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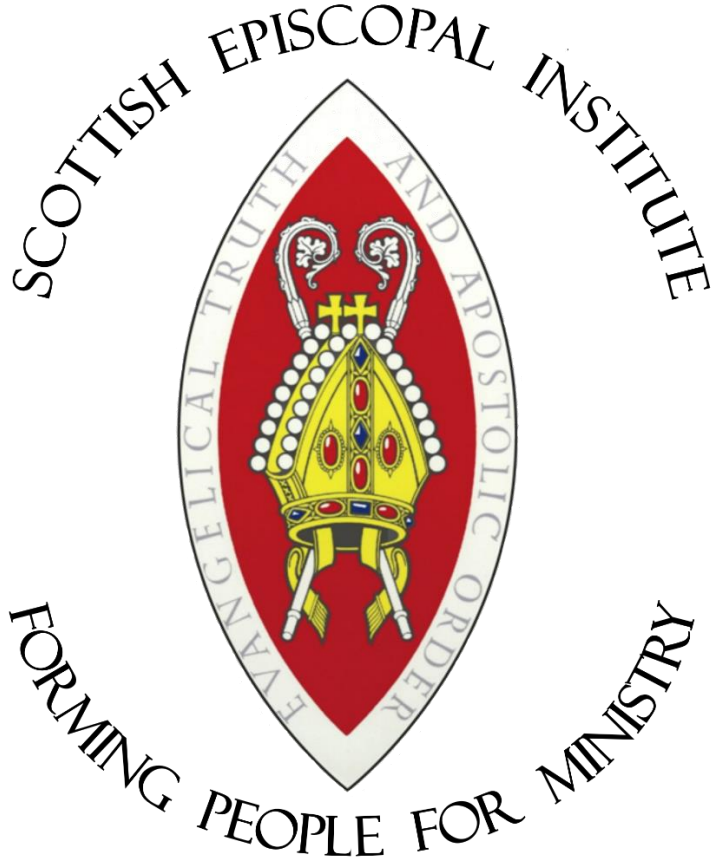

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ARTICLES

REVIEWS

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What does it Mean to Live a Sacramental Life in Communion in Twenty First century Secularised Europe?[1]

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Several socio-economic, cultural, and theological movements have converged in Europe over the past decades, all of which have in various ways influenced developments in the life, worship, and witness of the Church, and the lives of Christian people and families, through the recent pandemic and into its aftermath. Neither the external influences nor the changes they stimulated were necessarily welcomed at the time, but their consequences nonetheless remain a part of the context in which we live and worship. It is probably too soon to discern any significant changes in direction as a consequence of the pandemic, but thus far anecdotal evidence suggests accelerated decline in participation in public worship and in other social activities in many places, with few accounts of any "revival". The reality of on-line worship, a new experience for many and an option not available to those lacking the requisite equipment and connectivity, has yet to be fully assessed. It is to this question, and the extremely complex issues surrounding on-line Communion, that we perhaps need to give most attention, but at this stage we may perhaps hope only for very tentative indicators or areas for further observation and theological reflection.

It is generally agreed that Europe is secularised, even though there is rather less consensus as to precisely what this means: whether cultural changes have been accurately described, or any ideology of separation of religious and political institutions achieved, continues to be disputed.[2] That

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[1] Paper presented at the Porvoo Communion Thematic Consultation on Life in the Eucharist: the Eucharistic Life in our Churches, Madrid, October 2023.

[2] While separation of Church and State was advocated by such mediaeval movements as the Waldensians, the origins of the philosophical traditions arguing for the separation of religious principles and institutions from other areas of public and private life, or premised upon such separation, can be traced to the *Theological-Political Treatise* of Baruch/Benedict de Spinoza (1670) and the *Two Treatises of Government* and *Letters Concerning Toleration* of John Locke (1689-92). The term entered discourse with G. J. Holyoake, *The Principles of Secularism* (London: Austin, 1870). For recent treatments of the subject, cf. T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); P. L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative* (Garden City NY: Anchor, 1979);

fewer of the population of most countries, with the possible exception of the Vatican, belong to any church or attend public worship regularly, is generally accepted. Where there are state churches, with church taxes, or even national churches with a residual status in society, trends may be more difficult to quantify, but there are further questions which remain. Such mantras as "believing without belonging" and "spiritual but not religious", raise questions both of definition and of sustainability and regeneration, for the individuals and families concerned and for the Church.[3] What do such people believe, do their beliefs shape their lives and relationships, and is the spirituality they profess recognisably Christian? A more practical, if self-interested, question is the economic viability of churches dependent upon voluntary contributions, rather than church taxes or tourist revenue. More profoundly, are belief, moral values, and spirituality sustainable, and transmissible to the next generation, in the absence of a community in which faith, its beliefs, and its rituals, are cherished, taught, and interpreted, and their parameters defined, as members are nurtured through the stages of life in this world until they are committed to the next? These are questions which require careful investigation and thorough, theological, reflection, not least among those who advocate ways in which the Church might adapt its sacramental doctrine and discipline to "market demands",[4] which in practice

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views fundamentally revised in *The Desecularization of the World* (Grand Rapids MI: Ethics & Policy Center, 1999); J. Berlinerblau, *Secularism* (New York: Routledge, 2021); C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2009); S. Bruce, *God is Dead* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002); G. Davie, *Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Wiley, 1994); R. M. Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993); A. C. MacIntyre, *Secularization and Moral Change* (Oxford: OUP, 1967); C. M. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Bellknap, 2007); B. R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: Watts, 1966).

[3] It might be instructive to compare this trend with the decline in adherence and participation in cults in late classical Greece, sometimes attributed to the rise and increasing popular influence of the philosophical schools, and the scope this created for the spread of oriental cults, including Judaism and Christianity – were there sufficient information available.

[4] In the Church of England in particular, but also in other parts of the Anglican Communion and in other denominations, the propriety of baptizing the children of parents who are not active and committed members of the Church has been debated for several decades. An early critic of prevailing practice was Roland Allen, author of *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (London: Scott, 1912). More recent treatments (all Anglican authors), C. O. Buchanan, *Infant Baptism and the Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1993); A. W. Carr, *Brief Encounters* (London: SPCK, 1994); M. O. Dalby, *Open Baptism* (London: SPCK, 1989); M. Earey & al (ed), *Connecting with Baptism* (London: Church House Publishing, 2007); S. Lawrence, *A Rite on the Edge* (London: SCM, 2019); R. R. Osborn, *Forbid Them Not* (London: SPCK, 1972); N. H. Taylor, *Paul on*

often means competition from secular officiants offering naming ceremonies and other rites of passage with rather more flexibility regarding venue and ceremonial than tends to be the case either with clergy or with civil Registrars.

There are also significant issues to do with immigration and demographic change. The tortured history of Judaism in Europe does not need rehearsing, but does continue to require acknowledgement. Many European countries have more recently experienced an influx of voluntary and involuntary migrants, largely from Muslim-majority countries. This has raised several issues for the churches. The reality of multiculturalism has not merely seen the establishment of significant Muslim communities with their institutions, but also, on a smaller scale, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and others, many of which are very active in charitable and other social projects, and very much more committed to inter-faith networks than are most of their Christian neighbours. Just as the history of persecution of Jewish communities in Europe was noted previously, so also must be noted the rising tide of violent and sacrilegious Islamophobia, and the appropriation of Christian symbols as economic anxieties are manipulated by racist and fascist, and at times violent, nationalistic movements against the most recent influx of refugees.[5] In addition, there are in many places Christian migrants who are not spared the racism endemic in their host societies, and whose culture and spirituality do not fit comfortably with European traditions of worship to which they have not been previously exposed, or which they had previously renounced in favour of spiritual and liturgical forms which give more authentic expression to their own enculturated experience of God. The spontaneous segregation, even without the often unconcealed hostility of entrenched interests in the churches, and establishment of independent churches, raises profound questions about ecumenism and communion in many places.

Against this background, questions of sacraments and sacramentality may seem arcane, but they do relate very directly to the enveloping environmental and climate crisis, which is not only a significant existential issue for the world, but has been and continues to be a major catalyst for the

Baptism: Theology, Mission and Ministry in Context (London: SCM, 2016); P. N. Tovey, *Of Water and the Spirit* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2015). None of these question infant baptism *per se*, what is debated is the commitment to the worship and communal life of the local church which should be required before Baptism is administered.

[5] See H. M. Strømmen & U. Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right* (London: SCM, 2020).

social and economic issues mentioned, including migration and conflict.[6] This raises very fundamental questions about the nature of community, and here Christians can only begin with Baptism and the Eucharist.

The place of Baptism in the Christian life-cycle may be clear and secure in denominational polities and discipline, but the reality is of course very much more complex, and in many contexts strongly contested. I have, in a previous study, drawn upon and adapted the paradigm of church and society first modelled by H. Richard Niebuhr.[7] While the social sciences, their study of religious movements, and their application to the study of Christian origins, have developed considerably over the decades, the diversity in patterns of engagement with society noted by Niebuhr remains valid. Theological arguments about baptismal discipline, and credobaptism and paedobaptism in particular, are inherently inconclusive, and ultimately meaningless unless we first seek to understand how the Church and Christian belief relate to the host society and its culture. I do not propose developing this discussion further at this point, as I do not believe there has been significant change in recent years; the pandemic undoubtedly delayed the administration of Baptism in many communities, and may well have led many parents "not to bother" or to leave it to their children to decide for themselves later, accelerating a trend whereby the family abdicates responsibility for the Christian nurture of its children, in the expectation that they will continue, however nominally, in the faith as inherent in their culture and heritage. How this relates to the increasing fragility of family life, and the complex variety of patterns of family in modern societies, is an issue meriting investigation. Notwithstanding the acceleration of such trends in at least some places, any reflection upon mutations in the theology and practice of Baptism in our Churches, as a consequence of the changes in our circumstances brought about through the pandemic, remain ahead of us.

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[6] Philip Jenkins identifies climate change as a catalyst for the series of conflicts, migrations, dispossessions and massacres which all but eradicated what had been flourishing Christian communities in central Asia, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009).

[7] *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). Whereas Niebuhr defines a typology of Christian approaches to the dominant culture, I have sought to arrange these categories along a continuum, from adversarial rejection to close identification: from *Christ against Culture* "affirms the sole authority of Christ over culture and resolutely rejects culture's claims to loyalty" (p. 45), through *Christ and Culture in paradox*, which engages critically with prevailing culture, *Christ above Culture*, whereby the Gospel is incarnated in but distinct from prevailing culture, and *Christ transforming Culture*, which seeks to implement the "salt of the earth" principle rather than convert people, to *Christ of Culture*, the traditional stance of established churches, though now widely questioned, in my *Paul on Baptism*, 152-56.

It is the Eucharist which, it seems, has been central to reflection on how the Church was to sustain its worship and communal life through the pandemic, and which continues to pose challenges on account of developments which, if not entirely new in themselves, have become commonplace rather than hypothetical or "fringe".[8] On-line participation in the Eucharist is not in itself new.[9] Religious broadcasting has been a significant part of the lives of people separated from public worship through illness or frailty, or even geographical distance, for decades. Nevertheless, whether radio or television has been the medium, there has never been any suggestion other than that the service is being conducted, or was previously recorded, in one particular place, and is being heard and perhaps watched from somewhere else, with listeners and viewers fully conscious of that geographical and possibly temporal separation, and of the limits it imposes on their participation. When the liturgy broadcast was a celebration of the Eucharist, there would have been no suggestion that consuming food and drink simultaneously with the gathered congregation would in any way constitute partaking of the sacrament.

Why the internet has been deemed to be different in this respect is not entirely clear. Some, but not all, platforms provide a facility for more interactive modes of participation, beginning with the capacity for those attending to be seen and identified, and to communicate with each other, which certainly transforms quite radically the experience from that possible with earlier (and continuing) forms of (unidirectional) broadcasting; sometimes these communications, commonly and appositely known as "chat", may be visible to other participants who inadvertently and

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[8] Virtual Communion and the Covid-19 Pandemic. Report of the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation to the Inter Anglican Standing Committee on Unity, Faith, and Order, 2021; on-line at https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/493612/Virtual-Communion-and-the-Covid-19-Pandemic_220322_IALC.pdf, accessed 30 August 2024; Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order Report to ACC-18, Accra, Ghana, 2023, on-line at https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/498587/en_dept_IASCUFO.pdf, accessed 30 August 2024; ACC Resolution 3(g) on Virtual Communion, on-line at https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/513756/en_acc18_resolutions-and-statements-of-support_24.pdf; accessed 30 August 2024. See also R. A. Burridge, *Holy Communion in Contagious Times: Celebrating the Eucharist in the Everyday and Online Worlds* (Eugene OR: Cascade, 2022). Contra, C. A. Doyle, *Embodied Liturgy: Virtual Reality and Liturgical Theology in Conversation* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2021); J. R. Davies, "Eucharist, Church, and Judgment: Initial Questions about the Liturgical and Ecclesiological Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic", N. H. Taylor (ed), *Church, Ministry, and Coronavirus. Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* 4.2 (2020), 71-84.

[9] See earlier treatment, N. H. Taylor, *Lay Presidency at the Eucharist? An Anglican Approach* (London: Mowbray, 2009), 172-76.

unwillingly become third parties to distracting on-line conversations; the content of these exchanges may not always be appropriate to the occasion, and would in other circumstances constitute disruption of an act of worship. Some platforms include the capacity to limit participation to specific people, or the devices registered to particular people, so that the dispersed congregation is a closed group, which is not the same as a gathered congregation of people who have consciously conveyed themselves physically from their homes to the meeting place of the local church, to which, in principle at least, all are welcome. Notwithstanding the choices made by individuals and families, particularly in urban areas, as to where and how they worship, and the invisible barriers erected against people of particular ethnic and cultural heritage or socio-economic background, the gathering place of a gathered congregation is in principle open to all who seek to participate in its worship and community life. Two more significant differences would seem to be (1) the potential for the liturgy to be celebrated, not at a central or common place of worship by a gathered community, but with the remote participants constituting the entire congregation celebrating the Eucharist, and (2) the introduction of computer-generated images of buildings and people so that worship is effected or affected through increasingly sophisticated "virtual reality", and avatars perform on-screen and vicariously the functions of their principals, saying and doing what worshippers would say and do if physically present at the liturgy of a gathered congregation, including the roles of the presiding priest and other ministers.

Questions about the nature of the Church and the Sacraments need to be considered, irrespective of the spiritual benefits of on-line celebrations of the Eucharist claimed by some who experienced these during the pandemic. [10] Perhaps the most articulate apologist for this mode of eucharistic worship has been Richard Burridge; [11] a biblical scholar and theologian of some stature whose work transcends the traditional theological traditions within Anglicanism, even if not always transcending his own personal circumstances and experience. He reflects very largely on

[10] A clear distinction needs to be recognised between, on the one hand, any form of participation through observation of a celebration of the Eucharist, whether simultaneously or subsequently, through broadcasting or the internet, and consuming food and drink at the time of distribution, and on the other, Spiritual Communion through following such a celebration and offering appropriate prayers when those present at the celebration are receiving the elements. It was the latter observance which was encouraged by the Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church, who celebrated the Eucharist with their families, broadcast via the SEC website and social media during the periods that church buildings were closed.

[11] *Holy Communion in Contagious Times*.

personal experience with a number of like-minded friends in different parts of the world, during a period in which public worship was restricted, but not prohibited, and he mentions also some of the personal circumstances which contributed further to shaping his sense of social and spiritual need, and ways in which he felt nourished by his experience of on-line Eucharists. One might question whether these are the circumstances in which theological principles are most helpfully identified and articulated, especially by a recently retired priest having to process the changes in role and identity which accompany ceasing to exercise the cure of souls in any community – and enjoying unrestricted access to pulpit and altar in a consecrated space in which pastoral oversight is exercised. Nevertheless, several of the arguments Burridge musters, and the record he provides of debating several of the issues with colleagues, provide some insight into the experience of a particular cadre of (mostly ordained) theologians accustomed to relating across continents on academic matters, during a significant period of social crisis. These may not be typical, either of the clergy whose ministry is been essentially pastoral and related to a community gathered in a particular area, or to the congregations in their care; nor, indeed, would it be typical of local people to whom the church reaches out, and whom it invites into its fellowship. Still less would it reflect the experience of members of local communities who found their secular mindset challenged by the isolation of lockdown, the local church unable to open its buildings, and on-line worship offering them little or no access to the words and rituals with which they were at most vaguely familiar, all the more strange and arcane in the unfamiliar environment of on-line worship. Anecdotal evidence from parishes seems to indicate that a return by the faithful to gathered worship, as soon as was permitted, was both desired by and felt essential to the spiritual health of the communities affected – and to the mental health of many of the people. Where, mainly evangelical, congregations persisted in restricting their worship and other activities to on-line fora after resumption of public worship had been authorised, they found it increasingly difficult to resume physical gatherings for worship and other aspects of their corporate life at a later stage. Citation?

Writing during the early stages of the first lockdown, John Reuben Davies raised serious questions about the prolonged suspension of public worship, and in particular the celebration of the Eucharist.[12] These included

[12] "Eucharist, Church and Judgment". Davies was contributing to a collective endeavour to reflect theologically, and to offer the fruit thereof in support of clergy and laity, particularly in the Scottish Episcopal Church, and published in June 2020 in the *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal*. While referring specifically to the doctrine, liturgies, and rubrics to the liturgies of this Church, he interacts also with the writing of Roman

quite fundamental questions of order, the nature of the priesthood both of the people of God and of the presbyterate (and episcopate), and the ministry to the world to which they are called and to which the Eucharist is central. He raises questions also about the nature of human and Christian identity, given expression in the Body of Christ gathered for a common purpose, so that the individual attains his or her ultimate fulfilment in the life and worship of the Body, and not in individualistic self-assertion in isolation from or opposition to a community in which common identity and purpose are shared. Arguments focussed on reception, and the physical or theoretical possibility of partaking of sacramental elements consecrated remotely rather than in a corporate act of worship, overlook the nature of participation and sacrifice; in the Eucharist the worshipper offers, and pledges to continue a living sacrifice in the world, and not merely to be a beneficiary of Christ's saving death. This theological truth concerns the liturgy of the Word as well as of the Sacrament, both of which are fundamentally corporate acts.[13] The work of the Church in the world, to which the congregation is sent out at the conclusion of the Eucharist, cannot be reduced to lip-service to an abstract principle, but requires a practical implementation which may seldom be realised on Sunday mornings immediately after the dismissal, but is unlikely ever to be enacted if congregants remain sedentary in their own homes throughout the liturgy.

Perhaps even more threatening to the mission and therefore to the survival of the Church has been the collapse in its hitherto taken for granted presence in every community. Irrespective of the idealisation of the past implicit in this myth, a profound sacramental significance has been attached to this presence, in the permanent, visible, and distinctive buildings with their (often) theologically significant architectural features, and in the more mobile but nonetheless (intermittently) visible and available ministry of clergy who occupy a recognised and respected position in the community far wider than the scope of their proclamation of the Word and administration of the Sacraments, and perhaps wider even than the pastoral care extended to those on the fringes of the ecclesial community. The withdrawal of the Church from many local communities, often those most impoverished and most marginalised from civil society, may or may not in itself create a spiritual and moral wasteland, or leave a void in which those abandoned by the Church are vulnerable to exploitation and to the false hopes trafficked by populist and cultic movements. Nevertheless, this widely attested

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Catholic liturgical theologian Thomas O'Loughlin, *The Eucharist: Origins and Contemporary Understandings* (London: T & T Clark, 2015), and draws also upon my earlier work, *Lay Presidency at the Eucharist?*

[13] Cf. also A. A. Bartlett, *A Passionate Balance: The Anglican Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2007).

phenomenon raises serious questions about the nature of the mission which God has entrusted to the Church, and about our commitment to bringing food and healing to the most needy, integrating in the community and making disciples from among these as from the more privileged, and forming all within the fellowship of sacramental communities.

In conclusion, I would suggest that we face fundamental questions about the nature and mission of the Church in the secularised societies of Europe. Our sacramental life, and the sacramental nature of our presence in the world, are challenged both by decline and by social and cultural change. We cannot change our context without first reorienting our life and worship in the light of a fresh and honest re-assessment of our standing in society and our relationship with its defining institutions.

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The Bible, Theology and Literature: A Conflict of Interests?

The Revd Canon Professor David Jasper[14]
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I want to share with you this afternoon some reflections on a recent book of mine entitled *Scripture and Literature*, published by Baylor University Press in 2023. It is actually a collection of my mostly published essays written over some four decades, the earliest being published in 1982, and the book is essentially an historical and theological exercise. That is, it reflects the changing cultural, theological, intellectual and political contexts in which my thinking about the relationship between the Bible and literature (as well as the visual arts) have taken place. In the 1980s we were newly absorbing the impact of Jacques Derrida, post-modernism and deconstruction on the study of literature and theology (as in many other ways). That cultural moment is mostly now past, though it has left its mark, and we should be reminded that our academic studies - including those concerned with the Bible and (or perhaps 'as') literature - can never be insulated from the world in which we live at every level. I have always felt that the broader study of religion and literature is an edgy and ever changing business, and I want to try and demonstrate what I mean by that in this essay.

So let me start with chapter 10 in my book which is entitled 'The Bible, Christianity and War in English Literature.' It was first published in 2009 in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*,[15] and I would not change much of it today in the light of the present conflicts in our world. I start the essay with some words of warning from the late Gianni Vattimo in his book *After Christianity*:

> The presence in the Western world of a Christian tradition as a continuous background, albeit a vaguely defined one with a univocal meaning, is not an element for leveling out conflicts; on the contrary, it is (or has become) a constitutive factor in promoting them, and can exacerbate them.[16]

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[14] A revised version of the text of a lecture delivered in the Divinity School, University of Cambridge on 29th May, 2024.

[15] Edited by Kate McLoughlin.

[16] Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*. Trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 20002), p. 93.

The so-called 'design of biblical history' has been entirely eclipsed (if indeed it ever really existed), and within the dystopias of contemporary literature the biblical apocalypse (and the words are mine) 'by the postmodern apocalypse of implosion as envisioned by Jean Baudrillard - [there is] a descent into utter nihilism in a hyperreal, war-ravaged wasteland without redemption and without God.'[17] See now the dystopias of Gaza or eastern Ukraine.

I make no apologies for my sometimes rather strange theological mentors in many of these essays, perhaps above all my old friend the late Thomas J. J. Altizer, the most prophetic and Blakeian of the American 'death of God' theologians. You can take me to task on this if you will, but I reflect now that when I first met Tom, I was teaching the Bible and literature in the 1980s in a United States embroiled in the Iraq war and then I was later in Beijing where one's words were monitored in every class and lecture.[18]

However, I take my beginning today from a quieter place and from the kindness to me very early in career and in Cambridge of the literary critic Sir Frank Kermode, whose 1979 book *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* is still powerful and eminently worth reading. It was based on the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures for 1977-78, and evoked a violent response from the same named lectures given in the following year by Oxford's Dame Helen Gardner, published as her book *In Defence of Imagination* (1982). Gardner defends a deeply conservative Christian reading of literature which sets the Bible apart from all other texts, and which leads to some rather odd proposals. Mark's Gospel, for example, is placed by Kermode alongside such literary works as James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and emerges - and I think that this is quite correct - as itself, and whatever else might be said of it, one of the great *literary* texts of world literature. Gardner, on the other hand, clearly separates the biblical text from the literary text - with an odd take on authorial intentionality - writing that 'the enigmas and riddles which Kermode finds in Mark lie in the nature of the material he is presenting, not, as with Joyce, in the intentions of an author.'[19] It seems to me a very strange thing to say.

Kermode, on the other hand, who indeed takes biblical scholarship very seriously, weaves theology into the structures of narrative, taking the 'fictionality' of biblical literature very seriously. His mentor in this is a biblical critic - Austin Farrer - whose work on the gospel texts, in Kermode's

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[17] David Jasper, *Scripture and Literature: A David Jasper Anthology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2023), p. 173.

[18] I was once accused of being the only British theologian who took Tom Altizer seriously. If that is so I remain unrepentant.

[19] Helen Gardner, *In Defence of the Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 123.

words, 'was rejected by the establishment, and eventually by himself, largely because it was so literary.'[20] Farrer's reading of the Gospel of Mark, which had its quirks certainly but is still worth reading, is beautifully summed up by Kermode in one sentence: 'He let his imagination play over the apparently flawed surface of Mark's narrative until what [Robert] Adams calls fractures of the surface become part of an elaborate design.'[21] The theology, in short, is in the literary texture of the gospel which, I suggest, is a much darker and more mysterious text than is often thought. Nor is the Gospel of Mark simply a somewhat primitive model which the later author of St. Matthew tidied up, but a darkly brilliant work of literature with characteristics that we might now describe as 'postmodern'. Before I move onto further reflections on postmodernity, allow me to leave Kermode with the disturbing ending of *The Genesis of Secrecy*, when he draws us - without direct reference - into the unsolvable challenge of Kafka's Parable of the Doorkeeper from *The Trial* - a modern text with which Mark's Gospel has disturbing similarities. Thinking of Mark's uncomprehending disciples, the bewildering description of parables in Mark, chapter 4 - told to *prevent* us from turning again and being forgiven, the terror (is that quite the right word?) of the women running out of the tomb (16: 8, and to which I will return later) - listen to Kermode's final words on narrative:

> World and book, it may be, are hopelessly plural, endlessly disappointing; we stand alone before them, aware of their arbitrariness and impenetrability, knowing that they may be narrative only because of our impudent intervention, and susceptible of interpretation only by hermetic tricks. Hots for secrets, our only conversation may be with guardians who know less and see less than we can; and our sole hope and pleasure is in the perception of a momentary radiance, before the door of disappointment is finally shut on us.[22]

So, with these dark words in mind, let me take you forward a few years in my own academic career to the early 1980s, when I found myself engaged in a brief exchange of letters with the emergent French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Postmodernism and deconstruction were unavoidable, as much in their political radicalism as in their broadly philosophical significance. Of course they were of their time, but at the heart of the narrative of *Scripture*

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[20] Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 63.

[21] Ibid., p. 62.

[22] Ibid., p. 145.

and Literature is its being necessarily embedded in a shifting cultural and social context. That was something that Graham Ward and I agreed on in the broader field of theology and literature when we were editing the journal *Literature and Theology*. Theology cannot ignore its deep association with culture and politics and also with textuality and language and the haunting words of Derrida at the very beginning of *Of Grammatology,* in the chapter 'The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing', hung in the air in the early '80s.

> ...language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self-assured, contained, and guaranteed by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it.[23]

Though probably little read now, forty years ago Derrida (along with Lyotard, Levinas and others) was unavoidable. His thinking on language and text was clearly of profound significance for theology, kicking metaphysical and structural supports from under our feet. He was also a profoundly Jewish thinker and rooted in the texts of scripture - and above all, whatever people might have thought of him, he was a superb *reader,* and he allowed texts to live in endless, garrulous exchanges with other texts. Looking back at chapter 4, in my book, 'Down through all Christian Minstrelsy' (a quotation from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*), I found that this included one's own manner of writing. The Irish biblical scholar Stephen Moore put it succinctly.

> I am eager to reply to the Gospels in kind, to write in a related idiom. Rather than take a jackhammer to the concrete, parabolic language of the Gospels, replacing graphic images with abstract categories, I prefer to respond to a pictographic text pictographically, to a narrative text narratively, producing a critical text that is a postmodern analogue of the premodern text that it purports to read.[24]

Seeking to write in such a way, I turned for my models to the poets Coleridge and Blake (who famously claimed to have dined with Isaiah and Ezekiel), and

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[23] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 6.

[24] Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. xviii.

above all James Joyce and *Finnegans Wake* - perhaps the most scriptural text in all English (or more precisely Irish) literature. Here is my introduction to Joyce:

> In James Joyce's two great epics, *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), there is an epiphany of Satan, albeit silent and impassive, a Satan who is actually one with Christ, and a Christ who is one with Satan in the creative moment of the fall (a Christ who is known also to Blake).[25]

We have moved here beyond literary criticism, biblical criticism and theology - though all are present. And the language that plays, within the freedoms of postmodernity, with the textuality and theology of scripture and literature also opens up political dimensions that include the concerns of feminist criticism, postcolonialism (which we have now arguably moved beyond),[26] and so on.

By far the most important feminist critic for me has been the Dutch narratologist Mieke Bal, with whom I still correspond. Mieke has never claimed to be a biblical critic, but in the late 1980s she published a remarkable trilogy on the Book of Judges, entitled *Death and Dissymmetry* (1988), *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (1987), and *Murder and Difference* (1988). She describes her books as studies in *countercoherence*, a 'deconstruction in its own right' which exposes 'the reality of gender-bound violence' in Judges by revealing the counter-current or undertow in patriarchal narratives in the 'indestructible traces' of women who are almost entirely nameless victims. Bal gives these women - Jephtha's daughter, the Levite's concubine and so on - names in an eisegetical strategy which has long been an element of scriptural readings - in for example the sermons of Meister Eckhart.[27]

Bal is a doughty, deconstructive, political and challenging reader of texts. In the opening chapter of my book I return to an important, and largely forgotten article which Bal published in the journal *Diacritics* in 1986, entitled 'The Bible as Literature: A Critical Escape.'[28] In it she exposes the

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[25] Jasper, *Scripture and Literature*, p. 64.

[26] This point was debated at the Cambridge seminar and I made the point that words - like postcolonialism - change at various and different speeds. Postcolonialism as it was understood in the 1980s has certainly changed and moved on. In other respects - look at the present situation in Gaza - it has taken on new meanings. Thinking, too, takes place at different speeds at the same time.

[27] See the Introduction to Mieke Ball, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

[28] *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*. 16, No. 4 (Winter 1986), pp. 71-79.

foibles of three highly respected biblical critics - Meir Sternberg, Robert Alter and Phyllis Trible. Let me just take the case of Sternberg in his widely read and respected book *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (1987). Sternberg's biblical 'poetics', Bal argues, are based on an analogy between the omniscient deity and the omniscient narrator of the text, and to both of them Sternberg is 'ideologically' bound, thus cementing a powerful and impermeable 'drama' of reading. Bal succinctly expresses the *critical* dilemma for Sternberg here:

> Left with a circular methodology, he can only paraphrase, repeat what he thinks the ideology of the text is. This turns him from the literary scholar he claims to be, into a theologian.[29]

Bal, it should be said, deeply distrusts theologians - and she or may not be right to do so. Let it be said, however, like Derrida in a way, she is a formidable and precise *reader* of texts of all kinds (one of Bal's later books was entitled *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word Image Opposition* [1991] and was an encouragement to me to read the 'biblical' art of Turner and Holman Hunt in essays in my book) - and perhaps at least theologians should take note of this. Here, if I may quote my own words about Bal on Sternberg:

> ... on the whole, [Bal] thinks [that] theologians and literary critics do not mix particularly well. For one thing, this leaves Sternberg [a professor of poetics and comparative literature at Tel Aviv University] with the stain of an ineradicable male ideology that is constantly having to negotiate the surprise experienced when a figure like Deborah in the Book of Judges offers us the 'incongruity' [Sternberg's word] of a woman deliverer. At such moments, Sternberg's own text takes on a disturbing quality of mild patriarchal surprise mixed with a faint, and somewhat distasteful, undercurrent of salaciousness. He writes, 'For the first time in history - we rub our hands in anticipation - a woman will lead Israel into battle.' In anticipation of what, precisely?'[30]

Texts - and perhaps especially biblical texts - frequently find themselves caught between systems - struggling with the demands of omniscient deities, omniscient narrators, patriarchal structures, and so on. But they are also, by their textual nature, mischievous, sociable and errant and with a tendency

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[29] Ibid. p. 76.

[30] Jasper, *Scripture and Literature*, p. 20.

to keep bad company - of various kinds. Hermeneutics knows all this, of course, as I acknowledged in a little book on that subject which I wrote some years ago, quoting Alice and Humpty-Dumpty on words and meaning:

> 'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things.'
> 'The question is,' said Humpty-Dumpty, 'which is to be master - that's all.'[31]

But let me move on to another issue which is important in my own essays on the Bible and literature: the question of *inter-textuality*. Texts are endlessly sociable - and the isolation often imposed on the Bible texts in consequence of their 'sacrality' is deeply unnatural to the nature of texts. No text is an island and any text resonates endlessly with other texts of all kinds. So let me begin this part of my talk with an exercise of the imagination in the reading of biblical texts as they resonate with one another.

I take you back to the Gospel of Mark in the company of those who first read, or more likely, heard it in its present *koine* Greek form. I am assuming that they were Jewish 'Christians' who probably knew, and knew very well, the scriptures in the Greek Septuagint form. (All sorts of assumptions here.) So what about the notorious ending at 16: 8 - the women rushing out of the empty tomb: '*και ουδενι ουδεν ειπαν. εφοβουντο γαρ.*' ('And they said nothing to anyone, for they were terrified.') One of the standard commentaries on Mark when I was a theology student in the early 1970s (by Vincent Taylor) states clearly that this is not the proper ending, suggesting three possibilities: the manuscript was mutilated, Mark died in the act of writing, or deliberate suppression. (He agrees that 16: 9-20 is a later addition.)[32] This, I suggest, is all nonsense. Nothing more needs to be added to a moment that resonates with another similar moment in the Book of Genesis - when it dawns on Joseph's brothers who this strange Egyptian is - their long dead (as they supposed) brother Joseph (not unlike Jesus). And the Greek text of Genesis 45: 3 is a sentence that also ends in γαρ - describing the moment when the brothers are two things - like the women - speechless and astounded. It is, of course, in both cases, a moment of *anagnorisis* - of recognition.

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[31] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), quoted in David Jasper, *A Short Introduction to Hermeneutics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p. 15.

[32] Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 609.

Now take another text - more recent by far - Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* - which also ends in the middle of a sentence: 'A way a lone a last a loved a long the'. We know that Joyce did not die in the middle of writing this, nor was his manuscript mutilated or suppressed at this point. He ends the book here, in mid-sentence - in the manner of another literary genius, the writer of Mark's Gospel. And in each case the clue for the end lies in the beginning. Joyce's first words in the *Wake* begin in the middle of a sentence ('riverrun, past Eve and Adam's....') - which is, of course, the end of the sentence that concludes the book. The clue in Mark is the same - go back to chapter 1: 1 - 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. That is what, at last, the woman finally understand after a gospel of repeated incomprehension and mystery. All through the Gospel Jesus keeps saying to his disciples, 'Do you still not get it?' And finally, faced with the empty tomb, the women do get it - and no more needs to be said. Call it the Messianic secret if you like. And it all depends on the resonance with Genesis 45: 3. - which is so hard for us to pick up as we do not read the Septuagint every day. Or I am assuming we do not.

All this may indeed be pure conjecture, but still..... Incidentally, another chapter in my book is entitled 'Evil and Betrayal at the Heart of the Sacred Community.'[33] It is also about the Gospel of Mark as a text of betrayals - and this is another thing it has in common with *Finnegans Wake* - which also confronts many different kinds of betrayal - cultural, political, sexual. Text calls to text across the centuries.

But now let me move on to another example of inter-textuality that I explore in chapter 7 of my book - between the biblical narratives of the episode of Jesus' temptation for forty days in the wilderness in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and a modern 're-writing' of this in Jim Crace's novel *Quarantine*, which acquired almost scriptural status when it won the Whitbread Novel of the Year award for 1997. I met Jim Crace when he gave a lecture at the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop in 2002. *Quarantine* was still on the best seller list and he was keen to emphasize that as a novelist his job was to make things up - to spin yarns. He is a professed atheist of whom the critic Adam Begley once said, 'Jim Crace is a liar... Jim Crace is also stubbornly honest.'[34] This sounds alarmingly like the old alternatives for Jesus - another spinner of stories - *aut deus aut malus homo* - 'either God or a wicked man.'

Crace often begins his strange, mythic tales with a seemingly credible (but entirely fictitious) quotation from a seemingly authoritative source. In

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[33] Jasper, *Scripture and Literature*, pp. 93-110.

[34] Adam Begley, 'The Art of Fiction, 179: Interview with Jim Crace', *Paris Review* (2003), quoted in Jasper, *Scripture and Literature,* p. 112.

the case of *Quarantine* it is from Ellis Winward and Professor Michael Soule's book *The Limits of Mortality* (New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1993). (Like other readers, I suspect, I spent some time trying to track this book down - only to discover that it does not exist.) Its point is that no-one can be expected to live without food or water for more than thirty days and 'the forty days of fasting described in religious texts would not be achievable.' Thus the Bible narratives are either miraculous - or nonsense. Then the atheist Crace proceeds to spin another such yarn, a sort of morality play that makes for a good story for that is what novelists do, Crace affirms, they 'make things up.' And my point is, as Crace's story interweaves with the biblical narrative so wherein lies the power of the 'story' - and in what sense is Crace's novel religious, and the biblical narratives fictitious? And does any difference matter? As another modern novelist with somewhat obscure religious proclivities, Iris Murdoch, once wrote: 'The story is almost as fundamental a human concept as the thing... the story is always likely to break out again in a new form.'[35] So - if you have not read *Quarantine*, I will not spoil it for you except to give you a taste of Crace's writing at the very end of the book as the character of Musa (Crace's version of the devil or tempter of the biblical narratives) as he watches the probably mad young man whom he calls the Gally appearing from his desert sojourn:

> Musa looked towards the distant scree again. He told himself this was no merchant fantasy. His Gally was no longer thin and watery, diluted by the mirage heat, distorted by the ripples in the air. He made his slow, painstaking way, naked and barefooted, down the scree, his feet blood-red from wounds, and as he came closer to the valley floor his outline hardened and his body put on flesh.[36]

Set these words from an atheist modern novelist against the familiar biblical narratives and the story of Jesus in Christian tradition. Here is how I sum up Crace's writing in my chapter on him:

> People who do not claim to be 'religious' understandably dislike it when those people who do make such claims for themselves try to tell then that they are 'religious' after all, whether they admit it or not. Jim Crace, the novelist, writes within a tradition of language and textuality that connects

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[35] A. S. Byatt, *Iris Murdoch. Writers and Their Work* ((London: The British Council, 1976), p. 15.

[36] Jim Crace, *Quarantine* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 243.

> him through word and imagination with traditions that have their roots in Western literature in the Bible... and a long history of soul searching that extends from biblical revelations. Such texts dally with human time and culture, playing upon the sense that the fragile, suffering stuff of our being, or flesh, is susceptible to mysteries for which there is no direct expression and that can be glimpsed only by indirection, by hauntings, and in stories that we make up. Some such stories are there simply to deceive us, but others reveal something like the truth, but only by ever more devious forms of deception.[37]

Moving on: two chapters of my book are not directly concerned with the Bible and literature but with the Bible and visual art. I make no apology for this, going back again to Mieke Bal and her concern to move beyond the word/image opposition. I do not claim in any sense to be an art historian but one interdisciplinary exercise leads almost inevitably into another, and so I make a bold claim to 'read' the text of Turner's paintings just as Turner himself read the texts of scripture - and painted them. Or is it as simple as this? In his almost endless stream of biblical paintings, Turner explores visually the encounter with the mysterious - the *μυστηριον*: take, for example his late picture from the Book of Revelation, *The Angel Standing in the Sun* (1846), which explores, like other Turner paintings such as the blinding of the Roman general Regulus, what it is to look directly into the sun, which, of course, is to suffer blindness from an overload of light. You literally cannot see what you are looking at in the painting. (Who said that Derrida invented postmodernism and deconstruction?)

Towards the end of his life Turner painted two great pictures drawn from the story of Noah's Flood in the Book of Genesis. They were first exhibited in 1843 and now you can see them in the Tate Gallery in London. They are accompanied by lines from Turner's own fragmentary poem entitled *Fallacies of Hope*, and are entitled *Shade and Darkness: The Evening of the Deluge*, and *Light and Colour (Goethe's Theory): The Morning after the Deluge - Moses Writing the Book of Genesis*. The latter is not the snappiest of titles but it is deeply revealing of what Turner is up to.

To start with he is not so much paintings *from* the Biblical text in Genesis 9, as painting *towards* it, exploring the phenomenon of the rainbow - the spectrum of colour - through the theory of Goethe as expressed in Goethe's book *Zur Farbenlehre*, (*Theory of Colours*), published in 1810 and translated into English in 1840. We know that Turner owned a copy of it.

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[37] Jasper, *Scripture and Literature*, p. 127.

Allow me briefly to indicate the essence of Goethe's scientific 'theory' (and Turner's painting) in the words of a recent critic Michael Bockemühl:

> If one starts with the most intensive yellow, orange and red follow; then blue abruptly isolated in the upper right-hand corner and facing the most intensive yellow; then bright yellow again, orange, red, and black. The central zone of green, the secondary colour from blue and yellow, does not lie within the circle: the 'original contrast' of the creation of colour, yellow and blue, face each other in the pattern of movement. It is out of this contrast that every colour emerges ("Goethe's Theory"). Colour does not merely depict colour. Colour is colour. Whatever colour can appear in pictorial form in accordance with its own laws of manifestation, there it reveals its nature as reality.[38]

I have deliberately not shown you the painting, but turned Turner's painting back into the medium of scripture itself - words: back into 'theory'. At the centre of *The Morning after the Deluge* we see, though very vaguely in the blinding light, the figure of Moses, writing the Book of Genesis - and finally the serpent. And so, in what was a demonstration painting, Turner evokes, scientifically, the biblical act of creation and promise, mysteriously and without interpretation. Goethe's theory combines scientific analysis of the spectrum with biblical references - he believed that the earth's rocks originated in the covering of the waters at the flood. Thus, it might be said, the Bible is actually a commentary on Turner's paintings, rather than vice-versa. His paintings move towards scripture, his interpreter, Moses.

And so as I draw towards some kind of conclusion, I want to leave you with the sense of the novelists, poets and playwrights (as well as artists and musician) as essentially story tellers, and of the God and texts of the Bible as great spinners of stories. Inherent in story is also an art of memory - one of the most persistent and treasured of human faculties. In a sense, there is little to be distinguished between the memory that we call historical and the memory that we call fictive. In his remarkable book *The Great War and Modern Memory* Paul Fussell repeatedly affirms the literary status of Great War memoirs, writing that 'the memoir is a kind of fiction, differing from the "first novel" only by continuous implicit attestations of veracity or appeals

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[38] Michael Bockemühl, *J. M. W. Turner, 1775-1851: The World of Light and Colour* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 1993, p. 88, quoted in Jasper, *Scripture and Literature*, p. 144.

to documented historical fact.'[39] The same might be said, though more tenuously, of much of the Bible (and given the tenacious historical concerns of the traditions of biblical criticism at least since the nineteenth century). But how far, in Crace's terms, is it all just 'made up' - and why does this matter?

My concern in *Scripture and Literature* has not been so much to answer such questions but to keep the Bible and its texts alive in such discussions and to see what happens. Such conversations must always take place in the changing climates of politics, culture, ethics and the matter of deepest human concern. There has been much left unsaid and I am very clear that the manner in which I have addressed the business of the Bible and literature is embedded in my own time and its concerns, and things now must move on, though never forgetful of the past. I have to confess that it distresses me that a relatively recent publication from 2014, *Literature and the Bible: A Reader*, edited by Carruthers, Knight and Tate, seems not to have moved on - in a way it is too dryly, even remotely, academic and lacking in passionate concern for the things that are happening around us.

So - in my short narrative here I have made no apology for seeing the postmodernism of the 1980s as something to be taken profoundly seriously, and it is no diminution of its importance to say that it has had its day. Mieke Bal's feminism (and her version is just an example) was also something that mattered (and still does), and she showed us how corrosive of human well-being can be our reading of the Bible, affirming that 'it is a major accomplishment of women's studies to have shown the need of interdisciplinarity in order to counter the arbitrary or biased limits of scholarship when confronted with "real life".'[40]

And what have I left out? I have said nothing about the matter of postcolonialism - though that has been addressed in the field of biblical criticism and interpretation by such people as R.S. Sugirtharajah, who begins his book *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* with these words of warning: 'The trouble with texts, especially if they are ancient and sacred, is that they can be summoned and assigned meanings to prove or legitimize any cause, theory, or perspective.... When European colonialism was it its peak, biblical texts were taken out of context to prove biblical sanction for such a venture.'[41] We have moved on from postcolonial criticism to a later stage in world history[42] - and we need now to be alert to this and to its claims

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[39] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Sterling, 2009), p. 389.

[40] Mieke Ball, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 7.

[41] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 1.

[42] As before, I acknowledge that this is debateable.

on us as readers of the Bible. For the last few years of my working life at the University of Glasgow I was also privileged to be able to teach every autumn at Renmin University of China, Beijing, in the People's Republic of China. The work of such Chinese scholars as Yang Huilin and Zhang Longxi (especially the latter's book *From Comparison to World Literature* [2015]) opens up new horizons that prompt us to listen to such things as the growing field of Sino-Christian theology (a theology essentially without a metaphysical structure to lean on) and the increasingly translated world of East Asian literature whose relationship with the Bible is very different from that of the West but still deeply significant. I have neither the skills nor now the time to address such tasks - and there are many others in addition to these. But I would say to those of you either at the beginning or in the midst of their academic, or indeed clerical careers - do not do the same things I have done in my own time. I hope there might be something to be learnt from such times, but you need to engage now in your own way in a different and ever changing world. And a final word. As people from the time of Origen - writing of the Song of Songs - (if not, indeed the time of St. Paul) have said:

> You need to be an adult to read the Bible. Linking the Bible with literature is a dangerous exercise because it is literature *but not just literature*, a sacred text *but not just a sacred text*, both religious and profane - and religious because profane and profane because religious. [And] each new generation, with its own concerns and its own perspectives, needs to undertake this interdisciplinary task again.[43]

And this requires, among other things, an active imagination and an alertness to literary, cultural and political circumstances that shift and change. *Bon voyage*!

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[43] Jasper, *Scripture and Literature*, p. 190.

REVIEWS

Gordon Jeanes and Bridget Nichols (eds), ***Lively Oracles of God: Perspectives on the Bible and Liturgy*** (Alcuin Club Collections 97, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2022). xviii, 268 pp. Paperback ISBN 978-0-8146-6722-4.

This collection of fourteen essays, with a Foreword by Paul Bradshaw, doyen of contemporary liturgical scholars, addresses a range of questions surrounding "how Scripture works on those who encounter it when they gather for worship" (xii). Bradshaw's typology of the functions of Scripture in worship – kerygmatic, anamnetic, paracletic, doxological – give shape to the first nine essays. Thereafter contributions address hitherto marginal issues, increasingly recognised as vital to the mission and worship of the Church, and indeed to its survival into the future. The essays were written during the coronavirus pandemic, and contribute significant reflections on its impact on Christian worship.

Cally Hammond draws attention to the place of Scripture readings, and the order in which they are read, particularly in the order of the Eucharist. The principle that the Eucharist is a service of Word and Sacrament, in that order, and that the order of the readings, and who traditionally read them, are emphasised. The significance of the postures adopted, and of the rituals which may accompany the readings, are also explored, together with the differences which may be indicated by a large, perhaps ornately bound, lectern Bible or Gospel book, personal Bibles brought to church or provided for the use of the congregation in some places, and ultimately the iniquitous practice of individually printed orders of service to be casually discarded on departure. While objects and postures may be ascribed differing significance in different cultural contexts, the importance of issues commonly disparaged as peripheral, for the attitudes they convey and inculcate, and therefore for the liturgical formation of the faithful, have for far too long been widely neglected in the life of the Church.

John Baldovin reflects on different ways in which Scripture is read during worship, and the theologies implicit in the choices made between ordered lectionaries and the free choice of the preacher, the practice popular with evangelicals of courses of sermons on a particular book of the Bible. He notes also subtle but significant differences in how the lessons from different parts of the Bible relate to each other in various lectionaries, and in particular different versions of the Revised Common Lectionary. Further, he reflects on different ways in which the Scripture readings relate to other parts of the liturgy, particularly when the sacraments are celebrated or

pastoral offices administered. He also confronts the challenges in relating ordered readings to urgent issues of the day, in particular matters of racial justice felt very keenly in many countries during the early months of the pandemic.

That the long-established principle that Scripture is read at worship, and in particular at the Eucharist, is honoured only perfunctorily, is contended quite trenchantly by Thomas O'Loughlin. He cites the brevity of many readings, with pericopae at best decontextualised and frequently severed so as to lose all meaning. There needs to be a renewed consciousness of the symbiosis between Word and Sacrament in Christian worship, and in particular at celebrations of the Eucharist, with more substantial readings from Scripture and more careful and creative thought as to how they are chosen.

Anne McGowan explores ways in which Scripture, liturgy, and popular piety have converged in the seasons of Lent and Easter, and the pastoral and missional challenges created by their divergence. Modern patterns of life and work, as well as secularisation, mean that the continuous participation of the faithful is often impossible. Liturgical traditions have evolved so that distinct rites, whatever their underlying continuity, focus on particular events in an approximate historical sequence, so that particular events of significance – not least the crucifixion - may be missed in many people's observance. Ways need to be found to embrace and express clearly the fulness of the mystery of Christ's Passion even as specific events therein are commemorated.

In a treatment very much more closely focused on the Church of England, with some passing reference to other contemporary developments, David Kennedy discusses the liturgical reading of Scripture, and accompanying processions and other rituals, during Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. The contrast between ways in which the gospels of Matthew and Luke reflect Scripture in their nativity narratives is insightful. The tension between the pedantry of liturgical purists and the flexibility parish clergy and school chaplains often find necessary might fruitfully be explored further.

Normand Bonneau explores issues relating to the liturgical structure of the week, during Ordinary time in particular, with particular attention to the Roman *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, on which the Revised Common Lectionary is founded. The "horizontal" and "vertical" connections between readings at the Eucharist on successive Sundays and on the same day raise issues difficult to resolve given the nature of Scripture itself, but which illustrate the heuristic value of Ordinary time.

Catherine Reid considers issues to do with marriage rites in the Church of England, noting that the omission of the nuptial Eucharist which became

normal at the Reformation effectively removed the reading of Scripture from the liturgy, while the rite remained replete with biblical allusions. The patriarchal presuppositions of references to marriage, teaching on the subject, and analogies employed to illuminate the principles, pose challenges to the introduction of readings to modern marriage rites. This is particularly the case in an established Church which derives a substantial proportion of its income from providing a service to secular consumers for whom the Eucharist would be both completely alien and grossly inappropriate. She suggests other symbols, derived from Eastern Orthodoxy, might be incorporated into the liturgy, and used as a vehicle for imparting Christian teaching in preparing the couple for marriage. In closing, she makes reference to the question of rites for blessing same-sex unions, omitting to mention that the neighbouring Scottish Episcopal Church already does so.

Exploring Anglican and Roman Catholic funeral rites with particular reference to the Canadian context, Lizette Larson-Miller raises several issues which may be experienced in many parts of the world. The pastoral and liturgical questions raised in arranging funerals with relatives who do not share the faith of the deceased, and of evolving cultural attitudes to death and the decomposition or destruction of the physical body, and the tensions between faith and agnosticism about eternity, are undoubtedly perceived differently in different contexts, but are nonetheless helpfully treated here. The choice of Scripture readings, and their interpretation, as well as the significance attached to accompanying rituals, pose pastoral challenges but merit careful consideration.

Bridget Nichols draws this section of the book to a close with a wide-ranging study of ways in which the worship of God is complemented by the aspects of liturgical use of Scripture identified by Bradshaw. Texts such as the *Te Deum*, the eucharistic preface, and the *Exultet* among many others, evoke Scripture, and in so doing engage the human mind in the worship of God and the recollection of the great events of the faith which give meaning to their Christian lives. The rituals accompanying the reading of the Gospel in particular, and its procession into the body of the Church, give due emphasis that the Word is in no way a lesser preliminary to the Sacrament, but integral to the complete act of worship in which God is glorified, Christ made known, and the Spirit present in the life of the Church.

In a contribution which ought to be compulsory reading, not only for liturgists and clergy but for everyone in a position of church leadership, on an attitude about whom they will or will not welcome into the congregation, Léon van Ommen addresses issues of marginalisation and exclusion. He draws important connections between an unwillingness to read passages expressing lament or to engage with those expressing difficult or offensive sentiments, and the marginalisation and silencing of those who do not

conform to the supposedly normative middle class, adult but not too old, heterosexual, healthy, macho white male. In the endemically racist and xenophobic society which modern Britain has become, in which deviancy labelling is the default response to those "othered", the Church is unlikely to recognise, still less to address, the impact of neurodiversity and invisible forms of disability, or the widespread aversion to children in the congregation, without a considerable and costly effort.

Christopher Irvine discusses issues relating to the environmental and climate crisis. Rather than exploring the Season of Creation now observed in many Churches, he offers a sweeping survey of the liturgical heritage, noting that creation motifs are more prominent in the Old Testament than the New, and for that reason all too easily overlooked, even without the presumptions of the largely urban intellectuals of the European Renaissance. Particular attention to Rogation, attested during what used to be known as the "dark ages". Such Anglican classics as Hooker and Herbert are cited, and due acknowledgement accorded to Pope Francis's *Laudato si'* and the Anglican-Orthodox "Buffalo Statement". The problematic concept of stewardship is mentioned, without recognising that the concept excludes ownership and denotes responsibility.

In one of the last of her many insightful contributions to theology and spirituality, the late Ann Loades offers an incisive treatment of attitudes to children far too prevalent in the Church. The title of her chapter states the theological principle unequivocally that "Children are Church", as of course are their families, irrespective of the heresies common among entrenched vested interests who regard the church as their private club. Whether or not one agrees with the suggestions offered, or finds the particular examples cited helpful, in any particular context, unless and until the Church accepts the principle that those who enter a place of worship for the first time are as much a part of God's saving work as those who have been there for decades, and receives them accordingly, the decay and extinction of Christianity in Europe will continue inexorably – and rightly so.

Stephen Burns discusses the ever-expanding issues relating to gender and sexuality in the ordering of Christian life and worship. Most attention is focussed on feminist theology, its potential to enrich liturgy in both word and ritual, not least through Bible translation, and on ways in which vested interests have resisted not only the ordination of women but any challenge to masculine assumptions about God and ecclesiastical power. The issues regarding sexuality, their impact on the sacramental life and discipline of the Church, and the nature of Christian ministry, are treated more briefly.

Gordon Jeanes brings the volume to a close with a survey of some of the themes raised, and concluding by raising the vital question of how Scripture and liturgy relate to Christian living. Citing the example of the non-

sacramental Society of Friends (Quakers) and of the Salvation Army, with their unsurpassed record of Christian witness and service, not least in feeding the hungry, he asserts the authenticity of their worship. This challenges other Christians to examine ways in which they live out the heritage of their faith, rooted as it claims to be in the reading of Scripture and celebration of the Sacraments.

While some of the contributions are not without their weaknesses, this varied but nonetheless coherent collection will prove an immensely valuable resource to those responsible not only for the ordering of Christian worship in the challenging circumstances of the present time, but also for those who oversee the lives of communities whose faith is to be expressed in witness and service as well as in worship.

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David Brown, **Learning from Other Religions** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024). 390 pp. ISBN 978-1-009-36770-7. Hardback £30.

The author is well known in Scotland. He is Emeritus Professor of Theology, Aesthetics and Culture of St Andrews University, previously Fellow and Chaplain at Oriel College, Oxford and Van Milbert Professor of Divinity at Durham University. He has served as President of the Society for the Study of Theology and Deputy Chair of the Church of England's Doctrine Commission. He holds a Warrant in the United Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane.

Learning from Other Religions aims to equip the Christian reader to learn from other faith traditions. Intriguingly the process begins with an analysis of what the concept of divine revelation might mean. The author's analogy is one of complementary shards, interconnected but each imperfect entities "rather like beautiful but broken pots".

After an examination of various models of contemporary interfaith engagement, the reader is invited to look beyond inclusivism (crudely and in my words, the belief that God can save everyone, but Christianity is really the best route) and pluralism (the belief that all religions are equally valid and true in their understanding of God, salvation and the world) to gain an

understanding of Christianity and other world faiths from their historical and current contexts and also through encountering their adherents and experiencing their practices.

For a start, the origins Judaism and Christianity are considered in their contexts of ancient paganism, religions and classical philosophy. There then follows five chapters examining Hinduism, other religions of India (Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism), China (Daoism, Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism), Japan (Shinto, Nichiren, Pure Land and Zen Buddhism) and finally Islam – ten major world religions in all, starting with their own contexts and main traditions, along with "Test Cases" for some – really practical suggested ideas for dialogue.

The journey through these faiths from the author's thorough scholarship and wide-ranging travels and encounters is highly rewarding in itself. It successfully describes the variety of traditions, practice and thinking within each one, but also highlights aspects in several instances that Christianity might learn from. In a very practical way the aim is twofold- to facilitate greater understanding and mutual relations, but also to show how divine revelation might occur across the board. Brown argues that no religion possesses the totality of what may be known, and suggests that what is required is a degree of "humble recognition that sometimes the divine address has been more adequately grasped in some other faith community". A final plea to move beyond inclusivism and pluralism is made with some practical examples and challenges to the individual and the academy alike.

One matter, among many, was of particular interest to this reviewer. Given the global outcry from some concerning the inclusion of a recitation from the Qur'an concerning Maryam (Mary) in the context of an Epiphany Eucharist some years ago (which I had some responsibility for) I was keen to know whether this book might help a reflection on this occasional practice. Indeed it did. In one small section, "Methods of Dialogue", in the final chapter, the author offers the suggestion of members of different religious groups occasional attendance at each other's worship or inclusion of readings or prayers from another religion as part of one's own worship – not of course, he asserts, to merge identities but rather to gain better understanding, one of the other. Sometimes, he argues much the same sentiments can be found, "and in any case there is of course the precedent set of having the Hebrew scriptures adapted to a Christian interpretation" (p 366). These are but two examples to interreligious dialogue that would definitely profit from further discussion and experiment. And a reading of this entire book would provide excellent preparatory in that process.

A reader's first impression might be that this is not a book for the newcomer to theology or interfaith dialogue, but with the really helpful footnotes and thorough referencing throughout along with a concluding

comprehensive suggested reading list on each main subject, this is a book both for practitioners and resource libraries without doubt.

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Khalia J. Williams & Mark A. Lamport (eds), ***Theological Foundations of Worship: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives*** (Worship Foundations, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2021). xxviii, 290 pp. Paperback ISBN 978-1-5409-6251-5.

This collection of essays is intended as a resource for those training for Christian ministry, and others charged with leading worship. It aspires to be ecumenical in its scope, and most authors demonstrate a breadth and a sensitivity to differences among the denominations in addressing the issues with which they are tasked. Nevertheless, this is, perhaps inevitably, very much a North American and predominantly Protestant product, and is likely to prove most useful in contexts which reflect that demographic, and in which formation for ministry is undertaken at graduate level. It would probably have been impossible to produce within a manageable volume a book which dealt with the range of issues on a truly ecumenical scale, however worthy the aspiration. Nevertheless, greater attention to, and contributions from, the Orthodox traditions, and to churches formed through intentional inculturation of the Gospel independent of alien oversight, would have redressed a significant imbalance. Having made this observation, the chapters on theological principles and "cultural possibilities" address issues which are relevant in all parts of the world, even if experienced rather differently in the Global South. While the authors are aware of issues relating to social justice and migration, these could appropriately have been the subject of dedicated chapters. The chapters on Scripture with which the book begins are disappointing, not least in that the centrality of the Bible to theology and worship surely merited more extensive treatment. The chapter on the Old Testament is essentially pre-critical, avoiding discussion of the evolution of monotheism and the state cults in ancient Israel, or of the role of prophecy in relation to cult, king, and society. Readers, and candidates for ministry, would have benefited from a much more robust biblical foundation for the theological and practical studies which follow.

Notwithstanding the contextual issues, and the lacunae identified, there is much in this book which will prove valuable – and indeed both

stimulating and challenging – to students of ministry. The authors and editors are to be thanked for bringing this volume to fruition.

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Aramand Léon van Ommen, ***Autism and Worship: A Liturgical Theology*** (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023). Hardcover ISBN 9781481319898.

In his book, Autism and Worship, Armand Léon van Ommen, sets out to broaden the conversation around inclusivity and welcome in liturgical Christianity with the vital premise that failure to create truly inclusive liturgical experiences risks "the church miss[ing] out on the self-revelation of God, as God chooses to be revealed in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the spiritual gifts [of members (or potential members) who are autistic.]" In order to accomplish this task, van Ommen undertakes a study of both academic literature on autism and theology as well as personal interviews with autistic people who have lived experience of membership in liturgical communities. From the very outset, the author names his desire to write a text that can be used both as an addition to the academic study of autism theology and to broaden understanding for those outside of academia.

A major strength of this text is the robust theological exploration undertaken to support the conclusion that full inclusion of autistic individuals strengthens the faith journey of both the church as a whole and the autistic adherent. The discourse about sacramental theology and the ramifications of inclusion vs exclusion was particularly poignant and exceptionally important in the Scottish Episcopal context.

The book begins in earnest by outlining the various schools of thought regarding autism. Key terms are outlined and the debate between autism as pathology (Autism Spectrum Disorder, high vs. low functioning, person with autism) vs autism as diversity within God's creation (autistic person, neurodiversity, etc…) is explored. A conversation about the inclusion of autistic viewpoints in liturgical considerations cannot begin until one discerns how the church intends to view autistic individuals – as those "coping with" or "suffering from" a disorder or as people who see the world

through a different lens. The author is careful to point out that there is no uniform presentation of autism. Generalizations may help move the discussion forward, but it is crucial that churches listen to the diversity of voices in their own context – especially voices of those on the autism spectrum. Following this foundational work, a crash course in the emerging field of autism theology is offered and van Ommen carves out a place for his work as the first to explicitly focus on liturgical theology.

Through further exploration of the history and evolving understanding of autism in society and of society's construct of "normalcy," the text illustrates how the evolution of liturgical theology has, itself, become a biproduct of society's dominant viewpoint of what is considered normal. The implication being the expectation that those seeking membership in the liturgical community will conform to the norms set by the church. Although the Church has, to differing levels, acknowledged the need to adapt the liturgical experience to diversify membership for other marginalized groups (children, the physically disabled, women, lgbtqia+…) adaptation of liturgical experiences for autistic members remains a largely unexplored avenue.

At the centre of this argument, the author explores what it means to truly include another in decision making about liturgical adaptation. Drawing upon the work of Gabriel Marcel, the reader is led through conversation studying the meaning of "presence." Using Marcel's distinction between availability and disposability in relationship, van Ommen shows that Radical Welcome of autistic individuals depends on full inclusion of those individuals in conversation about the ways in which their need could be met by the worshipping body. It is only in full inclusion that we can meet the needs of autistic congregants and hope for active spiritual engagement rather than settling for passive participation.

It is crucial here to note a point that van Ommen makes well, early in the book: Autistic individuals do not expect the worshipping community to fully cater to all of their specific needs. Just as any individual will have aspects of the liturgical experience that they would prefer to function differently, autistic individuals will have aspects that they would prefer to function differently. However, what we are specifically exploring here are the things that could, for an autistic congregant, become barriers to participation – or, to put it more boldly, barriers in their relationship with and identity in Christ. Because each person with autism is an individual with their own specific presentation and needs, the text does not offer any "quick fixes" or general suggestions of changes to make. This is where I found this book particularly helpful. Rather than resorting to the oft employed strategy of oversimplification and universalizing experience such that blanket assumptions are employed to "fix a problem," van Ommen's research,

interviews, and thorough theological overview challenges readers to think deeply about their own setting and how to include autistic members and seekers in liturgical decision making. That said, the final chapter of the book visits a Singaporean autistic worshipping community, The Chapel of Christ our Hope, and specifically outlines what their liturgy and physical plant look like. This unique community and their story are a shining example of a church intentionally designed with the needs of their autistic members in mind. However, "the chapel is keenly aware that the community is not made up of only their autistic members but there is also a duty of care, in the widest sense, for the other members, too."

That last sentence is, for me, the most important point supporting the theme of this book – it reminds us that just as the Chapel of Christ our Hope recognizes their duty of care for their non-autistic membership, so must our churches recognize our duty of care for our autistic members. Van Ommen challenges the church to consider what a new normal, where the existence and experience of autistic members, is something to be fully embraced as part of the beautifully diverse body of Christ.

This volume is an important addition to the shelves of church leaders, lay and ordained alike, to consider what diversity and inclusion truly mean in the context of our church communities. I found the conversation about autism as pathology vs way of being in the world enlightening and helpful in expanding my view of both autistic persons and other marginalized groups. As a denomination who believe so deeply in the strength of our liturgy, this text is vital in pushing us to learn how we can make that liturgy accessible and welcoming to more in our sphere.

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Meindert Dijkstra, ***Palestine and Israel: A Concealed History*** (ET T. S. B. Johnston. Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2023). xviii, 360 pp. ISBN Paperback 978-1-6667-4878-9; Hardcover 978-1-6667-4879-6; Ebook 978-1-6667-4880-2.

This book is premised upon the recognition that the continuities and discontinuities between "biblical" and modern Israel need to be confronted, however unpalatable to any party the results of critical scholarship may be. The author was a Christian Old Testament scholar, familiar with the complex history of the ancient "Near East", its people, and their languages and cultures. He was also experienced in archaeological excavation and analysis, and accordingly able to read the vast accumulation of secondary literature

with critical rigour. Furthermore, he had worked among Christians of the region, and was familiar with their living heritage, as well as with the challenges they face. The fruit of his scholarship and personal experience is brought to us in this introductory text, covering the history of the Levant from the earliest records to the British occupation in 1917.

Dijkstra is concerned also with ways in which biblical scholarship, archaeology, philology, and history have, consciously or unconsciously, been appropriated in the service of ideologies – whether evangelical Christians' quest to prove the historicity of the biblical narratives, Zionists' justification of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians, and indeed with those who wish to "airbrush" ancient Israel from the history of the Levant. He is also concerned that the significance of environmental factors, including earthquakes, epidemics, famines, and droughts, as well as of distant and local political and demographic developments be recognised.

Dijkstra is, perhaps inevitably, at his strongest in dealing with the earliest periods in this history of the land variously called Canaan, Israel, Palestine, and other names by the multiplicity of people who have found their home there in diverse circumstances over the centuries. None can claim exclusive ownership of the land or of its rich cultural heritage. Discussion of the Roman period onwards is less informed by the author's own primary research, and the writing may have been overshadowed by his final illness, but nonetheless reflects familiarity with an impressive range of scholarship. The bewildering and constantly evolving complexity of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim groups, and their relations with one another and with a succession of Christian and Muslim regimes is covered with scrupulous impartiality, even if not with the detail appropriate to works with a much narrower focus.

This book would not only form a useful introductory text for a student of Scripture or of the ancient history of the area commonly known as the "Middle East". It would also provide an invaluable background to the issues of the present day, not least for western academics and journalists who approach the region with their own cultural assumptions, religious or secular prejudices, and residual Sunday School version of "biblical" history. It is warmly to be welcomed and commended.

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