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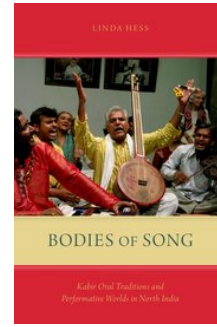
Book Reviews

Bodies of Song: Kabir Oral Traditions and Performative Worlds in North India, by Linda Hess



Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015 | xiii+467 pages | ISBN: 978-0-199-37416-8 (hardback) £64.00; ISBN: 978-0-199-37417-5 (softback) ££25.99

Linda Hess's new book, *Bodies of Song*, is beautifully written and important. It marks a culmination of her forty years of research on the songs and verses attributed to Kabir, the famous weaver poet and singer of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century North India. In the book, Hess pays special attention to the contemporary musical performances of Kabir songs by Prahlad Tipanya, a singer from the Malwa region of northeast central India, and to her conversations with him and his family members and with Shabnam Virmani, a film-maker who has made several films about Kabir.

Hess's accounts of her encounter and friendship with Tipanya, Virmani and others in the period from 2002 to 2015 give the book a deeply personal and autobiographical dimension. Her participant-observer role is highlighted by vignettes of her own personal experiences, selections from her field notes, transcriptions of her conversations and interviews, and, above all, her superlative translations of Kabir's songs and verses. These features enliven Hess's text and make it a pleasure to read. They also enhance the authority of her more academic discussions. Here I will first comment on three key aspects of Hess's book and then briefly discuss a few of her own comments on the work on Kabir of others, particularly Purushottam Agrawal, Winand Callewaert and myself. The first of my three comments has to do with translation. Hess is rightly regarded as by far the best translator of Kabir into English. Her translations display so singular a voice that sometimes it is hard to decide if Hess is channeling Kabir or Kabir is channeling Hess. *Bodies of Song* is full of Hess's trademark translations of Kabir songs, especially those of the Malwa tradition sung by Prahlad Tipanya. Both in terms of their sound in English and their closeness to the original sense of the Hindi, these translations are close to perfect.

The translations do, however, raise one intriguing question: Are they *too* perfect? How appropriate is it, in an academic study, to take what are essentially song lyrics, originally meant to be sung, texts with a definite meter and rhyme, and transform them into real English poetry using the very modern

literary medium of free verse, a medium that mostly eliminates any regular meter, does not use rhyme, and often employs a strong visual emphasis on certain words and phrases? To take an inverted example: what would we think about Asok Vajpeyi translating Bob Dylan's lyrics into modern Hindi free verse? The results would surely be excellent poetry, but in what sense would they embody the Bob Dylan originals? How can a translator who is also a poet solve this dilemma? Hess has responded to this comment rightly noting that it is virtually impossible to translate into English using rhyme and a uniform meter and still keep to the sense of the Hindi original. Nonetheless, the gap between the two artistic creations, and their performance, remains a large one.

A second comment concerns the concept of oral tradition. Hess's discussion of the strategies and techniques that Prahlad Tipanya employs in his song performances as well as her chapter on the theory of orality make manifest her deep love affair with live musical performances of Kabir songs and with the oral-performative mode of presentation in general. She defines (211) the oral-performative "as referring to live, body-to-body transmission, where sounds produced by voices and instruments reach ears located in the same physical vicinity." In this way she stresses the difference between the oral-performative and not only reading but also electronic reproduction. She notes (232) "Physical presence and social interaction entail a quality of embodiment very different from what occurs with internet communication. This is not just a marginal point. It is crucial." Hess seems to sense that she may be pushing her argument a little too far when she later asks (241): "Am I romanticizing orality?" She immediately answers with a denial: "No, the point I am making is not about nostalgia or romance." It is hard, however, to avoid the conclusion that she does tend to romanticize oral performance. As she says near the end of the chapter (p. 245): "I make a case for the particularity and preciousness of a tradition that is oral, physical, and social."

I myself certainly enjoy listening to Kabir songs by a good singer, especially when they are songs I already know. If the performance is live, so much the better. But there are also special virtues in reading Kabir, even in translation (though few translations approach Hess's excellence). Reading makes it possible to take one's time in understanding the texts and pondering their meanings. Sung words, particularly in a language that is not one's own, go by fast and are often lost in the sounds of the instruments. Memorization offers similar benefits to reading, but it is much more work.

My third comment concerns Linda's in-depth discussion of the sometimes tense relation between spirituality and politics in the Kabir songs and in the somewhat similar songs popularized during the 1960s movement for African-American civil rights in the United States. We all, I think, have a roughly similar idea about what we mean by politics, but how should we define spirituality? Linda says the following: "I use the word 'spirituality' to refer to (1) an inner-directed process of cultivating self-knowledge and alleviating suffering; and (2) an impulse to break free from the narrow bounds of self-centered individuality, to know one's connection to all living beings, to nature, to matter and energy" (357).

One problem with this definition is that, in her enthusiasm for spirituality, Hess seems to be claiming that this "impulse … to know one's connection to all living beings, to nature, to matter and energy" is about *knowing*, rather than about having a particular expansive emotion, an "oceanic feeling" as Freud called it. To suggest that this experience is based on an actual encounter with, or perception of, some sui generis, non-empirically verifiable reality out there in this world or beyond is, for me, once again to go a step or two too far. Spirituality also seems to me to be too vague a concept to be analytically useful. Does it mean more than loosely defined religiosity or religious sentiment separated from any explicit association with any specific religion or sect? More useful would be a discussion of how Kabir conceptualizes his religious experience: as a discovery of a divine person or spirit within one's body, as a divine person or spirit who pervades the universe, as a lover who has left the worshipper in the lurch, as a personal god somewhere out there. All these concepts can be found in Kabir's songs, but some are more important than others and their interplay merits close examination.

A few comments that Hess makes in her chapter on "True Words of Kabir: Adventures in Authenticity" are also worth noting. Here Hess does discuss written texts, especially the older manuscript anthologies containing Kabir songs. Hess describes, without taking clear sides, two basic ways of looking at the question of authenticity. Songs composed in Kabir's name—like many songs attributed to Sur Das and Mirabai—evidently continued to be produced long after Kabir's death. Should we regard all the songs that seem true to Kabir's "spirit" as authentic, no matter who wrote them when, or should we try to winnow out the authentic songs by accepting only those found several of the oldest manuscripts? Both approaches are valid, each in its own way, but each also has its own problems.

Part of Hess's discussion on authenticity is about the strategies used by Winand Callewaert to assemble his *Millennium Kabir* collection of 593 Kabir songs and against the criticisms against Callewaert's method made by Purushottam Agrawal. Agrawal particularly objected to Callewaert's creation of a "star system" in which he assigns one, two or three stars to specific songs based on their appearance in one, two, or three different old manuscript traditions. Hess argues (125) that Agrawal's "accusations against Callewaert are, in my view, excessive." She notes that (128) "Callewaert does not claim to have found the authentic Kabir," but she also admits that Callewaert explicitly says that " 'the songs which occur in most repertoires, in different regions, have a better chance of having been composed by Kabir.' " Reading a bit between the lines, it is hard not to see in this an attempt by Callewaert to create the impossible, an authentic "original" Kabir. Callewaert's rather sarcastic disparagement of the later "inauthentic" songs is also hard to miss.

Agrawal's own strategy for identifying the oldest Kabir is to tentatively accept, as a collection, the songs preserved in the Dadu panthi anthology known as the *Kabir-granthavali*. There are some serious difficulties with this argument as Hess notes. A related problem for any discussion of the relative authenticity of the old Kabir anthologies is what to do with the songs of the *Kabir Bijak*. This collection seems to be an old one and is regarded as the only fully authentic collection by the sadhus of the Kabir Panth. It also comes from the eastern Bhojpuri area where the man Kabir once lived. The stumbling block for accepting its antiquity is that the oldest known manuscript of this collection is dated 1805 CE. For this reason Callewaert did not include the *Bijak* songs in his *Millennium Kabir* collection. He does include a list of *Bijak* songs also found in the other old collections, but this list is in fact quite incomplete. It is also worth noting that the *Bijak* songs (*pad*s), like those of the *Kabir Granthavali* and the *Adi Granth*, have almost no overlap with the apparently more recent Kabir songs (*bhajan*s). This whole question needs further analysis.

Hess's book inevitably contains a few minor factual errors. She wrongly claims (121) that Shyamsundar Das edited "the 1928 *Kabir Granthavali* based on a single Rajasthani manuscript, which he thought was written in 1504." In fact Das used two manuscripts, the second of which had a colophon dated in 1634 CE. Again, Hess claims (352) that a song of the gospel singer Blind Willie Johnson, one that I compared to Kabir songs, says that God is not in the pulpit. In fact Johnson claims that God is not found *only* in the pulpit, but is also found everywhere including "all over the floor." In a remark

about a discussion I wrote about the relation of Advaita Vedanta to Kabir, Hess says (41) that she is "doubtful about his comparison of Kabir's *nirgun* bhakti to Shankara's Advaita Vedanta philosophy." This is taken somewhat out of context. It is less *my* comparison than a comparison sometimes made by modern, educated Kabir panthis. The use of the Brahman concept as an argument for social equality is not only sometimes used by Kabir panthis, it also appears in the words of a few of Shankara's (non-Kabir panthi) opponents in Shankara hagiographies. Hess is certainly correct, however, when she notes that Kabir bases his arguments for human equality mostly on the common flesh of all human bodies and not on their supra-physical identity in Brahman.

To recap, Hess's *Bodies of Song*, should become an instant classic. It is written in an innovative and entertaining way and not only wrestles with serious questions about orality, authenticity, and the interplay of the spiritual and the political, but also offers many beautiful translations of the lyrics of many of Kabir's songs.

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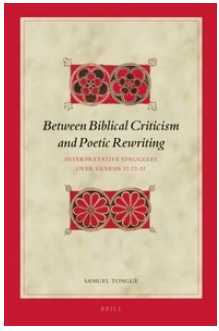
Between Biblical Criticism and Poetic Rewriting: Interpretative Struggles Over Genesis 32:22–32, by Samuel Tongue



Biblical Interpretation 129 | Leiden: Brill, 2014 | xii + 292 pages | ISBN: 978-9-004-27040-4 (hardcover) €115.00; ISBN: 978-9-004-27115-9 (e-book) €115.00

Tongue opens with the statement, "[t]his work is haunted by religion." But what is religion? A quote from Timothy Beal takes this further: is it "a kind of *binding* (from the Latin, *religare*) or "a *process of reading again*… (*relegere*)." Tongue follows this with "I argue that biblical interpretation proceeds by culturally constructed and critically legitimized retellings"(1). Tongue then sets out to make a strong case for including and critically legitimizing poetic retellings or rewritings as a vital means of interpretation. This entails not only engaging with the critical biblical tradition, but equally with the work of scholars in the wider literary and philosophical fields. To the "Big Three,"

writer, text, and reader, Tongue wishes to add a fourth: "the rewriter that produces more texts that participate in the meaning-making processes" (109). Interpretation by poetic retelling is to be understood as "paragesis," combining "exegetical, eisegetical and intergetical performances" (2). Tongue is well aware of the current biblical academic context, where the historical-critical and the literary, with all its sub-branches, are so often at odds with each other. He is arguing that paragetical poetic retellings go beyond this tension that "labels one imaginative production as art and performative artifice and another as critically realist and thus more epistemologically legitimate" (146).

There is, however, a background that needs to be explored. So in chapter one, Tongue traces the origin(s) of modern biblical interpretation to the intellectual movements of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, with the Enlightenment-Romantic divide being particularly significant, as was Robert Lowth's and Johann Gottfried Herder's moves to include the poetic in their interpretation. Authority and the demand for "authoritative" scholarship was key, leading to the tension between literary aesthetic and historical textual excavation. The question is raised, is there a religious Bible-as-Document and another Bible-as-Poetry and aesthetic object? Tongue's view: "I am not arguing for separate ideal Bibles that then exist in isolation from one another: ideal Bibles inform and create one another through their readers' different emphases and disciplinary identities" (36).

The title of chapter 2, "Biblical Studies and Postmodern Poetics; or, 'Gentlemanly' Readers Meet 'Uncouth Hydra Readers'" offers a sense of Tongue's lively and engaging style, which makes reading this work such a pleasure. It is not only a matter of careful detailed argument but engagement with a wide range of scholars brought into the conversation. Stephen Moore and Yvonne Sherwood are here with their *Critical Manifesto*.[1] Derrida, too, as Tongue draws upon his concept of the *pharmakon*, with its "anguish of writing" that "causes creative tensions in consigning sense and reference to biblical texts" (7). Michel de Certeau and Roland Boer are partners in discussing the concept of "realism" or the "fantasies of realism" (110), which Tongue sees lying behind much biblical criticism. This leads to the next sub-heading *Elephants in the Many Rooms of Historical Criticism* (113). Where does the

[1] Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), noting that this was read in its earlier *Biblical Interpretation* publications.

literary fit in? Can it be overlooked? If, on the one hand, much critical realist work "attempts to side step (or, more simply, ignore) postmodern difficulties around linguistic representation" (121), the historical and the literary, "always struggling to be autonomous from the authority of one another," are, in fact, "intimately bound together" (114). The chapter closes with the image of reader/text communication "always already run across with bindings and ligatures that hum like telegraph wires, murmuring with assent and dissent." Poetic retellings are a way of "trying to make some sense from the murmur and babble thrumming from different lines of communication" (119–20).

Chapter 3 then takes a detour to consider how writers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Philip Sidney, echoed in turn by later critics, understood poetry, before the move to "Disciplining the Imagination in Biblical Studies" (130). Imagination and the critic as a *bricoleur*! In biblical studies! We need reminding of the "noises (and silences)" that murmur and disrupt the flow of reading, "the angels that pass as we are trying to read or to hear the 'uncoded' messages" (155). It is a matter of the semiotic realities of language where "words as signifiers relate to one another" (156). Derrida, Serres, Ricoeur, and J. Hollis Miller join the "noisy" conversation as the knotty questions of language and literature are raised. How is meaning gained and what constitutes meaning?

Having set out the theoretical complexities in the first three chapters, Tongue now introduces the text announced in the book's subtitle (Gen 32:22–32), under the heading *Enacting Canonicity: Parageses in the Anatomy of Angels*. He gives warning of "thicken[ing]" the analysis, and indeed proceeds to do so. "We shall also continue to question the 'hospitality' of paragetical approaches to a Bible that is both host and guest of the literary and is, perhaps, hostile to being retold in certain ways" (168). But is it the Bible or the Academy that shows such hostility? Texts and scholars again jostle for space: George Aichele, John Barton, Philip Davies, and then Hosea (12:2-6). Calvin and Luther follow, and a stream of others, wrestling in turn with concepts of canon as well as the textual wrestler of Gen 32. The matter of "canon" and the nature of the Bible (which Tongue consistently capitalizes) seems inescapable. Tongue writes of the poet "renting a room" (187). What does this mean? For Tongue, "the Bible's open and shifting canonicity… invites retelling, a rearranging of the furniture, a new coat of colourful gloss, to remain hospitable to the present" (193). But might the retelling be "a parasitic guest"? And in this "intertextual hospitality" how are the "arrangements between guest and host (to) be constituted?" (194).

The way is now open for the poetic retellings. Here I encountered a difficulty: the poems were not included in full. The apposite lines were quoted but I needed to see them in context so had to resort to google and the local university library (one poem remained inaccessible). Perhaps a matter of copyright? Alden Nowlan, Yehuda Amichai, Jamie Wasserman, Michael Symmons Roberts, Michael Schmidt, and David Kinloch were the poets engaging with the wrestling Jacob, in this and the following chapter, each rewriting differently, seeing the characters differently, in different settings, to different effect. As Tongue writes, "the undecideability of what is happening at the Jabbok river is fundamental to its interpretative otherlives" (259). But is this biblical criticism? A quote from Miller, introduced for the second time, set me straight: "Criticism is the production of more threads to embroider the texture or textile already there." As Tongue writes, "the biblical critic and the poet choose to write… different filaments" (220–21). Both are biblical interpreters. The poets, in their rented rooms, are not only displaying the richness of the Genesis text, both in what it displays and what it does not, but highlighting the complexities. How to understand Jacob's wound, with its matter of "Reading 'Below the Belt' in the Critical Wrestle" as the subheading words it. And the nature of the wrestler? If divine, how is divinity to be understood? David Kinloch plays on the question: "Tryin tae get the shot. In focus like.… Hit the button. Jeezus! Naw! It wasny him. But somewun, something."[2] "Focalization on the spectacle of the struggle" (243) leads to the matter of the "male gaze." Is this a sight/site of male power or male vulnerability? Male? While Nowlan's wrestler is an angel with "sturdy calves, moist heavy armpits.… She wore a cobra like a girdle."[3]

Chapter 5 ends with the challenge: "Might a turn to the 'space of literature' offer more nuance to the work currently being done in 'Reception History,' recasting the traditional modes of biblical criticism as part of the cultural history of a given biblical text rather than the final word on the subject?" (260) While many reception studies do include references to poetic retellings, these are usually set within the more traditional critical genre rather than providing its body. The Conclusion both summarises and adds. To choose one final quote: "the paragesis, with its roots in the literary even as it feeds from the work produced in biblical criticism, keeps a foot in the door that allows for other aesthetic-ethical readings to enter" (265). Bibli-

[2] David Kinloch, "Jacob and the Angel," *Un Tour d'Ecosse* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001).
[3] Alden Nowlan, "The Anatomy of Angels," *Under the Ice* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961).

cal afterlives in music, film, art and popular culture are increasingly being explored. Poetic paragesis adds a further enrichment. We surely need all of these.

A review cannot do justice to the richness of the argument with its many facets, as it provokes and excites with possibility. Tongue's own poetic language is a bonus.

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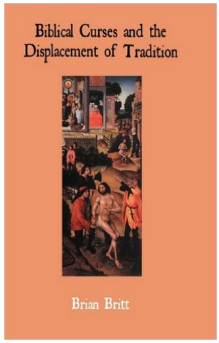
Biblical Curses and the Displacement of Tradition, by Brian Britt



Bible in the Modern World 34 | Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011 | x + 309 pages | ISBN: 978-1-907-53411-9 (hardcover) £70.00

Virginia Tech professor Brian Britt presents this far-reaching study on biblical curses and their reception history. Britt's introduction clearly sets out his goals for the book, especially the importance of distinguishing between the general power of curses in the ancient world and the general profanity of curses in early modern Europe and beyond. From the beginning, Britt provides his readers with the ambiguity and complexity of defining *curses*:

> The first [tension], of course, is whether and to what degree a curse i[s] efficacious. Is it a wish, a promise, or is the curse in itself the performance of actual harm? Sorting this out requires attention to the rhetorical patterns of the curse in their literary and cultural contexts. A second tension of curses concerns agency: who pronounces the curse, who (or what) carries it out, and how are the two related? Third, it is not always clear whether a curse is conditional or irrevocable. Certain oaths and curses appear to bind the swearer to certain actions; others appear unconditional, bringing harm no matter what one does. No system of classification based on rhetoric or semantics alone resolves these basic tensions. (3)

Britt elucidates that these ambiguities emerge from the cultural conditionality of curses—that is, from the dependence of curses upon their believability by the involved parties. This conditional potency is a foundational concept for Britt's larger argument on biblical curses. Equally as important is Britt's emphasis on *Biblical Curses* as a cultural study, since—as he notes—the mention of curses is far more prominent than the actual performance of curses throughout our literary sources. As an essential point of contact, *Biblical Curses* studies both the "power of speech" as well as the "power of the power of speech" in the potentiality/mention of curses. Britt expands upon James Scott's groundbreaking work on domination and hidden transcripts in order to suggest that curses often come from the politically disinherited, as Britt convincingly presents throughout this book.

Alongside these core definitions and nuanced presuppositions for his study, Britt also vigorously critiques post-Enlightenment convictions concerning a sacred/secular dichotomy. He meticulously traces the dynamics of cursing in the modern era through the works of Kant, Nietzsche, MacIntyre, Freud, Foucault, and Benjamin. Chief among his critiques at this point is the supposed sharp divide between the primitive "religious" epoch and the scientific, rational "secular" epoch. Instead of perpetuating this historically problematic and uncritical division, Britt suggests that we use Freud's concept of "displacement" in order to describe "manifest shifts and hidden continuities from one set of texts and discourses [such as 'religion'] to others [such as 'secular' law, commerce, and science], but unlike secularization, which sees 'religion' simplistically, displacement recognizes the complexities of tradition" (16). As is evident from the book's title, this concept of displacement is essential to Britt's analysis of biblical curses in Western thought. Britt persuasively argues that curses have not simply been relegated to a primitive and religious past, but are still relevant for modern discourse concerning the relationship between speech and power.

In the first section of *Biblical Curses*, Britt focuses primarily on the mention of curses in the Hebrew Bible and their social-historical contexts. He begins by, again, emphasizing the ambiguity of cursing even within scripture, since three words (אלה, קלל, ארר) have typically been translated as "curse." Just as was mentioned in the introduction, most of the references to curses involve actually the *mention* of curses rather than the actual *performance*, revealing to Britt's readers that the mere mention of the power of speech can be potentially efficacious (although it is difficult to tell when curses in the Hebrew Bible are actually efficacious). Britt's caution concerning the defini-

tion and the usefulness of curses in the Hebrew Bible is much needed—he is careful not to assume that the mention of curses means that their consequences occurred, nor that the Israelite scribes had a systematic conception of curses. Britt also questions the source of power for these ancient curses. Must one always invoke a god/God? As he wrestles with in a later chapter, how would Job's self-curse fit into such invocations, since Job seemingly challenges divine sovereignty and perhaps indirectly curses God?

In his dealing with covenant curses, Britt avoids the uncritical assumption of Christian progression over primitive Judaism (cf. Wellhausen, Weber, Berger) that still assume a post-Enlightenment rationalism within covenant theology—nor does Britt yield to the concept of "eternal recurrence" that claims rituals break one free of history in order to participate in sacred time (cf. Eliade, Levenson). Instead, Britt utilizes James Scott's "hidden transcripts" and John Austin's "speech acts" for the purpose of interpreting the effectiveness of curses and revitalization of covenant. As an example, Britt examines Exod 12–13 and notes that the cutting of animals in sacrifice is (perhaps ironically) reversed as a curse, such that the cutting will happen those involved in the covenant if they fail to uphold their part. Through this approach, Britt urges readers of the Hebrew Bible to appreciate the ritual aspects of covenant as much as (if not more than) the legal aspects of covenant. This imperative is much needed, since the typical "legal" approach to covenant often assumes early modern or modern conceptions of legality that simply do not fit into an Israelite context.

Britt deals directly with the role of ethnicity in Israelite curses through examination of Gen 9 and Josh 9. In the case of Genesis and Joshua, he finds that Israelite identity is apophatic, thereby distinguishing itself from the surrounding Canaanites and Gibeonites through curses—such a curse gives an etiological explanation and a retrojected backstory for the Levantine rivalries. Following Scott, Britt notes that the curses seem to be "weapons of the weak" and are given in an ad hoc (not ritualized) manner. In addition to emphasizing identity boundaries, Britt also reveals that the consequences of the curse upon the Gibeonites are effeminate, as they are threatened with the role of water-carrier and hewer of food. These Torah curses utilize ethnic and gendered language as part of the spontaneous (not ritualized) Israelite cursing. Most importantly in this section, Britt argues that "ethnicity" is neither universal nor self-evident—rather, ancient ethnicity appears to concern cultural-religious differences and the reification of such differences in collective-social memory. This critique urges readers to reexamine the use of

curses in identity formation as well as often-uncritical perceptions of ancient ethnicity.

The first section concludes with a fascinating examination of Job 3 and Jer 20 due to their uses of self-cursing. Britt exhaustively details the parallels between Job 3 and other Near Eastern texts concerning "cursing the day" and the role of divinities in such curses, as well as examining the poetic structure of Job 3 through the work of Adele Berlin and James Kugel. The most intriguing discovery concerning Job is the apparent paradox of his self-cursing: Job creatively asserts his selfhood and his own power in order to curse himself, yet his curse is wishing his own absence and powerlessness. Britt gives a powerful description of this self-contradiction and its nearly-postmodern implications:

> Job's curse is doubly paradoxical: by defying expectations of a pious individual in cursing the day of his birth, he performs a radical kind of self-assertion through an explicit wish for self-annihilation. But as a fictional being, Job can neither assert himself nor wish for his own non-existence. In order for the words of Job 3 to have meaning or power, the reader must suspend disbelief and imagine they have meaning or power. A figure of gossamer inscribed in a text, Job is nevertheless a figure rich with emotional expression and subjective reflection. (97)

Job's (meta-)speech act reveals the complexity of such self-cursing and the amount of knowledge concerning self-cursing that modern readers might still tease out after Britt's compelling examination of Job 3. To touch upon reception history, Britt presents how this self-curse finds its way into post-biblical laments among the Saint Job guild of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as well as the late antique *Testament of Job*. As Britt notes, Job became a figure of music and poetry, perhaps due to those arts' self-expressive possibilities.

The second section of *Biblical Curses* examines early modern expressions of cursing and the ideological "displacements" that occurred in the post-Enlightenment era. As a starting point, Britt meticulously critiques the traditional viewpoint of Enlightenment accounts that place early modern Europe in a "period of secularization." As a contrast, Britt distinguishes secularization (the process of removing sectors of society from religious authority) from secularism (a tangible decline in religion)—as he notes, the Bible is still taken

seriously in the seventeenth century, although it was not a primary factor in public discourse anymore. Following Bruce Lincoln, Britt suggests that religion does not diminish during this time period, but rather takes on new forms, as secular institutions still made use of religious symbols or rituals. In this time period, Britt sees the curse as being displaced into the realm of "profanity"—still retaining its religious context to an extent, yet while the potency of such curses declined. Britt helps his readers distinguish between the ancient and early modern contexts through the changing perception of speech and power. Through the writings of Hobbes, Locke, and Milton, Britt discovers that Enlightenment rationalization separates speech from action, thereby weakening the aforementioned "power of the power of speech" in biblical curses. Other figures like Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, directly question the effectiveness of curses as a worthless breach of manners and instead suggest the benefits of blessing. When cursing was used in the early modern era, Britt notes that it became a "hallmark of masculinity" for its challenge to institutionalization, much like the Reformation critique of the Catholic Church (146). As the first chapter of this section, Britt's most important contributions include the critique of secular society's effects upon the displacement and continuation of curses, as well as the growing conception of individuality that accompanied this evolving culture of cursing.

The second section also deals with ballads of the early modern era, primarily by Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth. Britt notes how Romantic writing displaced theology as well as displacing the people from the elite. In this context, Britt suggests that cursing became less of a supernatural power and more of a marker of socioeconomic success—as makes sense due to the rationalization of the Enlightenment era. Rustic language was usurped by elite classes, as well as the ability and effectiveness of cursing. Britt's contribution at this point reveals how the "words of the weak" utilized through the power of cursing is displaced to higher classes, yet cursing is still identified with those who are deemed "weak."

Britt also examines cursing in the writings of Nietzsche and Freud as a conclusion to his modern analysis of cursing's "displacement." While sifting through biblical allusion and cursing in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Genealogy of Morals*, and *The Antichrist*, Britt finds that Nietzsche views the Israelite God as an über-speech act, whose existence would act as "revenge" against the stronger opponents of Israel. Also, Britt's reading of Nietzsche reveals the necessity of disrupting tradition and dogma—rather than simply "breaking the tablets" and starting religion over, Nietzsche suggests that we disrupt our

search for canon. In Britt's reading of this claim from *Zarathustra*, paired with Nietzsche's negative portrayal of Christianity in *The Antichrist*, he suggests that Christianity (and religious language in general) has become a latent tool for Nietzsche—one that he cannot avoid even in his attempts at disruption. Although Nietzsche believes that Christianity now relies on curses in its "weakness," religious symbolism and ritual has been displaced and transformed within Nietzsche's own method of discourse. Similarly with Freud, Britt critiques his inability to recognize that anti-religious bias makes him blind to religious dimensions of psychological disorders (cf. "Rat Man" in *Case Studies*; *Interpretation of Dreams*). Consistently with the rest of his book, Britt reminds his reader that "displacement" tears down the grand narratives of progress and/or decline that both Nietzsche and Freud often assumed in their studies. Britt's complication of these boundaries, as well as the modern boundaries between secular and religious, should compel his readers to reconsider the guised impact of religious symbolism and thought in the early modern era.

Finally, section 3 concerns the contemporary usage of curses, especially in relation to fiction, erasure, and hate speech. Britt begins this section by discussing curses in American fiction (e.g. Zora Neale Hurston's "Sweat" and Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation"), within which the authors explain seemingly natural events with supernatural causes as well as debate the efficacy of speech. While examining curses and speech in "Sweat," Britt finds that literature seems to take on a life of its own, so that literature should be feared and the "magic of literature" is questioned by the apotropaic literary criticism. "Revelation" similarly uses religious symbolism in O'Connor's depiction of divinely motivated, conditional curses. In both narratives, Britt notes that cursing is displaced from early modern "blasphemy" to "cussing," perhaps due to the lack of God in the narratives.

Britt then moves on to examine the curse category of "erasure" through the texts of Derrida and Exod 17. Similarly to the paradox of self-affirmation and self-effacement in Job 3, erasure relies upon the presence of a word before it can be erased—negation and affirmation are intertwined. The paradox, in Britt's reading, becomes even more complex when one recognized that the command of erasure (cf. Exod 17) is *written down*. How does one forget what is written down and read aloud often? Perhaps Britt's most important interpretation in this section is that the ability to "erase" a name or "write" a name in the book is part of public/collective memory for early readers-hearers of Exodus, such that remembrance becomes a communal act. Britt gives an

example of this communal paradox of erasure in the Festival of Purim, where the Amalekite Haman's name was yelled and yet was drowned out with the shouting of other names—erasure thereby brings out remembrance and forgottenness. Britt's examination of this second paradoxical use of cursing and speech should again encourage readers to dig deeper into the complexities of the power of speech for communal destruction.

Britt's final chapter of section 3 concerns the growing questions of hate speech and political (re)action to such speech in the twenty-first century. Most importantly, Britt notes that opponents of hate speech advocate for a definition of hate speech that recognizes the *power of words*—power that the Enlightenment tried to detach from action (cf. Hobbes). Britt convincingly urges modern readers to join him in questioning the ever-present secular/sacred divide, especially in discussions of hate speech and political action that would be benefited by his concept of "displacement." Expanding upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Britt claims that the power of speech is related to social structures, yet speech is ambiguous per se—speech can be oppressive or subversive depending on their contexts. Britt gives the example of Salman Rushdie's *fatwa*, a form of speech that held power because traditional interpretations of Islam give credence to its power. Again, Britt reminds his readers that curses (and many other forms of speech) rely upon both parties recognizing the efficacy of the speech and the consequences thereof. Since secular society often discredits the "power of words" and rather sees words as a vehicle of communication and meaning, Western society fails to see the "religious" aspects of the supposed "secular" fight against hate speech. In Britt's own words, "the remedy doesn't fit the rule" (269). Western culture generally understands obscenity and its religious overtones and has thereby established obscenity laws—yet, the same cultures fail to view curses/cursing with religious implications and enforce cursing laws. Britt points to the radical Israeli group Pulsa Denura and the Westboro Baptist Church as examples of modern extreme groups who use curses (either performatively or through mere mention). In both cases, Britt makes clear that curses can be a political weapon because secular laws fail to take the efficacy of their claims (and curses) seriously—secular societies, from Britt's perspective, need to learn how to deal with speech in so-called "religious" contexts.

Overall, *Biblical Curses and the Displacement of Tradition* provides readers with a powerful study that attempts to disrupt the early modern secular/sacred divide with Britt's concept of "displacement." This book should encourage scholars and readers to reexamine these Enlightenment-era bina-

ries and instead look for the evolution and afterlives of biblical concepts such as cursing. Britt urges us toward future analyses of the paradoxical speech acts involved in Job 3 and biblical erasure, as well as reconsideration of the modern activism for abolishment of hate speech.

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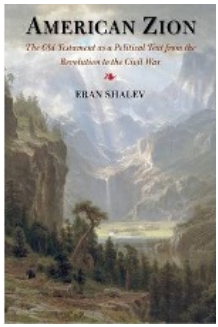
American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War, by Eran Shalev



New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013 | 256 pages | ISBN: 978-0-300-20590-9 (hardcover) $28.00

Eran Shalev's *American Zion* is a fascinating, well-documented, and well-argued book on the use of the Old Testament as a political text in the foundation and development of American national and political identity from the American Revolution to the Civil War. Throughout, Shalev, a senior lecturer in the History Department of Haifa University, provides readers with insightful description and analysis of the polyvalent ways that antebellum Americans received and deployed a variety narratives found in the Hebrew Bible. In doing so, Shalev demonstrates, as he puts it, the significance of the "Hebrew Bible, and particularly the role of biblical Israel, in the formation of an American national and political culture from the Revolution to the Civil War" (2).

While Shalev is by no means the first author to tackle the subject of the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the formation of American national identity, his approach, along with a focus that moves beyond the Exodus narrative to examine the use of other texts within the Hebrew Bible makes this work a useful addition to literature on the subject. In addition, Shalev's approach and treatment of the subject matter—that is, his analysis of the relationship between the uses and interpretations of texts within a given context—makes this work a useful model for how to undertake a sophisticated reception history of biblical texts, making it potentially valuable for non-specialists as well. I will have more to say on this below.

The book consists of an introduction, five substantive chapters, and a brief conclusion. In the introduction, Shalev lays out his key arguments, his use of terms, and where this book fits within, and differs from, the subject-specific literature. In particular he argues that Americans' frequent recourse to the Hebrew Bible was at times not only based on identification *with*, but also *as*, the Israelite political community. For readers who may be uncomfortable with the idea that describing the use of the Hebrew Bible as a "political text" might inadvertently naturalize the oft-critiqued commonsense notion that "religion" and "politics" are inherently discrete and identifiable categories, Shalev quickly quells this, by clearly outlining his use of the terms. For him, the use of the Hebrew Bible as a "political text" is quickly defined by its use in antebellum America as a "text about national politics" (1). This explanation receives a finer edge shortly thereafter, when Shalev writes that invocation of Old Testament texts alongside "the identification of the United States as a God-chosen Israel, provided a language to conciliate a modern republican experiment with the desire for biblical sanction; it could thus help alleviate anxieties related to the limits of human authority and legitimize the unprecedented American federal and republican endeavors" (2). Thus, Shalev's approach to analyzing religion or religious discourse—one to which I am quite sympathetic—is to consider the invocation of the Bible, or themes within it, as authorizing strategies, whereby novel human endeavors are given a more timeless sensibility through their rhetorical attachment to unseen providence. Throughout the rest of the chapters, various events and time periods are used to illuminate the utility of this approach, and its role in the formation of early American identity.

In chapter 1, "'The Jewish Cincinnattus': Biblical Republicanism in the Age of the American Revolution" Shalev provides a sustained analysis of the ways that Hebrew texts were invoked in the service of emphasizing the political doctrine of classical republicanism in the revolutionary era. While acknowledging the role that the Exodus narrative played in the American Revolution's political imagination (and again, its use as an authorizing strategy to invoke divine sanction to the revolutionaries' aims), he moves beyond this narrative to examine the use of other Hebrew texts in the service of outlining what he argues are consistent themes in classical republicanism: "corruption versus stern virtue, [and] self-aggrandizement versus sacrifice and self-effacement" (21). Among the highlights of the chapter is Shalev's analysis of the way the themes from diverse Hebraic sources such as the Book of Esther, Judges, and others, were combined with a civic humanist imag-

ination that began the formation and evolution of an American republican worldview that was heavily influenced by Old Testament scripture.

Chapter 2, "The United Tribes, or States of Israel" shifts to the post-Revolutionary period. Following on from America's Declaration of Independence and the authoring of the American Constitution, Shalev analyses the way that, once again, biblical tropes and identities were collapsed in time and space, and imagined as analogues to their contemporary American counterparts. Thus, he shows how pre-Civil War Americans articulated and constructed their political and national consciousness through the Old Testament, giving themselves a history where one did not necessarily exist. In this chapter we see how a number of clergymen, politically conscious Americans, and other statesmen drew on the Old Testament to "make sense of, justify, and reconcile the experimental constitutional arrangements of the young United States and the hallowed political models introduced through the history of what they often called the 'Jewish republic'" (51). Overall, the chapter provides a clear outline of how the Old Testament was used in early years after the American Revolution to alleviate the anxieties related to human authority by clothing them in the authority of scripture.

Chapter 3 shifts the book's focus toward a brief and lesser-known moment in early American biblical imagination. Subtitled "Pseudobiblicism, the Early Republic, and the Cultural Origins of the Book of Mormon" this chapter examines the previously unfamiliar style of American writing that peaked from approximately 1770–1840, and sought to emulate "the style of antiquity," through mimicry of the King James Bible, which Shalev calls "pseudobiblicism." This style of writing, according to Shalev, was "just as strange and foreign" to Anglophones of the time as it is to twenty-first century English-speakers today (85), making the popularity of this convention even more curious. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates that it was not frequently used in conventionally religious idioms, but rather by politically active authors and commentators, due to its linguistic similarity to another culturally authoritative text (the Bible), "as a means to establish their claims for truth, as well as their authority and legitimacy in public discourse" (85). Throughout the chapter, Shalev convincingly argues that extensive use of pseudobiblicism "demonstrates not merely the extent to which American culture was biblically oriented, but that that Biblicism was profoundly focused on the Old Testament" and Americans' "eagerness to understand themselves as latter-day Israelites" (101). Beyond describing this convention and its various uses, the chapter also advances the argument that this form of pseudobiblicism,

and the common practice of perceiving American history in biblical terms and in language that mirrored the King James Bible, provided the necessary backdrop for the popular reception of the Book of Mormon among some segments of the population.

The following chapter, "Tribes Lost and Found: Israelites in Nineteenth-Century America," provides the most explicit example of some Americans' more literal identification as Israel. Beginning with a discussion of a group of self-proclaimed "modern Israelites" that emerged around 1800, Shalev documents the ways those adhering to biological conceptions of their relationship with the ancient Israelites "leapt over typology and metaphor to discover actual Israelites, or their descendants, walking in their midst" (118). Another focus of the chapter is a discussion of Elias Boudinot's *A Star in the West*, published in 1816, which Shalev argues further transformed the American biblical imagination by reviving discussions about the possibility that "Indians" (native Americans) were of Israelite descent. Throughout the chapter, further interspersing discussions of a variety of works and modes of discourse that focused on the "Israelite-Indian theory" over the first half of the nineteenth century are used to demonstrate how this theory not only flourished, but, as with the focus of previous chapters, played a role in shaping American intellectual discourse, imagined history, and national identity.

The final chapter focuses on another turning point in Americans' invocation of the Old Testament and, more specifically, its decline in public political discourse. One of the arguments that underlies previous chapters is that one of the reasons the Old Testament was used so frequently to frame political and historical events is due to that text's preoccupation with worldly politics and social organization. This chapter, however, focuses on a period of time where the New Testament began to gain a more predominant role in public political discourse, as a result of evangelical revivals and the Second Great Awakening. As a result of this shift, Shalev argues that "This revamped emphasis on Jesus would transform the economy of American Biblicism and political imagination," ending the "golden age of the Hebrew Bible in American public life" not through processes of secularization but rather through that text being overshadowed by "New Testament–centered evangelical religiosity" (151–52). In addition to evangelical revivals, the New Testament and the figure of Jesus became predominant during this period due to emerging debates over slavery. Shalev shows how, after 1830, Jesus became a primary figure in the slavery debate with those in favor of the institution, as well as those who sought to have it abolished, invoking Jesus as a champion

of their cause. By examining these competing uses of Jesus, Shalev not only sheds light on the ways that Jesus was invoked for competing aims in this particular context, he also demonstrates more broadly the fact that Jesus, like the uses of the Old Testament in previous chapters, is ultimately devoid of any inherent "meaning" and can thus be co-opted for a variety of social and political causes.

A further highlight of the chapter is the clear documentation of the way abolitionists, in contrast to their predecessors who sought to show the parallels between the United States and Ancient Israel, worked hard to differentiate the two nations, due to the presence and sanctioning of slavery found in parts of the Old Testament. Such an observation brings to mind what Bruce Lincoln, in *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (1989), referred to as "affinity and estrangement" which he suggests are important discursive instruments that can either unite or divide a society. In this case, where an affinity with Ancient Israel had in the past played an enormous part of manufacturing a sense of shared American identity, from the vantage point of abolitionists, a sense of estrangement from Ancient Israel as a society that sanctioned slavery was invoked in order to provide a new model of what American society or identity ought to be. *American Zion* contains much more than I can possibly outline here, both in its historical content, and in its observations. While its variety of examples has its strengths, it also has its drawbacks. The wide-ranging discussion of examples in each chapter can at times lead the reader to wonder where it is all headed, and on occasion I felt as though a sustained engagement along with a bit of endurance was required to get through each of the chapters. This is not a criticism of the book as "too complicated" or a suggestion that it ought to have been made more simple. However, I do think that slightly clearer introductions to each chapter, outlining more explicitly the primary arguments that each sought to advance would help readers navigate some of the twists and turns by giving them a point of reference to which they could return.

Despite these minor issues, which may after all not be problematic for other readers, *American Zion* has many more strengths. For scholars of religion, reception history, identity studies, and similar fields, this book has much to recommend it. Shalev's close attention to the role that discourse played in the ongoing formation of (an unstable) American identity and the use of biblical texts and religious rhetoric to authorize and manufacture a sense of stability, and introduce divine providence to political contexts that were often new and novel, is, as I alluded to above, a useful model for anyone

interested in these issues, whether in an American context or not. Additionally, by closely examining the diverse ways the Old Testament was used as a political text in antebellum America, this book demonstrates the virtually unlimited ways that culturally authoritative texts (in this case the Bible) can be used to condemn or condone any number of social and political issues, and thus the futility of scholarly attempts to discern a text's singular "meaning." At the same time it is also demonstrative of the way that invoking a specific text as though it had inherent or stable meaning can lend a sense of continuity and "tradition" to the social and political issues one wants to endorse.

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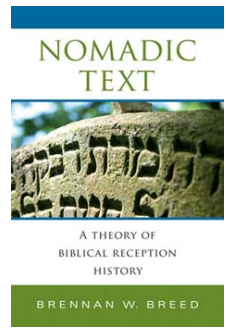
Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History, by Brennan W. Breed



Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014 | xii + 299 pages | ISBN: 978-0-253-01252-4 (hardcover) $60.00

Brennan Breed's *Nomadic Text* begins with what at first blush seems to be a simple question: where is the line of demarcation between the composition and reception of a text to be located? He notes that the consensus amongst reception historians is to divide the textual changes happening through the process of composition of the text (analysed by source and redaction criticism) from those changes which derive from the reception of the text (e.g., scribal modifications, translations, and the acceptance of different textual archetypes). For Breed, traditional "biblical studies… presupposes a clear distinction between the text's original meaning in its original context and its later meanings in later contexts" (3). Breed suggests that the "original text" and "original context" of the bible are both modern scholarly constructions, neither of which actually existed. In his words, "the biblical literature is itself a changing process. It was built up over a lengthy span of time and continued to develop and transform until well after any supposedly 'original' period. In the form of translations, critical editions, and innovative readings, it continues to change still" (12).

The argument progresses in two distinct movements. First, a theoretical section adroitly analyzes concepts of "original text," "original context," and "authorial intention" in light of current theories of biblical composition. This section brings the consensus position dividing a text from its reception into question. Breed points out several significant weaknesses in that consensus, and postulates a resulting theoretically appropriate way forward which requires that the "biblical text" be understood as a process, not an event; a topological identity, not a definitive shape; and as containing several virtual meanings at the same time, one (or more) of which are actualized in each context of specific reading. Second, Breed exemplifies his theory of the nomadic nature of the biblical text through a discussion of Job 19:25–27 ("For I know that my redeemer lives… ").

The theoretical section of *Nomadic Text* takes place in the first five chapters of the book. Chapter 1 analyzes the idea of "original text," specifically considering the time at which various textual critics explain that a text achieves its original formation. The consensus, as Breed sees it, is that "at one point in time, there was a text—either an original text, an autograph, a pristine copy, an archetype, a text that was considered authoritative, a final form of the text or merely a relatively more original version—that stood at the end of a process of composition and simultaneously at the beginning of a process of copying" (50). Previous to this point in time, changes to the text are a part of the process of its composition, but after this point, any alterations become corruptions. Breed argues that giving preference to one form of the text as "original" is a modern distinction, which does not adequately reflect the pluriformity inherent to the manuscript tradition. So in chapter 2, Breed lays out an alternative approach to textual criticism, which starts from the presupposition that there was never an "original text" of the Bible, but only particular forms of the text, which were read in particular circumstances. He argues for what he terms "new textual criticism," concerned not with getting back to the original text, but with analyzing and describing "the various representations of the changing biblical text" (55).

Chapter 3 is an analysis of the notion of "original context" and "authorial intent." Breed's basic question is this: since "modern criticism has shown decisively that biblical texts are composed of many sources, traditions, and redactions" (75), which author or context can defensibly be called original? As the chapter unfolds, Breed considers the contexts of semantics, genre, and history and argues that none provide any justification for the separation of "original" from "reception." Therefore, Breed presents an alternative under-

standing of context in chapter 4. His argument is that the very act of writing text creates a durable product intended to be meaningful in a different context from its composition. Further, he suggests that any description of historical or original context is a necessarily incomplete creation of modern scholars. Contexts, according to Breed, "must be determined by the individuals and groups living within them just as they must be (re)determined by the scholars who study them" (100). This chapter also reconsiders the idea of authorial intention. His argument is that "authors are not in full control of what they write" (108), and so notions of "authorial intent" fail.

In the final theoretical section, in chapter 5, Breed lays out his own proposal for how biblical scholars ought to understand the biblical text in all its forms. Following Gilles Deleuze, who described a text as containing both virtual and actual readings, Breed suggests that

> a text can also be thought of as a virtual multiplicity. The differential relations between lexemes, sentences, and paragraphs, for example, creates a potential field of reading that can be actualized in divergent ways. These differential relations within the text must be set in play with the system of culture within which one reads the text, including the semantic, generic, and historical sets of relations that determine the context of reading. Together, these differential relations comprise the powers of a text. (122)

Breed anticipates the problem of losing the text itself and, borrowing a term from mathematics, proposes that we think of the identity of the individual biblical texts topologically (127). "Instead of looking for a close resemblance of form, topology pays attention to the general coherence of the structure" (130). A bit later, Breed applies topology to biblical studies saying, "We can use topological thinking to break away from Platonic theories of reading and translating. Instead of asking whether a commentator has provided the correct meaning of the text or whether a translator has given the right translation, one could ask a more topological question, namely, how one might bend, stretch, and fold this text in order to read it differently without destroying its form" (130). Recalling Breed's criticism of textual criticism from earlier in the book, he is arguing that each manuscript and each reading of the biblical text is a different mutation of the biblical text, but so long as it stretches the text and does not break it, it still is obviously Bible. And so,

after much theoretical analysis, Breed proposes his theory of nomadic text. As he contextualizes it, the reception historian ought to "demonstrate the diversity of capacities, organize them according to the immanent potentialities actualized by various individuals and communities over time, and rewrite our understanding of the biblical text" (141).

In chapters 6 and 7, Breed puts his theory of the nomadic text into practice—explaining and organizing the various capacities of Job 19:25–27. He spends some time discussing the composition of the book of Job, and its literary contexts, after which he breaks the text in to "semantic nodes" of justice, survival, and presence. These nodes are essentially textual cues which lead to divergent understandings of the meaning of the text itself.

At least two criticisms of this practical section are necessary. First, Breed spends some time discussing the way in which modern critical editions are a part of the process of the reception of the biblical text early in his work. There, he seems to be arguing that one should consider the meaning of individual manuscripts rather than an arbitrary "original" produced by modern scholars. In light of that criticism, it is surprising that Breed bases his reading of the text from Job on critical editions. Second, whereas Breed has previously argued that text in translation functioned as authoritative for many communities, his lengthy discussion of the translational changes made by the "translator of OG Job" seems peculiar. The same method is undertaken when he discusses the Peshitta, which is unfortunately presented in Latin transliteration. In both of these cases, the discussion of the Vorlage seems out of step with his earlier trenchant criticism of the viability of the traditional ideas of textual criticism. In this section, Breed is speaking about the MT, the Peshitta, and the OG almost as authoritative "original texts," in ways that very much mirror the views he criticized earlier in his book.

In final analysis, I find this book to be intensely provocative. The arguments are bold, well-researched, and compelling. Of particular interest is Breed's observation that "biblical texts remain open to change even now" (22), which underpins his categorization of modern critical editions and translations as a part of the reception history of the biblical text. It is obvious that modern critical editions did not exist in antiquity, but Breed is right to observe that this conditions the way in which the Bible is read and becomes meaningful just as much as any ancient community's decision to read a particular text does. The way that the modern expression of the "original text" has changed or developed specifically in the aftermath of the discovery of the Qumran manuscript horde is worth study in its own right. Also, Breed's

proposal that scribal and translational changes are simply changes and not corruptions has significant impact. The fact is that many versions of the biblical text existed simultaneously, and were used meaningfully by different communities. Releasing these individual texts from the requirements of conforming to or diverging from an original, however it is conceived, enables these individual manuscripts to be studied differently, not in terms of their text type, or translational fidelity, but in terms of the way they uniquely communicate meaning. The practical section (chapters 6 and 7), describing the various meanings of Job 19:25–27, seems slightly less useful than the theoretical section, in part because, unless I have very much misunderstood Breed's proposal for understanding the biblical text as nomadic, it does not appear that Breed follows his own method absolutely. He certainly focuses on the capabilities of the text, but in so doing, seems to return to evaluative language in explaining some of the differences existing between different translations of the text.

The simple question with which this project began—where is the point of division between text and reception?—has triggered a nearly wholescale revision of the task of biblical scholars. In Breed's own words,

> the time is ripe to reconceive the task of the biblical scholar. Though we should not ignore the putatively original contexts or the earliest recoverable forms of the text—surely they are just as important as any other contexts or forms—we must realize that any one determination of a text, context, or meaning is a limited and impoverished viewpoint on the given objectile. A single determination of a text reveals merely a fraction of that text's contour. (206)

His conclusion is that the dividing line between text and reception "runs through the middle of every text" (206), and so the task before us becomes one of describing the various ways in which the biblical text has been determined.

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Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity, by Chris L. De Wet

Oakland: University of California Press, 2015 | xiii + 329 pages | ISBN: 978-0-520-28621-4 (hardcover) $95.00 | ISBN 978-0-520-96155-5 (e-book) $95.00

Doulology, the author's name for the dynamics of the discourse on slavery, is the primary concern of this outstanding study by Chris De Wet, Associate Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies at the University of South Africa. De Wet focuses his book on the doulology of John Chrysostom (*ca.* 349–407), the early Church father best known for his discourses against Judaism (or against Judaizers).

De Wet phrases the main objectives of his enterprise as follows:

> (1) to account for how ancient slavery is "put into discourse" in the context of everyday life and is spoken about, how it is enunciated and what it says (or is made to say), (2) to determine who does the speaking (and who compels the slave body to speak), (3) to discover which institutions prompted individuals like Chrysostom to speak about slavery, who stores, distributes, and utilizes the things that were said, and most importantly, how the pervasive technologies of power, the discursive "power tools" behind various statements in this discourse led to the formation of various Christian identities. (4)

De Wet emphasizes throughout the embodied experience of the slave. He acknowledges his indebtedness to the work of Michel Foucault and Jennifer Glancy, among others.

The first of seven chapters introduces the concept of doulology, which the author affirms to be a term he coined. He tells readers that "the discourse of slavery should be understood as a system of statements, signs, ideas, and practices discursively associated not only with a framework of labour regulation and the possession of human bodies as fungible property, but perhaps more importantly, one that shaped the very essence of late ancient subjectivity and relationships" (4).

"Divine Bondage: Slavery Between Metaphor and Theology" is the title of chapter 2, which focuses on how Chrysostom followed Stoic philosophy and Pauline theology in interiorizing and metaphorizing slavery. Slavery of the flesh was not as important as slavery to sin. Slavery of the flesh was temporary and the result of sin, but what really counted is the spiritual freedom that Christ brought. For De Wet, "the metaphorization and interiorization of slavery suffocated any possible seeds of abolitionist thought in antiquity" (81).

Chapter 3, titled "Little Churches: The Pastoralization of the Household and its Slaves," explores the ideology of slavery at the household level. De Wet finds that slavery rhetoric and practices permeated the households of late antiquity. Women were viewed as a sort of slave to the *pater familias*, even if one crucial distinction is her ability to join bodily with him. At the same time, wives were given authority to surveil slaves and some even conducted their own scriptural study groups. Chrysostom's advocacy of minimizing the number of slaves should not be viewed as part of any conscious trajectory toward abolitionism, but rather "a form of wealth renunciation" (111).

In chapter 4, which centers on "The Didactics of Kyriarchy: Slavery, Education, and the Formation of Masculinity," the author tackles the issues of how the system of slavery was reproduced through pedagogy, which was itself often considered to be menial work. De Wet discusses the paradoxes and other tensions that arose from the attempt to develop a strong masculine master, and the use of slaves (e.g., as wet nurses) to raise and educate the children destined to be masters.

"Whips and Scriptures: On the Discipline and Punishment of Slaves," is the title of chapter 5. According to De Wet "Chrysostom had a very explicit and Christianized program of reform for slaves centering on the teaching of virtue—a process I will call aretagogy" (171). Teaching virtue is actually a means of regulating slaves. Obedience is a virtue that should be based on both love and fear of the master. Punishment, even if it had some boundaries, could be harsh, especially because it intended to correct many of a slave's expected moral flaws (e.g., stubbornness, resistance, tendency to flee). Minimizing horrific punishment became a trend in Christianity. But such minimization could lead to justifying the maintenance of slavery by claiming that slavery was not as violent as it could be under non-Christian slave masters.

Sexuality is the theme of chapter 6 ("Exploitation, Regulation, and Restructuring: Managing Slave Sexuality"). For Chrysostom, the seat of lust

was not in the genitalia but in the seat of reason or in free will (*proairesis*). Such degenitalization of lust had implications for the violent acts that Chrysostom seems to tolerate against slave bodies. Insofar as eunuchism and eunuchs were concerned, De Wet argues that "Chrysostom was less concerned about the forced castration of slaves than he was about the eunuch as a sign of decadence" (270). By emphasizing the importance of spiritual castration, Chrysostom showed "a disturbing indifference to perhaps the most extreme and inhumane violence perpetrated against human bodies" (270).

In his concluding chapter, De Wet remarks that "the problem of slavery never became one of the great theological controversies of late antiquity, nor did it receive the attention that many other theological topics did" (271). Chrysostom's "homilies exhibit very little empathy toward slaves" (272).

De Wet's book is highly refreshing and a great contribution to the study of Chrysostom. It is refreshing because De Wet studiously avoids following the apologetic tendencies that one encounters in many works about Chrysostom. Some of these apologetic approaches may portray Chrysostom as signaling an advance toward abolitionism, while others attempt to mitigate some of the more disturbing aspects of his writings and ideas on slavery (and Judaism).

Instead, De Wet shows how some of the seeming mitigation of slavery by Chrysostom actually can work to maintain it. For example, the minimization of violent punishment of slaves can function as a justification to retaining slavery under the pretext that it is not so brutal as it could be. The idea that Christian owners should minimize the number of slaves arises from Chrysostom's renunciation of wealth and not because of some abolitionist trajectory or empathy for slaves. The whole idea that Christian slaves were considered "spiritual equals" with their master "probably carried very little weight" in ameliorating their situation (278).

I don't have any significant criticism of De Wet's work, but it may have been useful to have had a more extensive discussion of how slavery rhetoric permeates Chrysostom's view of the Jews. For example, in his *Adversus Judaeos* (5.9.1), Chrysostom states that his investigation focuses on "the Jews' present slavery and their bondage today" (following the translation of Paul W. Harkins, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians* [The Fathers of the Church 68; Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1979]).

A similar case can be made for more attention to Chrysostom's demonological rhetoric, which is ubiquitous in *Adversus Judaeos*, especially as Chrysostom claims that "the Jews themselves are demons" (ibid., 1.6.2)

In addition, De Wet's focus on the rhetoric of slavery may be complemented by an exploration of Chrysostom's use of therapeutic rhetoric, which is now the subject of a dissertation ("Paul's Therapy of the Soul: A New Approach to John Chrysostom and Anti-Judaism" [Boston University, 2015]) by Courtney Wilson VanVeller.

De Wet offers an important contribution because he shows how the implicit and explicit rhetoric of slavery in Chrysostom's writings reflected and maintained the practice of slavery in early Christianity.

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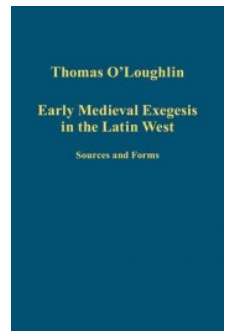
Early Medieval Exegesis in the Latin West: Sources and Forms, by Thomas O'Loughlin



Variorum Collected Studies Series | Farnham and Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2013 | xvi + 346 pages | ISBN: 978-1-40946-818-9 (hardback) $165.00

Thomas O'Loughlin is a master of teasing out large narratives from small details. His broad and deep knowledge of the Latin tradition of biblical exegesis allows him to move across centuries, regions, and diverse types of evidence with ease and creativity. He presents a vision of a tradition of exegetical practices in its variety and of the complex relations among its participants. His expertise in the Latin West begins in the early Christian centuries, finds its center in the early medieval period, and extends to later medieval and early modern authors. This volume treats readers to a collection of articles and book chapters from O'Loughlin's career that investigate exegetical communities and explore the notion of participating in an exegetical tradition.

All of the works in this volume have appeared in journals or edited volumes in the past. But several factors form a rationale for republishing these works as a single collection. First, most of the fifteen selections originally appeared in journals or volumes with limited circulation. Many of the selections come from three journals which are not widely available and do not appear in any online databases: *Milltown Studies, Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association*, and *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*. All but one of the re-

maining selections can be found in edited collections held only by the largest research libraries.

Second, the volume includes two indices. The first is a general index that indicates the names of the interpreters that O'Loughlin discusses. This facilitates cross references to major figures who appear repeatedly in the selections (Adomnán, Ambrose, Augustine, Eucherius of Lyons, Isidore of Seville, Jerome, Julian of Toledo). The second index notes all of the biblical passages that O'Loughlin discusses. Here his focus on select passages becomes evident (Genesis 1–2; John 5). These indices will make this book serviceable to those who wish to see if an author, topic, or passage receives attention in this diverse set of articles and chapters.

Finally, the volume groups the selections into three categories: part 1: Processing the Patristic Inheritance; part 2: Developing New Exegetical Strategies; and part 3: Exegesis as a Practice. The coherence of these groupings gives the volume its own character as a set of reflections on related themes. The final selection—the only one in a widely accessible journal—contains the greatest theoretical and methodological reflection in the volume, providing a sense of completion to the reader who reads this volume from back to front.

The first part—on the patristic inheritance—traces the interpretation of minute details in the biblical text to reveal broad trends in the history of interpretation. The firmament above (Gen 1:6–7), the age and death of Methuselah (Gen 5:21–27), the location of Adam's grave (cf. Gen 23:16–17), and the pericope of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53–8:11), serve as focal points. O'Loughlin helps us understand how these passages intersected the debate between faith and science, occasioned claims about the inerrancy of the biblical text, served as sources for different understandings of Christology and soteriology, and challenged major interpreters to treat passages which called into question their ethical norms. He concentrates on Latin authors from the fourth through sixth centuries here. But he gestures towards the reception of these figures in the Middle Ages. His ability to make sense of their logic allows for clear connections to modern issues of interpretation.

The second part turns to the early Middle Ages and examines different methods of communicating exegetical strategies. The first four articles focus on the handbooks or guides produced by individual writers from this time: Julian of Toledo's *Antikeimenon*, Adomnán's *De locis sanctis*, Eucherius of Lyons's *Formulae spiritalis intelligentiae*, and Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. The fifth and final selection investigates an illustration in the Book of Argmagh

as an example of complex exegesis. These articles form an impression of the types of intellectual activity occurring during the early Middle Ages. Although O'Loughlin distinguishes figures such as Augustine or Ambrose from the authors examined in this section, he demonstrates the error of simplistic interpretations of this period as a time of intellectual decline. These authors represent the riches of cultural history that are yet to be discovered and properly incorporated into historical narratives. This part probes deeper in one regard than the last. Only the works of some of these authors had enduring legacies, even if they had importance in their own time. O'Loughlin challenges us to see how patterns of exegesis became part of enduring traditions while others did not.

The final part of the book discusses the practices and tradition of exegesis in the Middle Ages. Here micro-studies of details in the biblical narrative open perspectives on the tradition. The rib of Adam (Gen 2:21–22) demonstrates how Aquinas worked within a tradition of exegesis dominated by the views of Augustine. The firmament above again serves as a focal point and allows for an examination of how Isidore of Seville drew on the intellectual heritage of late antiquity in writing his *De natura rerum*. Another selection investigates the general view of the Song of Songs as a source of theological reflection in the early Middle Ages before the distinctively Cistercian interpretation of this book. Two other selections expose early medieval interpretations of the gates of Hell and of numbers as sources of theological imagination to be appreciated for their creativity rather than judged on the basis of later interpretive approaches. The two previous parts exhibited the connection of biblical exegesis to the larger questions faced by ancient and medieval interpreters and to the means they used to communicate their interpretations. But this part provides the greatest sense of the development of an exegetical tradition with honored authorities, developed methodologies, and shared commitments.

The final selection in the volume is the most exploratory and conclusive for understanding the distinctive nature of early medieval exegesis. Here, O'Loughlin highlights early medieval exegetes' efforts to work within a tradition, exegetical authorities, social realities, commitment to meeting the needs of the church, self-understanding as intellectuals within the church, emphasis on collective excellence, and willingness to be anonymous in their activities. Some of his concluding words to this selection serve as a fitting summary of the volume as a whole:

> So we have a group who did not see themselves as individuals, but parts of a greater whole, and charged with two, seemingly enormous tasks. First, to take on board everything that came to them from the past as good listening disciples should; and second, to transmit it in the way that the pious teacher should. In the whole endeavor they saw Christ, in him they existed both as humans and scholars, from him they learned as disciples and like him they had to be teachers and in this he was both a model and warning. (313)

This article and the volume as a whole demonstrate well O'Loughlin's assertion that these anonymous authors from a maligned period of history developed foundational approaches to the biblical text and the world that would dominate until the early modern period.

In a preface to the volume, O'Loughlin writes that he still affirms the positions he held in these articles despite the passage of time. Yet he is careful to note that he would not "restate some the opinions now in the same terms" (ix). The selections in the collection date from 1992 to 2000. Although they have stood the test of time, they do not engage with methodological reflection on reception studies that has been characteristic of scholarship and led to the founding of this journal. Here one will find very little regarding methodological approaches. These would have amplified O'Loughlin's work and made comparisons with other traditions easier. His study of these works is foundational and a sure introduction to the biblical exegesis in this time period. Yet one wishes that more attention were granted to the theoretical frameworks that remain relevant for this topic.

This is an important collection of essays that will appeal to and serve the interests of various people. Researchers focused on modern reception studies will find the discussion of a concrete tradition illuminating for their work today. While O'Loughlin explores the notion of participating in a tradition from a particular vantage point, his approaches and findings bear implications for other settings. Scholars interested in the history of interpretation more broadly will also gain much from this volume. O'Loughlin not only investigates the tradition and its development, but he also shows how one can discover a tradition amidst the wide range of information that remains unpublished. Finally, he demonstrates how minute details can become significant for unlocking the secrets of communities of exegesis. This provides an excellent model for how one can do so with limited information from

the past. We will do well to consider how his approach may shed light on communal practices of exegesis in other times.

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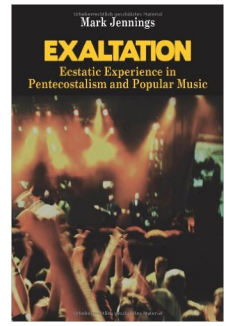
Exaltation: Ecstatic Experience in Pentecostalism and Popular Music, by Mark Jennings



Bern: Peter Lang, 2014 | 231 pages | ISBN: 978-3-0343-1348-3 (softcover) €68.60

In 2009, Angelica Mesiti won the Blake Prize for Religious Art with a silent, slow motion video of audience members at an Australian music festival titled *Rapture*. Mark Jennings is similarly interested in the parallels between religion, secular popular music, and festival culture in his work titled *Exaltation*. The study of religion and the study of popular music and culture seem to me to have developed a mutually beneficial relationship in recent years. Analysing ostensibly irreligious popular cultural content gives the study of religion secular credibility, and invoking religious parallels or making use of analytical concepts initially applied to religion gives the study of popular culture the moral seriousness it has sometimes looked for and lacked since the revolutionary pretentions of British cultural studies fell out of favour. The trick is to avoid falling into the trap Sean McCloud identified in this field, borrowing the term "parallelomania" from the biblical scholar Samuel Sandmel to describe how rather superficial analogies between religious and secular phenomenon lead to spurious analyses which—to paraphrase Hank Hill—do not make the study of religion better but only make the study of popular music worse.

Through extensive application of anthropological and sociological theory, as well theological and religious studies concepts invoked for their explanatory and descriptive power, the author avoids "parallelomania" and makes an important contribution, in particular, to the study of contemporary congregational music and contemporary Pentecostalism. Most significantly, the book offers an excellent overview of contemporary Pentecostal musicianship, which differs in significant respects from secular modern musicianship

while at the same time offering certain interesting parallels which are drawn out in the second half of the book on secular music festivals. The social scientific study of Pentecostal congregations is a growing field, as is the field of contemporary congregation music studies, but the focus has often been on the politics and spectacle of so-called megachurches where the full array of media technology can be deployed. The church in a rented hall, with its committed and efficient, but amateur and practically constrained musicians that the author studied are also a common form of contemporary Pentecostalism.

The book also raises several interesting methodological questions about how one studies issues of religion and spirituality within secular spaces with ostensibly secular subjects. In introducing the research, the author debates the fine line between "ethnography" and "participant observation," noting that his methodological approach tended towards the latter (19–25). He conducted participant observations at a Pentecostal church caled "Breakfree" (a pseudonym) and at a secular music festival, the West Coast Blues and Roots Festival, both in Western Australia. The author reflects upon the limits of his data, and there seems to me to be three particular concerns that one might reasonably raise with the data on which the author relies. However, since the author is relatively restrained in the conclusions he draws from his study (203–16), and although he is sometimes rather loose with his descriptive language—which in utilizing variations upon the language of ecstasy unintentionally overlaps at times with his more theoretical concepts—these concerns over the data are precisely that, and point to ongoing methodological discussions within studies into religion, culture and performance in secularizing societies.

Firstly, since we are dealing with festivals and rituals which are, to various degrees, set apart from everyday life—even if Pentecostal spiritual practice seeks to undermine such divisions—the question the author raises of long-term ethnography as opposed to more targeted observations and interviews is pertinent (19–25). In contrast to certain anthropological approaches that are content to examine musical performance as relatively isolated ritual, questions of the continuity of religious subjectivity and the social impact of personal religious experience have been vital questions in the sociology of religion—even if they appear methodologically old fashioned when faced with the axiomatically multifaceted and irreducibly individual nature of the late modern subject. In my own research, I have been struck by the ability of Pentecostals to transition between the sacred space and ecstatic experience of Sunday morning worship to more mundane experiences of Sunday lunch

or the Sunday afternoon barbeque in which less pious behaviour is on show. These are also concerns of the author, evident in his utilization of Ricoeur's work on mimesis, to explain the ongoing influence of worship music on the lives of Pentecostal musicians, as revealed by the stories they tell during interviews (70–71).

Secondly and more significantly, the datasets obtained from the church and from the music festival are quite different. In the first half of the book, where I feel the book's strength lies, the author draws upon interviews with musicians at "Breakfree" Pentecostal church. In the second half of the book, the author draws upon interviews with audience members at the secular music festivals he attended. He conducted observations of both events but heavily supplements this with interviews with quite different subjects aimed at quite different research questions. Pentecostal worship musicians are quite open about their desire to utilise music to "catalyse" religious experience (25) and such experiences are integral to Pentecostalism in general; seeking after ecstatic experience is a thoroughly documented (and critiqued) aspect of Pentecostal practice. The same assumptions cannot be made about secular popular music performances, and the second half of the book is concerned with the question of whether, and how, the West Coast Blues and Roots Festival can be understood in similar terms as Pentecostal worship music. Here, the author interviews festival attendees and makes selective use of published interviews with a small number of musicians who performed at the events he observed who speak about music in a recognizably spiritual and supernatural manner. Finally and relatedly, we are not told a great deal about how the author went about interviewing participants, and how he approached his research topic in interviews. This is somewhat problematic, since recent work has been done (by Abby Day, amongst others) on the methods through which one might be able to inquire into the beliefs of secular subjects without imposing a religious language upon the conversation, such as the author does when asking "do you think music can be a spiritual experience?" (170).

The book makes heavy use of ten oft-cited scholars to analyse the research data. The author's choice of theorists make sense insofar as he utilizes oft-cited authorities in the sociology of religion (Durkheim and Weber), of the study of festival and ritual (Bakhtin and Turner), and of religion sans religion (Tillich), amongst others, but one does get the impression that the author is working his way through scholars he feels he ought to have demonstrated his knowledge of while writing his PhD dissertation, rather than scholars whose work will draw the most out of his research data. Similarly, the desire to

employ the same scholars to examine both case studies makes for a pleasantly symmetrical table of contents but leads to some underwhelming analysis of the secular music festival. Here, the use of Weber and Durkheim (127–41) seems rather forced as the two are more useful when making sense of the way societies and institutions function. Indeed, the choice of deploying the same ten scholars, and more-or-less the same aspects of each of those scholars' work, to both case studies would seem to presuppose that they are proximate enough phenomena to justify such a move. By the time I reached the end of the end of the book, having read through the application of Weber, Schleiermacher, and others to a secular music festival, I was not so certain.

The use of Bakhtin's work on the carnival is more obviously relevant to the understanding of the West Coast Blues and Roots Festival (141–49), as Bakhtin is the obvious choice to work through when examining festivals, but the festival described by the author is not necessarily as "carnivalesque" as one might imagine. Much of the behaviour described is quite banal and usual when large crowds gather. This makes the use of aspects of Victor Turner's multifaceted work on ritual highly relevant (150–54), in particular his notion of "liminoid" spaces associated with optional leisure activities in modern societies. To my mind, though, Michel Maffesoli's unacknowledged notion of the neo-tribe, commonly cited in studies on popular music and youth culture since the late 1990s, would have most accurately explained the goings on at the West Coast Blues and Roots Festival. Neo-tribal theory has been applied to groups precisely like those attending music festivals who share spontaneous connections, rather than the deeper connections one finds in church congregations, and Maffesoli uses religious metaphors to explore continued desires for collective effervescence in late modernity.

This application of so many heavily-cited scholars of religion to a growing subfield in the study of religion is obviously to be welcomed. Because the book's transitions from theory to theory, and from theory to data, are so clearly sign-posted, I am certain that *Exaltation* will become a useful shortcut for students working on religion and popular music who are looking for a text that has already done the theoretical heavy lifting for them. Chapters 2 and 5 offer brief descriptions of the two case studies, and these descriptive chapters are then followed by two much longer chapters applying five theoretical approaches from theology and religion studies (Schleiermacher, Otto, Eliade, Tillich, Ricoeur) and then five theoretical approaches from the social sciences and social theory (Durkheim, Weber, Bakhtin, Turner, Foucault), such that each of these ten scholars ends up with approximately fifteen pages devoted

to the application of their theories to the experience of Pentecostal worship music and the experience of the secular popular music festival. Each section dealing with a particular theoretical approach is divided in half, moreover, with the first few pages introducing the key theoretical concept, and then the second few pages applying it to one or more examples from either the "Breakfree" Pentecostal church or the secular music festival.

Some readers will probably find the book too clearly signposted, and retaining too much of the regimentation of a PhD dissertation. The challenge, as one of my PhD supervisors put it to me in politely suggesting the re-write of a chapter, is "ticking all the boxes" without being "tick-boxy." This book does lean towards the "tick-boxy" but students studying religion and popular music will be grateful that the text is so accessible as a result. The book should also be welcomed by scholars of contemporary congregational music and Pentecostal musicianship. The first half of the book offers a very thorough analysis of the role of music in Pentecostal worship services, and the quite particular nature of Pentecostal musicianship which, as an influential form of creative self-expression at odds with many normative practices in secular culture, is certainly worthy of the sustained analysis that the author has offered.

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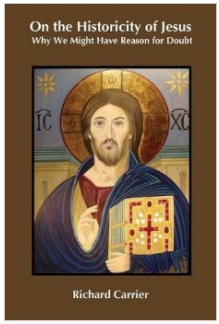
On The Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt, by Richard Carrier



Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014 | xiv + 696 pages | ISBN: 978-1-909-69735-5 (hardback) £60.00; ISBN: 978-1-909-69749-2 (softback) £25.00

In the mall in Newcastle there is a bookshop called *The Book Grocer*. I made one visit a while ago to shop for Christmas presents and found it the most bewildering place, in that I had not heard of *any* of the books in the shop, nor did they have anything of what I was after. It was like entering a parallel universe. Reading through this book has been a similar experience. I felt like I had stepped into some

inter-fundamentalist debate with strawmen popping up at every corner. And at the worst of times it felt like I had stepped into a Jesus Seminar, a seminar armed with a reversed agenda and TI-89 Titanium calculators:

$$\begin{aligned}[\text{Worst odds on } H] &= [\ 1/15\ ] \times [\ 3\ /\ 2500\ ] \\ &= 3\ /\ 37500 \\ &= 1/12500\ [\text{odds}] \\ &\approx 0.00008\ [\text{probability}] \\ &\approx 0.008\end{aligned}$$

> In other words, in my estimation the odds Jesus existed are less than 1 in 12,000. Which to a historian is for all practical purposes a probability of zero. For comparison, your lifetime probability of being struck by lightning is around 1 in 10,000. That Jesus existed is even less likely than that. Consequently, I am reasonably certain there was no historical Jesus. (600)

Halfway through writing this review (and cursing myself for suggesting it), I stumbled upon James McGrath's comprehensive and judicious review of the precursor, *Proving History: Bayes's Theorem and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2012/08/review-of-richard-c-carrier-proving-history.html). The reason why this review was a sight for really sore eyes was that while Carrier applies Bayle's Theorem in *On the Historicity of Jesus*, he recaps it in a single subsection (15–16) and otherwise refers to *Proving History* for further explanation. Now, having worked my way through 600-plus pages on the historicity of Jesus, you may forgive me for not jumping at the chance to read another 350 pages to figure out his basic methodology in the one I was actually reading.

On the Historicity of Jesus consists of twelve chapters. Chapter 1, "The Problem," gives us the full background of the development of Carrier's personal crusade, as well as the aim and description of the book. Chapters 2 ("The Hypothesis of History") and 3 ("The Hypothesis of Myth") set out his minimal theory of history and myth respectively. His minimalist historical theory (*h*) is based on the epistles and has the following three facts, which all have to be true for historicity of Jesus to be established:

> 1. An actual man at some point named Jesus acquired followers in life who continued as an identifiable movement after his death.

> 2. This is the same Jesus who was claimed by some of his followers to have been executed by the Jewish or Roman authorities.
> 3. This is the same Jesus some of whose followers soon began worshiping as a living god (or demigod). (34)

His minimalist theory of myth (*-h*) consists of the following five propositions:

> 1. At the origin of Christianity, Jesus Christ was thought to be a celestial deity much like any other.
> 2. Like many other celestial deities, this Jesus "communicated" with his subjects only through dreams, visions and other forms of divine inspiration (such as prophecy, past and present).
> 3. Like some other celestial deities, this Jesus was originally believed to have endured an ordeal of incarnation, death, burial and resurrection in a supernatural realm.
> 4. As for many other celestial deities, an allegorical story of this same Jesus was then composed and told within the sacred community, which placed him on earth, in history, as a divine man, with an earthly family, companions, and enemies, complete with deeds and sayings, and an earthly depiction of his ordeals.
> 5. Subsequent communities of worshipers believed (or at least taught) that this invented sacred story was real (and either not allegorical or only "additionally" allegorical). (53)

Chapters 4 and 5 assess the applicable background knowledge which tests the probability for these hypotheses. Chapter 4 looks at the established history of Christianity and its origins, while chapter 5 looks at everything else. This is necessary, because "even the most erudite scholars in the field are unaware of most of it" (15). The first twenty-two elements in chapter 4 are broken down into "Elements of Christian Origin" (1–10), which set forth the nature of Judaism at the rise of Christianity; "Elements of Christian Religion" (11–18), which include the relation to mystic religions, scripture, Jewish ritual, and the early Christians as schizophrenics suffering from hallucinations; and "Elements of Christian Development" (19–22), which discusses Paul as well as the lack of sources from 64 to 95 CE. Chapter 5 contains elements twenty-three to forty-eight, which concern (23–29) the political context including the Roman Empire; the Jerusalem Temple and Melanesian Cargo

Cults; religious and philosophical contexts (30–43) such as resurrection cults (Inanna, Adonis and Osiris), popular philosophy (Cynicism, Stoicism etc), Jewish sectarianism, popular cosmologies etc.; and literary context (44–48), especially hero narratives (Socrates, Aesop and Romulus) which culminates in the Rank-Raglan hero type (229), which happily shows that only mythical people fit this type (fifteen people who score more than half the twenty-two features) and "*every single one of them was regarded as a historical person and placed in history in narratives written about them*" (232, emphasis in original).

Carrier concludes this survey of the basic elements with the point that "in my experience, a great deal of what has been surveyed up to this point remains unknown even to many experts in the study of Jesus" (234). Given that he does cite selected scholars in his footnotes (he seems to have a particular fondness for James Crossley) to support the elements, one wonders who he is writing against, or who these ignorant experts and most erudite scholars are.

Just as a quick example, in the section on political context no mention is made of Richard Horsley's work (although he does get a lashing elsewhere) or Warren Carter's. Whether you agree with their work or not, it surely is extraordinary that a survey of the scholarship on the political context of early Christianity does not include their contributions to the field.

Chapter 6, "The Prior Probability," establishes the prior probability that Jesus was historical as 33%. This is based on Jesus's assignment to the Rank-Raglan reference class, which, as Carrier assures his readers, does not "presuppose that Jesus began as a Rank-Raglan hero." Even if strictly correct, the methodology is tenuous. In addition, the numbers and the statistics seem like a diversion or an illusionary tactic which intentionally confuse and obfuscate and attempt to give personal conviction the sheen of scientific language instead of presenting a sound argument. As an example, from chapter 8, after pointing out the discrepancy between the dating of Jesus's life and death to the time of Alexander Jannaeus in Epiphaneus (281–82) and that of the canonical gospels, Carrier ventures the opinion that the best explanation for this dual dating is that Jesus didn't exist:

> As a general rule, it must *surely* be more common for a mythical man to be placed in different historical periods than for this to happen to a historical man, for whom there would only be one core tradition originating from his own time, well known to his worshipers and tradents. I have no data on the relative

> frequency of this phenomenon (How many people do we know to have been set in different historical periods? How many of them never existed to begin with? What would those numbers then be in a hypothetical infinite repetition of history?) But it must *surely* beg all credulity to believe that this happens to historical persons exactly as often as non-historical ones—even for the simple reason that it is so much easier to do this to non-historical persons. As I noted before, if there is no actual set of historical events anchoring that person to reality, then they can easily be inserted into history wherever any given mythographer wants. This must *surely* be harder to do for a man already solidly linked to his actual historical context, and widely known to be so among all who worship him. *In mathematical terms, this would mean the ratio must be greater than 2 to 1—in other words, being placed in different historical periods must happen to mythical persons twice as often as it happens to historical persons. In fact, more than twice, surely. But I am committed to erring as far against the mythicist hypothesis as is reasonably possible, so I will assume this ratio to be 2 to 1.* (288, emphasis added)

This assumption (hey presto: "statistic") then takes on a life of its own in the prodigious footnote 18.

The following chapters, "Primary Sources" (7) and "Extrabiblical Evidence" (8) reiterate with tiresome pomposity debates over dating and authorship of the New Testament texts and extra-biblical evidence. On the basis of the extra-biblical evidence, Carrier unsurprisingly concludes that the evidence is against a historical Jesus.

Chapters 9–11 discuss in more detail the New Testament evidence. Chapter 9 looks at Acts, chapter 10 at the gospels, and chapter 11 at the epistles. Carrier's analysis of the gospels reaches the equally unsurprising conclusion that the gospels are mythological and have no base in history. Thus his analysis of Mark reveals that Mark "deliberately arranged his narrative to symbolically represent Jesus as the Passover lamb" (425); that the five Great Discourses in Matthew "are obviously meant to replace the five books of the Pentateuch" (468); and that Luke rewrote the story to communicate how Christian values differ from mainstream Roman values (482). He reserves his most scathing critique for the gospel of John, whose authors are totally obsessed (thus Carrier) with proof and evidence, inventing an eyewitness and

thus showing itself to be "the most ruthlessly propagandistic, and thus the most thoroughly untrustworthy, of all the canonical Gospels" (490).

In his conclusion, Carrier trumpets that for Jesus studies this means that "all later tales of a historical Jesus and his family need to be seen as legendary, mythical and propagandistic inventions, and studied for their literary and rhetorical purpose and not for their specific historical content" (608). Such a statement reveals Carrier's ignorance of the field of New Testament studies and early Christianity and we should once again ask to whom he is preaching. While I will concede that the historical Jesus haunts biblical scholarship of all shapes and sizes, Carrier's response seems to come out of some parallel universe. Maths aside, nothing in the book shocked me, but seemed quite rudimentary first year New Testament stuff. What did surprise me was Carrier's claims to indifference as to the historicity of Jesus and his professed lack of vested interest in the matter, which in my opinion rests somewhat uneasily with his confessed atheism and flies in the face of the fundamentalist drive of the book to disprove the historical Jesus. In sum, it is not that I disagree with some or all of his representations of the material; it is more the lack of insight into New Testament scholarship, the mathematics which replace careful argumentation, and above all, the evangelical commitment to truth that I find so tremendously off-putting.

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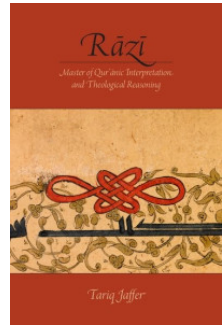
Rāzī: Master of Qur'ānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning, by Tariq Jaffer



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The insights of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), a well-known interpreter of the Qur'ān and Islamic theologian, are specifically *re*-examined by Tariq Jaffer. The major part of his introduction presents a literature review of Rāzī studies, with an analysis of how scholars have viewed Rāzī's interpretive and *kalāmī* methods. Rāzī's influence on different groups of scholars in various parts of the world is documented; for instance, upon Rāzī's death, his works were extensively used by different institutions and centres until the

twentieth century. Both Sunni and Shīʿī exegetical and theological schools were significantly influenced by his accounts.

Numerous scholars have attempted to find answers to serious questions in dealing with Rāzī's rational way of thinking in his major works. Also, many like al-Baydāwī (d. *ca.* 1280), al-Nisābūrī (d. *ca.* 1330) as well as contemporary commentators including al-Nawawī al-Jawī (d. 1897) in *Tafsīr Marāh labīd* and so on, have referred to Rāzī's arguments. This book shows that knowledge of the early period of Islam and familiarity with Aristotelian-Avicennian philosophy, Peripatetic thought, Muʿtazilism and Ashʿarism, and the Sunni-Shīʿī *kalamī* schools are all tools with which every Rāzī studies scholar needs to be equipped.

For many Muslim scholars (mainly traditionalists like Ibn Taymiyya (d. *ca.* 1328), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's exegesis of the Qur'ān contains everything except *tafsīr*. It reminds me of twentieth-century scholars who compared Tantāwī Jawharī's (d. 1940) *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* with Rāzī's commentary on the Qur'ān. They also considered that Tantāwī's so-called *scientific* exegesis contains everything but *tafsīr*. Yet Jaffer's book intends to reject underestimations of Rāzī's commentary and affirm that comprehending Rāzī's work(s) requires time and continuous effort to allow scholars to assess different aspects of his profound intellectual arguments.

This book is divided into five chapters starting with "Forging a new methodology," in which the author identifies that Rāzī not only endeavoured to remove traces of *taqlīd* in theology but also to establish a non-*taqlīdī* path in philosophical as well as *tafsīrī* works. In this volume, *taqlīd* is defined as "assenting to the beliefs of intellectual authorities—parents, teachers, or colleagues—without first examining the epistemic value of such beliefs for oneself" (17). For assessing "the *taqlīd* eradication process in philosophy," Rāzī's *al-Mabāhith al-mashriqiyya* ("Oriental studies") is considered. It is expressed that Rāzī inherited al-Ghazālī's (d. 1111) anti-*taqlīd* arguments. Ghazālī accused prominent Muslim polymaths such as Fārābī and Avicenna of following Aristotelian philosophical foundations. Jaffer deemed that Rāzī "formulates objections and counter-objections to the default positions of the philosophical canon as a means of resolving the doubts and difficulties that had arisen within it. By adopting this methodology, he avoids accepting methods and ideas simply because they are associated with the illustrious names of established authorities—especially Aristotle, Fārābī and Avicenna" (25). Later on, the reader's attention is drawn to Rāzī's exegetical methods and arguments applied in *Mafātīh al-ghayb* (the keys of the unseen), a *tafsīr*

written to introduce a new Qur'anic perspective. The main feature of Rāzī's *tafsīr* is his use of different disciplines, including ancient and Islamic knowledge such as logic, physics, metaphysics, law, *hadīth*, and mysticism in order to explain all Qur'anic verses. His theological-philosophical concerns are evident in his interpretation; for Rāzī, the Qur'ān can systematize both ancient and Islamic knowledge, according to Jaffer (32). In fact, it can be said that using different branches of classical knowledge was Rāzī's innovation in deterring his contemporaries and (perhaps) future generations from *taqlīd* and referring to unverified matters.

Following Ignác Goldziher, Jaffer also moves against the majority of scholarly works which indicate that Rāzī's methodology resembles that of the Ash'arites. Jaffer's voice is fresh when he, unlike many, contends that relying on human reasoning as a source of religious knowledge is the foundation of Rāzī's ideological approaches. In the second chapter, it seems the author attempts to introduce Rāzī as a moderate theologian who inherited knowledge from both Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. In other words, Rāzī gave "priority to reason over scripture" but viewed both the Qur'ān and Hadīth as reliable sources of knowledge. This book suggests that theological topics such as nature and God's vision as well as Muhammad's infallibility (*'isma*) were among the crucial points in which Rāzī opposed the Mu'tazilites. By contrast, in the *ta'wīl* subject for example, Rāzī followed the Mu'tazilites' methodology in standing against Hanbalite opponents.

According to Jaffer, both Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites are indebted to Rāzī's robust innovation in his commentary on the Qur'ān. Rāzī's main innovation was in naturalizing philosophical arguments and adopting them in his *tafsīr*, something not previously practiced by his predecessors, namely Ghazālī (a so-called Ash'arī thinker) and Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) (a Mu'tazilī exegete of the Qur'ān).

Some passages of chapter 3, "Reconciling reason and transmitted knowledge," indicate Rāzī's emphasis on the accuracy of prophetic truthfulness through miracles and the differences between miracles and saintly marvels. Rāzī believed that, unlike a saintly marvel, a miracle is a unique act accompanied by a claim of prophecy: "the claimant must announce and describe the miracle that God will perform" (107). Chapter 4 addresses the Light Verse from the Qur'ān: "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth… " (Q 24:35). Jaffer's innovation is again illustrated when he goes through (a) Avicenna's philosophical exegesis of the above verse by contrasting Rāzī's opinions in *Sharh al-Ishārāt* ("The Commentary upon the Ishārāt) and *Mafātīh*

al-ghayb, and (b) Ghazālī's exegetical accounts compared with Rāzī's *Lawāmi' al-bayyināt* ("Sparkles of the clear proofs") and *Mafātīh al-ghayb*.

The final chapter of this book addresses Rāzī's exegetical methods as well as thoughts on the concepts of the soul and vital spirit as mentioned in the Qur'ān. It demonstrates how Rāzī combined the "Aristotelian-Avicennian and Ghazālīan notions regarding the soul's perfection in his Qur'anic commentary."

This monograph is unquestionably able to fill a gap and it deserves to be translated into different Islamic languages (Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Malay) so as to allow it to be precisely examined and taught by Muslim theologians and Qur'anic studies scholars. Rāzī's resume (14) and list of works (215) are helpful as well. Comprehensiveness and innovation are the main features of Jaffer's book, which should capture the attention of enthusiastic scholars in respect of these theological and exegetical aspects of Islamic heritage.

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