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# Brexit Barrow

## Real-Time Receptions of the Bible during a Summer of Political Chaos

In the wake of the 2008 recession, the first mainstream challenges to the dominance of neoliberalism and its accompanying Bible in English political discourse have emerged in the 2010s. The referendum on EU membership brought to the fore grievances that had been building for decades, particularly in towns that have faced sharp industrial decline. One such town is Barrow-in-Furness. This article analyses interviews, discussions, and social media activity during the Referendum campaign and its aftermath in order to see what kinds of perceptions about the Bible and religion exist in Barrow and to compare them with assumptions about the Bible and religion in mainstream political discourse. There was minimal interest in the Bible and regular ridicule aimed at political claims of the Bible as the source of English or British values and identity. This partly coheres with some recent research on understandings of Christianity but it must also be understood in the context of the hatred towards political and economic authority in places like Barrow. Despite the minimal interest in the Bible and Christianity, their commonly constructed Other—Islam—was regularly seen as another source of threatening authority, a telling fear in a town with only 0.2% identifying as Muslim.

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Like much of northern England, Barrow-in-Furness[1] voted to Leave the European Union (EU). "The North" (as well as "the Midlands") has long been treated as something distinctly different from the centre of political, economic, and cultural power in London. Politicians and media figures may have come "from the North" or work "in the North" or talk to people "in the North," but in such cases the North is constructed in relation to, or in distinction from, the centre of power. A common refrain from "Remain" Labour politicians has been the need to convince people in the "traditional heartlands" of the North and the Midlands, as if these feral and formerly loyal voters just need to be properly managed and directed to vote the right way. Similarly, intrepid journalists on national television will visit places like Burnley[2] to discover why these strange folk behave and vote the way they do. Anyone who works in or around universities—northern or otherwise—will no doubt recall emotional academics and passive-aggressive official university pronouncements revealing their disbelief at what the rest of the population were thinking. Nevertheless, plenty of journalists and politicians from all parties, and even the occasional academic,[3] recognised in the lead-up to Brexit that there was a significant disconnect between the centres of political, economic and cultural power, and whatever is thought to be going on in working-class parts of the UK and universities north of the Watford Gap.

While presenting certain Barrovian voices from around the time of the Referendum, I will also be focusing on my specific interests in common constructions of the Bible and religion in contemporary political discourses. This is a development of approaches I pursued in my recent book on the role of the Bible in English political discourse since 1968.[4] There I looked at the ways in which the chaos of social upheaval and economic change can bring about shifts in, and explosions of, ideas and thinking which can have long-term impacts. I argued that the social upheavals of the 1960s and the economic shift from the post-war dominance of Keynesianism to the post-1970s dominance of neoliberalism brought about certain emphases and nuances in the ways in which the Bible is popularly understood, particularly in relation to dominant

[1] In terms of voting constituency, the area is "Barrow and Furness" and I will use this terminology accordingly.

[2] BBC Newsnight, "Burnley and Brexit: "We've done it!"" *YouTube* (June 24, 2016).

[3] Lisa McKenzie, "EU referendum: many don't care what happens next, they just wanted change," *Times Higher Education* (June 24, 2016).

[4] James G. Crossley, *Harnessing Chaos: The Bible in English Political Discourse since 1968* (updated edition; London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2016).

political ideas, and irrespective of whether such interpreters were committed believers or not. Thatcher's Neoliberal Bible, with its emphasis on "Britishness" or "Englishness," the private sector, and charitable giving over against welfarism, became the dominant template in mainstream political discourse, assisted by various credible cultural carriers of ideas, and pushed more socialist understandings of the Bible outside Parliament. Retaining Tony Blair's combination of economic liberalism and social liberalism, David Cameron provided the most intensified version of Thatcher's Bible yet seen. My approach incorporated a kind of narrative approach to history which, rather than making claims to be exhaustive, examined how seemingly different biblical interpreters (from mainstream politicians to popular musicians) could illuminate the dominant paradigm in their own idiosyncratic ways.

The present article asks what is happening next in the chaos of the 2010s and after the fall of Cameron. What makes this particular study different from my previous one is that the wider disillusionment with, and fragmentation of, mainstream politics and the mainstream challenges to neoliberalism that have emerged since the 2008 recession have also brought with it the first major alternative to Thatcher's Bible in mainstream politics, most significantly in the Corbyn movement. What happens next with the Bible in political discourses in a time of such political change will only be known with the benefit of hindsight but here we will see witnesses to whatever those historical developments might be, as well as some data for wider understandings of the Bible of the sort that is only slowly being developed in biblical studies.[5] Nevertheless, the issues brought to the fore by the Referendum seem to be symptomatic of significant socio-political changes and thus an opportunity to compare the views of mainstream politicians with an unusually engaged

[5] Ethnographic exceptions on uses of the Bible in the UK might include, for instance, Louise J. Lawrence, *The Word in Place: Reading the New Testament in Contemporary Contexts* (London: SPCK, 2009); Tiffany Webster, "'A Miner Knows Better Than Anybody You Have Little Power Over Mother Nature': Exploring Genesis 1:26–31 and the Concepts of Control and Power with South Derbyshire Coal Miners," *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 2 (2015): 145–174; David F. Ford, "Reading the Bible Outside the Church: A Case Study," PhD Thesis, University of Chester (2015), pp. 31–37 of which provides a helpful summary of some of the recent scholarly literature. But, as such specific studies and Ford's reference to various isolated examples suggest, there are masses of such ethnographic work that could now be carried out. I would also differentiate my own historically-inclined work in that I am trying to establish some immediate reactions to political changes while the more sociologically-inclined work of those listed above attempt to read the Bible in a more "controlled" environment. Needless to say, neither approach is inherently superior nor mutually exclusive of one another because the interests of each depends on the questions asked by the interpreter.

voting public in one such "northern town." Not only had a large percentage of northern voters contributed to a surprise result to leave the EU, but the following days and weeks saw a Prime Minister resign, the fall of leading political personalities, an ongoing civil war in the Labour Party, and a new Prime Minister. However, this was not just some irrelevant political theatre for Barrovians, because with the advent of the new Prime Minister came the renewal of Trident, the submarines which have been and now will be built in Barrow. All this provided a potentially important opportunity to interview Barrovians in a context of heightened political engagement, to see how political sentiments might relate to perceptions of the Bible and religion.

My goals in this respect are twofold: to analyse such data to see what kinds of perceptions about the Bible and religion might exist in Barrow and compare them with those dominant assumptions about the Bible and religion in mainstream political discourse. The sample size includes thirty face-to-face interviews and discussions carried out mostly in June and July 2016. In addition, in the same period, I examined and analysed numerous Facebook comments, discussion, and updates from Barrow circles, involving hundreds of participants. The material cited here has all been anonymised. Opinions taken from Facebook discussions and updates, while virtually all in the public domain, are paraphrased or quantified for reasons of anonymity. The gender split in participants was about 50:50 between those who identified as male or female (no other gendered identities were given) and the age range was about 18–80, with few patterns emerging in terms of gender or age. The sample is random at least in the sense that I did not target people who did or did not identify as "religious" and instead I wanted to see what sort of discourses about the Bible and religion emerge.[6] All participants had some connection

[6] One key feature of my approach which, I think, makes it different to analogous sociological approaches, is that my emphasis is on the discursive uses of "the Bible," "religion," and "Christianity," rather than what seems to me to be a dominant sociological and even historical approach of relatively strict, problematic, and essentializing classifications and measurements of "religion," "religious," "deeply religious," "very religious," "nominally religious," "belief," "secular," and so on, with accompanying traits suggested by the scholar. It is beyond the scope of this essay to provide a full critique, but the following works are among those crucial for putting the focus on discursive uses of "religion": Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: OUP, 2003); Russell T. McCutcheon, *Religion and the Domestication of Dissent: or, How to live in a less than perfect nation* (London & Oakville: Equinox, 2005); Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2000); Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Craig Martin,

with what might be deemed working-class life and/or the Shipyard, a near inevitability in a place like Barrow. Occupations (or not) past and present included, for instance, nurse, painter and decorator, domestic gas and heating engineer, offshore engineer, plumber, charity worker, retired, unable to work, youth worker, taxi driver, cleaner, receptionist, IT technician, pastry seller, merchandiser, and numerous former and present Shipyard employees (e.g., electrician, driller, fitter and turner, typist, secretary, chemist, quality control engineer).

The questions asked of all interviewees were centred on how people understand the Bible, religion, and English identity. The questions allowed a degree of freedom to air opinions on the Referendum result, how people voted, why they voted (or not), what they made of what has happened since the Referendum, and what their view of "Englishness" (often merged with "Britishness") might be. Ideas about nationalism are of particular significance because they turn up consistently in mainstream political discourse about the Bible and religion.[7] Moreover, as Ingrid Storm has shown with reference to the British Social Attitudes data from 2008, more than 23% made a connection between "British" and "Christian," particularly as a kind of ethnic marker, despite declining identification with Christianity and church attendance (indeed such connections seem less likely among regular churchgoers).[8] This may be connected with issues of immigration and ethnic diversity and a crucial flipside to this (and one also found commonly among politicians) is the identification of Islam or a "false" version of Islam as the problematic Other. With these factors in mind, I looked especially to discover assumptions about what interviewees and Facebook commenters considered "the Bible" and "religion" might be and, in the case of the interviewees, what they thought about David Cameron's claim on the eve of the 400th anniver-

*Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion and the Private Sphere* (London and Oakville: Equinox, 2010). Such scholarship is typically not present in sociologically-inclined literature. This is not to say that the relationship between individual identification and public presentations is not important, of course, but it would constitute another study. Especially relevant studies in this respect would include, e.g., Ingrid Storm,"'Christianity is not just about religion': Religious and National Identities in a Northern English town," *Secularism and Nonreligion* 2 (2013): 21–38, and Abby Day, *Believing in Belonging: Belief and Social Identity in the Modern World* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), which would also work in relation to the approaches I favour.

[7] Crossley, *Harnessing Chaos*.

[8] Ingrid Storm, "Ethnic Nominalism and Civic Religiosity: Christianity and National Identity in Britain," *The Sociological Review* 59, no. 4 (2011): 828–46.

sary of the King James Bible (and made elsewhere) that Britain is a Christian country. This speech (cited below) brought together all of Cameron's key assumptions about the Bible as a key source for British values. I will look at all these interconnected issues in turn before providing some analysis of Barrovian understandings of the Bible and religion.

Furness Peninsula, as seen from the top of Black Coombe, on the west Cumbrian coast. Photographer: James G. Crossley (and below)

## A Brief Recent History of Barrow-in-Furness

First, some history is needed of the town one journalist of the national newspaper, the *Telegraph*, wrote was "tucked away in a forgotten peninsula of Northern England."[9] Admittedly, plenty of people who live in the region have not forgotten where it is but some readers may share the implied *Telegraph* readers' forgetfulness.

Barrow is an industrial port town in the North West of England, once in the county of Lancashire (with which some still identify) until the boundary changes in 1974 when it became part of Cumbria. It is the sort of town that has become part of one narrative about the Referendum: the working-class northern towns voted to leave the European Union for a number of reasons, usually focusing around immigration, disconnection from political power and economic advantages, and employment issues. Indeed, the voting patterns were, like other northern towns, much higher than the 52:48 national split. Barrow was 60.6% (21,867 votes) in favour of Leave and 39.4% in favour of Remain (14,207 votes), with a turnout of 67.8%, a slightly higher turnout than the General Election for the Barrow and Furness constituency.[10] Like much of the narrative about "northern towns" in relation to

[9] Graham Ruddick, "Astute submarines keep Barrow and BAE Systems busy," *Telegraph* (August 31, 2011).

[10] "EU Referendum: Local Results (B)," *BBC News*; "Election 2015 Results: Barrow and Furness," *BBC News*.

the Referendum, the story of Barrow can be cast as one of industrial decline which gathered momentum under the neoliberal revolution led by Margaret Thatcher and carried on by Major, Blair, Brown, and Cameron, and which, at the time of writing, is currently being challenged by Jeremy Corbyn to much resistance from his own Parliamentary Labour Party. It is a town built on the iron and steel industry and immigration from, among other places, Ireland, Scotland, Manchester and Liverpool, and effectively grew from the mid-nineteenth century onward into a town with a population of just under 70,000, though the population is now in decline.[11] It would be shipbuilding that dominated the town throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, including the politically controversial Trident nuclear submarines. Until the past few years, it had a crane-dominated skyline along with Devonshire Dock Hall (DDH) where the submarines are housed and largely built amidst an array of grey, brown, and dirty beige. The DDH was opened by Thatcher in 1986 and nearby but long gone graffiti—with a nod to Bob Dylan—revealed its once popular nickname, "Maggie's Farm."

Left: the Barrovian skyline facing west, as seen from Bridgegate Avenue (the large yellowish building in the background towards the right is the DDH). Right: Buccleuch Dock, where some cranes remain.

But the locally famous yellow crane that dominated the skyline was dismantled in 2010 while the numbers employed by the Shipyard have also fallen. In the 1980s the shipyard employed around 14–15,000 but in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War, the numbers employed dropped sharply to the current figure closer to the 5,000 mark.[12] While Barrow may have

[11] Helen Nugent, "Census shows Barrow-in-Furness suffered steepest decline in population," *Guardian* (July 16, 2012).

[12] Russell Hotten, "600 more jobs to be axed at VSEL," *Independent* (March 1, 1995); Ruddick, "Astute submarines"; Graham Ruddick, "BAE Systems wins £328m submarine contract," *Telegraph* (May 22, 2012). In 2011, 6,570 or 21.0% worked in manufacturing

maintained some of its manufacturing industry (albeit reduced) compared with much of post-industrial Britain, it is worth noting comparative employment and benefit rates to give a general idea about issues facing Barrovians, such as Incapacity Benefits Claimants being higher than the national and regional levels.[13]


Left: "The Spirit of Barrow," Barrow town centre, a monument to the past unveiled in 2005 after a steep decline in employment at the Shipyard. Right: what remains of Arthur Street after its demolition in 2010.

In addition to shipbuilding, Barrow has had its occasional moments of cultural prominence and they are typically part of the various assumptions about it being isolated, miserable, poor or, more romantically, working class. Indeed, in 2008 Barrow made the national press for being named The Most Working Class Place in the UK based on the number of chip shops, workingmen's clubs, and bookmakers.[14] Other cultural moments include its fame as the end of the longest cul-de-sac in Britain, endless drug-related stories, having a bus depot being mentioned in an advert for its chewiness in compar-

(compared with 10.3% for the North West and 8.8% for England): "Area: Barrow-in-Furness (Local Authority): Industry, 2011," Office for National Statistics.

[13] According to the Office for National Statistics for 2012–13, the Economic Activity Rate (aged 16–64) was 70% (compared with 75.6% for the North West and 77.3% for England), the Employment Rate (aged 16–64) was 64.9% (compared with 69.2% for the North West and 71.1% for England), the Unemployment Rate (aged 16–64) was 8.8% (compared with 8.3% for the North West and 7.8% for England). For August 2010, Jobseeker's Allowance Claimants were 4% (the same as the regional and national percentages), while Incapacity Benefits Claimants were 11% (compared with 9% for the North West and 7% for England). "Barrow-in-Furness (Local Authority): Key Figures for Work Deprivation," Office for National Statistics.

[14] Kate Jackson, "Barrow-in-Furness: The working class capital of Britain," *Mirror* (January 28, 2012); Caroline Davies, "Barrow, capital of blue-collar Britain," *Guardian* (October 5, 2008).

ison to a popular confectionary,[15] the home of the alleged Lady in the Lake murderer who also happened to be a local schoolteacher, and the recipient of the undercover philanthropic Channel 4 programme, *Secret Millionaire*, which was controversial in its negative presentation of Barrow as all grinding poverty and dog turds.[16] To add to the legend, there was an outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in 2002 that made national news as did the claim that Barrow is the "least happy" place in the UK, according to a Personal Wellbeing survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics on behalf of David Cameron.[17] Rather than challenge the absurdity of such "measuring," a cover version of Pharrell's "Happy" was made by Barrovians to show how happy (some) people (apparently) are.[18]

Of course, counternarratives could be offered but, for now, we are dealing with a dominant narrative of decline, one which is taken up in the mainstream media and one which not all Barrovians would dispute. It is clear enough that it is yet another town which has been at the mercy of Thatcherite neoliberal economics which were continued in the New Labour era and which helps explain why towns like Barrow voted how they did, at least partly in protest at a political and economic elite in the South East. The voting intentions of Barrovians and those much publicised "working class" areas of Barrow would be familiar to viewers of Sheena Moore's documentary, "Why we voted leave: voices from northern England,"[19] as well as readers of John Harris's regular *Guardian* series, "Anywhere but Westminster," and Mike Carter's Orwell-esque Brexit report of his journey from Liverpool to London[20] full of urban decay, St George flags, anti-immigration rhetoric, pound shops, boarded up pubs, bookmakers, and Leave posters. Although there are more prosperous areas, Barrow too has its pound shops, boarded up pubs, plenty of bookmakers, and, of course, zero hours contracts. Barrow even had certain streets knocked down in 2010 (despite some opposition from residents) for "redevelopment" and yet there are still no replacement houses. Walking

[15] Zillastyledotcom, "Chewits Advert 1980s–2 of 4," *YouTube*.

[16] Murray Wardrop, "Secret Millionaire cash given back over Barrow-in-Furness smear," *Telegraph* (May 6, 2009).

[17] Chris Green, "Brits happier than they've been in years, claims ONS," *Independent* (September 24, 2014).

[18] Shield of Joy, "Locals, Town Mayor, and Hairy Biker Unite in Barrow Happy Dance," *YouTube* (Oct 2, 2014), which also gives five tips for "a more joyful you."

[19] Sheena Moore, "Why we voted leave: voices from northern England," *Guerrera Films*.

[20] Mike Carter, "I walked from Liverpool to London. Brexit was no surprise," *Guardian* (June 27, 2016).

close by through the Risedale area of Barrow a few days before the vote, there too were a number of sizeable "Leave" posters and signs and no "Remain" ones that I could see. Unsurprisingly, the post-industrial town clichés can indeed be found in Barrow.

But, like any town, Barrow also has its own peculiarities. While some might want to foreground Furness Abbey (see below) as part of their understanding of Barrow, I want to play the game of the standard media narrative to show that Barrow (and, no doubt, equally anywhere else) does not quite fit what they think about "the North." For a start, the idea of mass immigration in relation to (what is categorised as) "White British" does not apply to Barrow in the same way as it does other Brexit towns, with "White British" percentages remaining in the high 90s in the 2001 and 2011 censuses.[21] While Barrovians may or may not have strong views on national immigration, and while there has been some immigration from outside the UK, it can hardly be said to be a major feature of contemporary Barrovian demographics.

On the one hand, Barrow fits the idea of what is usually labelled a traditional "Labour town" where there appears to be increasing disjunction between its established working-class vote and the main party. We might consider what Paul Mason reported in 2015 just prior to the General Election which chimes with the sentiments I have heard:

> Labour has not [captured the zeitgeist of their heartlands well]. Having spent last week sitting in the clubs and workplaces of Blackpool, Preston and Barrow-in-Furness, I can see the situation is clearly [*sic*]: that even where they'll vote solidly for Labour, they'll do so without enthusiasm. Offered the chance to watch Paxman v Miliband, the members of one Barrow working men's club switched to the rugby league.[22]

[21] In the 2011 census, 97.1% identified as White in relation to English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British (compared with 87.1% for the North West, and about 79.8% for England), which is down from 99.2% in the 2001 census, reflecting a small shift (including immigration). The second highest category of identification was "Other White" (not including the other census classifications of White, Irish, Gypsy and Irish Traveller) at 0.9%, which probably includes most recent immigration, and so other census categorisations involving Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups, Asian/Asian British, Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, and "Other Ethnic Group" are, obviously, lower still. "Area: Barrow-in-Furness (Local Authority): Ethnic Group, 2011," Office for National Statistics; "Area: Barrow-in-Furness (Local Authority): Ethnic Group, 2001," Office for National Statistics.

[22] Paul Mason, "Three new tribes of voters will dominate this election," *Guardian* (March 29, 2015).

But, on the other hand, it is what remains of a manufacturing industry that makes Barrow different from plenty of stories about "northern towns" where industry has all but disappeared and this comes through in voting patterns. The Conservatives are the second main party (not that many will admit to voting for them) and have had some electoral success because of Trident submarines. The Conservatives held Barrow in the 1980s but lost in 1992 when it was clear that the infamous promises of a "job for life" were looking increasingly inaccurate in light of redundancies. Since then it has been Labour (John Woodcock is the current MP) but their majority has shrunk to only 795 votes in the 2015 General Election. As is standard with the "northern town" narrative, UKIP's vote has risen (by 9.8%) but in Barrow and Furness constituency they are placed third (behind Labour and Conservative) by some margin with 11.7% of the vote share (compared with 42.3% Labour and 40.5% Conservative), though it should be noted that this constituency contains rural areas and the nearby market town of Ulverston.[23] Even by the standard framing of the issues, then, Barrow already has its own significant differences which must be kept in mind in this study.

Left: the spire of St Aiden's Church, Newbarns, the top of which is a regular resting spot for seagulls. Right: "Our Lady of Furness," St Mary's Church, Hindpool.

## Christian Barrow?

Fairly recently, I had a conversation with someone from the local clergy who told me that Christianity in Barrow had been visibly declining for years. If by this we mean church buildings and attendance, then it is easy to find churches which now have different functions (e.g., dojo, nightclub, derelict, auction

[23] "Election 2015 Results."

hall) or which have been demolished, while the diocesan church attendance continues to decline in line with national trends.[24] This appears to reflect my own perceptions of religion growing up in Barrow, namely a place where there was general public indifference towards anything deemed "religious" and where questions about belief in God, the Bible or church attendance were (or so I thought) potentially embarrassing. When I left the Shipyard in 1993 to do "A" Levels in Sixteenth-Century History, English Literature and Religious Studies, I may have been doing subjects which I thought were anti-Shipyard but it was for good reason that I either mumbled over, or neglected to mention, "Religious Studies."

Churches in transition: left, St Luke's Street Church, no longer in use for church services; right, the site of two former Presbyterian church buildings on School Street, one now an auction house, the other demolished and now an accompanying private space.

However, it is possible that there is something that the decline of churches and my own experience perhaps misses: self-identifications. In the 2011 census, 70.7% identified as Christian, which is higher than both the regional and national percentages, though notably down from 81% in the 2001 census.[25] Also worth noting is that 22.1% identified as having "No Religion," whereas other religious self-identifications (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and "Other") do not rise above 0.2%.[26] But, as is often pointed out, such statistics are hardly without their difficulties, and nor are the ways in which the questions are asked, including different questions relating to the complexity of "biblical literacy."[27] This was one reason I did not want to seek

[24] "2014 Statistics for Mission," Church of England (January 2016).

[25] For the North West the figure was 67.3% and for England, 59.4%. "Area: Barrow-in-Furness (Local Authority): Religion, 2011," Office for National Statistics; "Area: Barrow-in-Furness (Local Authority): Religion, 2001," Office for National Statistics.

[26] Those identifying as "No Religion" were 19.8% in the North West and 24.7% in England. "Religion Not Stated" was 6.4%.

[27] Ford, "Reading the Bible Outside the Church," 31–37, summarises the latest literature.

out participants who identified as Christian or non-Christian, i.e., to maintain the complexity and blurriness of self-identifications that are present and analyse different discursive uses of "the Bible," "religion," and "Christianity."

Recent works by, for instance, Ingrid Storm and (most recently) Stephen Bullivant, have used alternatives to census data, turning instead to the British Social Attitudes (BSA) data.[28] This too should be noted because the question significantly shifts to "Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?" from the census question of "What is your religion?" According to this line of questioning, in England and Wales 48.5% (44.2% for the North West) identify as "No Religion" (BSA 2012–14).[29] In terms of changing self-identification, this was contrasted with 71.4% claiming to have been brought up Christian and 19% claiming to be brought up with "No Religion." The decline of those identifying as "Anglican" has been the sharpest, from 34% in 1983 to 19% in 2014, while "No Religion" rose from 39.1% to 47.9%. Bullivant had a particular interest in Catholicism and, for us, the most notable statistic is that at 15.3% the North West has the highest regional percentage of people identifying as "Catholic."[30]

A number of relevant points emerge from this. First, the higher levels of identification with "No Religion" is particularly notable and may suggest that the blunter census question of "What is your religion?" could result in a de facto identification with (for instance) "Christian" (including in Storm's sense of ethno-national identity), irrespective of levels of personal attendance or interest. Second, there has been a sharp decline in people identifying as Christian, and an especially sharp decline in those identifying as Anglican, corresponding with a rise in those identifying as "No Religion." Third, the

[28] Ingrid Storm, "Ethnic Nominalism and Civic Religiosity: Christianity and National Identity in Britain," *The Sociological Review* 59, no. 4 (2011): 828–46; Ingrid Storm, "'Christian Nations'? Ethnic Christianity and Anti-Immigration Attitudes in Four Western European Countries," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24 (2011): 75–96; Stephen Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism in England and Wales: A Statistical Report Based on Recent British Social Attitudes Survey Data* (Twickenham: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2016). Further breakdown of the data for religious identification in England and Wales includes: 19.8% "Anglican" (20.4% for the North West); 15.7% "Other Christian" (12.0% for the North West); 8.3% "Catholic" (15.3% for the North West); and 7.7% "Non-Christian Religion" (8.2% for the North West).

[29] Bullivant, *Contemporary Catholicism*, 7.

[30] Bullivant (*Contemporary Catholicism*, 11–13) also notes that 55.8% of cradle Catholics still identified as Catholics by adulthood. However, there are notable regional variations for Catholic retention, and in the North West the figure is 62.8% with only the North East higher (64.3%).

North West shows a comparative strength of Catholic identification. Despite the difficulties gaining precise data, we might reasonably speculate that this has relevance for understanding Barrow—a town which has had a prominent Catholic heritage not only in churches but also in schools (e.g., St Bernard's Catholic High School, Holy Family Catholic Primary School), sport (e.g., Barrow Celtic Football Club), and social clubs (e.g., Knights of St Columba, St Patrick's Club). Whether popularly identified as such is not possible to answer on the basis of available data, and drinking establishments such as the Knights of St Columba provide popular late night entertainment for, as Cameron might put it, all faiths and none.


Left: the site of St Patrick's Social Club (with St Patrick's Church in background), Barrow Island. Right: Knights of St Columba, a popular city-centre haunt for local revellers.

Indeed, the relatively small sample of Barrovian views, where they even exist, on the Bible and religion may partly confirm the significance of the decision of those who use the British Social Attitudes Data and the suspicions of my younger self, though we should always recognise the significance of shifting identities according to context and questions asked. It was clear that there was very little interest in issues of Christianity, the Bible, or religion, or at least very little interest in mentioning anything publicly. There was only occasional self-identification as "Church of England" but no one claimed to attend church regularly (though some might without mentioning it). Almost everyone I asked about Cameron's views on the Bible and Christianity as a source for Britishness and political ideologies (see below) responded with bafflement and some thought I was making it up. Given Storm's research, we might speculate that this is perhaps because of a lack of immigration and ethnic diversity in Barrow. More often than not, the discussions of the Bible, Christianity, and religion were by far the briefest

(in sharp contrast to views on the Brexit) and in some cases people provided more detail about their age, place of birth and occupation. With the (crucial) exception of Facebook posts on "Muslims," and the occasional posts on guardian angels, ghosts, or heaven, it is difficult to convey just how little (any other) issues that might otherwise be perceived to relate to Bible, religion and Christianity emerged. I have been through countless Barrovian Facebook posts and it would not be difficult to collect themes, patterns, and popular interests including drinking, hangovers, work, animal welfare, football, rugby league, submarines, personal weight gain/loss, local history, inspirational quotes, the state of the EU, mental health, dogs, cats (less so it seemed to me), plenty of near-naked women, some near-naked men, hen nights, stag dos, nightclubs, television comedy, motorbikes, armed forces, condemning paedophiles, criticising anonymous friends and colleagues, strong political opinions, bad jokes, fishing, weddings (with the occasional background church), music, DJs, local news, conspiracy theories, holiday snaps, immigration, refugees, family pictures, or dramatic coastal photographs on the statistically unlikely sunny days. The only reactions to my own Facebook interests in the critical study of religion and the Bible have been baffled responses or questions about whether I am a Christian. During this period (and well beyond), I have had countless discussions about work, earning money for working long hours (incomprehensibly deemed a good thing), drinking, Brexit, where to go for a walk, holidays, the weather, or putting undeservedly smug people in their place. The closest religion gets to the conversation is when I admit what I do for a living and even then the response is almost always bewilderment at what my job is and a few questions of clarification which rarely get answered satisfactorily.

Such public presentations of the Bible and Christianity may well obscure assumptions about the Bible and Christianity being appropriately present in certain designated contexts (christenings, weddings, and funerals). Nevertheless, and whatever we might make of the controversial secularisation theses, this is all symptomatic of sociological and historical shifts in affiliation in the UK since the 1960s and the emergence of ideas relating to "belief without belonging," those identifying as "spiritual but not religious," and a range of views that might be equally classified as "spiritual," "religious," or "supernatural," as church attendance and the political and cultural authority of the established churches declined.[31] And perhaps Stephen Moore and

[31] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Black-

Yvonne Sherwood were on to something in their double-edged claim that "the mantra of the Bible as the book that Western Culture cannot get over or get around finds its consummate expression in biblical cultural studies."[32] However, there was *some* engagement and it was rarely hostile to concepts relating to the Bible, Christianity, and religion, and there are notable similarities and differences to such understandings in mainstream political and media discourses on such topics. But before we look at the nuances among this set of Barrovians, we first need to understand these sorts of responses in the current climate of Brexit. It is essential to look at the Barrovians' views on the Brexit itself because the overwhelming anti-authority or anti-politician attitude that emerges will further explain the attitudes towards the Bible, Christianity, and religion, even where it is one of indifference.

## Brexit Barrow

A range of reasons for voting Remain or Leave (or not at all) were given. Almost all the Leave voters (irrespective of age and gender) thought Leave was simply the only choice and strange that anyone would think otherwise. The reasoning on both sides is familiar to anyone who followed the story on various media, such as those relating to workers' rights, immigration, national decision making, national autonomy, the "Norway option," financial and cultural links with Europe, safety, fear of the consequences of leaving, anti-racism, pensions, the EU itself, financing other countries, big business, the EU treatment of Greece, and even to annoy work colleagues. But, from the people interviewed and from the numerous Facebook discussions, irrespective of political affiliation and for or against Brexit, there was a near-universal

well, 1994); Callum G. Brown, "The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s have done to the Study of Religious History," in H. McLeod and W. Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 29–46; Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Peason, 2006), 224–77; Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation* (2nd ed.; Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 175–233; Gerald Parsons, "How the Times they Were a-Changing: Exploring the Context of Religious Transformation in Britain in the 1960s," in J. Wolffe (ed.), *Religion in History: Conflict, Conversion and Coexistence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 161–89; David Voas and Alasdair Crockett, "Religion in Britain: Neither Believing nor Belonging," *Sociology* 39 (2005): 11–28; Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 985–89; Day, *Believing in Belonging*.

[32] Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 94.

disdain for mainstream politicians who were repeatedly seen as effectively the same ("bunch of bastards from Oxford and Cambridge versus another spate of bastards from Oxford and Cambridge," "they've never really given a shit about people like us," "they claim expenses, and that's it," "I don't trust any of them," "they'll fix the result," "absolutely fed up with politicians from all sides and not listening"), as well as regularly accompanying disdain for almost anyone associated with the ruling class (EU, banks, bankers, Bank of England), media ("I don't believe much of what I read," "don't trust [them]… at all," "don't give a shit about us and we all know that politicians are texting them"), and even farmers who were seen as unfairly benefitting from subsidies ("brand spanking new 4x4s"). Remain voters regularly claimed that politicians had "no plan" for the post-Brexit situation and claims of incompetence and deceit were common. As one voter who said she was a reluctant Remainer, claimed, "What can I say? Same old bloody lies from both sides." There were some answers revealing general suspicions and a contrarian attitude towards authority and their perceived threats. One Leave voter claimed that the reason Leave won was because "the government wanted to vote in" and, she added, "Cameron wanted to vote in, so I voted out." Another Leave voter was contemptuous toward what he saw as "scaremongering" (a repeated complaint among those who voted Leave), adding, "And if somebody tells me to do something or else, I'll probably do the opposite." But it was also clear that this theme was not necessarily anti-authority per se but more that the wrong people have long been in control. As another Leave voter claimed, his vote was nothing to do with any of the "out leaders" but that Britain could be "made great again" with new leaders "and not nest featherers."

Individual politicians were regularly singled out on all sides, especially Cameron. As far as I could see, Cameron was not once praised and was repeatedly criticised (e.g., "massive bellend," "smug bastard," "cockiness," "dodgy Dave," "liar," "weak," "that [Bullingdon Club] thing, it doesn't go down well here," "he wanted us to remain for his retirement pot," "as much to blame as anyone for jumping ship [resigning]"), whether for his decision to resign or perceived hypocrisy, or, as we will later see, the alleged and much publicised porcine penetration during his university leisure time. One Remain with a husband from an EU country (both of whom do not live in Barrow but a different north-western town noted for greater ethnic tensions) worryingly recalled that when "Cameron [said] EU nationals are ok… I just thought 'oh shit,"' then added that "I have hated him more and more since this has happened. I can't believe he did this." Nicola Sturgeon ("that bloody

Scottish gnasher") and Scottish MPs came in for occasional criticism with claims that they were intent on stitching up England. Though never mentioned explicitly, it should also be recalled that scrapping Trident is central for the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the possibility of a Labour-SNP coalition was played up by the local Conservatives in the last General Election. Whenever Tony Blair and Iraq was mentioned (the long-awaited Chilcot Report into the Iraq War was released on July 6, 2016), it was always strongly negative (including one hiss) and he was regularly blamed for turning Labour into something they are not. The UKIP leader Nigel Farage was one reason some reluctant Remain voters voted the way they did, particularly his infamous anti-immigration adverts ("it makes you a bit wary to say the least.… Mind you he's buggered off now at least"). Others singled out include Boris Johnson ("idiot"), Michael Gove ("that chinless bloody wonder"), Gordon Brown ("idiot," "useless"), Neil Kinnock ("bloody windbag"), and so on. One middle-aged male Leave voter epitomised the disdain for politicians no matter what ("they're all full of shit. All of them in it for their own profit") in the claim that "it was a bastard thing what happened to Boris by Gove. Bastard. But, still, I'm glad he did!" However, it was telling that, despite identifying as a "traditional Labour voter" even if politicians should never be trusted, there were some positive words for Theresa May, a point to which we will return.

Strong criticisms of the local MP, John Woodcock, were also repeated ("dumped on us because it was a safe Labour seat," "he never listens"). One late-teen Leave voter hoping to work in the Shipyard said that he does not even believe that Woodcock supports Trident (Woodcock's most prominent view). But available criticisms were mostly in relation to Woodcock's opposition to the Labour leader (at the time of writing), Jeremy Corbyn (e.g., "no principles and has been stabbing Corbyn in the back since day one," "absolute disgrace… He is arrogant and pig-headed to think that he can just waltz in and let his mates take over," "at least [Corbyn is] trying to make this country a better place"). As this suggests, there were politicians singled out for praise. But their singling out was clearly a variant on the anti-authority, anti-politician, anti-media, anti-elite theme. Moreover, Corbyn was almost the only politician who was regularly praised *prior* to the confirmation of the new Prime Minster, Theresa May. The occasional exceptions included a hope for someone other than Corbyn to become leader of the Labour Party and there was even one (and only one) who praised Johnson and Gove. Farage gained some praise from those (unsurprisingly) with UKIP sympathies, in-

cluding hope that he would play a role in Brexit negotiations, that he might topple Conservative and Labour, and that his provocative anti-EU performance in the European Parliament shortly after the Referendum result was a good thing.

Though not without his own fair share of criticisms ("those around him are dangerous. Gangsters. Thugs," "I don't like him"), it was Corbyn who was by far the most common politician singled out ("seems to have retained some dignity and balls," "he's quietly spoken but to me he comes across as being sincere," "acted admirably," "decent bloke").[33] But again this was clearly part of the dominant anti-authority theme and contrasted with Conservatives, the current Parliamentary Labour Party, the rest of the Labour Party since Blair ("those, you know, Blairites… Those lot are just in it for power"), and Blair himself ("whatever your politics, you know what he stands for. Unlike Blair"). Even one UKIP supporter who had previously mocked Corbyn's appearance and disagrees with much of what Corbyn says, was impressed with Corbyn being prepared to stand up against the establishment on Iraq, Blair, and the Chilcot report. It was not always clear the extent of the support for Corbyn but it was clear that he was deemed to be someone targeted by the political establishment and media ("made a scapegoat for [the] mess," "it *is* like bullying," "the media [treatment]… disgusts me," "they are trying to get Corbyn"). One Remain voter in her late sixties stressed that it was the press who "pick out the worst bits… hone in on something, hammer it until people believe it. Like they did with the old donkey jacket [Michael Foot]."

On Facebook, there were various posts in support of Corbyn with virtually no support posted for the then leadership alternatives to Corbyn (Angela Eagle and Owen Smith). This, of course, may be because of my limited access to different Facebook networks but none of the interviewees or discussants showed any support for the then present alternatives to Corbyn. This does not mean that there was not private support for such people, of course, but if there was it was not the sort of thing people felt like mentioning in the networks I saw. There is also a little more data with which to work on this issue. On 28 June, 2016, Woodcock uploaded a video to his constituency Facebook page explaining his opposition to Corbyn. By my count (on July 5, 2016), there were about 91 different individual commenters, most of whom appear to be from Barrow and surrounding areas (and thus Wood-

[33] Corbyn also appears to come across comparatively well in Sheena Moore, "Why we voted leave: voices from northern England."

cock's constituents), and with more male than female commenters (approx. 60–40 split). Some comments were not entirely clear but most were and the overwhelming sentiment (from about 68 of the individual commenters) was support for Corbyn and/or hostility to Woodcock or his wing of the Labour Party whereas about 18 (including Woodcock himself) appear to agree with Woodcock's message, even if not necessarily supportive of Woodcock. The issues used against Woodcock, or in support of Corbyn, are familiar ones, such as claims that Corbyn is honest and has integrity, that Corbyn supports the working class or "the people," that he won the vote for leadership of the Labour Party, that he is electable, that the media are unfairly against him, that he has been unfairly blamed for the Referendum result, that "Blairites" or "career politicians" are selfishly causing problems or refuse to listen to their membership, that those opposed to Corbyn have been too scared to field a candidate, and that the Iraq War and the (then) imminent Chilcot report was the real reason for the criticisms.[34]

But, still, the pro-Corbyn and anti-Woodcock rhetoric needs qualification. It is difficult to know how much to read into the anti-Woodcock polemic (other than as representative of the anti-politician sentiments running throughout) because it is tied in with support for Corbyn. Woodcock is one of the most prominent anti-Corbyn Labour MPs and his name in such contexts will inevitably attract attention both inside and outside Barrow and Furness. Moreover, one interviewee casually mentioned to me as I was leaving that Woodcock "seemed ok." Certainly, Corbyn is the only figure who had any significant degree of support among the interviewees, discussants, and on Facebook (prior to the announcement of a new Prime Minister) but this does not necessarily mean that this translates into widespread support in Barrow and Furness, the North West, England, or the UK. There were certainly people who identified with Corbyn's politics. From what came across among the interviewees, some admire him because of his "underdog" status and because he is not perceived to be a part of a despised "political elite" or the perception of the standard Labour politician. But plenty of people simply did not mention Corbyn and we do not know their views. For all

[34] For what it might be worth, the pro-Corbyn comments attracted by far the most "likes" (occasionally as high as 40–50) whereas those supporting Woodcock rarely got "likes" at all. It is worth noting that Woodcock's posts rarely attract more than 10 comments. One exception was the opening of a new office in Ulverston (March 26, 2016), which attracted 193 comments, but the points raised were again of a similar type and pattern as those in response to his video explaining why he voted to ask Corbyn to step down. Even his video on the Referendum result (June 25, 2016) attracted more criticism, particularly on the Corbyn issue.

we know, others who have a have a positive view may simply admire him but that does not necessarily mean they will vote for him while those who might be favourably disposed towards him or hold an indifferent view may make up their minds closer to the time of the General Election, should he be leader by then. There may well be comparisons here with the popular reception of Corbyn's mentor, Tony Benn: admired for his authenticity even in disagreement. Moreover, it is clear, as we will see, that Trident is precisely the sort of issue that would prevent some of his admirers accepting Labour with him as leader and, prior to Corbyn, a similar view was pushed hard (with some success) by the Conservatives in the 2015 General Election in Barrow. If more questions in the interviews had been geared towards Corbyn then maybe something clearer would have emerged. Yet it remains striking that, prior to the confirmation of the new Prime Minister, he was almost the only political figure who is regularly thought of positively, other than some not insignificant pro-Farage exceptions. He is the exception that again proves the rule of the sample that politicians really are not trusted or liked.

But all this was before May was confirmed as Conservative Leader (11 July, 2016) and officially appointed as Prime Minister (13 July, 2016). This brought certain questions to the fore which may well have been mentioned had the other interviews been carried out at this time. The last batch of interviews happened after this and after the parliamentary debate on the renewal of Trident (18 July, 2016). Positive and romantic sentiments regarding Trident and the need for someone to launch nuclear missiles from submarines to kill fellow human beings as the ultimate deterrent are not unusual in Barrow, irrespective of gender self-identification or age. Indeed, plenty of positive sentiments and "likes" could be found across personal and group Facebook pages of Barrovians when the vote went through for the renewal of Trident. On the popular Facebook group, "Barrow-in-Furness in Old Photos" (with nearly 20,000 members), a picture of an older Trident submarine in the Shipyard was posted shortly after the announcement of Trident renewal to 379 "likes" (or the like), much local pride, and only one dissenting voice. It is also striking that when Woodcock posts on Trident on Facebook the response is typically more positive than usual.[35]

[35] For instance, a Facebook post about how the Trident result was the "proudest day" of his parliamentary life, quickly amassed 160 "likes" and "loves" and mostly positive comments. His announcement of the vote on Facebook got over 200 "likes" and "loves," but there were a number of critical comments, as there were with other posts close to the time of Trident, though they mostly appear to have been from by people not from Barrow and tied in with national Labour Party battles.

It should be no surprise that such events would have an impact on how interviewees would likewise respond and shift their emphases. With the appointment of a female Prime Minister, the otherwise rare (among interviewees) gendered assumptions started to become evident. Indeed, one middle-aged Leave voter, was happy with May and her views on Trident, though he was also keen to make it known, accompanied by a cupped hand gesture at chest level, that he was also hoping that the she was the glamour model, Teresa May, who had a prominent role in the controversial video for the equally controversial Prodigy song (apparently "about" heroin), "Smack My Bitch Up" (1997), before being confused on Twitter with the incoming Prime Minister.[36] Another retired Leave voter thought that May needs a makeover, hairdresser, and fashion advisor but she also thought May was performing well as a politician and, in sentiments rarely heard in Barrow, that "she's Maggie with knobs on!" But what was also striking was how self-identified Labour supporters (though not necessarily voters) warmed to her ("one of the better ones. Not a Tory really") and especially her views on Trident. One Leave voter could not vote for Labour because of Corbyn's views on Trident but she "quite liked" May because of "vot[ing] Trident in" and "what she said when she'd press the nuclear button if need be." Another perhaps highlighted what might be a potential problem for Labour in Barrow. He said that he would now vote Conservative because of Trident. He "liked what she [Theresa May] said," that she is "prepared to kill 100,000 innocent people—yes. You've got to be, haven't you?" He added that perhaps Corbyn would be the only reason he would vote for Labour because he admires him as a person ("I like him. I like the way he comes across. I like the way he speaks") but "I don't agree with his views." However, "apart from Corbyn, I don't like Labour anymore," he was quick to point out, because "they aren't Labour anymore. They are just Conservatives but without the backbone." This was not the first time such views about Labour as "mild Tories" (as another put it) would come up.

## Englishness: "snobby and backhanded"

Issues relating to disdain for politicians and "elites" is probably one of the few generalisations worth making from the study, not least because it helps us understand the logic of the answers on various issues, notably for my purposes

[36] Helena Horton, "Glamour model Teresa May swamped by tweets from people thinking she is the next British Prime Minister," *Telegraph* (July 12, 2016).

the Bible, Christianity, and religion in relation to notions of "Englishness" (which regularly drifted into "Britishness") in Cameron's understanding of the Bible and Christianity. Certainly, there were diverse views about Englishness and Britishness. One (and only one) interviewee referred to the geography of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England. A Leave voter identified as British but primarily as English, though with little elaboration. A common ironic response was to refer to England as poor at sport or disappointed by it, especially football. One Remain voter admitted it was "pretty hard" to define Englishness, "unless you want that shit you seen in the media, tin hats, St George's cross, rubbish at football." Less jokey were a number of militaristic presentations of Britishness on Facebook, even in contrasting overpaid English footballers negatively with armed forces. Ironic connections were also made with food (cups of tea, fish and chips) and accents.

Such offhand sentiments were common enough and most claimed to not really know what "Englishness" might mean.[37] But once again anti-authority ideas dominated understandings of "Englishness" and "Britishness," or even, as we saw, "anti-Scottish" in terms of governance. However, the dimension of class was more explicit still, and usually in a negative sense. And by this I mean it was thought that Englishness was typically associated with perceptions (often by "outsiders") of middle- or upper-class behaviour and values, or southern behaviour and values (perhaps not easily distinguished from perceptions of middle and upper classes). The Royal Family also came up (with only occasional mild positivity) as did some of the most overtly antagonistic class-based views such as "the posh English accent or whatever" ("That's not me. Can't stand it all"), "bowler hats and suited and booted in London," "speaking posh" which "might have happened in an Agatha Christie book" but "it's a load of crap," "snobby and backhanded," and "the Tory-like, toffee-nosed china tea cup drinker" who has an agenda which appears to be "the separation of classes" and the maintenance of rules "for personal gain." Such negative constructions were sometimes in distinction to what might be deemed to be more reasonable forms of "Englishness" or "Britishness" involving issues of tolerance, decency, common sense, resilience, and fairness (e.g., "community spirit, unflappability, a dislike of unfairness," "this country takes it on the chin and gets on with it," "free thinking… not racist… not bigoted… listen to everyone's view").

[37] On national and regional identities, there are a number of similarities with the answers presented in Storm, "Northern English Town," 29–33.

As might have been expected in a post-Referendum context, immigration and national difference came up regularly in relation to "Englishness," though was not quite the dominant theme in the way class was in the interviews and discussions.[38] A Leave voter in his forties suggested that "political correctness has silenced people who won't say what their heart tells them in case they are branded racist or bigoted in some way for caring about their people and culture." The Leave leaders were not the reason he voted but rather he knew "in my bones that England would never be free tied to the yoke of the continentals." Even when class distinction was not explicitly invoked (as it was in most cases), related distinctions could still be made and tied in with issues of immigration. In the case of one UKIP sympathiser in his seventies, a distinction was made between "the British public" and "any other country" (where "there would have been riots, huge protests") and a few minor exceptions "in London." He further argued that "the British people have had enough of politicians" but this adds a further element to his understanding of national identity because "immigration is a prime example" of why people are disillusioned. "Whole communities have been changed," he added, but this should not be confused with racism because "British people are quite tolerant but then get to a stage where it's too much."

While issues relating to immigration and nationalism were common, there was a kind of photo negative equivalent of this argument, notably (but not exclusively) among Remain voters. One Remain voter who said she would have voted Leave but thought there were too many racist attitudes among its adherents, added, "Whether you like the fella or not, Sadiq Khan is British and it annoys me when people says he's not," though in line with the general disdain for politicians immediately added, "I don't like him." Another voter who said that he was also swayed to vote Remain because of the issue of racism referred to allegations of post-Referendum racism as "an absolute fucking disgrace" and gave the example of "them fuckers like in Manchester on the tram or train abusing some guy" and "the posters about get rid of the Polish vermin." He laughed and suggested that it has "given rise to the proper Nazis in this country" and the Referendum has brought what was "under the surface" to "the forefront." Away from Remain voters, similar sentiments could also be found. One Leave voter repeatedly emphasised her respect and support for immigrants and love of Europe and that

[38] It is notable that similar views emerged in Storm, "Northern English Town," 34–35, where there was much more cultural diversity than Barrow.

her decision was about national sovereignty and hostility towards the EU. One Leave voter who moved to Barrow from Glasgow some years ago, gave different kinds of "Englishness" where class snobbery was sharply presented (and disliked), as was "the racist homophobic Britain First lovers with their muddled patriotism, bulldog tatts, and footy tops." The version he endorsed was that which he sees in his social group and people he meets in Barrow and other industrial towns and cities, namely a "hard-working, hard playing, welcoming, community-minded people proud to be English" but ashamed of those who behave like snobs or promote racism.

But the angriest response came from the Remain voter with an EU spouse who lives in another town more known for ethnic tensions. She argued that "We're just really weird… We dig our heels," people who argue about "the metric system. Awkward. It's down to our past, the Empire. We shit on the world. We're arrogant. Ignorant. Even using 'Great Britain' but people use it for how 'great' we are… embarrassing." The interviewee remained "really proud of our musical culture" but was upset that the present climate showed that being "quite open minded" and "tolerant" is "declining," before concluding that now "I really struggle with being a patriot." She cited (with reference to personal experience) a "backlash on attacks on EU nationals and anyone who's not white. It's no coincidence. I know it was already there but it's got much worse since 24th June."

## The Barrovian Bible

Storm's claim on the likelihood of those intertwining Christian and national identity in terms of a kind of ethnic marker, but with the associated construction of a Muslim Other, has some relevance here. For what it is worth for such a small sample size, only Leave voters mentioned Islam and Muslims in relation to issues of immigration, Brexit or the question of Britain being a Christian country. This crosses all voting age groups, though those who expressed such views appeared to be largely (but not exclusively) male. One discussion, with some far-right involvement, had the claim that "Muslim immigrants" were "raping" Europe (whether this was metaphorical or not was not made clear) and that it is wrong to call critics of Islam "racist" because Islam cannot be classified as a "race." Another Leave voter implied that flag burning by "Muslim extremists" should result in deportation. There was also a story (to be found also among far-right groups) about a pregnant woman in another town arrested for carrying the Union Jack because it was

"offensive." Another Leave voter talked about the importance for him of the Union Jack and not a "Muslim flag" flying in this country, regularly mocked "Muslim terrorists," and allowed the idea of forgiveness of terrorists but only once they had been sent to God first (i.e., killed by the armed forces). Such discussions on Facebook were typically found alongside militaristic imagery and memes, and angry comments that Facebook was allegedly banning such memes. But not all sentiments critical of Islam and Muslims were militaristic. One exception from a Leave voter with UKIP sympathies was that he did not think that Cameron's view of the Bible and Christianity "applies to all religions in equal proportions" and that while "the majority of Muslims are probably alright," the press "hide the baddies." There was a claim that we should tolerate religious beliefs but that tolerance cuts both ways and that any mosque ought to be placed near pubs, gay bars, and pork butchers. Another person even warned me that within twenty years Barrow would be covered with mosques, a telling fear for a town that currently appears to have no mosques and 172 people (0.2%) identifying as Muslim which, according to the Census statistics, means a decrease in Muslim population by 10 between 2001 and 2011.[39]

Negative views about politicians and authority consistently came through strongly (to put it mildly) in what people thought about Cameron's remarks about the Bible and Christianity, which were as follows:

> [From] human rights and equality to our constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy… the first forms of welfare provision… language and culture.… The Judeo-Christian roots of the Bible also provide the foundations for protest and for the evolution of our freedom and democracy.… [They form] the irrepressible foundation for equality and human rights, a foundation that has seen the Bible at the forefront of the emergence of democracy, the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of women.… Responsibility, hard work, charity, compassion, humility, self-sacrifice, love, pride in working for the common

[39] Religion, 2011;" "Religion, 2001." I recall, but can no longer find, similar comments from an unsuccessful UKIP or possibly BNP candidate running for a place on the local council a couple of years ago. While other parties were making promises about fixing loose paving slabs or cleaning up more dog excrement, this candidate was wanting to prevent the "Islamification" of (I think) Hawcoat. As yet no minarets or crescent moons are challenging Furness General Hospital for dominance of the skyline of that more upmarket part of town.

> good and honouring the social obligations we have to one another, to our families and our communities these are the values we treasure. Yes, they are Christian values. And we should not be afraid to acknowledge that. But they are also values that speak to us all—to people of every faith and none.[40]

"I think that's a load of bollocks," was the surprised response of one Leave voter when she heard it, whereas another Leave voter said in exasperation, "I cannot see how it comes from the Bible at all. Bloody hell!" One Remain voter was also puzzled: "He said that? He also said that they are the values of everyone? It doesn't make sense. How can they belong to everyone?" One Leave voter who denied Britain was a Christian country but said that Cameron's views tallied with his own experiences of Christians, suggested that Cameron's claim "proves… what a massive bellend he really is," with further comment on Cameron's end-of-slavery argument: "What a fucking statement that is, CLOWN!" A Remain voter in his forties similarly laughed in disbelief at Cameron's comments and again made the connection with a perceived hypocrisy of political behaviour. These comments might be colourful but the sentiments are typical:

> What the fuck is he talking about? Ha ha. Fucking bullshit! Absolute bullshit! He can't even peddle it out himself or his party! Does it include shagging a pig's head? Not very Christian of him! Not very Christian or nice the way they act in parliament when they are slagging each other off and generally being gobshites. Schoolkids at Alfs showed more decorum than them![41]

What is also notable about these sentiments is the implicit understanding of Christianity (whether accepting of it or not) also reveals standard assumptions about Christianity and the Bible which were not especially negative (e.g., politeness, sexual restraint, peace), as well as including more hostility towards politicians. This was not the only time Cameron's alleged behaviour was mentioned in relation to his idea about the Bible and Christianity. There was an implied allegation of hypocrisy in the nickname given to Cameron ("Oinkgobble") by one Remain voter, even if there was an agreement with

[40] David Cameron, "Prime Minister's King James Bible Speech (December 16, 2010)."
[41] "Alfs" is a reference to Alfred Barrow secondary school which closed down in 2009.

some of Cameron's sentiments. One non-voter responded with "That's just stupid. What's he on about? Isn't he into bombing countries? Where does that fit in? I don't think Jesus said much stuff like that.… Hard work? What, thou shalt work hard? I don't remember that one!" However, some points like "compassion" were conceded but even here it was suggested that "it's not like only the English are compassionate for fuck's sake." The already obvious suspicion came further to the fore: "Is he just saying this stuff to sound like he's a nice bloke or something?" One non-voter claimed that Cameron is either confused or a hypocrite because "the Bible talks about things that have nothing to do with democracy" while one retired Leave voter (who supports same-sex marriage) pointed out that same-sex marriage is not in the Bible. Such claims of Cameron being wrong in his view of the somewhat innocent Bible was a near-universal sentiment among interviewees, across different perspectives.

With perhaps some echoes of Storm's claims about Christianity and ethnic identity, occasional participants (all middle aged and up) responded by identifying with the Church of England, even though they do not attend a church and even though such identification presumably would not have been mentioned if such a question had not been raised. In response to one Leave voter in his sixties claiming to be "Church of England," a (reluctant) Remain voter responded incredulously, "He's not a bloody Christian! Since when has he ever gone to church or believed in any of that?" "I would personally always say my religion is Church of England" said another Leave voter, whose immediate point of contrast was to say that "I wouldn't say I was Catholic." Nevertheless, there was still little support for Cameron's claim. "I don't agree that they're all [the listed values] from the Bible," even though he believed that "democracy and tolerance and everything else he said are part of our way of life." Other responses probably reflect such sentiments by showing a lack of interest in discussing the Bible or Christianity. Indeed, it was striking that the question which caused consistent puzzlement, indifference, or incredulity was that which sought the interviewees' opinion about Cameron's claim about Britain, Christianity, and the Bible.

A retired Leave voter thought Britain "*was* a Christian country" but that it is changing and that "Cameron's statement is far too general." He added that "when I was a kid it [the Bible] was taught" and that it is as "a set of rules, good rules, but people are drifting away from it." It should be added that there was no indication that this was an especially good or bad thing and he ended his point with another sentiment that would turn up on a number

of occasions: "I don't mind people being religious but as long as they don't make me religious." The idea of a Christian past came up occasionally. After a long pause, one retired Remain voter gave the short answer, "No," before she added after another pause, "he's not right" and that "when you were young, well, you just put 'Christian' when you were asked to but no one in my family really believed in anything." One non-voter casually claimed that "I suppose we were a Christian country ages ago, maybe even in the 1950s or something, but I don't know anyone who goes to church and look around here and there's just abandoned churches. It's been like that for ages." One Remain voter in her thirties simply did not believe that "we're a Christian country" anymore and that "it is divisive to say we're a Christian country." Rather, she claimed, "we're a secular country" and she only knows "one or two Christians."

But there were virtually no overtly longed-for, sentimental, nostalgic views of a Christian past, despite suggestions that the past might once have been "Christian" and despite regular enough claims of a country that once was better.[42] Whenever such issues were raised, they were dealt with matter-of-factly, as if part of some great historical process. Perhaps tied in with such sentiments are those views which avoided the part of the question mentioning "Christian" and the "Bible" and proceeded to talk only about issues relating to British values. Another response by a Remain voter to the question about the Bible and Christianity (at most perhaps implying that Cameron's interpretation belongs to a romantic vision) was simply to register her surprise that Cameron did not vote for Brexit, adding in a now familiar way that "he's old fashioned and stuffy, narrow-minded Oxbridge boy." Another Remain voter, did not discuss the Bible as such but rather expressed her hope for the realisation of ideals, "to have compassion for others," as well as implying a degree of deception about Cameron's views (e.g., some people like the monarchy and others do not and that slavery has not ended as "modern day" slavery goes on behind closed doors).

Yet it was notable that numerous Facebook posts would promote or share ideas about issues which might be popularly categorised as "religious." Posts about guardian angels, personal angels, fairies, ghosts, weddings, heaven, or the supernatural were easy to find and perhaps we might classify the very occasional Jesus meme alongside these. But the infrequent Jesus or overtly Christian memes I encountered on Facebook were different from posts about

[42] This coheres with Storm's findings ("Ethnic Nominalism and Civic Religiosity") on assumptions made about Christianity and a lack of interest in a nostalgic past.

various supernatural beings like ghosts or guardian angels or statements about pets joining their owners in heaven in that they were militaristic and more akin to the anti-Islamic or anti-ISIS (depending on the user) memes about Christian crusaders fighting terror (memes which also occasionally occurred among Facebook users in Barrow). Beyond Barrovian networks, I have seen non-militaristic Jesus memes on Facebook, from fairly conventional devotionals through comedy to something that might be perceived as "New Age" or "spiritual" and no doubt there will be some of this on Barrovian Facebook pages. I did not, however, come across any in this sample.

In this respect a comparison with discussions of Furness Abbey—a local heritage site on the outskirts of Barrow—is perhaps more instructive. Furness Abbey was a Cistercian monastery founded in the twelfth century. It became a ruin in the English Reformation and has gone into romantic memory thanks in no small part to figures like Wordsworth and Turner (and the reception of such figures and their work).[43] It has also become associated with ghost sightings, medieval festivals, local walks, glue-sniffing in the 1980s, and a more refined location for discreet outdoor sexual encounters than (say) the docks. Recently, there was an attempt to get permission to build "executive" housing on the Manor Lane entrance to the Abbey which, by the end of May 2016, had successfully been prevented by a local group after a two-year campaign. The public Facebook group, "Stop development of green field sites around Furness," attracted a lot of activity and, given the object under discussion, might have been seen as a rare occasion where issues relating to religion could get a public airing. At the last time of checking (July 20, 2016) the page had 1,250 likes (including, for full disclosure, one by this author) and there have been over 200 posts with regular comments between January 22, 2014 and May 26, 2016, culminating in the victory for the protesters.[44] There were repetitive reasons given by commenters (whether part of the official case or not) for opposing the building of the new houses. Most common were those relating to local heritage, animal and wildlife conservation, and aesthetics and, as ever, it was regularly presented as standing up to the distant, uncaring authorities. But, despite the building being an abbey, there were only very occasional references to anything that might just be popularly be classified as "religious" or "theological," and even then it is

[43] C. Dade-Robertson, *Furness Abbey: Romance, Scholarship and Culture* (Lancaster: Centre for North-West Regional Studies, 2000).

[44] Based on the 83 "likes" for the final post suggests a gender split of about two-thirds female. Age range is less clear.

not easy to differentiate such comments from "aesthetic" reasons (e.g., ideas about being engulfed by quietness and calm, a special place, sense of awe). Perhaps the most explicit example is from one of the key players in the victory, Gill Jepson, who reported the news on her blog (also made available on the Facebook group), suggesting, with a popular allusion to Acts 9.18 (intentional or not), that the inspector "cannot have failed to understand the historic importance of our amazing abbey and appreciated that to build a housing estate—however high status and beautiful—would detract from the reverence and spirituality of the approach. In short the scales fell from his eyes."[45] But all these are, at most, isolated and occasional examples.

Furness Abbey, Vale of the Deadly Nightshade, popular with visitors and locals alike, including Daz T.

## What (What's Left of) the Bible Means

What can we say about such Barrovian understandings of the Bible? Whenever an obvious reference to the Bible turned up (e.g., "Hard work? What, thou shalt work hard?," "David and Goliath," "scapegoat," "scales fell from his eyes") it held a low-level nostalgic power with an ironic distance from what is an occasional cultural resource, much like Furness Abbey but probably not as popular. In this sense, we have some minor examples of David Crystal's argument about the cultural survival of the language of the Bible (partly) through a witty use of idioms and a draining of anything perceived to be too "religious" (Crystal was referring to the language of King James

[45] Gill Jepson, "Keyboard Warriors, Localisation and People Power," *Out of Time* (May 26, 2016). Jepson also referred to this as an underdog story of "David and Goliath" ("Public consultations and planning—a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing!" *Out of Time* (March 10, 2016)).

Bible but the point stands).[46] This is the Bible without context or content, deprived of any malignant properties as it continues intentionally or not to survive (and only just in this sample from Barrow) in Western cultural contexts, striving to come to terms with secularism, nationalism, and global capitalism.[47] As a physical cultural artefact, in a place like Barrow it is most likely to be the Bible received as a gift at christenings (one of the rare occasions where the Bible and Christianity will openly feature in public life) before being consigned to a life of gathering dust on the shelf.

But the Bible is a cultural resource only faintly connected with English heritage and culture in this sample. And although defining Englishness was regarded as difficult by most participants, it was never explicitly mentioned that it must involve the Bible or Christianity (other than an occasional Church of England identification) and there was little in the way of nostalgia for a lost Christian country. This contrasts sharply with Cameron's use. The quotation from Cameron on the Bible and Britain as a Christian country was delivered in the context of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible in 2011. His Bible as Liberal Bible (i.e., compatible with tolerance, democracy, freedom, rule of law, etc.) and Neoliberal Bible (e.g., hard work, downplaying of state welfare provision) is standard among mainstream politicians, certainly from Thatcher onward. Any malignant, strange, or anti-democratic properties the contents of the Bible might have are not discussed as the Bible must conform to certain assumed liberal standards (compare the problems now facing politicians whose views on homosexuality are euphemistically called "traditional"). By claiming that Britain is a Christian country he is claiming the Bible as an authoritative source for liberal democracy,[48] an authority rarely recognised among the Barrovian sample who saw right through his ideological move, as might even be expected in light of Storm's claims about the relationship between nationalism and Christianity in Britain.

The Bible of the Cameron-led Coalition (2010–15) and of the Cameron quotation I showed people was, more precisely, that ready-made icon: King James Bible. Indeed, when Michael Gove was the Coalition Education Secretary, copies of the King James Bible were sent to English state schools. Gove explained that this was because "The King James Bible has had a pro-

[46] David Crystal, *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).

[47] R. S. Sugirtharajah, "Loitering with Intent: Biblical Texts in Public Places," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 (2003), 572–73; Crossley, *Harnessing Chaos*, 254–66

[48] For full discussion see Crossley, *Harnessing Chaos*, 249–54, 277–82, 283–97.

found impact on our culture.... Every school pupil should have the opportunity to learn about this book and the impact it has had on our history, language, literature and democracy."[49] Gove's Bible ought to be connected with his early draft proposals for the History curriculum which included as patriotic narrative history of Britain and the importance of this history for national (effectively English) identity.[50] The sentiments of Gove were common enough during the 2011 "celebrations" of the King James Bible. The King James Bible Trust spoke of the KJV's importance for understanding language, education, aesthetics, and heritage (but not religion, conversion or imperialism).[51] Even Richard Dawkins played along and was a key figure in the promotion of the anniversary. Dawkins—always happy to note the not inconsiderable bits of the Bible of which he disapproves on moral grounds—claimed that the KJV includes passages of "outstanding literary merit" and it is "a major sourcebook for literary culture" and "a treasured heritage."[52]

It is not unreasonable to see class and generational elements intersecting with certain presentations of nationalism in these presentations of the Bible, especially when compared with the Barrovian receptions. The Gove Bible came out of an Oxbridge-educated government. The King James Bible Trust included videos by various polite English vicars, Boris Johnson, the former poet laurate Andrew Motion, Baroness Thomas, Patricia Routledge (most famous for playing the snobbish Hyacinth Bucket in *Keeping Up Appearances*), Dawkins (reading Song of Songs, which he informed us is an "erotic poem"), and even SBL's former Executive Director, Kent Richards.[53] Even if there was the occasional regional accent not always associated with the English middle class (or above) and even if some readers may have come from working-class backgrounds, the participants were from the world of media, arts, trusts, and politics, and obviously so. Viewing these videos in the context of the Barrovian interviews on Cameron's use of the King James Bible made for a striking contrast for this writer. And the hazy "middleclassness" of a cultured elite came through in the repeated rhetoric in 2011 that we all *must* learn about the King James Bible in order to be informed cultured citizens.

[49] "Schools get King James Bible to mark 400th anniversary," *BBC News* (May 15, 2012).

[50] Crossley, *Harnessing Chaos*, 252–53.

[51] http://www.kingjamesbibletrust.org/about-us/mission-statement. I owe this observation to Yvonne Sherwood, "This Is Not a Bible/Ceçi n'est pas une Bible," unpublished paper, Biblical Literacy and the Curriculum Conference, University of Sheffield, May 25–28, 2011.

[52] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantham Press, 2006), 340–44.

[53] King James Bible Trust.

Oddly, one of the most explicit examples was the high cultural pomposity of Dawkins. He wrote that he was "a little taken aback at the biblical ignorance commonly displayed by people educated in more recent decades than I was" and proclaimed, "Surely ignorance of the Bible is bound to impoverish one's appreciation of English literature."[54] He was apparently "a little shocked at the implication that not every school library already possesses a copy. Can that be true? What do they have, then? Harry Potter? Vampires?… does anybody… seriously think they will [read it]?"[55] He even suggested that a "native speaker of English who has never read a word of the King James Bible is verging on the barbarian."

Some of the retired Barrovian participants would recognise Dawkins's claim that younger people do not know the Bible. But it is far from clear that the retired participants would have cared ("When you were young, well, you just put 'Christian' when you were asked to but no one in my family really believed in anything"). It might be expected that Dawkins ought to be proud of a number of Barrovians who, unlike mainstream politicians, were prepared to make claims that democracy and related values are not found in the Bible. But they did so through a distrust of politicians and their pomposity and privileges, effectively represented here by Dawkins himself. Against the backdrop of what we have seen about Barrow so far, Dawkins's idealised Middle-Class Bible roughly represents the kinds of assumed attitudes attacked in the interviews.[56] By Dawkins's logic there would also be a number of Barrovians who would be "verging on the barbarian," which has a vague parallel in the self-righteous liberal outrage levelled at the unwashed Brexit masses. Indeed, there are parallels in comments made by Dawkins on the Brexit.[57] Yet, Dawkins's barbarians would include much of the pop-

[54] Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 340–44.

[55] Richard Dawkins, "Why I want all our children to read the King James Bible," *Observer* (May 19, 2012).

[56] Compare Terry Eagleton's comments on Dawkins: "These are not just the views of an enraged atheist. They are the opinions of a readily identifiable kind of English middle-class liberal rationalist.… Dawkins … occasionally writes as though 'Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness' is a mighty funny way to describe a Grecian urn.… One would not expect to muster many votes for either anarchism or the virgin birth in North Oxford. (I should point out that I use the term North Oxford in an ideological rather than geographical sense.)" ("Lunging, Flailing, Mispunching," *London Review of Books* 28/20 (19 October 2006), 32–34.)

[57] Dawkins argued that politicians function as the experts on complex issues like the EU and that there should never have been a Referendum in the first place. This is not to agree or disagree with Dawkins's main point but note how he puts the obvious disillusionment driving

ulace. It was for good reason that the King James Bible Trust changed its name from the 2011 Trust: there was presumably not widespread popular knowledge about what significance the year 2011 held. Dawkins's Bible—and the Bible of the official KJV narrative—is the Bible of a certain context, a certain upbringing, and certain aesthetic tastes, whether it likes it or not. And we can make an educated guess about the sorts of receptions Dawkins on the KJV might receive in Barrow.

For while such sentiments may reveal different class assumptions, they reveal a blunt disjunction between the quasi-official Bible of the ruling class (or at least its politically authoritative interpreters) and the Barrovian sample (e.g., "a load of bollocks," "bullshitting," "absolute bullshit," "stupid," "what?," "eh?," "he said *that*?," "debateable," "I don't think he knows what he is talking about," "hypocrite," "do they really relate that to the Bible?") with all the accompanying puzzled looks, laughs, and untypically long pauses. One Leave voter who clearly had no such sentimental attachment to the Bible, asked (as did others) whether Cameron got "a lot of hassle for that?" With such examples in mind, Alastair Campbell's fears may not have been unfounded when he shut down an interview with "we don't do God." The British electorate, he has claimed, do not "want their politicians banging the Bible all the time. They hated it, I was sure of that."[58] It might be an understatement to claim that Campbell's view would resonate among at least

much of the Brexit vote in its place in much the same way as he deals with his assumed uncultured non-readers KJV: "'Well, at first I wanted to leave, to punish David Cameron. But then Boris came out as a leaver and I can't stand his hair so I'll be voting to stay in Europe.' That is approximately the level of discourse which will momentously decide Britain's future.… I really did hear the following remark yesterday on television: 'Well, it isn't called Great Britain for nothing, is it? I'm voting for our historic greatness.' Actually it was originally called Britannia major to distinguish it from Britannia minor, the French province of Brittany. Later, 'Great Britain' signified the union with Scotland, and distinguished the geographically larger of the British Isles from the smaller, Ireland. It has never meant 'great' in the bombastic sense you imagine will justify your 'patriotic' vote.… I shall vote. And I shall vote to stay in Europe, exercising the Precautionary Principle which is appropriate to anyone lacking the confidence to push for a radical change in the status quo. Better the devil you know, or at least the devil that seems to be working adequately.… The evidence-based arguments tend to be the ones for remaining in Europe, whether they come from professional economists, historians, business leaders or powerful foreign politicians." ("Ignoramuses should have no say on our EU membership—and that includes me," *Prospect* (June 9, 2016).)

[58] Alastair Campbell, *The Blair Years* (Hutchinson: London, 2007), 111–12; Alastair Campbell, "Baroness Warsi misses point of 'we don't do God,' writes a pro faith atheist," Alastair's Blog (September 16, 2010). See also Martin H. M. Steven, *Christianity and Party Politics: Keeping the Faith* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 105.

some of the Barrovian electorate. As one Remain voter put it, she does not "appreciate politicians using religion to sell us something."

Campbell was also worried about what the media would do with a Bible-wielding politician. Indeed, those like Tony Blair, Steve Webb, and Tim Farron have all had a bad press for expressing their views on the Bible. But the consistent use of the Bible by politicians like Cameron and in official narratives does not necessarily have to be understood as a naïve blunder. PR-savvy figures like Cameron are perfectly aware of the need to tread carefully. Moreover, it was clear that no one had heard about Cameron's use of the Bible which might even suggest that Cameron's PR team were doing their job properly. There are various reasons for the use of the Bible in political discourse. It certainly provides an authority that is not widely despised in and of itself, it certainly speaks to respective political traditions historically tied up with different denominations (e.g., Tory Anglicanism, Liberal Nonconformity, Labour Nonconformity and Catholicism), and if worded carefully and deemed credible, it might just gain a politician a favourable headline. But it also speaks to those with ears to hear. Like a vague biblical allusion, the use of the Bible in political discourse might bypass those with no interest but not necessarily those who do and such references can be found easily online for those willing to look. Christian media outlets almost always pick up on mainstream political uses of the Bible (and typically favourably so). There may not be a significant "Christian vote" in the UK, or at least in England, but there is equally no need for a politician to alienate such voters nor indeed Christian lobbyists.[59]

It is possible that a vague notion of the Moral Bible might have had some purchase among those I interviewed, viewed, and discussed.[60] Though there was plenty of scepticism about whether the Bible was really the source of Anglicised tolerance and democracy, for some the Bible has produced some useful moral rules (even if its time was thought to have passed). And some, as we saw, clearly worked with the implicit assumption that they there is some kind of purer form of biblical morality which has been abused by people like David Cameron and even Donald Trump (e.g., the idea that warmongering and certain sexualities are not the sorts of things promoted by the

[59] On which see further, Steven, *Christianity and Party Politics*, 105–120.

[60] Cf. Storm, "Northern English Town," 27 (cf. 33): "Most of the respondents, whether or not they were religious themselves, felt that being religious was generally positive rather than negative for morality and social cohesion, although they almost unanimously acknowledged that it can be used to bad ends."

Bible). In this respect, it may be that notions of "not passing by on the other side" from the Parable of the Good Samaritan (probably the most common contemporary use of the Bible in political discourse) would hold sway as it is one of those biblical-sounding phrases that survives in cultural discourses and fits in with a general notion of "doing good" rather than elaborate claims about democracy, slavery, or freedom. However, Corbyn (a regular user of the Good Samaritan) was the one politician who was commonly deemed a morally upright or decent person figure but was not understood in terms popularly deemed "religious," contrary to some dominant representations in mainstream political and media discourses.[61] There was no persistent discussion (positive or negative) of "Saint Jeremy," "JC," "Messiah," "Christ-like," "religious fervour," "revivalist meetings," "sects," "cults," or any of the other related language found in other political and media discourses. Perhaps one exception was a Star Wars meme shared on Facebook which compared Jeremy Corbyn with Obi-Wan Kenobi (a theme picked up in a different way, for instance, by the *Guardian* cartoonist Steve Bell) and which found its way to Barrovian Facebook networks. Once again it reflects the theme of fighting an evil authority (in this case, Kenobi/Corbyn versus the Empire). Anyone wishing to categorise this as "religious" might recall the 2001 census process where there was an attempt to get "Jedi" recognised as an official religion.

None of this means that Barrow has become a haven for atheistic, anti-supernatural, Bible-hating materialists. For a start, none of the interviewees expressed any particular hatred for the Bible or Christianity, even in disagreement. For some they were merely some ineffective, half-forgotten relics from the past while for one interviewee it was not to be foregrounded in political discourse because it might be a socially divisive move against non-Christians. But it should also be stressed that discussions of the Bible and Christianity only came up because of my prompting and my questions clearly assumed a certain kind of understanding of Christianity, religion, and the Bible. We might reasonably speculate (and with some support on Facebook) that another study would find that the Bible and Christianity (or certain understandings of them) are regulated and to be presented, not in political pronouncements, but at christenings, weddings, and funerals. Nevertheless, it soon became clear on Facebook that there are people who post about guardian angels, personal angels, fairies, ghosts, the supernatural, and heaven as the location of deceased relatives, friends, or pets. These might not always

[61] Crossley, *Harnessing Chaos*, 306–18.

be the kinds of belief that would be pleasing to those with more orthodox theology or church group leaders but Bible quotations or (especially) the views of Karl Barth were never likely to be more popular, at least on the personal pages in the networks I viewed. This, I should add, is strikingly different to my own personal social media networks (which will presumably be similar to many readers of this journal) in that they involve plenty of scholars of religion, many of whom are clearly church-attending Christians and open in their theological loyalties.

However, one thing such academic Facebook networks share with the various Facebook pages of Barrovians is a recurring interest in, or obsession with, the behaviour of "Muslims," the most obvious aspect of Storm's claim that a nationalistic assumption of Christianity is more likely to be thought of in "ethnic" differentiation. This is, of course, part of, or a reaction to, a long-standing Orientalist discourse which has gained momentum since the 1970s and intensified in light of events such as September 11, July 7 bombings in London, and recent attacks in France, as well as shifts in Muslim self-identification. In the UK, this is also tied in with issues of immigration and assimilation, though, as we saw, there is no sizable Muslim population in Barrow, particularly compared with certain other northern towns. Nevertheless, as we saw, criticisms of Muslims and issues of immigration were regularly raised. While not widespread on the Facebook networks I looked at, militaristic anti-Islamic/Muslim memes from far-right groups like Britain First or Infidels of Britain were not difficult to find and exist alongside anti-EU, anti-political correctness, and anti-immigration rhetoric, as well as the common rhetoric in the Brexit debate of "taking our country back." These are typically related to crusader imagery favoured in far-right social media which has taken on the rhetoric of not being "racist" but "anti-Islamic." This included perhaps the most notable example for present purposes: a stock image of a kitsch serene Jesus who also happens to be the commander of a crusader army. The rhetorical move of the far-right to disown "racism" in favour of opposition to perceived anti-Islamic intolerance was not pervasive on Barrovian Facebook pages but it can be found with relative ease in updates and comments when such issues arose.

Much more could be, and has been, written on the history of such Orientalist discourses, the pervasiveness of which among politicians, media, public intellectuals, social media users, or any other members of the electorate, should be well known to readers of this journal. Such discourses obscure

complex local and geopolitical histories of the Middle East and North Africa, complex British and European imperial histories, complex migration histories, complex histories of modern Islamic thought, the recruitment strategies and demographics of ISIS, and so on. It is a particularly convenient discourse which can place blame on something like "Islam," "False Islam," or a "perversion of Islam," even to the point of being a ready-made narrative when it is irrelevant, as seen in the immediate (and not-so-immediate) reporting of Anders Breivik where a number of Orientalist tropes were still played out.[62] Unlike public proclamations about the Bible and Christianity which, in such discourses, have been largely drained of any malignant (or authoritarian?) properties or even relevancy, such discourses show no sign of dying in a place so seemingly indifferent to religion as Barrow. Indeed, it is typically the perceived "religiousness" of this Other (e.g., in presentations of fanaticism, martyrdom, halal, hijab, intolerance, mosque building) that makes it such a perceived threat and yet another authority to be rejected. The pervasive cultural suspicion of Islam also owes something to its appeal not only to a certain type of Remain voter but also to a certain myth of Christian Europe in relation to a threatening Islamic Other, seen, for instance, in the ramblings of Remain advocate and theologian, John Milbank.[63]

But it is also a convenient myth of innocence, as it puts a significant emphasis on an essentialised and fully caffeinated construction of "religion." This discourse thrives more easily among contemporary liberal discourses

[62] *The Sun* ran the headline, "Norway's 9/11." For wider discussion see Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London: Zed Books, 2014). In our study of the reporting of Benedict XVI's visit to the UK in 2010, we found that the press still managed to ensure a "Muslim terrorist" angle was present in the reporting. See James G. Crossley and Jackie Harrison, "The Mediation of the Distinction of 'Religion' and 'Politics' by the UK Press on the Occasion of Pope Benedict XVI's State Visit to the UK (2010)," *Political Theology* 16, no.4 (2015): 329–45.

[63] John Milbank, "Christianity, the Enlightenment and Islam," *ABC Religion and Ethics* (August 24, 2010); John Milbank, "Theologising Brexit: Europe, Sovereignty and Nation," *ABC Religion and Ethics* (July 20, 2016). Note the following Dawkinsesque assumptions: "Englishness has hitherto been to do with a language, a literature, a legality and a constitutionality that inherently flowed outwards as gift and exchange. But once that flow has been cut off, and Englishness is thought of as a boundary and a narrow set of customs, sports, recreation and (debased and self-forgetting) cuisine one is left pretty much with beer, fish and chips, nasty dogs, angling rights and football violence." These pronouncements should be read in light of the critique given by Deane Galbraith, "John Milbank's Atavistic Orthodoxy," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* (September 6, 2010).

because its classificatory and discriminatory justifications are grounded in the rhetoric of (in)tolerance of ideas and culture rather than the now more socially taboo (in)tolerance of race, even if it is not always easy to distinguish between the two in practice. In this respect, it is striking that some of those we have looked at were also sceptical about the level of post-Brexit racial violence. But in this respect it is telling that some of the overtly anti-racist responses (echoed by groups such as Unite Against Fascism) to far-right rhetoric among interviewees also did not distinguish between the rhetoric of "anti-Islam" and "anti-racial." For these interviewees (echoed by some on Facebook) there was no mention of Islam and such far-right thinking and individuals were just deemed racist. And, in terms of the impact of such rhetoric about "religion" we need only turn to the reported post-Brexit attacks, which would fit conventional understandings of "racism," and wonder if such ignoring of the far-right distinction between "anti-Islam" and "anti-racial" might be on to something.

## Concluding remarks

We can now see what kinds of perceptions about the Bible and religion exist among this sample of Barrovians and how they compare with dominant political assumptions about the Bible and religion over the past forty years and crystalized by David Cameron. There were hints that Christianity could be used as a kind of ethnic marker, as Storm suggested was most likely, with little concern for a nostalgic view of a Christian past, a collection of moral guidelines, or church attendance. But, overall, there was minimal interest in the Bible or Christianity, perhaps because immigration has not been the same in Barrow as it has elsewhere. However, the views of these Barrovians in this instance cannot be fully understood aside from the post-Referendum context. Throughout these snapshots of Brexit Barrow, we have seen a consistent disdain of politicians and established authorities—and perhaps unsurprising for a town which has faced sharp industrial decline since Thatcher. When I rewatched Sheena Moore's documentary, "Why we voted leave: voices from northern England," I was struck by the striking similarities among those she interviewed and those I interviewed. From the context of Brexit Barrow, we should not underestimate how strong the anti-authority feeling was. It was near universal among the sample. A number of people who were a little nervous about what they were saying when interviewed were insistent that I publish their views on how much they dislike the political and economic elite.

This theme runs through not only issues of voting in the EU Referendum itself but also notions of Englishness, Britishness, the Bible, Christianity, and religion. The Bible and Christianity, and their interpreters, hold minimal authority among those Barrovians I looked at and this may also be partly why they were often viewed with such indifference and rarely with disdain.

Of course, reception in real time can provide different results. We saw how Theresa May and the renewal of Trident brought a degree of positivity towards a new authority, a positivity only previously seen in political figures deemed victims of authority or anti-authority, such as Nigel Farage and especially Jeremy Corbyn. Similarly, had interviews taken place in one of the rare public outings of the Bible and Christianity (e.g., christenings, weddings, and funerals) we might have witnessed some different understandings and an acceptance that certain contexts are their correct social location. Likewise, a more interventionist approach of recent ethnographic work (e.g., questionnaires, observed readings of biblical passages) on British Bible reading would no doubt have provoked new insights into the reading process of those who otherwise show little interest in the Bible. Nevertheless, my snapshots of Barrow do seem to be in line with some of the results about shifting religious self-identifications in the UK, particularly those relating to Christianity.

The anti-authority theme also stretches to some understandings of the Bible and religion among this group of Barrovians. In addition to a clear disdain for Cameron's use of the Bible as a source of authority for, and compatibility with, "British values," there is another source of authority associated with discourses about religion which comes out negatively, and the most obvious flipside of Christianity as a kind of ethnic marker: Islam as a source of intolerant authority. In this respect, Barrow reflects the views found in other Brexit towns, though the key difference is that immigration and people identifying as Muslim has been minimal in Barrow. And while some may have been expressing solidarity with other towns in the UK, it would not be difficult to turn this narrative about authority on its head in the case of the tiny minority of Muslims in Barrow, none of whom I was able to interview. Who, after all, holds most power in this context? Perhaps not the 0.2% of those identifying as Muslim. Furthermore, understanding post-industrial Britain and its hatred of political authority actually helps us understand why plenty of Barrovians can, in some cases, welcome Conservative authority with open arms (even among people who identified as Labour voters and were critical of authorities): they might just bring the power of Trident. For when it comes to the possibility of stable employment, more working hours, and

bonus pay, do not be surprised to find plenty of Barrovians happy to accept the authority of one who is prepared to kill—as George Kerevan put it to Theresa May—"100,000 innocent men, women and children."[64]

[64] "UK's Nuclear Deterrent," *Hansard* (July 18, 2016; Volume 613, column 559).