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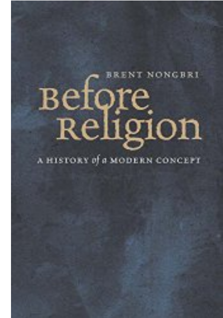
Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept, by Brent Nongbri



New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013 | ix + 275 pages | ISBN: 978-0-300-15416-0 (hardcover) $40.00

Brent Nongbri has written a notable introductory text on the history of the concept of "religion," drawing heavily from the works of other influential scholars in the field, such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Talal Asad, Tomoko Masuzawa, David Chidester, and Russell McCutcheon to name a few. The basic thesis of his book is that "religion is a modern and not an ancient concept" (12), with "modern" referring to the middle of the fifteenth century onwards. For Nongbri, it is during that period that "distinctions between 'the religious' and 'the secular'" (5) arose, thus demarcating the beginnings of the modern usage of the term. As such, religion "is not a native category to ancient cultures" (7) as Nongbri argues, following the famous statement by Jonathan Z. Smith. It is exactly that history of the term that constitutes the central topic of this volume.

However, tracing the history of the term does not simultaneously mean that a satisfactory definition of "religion" will somehow emerge or reveal itself through such a historical study. Nongbri makes sure in his first chapter, "What do We Mean by 'Religion,'" to point out right from the outset that attempts by modern scholars to define religion have proved to be, to say the least, futile. Based on the very fact that most scholars have approached the tantalizing issue of defining religion starting from a common denominator, i.e., that religion in its modern expression as a category is related to the Protestant usage of the term, Nongbri offers a (subtractive) definition based on its use in the modern western world: "religion is anything that sufficiently resembles modern Protestant Christianity" (18).

Even though postcolonial scholars have continually stressed what Nongbri here rightly points out, the issue of whether the term "religion" can or should be used as common descriptor for modern phenomena is more complicated than simply pointing it out. After all, isn't the term "religion" now also "property" of modern people outside the so-called Western world? As such, an enterprise of tracing the history of the term "religion" must, at the same time, deal with how and when the category was eventually adopted and used by the cultures upon which it was initially imposed—an issue that

Nongbri does not address. If such an enterprise seems possible in a contemporary cross-cultural historical research, it becomes nevertheless impossible when we turn our attention to the ancient world.

Chapter 2, "Lost in Translation: Inserting 'Religion' into Ancient Texts," deals with a profoundly important issue in the study of the category "religion." Among various options, Nongbri concentrates on three terms, i.e., the Latin *religio*, the Greek *thrēskeía*, and the Arabic *dīn*. The main point here is the illustration of the problems that arise when scholars encounter the aforementioned terms "in modern translations as 'religion'" while "the contexts in which these terms occur often make such translations problematic" (26). Nongbri examines various instances where those terms appear and shows that "the entities being classified *should not* be confused with the modern religions" since such a misguided translation is "bound to be a misleading practice" (45). I should add at this point that the discussion around the term *thrēskeía* (34–38) is not as detailed as the other two of Nongbri's examples, while the term *haíresis* (36) is not adequately discussed since it has a history of meaning, as does the term "religion," changing from "choice" to "heresy."

In the next two chapters Nongbri turns his attention to the examination of certain historical moments that for scholars signal the emergence of religion in the modern sense ("Some (Premature) Births of Religion in Antiquity") and, then, the way ancient groups attempted to distinguish themselves from others by employing different strategies that have little to do with the modern discourse on ancient religions ("Christians and 'Others' in the Premodern Era"). Presenting examples that range from the Revolt of the Maccabees and the function of the term *religio* in the works of Cicero to Manichaeism—as an allegedly straightforward case of the emergence of religion before the modern period—and early Islam as a Christian heresy in the works of early Christian writers, Nongbri shows not only that the term "religion" causes "more problems than it solves" (64) but, more importantly, by employing such a terminology modern scholars create "boundaries that are alien to the boundaries the ancient authors constructed" (84). These two chapters are extremely well structured and clearly show Nongbri's knowledge of the premodern era and the ease with which he moves between primary sources and theoretical issues.

Chapters 5 ("Renaissance, Reformation, and Religion in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries") and 6 ("New Worlds, New Religions, World Religions") constitute a succinct discussion of how and when the distinction

between "religious" and "secular" emerged and became the dominant "way of conceiving of the world" (85). This development within the European locale led to the "production of the modern concept of religion" (106), which resulted—through trade and colonization—to the formation of what, already from the nineteenth century, is known as "the modern framework of World Religions" (124). With these two chapters, Nongbri concludes the historical survey of his project in order to return to the ancient world but, now, from a different perspective: to deal with the so-called "ancient religions" based on the developments already discussed that led to the emergence of the categories "religion" and "World Religions."

The seventh and last chapter, "The Modern Origins of Ancient Religions," concentrates on "how and why we have come to speak so easily of ancient religions" (132) when, obviously, the category is a recent development. Nongbri traces the origins of such a classification of ancient practices in the same colonial era during which the term "religion" emerged as well as during the rise of Romanticism in Europe. The latter caused a "renewed European interest in mythology fueled (and was itself fueled by) nationalist concerns" (140). As with all similar phenomena across time and space, the matter of "origins" is always both at stake and at the core of such ideologies, and a renewed interest of what was seen as ancient "religions" was at work during this period of European history. As Nongbri rightly emphasizes, the twentieth-century turn towards the actual facts and figures of ancient "religions," as prominent classicists have shown, shares very little with how the modern concept is conceived and understood. Nevertheless, scholars of antiquity still call these phenomena "religions," which justifiably urges Nongbri to ask: "if the things that modern people conceive of as 'religious' were not so conceived in the ancient worlds and vice versa, then how and why are ancient practices to be recognized as 'religion' at all?" (143). This chapter concludes with Nongbri arguing that any conversations about "ancient religions" inevitably bring into the picture two contradictory terms. Insisting to use the modern concept of religion upon ancient practices and configurations without acknowledging the anachronism at work, or making clear how the term is used, only means that eventually "we turn our ancient sources into well-polished mirrors that show us only ourselves and our own institutions" (153).

One would expect Nongbri to offer either an alternative term or disregard altogether the category "religion" as a scholarly tool in studying antiquity. Surprisingly, however, he chooses another path in his epilogue ("Con-

clusion: After Religion?"). After a short summary of what this book is all about—concentrating on the history of the term "religion," the distinction between ancient and modern worlds and between "descriptive and redescriptive usages of religion" (154)—Nongbri does not share (as one would expect) the suggestions to abandon the term offered by other scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Timothy Fitzgerald. On the contrary, "religion" may continue to be a scholarly term as long as "we are going to use religion as a second-order, redescriptive concept" being "explicit that we are doing so and avoid giving the impression that religion really was 'out there,' 'embedded in' or 'diffused in' the ancient evidence" (158). This of course means that any first-order, descriptive use of the term—where by "descriptive" Nongbri refers to the usage of the term as an "attempt to reproduce the classifications of the group of people being studied" (157)—must be abandoned.

Nongbri's project is ambitious and undoubtedly challenging. Nevertheless, he manages to offer a survey of the history of the term "religion" without neglecting the important issues that arise out of questions pertaining to *how*, *why*, and *by whom* religion is defined, used, and applied as a category. *Before Religion* is a concise and very well written introduction to the broader issue of the place of the term "religion" within academia, in which undergraduates will find various interesting topics and a good bibliography that can open new paths in their understanding and evaluation of their own categories and concepts. Additionally, scholars will find this volume interesting and a welcoming addition to a series of books—some way more hostile to the term "religion" than Nongbri's—that, more or less, have reshaped the way scholars of religion talk about their discipline and their classifications.

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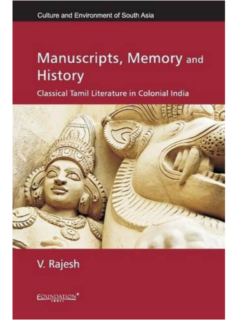
Manuscripts, Memory and History: Classical Tamil Literature in Colonial India, by V. Rajesh



New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India, 2014 | 304 pages | ISBN: 978-9-382993-049 (hardcover) Rs. 895

In *Manuscripts, Memory and History: Classical Tamil Literature in Colonial India*, V. Rajesh traces the circulation, printing and reception of classical Tamil literature in nineteenth-century Madras Presidency. In his introductory chapter, Rajesh acknowledges the impossibility of capturing what he calls a narratable and unified history of classical Tamil literature. The book aims to redefine or expand an idea of literary history to include the cultural and economic conditions that produce articulations of the literary. While Rajesh concedes the fact that the Tamil literary field is fluid and discontinuous, the book still attempts to provide a unified history of the reproduction and reception of classical Tamil literature.

Chapter 2, "Interrogating 'Rediscovery' and an Enquiry into the Transmission of Sangam Literature during the Pre-modern Period," questions what twentieth-century Tamil historical scholarship has termed the "rediscovery" of the classical Sangam corpus. Rajesh explores sites of literary circulation that have not received scholarly attention—Jain mutts, missionary documents, the early colonial records of the Mackenzie collections, the Board's collections of the College of Fort St George, and colonial book production—to suggest that the Tamil classics were far from being rediscovered through print. The chapter tracks the pre-modern transmission, production, and compilation of the Sangam corpus and suggests that the idea of the Sangam as an academy of poets who produced the earliest Tamil poetry was embedded in the Tamil literary imagination. What the chapter also reveals is the lack of scholarly consensus on what constituted the Sangam corpus and when these poems were composed. The flexibility of the literary tradition is replicated in modern scholarly debates after the publication of classical Tamil literature.

Chapter 3, "Patrons and Networks of Patronage in the Publication of Tamil Classics," looks at networks of patronage that supported the publication of the Tamil classics in the nineteenth century. Rajesh identifies three phases in the history of Tamil print: firstly, the collection, editing, and printing of palm leaf manuscripts by pundits and students in the College of Fort St George; secondly, the editorial and printing activities of Aru-

muga Navalar who spearheaded the Saiva revival movement in Jaffna; and thirdly, the editorial works of C. W. Damodaran Pillai and U. V. Saminatha Iyer among others. While modern historical scholarship has largely relied on Saminatha Iyer's autobiography and his edited works in their understanding of nineteenth-century literary culture, Rajesh draws out the continuities and discontinuities between three overlapping sites of literary production in the nineteenth century. The College of Fort St George mostly published Tamil grammars and dictionaries that as Rajesh argues, did not result in a new understanding of the Tamil literary past. It was Arumuga Navalar's publishing of various Saiva and non-Saiva texts and the editorial contributions of Damodaran Pillai and Saminatha Iyer that fueled twentieth-century debates on the antiquity of Tamil language and literature. Rajesh reveals the nexus between the wealthy landholding Saiva mutts of Thiruvavadathurai and Ramanathapuram that patronized the upper-caste pundits of the College of Fort St. George as well as Arumuga Navalar, Damodaran Pillai and Saminatha Iyer. Navalar's efforts to resist the spread of Protestantism were reflected in the publication of several Saiva and non-Saiva texts and their commentaries. A list of the books he published also included medieval commentaries on Sangam and post-Sangam literatures. Damodaran Pillai and Saminatha Iyer edited and published the Sangam anthologies along with their commentaries for the first time. Like other native pundits of the time, Pillai and Iyer's editorial efforts were not acknowledged by the colonial state that was more interested in sponsoring dictionaries and grammars to help its officials learn the language. Pillai and Iyer thus had to approach the Saiva mutts that had patronized Navalar or seek the interventions of non-native scholars like G. U. Pope to get state support. In this chapter Rajesh dismisses the popular view in modern scholarship that believed the Tamil classics were ignored because of religious sectarianism. Such a view, Rajesh argues, ignores the role of the Jain and Saiva mutts and the *kavirayars* or travelling poets in disseminating Tamil literature.

Chapter 4, "From Reproduction to Reception: The Writing of Literary Histories," notes the emergence of literary histories by native scholars that critiqued colonial philological scholarship. The publication of the Tamil classics enabled native scholars to push back the antiquity of Tamil literature to eight centuries earlier than what was widely assumed by European scholars. This had important implications for the rise of the Dravidian Non-Brahmin Movement in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Chapter 5, "Orientalism, Tamil Classics and the Organizational Politics," explores the political role that the publication of Tamil classics played

in twentieth-century Madras Presidency. The advertizing of the newly published classics in vernacular and English newspapers and periodicals, the establishment of language promotion associations and the insertion of these classics in university curricula created a new literary consciousness among the literate public. The knowledge of these classics also helped an elite segment of the Non-Brahmin population to contest Brahmin dominance in the colonial public sphere. The political hostility against Brahmins was extended to the cultural sphere with the publication of the Tamil classics that were seen as emblematic of a Dravidian tradition untouched by Sanskrit and Brahminism. Brahmins were identified as custodians of an alien Aryan religious tradition who were out to destroy Dravidian culture. The binary opposition between Brahmin and Non-Brahmin, Aryan and Dravidian, and Sanskrit and Tamil were first laid out by the philological writings of Robert Caldwell in his comparative grammar of the Dravidian family of languages. The Tamil classics were repeatedly invoked by the Non-Brahmin Justice Party and nationalists to glorify the historical valor of Tamils in their fight against the colonial regime and Brahmin domination.

Unlike most Tamil literary historical scholarship, Rajesh's book provides a comprehensive history of the publishing and political reception of the Tamil classics. However, more attention could have been paid to the diegetic worlds of these texts. Although Rajesh claims to offer a history of Tamil literary cultures, the book does not give the reader an idea of the texts themselves and the commentarial traditions that formed the earliest instance of Tamil literary criticism. One way of addressing this concern would be to provide a glossary that familiarizes the reader with the major thematic and formal concerns of these texts and the shifting criteria by which they were interpreted and judged. This would also help the reader understand the politics of literary canon formation in terms of why certain texts or genres gained a certain prominence over others at particular historical junctures. It is thus not necessary or desirable, I believe, to promise a unified history of Tamil literature but acknowledge the productive continuities and discontinuities of an elastic literary field.

Although the introductory chapter suggests Rajesh's familiarity with the larger field of scholarship on print histories, a more critical engagement with these sources is necessary. What could have been addressed in this review of print scholarship is the significance of his book's intervention in the field.

What could also have been addressed in greater detail are the conditions under which palm leaf manuscripts were transcribed and published. It is not clear whether there were discrepancies in various manuscript copies of

the same text that may have had implications in the way they were received and interpreted. In many instances the printing and standardization of these texts may have had to deal with inconsistencies that resulted in significant semantic shifts.

Another aspect that the book has only mentioned in passing is the contemporary literary culture of the nineteenth century and the ways in which these texts circulated and were read against the authoritative classics. It becomes important for this reason to delineate the circulations of classical and contemporary Tamil texts within the literary domains of the Jain and Saiva mutts. What was the nature of the religious and literary exchanges between these institutions? Were the different religious affiliations of these mutts reflected in the literary works they possessed and if so how? What were the social identities of the *kavirayars* and the nature of their associations with these mutts? This becomes significant when one considers the fraught history of inter-religious violence and conversions that characterized the sectarian exchanges between Saivism, Vaishnavism, Jainism, and Buddhism. It is thus important not to assume either Bhakti is a symbol or Jainism and Buddhism are symbols of religious tolerance or peace but as deeply fissured by sectarian and caste violence.

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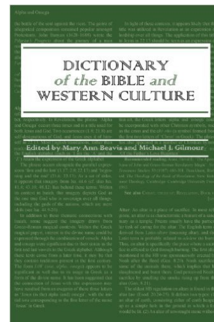
***Dictionary of the Bible and Western Culture*, edited by Mary Ann Beavis and Michael J. Gilmour**



Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012 | xviii + 620 pages | ISBN: 978-1-907534-79-9 (hardcover) £60.00

Both Beavis and Gilmour are practising biblical scholars and pop culture experts. Their edited book is one of the latest in a long line of religious reference works that makes this sacred Judeo-Christian text even more relevant to contemporary western audiences who need “basic, easily accessible information” (vii) within our increasingly biblically illiterate, post-print, post-Christian world. It deftly bridges the gap between biblical studies and the humanities with non-confessional, cross-

disciplinary entries that begin with a "discussion of biblical terms in their original settings, and then illustrate occasions when those terms reappear in later cultural artefacts" (vii), particularly, film, television, music, and the fine arts. As such, this stand-alone text sits comfortably alongside *The Cultural Dictionary of the Bible* (1999), *A Concise Dictionary of the Bible and its Reception* (2009), *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2011), and the ongoing multi-volume *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (2009–).

Structure-wise, it consists of the usual academic apparatus comprising of title, publication details, "Contents," "Preface," "Recommended Reading," "Abbreviations," and "Contributors," followed by "a little more than one thousand" (viii) A–Z entries of varying length ranging from "A day is like a thousand years" (1; first page number used only, and hereafter) to "Zophar" (620), written by "more than two hundred scholars" (viii). In addition to listing the obligatory people, names, and places, it was a delight to see many "famous" scriptural phrases explicated, such as: "Camel through a needle's eye" (76), "Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth" (148), "Gird up your loins" (183), "How are the mighty fallen!" (221), "Keys of the Kingdom" (275), "Seek and you shall find" (475), "Wolves in Sheep's Clothing" (606), etc. In the majority of instances, the entries are followed by "Recommended reading" and "See also" sections, plus bracketed author initials.

The book is easy to read in its two-column format; however, many annoying glitches marred the work as a whole, even if not necessarily noticeable within a single entry. For example, "Bibliography" instead of "Recommended reading" in "Abel" (3), inconsistent "Recommended reading" reference style throughout, notably, first author name in full (e.g., 4, 88, 160, 228, 347, 429, 520, 618) versus initials only (e.g., 3, 69, 119, 209, 304, 421, 521, 567). Yet the most damning proof-reading blemishes were the (near) identical duplication of the same authored entries in two different locations, namely: "Azariah, Prayer of" (38) and the redundant "Prayer of Azariah" (411), "Zelophehad, Daughters of" (617) and the redundant "Daughters of Zelophehad" (107).

The omission of many "Recommended reading" sections, which were easy to accommodate, was puzzling, for example: "Abraham" (5), "Ark of the Covenant" (31), "Garden of Eden" (175), "Jews, Judaism" (251), "Joseph of Arimathea" (262), "Moses" (348), "Old Testament" (382), "Sinai, Mount" (503), "Twelve Apostles, the" (563), and "Women" (606). Similarly, there were many missing "See also" sections, notably: "Ananias and Sapphira" (17), "Barabbas" (43), "Great commission, the" (195), "Life" (298), "Lost

tribes" (307), "Macedonia" (314), "Many mansions" (321), "Tarsus" (535), and "Zelophehad, Daughters of" (617), although its redundant duplication "Daughters of Zelophehad" (107) included it! Furthermore, there were linkage omissions within the "See also" sections which *were* warranted, for example, "Book of the Law" (67) connected to "Law" (289), "Book of Life" (68) connected to "Life" (298), "Pontius Pilate" (407) connected to "Barabbas" (43), while "Blood of the Lamb" (62), "Brothers of the Lord" (73), "Dreams" (123), "Eternal life" (141), and "Mary, Childhood of" (327) had *no* "See also" or "Recommended reading" sections.

And of those provided recommended readings, one puzzled at their selection when "better" references abounded, for example: "Caiaphas" (75) recommended a 1993 New Testament Who's Who, "Festivals" (159) recommended a 1976 book on Deuteronomy, "Holy Spirit, the" (218) recommended a two-volume 1966 commentary about John, "Sermon on the Mount" (477) recommended a 1995 and a 2001–2007 book on Matthew; and yet, dedicated scholarly books, chapters, and articles exist on the *exact* entry topic. One also wonders at the wisdom of including non-English recommended readings in the entries for "Cock" (93), "Eli" (130), "Offering" (379), "Ten Commandments" (539) and "*Vaticinium ex eventu*" (577). Especially for an English language textbook wherein the editors claimed: "we have in mind readers without the specialization of formal biblical studies, and even those not familiar with the Bible's basic content" (vii), and presumed lack of multiple language skills.

Somewhat annoying were the many pertinent film examples that were missing within a book deliberately devoted to fusing Scripture with western (particularly, popular) culture. For example, Moses's epiphany in *The Ten Commandments* (1956, dir. Cecil B. DeMille) for "Burning bush" (73), *Oh, God!* (1977, dir. Carl Reiner) starring George Burns as the Almighty, and in its two sequels, for "God" (185), the heaven scenes in *The Green Pastures* (1936, Marc Connelly and William Keighley) for "Heaven" (210), and the hell scenes in *Deconstructing Harry* (1997, dir. Woody Allen) for "Hell" (212). Disappointingly, these four entries had *zero* film examples, and did not adequately fulfil the second of the editors' two claims, namely of illustrating "occasions when those terms reappear in later cultural artefacts" (vii).

Also annoying was the provision of two different names for the one entry-cum-header with *no* additional entry (with or without redirection) for the other name, as was correctly done regarding "Bilhah and Zilpah" (58) with its associated redirection "Zilpah (see Bilhah and Zilpah)" (619), and other

examples throughout. The troubling omissions concerned: "Asherah (Ashtoreth)" (34), "Beelzebub/Beelzebul" (49), "Giants (Nephilim)" (182), "Gog and Magog" (186), "Hophni and Phinehas" (219), "Kingdom of God (Kingdom of Heaven)" (277), "Priscilla and Aquila" (415), "Serpent/Snake" (478), "Uzziah (Azariah)" (574), and "Harp and lyre" (206). Furthermore, although there was no "Lyre" entry per se, a "See also Lyre" (582) redirection *was* given in "Voice of the turtle" (581).

Especially puzzling was the troubling "Zipporah/Tzipporah" (620). The name "Zipporah" is frequently mentioned in multiple entries therein (e.g., 181 (4x), 251 (2x), 341 (6x), 591, 620 (3x)) thus justifying its "Z" (not "T") alphabet location, and yet "Tzipporah" is frequently mentioned within the "Zipporah/Tzipporah" entry (11x) compared to "Zipporah" (2x - entry header and book title, but *nowhere* else therein, not even to explain it as an alternate spelling). So, why did the author favour "Tzipporah" spelling exclusively in the "Zipporah" location?

As with every dictionary, what was left out can be just as upsetting as what was put in (correctly or otherwise), which for this author was the missing entry of "Jehovah" (Exod 6.3; Psa 83.18; Isa 12.2, 26.4 KJV), even if only as a redirection to "Yahweh, YHWH" (614) and "Lord" (303). This is annoying considering that "Jehovah" (245, 303 (2x), 484, 526, 614), "Yahu/Jehovah" (38, 411, 443), "Jehovah's Finger" (162), and "Jehovah's Witnesses" (e.g., 26, 54, 138, 180, 376, 443, 586) were frequently mentioned throughout the dictionary (and many lay readers would have been exposed to the name due to JW proselytizing activities).

Although numerous feature films were mentioned, the examples chosen frequently lacked crucial identifier details (e.g., year released, director names), and in some cases, the title provided was technically incorrect or even misleading. For example, the (redundant) entry "Daughters of Zelophehad" stated: "A motif of female inheritance of the father's assets appears in modern literature and film (e.g., *Lara Croft*, *The King of Texas*)" (108; see also 618). However, "Lara Croft" is not an example of modern literature; but rather, she is a video game-cum-feature film character (with associated spin-off publications). And if the author considered it a feature film (not literature) example, then the correct title is *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001, dir. Simon West) and/or its sequel *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003, dir. Jan de Bont). Furthermore, if "*The King of Texas*" (108) was meant to be the film example, then it is also technically incorrect because *The King of Texas* (2008, dir. René Pinnell) was a documentary about Eagle Pin-

nell, an independent Texas filmmaker, whereas *King of Texas* (2002, dir. Uli Edel) dealt directly with female inheritance issues and was thus the correct title-cum-example.

In other troubling instances, film release dates were provided but not the film titles, for example, "David" (108) stated: "while movies starring Gregory Peck (1951) and Richard Gere (1985), among many others, have tried to bring David's life to the screen" (108). However, the two relevant (but totally ignored) film titles were "*David and Bathsheba* (1951, dir. Henry King)" and "*King David* (1985, dir. Bruce Beresford)," which is more accurate, useful, and user-friendly information (without but preferably with the associated actors' names). Other entries included the film title, release date, and a significant name, but without stating the relevance of that name, for example, "Delilah" (114) stated: "Cecil B. DeMille's film *Samson and Delilah* (1949)" (115) without specifically identifying DeMille as its director. Yet, how are readers unfamiliar with Hollywood history expected to know this important technical fact?

Similarly, "Witch of Endor" (604) referred to "the character named Endora from the television series *Bewitched*" (605), but neglected to provide the name of the actress, Agnes Moorehead, and her appearance in 219 different episodes during its 1964–1972 run, or any other details. To enhance this entry, the author could have also mentioned "Endora" (Shirley MacLaine) from the feature film *Bewitched* (2005, dir. Nora Ephron), or better yet, the "Witch of Endor" (Dov Reiser) from the TV movie, *The Story of David* (1976, dir. David Lowell Rich and Alex Segal) and the "Witch of Endor" (voiced by Christine Pritchard) in the "David and Saul" segment of *Testament: The Bible in Animation* (1996, dir. Gary Hurst).

Given the wealth of film and television examples employed throughout, it is disquieting to note that the dictionary contained *no* pictures, graphic illustrations, or screen shots to visually reinforce their entry content; no doubt due to cost factors, but it would have been nice to have a few examples to practise what they preached. Overall, one would have thought that tight editorial control over the entry format parameters (and proof-reading processes) would have been a pre-production necessity, which would have minimised all these easily avoidable blemishes.

Nevertheless, there is a veritable feast of interesting factual information and vivid examples that more than compensates for the production errors. Beavis and Gilmour's book is a welcomed biblical reference tool in a world bogged down with increasing theological complexity, specialist terminology,

and ever-growing pop culture manifestations that would be churlish to decry and counterproductive to deny; especially in this second century of the age of Hollywood. The wide-ranging topics, the numerous painstaking explanations and the gamut of western cultural examples make this text an interesting and thoughtful addition to any religion studies collection, whether for personal or professional purposes, for teaching or for preaching, whether by the layman or scholar, undergraduate or postgraduate.

Readers need only dip randomly into its pages to realise how much there is already known, how deep the Bible has penetrated western culture, and how much one can still learn once inquisitive appetites are whetted. One looks forward to Beavis and Gilmour's future reference works; possibly "A Dictionary of Western Biblical Pop Culture" that significantly expands upon their current, but frequently all-too-brief, examples.

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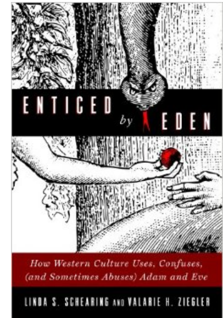
Enticed by Eden: How Western Culture Uses, Confuses, (and Sometimes Abuses) Adam and Eve, by Linda S. Schearing and Valarie H. Ziegler



Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013 | 230 pages | ISBN: 978-1-602585-43-0 (hardcover) $29.95

In their 1999 textual anthology *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*, authors Linda S. Schearing and Valarie H. Ziegler (along with Kristen E. Kvam) analyzed the reception of Genesis 2–3 through the twentieth century. In *Enticed by Eden*, they narrow their focus from the broad sweep of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim interpretation to the contemporary United States (with a handful of exceptions, such as the analysis of a Belgian beer advertisement on page 128), and at the same time take an ethnographic turn from the world of literary and theological texts to that of vernacular culture, particularly the subcultures of conservative evangelical Christianity and of advertising. This book examines appearances of the biblical Adam and Eve in such diverse contexts as popular devotional literature, evangelical Christian dating (or anti-dating) and mar-

ital manuals, "girl culture," the "stay-at-home daughter" movement, online dating sites, the Christian Domestic Discipline (CDD or "wife-spanking") subculture, jokes, advertising, and the adult entertainment and novelty industry. As in *Eve and Adam*, the focus is on the place of the biblical text in discussions of gender.

The book's six chapters are divided into two parts based on the distinction between "recreating" and "recycling" the biblical story of the Garden of Eden, with the principal difference between these two modes of engagement being that the re-creators (conservative evangelicals looking to enact a "complementarian" or hierarchical vision of "biblical manhood and womanhood"), unlike the recyclers (humorists, advertisers, and purveyors of adult entertainment and products), grant the biblical text normative religious status and authority, while the latter invoke the text simply as a "cultural artifact" (93). The hallmark of the book is the wide diversity of the data and the authors' acumen for identifying obscure, fascinating, and sometimes repulsive corners of evangelical subculture and then describing the data incisively, scathingly, and often with a good deal of wit and humor. The data are collected not only from published books, but also from internet discussion lists, commercial websites, and blogs. The book is effective in documenting a wide range of conservative Christian discourses in which the story of Adam and Eve crops up, and it is therefore an enriching and intrepid extension of the project begun in *Eve and Adam*.

Chapter 4 ("Laughing At Adam and Eve"), which begins the "recycling" portion of the book, is the most extensively theorized chapter. The authors analyze the ways in which the Adam and Eve story is deployed in sexist, feminist, and post-feminist humor. This is also the chapter that most effectively brings critical exegesis of the biblical text into conversation with popular appropriations, and most clearly uncovers the exegetical inferences and irregularities behind modern retellings of the Adam and Eve story. For example, on page 106, the authors demonstrate that the "'I have a Problem, Lord' joke type" is based on a reversal of the sense of Gen 2:18a, where it is actually God (not Adam) who first notices that it is not good for Adam to be alone.

There are a number of instances in the book where the authors observe that modern interpretations are at odds with the "original meaning and function" (112) of the biblical text. While the free-verse epigraphs at the beginning of some of the chapters (attributed to "L. S. & V. Z.") partially elucidate the "original" interpretation of Genesis 2–3 that is implicitly in conversation with the data throughout the book, it may be useful for readers to refer

to the 1999 *Eve and Adam* volume for the detailed historical and exegetical arguments that generally stand behind the authors' critiques of recent interpretations. In many cases, *Enticed by Eden* deals with impressionistic appropriations of the figures of Adam and Eve, rather than with verse-level readings of the biblical story.

In the interest of space, I will focus the remainder of this review on the heart of the book, the first three chapters and the authors' critique of conservative evangelical appropriations of the text. The central argument of the book is that for American evangelicals

> Eden functions as a normative culture, and the crusading evangelicals determined to recapture it have no intention of excluding nonbelievers from their new social order. Indeed, the prospect of remaking *all* American mores and institutions in the image of the Garden is precisely what appeals most to these reformers. Their visions include heady mixes of patriotism, capitalism, consumerism, and most important of all, sexism. More than anything else, the so-called complementarian understanding of the creation seeks to put women in their places as submissive servants of men. Gender hierarchy is not an afterthought in this theology; rather, it *constitutes* this theology. (152, emphasis in original)

While it is true that much of the data in the first three chapters is found in the context of the American evangelical subculture, broadly defined, it strikes me as an oversimplification to equate evangelicalism per se with complementarianism, let alone with the alarming vision referred to in the above quotation, and even less so with the aspiration for "a world in which husbands routinely inflict violence upon wives, fathers regard daughters as personal possessions created to wait upon them, and women everywhere—in the home, in the church, and in the state—are to remain silent" (152). The authors' appraisal of the evangelical subculture, which regards complementarianism as the "absolute centerpiece of evangelical theology" (3), takes little notice of the lively intramural evangelical debate on the complementarian-vs.-egalitarian issue, which exists on the level of academic theology (e.g., Craig S. Keener among many others), as an organized movement (the complementarian Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood has an egalitarian counterpart, Christians for Biblical Equality), and on the popular level.

Again, any fair account of contemporary American evangelicalism must include not only the ravings of anonymous, complementarian or patriarchalist internet commenters, but also the voices of influential pastors and academics at evangelical institutions of higher learning.

The authors cite sociologist Sally K. Gallagher on the centrality of gender in evangelical thought and the influence of the complementarian rhetoric of figures such as James Dobson and Wayne Grudem (158; notes to page 4), but I think that Gallagher's findings concerning the countervailing fact of pragmatic egalitarianism among evangelicals should carry more weight in any overall assessment of the evangelical subculture. In a few places, the authors do note evangelical objections to the more lurid manifestations of complementarianism such as wife-spanking (see 174, for example, where evangelical umbrage is nevertheless relegated from the main text to endnote 10), but elsewhere they give the impression that colorful voices speak for an evangelical consensus, when no such consensus exists. Mark Driscoll, whose book *Real Marriage* provides a vivid example of what the authors call the "Adam as Alpha Male" syndrome, was criticized stridently in 2011 by the evangelical author and blogger Rachel Held Evans, to give one example. (Since I first wrote this review, Driscoll has stepped down from leadership and his organization has been disbanded under a cloud of scandal involving, among other things, manipulation of sales of *Real Marriage* to achieve bestseller status and the resurfacing of sexist comments Driscoll made in 2000 and 2001 under the internet pseudonym "William Wallace II." These revelations vindicate the authors' assessment of Driscoll as an "alpha male," while the role of prominent evangelicals in scrutinizing and investigating Driscoll underscores my contention that the authors did not sufficiently situate Driscoll among his evangelical detractors. Rachel Held Evans has since moved away from the "evangelical" label.) It would be useful to plot such evangelical discourses as are discussed in this book within a more detailed topography of American evangelicalism. In fact, as it is used by evangelicals, the term "complementarianism" defines a position not in contrast to a secular or even mainline Protestant alternative, but to the alternative of *evangelical* egalitarianism.

With a few exceptions (for example, tracing the roots of Joshua Harris's anti-dating writings on marital romance to Elisabeth Elliot's 1984 *Passion and Purity*, 18), this book does little to set the data in the historical context of twentieth- and twenty-first-century evangelical discussions of Genesis. Again, *Eve and Adam* will provide useful background, though the selection of data (Chapter 8 of *Eve and Adam*) mostly reinforces the simple equation of evangelicalism and "hierarchical" (i.e., complementarian) approaches.

After a deeply unsettling account of an online discussion of domestic abuse that culminated in three respondents blaming the female victim, the authors argue that

> This reaction was *a predictable result* of a theology that required utter submission from women and absolute domination from men. Those attributes, moreover, were constitutive of the gender roles routinely celebrated in *evangelical Christianity*. CDD merely revealed the dimension of coercion inherent in biblical manhood and womanhood. If, *as evangelicals argued*, God created men to dominate women and promised to hold men accountable if they failed at that task, it was hardly surprising that physical violence proved to be a useful or even celebrated tool. (85, emphasis added)

Whether or not it is true that CDD is a "logical extension of the valorization of romance and wifely submission typical of evangelical discussions of biblical manhood and womanhood" (67), I would speculate that a fair number of complementarians would object to being placed at the top of the slippery slope uphill of a subgroup that is controversial and objectionable within the broader evangelical movement, to the extent it is even known. The authors themselves acknowledge that CDD would likely be shocking to many evangelicals, but that in fact it should not be, given evangelicals' interpretation of Adam and Eve. In a strategically similar move, the authors speculate that "it would not be surprising if [evangelical author Joshua] Harris concludes in the future that men and women should not sit together (or perhaps not even in sight of one another) during worship" (162). Apart from this jab (which ridicules not only Harris but also various religious communities, Christian and non-Christian, who have traditionally and for a variety of reasons maintained a separation of the genders in their houses of worship), the analysis of Harris on pages 20–23 is quite penetrating, and I think that it detracts from the authors' argument to implicate him speciously in a position that he does not actually hold.

The liability of such "slippery slope" or "guilt by association" arguments is not simply that they are potentially unfair (to people who might well deserve to have their cages rattled by an exposé of the way they unwittingly pave the way for more extreme positions than their own), but that such generalizations close the door on a set of more interesting and important questions. Why are some evangelicals complementarian and some egalitarian,

when all claim to proceed from a common understanding of biblical authority? Why are many evangelicals (even complementarians) shocked or repulsed by CDD, and others are not? Why does Joshua Harris regard women fundamentally as "threats to male power and purity" but stop short of separating men and women in worship? Or to return to the question raised by Gallagher's research, why do complementarian discourses thrive in a functionally egalitarian subculture? From the perspective of the academic study of religion, the salient fact to be explained is why for some subjects the slope is not in fact as slippery as it seems to an outside observer.

My criticism here is both that the authors have adopted a narrow definition that does not include all those who self-identify as "evangelical," and more importantly that even the specific groups and individuals who are mentioned in the book and lumped together under the label "evangelical" would not necessarily recognize their distinctive and sometimes conflicting opinions on gender and interpretations of Genesis 2–3 as manifestations of a common theology, or, as the authors allege, as the central tenet of evangelicalism per se (3).

Schearing and Ziegler generally downplay the way in which evangelicals and especially complementarians approach Genesis 2–3 primarily through the interpretive lens of a handful of New Testament references to Adam and Eve. On page 71, they quote one CDD website as referring to Eve's "sin nature," using language (Greek *sarx*, rendered as "sinful nature" in the widely-used evangelical New International Version) that is typical not of Genesis but of Paul's letters. The authors may have missed the opportunity to point out not only the interference of a New Testament text in the interpretation of Genesis 3, but also that in the New Testament texts that stand behind the language of "sin nature," it is Adam rather than Eve who is to blame. At another point in the discussion of Christian dating websites (50–51), the authors document the perplexity of message board participants in interpreting seemingly contradictory passages on gender in the New Testament: 1 Cor 11:2–16; Eph 5:21–33; 1 Tim 2:11–15; and Gal 3:27–28 (see also *Eve and Adam*, 108–10, 116–19). This passage suggests to me that rather than merely providing "additional support" (4) for a complementarian reading, the New Testament texts fundamentally control and constrain possibilities for the meaning of Adam and Eve.

Of course, in many of the instances cited in the book, evangelical subjects would claim to be engaging in a plain sense reading of Genesis, that is, a reading the result of which is not predetermined by any New Testament

passage. But this needs to be recognized and discounted as the theological strategy it is. To take complementarian arguments at face value as unmediated encounters with Genesis is to give them too much credit, as Schearing and Ziegler are elsewhere eager to avoid doing. The recent argument of New Testament scholar J. R. Daniel Kirk (*Jesus Have I Loved, but Paul?* [Baker, 2011], 117–39) complicates not only the portrayal of evangelicalism as a complementarian monolith, but also the presumed priority of Genesis in the construction of both complementarian or patriarchalist thought and evangelical egalitarianism.

The accounts of internet discussion boards were often engrossing, and more needs to be done to explore the relationship between subjects' self-representations and their real-life practices, as well as the role of the biblical texts under consideration in shaping those self-representations (as opposed to the real-life practices that may or may not stand behind them). The authors tend to approach the discussion board posts as texts, but I think it would be worthwhile more thoroughly to theorize (in conversation with new literature on internet ethnographic methodology) the online forum as a social space that shapes the discussion.

Finally, to return to the major divisions of the book, I am not persuaded that the language of "recreating Eden" is an adequate description of the precise sense in which the Garden of Eden story is normative for evangelicals, though the book forcefully makes the case for its normativity in some sense. In my judgment, the most exegetically detailed data in (and outside of) the book suggest that for most complementarians, following New Testament exegesis of Genesis 2–3, the story is etiological rather than teleological. The complementarian argument is not that Eden provides a "blueprint" (151) for the eschatological (or even pre-eschatological) restoration of the post-Edenic world. Instead, Genesis provides an account of gender that transcends the loss of Eden, describing not the world as it once was and will again become, but instead how the world came to be what it is and always has been. If complementarians do not themselves speak of "recreating Eden" (and I have not seen that they do) it is because they do not believe that the world of Eden was ever uncreated.

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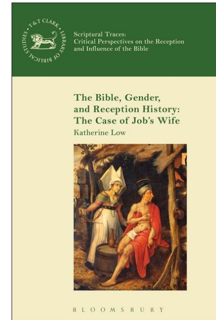
The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife, by Katherine Low



London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013 | Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception and Influence of the Bible 1 | The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 586 | 240 pages | ISBN: 978-0-567-23921-1 (hardcover) £55.00 | ISBN: 978-0-56-766247-7 (softcover) £17.99

This monograph, the published version of the author's doctoral thesis from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University, provides a fascinating glimpse into the reception history of Job's wife. Low explores the portrayal of Job's wife through gender theory, with focus on her depiction in literature and art. She proceeds chronologically through the material, beginning in the mediaeval period with the church fathers and ending in the nineteenth century with an extended discussion of the art of William Blake.

The Introduction opens with a brief discussion of the biblical text itself. Low states that few words uttered in the Bible are as controversial as those of Job's wife. She only speaks once, in Job 2:9, where she makes two statements עדך מחזיק בתמתך ("are you still holding on to your integrity?"), and ברך אלהים ומת, normally translated as "curse God and die" (the verb ברך, which literally means "bless," is understood to be a euphemism). The latter statement, interpreted as an expression of despair and a wish for Job to commit suicide in order to end his suffering, has had a significant afterlife in art, literature, and film etc. The underlying idea is that of retributive theology: if someone curses God, God will retaliate and punish him. Job's response to his wife is negative: she speaks like a foolish woman (כדבר אחת הנבלות תדברי, v. 10aα), because humanity receives both good and bad things from God. The narrator then concludes the dialogue with the summary statement, "in all this, Job did not sin with his lips" (בכל זאת לא חטא איוב בשפתיו).

The rest of the introduction contains a lot of material which is interesting but presented in a somewhat haphazard fashion, which makes it sometimes difficult to follow the train of thought. Low looks at the longer version of Job's wife's speech found in LXX Job 2:9, which emphasizes her loss of her children, as well as her impoverished future as a servant woman. This addition links the narrative of Job and his wife with that of Tobit and his wife Anna, where the latter must support her blind husband. She also looks at tra-

ditions (e.g., *The Testament of Job*) which differentiate between, on the one hand, Job's first wife (named Sitidos) who is the mother of his dead children and who suffers servitude alongside Job's suffering, and, on the other hand, his second wife, identified with Jacob's daughter Dinah, whom he marries after his recovery and who becomes the mother of his second set of children. Unfortunately, Low does not delve deeper into these traditions and thus fails to explore their underlying theology as to why there is no afterlife for Sitidos.

Low also looks at some general methodological aspects of reception history, and defends her own choice of gender theory as the guiding principle for her work. She further surveys key works on gender theory and the Bible, with focus on Judith Butler, as well as theories pertaining to the gendered body. For instance, why did mediaeval painters emphasize Job's tormented suffering body? Further, how is Job's masculinity portrayed in contrast to his wife's femininity? Low ends the introduction with an overview of her study.

Chapter 1, entitled "Eden's Dunghill and the Wife's Deviant Speech," explores the portrayal of Job and his wife in mediaeval Christian literary sources. As the title suggests, early Christian writing often connected the tradition of Adam and Eve with that of Job and his wife. Eve's speech caused Adam to sin. Likewise, Job's wife, through her spoken words, is tempting Job to sin. In contrast to Adam, however, Job survives the spiritual test (2:10). The portrayal of Job's wife thus highlights the issue of gendered (female) deviant speech. Another connecting point between Job 1–2 and the Creation account in Gen 2–3 is the role of Satan who was understood to feature in both accounts (the Accuser in Job 1–2 and the Serpent in Gen 3). Low surveys mediaeval theological writings on the book of Job, with emphasis on their application of Job's wife's speech and on her and Eve's shared role as tempters of men. Common to most texts is the notion of contrast: while Adam fails in his marriage, Job succeeds as he does not heed his wife's words. According to this line of interpretation, Job's wife is an additional test which Job must overcome. Furthermore, alongside Eve, Job's wife is under Satan's control and her words are those of Satan.

These theological issues are expounded upon in the writings of the Church Fathers. Augustine, for example, treats Eve and Job's wife as parallels. Chrysostom represents another perspective as he maintains that in Eden, Satan used the Serpent, but now he uses the woman. Along similar lines, Gregory the Great portrays Job's wife as a vehicle which Satan uses in order to test Job. Satan remembered that Adam was prone to listen to his wife, so he assumes that Job's wife would likewise be able to persuade Job to sin. Other patristic

writers used the exchange between Job and his wife to illustrate a specific doctrinal point. Ambrose, for example, used Job 2:9 as a tool against his Arian opponents who were seeking to lead his own flock astray. There are, however, a few exceptions to this negative estimation of Job's wife. Notably, Asterius did not appeal to Eve but instead referred to Job's wife as an example of a good wife who cares for her husband. The idea of Job's wife as Satan's helper appears also in later mediaeval writings. In the homilies written by the Anglo-Saxon English abbot Ælfric, Job's wife is mobilized by Satan in order to tempt her husband so that he, like Adam, would fall. Similar thoughts are also present in the writings of Thomas Aquinas.

The tendency to connect Eve and Job's wife continues throughout the Middle Ages. Low interacts with a wide selection of texts, for example the writings by Heloïse, John Lydgate, Eustache Descamps, Chaucer, as well as manuals for women, and mystery plays. She further explores the notion of female deviant speech outside of the context of Job's wife, and highlights the prevalence in preaching and literature of the stereotypical foolish and chatty woman who utters useless words and who is prone to scold her husband. In contrast, she notes that blasphemy, a sin akin to heresy, is related to men.

The relatively short chapter 2, aptly entitled "the Troublesome Trio of Job, His Wife, and Satan in Medieval Art," runs in parallel to the first chapter. Low highlights the significance of the figure of Satan in art and how he tends to be portrayed in proximity to Job's wife, in this way symbolizing their close association with one another. As in the aforementioned literature, the focus in art is on gendered deviant speech. Much of chapter 2 explores a text called *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* ("Mirror of Human Salvation," here abbreviated as *SHS*), a widespread and well attested illustrated work of popular theology in the late Middle Ages. Each New Testament text is accompanied by three Old Testament texts which are understood to prefigure it. The scene of Job and his wife accompanies the New Testament passage which deals with the flagellation of Jesus. This typology serves to put Job's wife on par with those who carry out the flagellation of Jesus. The second Old Testament passage, namely Gen 4:18–19, which features Lamech and his two wives Adah and Zillah, strengthens this typology. In the *SHS*, these two women are shown to be nagging Lamech, in this way symbolizing the Gentiles who whipped Jesus. Both Lamech and Job are thus depicted as having marital difficulties. This portrayal in turn serves to highlight the benefits of a celibate marriage which, according to Mediaeval Christianity, was something to strive towards. Furthermore, by combining the idea of flagellation

and the idea of women's deviant and potentially dangerous speech, mediaeval art sought to depict Job as being scorched in two ways: physically by Satan and verbally by his wife. In addition, *SHS* conveys the view that the dominance of women over their husbands is from the Devil. Several manuscripts portray Job's wife in a position of standing (while Job is mostly sitting) with both hands on her hips, two positions which indicate her scorn and her sense of superiority towards Job.

Low also discusses the depictions of Job's wife in other mediaeval works of art, and how they differ from early Christian portrayals in terms of her gestures, her position in relation to Job, and her bodily posture. In mediaeval art, Job's wife often faces Job with her mouth open and her right arm drawn away from him and placed across her chest. Low highlights that the open mouth symbolizes her (deviant or useless) speech and that her arm gesture indicates her pride or her scorn: rather than touching Job as some of his friends do, she remains aloof.

Chapter 3 continues the focus on the role of Satan in mediaeval material related to Job. The chapter opens with a discussion of the portrayal of Job, his wife, and Satan in Reims Cathedral (1220 CE). Low then explores the significance of the body in mediaeval art. Following Mary Douglas, Low argues that the body serves as the primary instrument through which societies communicate their limits and beliefs. She looks at the concept of Satan as a bodily representation of evil. He is often depicted in grotesque form which symbolizes his monstrosity. The fact that he is often given select feminine features, such as having large breasts, further serves to warn the audience of the dangers of women and sexuality. Turning to the tormented body of Job, Low notes how he is often depicted with open sores or as suffering from other kinds of skin disease. According to Low, this portrayal stresses his suffering, yet also symbolizes his resistance to and subsequent victory over Satan and women. His nudity further serves to denote him as an innocent, pre-fall figure who, unlike Adam, has resisted Eve's temptation. In this way, the motif of Job's sore-ridden body preaches a message of human spiritual endurance, as well as prefiguring Jesus's suffering and ultimate victory. As we move closer to the Renaissance, the depictions of Satan change character, as do those of Job and his wife. Job no longer appears with open sores. He is rather portrayed in such a way as to emphasize his Christ-like patience and his belief in restoration and in the triumph of faith. He is still suffering, but now as a model Christian rather than as a type of Jesus. As such, he is supposed to show inward reflection as he ponders sin and salvation. Thus, when we

reach Baroque art, Job is no longer depicted as sitting on a dung heap where mediaeval art tended to place him. Instead we find him looking like a herald of Jesus's resurrection and like a symbol of ultimate redemption. In parallel, Satan is no longer furnished with a grotesque body. In fact, the satanic figure gradually disappears from view as the focus changes from Job's torment to his victory. Pictures may contain demons, and Satan may appear portrayed as a sinister human, but he lacks the traditional satanic features such as wings and grotesque form. Hand-in-hand with this development, the image of Job's wife also changes. In contrast to earlier material where she, through her deviant speech, sided with Satan, in Baroque art she is gradually shown as a *bad* wife. Her portrayal thus serves less to emphasize her deviant speech and more to present her as a shrew, i.e., as a woman given to violent, scolding, and nagging treatment (cf. chapter 4). She is furthermore depicted as old, and thus made to symbolize the threat to society that older women constitute, as they are past their "natural" role of wives and mothers.

To illustrate these tendencies, Low examines the art by, among others, Albrecht Dürer, Jan Lievens, Georges de La Tour, Gioacchi[n]o Asser[e]to, Gaspard de Crayer, Peter Paul Rubens, Matthaeus Merian, Bernard Picart, and Caspar Luyken. As in chapter 2, Low looks at the way that the painters have portrayed the body position and gestures of Job's wife. She is often, as before, depicted with her hands on her hips and her elbow pointing away from her body to symbolize her disassociation or disagreement. She furthermore often makes a "fig sign," i.e. a clenched fist where the thumb partly pokes out, which was understood to be a sexually offensive gesture.

Chapter 4 explores how the imagery of Job's wife as a shrew, found in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art, walks hand-in-hand with the imagery attested in literature from the same time period. At this time, the book of Job had come to be used as the means of teaching men and women about Christian marriage. As such, it served to project gender expectations and to emphasize women's subordinate role in marriage. The figures of Job and his wife were employed as a visual metaphor for tension within a marriage. Job's wife exemplifies a bad wife who violates gendered social expectations, to be contrasted with a submissive and obedient wife who knows her place. After a general discussion of marriage in early modern Christian thought, Low turns to the ideal Christian marriage as portrayed in literature and highlights that religious ideas about marriage directed towards women can be found as early as fourteenth-century literature. She surveys pertinent works by, among others, George Swinnock, William Vaughn, Joseph Swetnam, John Donne, and William Shakespeare. Low notes that a married woman should ideally

comfort and support her husband in his suffering in silence. Many of these texts use Job's marriage as a counter-example.

The final chapter 5 focuses on the art of William Blake, and how he envisioned Job's wife in a non-traditional manner. Low explores the role of Romanticism in Blake's art, and how his depiction of Job and his wife agrees with Blake's wider understanding of Christianity. Low opens her discussion with an overview of those aspects of the Job narrative on which authors and artists tended to focus. She notes that, by the eighteenth century, the central issue concerned whether Job's suffering represented a specific historical situation in the past or served as an ongoing symbol of human suffering. In William Warburton's writings, for instance, Job's wife represents the exogamous marriages reproved by Nehemiah. In parallel, the book of Job began to feature in the debate of divine control and human will. Mary Shelley, for example, understood God as an oppressive force against which Satan rebels. This way of thinking further opened up the question as to whether Job's wife's speech—which questions God's decision—should be viewed negatively as it traditionally had been seen, or be reevaluated as commendable.

Turning to the art of William Blake, Low begins her discussion with a survey of Blake's life, beliefs, work, and their interrelations. She then explores the portrayal of Job's wife in the engravings in his Job series, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*. Low first offers an extended discussion of the 21 plates. All the plates, as well as select additional ones bearing on the discussion, appear as illustrations in the book. This is very useful as it enables the reader to follow the discussion while looking at the pictures. Subsequently, Low analyses the role of Job's wife as she appears in these pictures. Job and his wife are depicted as a couple. Job's wife is his faithful companion who shares in his suffering and redemption. They are often portrayed as sitting together, opposite his friends. Low also explores to what extent this portrayal of the harmonious couple reflects William Blake's own marriage with Catherine Blake. At the same time, she argues, we would do Blake an injustice if we assumed that he regarded Job's wife as being on the same level as Job. She is his companion, not his equal. This view agrees with Blake's general view of mythology and marriage. The sexes cooperate and work together towards harmony, with the goal that, at the end of this process, the Female Will is to be reabsorbed into the Male.

Low's book is a good example of reception history carried out well. Low deals competently with a wide range of material and offers new insight into the subject matter. At times, however, it is difficult to follow the train of thought, and the book would have benefited from spelling out some of the

insights in a clearer manner. For instance, although the book sets out to present the material in a chronological fashion, it is not fully clear why some material is discussed in chapter 2 and other, similar material in the opening parts of chapter 3. It also took me some time to understand the structure of the various chapters: general discussions tend to precede discussion of specific examples, yet in other places general discussions draw from specific examples. These drawbacks do not, however, deter the reader from enjoying the book.

The book is richly illustrated, with works of art stemming from the mediaeval ages to the nineteenth century, which greatly helped me follow the discussion.

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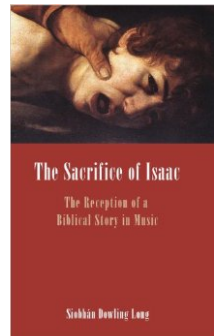
The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Reception of a Biblical Story in Music, by Siobhán Dowling Long



Bible in the Modern World 54 | Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013 | xxix + 280 pages | ISBN: 978-1-907534-87-4 (hardcover) £60.00

Siobhán Dowling Long's *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Reception of a Biblical Story in Music* provides a well written and interesting account of the reception of the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. In addition to an examination of its reception in music, Long details art works, Christian and Jewish traditions, and even plays. Long's breadth of knowledge is impressive. Even more impressive is the amount of information she is able to combine in a concise and interesting manner. Long emphasizes that it is the story's complex questions, for which there seem to be no answers, that attracts continual fascination (xxvii). Long writes, "The biblical story of the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22.1–19), or the *Akedah* in Hebrew tradition, has inspired composers, artists, writers, and dramatists down through the centuries to produce some of the greatest musical, artistic, literary and dramatic masterpieces the world knows today" (xxv).

Art allows viewers to appreciate the story with their eyes, but art can only

represent one scene at a time. Music, on the other hand, enables listeners to "hear" as well as "see" the entire story (xxvii). Long's book is written for musicians as well as those with no musical training. To facilitate this wide range of readership, Long develops a two-part structure. The first part of the book is a retelling of the sacrifice of Isaac that Long combines with references to art and music. The second part of the book is a detailed reception of five musical compositions. Providing a reception of music on any topic is difficult. It is often too simple, so as to be uninteresting to musicians, or too difficult and therefore inaccessible to non-musicians. Long's two-part approach makes it possible to engage both audiences.

Part 1 is comprised of four chapters. Throughout this first part, Long refers to the compositions that will be explored in depth later. Long does not add new insights into the interpretation of the story, but relies upon the work of Robert Alter and Jan Fokkelman to provide a literary analysis. Chapter 1 focuses on the Latin Vulgate translations of the story, since her musical choices draw from these translations. The second chapter traces the story through Christian tradition, as well as its cultural influence throughout the centuries. Chapter 3 addresses mediaeval mystery plays, focusing on Chester and Brome plays which underscore Long's music selections (xxiv). And the fourth chapter traces the reception of the story within Jewish tradition.

Long tells the story of the sacrifice of Isaac in an easily accessible fashion. Readers are encouraged to be aware of "gaps" in the story and to allow these gaps to provoke questions. Focusing on its "literary artistry," Long emphasizes the ambiguity of the story. This enables readers to imagine how the story could be adapted to various interpretations. Long paints a picture of the story using theatrical terms such as "stage," "centre," "verbal cues," and "narrator" rather than simply retelling it. Her writing creatively engages the reader's imagination. For example, Long writes,

> To highlight the magnitude of God's speech in vv.15b–18, the narrator's voice remains silent to allow God to take centre stage and make his final proclamation before Abraham. Where composers omit the sound of the narrator's voice, they generally heighten the dramatic tension of the story through the music. (4)

In addition, Long treats the story as a stage play, dividing it into three acts with seven scenes. The use of theatrical setting assists the the reader with

following the more detailed musical reception in part 2. Act 1 focuses on Beersheba in two scenes, night and day. Act 2 consists of Abraham's journey to the "outskirts of the mysterious place," and "the mountain trek" (8). Finally, Act 3 is the sacrifice in three scenes: Abraham's preparations, the angel's first call, and the angel's third call. The story in acts and scenes is accompanied with charts and paintings that help the reader follow Long's focus. Relating the story in scenes, providing questions, and suggesting musical and artistic opportunities, leaves the reader feeling confident not only to enter her musical discussion, but to engage the various compositions.

Long makes her way through centuries of music and art. A detailed history of the story in both Jewish and Christian tradition provides a cultural and historical perspective of not only the story, but the environment in which the works were created. A lengthy treatment of the character of Sarah is much appreciated. Long writes, for example:

> Interestingly, Metastasio extends the drama to include the whole family: here, Sarah plays an active role, and unlike the interpretation put forward by Gregory of Nyssa, participates in the sacrifice from her home, following Abraham's revelation of God's command. Although she does not accompany Abraham and Isaac to the sacrificial mount, she is portrayed as a type of Mary, Christ's mother, who participated in the sacrifice through her knowledge of and consent to the sacrifice. (43)

This first part of the book is well worth the investment even on its own. The second part begins the in-depth discussion of the five musical compositions.

In Part 2, Long leads the reader through five compositions. Chapter 5 is a reception of seventeenth-century *oratorio latino*, *Historia di Abraham et Isaac* by the father of Oratorio, Giacomo Carissimi. Chapter 6 discusses the libretto, *Isacco, figura del Redentore* (1740), by Habsburg court poet Pietro Metastasio, and the Metastasian libretto in one *oratorio volgare*, *Abramo ed Isacco* (1775). The seventh chapter covers Benjamin Britten's *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac*, Op. 51 (1952), and the *Offertorium* movement from the *War Requiem*, Op 66 (1962). Long concludes with Judith Lang Zaimont's interpretation in *Parable: A Tale of Abram and Isaac* (1986). This section of the book is captivating and challenging for those with a musical background. As a musician, the explanations were easy and interesting. I felt I needed the score in front of me to benefit fully, and would have happily done so if it were available to me. Yet Long does provide excerpts from the music.

The detailed account of music requires some facility in understanding musical terms. While a musician will find the presentation engaging, a non-musician might find it a bit difficult to decipher due simply to a lack of music vocabulary. A glossary is furnished at the back. Even if a reader cannot follow all of the musical explanations, there is enough that is otherwise engaging about Long's descriptions to maintain the reader's interest. Reading Long's book ignites an interest not only in the music composed, but in the people who wrote the music and the artists who created their work.

Long's knowledge of the story's reception is mind-boggling, yet while the citations of music and art are exhaustive, they do not feel overwhelming. Certainly a reader would not hope to get to the end and remember most of the details, but the way the book is written will leave the reader with an overall sense of the importance of the story in music and art. Long's conclusion is also well written, demanding a reading all on its own. Long has taken on an insurmountable amount of research and, through her concise and organized style of writing, writes a book that is as accessible as can be achieved given its technical details. It is certainly a book to have on the shelf regardless of one's expertise in art or music. Long does not provide a reference guide, but her work invites readers to listen to a story and hear the music.

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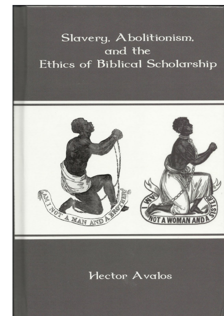
Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Ethics of Biblical Scholarship, by Hector Avalos



Bible in the Modern World 38 | Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011 | xiv + 331 pages | ISBN: 978-1-907534-28-7 (hardcover) £70.00 | ISBN: 978-1-909697-18-8 (softcover) £19.50

This provocative book represents a genre of writing enjoying a renaissance these days: the informed atheist attack on Christian traditions of biblical interpretation. It has resonances of Robert Ingersoll's writings in the nineteenth century, but this twenty-first-century analysis of the biblical and church teaching on slavery is by an aca-

demic, Dr Hector Avalos of Iowa State University, who has taught Religious Studies and Latino Studies at Iowa since 1993. This book is intriguing, stimulating and irritating! Yes, all of these. Its argument is that far from condemning slavery, the Bible on the whole defends and protects it, and the same trend is dominant in church history as well. So this is a very broad and sweeping challenge, which includes a chapter attacking the ethics of Jesus.

There is undoubtedly a case to be made that the Bible supports the institution of slavery and Christian apologists have frequently defended it. Avalos bases much of his commentary on the pro-slavery literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and considers it more intellectually honest than the abolitionist literature. Much of the book is a reaction to Rodney Stark's book *For The Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts and The End of Slavery* (Princeton University Press, 2003). Stark is a big name in the sociology of religion, and also doubles as a passionate Christian apologist. Now, as Avalos points out, Stark is no historian, and often seems very loose with details—rather disturbing in so prominent an academic. Consequently, faced with this high-profile academic blundering into areas where Stark has very limited expertise, Avalos has a field day. But in the process, we end up with a broad-brush attack not as sloppy as Stark, but no more subtle than Stark's in its arguments.

The aspects of the book require some careful and specific reflection, and perhaps this is a good reason why the book deserves to be read. However irritated I am with some aspects of it, I think it is still an interesting book making some excellent points as well as some weak ones.

The book starts very well with its analysis of slavery in the Old Testament. Its case is, quite simply, that there is nothing distinctive about the ancient Hebrew approach to slavery. Its provisions for manumission are in fact fairly typical of the Ancient Near East. The points are well made, but the difficulty is that Avalos ranges freely into Mesopotamian, Greek and Roman traditions over many centuries, and it is very difficult to establish whether like is being compared with like. Moreover the treatment of slavery in Roman society and a number of these economies which were based on the labour of slaves perhaps would be better viewed without constant comparisons with Southern states of the USA in the nineteenth century. Still, I certainly think that Avalos makes a good point that the Pentateuch does not conceive of Hebrew society abandoning slavery, and while the law has manumission provisions, these cannot be used to establish the moral superiority of the Hebrew theocracy. Avalos is right to critique some scholars like Westermann who argue

the moral superiority of the Jewish law. He rightly critiques the interpretation that the chosen people are slaves to God, and therefore they must reject all enslavement to humans. It sounds convincing, but it certainly does not seem to be either the practice or theory of Jewish society.

However, Avalos cannot resist broadening his case into a strident attack on all aspects of biblical ethics, and as far as he is concerned, all use of the metaphor of slavery in the Bible—for example with respects to females based on Gen 3:16 or metaphorically to Christian "service" of God—is further evidence of the moral inadequacy of the Bible. This argument is very weak. The treatment of the free wife by the husband is sometimes described in the language of service, but this does not establish that it is the same thing. Equally, describing the Christian as a slave to God does not mean that it equates in all ways to the institution of slavery, only that it is capable of camparison in some key respects.

There is a curious aspect, then, to Avalos's scholarship. Furious at Phyllis Trible's attempt to lessen the force of the language, he attacks her as any fundamentalist would. Indeed, Avalos is, just like the nineteenth-century rationalists, every bit a fundamentalist in his use of the Bible. The result is wild exaggeration based on a very literal reading of the text. Abraham is accused of raping Hagar in Gen 16. Circumcision is described as a form of mutilation in which God treats the Jews as slaves to be stamped with a cruel mark of ownership. The Exodus may take the Jews out of slavery but it gives them the right to enslave others. Slave owners are allowed to beat slaves and if they do so wrongly they can escape with monetary compensation, which proves "the inhumanity of this biblical law." But there are other possible interpretations of Exod 21:26–27. In a fascinating section, Avalos attacks the church as hypocritical, and attacks their behaviour by citing James 2:17 and Matt 7:16–17. This language struck the reviewer as absurd.

When Avalos comes to the New Testament, he focuses on the way that the Christian community responds to Roman slavery both as an institution (Gal 3:28 and Eph 6:5 and Philemon) and as an image (Gal 4:6–8 and Phil 2:6–8). He reacts especially to Horsley's anti-imperial interpretation of Christianity, which he regards as nonsensical. Some of his argument is an overdue response to our tendency to re-read scripture in the light of the abolition of slavery in the modern age. If New Testament writers had wanted to fully condemn the institution of slavery they could have, for there were classical precedents for attacks on the institution of slavery. This does not mean, however, that the New Testament advocates or defends slavery. There

is an intermediate position, that the early Christians live with slavery but treat slaves as equal in discipleship. I do not think he makes enough of the encouragement to seek freedom from slavery in 1 Cor 10.

The argument becomes particularly far-fetched when applied to Jesus. According to Avalos, when Jesus instructs his disciples in Matt 5:41 that if they are required to accompany a soldier for one mile they should go two miles, that means he is endorsing slavery! Really? In essence Avalos is taking a very modern position, that all service is servile, even voluntary service. He finds a dominant metaphor in scripture of Christ as imperial slave master and attacks the morality of Jesus inviting service from his followers as morally repugnant. Once again metaphorical words are not allowed to be qualified by the terms on which Jesus invites discipleship. He is especially emphatic on the morality of a Jesus who can say that he comes not to bring peace but a sword (Matt 10:34). Part 2 of the book portrays the history of slavery in the Christian world. He criticises the survival of slavery in the Christianised imperial and medieval worlds (describing serfdom as slavery). Rejecting the claim that Thomas Aquinas was an opponent of slavery, he looks carefully at the famous debate on slavery between Spanish theologians Las Casas and Sepulveda and the response of the papacy. Curiously Avalos says Sepulveda takes the honest and correct interpretation when he argues from scripture, because Las Casas treats the biblical text too loosely (204) and notes that Las Casas never questions the justice of slavery itself.

Coming into the modern era, Luther's morality is attacked, there is criticism of Catholic and Protestant states' approach to slavery, and he is unsympathetic at a mere rising of compassion for the suffering of slaves (230). Here Avalos's lack of historical understanding is very apparent. Compassion was certainly not a principled attack on slavery, but Avalos fails to see that compassion because it treated slaves as fellow humans and Christians, had an implication for the practice of slavery. Of course it is historically evident that a crucial tool in the change in slavery has as much to do with the Enlightenment as with Christianity, but it is easy to show the hypocrisy of the enlightened as well. Avalos delights in showing that the British abolitionists had weak biblical arguments, and thinks that this shows how useless the Bible is in moral reasoning. Needless to say he revels in the biblical disputes between the southern and northern US states, and considers that the abolitionists were weak on scripture. Citations of Acts 17:26 do not impress Avalos, because they teach a universal slavery to God as master. Avalos backs the Williams argument that slavery collapsed not because people listened to the Bible, but because economically it had passed its day and because the world was becoming more secular.

In his conclusion, Avalos insists that "biblical ethics stands or falls on its attitude toward slavery" and declares that in the light of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Bible "has been one of the greatest obstacles to human ethical progress in history." Avalos's consistent use of modern notions of human rights with which to attack traditional cultures is the sign of the lack of understanding of history. Institutions such as slavery existed but that did not make them morally commendable in the eyes of people in the ancient world. The reform of social institutions is not the central theme of scripture. The biblical position probably is not wholly consistent, but then neither was the type of slavery. Roman slavery is very different than Ancient Near East slavery, based as it was on a vastly higher proportion of enslaved people. Similarly a human rights ethics, standard as it is today, is not the only model of ethics, and it carries with it weaknesses as well as strengths. In my view Avalos is guilty of presentism.

The book intrigued me so much that I ransacked websites to learn about the author, and was intrigued to find him described as a Mexican, a Pentecostal child evangelist who became an atheist at the age of 19 when he was studying to answer Jehovah's Witness questions, and decided that it was impossible to defend Christianity adequately. He suffers from a very rare disease, but nevertheless gained a doctorate from Harvard in biblical studies and seems to be a well respected teacher.[1] He has clearly come to prominence through association with the New Atheists, yet unlike most of them he knows his field very well. He has written three books rather in the same genre, including also *Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* (2005) which uses the theory of scarce resources to explain why people fight over religion; *The End of Biblical Studies* (2007), which ferociously criticises the relevance of the Bible to the modern world, as well as works on illness in the Ancient Near East and works on Latino experiences of religion. So I did not waste my time reading this book; it was stimulating as well as provoking.

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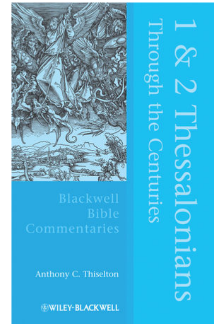
[1] Kate Kompas, "Avalos encourages religious diversity," *Iowa State Daily*, October 18, 1999, http://www.iowastatedaily.com/article_e2452f94-6e07-57d0-b4f3-9d01e477791a.html; Taysha Murtaugh, "An Unlikely Atheist teaches others," *Iowa State Daily*, November 9, 2010, http://www.iowastatedaily.com/news/article_dc15f8b2-eb81-11df-9186-001cc4c002e0.html.

1 and 2 Thessalonians Through the Centuries, by Anthony C. Thiselton



Blackwell Bible Commentaries | Chichester and Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011 | xvi + 317 pages | ISBN: 978-1-4051-9682-6 (hardcover) £83.50 | ISBN: 978-1-4443-9014-8 (ebook) £75.99

This timely and interesting series purports to focus on the reception history of books of the Bible, rather than on the question of what biblical books originally were intended by their authors/editors/compilers to have meant. Thus, a significant part of what this commentary deals with is how different biblical commentators and perhaps others have dealt with 1 and 2 Thessalonians, since these were written in the middle-to-late first century of the Common Era.

Yet the traditional concerns of historical criticism are not completely overlooked in this commentary. After an exposition of reception history on pages 1–7, Thiselton does deal with what he terms "The Situation and Substance of 1 Thessalonians"on pages 7–10, followed by material about the historical situation of Thessalonians in the late first century BCE. and in Paul's century. We read of the loyalty of the city of Thessalonica to Rome, so that "[a]ny 'troublemaker' who tried to rock the boat would not be tolerated" (11). Thiselton concludes that "[t]he Acts account of the charges and the riot is all the more plausible in this light" (ibid.), so that his reading of the history of Thessalonica confirms the historical accuracy of Acts 17, which, as New Testament scholars are very aware, has a profound effect on the interpretation of 1 Thessalonians and especially 2 Thessalonians.

Historical criticism continues unabated with a new section, "Traditional and Nineteenth-Century Arguments about the Authenticity of 2 Thessalonians and Their Criticism" (ibid.). We are told that no scholar "doubted" the sequence of 1 and 2 Thessalonians before Hugo Grotius, and no one doubted the "traditional" authorship (meaning authorship by Paul) until Johann Ernst Christian Schmidt in 1801 (ibid.). Hence, the positing of authorship for 2 Thessalonians other than by the Apostle Paul is referred to as a "doubt," which hardly seems to be the most objective way of dealing with the issue which has been (and remains) at the center of the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians since the early nineteenth century, namely for the past 200 years. The next page features a subsection entitled, with equal one-sidedness,

"Attacks on the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians in the nineteenth century" (12–14). On the "[s]ituation and [s]ubstance of 2 Thessalonians," Thiselton tells his readers, "We simply do not know the exact date of the Second Epistle, but it contains sufficient echoes of the First to assume that Paul wrote both within a very short period… " (15). Why exactly should one "assume" that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, given that something like a bare majority of current critical commentators, internationally, appears not to agree with this assumption?

As this commentary proceeds after the Introduction to both Thessalonian letters, it focuses on the usual assortment of pericopes of the letters in their canonical order. In these sections, there is commentary based on comments by writers of the patristic era, the middle ages, the eras of the sixteenth-century Reformation and Post-Reformation, the eighteenth century, and the nineteenth century. In the "Introduction and Overview" of each pericope of text, often twentieth-century and contemporary scholars are quoted and cited. Many New Testament scholars are familiar with Hugo Grotius's reversal of the historical order of 1 and 2 Thessalonians in his *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* in 1641, yet it is a new experience for most of us to see comments by Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Rabanus Maurus, Lanfranc of Canterbury, Martin Luther, William Estius, James Arminius, Lancelot Andrewes, George Herbert, and Benjamin Jowett in the same volume with the critical issues of introduction featuring late-nineteenth-century and twentieth-century scholarship. It is a reminder to contemporary New Testament scholars that all sorts of people—mystics, poets, scholars, and preachers through many centuries—have read and thought deeply as they interpreted the New Testament. The writing of this commentary by Thiselton clearly was a massive task, and much of the task was his deciding which bits and pieces from the past to include, and which to pass over in silence. So this commentary, like all others which used quite different methods, was very much a matter of interpretation by its learned author.

Various passages are treated in different ways, based on how the Christian tradition has interpreted the passages in question. 1 Thessalonians 4:4 contains the famous sentence in which Paul's readers are advised to *ktasthai* their *skeuos* in holiness and honor. *Ktasthai* usually means "to create," but it can also mean "to acquire" or "to take control of." *Skeuos* literally means "vessel" but can also mean, more metaphorically, either "wife" or "body" or, as Thiselton does not point out, "penis" (96). Depending on how one translates *skeuos*, either "acquire" or "take control of" is possible for the translation of

ktasthai. Subsequent to Paul, commentators have come up with a variety of interpretations with several different rationales, as Thiselton does point out at great length. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 occasions a compact discussion by Thiselton of "the Rapture" in connection with Dispensationalism (143–5).

There is an extended discussion of the apocalyptic or apocalypse-like features of 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12 (211–44). Part of this discussion is to reiterate the arguments of Alexandra Brown, Ernst Käsemann, Klaus Koch, and J. Christiaan Beker in favor of the centrality of apocalyptic to Paul's thought (16–17; cf. 191–2 and 212), which, as far as the present reviewer knows, is not controversial at the present time.

This brings us back to the central issue of interpretation of these two New Testament letters: the authorship of 2 Thessalonians. Thiselton has surely shown that there is a wide variety of themes in which scholarship before 1901 was deeply interested, and many of these themes revolve around the interpretation of the apocalyptic material in 2 Thessalonians, especially chapter 2. Not to be forgotten is the material in 2 Thess 1:5–12, where one of the reasons for thanksgiving is the judgment of God on those who do not believe in Christ (2 Thess 1:6–8), also an apocalyptic topos.

In dealing with the authorship issue, while it is probably true that some commentators thought the apocalyptic material in 2 Thessalonians to be "too 'Jewish' to have been written by Paul" (191), it remains quite true that one of the objections against Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians is that Paul in 1 Thess 5:1–3 says that the Day of the Lord will come suddenly, without any intervening signs, in contradistinction to 2 Thess 2:3–12 where several signs must happen before the Day of the Lord comes. It seems to me that this is an example of a topos of apocalyptic literature being used negatively in one letter and positively in the other. Neither one is more or less Jewish than the other: they rather represent different ways that a familiar topos in apocalypse-like literature can be used.

This reviewer writes as a partisan in the debate over the authorship of 2 Thessalonians. When I was writing my dissertation in 1983–84 and the book that came from it, *Early Christian Rhetoric and 2 Thessalonians* (JSNTSup 30; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), I determined that the evidence pointed me, along with quite a few other contemporary scholars, away from Paul's authorship of 2 Thessalonians, I never believed that I was attacking anything or anybody. I thought I was coming to a better understanding of the actual authorship of a letter of the Pauline corpus. I thought I was coming to a more mature understanding of how Paul and Paul's theology were understood

and further developed after the Apostle's death. To give another example, is it somehow better or more Christian to believe that Paul wrote Ephesians than to believe that he did not? What criteria would one use to answer that question? Surely these would be legitimate questions that anybody working in hermeneutics of the New Testament should take up.

Hence although it is clear that much research has gone into Thiselton's commentary, I am left with a number of questions that hover around the notion of reception history. How does reception history deal with the current era of exegesis, at least going back to Johann Ernst Christian Schmidt, not to mention William Wrede or Glenn S. Holland, or even Charles Homer Giblin, all of whom decided (Giblin changed his mind in favor of nonpauline authorship towards the end of his life) that it is most likely that Paul did not write 2 Thessalonians? Thus, one may legitimately ask whether reception history is meant as a complement to historical criticism or as a corrective to it.

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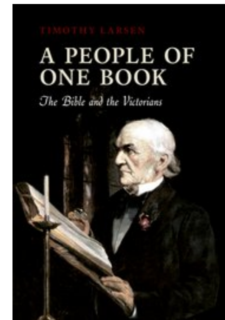
A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians, by Timothy Larsen



Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011 | 326 pages | ISBN: 978–0–19–957009–6 (hardcover) £34.00

The Victorians read the Bible—prolifically. This is the thesis of the book, and one fulsomely demonstrated. But even though the case for the novelty of this thesis is made out in the introduction, it probably won't come as a surprise to any who have even a passing acquaintance with the period, admitted as such by the writer himself: "no one has ever doubted that the Bible had a prominent place in Victorian culture" (295). The point of the book therefore is really to demonstrate how much the Bible held a prominent place, across a wide range of groups and individuals, from atheists (such as Charles Bradlaugh) to Catholics (such as Cardinal Wiseman), from agnostics (self-defined by Thomas Huxley) to Quakers (such as Elizabeth Fry). Here gathered into one book are a series of case studies ultimately built on the refrain that so-

and-so was a Bible man/woman. And this is one of the welcome features of the book; that is, the determination to ensure that the majority of church attenders—women—find significant representation in the case studies, half in fact.

There is no particular logic in the order, with Timothy Larsen claiming that arrangement was determined by the unfolding chronology of his research (7). He actually had dreamed of including more—the Brethren, Jews and Spiritualism—but the exigencies of publishing determinations prevented anything more than summary pages tacked into a concluding chapter. I was particularly disappointed that a Jewish presence was not included, not merely because his designated representative, Grace Aguilar, is so intriguing in her deft self-positioning in the values and culture of Victorian society, but also because Jewish biblical scholarship was beginning to be touted in public and private arenas. So, for example, the House of Commons MP Charles Buxton wanted Jews invited into the committee for the revision of the KJV Old Testament. Even though Gladstone stymied this appeal, members of the both Old and New Testament committees did turn to various London rabbis for advice. As for the Spiritualists and the use of the Bible, this section could have been, strangely perhaps, dove-tailed into Annie Besant who moved from atheism to theosophy, perhaps wedding her with Robert Owen rather than Charles Bradlaugh. As for the Brethren, the repetition of the separation of Victorian indebtedness to the Bible from those embroiled in "higher criticism" might have been tempered somewhat by the mention of the groundbreaking significance of the text-critical work of Samuel Tregelles. His was a special relationship with the Anglican Fenton J. A. Hort. Hort took the responsibility of seeing Tregelles's textual work on the New Testament through to completion after first his health, then sight, then ultimately life faded.

This relationship belies a number of loose assumptions that drop into the text from time to time—that Broad Church (with which Hort was generally equated) and skeptical are to be combined together as if both were interested in destroying the Bible. And yet, in other places, there is some greater precision granted, for example where Broad Church is defined (114) and separated from "liberal" (222). The problem is not only that such terms seem loosely applied, with occasional greater precision fostered by the requirements of a particular case-study, but other terms are dropped in as if they capture the meaning of a nineteenth-century position. It is simply misleading to speak of F. D. Maurice and Charles Kingsley as "even post-Christian thinkers" (223). In this sense, the author at times seems merely to reinscribe attitudes held

by some groups in the period, even though they may be given the added incitement of contemporary terminology. Occasionally also, Larsen speaks for his subjects, claiming for example that Besant would have destroyed a paper (75–76), or "Pusey would have deferred to Keble as the true father" (12) or even "As a theological liberal, Nightingale also wrote sermons" (129). These sort of throw-away comments may be fit for a student lecture but bedevil historical writing by putting words into the mouths of the past with no chance of their subjects' rejoinder.

The fundamental problem for the book lies in its very case-study approach that is adopted. There is an absence of coherent methodology for analysis. This begins with the problems of trying to decide what "representative" means for particular individuals. How *is* Mary Carpenter for example to be taken as representative of Unitarians in their approach to the Bible, especially when G. Vance Smith is invited into the New Testament committee for the work of the Revised Version—an invitation gratefully accepted as marking a recognition of the learnedness of Smith and a measured acceptance of his biblical scholarship amongst an array from Methodists to Baptists. The defence of Florence Nightingale as "representative" of "Liberal Anglicans" reaches apologetic dimensions (114) when Larsen argues that because men such as J. W. Colenso and F. D. Maurice were ordained they were "restrained by clerical subscription and ministerial propriety and effectiveness from being too bold in their speculations and pronouncements." That both men paid for their boldness of pronouncement is clear from the historical record, with Maurice at least being regularly touted as having an immense influence on two generations of Anglicans, spinning off in different directions. This is not to deny Nightingale's inclusion but the justification is over-wrought. Indeed, it would have been an interesting study to plot the lines of influence between the Reverend Benjamin Jowett and Nightingale's ideas, for he too paid a heavy price for his contribution to the infamous *Essays And Reviews* and avowed thereafter to restrict himself to exposition of the classics, especially Plato.

This leads to a further issue of method. It is one thing to assert that the Victorians were "People of One Book." It is another to test that assertion by countervailing evidence. In one sense the Victorian period was equally a Hellenising or Classicising period as it was a biblicising one. This shows out in one quotation from Nightingale herself. The array of alternatives to some less-favoured and -favourable biblical stories come from the Classics — Achilles and his horses, Andromache and Antigone with Homer, Sophocles

and Aeschylus the great suppliers of great lore (132–3). The array is no coincidence. As Richard Jenkins noted, "Few people suspect the extent to which the ancient world, and especially Greece, influenced the Victorians.... Unless we realize how much the Victorians thought about Greece we will not fully understand them" (*The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, x). As if to accent this observation, the cover of the book, with the avowed King James supporter, William Gladstone reading from the Bible lectern at St. Deiniol's Anglican Church, Hawarden, finds no echo in the book, with Gladstone scoring but two asides. For all his devotion to and formation in the language of (KJV) Bible English, he yet extols "that wonderful thing Hellenism," as well as being a member of the Society for Psychical Research. Yes, Victorians were saturated in the Bible and biblical language but they were also saturated in many other aspects that have been seen as characterizing the age. It is how the Bible was held together with these other aspects, informing and informed by them, that complicates the picture of the Victorians and the Bible. It is simply not helpful to assert as a concluding insight that the Anglo-Catholic Pusey was "a Bible man" (41) and that the first Roman Catholic archbishop of Westminster, Nicholas Wiseman "was a Bible man all his life" (56), or again "a Bible man through and through" (65). Even allowing that one was an exegete and another a textual scholar does not open up interpretative insight into the array of assembled material.

The subtlety of the explorations of *how* the Bible was meaningful, not simply that it was, that one finds in, say, Stephen Prickett's *Words and the Word* or Michael Wheeler's two volumes on John's Gospel (*Death and the Future Life, St John and the Victorians*) is what goes begging in this catalogue of case studies. Having noted that two of the women (at least: the Quaker Elizabeth Fry and Nightingale) annotated their Bibles with references to their own personal lives and to public events, one is left wondering what self-definition, -therapy, -justification was operating here and how the Bible was being used to shape understanding and directions. Larsen's penchant for lists (see, for example, 21, 37–38, 39, 40) in spite of a recognition that such cataloguing can become tedious (80), may be useful in the fodder for analysis but it is the analysis that becomes critical. Otherwise, one is in danger of reinscribing biblicist attitudes as a screen of deeper matters that are being explored. One thinks, for example, of the use of the Bible as the arena by which denominations and even nations staked their claims for status and recognition. Conversely, one sees the fracturing of denominational lines as between the Anglican Brooke Foss Westcott and the Methodist William Moulton as they

joined together in common tasks that bonded them in friendship throughout their mature lives.

The book does re-awaken a sense of the richness of the material that can be harnessed to investigate and fill out the case that the Bible was much-used, much-loved by the Victorians, even that it was a, if not the, major linguistic provision for imagining their world. The period was a time when letters, books, speeches, and lives were treasured, thereby providing a vast reservoir of evidence from which to drink—the list of manuscripts, magazines, and contemporary printed material at the end of the book bear powerful witness to this. What Larsen's book has achieved is a reminder of that resource. The development of a coherent method of analysis of that resource, in part along the lines suggested by Prickett and Wheeler, yet remains.

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Bible, Art, Gallery, edited by Martin O'Kane

Bible in the Modern World 21 | Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2011 | xix + 199 pages | ISBN: 978-1-906055-63-9 (hardcover) £50.00

This fascinating collection of essays contains papers presented at conferences held at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, and at the Manchester Art Gallery, highlighting some of the "hidden gems of biblical art" held in the collections of both galleries and assisted by funding from the British Academy. The papers presented at these conferences, drawn from the worlds of biblical studies, art history, philosophy, sociology and music, reflect the interdisciplinary goals of the project. These essays serve not only to showcase biblical paintings by lesser-known artists but also to illustrate the wide range of perspectives and insights conveyed by different academic disciplines.

Martin O'Kane, the editor, writes the introduction in which he describes the background to the British Academy Bible and Art project (2006–2007). All the essays of this collection are worthy of attention; here are highlights. Nicholas Davey's fine essay, "The Bible and Visual Exegesis", establishes a

theoretical framework for the collection by exploring how viewing a biblical painting parallels the way we read a biblical text. Davey draws on Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, to distinguish between the way in which things are presented and things that are represented so as to be deciphered and interpreted. Gadamer resists decipherment: he says that what matters is not what words and images refer or defer to but what they say, that is, what their performance "brings forth" or makes happen. Meaning erupts beyond the intent of the artist, and beyond the denotative and connotative meanings of words. In the released energies of emergent meaning we find, I think, a primary locus for the experience of sacrality.

John Harvey's essay, "Framing the Word: Commentary, Context, and Composition," explores the role and function of the Bible in several Victorian paintings, especially in Hunt's iconic painting, *The Light of the World*. His acute observations about (dis)locations of paintings in galleries merit attention: "A gallery is to biblical artworks what a zoo is to wild animals: specimens are removed from their natural habitat, sometimes in order to preserve the species, and placed in enclosures, tamed and framed" (47).

In David Jasper's essay, "The Desert in Biblical Art," the focus on William Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat* (1854) conveys a particular relationship between biblical narratives and western depictions in art of the desert. Mid-Victorian artists at the time of the quest for the historical Jesus sought to render religious scenes from experience. Hunt's *Scapegoat*, for instance, renders details of the goat in the arid salt flats of the Dead Sea landscape in strange, authentic colors.

J. Cheryl Exum's essay, "Notorious Biblical Women in Manchester: Spencer Stanhope's Eve and Frederick Pickersgill's Delilah," reads two paintings of Eve and Delilah as visual exegesis that exposes particular interpretations, including male control of representation and even those that biblical writers suppress. She encourages viewers as consumers of visual images to interrogate coded messages about sexual identities and gender roles and consider "whether or not we wish to resist them" (96).

Siobhán Dowling-Long's essay, "Musical Instruments in Biblical Art: Evaristo Baschenis's *Still Life with Musical Instruments*," explores the significance of the five musical instruments and their importance in masterpieces of biblical art. Since violinmakers and musicians use physical terms to describe parts of instruments: body, back, ribs, neck, etc. The broken and decayed instruments symbolize the fall of humanity in Gen 3 and the fragmented human body in particular.

John F. A. Sawyer, in his essay "Van Dyck's *Ecce homo* in the Barber Institute," explores the iconographic tradition behind this image of an isolated Jesus with particular emphasis on the intended reaction of the viewer.

Keith Tester, in the essay "Poussin, a Poem and a Sacred Story," argues, through the prism of Stoicism and by a particular reading of Tancred's hands, that Poussin's *Tancred and Erminia* should be understood as a interpretation of the biblical narrative of the encounter between Mary Magdalene and Jesus in John 20.

Martin O'Kane's concluding essay "Who is Esau (Genesis 27:32)? Matthias Stom's *Isaac Blessing Jacob* in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts," reflects on the prominent location of the Stom painting in the gallery in order to refocus on Esau and present a history of Esau (re)presentations.

Individually and cumulatively the essays convey remarkable insights. They also model integrative work on the intersections of art and biblical interpretation that could be replicated in other contexts.

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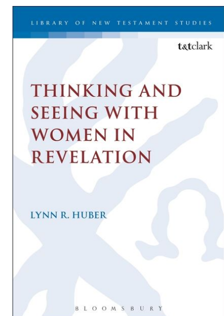
Thinking and Seeing with Women in Revelation, by Lynn Huber



The Library of New Testament Studies | London: T. & T. Clark, 2013 | 224 pages | ISBN: 978-0-567662-61-3 (softcover) £18.99

In this book, Lynn Huber highlights two key conceptual frameworks which can aid us in understanding the book of Revelation and its reception: metaphor and vision. These facets of the text, Huber persuasively argues, are central to the imaginative pull of Revelation. They are at the heart of John's appeal to ancient readers and subsequent visionary authors and artists.

In the Introduction, Huber demonstrates that Revelation's climactic vision of the marriage of the Lamb and Bride is prefigured even in the text's opening word: *apokalypsis*, or unveiling. She demonstrates that John's depiction of female characters such as "bride" and "whore" carried deep resonances

within contemporary culture. The text's blending of metaphorical concepts attached to these characters is thus key to its critique of Roman cultural and political mores. Revelation's rhetoric, Huber argues, creates a symbolic world in which the audience can participate, and which in turn shapes how they see the world.

These insights are fleshed out in the book's first two chapters. In the first, Huber underscores the importance of "seeing with" John as a hermeneutical key to Revelation. Huber draws attention to the visual nature of John's rhetoric, aligning John's repeated commands to "look!" with the ancient technique of *ekphrasis*—prompting the reader to envision a scenario in order to accept the narrator's evaluation. The otherworldly nature of the text's visions prompts its author to draw upon metaphor and simile as vehicles for conveying his experiences. This, for Huber, allows us to draw upon modern conceptual metaphor theories to explore how the author constructs the women in his text. Huber's second chapter is thus dedicated to setting Revelation's metaphorical imagery in context. She notes that John's metaphors draw upon concepts which resonated both within contemporary Roman culture and the author's Jewish scriptural heritage. In particular, John regularly uses the metaphors of "woman" and "city" in the construction of his text, presenting the whore of Babylon and New Jerusalem as images of communal identity.

Chapter three offers a reading of Rev 17–22, paying close attention to the depiction of Revelation's key women, Babylon and Jerusalem. Huber offers a detailed and sensitive mapping of the metaphorical concepts and domains which John blends to create these women/cities. She reads Revelation's use of the "prostitute" metaphor alongside contemporary Roman attitudes to honour and sexuality. She also makes instructive use of contemporary depictions of powerful prostitutes such as Messalina in Juvenal's sixth satire. Her analysis of Revelation's depiction of New Jerusalem offers a similarly rigorous exploration of associations with the concepts of "bride" and "wedding" in John's cultural and political context. One facet of the Revelation's metaphorical equation of women and cities is especially brought to the foreground in Huber's analysis: the notion of the woman/city as a "container." She highlights how both women are construed as containers for communities: one afflicted by vice (Babylon), and one faithful (New Jerusalem). Revelation exploits this mapping of women as cities and, therefore, containers, in a number of ways. It can be used to convey the sense of security of a protected community, or it can be used to construct a woman/city as a prison.

The final two chapters of the book draw upon these central metaphors at the heart of Revelation's rhetorical construction of Babylon and New Jerusalem. By paying attention to how the text was received and interpreted by two medieval visionaries and two modern visionary women, Huber demonstrates how Revelation's metaphors survive and evolve in the imaginations of later readers. Chapter 4 shows how Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant use Revelation's metaphors to explore the text's meaning in new cultural contexts. Huber first demonstrates how Hildegard of Bingen uses Revelation's "woman" metaphor to depict God's faithful community. Huber explores how Hildegard develops John's imagery by emphasising the domain's associations with procreation and motherhood. In her analysis of Hadewijch's visions, Huber shows how the visionary redirects the communal emphasis in Revelation's metaphors and instead uses them to explore the experience of the individual contemplative soul. In this way, Huber demonstrates that Hildegard and Hadewijch did not just restate John's visions. Instead, they draw upon Revelation's imagery to explore new meanings inherent in the text's metaphorical mappings. They depict the "woman" as community and mother; as individual and bride.

This exploration of the development of Revelation's metaphorical mappings of "woman" and "city" culminates in Huber's exploration of the art of two twentieth-century readers: Sister Gertrude Morgan and Myrtice West. Huber contextualises Morgan's and West's careers against the backdrop of modern American evangelicalism, before recounting how Morgan draws upon Revelation in her art. Huber's analysis is rich in detail, and she pays close attention to Morgan's self-portraits. Huber shows how Morgan presents herself as the source domain for Revelation's bridal imagery. This in turn, is used by Morgan to think through the theological ramifications of a personal relationship with Jesus and God and its effects upon a wider believing community. The concept of marriage stands alongside the New Jerusalem as key subjects in Morgan's art, and Huber shows how Morgan's illustrations *New Jerusalem Court*, *Gloryland St.*, and *The New Jerusalem* situated Revelation's vision of the New Jerusalem in the present. Huber explores how Morgan, through her visions and illustrations, finds herself represented by the women in Revelation. West uses Revelation's metaphors to explore her own identity and the text's meaning in her own context. In doing so she resists John's prohibition against altering the text (Rev 22:18–19).

Huber finds a similar affirmation of an artist's right to appropriate Revelation's metaphors in Myrtice West's paintings. Huber analyses three of

West's paintings in the Revelation Series and shows how West further blurs the domains of "city" and "woman" in her depiction of Babylon. West depicts her own murdered daughter as Christ's "bride" and thus places special emphasis on Revelation's "wedding" metaphor as the focus of the text's promises. Morgan's and West's adaptations of Revelation's metaphors, for Huber, have a dual purpose: they provide tools to explore their own experiences, and they provide opportunities to shape their own audience's understanding of the text's promises.

In the book's epilogue, Huber reflects on how Hildegard, Hadewijch, Morgan, and West create new associations between Revelation's metaphors. Huber concludes that these women were able to counter John's own attempts to render the women in his text passive. They used the text's own metaphors and images to assert their own voices against contemporary patriarchal norms.

Huber's book navigates several complex areas of scholarship in a lucid and engaging manner. The book is a gold mine both for readers interested in the first-century context of the book of Revelation, and those interested in its interpretation in different cultural contexts. Huber draws on a breadth of material to contextualise the metaphors at the heart of Revelation's portrayal of women. She also offers a wealth of detail as she charts the reception of these metaphors in the visions of later writers.

While reading the book, I found Huber's use of conceptual metaphor theory helpful. The index of "Conceptual Metaphors and Blends" at the end of the book is a particularly helpful aid for the reader. I particularly enjoyed the way she used the method to pare down Revelation's dense imagery to its constituent metaphorical mappings. This is a useful tool for the study of the text's reception history. It shows how metaphors such as "woman" and "city" work upon the imaginations of interpreters at a distance of one millennium or two millennia from the original source text. Hildegard, Hadewijch, Morgan, and West can thus speak the same language as the visionary author that inspires them, and can thus challenge his metaphorical mappings using his own terms. Huber's detailed exposition of these later visionaries' works, however, underscores the force of the women's own rhetoric in their own times. She highlights how their appropriations of John's visions force his metaphors to yield new meanings and connotations.

Huber's book leaves open further avenues for exploration. By her own admission, there was insufficient space to discuss the construction of the woman of Rev 12. This character has inspired many later visionaries. She has also

been used by female interpreters, artists and prophets to explore their identity. Characters such as Jezebel also play an important role in Revelation's construction and subjugation of women. Yet this is not brought up by way of criticism of Huber's project. Rather, it underscores that there is much mileage to be had in the thought-provoking analysis Huber offers. Her book unveils how John sees the women in his narrative. It also shows how Revelation's women engender new metaphorical mappings when seen afresh in new contexts. This book is thus a helpful and instructive contribution to the debate surrounding how the reception of texts can contribute to the task of interpretation.

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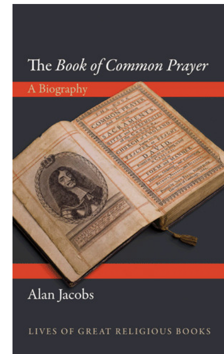
The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography, by Alan Jacobs



Lives of Great Religious Books | Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013 | 256 pages | ISBN: 978-0-69-115481-7 (hardcover) $24.95

A further volume in this fascinating series of profiles of the history of key texts, this one is an account of the prayer book which was and still is technically the only legally authorised text for services in many Anglican churches throughout the world, although in practice, as the author acknowledges, multiple local prayer books have largely taken its place.

Alan Jacobs is a distinguished professor at Baylor University, with a very fine writing style, who in recent years has written a number of works on topics of historical theology. His fine sense of style and craft makes this a compelling read and I finished what is admittedly quite a small book in a few hours.

The ingenious vision of this series is that the circulation, reputation, and reading of any book is a history worth telling. The focus is not on the broader "influence" of a work but of its direct history as a book. Jacobs's work does not quite live up to this commission. Unlike some other books in this series, the work moves rather beyond the text at hand and into the history of liturgy

especially for the recent period of new liturgies. The actual history of the book, its production and publishing and distribution is relegated to a brief appendix (195–200)—which is a pity, because the story of how the crown copyright of the text was abused in Oxford and honoured by Baskerville in Cambridge is a very interesting tale.

The story of the abandonment of the Latin Mass and the creation of the four versions of an English prayer book and their authorisation by parliaments in 1549, 1552, 1559, and 1662 has often been told. There is rather a different focus in this book.

Most historians focus their accounts of the prayerbook on the shaping of its text. This is a very curious and important story for the history of the English Reformation. Stage one had been the translation of the Latin mass into English, but then Cranmer set to work in Edward's reign to create a Protestant prayer book, the one known as the 1549 book. When Cranmer became bolder in his theological views after completing the 1549 book, he began work on what became the 1552 book. Jacobs provides an excellent description of the construction of Matins and Evensong out of the monastic cycle of prayers. In contrast Jacobs is a bit inadequate on Cranmer's most radical revision at that time, for in the 1552 book he chopped the traditional Eucharistic prayer in half and re-ordered it, in order to undercut any notion that something happened to the bread when it was consecrated. Jacobs does explain this in his chapter on Gregory Dix at the end of the book but he does not provide any detail on the text of the 1552 communion. This chapter contains a most interesting discussion of the inadequacies of the prayer book as liturgy, but I fail to see why it was held back until this point. I would have preferred to have heard more about the construction of the text in the chapter on the 1552 book. The history of a book without some history of its text seems a little perverse.

The strength of this book is its account of the changing fortunes of the book over the last 450 years. Jacobs's history of the American text and how it developed is interesting. Jacobs also explores the huge liturgical debates of the nineteenth century and neatly summarises them. He very helpfully analyses the translation of the prayer book into a wide range of languages. There is a significant story not told here of how Selwyn in New Zealand used the BCP as the definition of Anglicanism and thus gave the prayerbook a defining status in the Church of the Province of New Zealand.

Among the most interesting chapters of the discussion is an analysis of the use of the prayer book during World War One. Jacobs suggests that this was

a profoundly difficult moment for the book when its widespread distribution to the soldiers in World War One did not provide spiritual resources for the soldiers, who found it too difficult to understand. I am not persuaded that three quotations from Robert Graves and Vera Brittain are sufficient to establish this point. Nevertheless the failure of the traditional words to resonate with working class soldiers who had little experience of church attendance certainly highlighted the need for revision of the text. So the 1929 revision was commenced. Then after a celebrated debate the House of Commons failed to authorise the revised prayer book for use in the Church of England, although in Scotland the book was adopted. Thus prayerbook revision only became acceptable in the postwar age, when the English church, now with its own General Synod, authorised the use of Series 1, 2, and 3, while other Anglican churches launched their own experimental liturgies. The author's researches do not note the significant role played by the New Zealand Anglican Church, since the New Zealand Prayer Book was one of the very first full prayer books to be issued.[2] These revisions have undone some of Cranmer's revisions and restored an order to the liturgy which closely resembles the recent vernacular texts of the Catholic mass.

Meanwhile the Book of Common Prayer, which once defined and united Anglicanism, has faded into insignificance. A brand of faith built on a state version of Christianity has had a difficult life over the last century and a half, and virtually its only coherence has been its prayer book. Cranmer's superb liturgical sense has given it more ability to survive than it might otherwise have had. But now much of this has been lost, in the plethora of new books of prayer. No wonder that people fear that Anglicanism is doomed to fray apart. Thus the history of the prayerbook reflects a very significant story.

The book does not profess to make any original contribution to the vast literature on this subject, but its summation of recent scholarship is very well done. Jacobs has not written a technical book; if you want that you will need to consult Dix or Wheatly, the great nineteenth-century liturgist. I have identified some deficiencies in the book, but it is certainly readable and reliable in the areas it covers.

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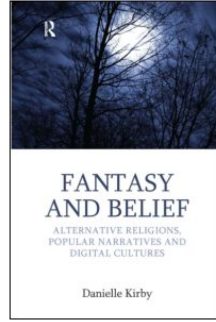
[2] This story has recently been described in Brian Carrell, *Creating a New Zealand Prayer Book: A Personal Reminiscence of a 25 Year Odyssey 1964–89* (Christchurch: Theology House Publishing, 2013).

Fantasy and Belief: Alternative Religions, Popular Narratives and Digital Cultures, by Danielle Kirby



Sheffield: Equinox, 2013 [now London: Routledge, 2014] | ix + 194 pages | ISBN: 978-1-908049-23-0 (hardcover) $120.00

The influence of the internet on religion has been a topic which has garnered a great deal of academic interest over the past twenty years. While much of this work has concentrated on the way in which religion has been practiced online, or how online communities such as popular culture fandoms act as surrogate religions, Danielle Kirby's *Fantasy and Belief* adopts a different approach. Examining the fascinating, but largely under-studied community of the "Otherkin," Kirby engages with debates over the changing nature of religion in the contemporary world, as well as with questions of new forms of belief and religious self-projection in the online age.

The Otherkin are a loosely affiliated group who believe that they are something more than human. This belief often manifests itself in the claim that the individual is, in reality, some kind of mythical creature—an Elf, Vampire, Angel, or Demon—in human form. Often, although not always, these beliefs take some form of inspiration from popular texts, with fantasy narratives being particularly influential. More controversially, individuals can also identify as "Otaku-kin" or "Media-kin," in which they believe that their true self is an anime, video game, or popular media character. Kirby emphasises the diverse nature of this community: there is no single belief holding them together, other than the claim to be "more than human."

It is easy to see how these unusual beliefs could be pathologised or dismissed as "irrelevant" by scholars, in much the same way as studies of pop culture fandom dismissed fans as media dupes prior to the pioneering work of John Fiske and Henry Jenkins. Kirby deserves great credit for not only sympathetically exploring the fascinating world of the Otherkin, but in successfully linking it to developments in the study of the internet and religion and NRMs in general.

Developing Colin Campbell's concept of the "cultic milieu" and Christopher Partridge's idea of "occulture" she suggests that the Otherkin make use of a "fantastic milieu," defined as "a conglomerate of interrelated yet discrete

ideas that may be engaged with at the discretion of the participants, and yet form *en masse* a broadly continuous body of ideas" (1). As individuals within the Otherkin community identify with different mythical/supernatural figures, this approach provides the flexibility with which to examine a diverse and loosely affiliated community of belief while still providing theoretical rigour.

This enables her to suggest a broad base of fantasy/science-fiction texts as appealing to the Otherkin, identifying shared elements within them without highlighting one particular text above others. These key concepts are then used by individuals to construct their individual spiritualities, while sharing enough similarities to form what can be constituted as a loosely-defined community. The "fantastic milieu" is not to be understood as separate from wider trends in western spirituality. Kirby therefore connects the Otherkin to the development of magick practices and neopaganism, as well as concepts taken from popular media. The beings that Otherkin tend to see themselves as are generally powerful, tend towards isolation, and appear as aloof from humanity. While many of these figures, such as Elves, have roots in both folklore and literature, she argues that the portrayal of the fantastic in popular media has directly contributed to the plausibility of Otherkin beliefs.

Kirby sees it as no coincidence that many of the beings the Otherkin see themselves as, such as dragons, vampires, and werewolves, have been increasingly humanised in recent media portrayals. Whereas they were once seen as manifestations of evil, popular media such as *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, and *True Blood* have shown these creatures in a much more sympathetic light. At the same time, these texts imagine the intrusion of the supernatural into the mundane world, making combinations of the magical and the physical more plausible.

While the beliefs Kirby charts are based on this wider fantastic milieu, which is partly communicated through popular culture, they are not dependent upon it. For example, those who believe that they are Elenari Elves adopt the term for "star" from Tolkien's Elvish, while simultaneously creating a new cosmology which moves beyond Tolkien to speculate on their true existence on distant, magical planets. There are certainly similarities here to what goes on within fan cultures (and in fan fiction in particular), and this is a connection which might have been more fruitfully explored. Yet Kirby is right to point out an essential difference between fandom and the Otherkin—fans might identify closely with a text or character; the Otherkin believe that they *are* the being they identify with.

These themes are related back to the role of the internet in the final chapter, which is seen to have laid out the conditions necessary for the emergence of the Otherkin. Kirby argues that the nature of online engagement promotes the idea of an existence beyond the real, raising issues of the boundaries of the self in space and spirit. Through massively-multiplayer role playing games such as *World of Warcraft*, virtual worlds become fully inhabitable for the first time, promoting the idea of a simultaneous existence in another reality. Combined with scientific and philosophical ideas of the "multiverse," it becomes possible to imagine existence in the contemporary world as just one reality amongst many. When combined with the playfulness of the remix culture encouraged in popular culture fandom, and the ability to identify existence of communities of like-minded individuals online, a creative and spiritual engagement with popular texts become possible.

The central arguments of this book, which theorise the way in which popular narratives, the internet, and faith can work in new combinations, are strong. The idea of the "fantastic milieu" provides a helpful way of looking at the interaction of faith and popular culture and is a concept that will no doubt prove foundational to a number of studies that will follow in Kirby's footsteps. Yet there are areas in which this might have been developed further. While Kirby should be praised for emphasising that the Otherkin are not "unthinking dupes or chronic escapists" (37), I was left with a sense of dissatisfaction when it came to a systematic study of the group. While Kirby admits that her book does not aim to be an ethnographic study, this limits its usefulness in exploring the nature of Otherkin as a religious movement. At several junctures I was left wanting to know more about how the Otherkin themselves understood their beliefs and their relationship between popular culture and religion.

Kirby's methodology is somewhat problematic here—she bases her examination of the community on publically available internet resources, such as forum posts and Wikis. There are, of course, good practical reasons for doing this. Yet it leads her to admit on several occasions that the Otherkin may be presenting themselves in a very different way on websites which require registration compared to their presentation on public forums. The only way to know whether this was the case or not would have been to engage in interviews or wider ethnographic work with the Otherkin themselves. While Kirby's book offers a sympathetic portrayal, it lacks the sense of how the community understands themselves and wishes to promote themselves to the outside world. Indeed, the one piece of direct engagement with the community,

a survey which Kirby attaches as an appendix, provides a range of fascinating responses which could have fruitfully been explored further.

Despite these reservations, this is an important book that will prove to be a valuable resource to those working on new religious movements, religion online (and online religion), and the engagement of religion and popular culture. Kirby should be commended for producing a stimulating work that will generate both further debate on the issues she raises and future work on the Otherkin themselves.

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