopal liturgies when we tie our tongues, saying the Lord's Prayer in at least two different ways in our authorised Eucharists, namely the Scottish Liturgy (1982 [rev. 2022]) versus the Scottish Liturgy (1970) and the Scottish Prayer Book (1929): 'Our Father in heaven' versus 'Our Father which art in heaven', respectively. This is but a sample of the cacophony of translations of the Lord's Prayer in English. Is God's name 'hallowed' or 'holy'? Are we up for 'sins', 'trespasses' or 'faults'? Not to mention the use of the doxology, 'for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever' (as per Mt. 6.9–13 and the *Did.* VII). How far can this be taken? Consider interpretations that aim to be so contemporary or idiosyncratic as to (mis)translate: 'Our Father in heaven, you are awesome!'[9] or 'Do not let us fall into temptation' rather than 'Lead us not into temptation'.[10]

It reminds me of a story. A colleague of mine who hails from and teaches biblical studies in the American South told me that his father, a devout Christian and prayerful student of the Bible, only uses the King James Version. His son, my colleague, once asked him, 'Dad, have you ever seen the NIV? I think you'd like it'. To which his father replied, somewhat wryly, but in good rabbinical fashion, 'Why would I like a New *Incorrect* Version?' So, why a new incorrect Vulgate from the Old Vulgate? It was for utility — the language of the people of God, thanks to the Roman Empire, even its decline, was Latin. I say 'decline' because classicists claim that the Silver Age of Latin literature was about AD 18 to 133, and the Golden Age much earlier (70 BC to AD 18). What would Virgil say?

Yes, translations are tricky. There are reasons why some works are mostly translated, usually to make them accessible to audiences for whom the original language may be a hindrance, and some are mostly not, usually because the work is thought to be diluted in some fashion by translation. Jerome's efforts fell to the former in a tradition of translation that dates back to the earliest days of Christianity. The *raison d'être* for a new translation vis-

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times. For further details, see Scott Goins, 'Jerome's Psalters', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. by William P. Brown, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2014): https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199783335.013.012 [accessed 15 March 2024].

[9] See https://ourmagnet.hymnsam.co.uk/articles/116/meditations/our-father-in-heaven-you-are-awesome/ [accessed 4 March 2024].

[10] See https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/reading-the-bible-upside-down [accessed 13 March 2024].

à-vis Jerome and Damasus was prayer and worship in the form of liturgy. Indeed, it has been argued that the stability of Latin texts, such as they were in the primitive church, was the result of texts' use in liturgical worship, including the public and corporate recitation and proclamation of Holy Scripture. To cite an example, the Book of Common Prayer (1662) is about 85 per cent taken directly from the Bible and is usually associated with the Authorised Version of the Bible (1611). Plagiarism software would have a field day. But the Psalter included in that Prayer Book is of the Great Bible translated by Myles Coverdale a century earlier, which had been the translation used since 1549 in England. The Great Bible had caught on, just as Jerome's Gallican Psalter had, and even Jerome was not allowed to change that with his own fresh version from the Hebrew. The accessibility of the Word of God in the language of the people of his day is why Augustine, neither friend nor fan of Jerome, could speak of Jerome's translations as 'a work so useful'.

The thing is, though, that every translation is an interpretation. Let us take a first-century example — Augustus's *Res gestae divi Augusti* ('the things done by the divine Augustus'). It is an official, first-person autobiography of 35 or so paragraphs meant to tell the Roman people how great Augustus was. Although the text of the *Res gestae* was likely revised several times and its original has been lost, though was once engraved in bronze in front of Augustus's mausoleum, it seems to have come into its final form just before Augustus's death in the year AD 14. Many copies were made and many inscribed throughout the Empire, and a complete full copy — written in the original Latin and the 'official' Greek translation — is preserved on a temple to Augustus in Ankara, Turkey. In Augustus's, Jesus's and Paul's day and up to Jerome's day the city, then known as Ancyra, was the capital of the Roman province of Galatia. The Greek text, usually referred to by the name of the building upon which it is inscribed, is the 'Monumentum Ancyranum'.[11] The Momunentum Ancyranum is neither a straight translation nor a transliteration of the *Res gestae*, but a carefully reworked translation with a twist. The Latin version is highly Roman-centred in terms of Roman satisfaction with victory, whilst the Greek version appeals to the provincials, as it were, emphasising liberation from oppression — from those other than the Romans. These are two texts really, rather than one, with different uses. Spin doctors did not start with us.

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[11] Green, p. 266. In *c*. AD 398, Galatia was divided into the provinces of Galatia Prima and Galatia Secunda (or Salutaris); Prima covered the north-eastern part of the old province and retained Ancyra as its capital. Justinian I briefly reunited the province in 536–548.

Indeed, the translations — and therefore the interpretations of texts, particularly biblical texts — continue to plague us, not only in cases like the inspired King James Version groups, who will allow no New Incorrect Versions, but also in church texts, not necessarily liturgical, by which we are meant to say what we believe, and to believe what we say. How messy? Take the dog and pony show of a Roman pope and a Constantinopolitan patriarch reciting the Nicene Creed in Greek in 2004 and again in 2008.[12] The joke is that the original Greek text is not in dispute in any way, shape or form, nor has it ever been since the fourth century. Yet nevertheless its meaning is hotly debated, so much so that neither pope nor patriarch would recite any translations of the Greek, unless they believed such translations to be accurate as to their particular Christian faith. The issue is the meaning or the sense of the words, not the words themselves. 'To *filioque* or not to *filioque'*, as I have argued elsewhere, has to do with what we believe by warrant of the Holy Scriptures, not the transliteration of fourth-century Greek text.[13]

On the one hand, we could take the extreme position — along the lines of the old Italian proverb, *Traduttore, traditore*, 'The translator is a traitor' — that a translation in and of itself misses the mark. Full stop. We must stick to the original language of a text, especially one which we claim to be the distinctive voice of God in the Holy Scriptures. Note that about 1.8 billion people, about 24 per cent of the world's population, take a point of view along these lines. For Muslims, the Qur'an is divine revelation in a single tongue and should only be recited in Quranic Arabic. That is not to say that Muslims do not translate their sacred book, but the lion's share of Muslims finds the uniquely sacred character of the text only in the Arabic original.

We Christians are of a different dispensation altogether. We are different right down to the very core of our Holy Scriptures and the Gospels and Jesus. Do we think that Jesus's Aramaic words were limited to *talitha*

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[12] John Paul II with Demetrius in 1987, and Benedict XVI with Bartholomew in 2008 (www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iFGtGjhVbU [accessed 15 March 2004]).

[13] See 'Article VIII. OF THE THREE CREEDS: The Three Creeds, *Nicene* Creed, *Athanasius's* Creed, and that which is commonly called the *Apostles'* Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture'. See also Michael Hull, 'To *Filioque* or Not to *Filioque*: The Warrant of Holy Scripture', *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*, 5 (2021), 105–17; also available in lecture form at www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_JeO0dzPNU [accessed 22 February 2024].

koum (Mk 5.41), *ephphatha* (Mk 7.34), *eloi eloi lama sabachthani* (Mt. 27.46; Mk 15.34) or *abba* (Mk 14.36)? When the scroll of Isaiah was handed to Our Lord in that synagogue in Nazareth as recounted in Luke 4, do we think it was in Greek? Do we think Jesus spoke Greek in his prophecy there commenting on the fulfilment of Isaiah? How about being lost for three days and answering his mother back — in Greek? Now, it is John 19 — as the Roman soldiers cast lots rather than divide his garments, and his holy mother stands in sorrow with her sister and the others, Jesus looks down from the Cross, to say 'Behold your son'. Would Jesus speak in such a moment in the language of the oppressors to his Mary? I think John, not to mention the other three Evangelists, translated swathes of Jesus's Aramaic into Greek from the get-go.

Translation is endemic to our Holy Scriptures and our lives of faith because the Holy Word of God is larger than any language, as we see in Acts 2 with the preaching of the disciples immediately after Pentecost. Again, as our Lord prophesied in Acts 1.8, with the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians spread the Good News in translations of the Holy Scriptures. Thus I make my second claim — translations are a boon of utility rather than a betrayal of meaning. Jerome's take on translation may be found in a nutshell in one of his letters to St Pachomius, whose *Rule* Jerome translated into Latin. *Non uerbum e uerbo sed sensum exprimere de sensu*, writes Jerome ('Not word for word but to express sense from sense', or we may say, 'meaning from meaning'). Except, Jerome goes on to say, *Scripturis sanctis, ubi et uerborum ordo mysterium est* ('In the Holy Scriptures, where even the order of the words is a mystery').[14] What God's people need for their prayer and worship is the sense, the meaning, of the Holy Word, the Divine Logos, Jesus. What could be a more useful, if Augustine does not mind me paraphrasing his words to my own end, than questing for God's Holy Word as Jerome did?

Jerome's quest for the Holy Word

Jerome's quest for the Holy Word consumed his life. His goal was to communicate Christ by opening God's Word to his contemporaries through their common language of Latin. Jerome was bent on presenting God's Word accurately in his translations and his revisions of others' translations. For Jerome, the Scriptures were 'alive and powerful' (Heb. 4.12). Jerome's well-known adage — 'ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ'[15] — is programmatic to his ministry. Jerome did not quest for a translation as an academic exercise. Rather, he quested to keep the sense of a body of literature which is a vehicle to Christ. His goal was to present a person, not a

[14] Letter 57. *Ad Pammachium* 5.2.

[15] Prologue, *Commentariorum in Isaim Prophetam Libri.*

thing. In broad strokes, Jerome's quest for the Holy Word is different to, say, the quest for the Holy Grail. The mythical Perceval quested for an object. The irony of Perceval's quest is its folly — the Grail is but a vessel. The Grail is of little value without the presence of Christ. Without Christ, it is a just a cup; with Christ, it is the Holy Grail. Jerome quested for Christ, to get the sense of Him, to get the meaning and to translate, in the etymological sense of that word, is to move something from one place to another.

Now bear in mind that the creation of the Vulgate is strikingly complex. What source texts did Jerome use? What translated texts did he use? What was his capacity in the source and target languages? How well did he write? Of all Christian Latin writers Jerome most closely approaches the standard of classical purity, when writing at his best. He had so absorbed Cicero, Virgil, Horace and other Latin writers that we hear constant echoes of them in his works. Though he tried hard to 'declassicize' himself, he could not succeed. His pagan master was Cicero; his Christian was Origen.[16]

The sources languages were another matter. Jerome laments not only the most vicious variations in translations of biblical books in Latin, but also the variation of texts in the Septuagint. Because of his proficient Greek, Jerome knew that the Septuagint, in its dozens of versions in the first century, was a problem. Whilst it is a no-brainer for us to favour the original Hebrew over any translation, Jerome dealt with formidable adversaries like Augustine and Hilary of Poitiers who believed that the Septuagint carried authority.[17] Jerome was determined to return to the original insofar as was possible. So, for the Old Testament, he wished to go back to the *Hebraica veritas*, the Hebrew truth. Jerome argued that the New Testament itself quotes the Hebrew rather than the Septuagint, and that the Septuagint is a translation

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[16] *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd edn, ed. by Nicholas G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 562.

[17] On the one hand, the Septuagint is different to the Hebrew text in significant ways. On the other hand, St Augustine of Hippo and St Hilary of Poitiers, to name just two theologians of the primitive church, considered the Septuagint authoritative on the grounds of inspiration on the part of the translators. See, inter alia, Aaron D. Henderson, 'The Inspiration of Scripture and of the Septuagint in Book XVIII of Augustine's *City of God*', *Heythrop Journal*, 62 (2022), 1100–8: https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.13977; Adam Kamesar, 'Hilary of Poitiers, Judeo-Christianity, and the Origins of the LXX: A Translation of "Tractatus Super Psalmos" 2.2–3 with Introduction and Commentary', *Vigiliae Christianae*, 59 (2005), 264–85: www.jstor.org/stable/1584572 [both accessed 22 February 2024].

rather than some sort of revelation,[18] so he set himself the task of learning Hebrew:

> To bring [my mind] under control, I made myself the pupil of a Christian convert from Judaism. After the subtlety of Quintilian, the flowing eloquence of Cicero, the dignified prose of Fronto, the smooth grace of Pliny, I set myself to learn an alphabet and strove to pronounce hissing, breath-demanding words.[19]

In fact, Jerome turned learning Hebrew into an ascetic practice wherein he took himself to be mortifying his flesh with 'hissing' sounds which he thought harsh to Latin ears, and pronouncing them with the effect of making his throat pant,[20] even to the point of being seemingly shameful.[21] The production of his Vulgate was, then, a concerted effort to return *ad fontes* in order to share the original(s) as best he could in translation.

My third claim, then, is that Jerome's quest for the Holy Word is a model for our own ongoing ministerial development insofar as Jerome sought to share Christ with others. Each and every one of us, though not to the extent or dare I say to the high standard of Jerome, chooses translations again and for the people whom we serve. Our choices among the contemporary and not so contemporary translations now available to us are interpretations. Every translation, from the 'literary' of Ronald Arbuthnott Knox's translation of the Bible[22] to the 'literal' of David Bentley Hart's

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[18] Paul B. Decock, 'Jerome's Turn to the Hebraic Veritas and His Rejection of the Traditional View of the Septuagint', *Neotestamentica*, 42 (2008), 205–22: www.jstor.org/stable/43048677 [accessed 22 February 2024].

[19] *Epist*. 125.12.

[20] Patricia Cox Miller, 'The Blazing Body: Ascetic Desire in Jerome's *Letter to Eustochium*', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 1 (1993), 37–8.

[21] Thomas E. Hunt, 'Breathy Shame and the Place of Hebrew in the Work of Jerome of Stridon', *Religion and Theology*, 26 (2019), 85–111: https://doi.org/10.1163/15743012-02503013.

[22] 'Two alternatives present themselves at once, the literal and the literary method of translation. Is it to be "Arms and the man I sing", or is it to be something which will pass for English? If you are translating for the benefit of a person who wants to learn Latin by following the gospel in a Latin missal when it is read out in church, then your "Arms and the man I sing" is exactly what he wants. If you are translating for the benefit of a person who wants to be able to read the word of God for ten minutes on end without laying it aside in sheer boredom or bewilderment, a literary translation is what you want—and we have been lacking it for centuries' (Ronald

translation of the New Testament, is a quest to produce something useful for the reader.[23] One translation may be more or less artistic than another on a variety of levels, but their utility, their usefulness, for us in our ministry seems to be, by my lights, the success that they have in translating texts not just word for word, but also sense for sense.[24] Their boon, if any, is the way in which they make Jesus Christ, the Divine Logos, the Holy Word, present to us and to our sisters and brothers in the Christian faith.

Conclusion

We will keep digging in Palestine, for grails and texts, and well we should. The Dead Sea Scrolls, for instance, advanced our biblical scholarship; and though it is fodder for another lecture, the manuscripts from Qumran validate parts of Jerome's translations from the Hebrew.[25] We will keep translating as our comprehension of both source and target languages expands, but as Christians who recall the *labor tam utilis* of Jerome, which sought not a divine text per se, but a Divine Person who himself is Revelation Incarnate. Our quest in sharing the Holy Scriptures through the translations we choose ought to be based on knowing the one, true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent.

Let me conclude with a question posed by Kazim. Kazim? Kazim is the leader of the fictional Brotherhood of the Cruciform Sword featured in the film *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*.[26] Kazim devotes his life to protecting the secrets of the Holy Grail, and in — of all places — Venice he tests Indiana Jones: 'Ask yourself, why do you seek the Cup of Christ? Is it for His glory, or for yours?' I would claim that Jerome quested for the Divine Logos in his translation not for his own glory but for God's, and we would do well to do

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Arbuthnott Knox, *On Englishing the Bible* [London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1949], p. 3).

[23] 'Again and again, I have elected to produce an almost pitilessly literal translation; many of my departures from received practices are simply my efforts to make the original text as visible as possible through the palimpsest of its translation […] Where an author has written bad Greek […] I have written bad English' (David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* [New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2017], p. xvii).

[24] In fact, Jerome claimed that he was a better translator of the Hebrew Old Testament because of his Christian faith. On this, see Decock, pp. 217–18.

[25] Martijn Jaspers, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and Variant Readings in Jerome's *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos*: The Fourth Book of the Psalter (Psalms 90–106) as a Case Study', *Vulgata in Dialogue*, 6 (2022), 1–14.

[26] Directed by Steven Spielberg, screenplay by Jeffrey Boam, 1989.

the same — to share the Person of Jesus Christ with others via the Holy Scriptures to the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

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Mapping the Spirit's Role in Prayer: How Liminality and Ecstasy in Romans 8 can Enlighten Pneumatology

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Introduction

In this introduction I bring to the surface several different tensions that are uncomfortable but fruitful as a reflection on academic work in pneumatology and the place of this paper within this endeavour.

The first tension pertains to the different values that might support our academic enterprise. Writing as a woman on a text that has an explicit feminine image of labour, I endeavour to contribute to feminist theology. Feminist theology sometimes has an uneasy relationship with traditional theology and the academy at large. It is interested in the voices from the margin. In academia, whether at the colloquium at which the ideas in this paper were first expressed[1] or in the *SEI Journal*, finding space for these voices is difficult. Those who are younger, less experienced in academic ritual, from diverse ethnic backgrounds and of lower socioeconomic standing are often not heard. For academic practice this might be the norm, but for feminist theology it is disturbing, even though it is part and parcel of the academic practice that sets the norm.

Theological thinking on pneumatology takes place in the wider context of a migration crisis and increasing religiously motivated violence. Within this wider context, and with a view to the Spirit in whom racial and academic divisions disappear (1 Cor. 12.11), it is important to become aware of the tensions between different values. Although the underlying presuppositions of this paper include an appreciation for academic rigour, values of inclusion and listening to the voices from the margins also have priority. Mutual dignity and equal regard[2] are regarded as being as important as academic experience.

The second tension concerns Jewish–Christian relationships. This tension becomes especially pressing in biblical studies when Gentile

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[1] 'The Spirit, Hermeneutics, and Dialogues', 25–27 May 2016, Leuven.

[2] Nancy M. Victorin-Vangerud uses and explains these terms at length in her book, *The Raging Hearth: Spirit in the Household of God* (St Louis MO: Chalice Press, 2000).

researchers (such as myself) work within a non-Jewish (if not anti-Semitic) framework, reading scriptures that were mostly written by Jews for Jews. The Second World War in Western Europe has thrown a long shadow of shame and guilt, and through that shame has brought an awareness of this tension. This paper tries to both respect and acknowledge Jesus's Jewishness and rabbinic wisdom, but is aware that it finds its roots in Gentile scholarship. In a certain sense the early split between the people of the way and the synagogue is a deep tragedy.

The third tension is between academic impartiality and religious commitment. Within diverse religious commitments, prayer is something that we share, but not with a secular academic community. The role of prayer in theology and in biblical studies is contested. Some will not be engaged in the task without prayer, others will try to separate their devotional activity from their academic work, and yet others might claim that for 'real' scholarship to be objective one should not be allowed to pray at all.

Prayer as a requirement?

In this paper I explore the role of prayer in pneumatology by reflecting on Romans 8 through the hermeneutical lenses of liminality and ecstasy. The idea of bringing together pneumatology, Romans 8 and thinking about prayer is inspired by Sarah Coakley. She refers to Romans 8 as a biblical source for bringing together a theology of the Spirit with prayer. She also writes about the relationship between prayer and theology more generally. Coakley argues in *God, Sexuality, and the Self* that 'if one is resolutely *not* engaged in the practices of prayer, contemplation, and worship, then there are certain sorts of philosophical insight that are unlikely, if not impossible, to become available to one'. [3] She claims that 'the question of right contemplation of God, right speech about God, and right ordering of desire all hang together', [4] and she is committed to 'the discipline of *particular* graced bodily practices which, over the long haul, afford certain distinctive ways of knowing'.[5]

For Coakley it almost seems that prayer is a precondition for doing theology. She argues this point intricately and consistently over a whole range of specific subdisciplines within theology. A compelling example is her

[3] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay 'On the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 16.
[4] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 2.
[5] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 19.

essay on kenosis in her book *Powers and Submissions*,[6] in which she argues that the 'willed *practice* of ceding and responding to the divine' [7] in contemplative prayer is not only *the* way to understand kenosis but is also effective in undermining masculinism and its abusive worldly power. For Coakley, prayer is not only important for understanding kenosis, but is also crucial when speaking of the Trinity and the Spirit.[8] She claims that the revival of meaningful Christian doctrine 'most naturally arises out of a […] commitment to prayer, and especially prayer of a relatively wordless kind'.[9]

Although I appreciate Coakley's intelligent and persistent argument for the requirement of contemplation, I am also aware that the opposite is true. For although there are insights in theology and biblical interpretation that are impossible to glean if you do *not* pray, there are also other insights in theology and biblical interpretation that are impossible to glean if you *do* pray. One of the important insights of feminist theology has been that the objective view from 'nowhere' does not exist. All human knowledge, and therefore theological insight, is contingent on its situation and context. This means that Coakley is right when she claims 'certain distinctive ways of knowing' for '*particular* graced bodily practices',[10] but it also means that there are certain distinctive ways of knowing through the absence of such practices. There is insight to be gleaned from biblical texts and theology that comes from the specific place of cynicism, suspicion, unbelief, secularism and a disdain for any form of spirituality. Human insight is always partial. Therefore the person who prays also needs the dialogue with the person who does not pray, just as much as the opposite is true.

Yvonne Sherwood's *Biblical Blaspheming* is an exciting example of this. Sherwood does not tell her readers whether she prays or not, but she 'thanks

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[6] Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 3.

[7] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, p. 34.

[8] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 23.

[9] Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015), p. 85.

[10] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 19.

her lucky stars'[11] and claims that her essays 'fail to conform to the profile of believer or atheist or "deist"'.[12] Although her exploration of blasphemy is, by definition, 'invested in the sacred',[13] I somehow doubt that her insights are rooted in the kind of contemplation that Coakley describes.[14] I think that for biblical studies Sherwood's insights are as valuable as Coakley's, and maybe even more so, as the voice of the outsider may lack the blind spots that those with a religious commitment to this text share. This means that I embrace both insights rooted in contemplation and insights rooted in deeply secular discomfort with religious practice. So, in this paper, prayer of whatever kind is not a precondition of speaking of the Spirit. All voices are significant. The voice from 'outside', the insight from the 'margin' (and other liminal spaces)[15] and the knowledge that does not fit neatly but overflows (as in ecstasy) our pneumatological concepts are all vital to this essay. Even so, it remains important to explore Coakley's contention further, especially where pneumatology is concerned.

For Coakley, the deep interrelatedness of theology, prayer and desire emerges in the 'primary interaction with Scripture'[16] and the early Christian tradition. Contemplation is a way to enter into the life of divine desire, and

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[11] Yvonne Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. vii.

[12] Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming*, p. 5.

[13] Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming*, p. 5.

[14] Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, p. 40.

[15] Interestingly, the 'voice from the margin' that was not heard during the conference, as I alluded to in the introduction, seemed to be a voice that *was* rooted in prayer. Maybe in academic discourse the insight that is rooted in prayer is more marginal than the wisdom that is rooted in secularism. In their response, the faithful should be careful not to make the same mistake.

[16] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, p. 2.

the Spirit is the point of entry.[17] Moreover, Coakley explains her point by a 'discussion of the nature of Christian prayer in Romans 8'.[18]

In this paper, I explore Coakley's claims and commitment, especially in relation to the Spirit, in a reflection on Romans 8 through the hermeneutical lenses of liminality and ecstasy. It is my hope that this exploration will lead to a deepening and colouring of pneumatological insight.

Liminality and ecstasy

The idea of liminality emerges from anthropology, especially where it focuses on ritual in communities. Arnold van Gennep studied *rites of passage* and described three phases in a process of transition, of which the middle one is the 'liminal state'.[19] The other two phases are separation at the beginning, and aggregation (re-entry into the community) at the end. The liminal stage is the moment when whoever goes through the process of transition is challenged in their sense of identity and is helped to re-formulate who they are. According to Victor Turner it is a process of undoing and remaking.[20]

The term 'liminality' comes from the Latin word *limen*, which means 'threshold'. It denotes borderlands — the borderland between childhood and adulthood as in the study of van Gennep, or the borderland between cultures when you are not quite sure what the rules are and what the important values are. In a liminal space, normal rules of society do not count because you are crossing a boundary and going over the edge. On the other side you will be somebody else. It is a place of uncertainty — uncomfortably alien, unsettling and insecure. Here you are vulnerable because conventions, ideas and ideals, priorities and the general status quo might all be turned upside down.

I am not the first to use the hermeneutical lens of liminality when reading the Bible. Andrew Mayes, for example, uses it when reading stories

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[17] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, pp. 23–4.

[18] Coakley, *The New Asceticism*, p. 86.

[19] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

[20] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: EDS Publications Ltd, 1995).

from the gospels for people on a spiritual journey.[21] Nanette Stahl explores how law is often part of a liminal moment in the biblical narrative in the Hebrew Bible.[22] Wilderness and exile are both claimed as biblical themes with liminal overtones. Pilgrimage might be seen as a liminal spiritual practice. Liminality is an important theme in the spiritual writing of Esther de Waal, with titles like *To Pause at the Threshold* and *Living on the Border.*[23]

When we are thinking about the place of prayer in pneumatology, liminality is a concept that comes immediately to mind as important. To return to Coakley's vision of theology as an ascetic exercise, 'the task of theology is always in motion (*in via*), always undoing and redoing itself', because with contemplative practice comes a darkening of the mind and a 'disconcerting reorientation of the senses'.[24] Although Coakley does not use the word, she does use the concepts connected with liminality.

Those on the margin are familiar with liminal spaces. They often have to cross cultural or other boundaries. In connecting this concept to prayer and pneumatology, I hope to make both more accessible or relatable to those on the margin. In my reading of Romans 8, I explore how this text interacts with liminality. However, before I do that, I shall investigate the word 'ecstasy'.

In Coakley's work, alongside contemplation, desire is also important. It is a theme she returns to again and again. I would like to come to the same kind of intersection between contemplation and sexuality via a slightly different route — that of ecstasy.

Like liminality, ecstasy is a concept that indicates movement, a movement outward, or even an exodus. In ecstasy you are transported out of yourself. The word comes from the Greek *ekstasis*, which means 'displacement', and indeed a displacement of mind, as in 'trance' or 'rapture'. In the New Testament the word is also used to mean 'amazement'.[25] The two

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[21] Andrew D. Mayes, *Beyond the Edge: Spiritual Transitions for Adventurous Souls* (London: SPCK, 2013).

[22] Nanette Stahl, *Law and Liminality in the Bible* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009).

[23] Esther de Waal, *To Pause at the Threshold: Reflections on Living on the Border* (Harrisburg PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004); Esther de Waal, *Living on the Border: Reflections on the Experience of Threshold* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2011).

[24] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, pp. 18–19.

[25] Compare Acts 10.10 with Mk 5.42.

parts of the Greek word are *ek*, meaning 'from' or 'from out of', and *stasis*, which means 'standing' or 'status' and is also used for 'insurrection' and 'strife'.[26] Thus it means coming out of what is normal.

As with liminality, so also with ecstasy — it is a human experience that is linked not only to the sexual act but also to contemplative prayer. During the ecstatic experience, boundaries are crossed and new relationships forged. After having been ecstatic you are a different person. It can be described as the overflowing of desire into its fulfilment that nevertheless does not result in the cessation of desiring. This can relate to mystical prayer of both the contemplative and the charismatic kind. In Acts, both Peter and Paul experience this ecstatic trance in prayer, where it is linked to receiving a vision.[27]

Ecstasy is an experience that is equally available to those on the margin. A Dutch colleague working as a prison chaplain told me how the young offenders would commend her service to each other: 'Go to the chaplain, she prays for you. The feeling is better than a drugs high'. This voice from the margin can inform our thinking about the ecstatic nature of prayer.

Catherine LaCugna thinks that there is a special relationship between thinking about the Spirit and ecstasy. For her this relationship is not particularly in the ecstatic experience of the person filled by the Spirit, but is about the ecstasy of God. She writes that 'The life of God is ecstatic and fecund' and that 'the Holy Spirit is in a unique way the ecstasy of God'.[28] She imagines God overflowing outside herself. This overflowing of God is the Spirit.

With LaCugna we can imagine ecstasy as overflowing — as an excess that takes us (and God) out of our normal self. Eugene Rogers reflects similarly on excess and the Spirit. He asks whether the Spirit is superfluous.[29] Although there is suspicion of superfluity and excess in the Christian tradition, there is also the gratuitous grace of God that is honoured: 'my cup flows over' (Ps. 23). There is an overflowing that goes over the edge which

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[26] George Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1937), pp. 135, 141, 415.
[27] Acts 10.10 and Acts 22.17.

[28] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: Bravo Ltd, 2000), pp. 351, 355.

[29] Eugene F. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), p. 33.

is associated with the Spirit. In the following I shall explore Romans 8 through the hermeneutical lens of ecstasy.

Often, in academic papers, the biblical text is deemed to be known and therefore remains unread. This saves time and space and is in every way more efficient, but efficiency is not what I am striving for here. Liminality, ecstasy and contemplative prayer are all inefficient. The following will come to life if the text of Romans 8 is opened and read alongside the exegesis.

Spirit of the Resurrection[30]

John Levinson in his magisterial *Filled with the Spirit* begins his discussion of the Spirit in the Letters of Paul with Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones.[31] Arland Hultgren ends his discussion of Romans 8.1–11 with the same reference.[32] Both authors link the image of the valley full of dry bones with Paul's writing. This image of dry bones — very many of them, and very dry — is an image of liminality. In those first few verses of Romans 8, Paul presents us with an interesting borderland. Paul sets the sphere and law of the Spirit of Christ over and against the sphere and law of death and the flesh.[33] These are two realms, two schools in which you can amble about, in which you can conduct your life, which form your habits and thoughts.

Paul uses the word 'flesh' (*sarx* in Greek) not literally, but to signify the human self in a state of sin and weakness. Lewis argues that when thinking of the sphere of the flesh we have to think specifically of Gentile flesh.[34] How is it possible that Jesus the Jew took on Gentile flesh? It happened in his death on the cross. This punishment excludes you from the people of God, places

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[30] Daniel Kirk explores Paul's use of the Resurrection in Romans extensively in his book, *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Grand Rapids MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

[31] John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), p. 253. Ezekiel 37.

[32] Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 306.

[33] I use the word 'sphere' in the same way as Robert Brian Lewis does in his book. *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), p. 149.

[34] Lewis, *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context*, p. 143.

you outside the camp (Deut. 21.23).[35] From a Jewish perspective this Gentile flesh is marginal, our thoughts go to the margin. In his crucifixion, the Jew Jesus takes on Gentile flesh, to include both Jew and Gentile in his resurrection. In this reading, Romans 8 becomes a passionate plea to overcome the tension in Jewish–Christian relationships that I spoke of in the introduction.

This first part of Romans 8 is constantly crossing the border, going over a boundary. In the text it is as if our eyes are constantly moving from the one place to the other, like following the ball in tennis: Christ Jesus — sin and death (Rom. 8.2); sin — just requirement (Rom. 8.3–4); flesh — Spirit (Rom. 8.5); death — life and peace (Rom. 8.6); hostile to God — belonging [to Christ] (Rom. 8.7,9); flesh — Spirit (Rom. 8.9); sin — righteousness (Rom. 8.10). For Paul, this flow to and fro is a rhetorical device. For the reader, in this constant movement from a negative notion to a positive notion, a space in between is created — the edge, the rim, the boundary that needs to be navigated. Paul's presumption that his readers are firmly in the sphere of the Spirit could be raised as an objection to reading the text with a backward and forward motion. The problem is that Paul's presumption is slightly undermined by all his 'ifs' and 'buts', even if you were to translate them as 'since' and 'but'.[36] The text feels as if he is convincing himself that his hearers have indeed crossed into the realm of the Spirit. The text feels as if he is convincing his readers that it is possible (even for Gentile flesh) to move across the border. In his passionate plea that the trek is possible and has been made, he takes his readers to and fro all the time. And every time you move out of what is 'normal' in one sphere, you will hang in the balance and unlearn and re-learn a total way of life before you enter the new sphere and experience that as 'normal'.

This hanging in the balance, being in limbo or entering a liminal space is especially pronounced when it is represented with the image of the Resurrection. The night in which Jesus was raised from the dead is never described. The crossing into death on the cross has a detail that is absent from the crossing into life in the stories. Here, speaking of the Resurrection, Paul evokes the Trinity. In this way the Spirit becomes party to the Resurrection, as if the Spirit herself also crosses into the realm of death to rest on Jesus and bring him into the realm of life. Rogers writes: 'The Spirit

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[35] Lewis, *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context*, p. 147.

[36] In the NRSV translation of the Bible there are six 'ifs' and five 'buts' in Romans 8.1–17.

rests on the Son in the Resurrection'.[37] The movement that the Spirit makes across that ultimate boundary in the resurrection of Christ is a movement that he makes by 'dwelling' — by being in one place. This resting or dwelling is then a movement that is repeated in our mortal body by the Spirit who rests there. The Spirit transforms by being on the boundary. The resting of the Spirit is a resting in the place where death is transformed into life. In this way, to quote Rogers again, 'the Spirit gives to Gentiles in the Son what Jews keep in the Messiah'.[38]

We are left with the question of whether this move from death to life, this journey through the liminal spaces into the sphere of the Spirit, is an ecstatic experience or whether it has little to do with ecstasy. Hultgren claims that Paul was not a mystic, even though Ulrich Luz discusses six features of what he calls 'Pauline mysticism'.[39] It all depends on what definition is used. In the text of Romans 8 up to verse 12 there is no sign of ecstasy, but as we read on ecstasy does appear.

Spirit of adoption

Paul does not leave it at life out of death, but rather he presses on. Those on the journey with the Spirit are children of God, adopted as heirs. We have moved from death to life to divinity. Going from human life to divine life is another major crossing of another boundary. I have argued that the crossing from life to death can be understood as a liminal experience. I would also like to argue that the transition from life to divinity can be understood as an ecstatic experience.

This transition is accompanied by the 'Spirit of adoption'. And this Spirit gives us the 'ecstatic' or 'deeply emotional' cry of 'My Father!' or 'Daddy!' (Rom. 8.5).[40] Hultgren makes a distinction between 'ecstatic speech'

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[37] Rogers, *After the Spirit*, p. 75.

[38] Rogers, *After the Spirit*, p. 85.

[39] Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, p. 303. Ulrich Luz, 'Paul as Mystic', in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Origins: Essays in Honor of James D. G. Dunn*, ed. by Graham N. Stanton, Bruce W. Longenecker and Stephen C. Barton (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 131–43.

[40] The word 'ecstatic' is used by Lewis and Hultgren, whereas Dunn uses the slightly different term 'deeply emotional': Lewis, *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context*, p. 161; Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to*

and 'liturgical formula'. In Coakley's writing that distinction is less clear, especially in her descriptions of contemplative prayer.[41] You could infer from her texts that there are liturgical prayer formulas which help our desire for God and might therefore be ecstatic. Whether or not the distinction between 'ecstatic speech' and 'liturgical formula' is helpful, the cry 'My Father' in Romans 8 is, I suggest, an ecstatic prayer that accompanies the human transition to divinity.

The desire for the revelation of the children of God in Romans 8 is expressed with groaning as in labour (Rom. 8.22), and with groaning inwardly (Rom. 8.23). These are prayers that rise inadvertently not out of discipline or ascesis, but out of the sheer frustration and pain of the eschatological not-yet. The hard work of the liminal journey through the borderlands is accompanied by groans. The journey of becoming divine is accompanied by groans.

The Spirit joins these groans with her sighs 'too deep for words' (Rom. 8.26). The Spirit is praying within the people of God with sighs too deep for words. When words fail, the thinking mind is displaced. Paul describes here an ecstatic experience. When the groaning prayers of creation and humanity are met by the non-verbal prayers of the Spirit, both God and humanity come out of themselves in an ecstatic experience that creates new relationship, new order and an utterly new status quo. The children of God travel from the painful groans through the spiritual experience of sighs too deep for words to the ecstatic call of 'my father'. This is a liminal journey with the Spirit.

Lewis claims that Paul is using the analogy of the Roman emperors, who become 'sons of God' through adoption. In Rome there was a civic cult that celebrated Augustus as the 'son of God'. Everywhere images proclaimed the Caesar to be the son of God. Being a child of God is the highest status available in the ancient world, far better than being free (from slavery).[42] Adoption in the Roman world brought with it 'a new name, a new fortune, a

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the Romans, p. 315; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 453.

[41] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, pp. 18–19.

[42] Lewis, *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context*, p. 177. The difficult lives both of slaves and of those being freed from slavery in the Roman Empire are described by Peter Oakes in his book, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level* (Minneapolis MN: SPCK, 2009), pp. 132–43.

new power, and most significantly […] a new family spirit or *genius*'.[43] This family spirit came with its own rituals and observances, and needed care and attention. It was the transfer from one family religious cult to another. Lewis concludes: 'The status that belonged to only a few according to Roman Imperial ideology has now been extended to all, including many of those who were at the bottom of the social scale'.[44]

This exploration of the significance of the relationship between the Spirit and adoption brings us right back to liminality again. As with the rituals surrounding maturation, so with the rituals surrounding adoption — the liminal place is very important to them. In Romans 8 it seems as if this period between 'becoming' children of God and being 'revealed' as children of God is the time we are in. This is a liminal time with much groaning as in labour and with many ecstatic cries and sighs.

Mapping the Spirit's role in prayer

In the borderlands between the law of death and dwelling in Christ, between the bondage to decay and the glorious freedom of children, it is in that in-between space that the Spirit works and prays. There the Spirit indeed becomes the entry point into the life of divine desire, as Coakley claims.[45] This is entry into God's prayer — prayer that is ecstatic in its inexpressibility. It is ecstatic because it takes both God and the believer outside themselves and into a new adventure. In this adventure our experience and our ideas of the Spirit are enlivened and enlightened, through prayer.

This prayer is liminal in that it is prayed between death and life, between humanity and divinity, and between now and an eschatological future. The Spirit is in this way drawn into that liminal place of uncertainty, where normal rules don't count — a place that is uncomfortably alien, unsettling and vulnerable. There God's transformational encounter with creation is exposed to the chaos of death. In that exposure the Spirit is illumined by her accessibility and sensitivity.

This prayer is not so much a discipline, ascetic practice or precondition as Coakley suggests.[46] It is more the overflowing of the superabundance of God's grace and delight. God's desire is for us to join her: 'My cup overflows.

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[43] Lewis, *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context*, p. 182.

[44] Lewis, *Paul's 'Spirit of Adoption' in its Roman Imperial Context*, p. 185.

[45] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, pp. 23–4.

[46] Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self*, pp. 15–16.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long' (Ps. 23.5–6).

This mapping of prayer in the understanding of the Spirit brings us back to where we started. In the opening of the space for the voiceless to speak, to overflow the academic boundary, the Spirit prays. In the crossing of the boundary between Jew and Gentile, the Spirit prays. In the meeting and the dialogue between those who pray and those who cannot pray, the Spirit wordlessly intercedes.

Lyrical theology

The ideas presented in this paper lend themselves more to lyrics than to academic discourse.

Invitation

The groans of creation,
the sighs of the Spirit
invite us to choose
life over death:
resurrection.

The groans of creation,
the sighs of the Spirit
invite us to join
the incessant stream
of call and response
between God and humanity:
resonating love.

The groans of creation,
the sighs of the Spirit,
invite us to travel
into a liminal space
where the voiceless can speak,
where Jew and Gentile meet,
where any call can be
a call from God,
a call to God,
a call to become God.

Prayer

Oh, Holy Centre of my universe,
flaming, Sacred Heart of love,
Pulsating Core from which all flows,
Middle in the midst of us.

You confined your boundlessness,
boundaried your endlessness.
Transgressed into the wilderness,
to meet humanity's margins.

The manger at the core
dislocates my middle.
Your home among the rejected
invites me out of my comfort.

Take me outside myself,
with sighs too deep for words.
Draw me into your delight:
divine life overflowing.

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REVIEWS

Sabeel, *This Is Where We Stand: A Sabeel Reflection on Antisemitism* (Jerusalem: Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, 2022). viii, 137 pp. ISBN 978 965760775 6.

I began to write this review on 30 September 2023, starting with the following paragraph:

> Since the first edition of this book was published in 2022, the political situation in Israel/Palestine has deteriorated so much that it is impossible to write a review of this reflection on anti-Semitism written by a Palestinian organisation without first strongly urging readers to pay attention to the serious threat of unprecedented violence looming over the heads of all Palestinians who currently reside in the land 'between the river and the sea'. It is with an increasing sense of alarm and concern that I follow the news from my own homeland, Israel/Palestine, and in my native language, Hebrew, and it is with awe and admiration of my fellow countryfolk — the Palestinians who wrote the book under review — that I wish to frame the following. Despite facing ongoing suffering and imminent existential danger, they found the courage and clarity of mind to reflect on the existential predicament of the very people who are responsible, to a large extent, for their own collective plight. This is indeed commendable. But I also write this review out of concern for my own Jewish people and fellow Israeli citizens, and with a sense of obligation to both parties involved.

After continuing my first attempt at the review in this vein, I soon began to feel that it was too focused on my own stance, so I returned to it on 2 October and wrote the following:

> This book is an invitation to listen to the Palestinian claim to self-determination. It approaches this by a remarkably empathic, in-depth listening to the Jewish claim to self-determination, albeit effectively subjecting Palestinians to exile and displacement for the past 75 years. This claim, the authors tell us, is very real and valid, but so is ours. Ostensibly contradictory, these conflicting claims to self-determination in the same territory are not, they insist, mutually exclusive. They state the motive of their reflection on anti-Semitism right at the outset: 'If it is

> wrong of the State of Israel to deny our full humanity, it is futile and unacceptable for us to do the same' (p. vii). Guided by their ideological affiliation to liberation theology, they rely on the New Testament to ground their reflection as Palestinian Christians on anti-Semitism, as a 'sin' as well as the origin of prejudice and hatred towards Jews in the Christian tradition (pp. 3, 25–28). Their ideological underpinnings are also visible in their frequent references to international law (e.g., pp. 33–34, 81–82), facts (e.g., pp. 74–77) and human rights frameworks (e.g., pp. 111–113), especially in foregrounding their plight as oppressed and occupied people.

I then paused, planning to complete the review the following Saturday, 7 October — but that was when all hell broke loose, turning the lives of millions of people upside down.

Ever since then, every Saturday I have woken with half-sentences for the review floating in that space between sleep and wakefulness, only to be pushed aside by the relentless eruption of horrors livestreamed from Israel/Palestine on multiple media channels and social media platforms. The cries of agony and unbearable pain from Gaza deprive many of us of sleep at night, as the reality on the ground for everyone between the river and the sea becomes ever more brutal and ruthless. And all the while we continuously self-censor our words and silence our thoughts, dreading accusations of anti-Semitism. Jews fear the serious implications for our familial and social connections. Israeli nationals, especially Palestinians, fear their civil rights. And many others around the world risk facing detrimental impacts on their professional careers. But this review keeps haunting me. I must complete it now, as serious allegations of committing genocide have been brought — before the most respectable judges in the world at the court in the Hague — against the government that runs my country.

So here is the completed review of the Sabeel book, with the following additional paragraphs (written 13 January 2024) to be read as a supplement to the two presented earlier.

This book is essential reading, especially now, after over 100 days of immense suffering in Gaza, and soon after Israel has addressed the serious allegations put forward against it on 12 January 2024. This book is essential reading for anyone following the South African application to the International Court of Justice for provisional measures to prevent a plausible case of genocide according to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). It is a significant reflection to engage with these days because it courageously tackles the grim and heavy

toll of genocidal anti-Semitism, which was the driver behind the formulation of the Genocide Convention, as the nauseating stench of unspeakable brutalities still emanated from the ashes of millions who were burned in the Nazi death camps.

This book thoughtfully articulates its criticism of the working definition of anti-Semitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), reflecting on its own positionality as a Christian Palestinian organisation, conscious of risking accusations of being anti-Semitic when criticising the acts of the Israeli government. It goes even further than that, reflecting also on anti-Semitism in the context of Islamic theology (pp. 93–97) and religious Zionism (pp. 98–105), with one especially compelling observation warranting mention here:

[W]hen religious Jews believe that the majority of Jews must be in the land of Israel in order that the third temple be built, and thus also see the Jewish people as a tool in bringing about the world to come (*olam habah*), they are instrumentalizing Jews to bring about what they think is best (even if it is what they think is best for the Jewish people) rather than taking into account the wants, desires and needs of an incredibly varied and diverse community, many of whom have no interest in immigrating to the land of Israel (p. 100).

This observation is indeed shared by many of us left-leaning and progressive Jews working and living in the UK and elsewhere in Europe and in North America, where the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism has been adopted by academic and governmental institutions. The authors of this book reach precisely the same conclusion that we reached, that '[t]his self-interested form of Jewish religious Zionism is, therefore, antisemitic, for it is placing fulfillment of biblical prophecy over the best interest of the living, breathing Jews of the world today' (p. 100).

These days, as we eagerly wait for the International Court of Justice to order provisional measures against the plausible case of genocide in Gaza, the authors' repeated references to international law cannot be overemphasised. They effectively offer a remedy to the Israel/Palestine conundrum in a clear, lucid formulation:

Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, as guaranteed by international law [is anti-Semitic:] 'All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'. However, it is not antisemitic to criticize the method or means by which a people are choosing to self-determine, especially if these means and measures are undermining the ability of another people to self-determine and violating other human rights of said peoples as guaranteed by international law […] we are not denying that the Jewish people have a

right to self-identify as a people, and we recognize that any people who choose to self-identify as such have a guaranteed right to 'freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'. However, *we cannot accept Zionism as the political and demographic domination of Jews over non-Jews in historic Palestine. Jewish self-determination was, tragically, established at the expense of Palestinian self-determination* (p. 111, my emphasis).

As I stated earlier, this book — this reflection on anti-Semitism by a Christian Palestinian organisation — is first and foremost an invitation to listen. But it is also a guide to upholding standards of effective inter-communal, inter-religious dialogue on conflicting national interests, urging the rival parties to have the painful, difficult conversation enshrined in historical facts, international laws and conventions, and adherence to universal human rights. Whether they are a follower of one of the religions of the Holy Land, or an atheist who subscribes to universal human rights, or a member of one of the two nations that are competing for and claiming ownership of the same territory, that person can and should engage in this seemingly impossible conversation by clinging to the historical facts and international legal frameworks. This book presents a powerful example of how to do precisely that.

I would therefore encourage my colleagues and friends, especially those directly connected with Israel/Palestine, to listen and reflect in a similar manner for the sake of our nations, communities and future generations.

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Isaac Augustine Morales, *The Bible and Baptism: The Fountain of Salvation* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2022). xxvi, 230 pp. Paperback ISBN 978-1-5409-6178-5.

This book, as suggested by the series title, *A Catholic Biblical Theology of the Sacraments*, is firmly rooted in the Western Catholic liturgical and exegetical tradition. Although Greek patristic texts are cited, and there is some reference to Protestant biblical scholarship, these are drawn upon to support the author's interpretations, rather than as a source of potential enrichment from a broader Christian heritage. Although conscious of these limitations, the author expresses the hope that Christians of other traditions, including Eastern-Rite Catholics, will at least be able to form a clearer understanding of the Western Catholic tradition.

The book begins with a survey of the symbolic value attached to water in the biblical tradition, categorised under life, death, freedom and purity. The Creation and Flood narratives in Genesis, and the parting of the waters in the Exodus narrative and in the myth of Joshua's invasion of Canaan, as well as the numerous purity rites prescribed in the Pentateuch, are identified as types of Christian baptism. The accounts of the baptism of Christ in the gospels, and passages treating Christian baptism in Acts and the Pauline corpus, together with temple motifs in Hebrews and Revelation, are considered in successive chapters. Examples of ways in which patristic writers interpreted the texts and the themes expounded therein are provided throughout the text.

Although there is much of value in this book, as well as much to learn from it, disappointment must also be registered at the missed opportunities. More attention to scholarship emanating from outside the author's own confessional tradition might have enabled him to develop more fully many of the insights with which he grapples somewhat awkwardly. An example of this would be his treatment of the clothing imagery that accompanies several baptismal texts in the New Testament. A more rigorous appreciation of scholarship informed by the social as well as the historical sciences would have enabled a clearer and more forthright articulation of the rather tentative suggestion that clothing reflected status and identity, rather than sartorial taste and personal choice as is taken for granted in affluent modern societies.

Although in many ways this book has not fulfilled its potential, it nonetheless offers the reader opportunities for further reflection and insight, if it is read alongside works of critical exegesis and other recent biblical and liturgical scholarship.

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Michael Fuller, Mark Harris, Joanna Leidenhag and Anne Runehov (eds), *Issues in Science and Theology: Global Sustainability. Science and Religion in Dialogue* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023). v, 223 pp. Hardback ISBN 978-3-031-41799-3. eBook ISBN 978-3-031-41800-6.

This edited volume on global sustainability is the seventh in the series *Issues in Science and Religion: Publications of the European Society for the Study of*

Science and Theology, which aims to capture current science-and-religion trends around the themes of each conference for both the wider science-and-religion community and the general public. This particular volume presents 20 papers on global sustainability in the face of climate breakdown, treating the issue from a variety of perspectives, calling for and justifying action that is practically implemented and sustained.

The first four chapters of the volume consider generally the call to action, challenges to that call and justifications for it. Christian Berg points out the complexities and practicalities underlying sustainability goals, outlining why progress towards sustainability has been slow despite the fact that calls for it have been made for a long time. This chapter contains the first of many references to the 'Brundtland definition' of sustainable development: 'to ensure that it [humanity] meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (p. 2). This chapter also introduces readers to the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly. Despite the slow progress towards sustainability, Berg argues that the concept is nevertheless needed and that the barriers to progress can be analysed and necessary changes triggered by multiple actors working towards the same goals in a coherent way. Willem B. Drees then seeks to justify calls for sustainability. It is in this chapter that readers are first exposed to another commonly referenced publication, namely Lynn White's 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', [1] in which White lays the blame for exploitation of the earth on the anthropocentrism of Western Christianity, and claims that a corresponding religious solution is therefore needed for the ecological crisis. Drees, on the other hand, argues that science, philosophical ethics and religious traditions are not able to provide a single overarching justification for sustainability. Rather, we are inevitably left with the messiness of political processes. Ernst M. Conradie asks the following titular question: 'What, exactly, needs to be sustained amidst a changing climate?' After complexifying the term 'sustainability', Conradie suggests that it is not enough — we also need adaptability, flexibility, resilience and social transformation. Lluis Oviedo and Sara Lumbreras call for religion to engage with other disciplines within society and culture to help to generate and motivate responsiveness to calls for sustainability.

There then follows a group of chapters that take historical approaches to the issue of global sustainability. Axel Siegemund considers the role of engineering and technology in our understanding of the natural world, shifting from a way to tame fallen nature to a locus of iniquity. Siegemund

[1] Lynn White, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis', *Science*, 155 (1967), 1203–7.

argues that, if we consider our technology to be a means of enacting our role as 'created co-creators' with God, then technology might once again fulfil a theologically informed role. In his chapter responding to White's influential argument, Josef Quitterer suggests that such an argument is supported by an assumed dualism between humankind and nature, and he argues for an alternative view of natural causation that is compatible with the Christian tradition and that 'leads to a reconsideration of the dignity and "sacredness" of natural processes, as well as providing space for a meaningful reconstruction of the interaction between natural, human, and divine agency' (p. 68). Similarly responding to White's thesis, Jason Stigall argues for use of the concept of divine therapeutic trust in understanding the creation accounts, such that God therapeutically trusts humanity with the care of creation, with the aim of inspiring humanity's faithfulness to that vocation. Knut Alfsvåg, who maintains that the roots of the ecological crisis are to be found in the Industrial Revolution and the theology of that time, then turns to the eighteenth-century thinker Johann Georg Hamann as an antidote to the mathematical reductionism of the Revolution by advocating a strong theology of creation, according to which nature is understood as divine communication.

The next five chapters explore the complex relationship between human beings and the natural world. Fabien Revol addresses the concept of human uniqueness as it intersects with evolutionary theory, arguing that continuous creation better locates humanity within the earth's ecosystems, yet maintains the dignity of human nature as a site of divine incarnation. Chis Durante considers human and natural flourishing, referring to the writings of Maximus the Confessor as presenting an approach to the natural world which values it as revealing something of God. Durante defines ecological sin as missing the mark of flourishing, and suggests a practice of natural contemplation as a way of 'reading' the book of nature. Roland Cazalis suggests an appropriate embedding of the human species within the biosphere of which we are a part, thus translating the biosphere's internal logic to human ethics. Jaime Tatay brings together conservation efforts at sacred natural sites with ecological interests in the sciences and religions, suggesting the fruitfulness of a previously unexplored interplay that blurs the nature–culture distinction. Mark Graves then proposes a pragmatic 'pan-experientialist' interpretation of nature that identifies nature as both actor and agent.

Next are three chapters that address practical responses to the challenges presented by the ecological crisis. Gerard J. Ryan writes of ecological accompaniment as a form of pastoral care in response to both ecological crisis and the epidemic of loneliness. Hannah James challenges the concept of sustainable prisons, using liberation theology to call for their

abolition. James Thieke then provides an eco-theological reading of Jesus's teachings found in Matthew 6 and Luke 12 about not worrying about the future with Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*, arguing for the concept of discipleship in the context of a Christian ethic of sustainability, which 'encompasses human responsibility to God first' (p. 177).

The volume concludes with further theological reflections from a variety of different perspectives. Tom McLeish considers the shift in the science-and-religion field from an apologetics project (defending the idea that science and religion can do more than simply be in conflict with each other) to more integrative projects, such as articulating a 'scientific theology' or a 'theology of science', as well as how this shift is creatively reflected in church communities to generate discussion about and action towards sustainability. Ximian Xu brings human ontology as ectypes related to the archetype of God into conversation with the technological singularity predicted by artificial intelligence researchers, such that humankind might be sustained through such an event. Berge Traboulsi writes of the current and potential engagement of the Orthodox Church with the Sustainable Development Goals. Finally, Nadeem Haque writes from an Islamic perspective on the concept of 'ecolibrium', in which the dynamics of the biosphere are founded on the Quranic concept of balance.

Although this book may have been compiled with the general public in mind, it is not for the faint-hearted. I do think, however, that it provides an excellent snapshot of the current breadth and depth of the science-and-religion field, especially as it relates to this important topic of global sustainability. For those of us who are interested in the role that the Scottish Episcopal Church might play in supporting discussions, decisions and actions towards global sustainability, I would suggest focusing on chapters that touch heavily on Christian theology, such as Stigall's consideration of divine therapeutic trust, Alfsvåg's exploration of Hamann's theology of creation, or Durante's similar exploration of the theology of Maximus the Confessor (two historical theologians to turn to other than St Francis of Assisi!). We might also be interested in some of the practical outworkings of theologies of sustainability, such as Ryan's ecological accompaniment, Thieke's emphasis on discipleship or James's call for the abolition of prisons as good news for the captives and the earth. However, for all of us, the book as a whole encourages us to look beyond our discipline of theology, beyond our own areas of special concern (no matter how important!) and beyond our own religion. The interdisciplinary nature of the science-and-religion field has always endeavoured to train people to be translators, mediators and collaborators, and this series indeed continues to bring that training beyond academic walls into the public realm. This particular edited volume

admirably does so again, while at the same time addressing what is one of the greatest existential threats to our species and to Creation as a whole.

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