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Chapter 1

‘CHAOS IS A LADDER’: RECEPTION HISTORY OF THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH POLITICS

Put bluntly, this book is an explanation of changes in dominant politicalised assumptions about what the Bible ‘really means’ in *public presentations* in English culture since the 1960s, but with wider implications.¹ This book reflects my wider interests in the ways in which the chaos of social upheaval and economic change can bring about shifts in, and explosions of, ideas and thinking (whether revolutionary, reactionary, creative, culturally bizarre, peaceful, violent, accidental, and so on) which may have long-term impacts, be clamped down almost immediately, or have potential unrealised. In this case, I want to look at how the social upheavals of the 1960s and the economic shift from the post-war dominance of Keynesianism to the post-1970s dominance of neoliberalism – or, alternatively, the cultural shift from high modernity to post-modernity – brought about certain emphases and nuances in the ways in which the Bible is popularly understood, particularly in relation to dominant political ideas.

Appreciating the chaos of history within a more totalising history, and its impact on changes in the history of ideas, has a long intellectual tradition but remains most useful when qualified by Foucault’s reading of genealogies.² When taken in this sense, historical analysis looks for the

1. In this respect, this book echoes the some of the key methodological concerns of M.H.M. Steven, *Christianity and Party Politics: Keeping the Faith* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 14: ‘No archival work has been conducted – the premise of trawling through documents in any of the party archives in London, Oxford and Manchester was ultimately considered to be pointless. It is highly unlikely that the influence of Christianity upon policy documents – or some sort of equivalent – exists or is made available for public consumption... Media sources, however, are used... in an attempt to give the study as much impact as possible.’

2. M. Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in D.F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-64.

somewhat chaotic redirection of ideas without recourse to implied meta-physical origins. This Foucauldian qualification is, perhaps, especially important in this instance because it is clear that people – including some of those studied in this book – *really do* think the Bible and categories sometimes associated with the Bible (e.g. marriage) can be traced back to pure biblical and civilizational origins. Rather, to reemphasise, what is being done in this book is tracing and unravelling the assumptions held about what the Bible ‘really means’ or how it is used rhetorically and looking at the contemporary history of accidental, purposeful, discontinuous, and implicit meanings in the developments of such ideas as they appear in English politics and culture.

On one level, this book is a narrative history, self-consciously weaving ‘popular’ biblical interpretation in and around a retelling of English politics since the 1960s. The narrative of this book is very definitely *not* an all-encompassing retelling of the Bible and biblical interpretation since the 1960s, but rather a look at the ways in which some seemingly very different biblical interpreters are embedded in English political discourses and popular culture, with the major thematic links being the Bible, the country in which the interpretation was undertaken, and the timeframe. To take an unlikely analogy, it is using themes in a not entirely dissimilar way to Simon Schama’s *Landscape and Memory* (to take one example) and his use of ‘mythic’ themes such as wood, rock, and water as loose unifying narrative features to illustrate the ways human beings have interacted with the world around them.³ Though this book obviously has more emphasis on chronology (for the purposes of organization) than Schama’s great work, the eclecticism of his choice of individuals studied to illustrate broader issues is something I have found appealing. Similarly, I think it remains important to focus both on politicians central to mainstream political assumptions about the Bible (e.g. Thatcher, Blair, Cameron, Gove), as well as those figures seemingly more incidental (e.g. Hill, Archer), and those seemingly unconnected to the mainstream political process (e.g. Monty Python, Manchester musicians) because I want to illustrate the widespread power of (often unconscious) ideological and historical change and presentation in the public arena, irrespective of whether the given politician, musician, or filmmaker personally agreed with, or were even aware they were part of, a given dominant ideological trend.

3. S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Vintage, 1996).

There are further reasons why this book, with this sort of approach, benefits from chapters on popular culture and seemingly more incidental figures. The so-called 'anomalies' of history will always tell us something about their times. We might bring this sort of logic in line with Robert Darnton's suggestions about the role of the historian and interpreter in his book on eighteenth-century French cultural history, *The Great Cat Massacre*. For Darnton, the best starting point in attempting to penetrate an alien culture is 'where it seems to be most opaque'; by 'getting' the joke, proverb, riddle, ceremony or whatever, it is possible to start grasping a 'foreign system of meaning'.⁴ We might turn Darnton on cultural contexts closer to home and those parts of our own culture which might seem alien to some investigators but which in fact help us understand our own systems of meaning. The cases of potentially surprising inclusions such as Archer, Hill, Manchester, or Monty Python will likewise tell us something about ideological developments in the period covered in this book both in terms of similarities and differences from mainstream political developments.⁵

The inclusion of what might broadly be labelled 'popular culture' has another important function in terms of change in the history of ideas. As we will see below, it was counter-cultural challenges from outside the political establishment that, in part, prepared the way for, and/or were harnessed by, the political changes of the 1970s and 1980s, even if some of the participants on all sides would no doubt be horrified to hear this. Furthermore, popular culture arguably contains more effective carriers of cultural change than parliamentary politics, holding cultural or sub-cultural capital that politicians do not always have. Besides, we are living in an era where the distinction between high and low culture has apparently collapsed, and the characters in this book are no different, whether it be the creative array of visual portrayals of Thatcher, graffiti or t-shirts bearing slogans about Enoch Powell (a one-time professor of Greek,

4. R. Darnton, 'Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin', in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Allen Lane, 1984), pp. 75-104 (77-78).

5. We might note here that there is no significant discussion of John Major or Gordon Brown. There are a number of related reasons for this near-exclusion. Both Major and Brown were largely continuing the agendas of their predecessors, no matter how much they might have tried to distance themselves from them. To discuss either would involve repetition. However, and certainly in the case of Major, the Bible is not used to the extent it was by Thatcher and Blair who both set the hermeneutical agenda for what followed.

brigadier, and devotee of Nietzsche), Christopher Hill embracing free-love, Ian Curtis reading Camus, Monty Python engaging with technical biblical scholarship, Tony Blair entertaining pop stars at Downing Street, or the Eton-educated Cameron texting ‘LOL’ to Rebekah Brooks, even if he did admittedly face media ridicule for thinking it meant ‘lots of love’.⁶

1. Why ‘English’?

Like the tradition-history of many books, this book has developed into something different from that which was initially intended. I initially set out to write a book on the Bible and popular and political culture with a range of diverse and eclectic examples of how different people use the Bible and how the Bible survives in different and not typically confessional contexts. I was (and to some extent still am) guided towards topics by (what seemed to me to be) sheer curiosity. Then I noticed that most of the examples were *British*. Then I noticed that most of the examples were, in fact, *English*. Nationalism and patriotism are not things that appeal to me, whether from the Enoch Powell-inspired Right or the Billy Bragg-inspired Left of the political spectrum. But English cultural history is certainly something that interests me and this has come out, unintentionally to begin with, in this book. Peter Hennessy pointed out in a slightly different context what must be close to a truism: ‘The history of one’s own country always has a “special claim” to one’s personal attention whatever its place in the spectrum of world power’.⁷ The ‘special claim’ to my personal attention is now obvious: the subjects of the respective chapters reflect areas of interest – whether love, hate, or mere curiosity – that are roughly contemporaneous with my life so far. As someone who was born in England and has always lived in England more-or-less for the proposed period of this book, and has written

6. ‘Rebekah Brooks reveals “LOL” texts from Cameron’, *BBC News* (May 11, 2012), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-18032027>; J. Beattie and A. Shaw, ‘Oh, you are ROFL: Ex-Sun boss reveals PM signed off texts with LOL’, *Mirror* (May 11, 2012); L. O’Carroll, ‘Rebekah Brooks: David Cameron signed off texts “LOL”’, *Guardian* (May 11, 2012); E. Branagh, J. Tapsfield, and E. Pickover, ‘Lots of love: Rebekah Brooks lifts lid on David Cameron friendship at Leveson’, *Independent* (May 11, 2012); J. Chapman and V. Allen, ‘So that’s how close they were! David Cameron signed off texts to Rebekah Brooks with “lots of love” (and they DID discuss phone hacking)’, *Daily Mail* (May 18, 2012).

7. P. Hennessy, *Never Again: Britain 1945–51* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), pp. xiv.

(largely) in England at a time when *English* nationalism – as opposed to *British* nationalism – has been reasserted since the 1990s, it is perhaps no surprise that the subjects of interest are all part of English popular and political culture, no matter how much disdain I may have for English and British nationalism. To state what perhaps should have been the obvious all along, I am as much a part of my cultural context as a reaction against it.⁸

But there are less idiosyncratic and less parochial reasons for studying this period of English history. The 'secularisation thesis' may be controversial but we can at least follow the detailed work of those who argue that the social upheavals of the 1960s brought about significant changes in perceptions and understandings of Christianity, religion, and the Church and the decline of the social and political significance of religious institutions.⁹ While such debates often look at broader post-Enlightenment trends, the intensified ideas of individualism and consumerism emerging from the chaos of the 1960s have been seen to be pivotal in drops in church attendance (with plenty more choices for Sundays) and the declining lack of influence of the Church of England. As Callum Brown claimed more dramatically still: 'The death of Christian British culture, or the rupture in Christianity as McLeod puts

8. Compare the issues faced by Nick Spencer when writing his book on the history of the Bible in English politics: '*Freedom and Order* focuses disproportionately on English politics, a fact that demands a word of explanation. This book began as a study on British politics but it soon became clear that my focus was largely south of the border... [I]t was decided to maintain that focus rather than risk doing an injustice to Scottish, Welsh or Irish politics by dealing with them cursorily. For that reasons, the "history" and "politics" of the subtitle refer primarily to English history and English politics.' See N. Spencer, *Freedom and Order: History, Politics and the English Bible* (Kindle edn; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011), Introduction.

9. See e.g. C.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: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 29-46; C.G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006), pp. 224-77; C.G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain Understanding Secularisation* (2nd edn; Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 175-233; G. 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), pp. 161-89; H. McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); D. MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), pp. 985-89.

it, was a real and – I would argue – a cataclysmic event of the 1960s'.¹⁰ This has not necessarily led to widespread atheism, of course, or even the end of denominational and Christian voting.¹¹ Moreover, ongoing Christian or 'religious' beliefs have been seen to permeate contemporary culture implicitly and result in a more privatised understanding of religion, leading Grace Davie famously to coin 'believing without belonging'.¹²

As Eliza Filby has shown, these cultural upheavals had a significant influence on the rise of Thatcher, her understanding of religion and the role of the Church in political life, and, to a lesser extent, her reading of the Bible.¹³ This period further witnessed debates which directly affected changes in Church and State. The New Right of the 1970s (theological and political) took advantage of a rethinking of 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' generated by the perception of 1960s permissiveness, decolonisation, immigration, and concerns about secular liberalism. Despite tensions between liberty, tradition, and conservatism, New Right thinking fed into the emerging dominance of Thatcherism.¹⁴ This New Right thinking also included a re-emphasis on 'original sin' over-against utopianism and the perfectibility of humanity, a view we will see in the chapters on Powell and Thatcher. In less abstract terms this meant a critique of socialist emphases on the importance of the State in bettering society and the post-war Keynesian consensus. While not removing the significance of State interventionism, the alternative emerging from the New Right was a stress on economic liberalism coupled with rhetoric of freedom, liberty, and personal responsibility. With the emphasis on private sector over public sector came a restating of the significance of the entrepreneur for the re-invigoration of the economy. This, it was famously argued, would create wealth and redistribution would be rethought in terms of 'trickle-down' economics.

But there was an awareness that this ideological and cultural revolution would almost inevitably result in conflict and difficulties. Most prominently this would mean confronting trade unions and risking high unemployment through controlling inflation. However, it was these

10. Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, p. 232.

11. Steven, *Christianity and Party Politics*, pp. 21-44, 139-50.

12. G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

13. E. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher: Religion and Politics in 1980s Britain' (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2010). For a detailed summary of what follows see pp. 138-57.

14. For discussion of 'Thatcherism', see Chapter 4.

issues which helped the New Right into power. The narrative is now well known but is worth summarising. A number of political crises in the 1970s aided the emergence of Thatcher and eventually the phenomenon of Thatcherism (see Chapter 4). High inflation and high unemployment had widespread effects but the then powerful National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was representing workers from a nationalised industry whose wages were not rising with inflation. 1972 and 1974 saw two major strikes and, after the turmoil of the three-day working week and blackouts, Edward Heath's Tory government called an election to decide whether it was Parliament or unions who was running the country. Labour won but had to deal with the problems of the interests of its supporters among trade unions and the public sector, on the one hand, and austerity courtesy of the IMF, on the other. The result was the Winter of Discontent in 1978, with strikes affecting hospitals, transport, and even burials, and, with press and public disillusionment towards the status quo and continuing high unemployment, Thatcher was able to come to power with significant middle-class support to challenge unions and the role of the public sector.¹⁵

But first Thatcher had to overthrow the Conservative establishment which, though hardly uncritical, was relatively settled in the post-War Keynesian consensus by the 1970s. While the Conservative Party had suffered two narrow election defeats within a year in 1974 resulting in a minority Labour government, an ideological revolution was being plotted within the Conservative Party which was to be implemented after Thatcher emerged as the only credible figure to challenge Heath for the leadership of the Party in 1975. Influenced by the ideas of Friedrich von Hayek, and building on a range of cultural changes challenging traditional upper-class and bureaucratic power, these Conservative revolutionaries, ultimately led by Thatcher, came to represent new changes in economics and politics in the mid-1970s, building on nearly two decades of work coming from the Institute of Economic Affairs and its advocacy of economic liberalism; those ideas that would eventually come to be labelled 'neoliberalism'. Alfred Sherman and Conservative MP Keith Joseph, one of the chief pioneers of English and British neoliberalism and one of the biggest direct influences on Thatcher, established the Centre for Policy Studies in 1974, itself soon to be followed by the Adam Smith Institute in 1976, both of which marked shifts towards

15. For a summary in the context of the emergence of neoliberalism in Britain see D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 56-59.

economic liberalism in English politics at least. This intellectual revolution and changes in elite power among the Conservative Party would in many ways become a dominant – but hardly unchallenged – ideological position until the present day, at least in parliamentary politics. These developments were not simply a post-1974 implementation of the agenda of a Thatcher-led New Right; they are an Anglicised manifestation of broader ideological and economic changes which were starting to take shape at the end of the 1960s and which have become the norm for leaders of the main political parties since.

2. Why ‘since 1968’?

‘1968’ is a date that will be used throughout this book partly out of convenience and as shorthand for wider cultural changes of the time, or indeed as a key moment of historical chaos generating such shifts. 1968 is especially convenient because it was, of course, the year of widespread international political, and social uprisings – particularly the Paris uprising – and is often associated with student movements, strikes, and the emergence or re-emergence of a range of leftist and often playful political thinking (e.g. anarchism, Situationism) which focused on individualism and personal freedom as well as collectivism associated with the traditional Communist and Socialist parties. But these uprisings, changes, and disturbances were not out of the blue and we might reasonably turn to the previous year and the 1967 Summer of Love (or indeed the coming of age of a post-war youth culture in the 1960s more generally) which likewise saw a hippy-inspired culture challenging traditional understandings of gender and sexuality and pushing for civil rights, peace, social justice, liberalisation of drugs, free-love, free-speech, and so on. As we all know, the cultural changes brought about by the mythical 1960s have been profound, as has its political impact since. However, while the rhetoric of 1960s freedom may have become more closely associated with strands of the liberal Left,¹⁶ it is increasingly clear that the New Right likewise owe a debt to the changes generated by 1968. David Harvey has argued that the tensions between, on the one hand, the rhetoric of individual freedom, identity politics, and the intrusive state, and, on the other, the organised labour movement of the traditional Left, while not irreconcilable, could lead in different directions. For instance, Harvey notes how the rhetoric of individual freedom and identity politics

16. J.G. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship, Ideology* (London: Acumen, 2012), pp. 25-26.

could be developed into 'narcissistic consumerism' and, coupled with hostility towards the state, ultimately exploited in the development of 'neoliberalism'.¹⁷

Neoliberalism is associated with a variety of issues noted above in relation to Thatcher and the New Right. To generalize, neoliberalism advocates a variety of issues such as individual property rights and free trade, promotes the private sector over the public sector, supports deregulation of the market, challenges traditional manifestations of state power, urges virtually every aspect of human existence to be brought into the market, encourages individual responsibility, downplays systemic problems as a cause of individual failure, and emphasizes the importance of the market for the common good, human freedom, elimination of poverty, and creation of wealth.¹⁸ Neoliberalism has been the dominant ideological position in the West since the 1970s, replacing the previous Fordist–Keynesian consensus. Of course, in reality, 'pure' neoliberalism does not happen and state interventionism has hardly withered. But the *ideal*, with increasingly higher degrees of implementation, has been dominant and has manifested itself in forms of high profile advocates or implementers, such as Thatcher, Reagan, Blair and Cameron. David Harvey can even write about 'the neoliberalism of culture'.¹⁹

Harvey, Fredric Jameson, and Perry Anderson have shown the links between late capitalism, or neoliberalism, and postmodernity,²⁰ all with the accompanying challenges to traditional concepts of truth and meta-narratives and greater emphasis on diversity, indeterminacy, instability, kitsch, playfulness, eclecticism, derivation, and a certain de-centeredness.²¹ Assisted by the rise of mass media and communications, the instant image and PR has become more prominent than ever before. Perhaps

17. Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, pp. 56-59.

18. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism*, pp. 21-37. For full discussions of neoliberalism see e.g. Harvey, *Neoliberalism*; D. Plehwe, B.J.A. Walpen, and G. Neunhoffer (eds.), *Neoliberal Hegemony: A Global Critique* (London: Routledge, 2007); P. Mirowski and D. Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2009).

19. Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, p. 47; cf. F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 261, 263, 265-66, 278.

20. D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989); Jameson, *Postmodernism*; P. Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* (London: Verso, 1998).

21. T. Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. vii.

paradoxically, however, we find nationalism, jingoism, imperialism, and war taken up by neoliberal states to promote or provoke, directly or indirectly, neoliberalism (think of the Falklands or the Iraq wars), or indeed as a reaction to the globalizing tendencies of neoliberalism.²² This tension between non-intervention and state intervention partly explains why neoconservatism came to the fore in the past decade. Neoconservatism has not only provided vigorous support for neoliberal economics but has positively revelled in the possibilities of militarisation, authoritarianism, and threats to the order (whether real or otherwise).

3. Political Receptions of the Bible since 1968

Nick Spencer has suggested that the Bible and its uses in English political history contain two distinctive, and potentially contradictory or complementary, tendencies between freedom and order.²³ I want to develop this further and look at how some of the distinctive post-1968 trends (in both global and Anglicised manifestations) outlined above intersect with four related, inherited, and, mostly, deeply embedded understandings of what the Bible ‘really means’ or how it is used rhetorically, particularly, but not exclusively, in the context of Anglicised political discourses. Once these four broad understandings are established, we can then proceed to look at how they are negotiated and nuanced by various political figures throughout the rest of this book. These four understandings are: the Cultural Bible; the Liberal Bible; the Neoliberal Bible; and the Radical Bible.

a. *The Cultural Bible*

The one assumption that runs throughout all political persuasions is what we can call, following Jonathan Sheehan, the Cultural Bible.²⁴ Sheehan has shown in detail how the Enlightenment produced a Bible which was (sometimes contradictorily) a philological and pedagogical resource, a literary classic, a moral guidebook, and a historical archive. These

22. See e.g. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 5; Harvey, *Neoliberalism*, pp. 64-86; N. Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 136-40; W. Brown, ‘American Nightmare: Neoconservatism, Neoliberalism, and De-democratization’, *Political Theory* 34 (2006), pp. 690-714; R. Boer and A. Andrews, ‘Thin Economics; Thick Moralising: Red Toryism and the Politics of Nostalgia’, *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 40 (2011), pp. 16-24.

23. Spencer, *Freedom and Order*.

24. J. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 93-258.

different strands were encapsulated by the Cultural Bible, and biblical readers and interpreters interacted with developing ideas of secularisation. That these developments were taking place at a time of developing nationalism and Orientalism, particularly in the nineteenth century, is of some significance. This Bible was part of 'our' Western culture and civilisation and even an English classic.²⁵ Examples of the Cultural Bible abound and we will see numerous examples running throughout this book.²⁶ One particular twentieth-century example, though, might show us some of the assumptions underpinning discussions of the role of the Bible in English culture: the publication of the *New English Bible* New Testament in 1961. T.S. Eliot was less than impressed with this new version, claiming that it lacked the 'verbal beauty of the Authorized Version' and 'it would be good if those who have authority to translate a dead language could show understanding and appreciation of their own'. Eliot went further still and emphasised the importance of biblical translation for an English heritage:

The age covered by the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I was richer in writers of genius than is our own, and we should not expect a translation made in our time to be a masterpiece of our literature or, as was the Authorized Version of 1611, an exemplar of English prose for successive generations of writers. We are, however, entitled to expect from a panel chosen from among the most distinguished scholars of our day at least a work of dignified mediocrity. When we find that we are offered something far below that modest level, something which astonishes in its combination of the vulgar, the trivial, and the pedantic, we ask in alarm: 'What is happening to the English language?'²⁷

As we will see in Chapter 9, proclamations about the importance of the King James Bible in connection with an English heritage were not difficult to find during its 400th anniversary in 2011. For Richard Dawkins,

25. On the on-going influence of the Enlightenment and Cultural Bible more generally see S.D. Moore and Y. Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

26. The Cultural Bible shares common features with earlier assumptions of the Bible, what Sherwood has labelled the 'Deferential/Passive Bible' and the 'Monarchical/Patriarchal Bible', in its emphasis on order and respect. See Y. Sherwood, 'On the Genesis between the Bible and Rights', in M.J.M. Coomber (ed.), *Bible and Justice: Ancient Texts, Modern Challenges* (London: Equinox, 2011), pp. 13-42 (22-28). However, we will see that the Cultural Bible has long been utilised by radical and liberal readers of the Bible as well.

27. Available at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/neb-eliot.html> and originally published in the *Sunday Telegraph* (December 16, 1962).

the English Bible ‘needs to be part of our education’, ‘is a major source-book for literary culture’, and ‘a treasured heritage’.²⁸ Similarly, Michael Gove, who sent out King James Bibles to English schools in his role as Secretary of State for Education, spoke of how the King James Bible ‘has had a profound impact on our culture’ and that every school child ‘should have the opportunity to learn about this book and the impact it has had on our history, language, literature and democracy’.²⁹

b. *The Liberal Bible*

The connection between the Bible and democracy brings us on to another dominant form of understanding of what the Bible ‘really means’. Looking partly at George W. Bush’s use of the Bible, Yvonne Sherwood coined the phrase the ‘Liberal Bible’ which she described as an interpretative tradition developing since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³⁰ The Liberal Bible is an understanding of the Bible as supportive of freedom of conscience, rights, law, government, and consensus, and marks a shift from the Absolute Monarchist’s Bible where decisions made by the monarch were to be seen as proof of divine power. The Liberal Bible has also produced the (mistaken) assumption that the Bible is the foundation, and consonant with the principles, of western democracies without acknowledging that such a view of the Bible has its roots in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. The Liberal Bible is able to endorse actions against its constructed opposite: the undemocratic, tyranny, and terror. Unsurprisingly, it can follow from this anachronistic perspective that the Bible and Jesus are believed to be more representative of democracy than the Qur’an and Muhammad. Because of its early modern origins, the Liberal Bible is continually vague. As Sherwood put it, ‘It reduces the Bible to a few benign and vague axiomatic politico-theological principles that can be liberally applied (excuse the pun) thereafter’.³¹ In the case of Bush’s speeches, for instance, there were just enough biblical allusions to win key electoral support from Protestant Christians, with the specifics of faith left ambiguous. Indeed, Jacques Berlinerblau has additionally argued that successful American politicians

28. R. Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), pp. 340–41, 343, 344.

29. ‘Schools get King James Bible to mark 400th anniversary’, *BBC News* (May 15, 2012), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-18073996>.

30. Y. Sherwood, ‘Bush’s Bible as a Liberal Bible (Strange though that Might Seem)’, *Postscripts* 2 (2006), pp. 47–58; Sherwood, ‘On the Genesis between the Bible and Rights’.

31. Sherwood, ‘On the Genesis between the Bible and Rights’, p. 35.

over the past thirty years have always used the Bible in a vague, non-polemical manner in order to signal to the electorate that the politician is a decent God-fearing person while simultaneously trying to avoid controversial debates about the Church/state distinction and a backlash from the liberal media.³² While there may be different emphases and nuances depending on the party-political persuasion of the interpreter, the use of the Liberal Bible, like the Cultural Bible, along with the related rhetorical moves, is a common feature of all the major British and English politicians, an assumption shared with much of the contemporary media.³³

An example of the interpretation of the Ten Commandments – itself an important text (or texts) for the Liberal Bible tradition – highlights the point well. In one of his regular criticisms of the BBC, social liberals, and multiculturalism, *Daily Mail* columnist Richard Littlejohn used the Ten Commandments to show a vague legal underpinning of social values, in particular to argue that (male) homosexuality is not really prominent in the UK outside liberal types. In defence of this worldview, Littlejohn claimed that 'OK, so we may not all be regular churchgoers, but we are still cultural Christians, who broadly buy into the Ten Commandments – if only in the breach rather than the observation'.³⁴ We will turn to another overlapping emphasis on the Cultural Bible in due course but a parlour game might show the potential disjunction between the content of the Ten Commandments and their apparent application in contemporary British law and culture. We can start by establishing a checklist of commandments:

You shall have no other gods before Me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing loving-kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

32. J. Berlinerblau, *Thumpin' It: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today's Presidential Politics* (Louisville: WJK, 2008).

33. J.G. Crossley and J. 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* (forthcoming).

34. R. Littlejohn, 'Whatever the BBC say, Britain is still mainly white, Christian and straight', *Daily Mail* (September 30, 2011).

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

Honour your father and your mother.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not murder.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour. (Exod. 20.1-17; Deut. 5.1-21)

A reasonable case might be made that in neither the Exodus nor the Deuteronomy versions are the people who might be expected to observe these commandments (even in breach) 'Christians'. Moreover, Sabbath observance might, of course, be alternatively be understood as the Jewish Shabbat. And what relevance to the Littlejohn household is avoiding 'any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth'? But even if we bring a number of the more famous commandments into the present, a number of sentiments (e.g. honour parents, do not steal, do not murder) are general sentiments that would no doubt unite people from a number of backgrounds, religions, countries, moral systems, and so on, whether a BBC employee or *Daily Mail* columnist. It might even be suggested that a male homosexual is less likely to covet his neighbour's wife than Littlejohn's heterosexual English male. So, if we were to follow Littlejohn this literally, his view of Christian Britain is problematic. But this is not the point. The Ten Commandments are simply deemed to be more-or-less part of British democracy, laws, rights, society, and so on, irrespective of their actual contents. The Liberal Bible understood this way is an extremely common phenomenon in political discourse as we will see throughout this book, and has manifestations across the mainstream political spectrum.

In a recent study of the British Press and their treatment of Benedict XVI's papal visit in 2010, Jackie Harrison and I showed that a dominant positive understanding of 'religion' was that it was, or indeed had to be, compatible with liberal democracy. Correspondingly, the positive use of the Bible (invariably the King James Bible) was largely from the Liberal Bible tradition, typically using the KJV-isms, *love thy neighbour* or *render unto Caesar*.³⁵ For instance, the *Daily Mail* quoted the Catholic

35. Crossley and Harrison, 'The Mediation of the Distinction of "Religion" and "Politics"'.

MP, Mark Pritchard, as saying 'The Catholic Church is an imperfect institution but it is amazing the BBC has found nothing positive to say about a church whose key message is to love thy neighbour including feeding the poor and helping the homeless'.³⁶ Of course, transubstantiation, sin, salvation, sacraments, anti-contraception, and so on might alternatively be thought of as central to understandings of Catholic history but, as ever, that is not the point: once in the contemporary political and cultural arena, and with the need to be seen as acceptable, 2000 years of complex history is boiled down to *love thy neighbour*. More explicitly, Dominic Lawson removed any political danger away from 'religion' by claiming that Benedict was an 'un-political' Pope who had 'no interest in inserting the Catholic Church into the political process'. This is because Benedict apparently inherited his worldview from Jesus who declared 'that the temporal and spiritual worlds should be entirely separate'. To support this argument, Lawson quoted 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's'.³⁷ What we have here is the Bible being used to support the typical privatisation of 'religion' and the historic rhetoric concerning the separation or integration of the seemingly binary categories of 'Church and State', which covers up a much more complicated, interrelated reality.³⁸ This is, as Russell McCutcheon put it, 'firmly entrenched in the well-established liberal tradition of distinguishing the relatively apolitical freedom "to believe" from the obviously political freedom to behave, organize, and oppose. It is none other than the rhetorical distinction between private and public...that makes possible both the internalization of dissent and conformity of practice.'³⁹

c. *The Neoliberal Bible*

In fear of stating the obvious, the Neoliberal Bible can simply be understood to be largely compatible with the ideals of neoliberalism. In this vein, we could fast-forward to Chapter 4 and Thatcher's Bible which, as

36. S. Doughty, 'Pope faces atheist hate campaign in UK after top German aide says: "When you land at Heathrow you think you're in a Third World country"', *Daily Mail* (September 16, 2010).

37. D. Lawson, 'Pope Benedict...an apology', *Independent* (September 21, 2010).

38. For a detailed history, deconstruction, and analysis of the rhetorical distinction between 'religion' and 'state' from early modern Europe and as a product of modernity see C. Martin, *Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion and the Private Sphere* (London: Equinox, 2010), pp. 33-57.

39. R.T. McCutcheon, *Religion and the Domestication of Dissent: or, How to Live in a Less than Perfect Nation* (London: Equinox, 2005), p. 62.

we will see, emphasised individualism over state, characters like the Good Samaritan for his money to enable charitable giving, patriotism, and social order. In fact, Thatcher's Bible, as will be argued throughout much of this book, could be said to be the template for political exegetes, just as Thatcherism (in some form) has become the dominant ideological position of the main political parties. There will be much more detail on this in due course but there is another aspect of the Neoliberal Bible which needs to be highlighted and which had less direct input from Thatcher but tallies with neoliberal trends more generally. Indeed, it might even be suggested with only slight exaggeration that neoliberalism provides the ideal economic and ideological conditions for the idea that the actual contents of the Bible barely matter in understanding what the Bible 'really means', particularly in the idea of the importance placed on marketing and instant imaging.

For instance, the commodity fetishism involved in (re-)packaging already existing biblical translations for a targeted audience/market neatly replicates the relentless postmodern interest in, and market of, multiple identities. And it is surely Zondervan who has cornered the market for identity marketing of effectively the same Bible, more precisely the *New International Version* repackaged in different forms, such as: *Playful Puppies Bible*; *Curious Kittens Bible*; *The Holy Bible: Stock Car Racing Edition*; *True Images: The Teen Bible for Girls*; *Revolution: The Bible for Teen Guys*; *Couples' Devotional Bible*; *Engaged Couples' Bible*; *Life Journey Bible*; and so on and so on. By way of analogies from memetics, Hugh Pyper has suggested that multiple manifestations of biblical books, versions, translations, and so on, have generated the Bible's own survival.⁴⁰ We might rethink Pyper's suggestion in more economic terms and argue that the Bible has survived by these multiple manifestations being embedded in capitalism's relentless quest for more markets.

Of course, the (re-)packaging of these Bibles conveys a range of ideological meanings. The instant imagery of military insignia, photographs of soldiers and a helicopter, and the background picture of the American flag on the cover of *The Soldiers' Bible* (2004) are all that are needed to convey a certain ideological message. This is a message – effortlessly combining the core of American neoliberalism and neoconservatism in convenient green bonded leather with slide-tab closure – that probably does not need spelling out. And nor does the significance of the quotations, prayers, and inspiration from, among others, President George W. Bush and General George S. Patton, the description that it is for those

40. H.S. Pyper, *An Unsuitable Book: The Bible as Scandalous Text* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

'men and women who serve the cause of freedom around the world', or the words to America the Beautiful contained therein. Indeed, a glance at the covers and additional advice interspersed between the pages of the *New International Version* will immediately tell readers what sort of gender, cultural and political positions can be expected for the ideal buyer of the *Teen Bible for Girls* or the *Bible for Teen Guys*.⁴¹ Likewise it is easy enough to guess what interests are at play by the mere title of the 'Queen James Bible'. We are informed that the Queen James Bible has been 'edited...to prevent homophobic interpretations', that the King James Bible (in its 1769 version) was chosen for the revision because of, among other reasons, 'The obvious gay link to King James, known amongst friends and courtiers as "Queen James" because of his many gay lovers',⁴² and the title on the home webpage tells us that this is 'A Gay Bible'.⁴³ However, this information is, to some extent, superfluous, as the white cover with a cross in the colours of the LGBT rainbow flag conveys enough information for a market audience with interest in such identity politics.

Indeed, image is further significant for the range of meanings it can convey *instantly*. Katie Edwards has shown that the Bible in advertising only needs a split-second viewing as pages are turned or an advertising board passed to convey a range of ideological meanings. For instance, a standard glossy magazine advert with an Eve-type figure tempted by an apple can convey a set of assumptions about consumerist desire and constructions of gender, whilst an advertising board featuring England footballer Wayne Rooney in a 'Messianic' pose shows the intersection of (among other things) branding, masculinity, and nationalism.⁴⁴ There is a lot of discussion about declining standards of biblical literacy which work with a Protestant model of knowing the details of given passages and stories; does the Neoliberal Bible not suggest that biblical literacy still exists, just in a radically different way?⁴⁵ We will see in Chapter 9 how this sort of Bible has manifest itself in contemporary political debates.

41. J.G. Crossley, 'OH-MY-GOD – It's So the Teen Bible!', *SBL Forum* (January, 2007), <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=615>.

42. <http://queenjamesbible.com/gay-bible/>.

43. <http://queenjamesbible.com/>.

44. K.B. Edwards, *Ad Men and Eve: The Bible and Advertising* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012); K.B. Edwards, 'Sporting Messiah: Hypermasculinity and Nationhood in Male-targeted Sports Imagery', *Biblical Reception* 1 (2012), pp. 323-46.

45. The Neoliberal Bible, alongside the importance of the image and economics, is not, of course, an entirely new phenomenon and familiar in the history of, for instance, propaganda or any number of historical antecedents. I hope this will be

d. The Radical Bible

The Radical Bible is a historic tradition of understanding the Bible which, put crudely, equates the Bible with socialism in one form or other or even with revolutionary transformation. Or, as Tony Benn put it, ‘the origins of socialism can be traced back as far as the time of Christ himself and even to the Old Testament’.⁴⁶ A number of themes about what the Bible ‘really means’ in the Radical Bible tradition include: land and wealth redistribution, confronting power and wealth, communitarianism, egalitarianism, anti-clericalism and direct access to God, the importance of conscience and/or the Spirit, prophetic critique, and even ‘apocalyptic’ language, particularly with reference to a radical transformation of the social, economic, and political order.⁴⁷ To rephrase Morgan Phillips, the Radical Bible owes as much to Marx as it does to Methodism. What I label the Radical Bible is perhaps best known, at least among theologians and biblical scholars, from Liberation Theology. Yet we should not forget that there is a long, wide-ranging history of radical and popular readings of the Bible or biblical texts which have challenged ecclesiastical, priestly, economic, social, or imperial authority and hierarchies, even if they are not all technically ‘socialist’ and some only show elements of what we might label ‘political radicalism’. These might include (among many others): early Jewish bandits, at least as described by Josephus (*War* 2.228-231; 2.247-248; 2.274-276; *Ant.* 20.113-117); perhaps Jesus himself (e.g. Mark 10.17-31; Luke 16.19-31); the Cathars; Müntzer and the radical Reformation; Catholic Worker Movement; a range of Marxist

assumed by readers. A painting as famous as Thomas Jones Barker’s ‘The Secret of England’s Greatness’ (1863) illustrates the use of the Bible and its interaction between image, politics, imperialism, and economics. We might, alternatively and not unreasonably, call the Neoliberal Bible the ‘Postmodern Bible’, but I prefer Neoliberal Bible for a number of reasons, including the follow two. First, it maintains the more explicit economic element in the analysis, though readers of, for instance, David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, and Perry Anderson will be well aware of the economic underpinnings of postmodernity. Second, the term ‘neoliberal’ retains the important connections with ‘liberal’ and, more to the point, the tradition of the Liberal Bible.

46. T. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), p. 23.

47. The literature on radical interpretations of the Bible is vast, wide-ranging, and diverse. Two helpful summaries of key points in the history of politically radical biblical interpretation are R. Boer, *Rescuing the Bible* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 105-27, and C. Rowland and J. Roberts, *The Bible for Sinners: Interpretation in the Present Time* (London: SPCK, 2008). Sherwood, ‘Alliance’, pp. 21-22, discusses the ‘Revolutionary/Republican Bible’ with particular reference to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

intellectuals, including the relatively recent interest in Paul as a revolutionary thinker by philosophers such as Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek; and even Marx and Engels themselves.⁴⁸

The importance of the Radical Bible in English politics and culture likewise has a long history (e.g., among many others, Peasants' Revolt, Wyclif and the Lollards, Blake, F.D. Maurice, Chartists, Socialist Sunday Schools etc.). One of the most important moments in terms of its potential influence on party politics was the English Civil Wars and Cromwell's harnessing (and ultimate rejection) of politically radical readers of the Bible, such as Gerrard Winstanley and the Diggers. But it was not until the turn of the twentieth century and the emergence of the Labour movement with its strong Nonconformist contingent that the more sustained influence of the Radical Bible was felt in party politics.⁴⁹ The Radical Bible features in the rhetoric or upbringing of a number of major Labour party figures associated with the Left and leftist causes, such as Keir Hardy, Margaret and Rachel MacMillan, Will Crooks, R.H. Tawney, George Lansbury, Ellen Wilkinson, Aneurin Bevan, Stafford Cripps, Donald Soper, and Eric Heffer,⁵⁰ as well as in radical movements and figures with some connections with the Labour Party in the twentieth century, such as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), and even the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson,⁵¹ and with ongoing echoes in the contemporary think-tank Ekklesia.

48. J. Økland, 'The Spectre Revealed and Made Manifest: The Book of Revelation in the Writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels', in J. Økland and W.J. Lyons (ed.), *The Way the World Ends? The Apocalypse of John in Culture and Ideology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), pp. 267-88. Cf. F. Engels, 'On the History of Earliest Christianity (1894)', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works Volume 27, Engels: 1890-95* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp. 447-69.

49. See e.g. Spencer, *Freedom and Order*, Chapters 7-10.

50. See e.g. G. Dale, *God's Politicians: The Christian Contribution to 100 Years of Labour* (London: HarperCollins, 2000).

51. On Thompson's little-known poetic engagement with the Bible (and in relation to CND) see E.P. Thompson, *Infant and Emperor: Poems for Christmas* (London: Merlin Press, 1983), and R. Boer, 'Apocalyptic and Apocalypticism in the Poetry of E.P. Thompson', *Spaces of Utopia* 7 (2009), pp. 34-53. On Thompson's uneasy relationship with the Labour Party see e.g. S. Hamilton, *The Crisis of Theory: E.P. Thompson, the New Left and Postwar British Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 162-63, 180.

4. Tony Benn and the Decline of the Radical Bible

From the 1970s onwards, Tony Benn became the standard-bearer for the Radical Bible in party-politics and the Labour movement. Benn came from a Nonconformist and politically dissenting background but between 1964 and 1970 settled into the Labour establishment serving as Postmaster General and Minister for Technology under Harold Wilson. However, by the end of the 1960s, and after experiencing the constraints of government first-hand, he started his move to the radical (or ‘hard’) Left of the Labour Party where he championed a number of major leftist (and, at the time, often unpopular) issues, such as post-1968 feminism, syndicalism, the Miners’ Strike of 1984–85, Irish unification, anti-war(s), unilateral disarmament, and anti-hierarchical radical democratic equality (not least in the Labour Party), as well as continuing his long-standing opposition to racism and the treatment of immigrants.

Some of this radicalism was influenced by Benn’s mother, Margaret ‘Didi’ Holmes, who was a feminist, from a background of liberal Nonconformist (Congregationalist) dissent, a biblical scholar of some training (e.g. she read Hebrew and Greek), and contact of the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (whom Benn visited as a young man).⁵² On meeting the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, Holmes said that she wanted her sons to grow up in a world where women would be given ‘equal spiritual status’,⁵³ a view which would chime with Benn’s radical egalitarian democratic views and his understanding of the Bible with a radical Protestant spin. Citing texts such as Mark 12.29–31 in support,⁵⁴ Benn argued that the concept of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ was ‘based on the belief that every person had a direct line to the Almighty and does not require a bishop to mediate concerning what to believe and what to do’,⁵⁵ nor indeed the ‘intervention of an exclusive priestly class claiming a monopoly right to speak on behalf of the Almighty, still less of a king claiming a divine right to rule’.⁵⁶ He labelled this religious dissent as ‘a completely revolutionary doctrine

52. T. Benn, *Conflicts Of Interest: Diaries 1977–80* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), pp. 7–8; Dale, *God’s Politicians*, p. 196. Benn parallels Niebuhr’s views on democracy and sin with those of the Levellers whom Benn also admired. See e.g. T. Benn, *The Levellers and the English Democratic Tradition* (Nottingham: Russell Press, 1976), p. 14.

53. D. Powell, *Tony Benn: A Political Life* (New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 13. Cf. T. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel: Then and Now* (London: Arrow Books, 2004), p. 5.

54. E.g. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, pp. 24–25.

55. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 5.

56. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, p. 25.

because it undermined authority, disturbed the hierarchy and was seen as intolerable by the powers that be, in exactly the same way that, today, political dissenters are projected as trouble-makers and members of the "awkward squad", whose advice would lead to chaos'.⁵⁷

The interconnected themes of individual conscience and confronting power and hierarchy are common in Benn's understanding of the Bible. Citing Amos 5.24 and Micah 6.8, Benn looked to the 'deep conviction to be found in the Old Testament that conscience is God-given, or derives from nature or reason' and is supreme over human-made law, a conviction that is 'still passionately held today'.⁵⁸ Perhaps most famously, Benn recalled his father's fondness for the story of Daniel in the lions' den and the words from the Salvation Army hymn, 'Dare to Be a Daniel' ('Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone, Dare to have a purpose firm, Dare to make it known'). Benn claimed that that these sentiments 'greatly influenced my life' and 'taught me the importance of consistency and courage in the face of adversity – essential for anyone who is criticised for his convictions'. He even photographed a picture he saw in the YMCA in Nagasaki in 1983 of Daniel – head bowed, hands behind back, and surrounded by lions – and hanged the photograph in his office 'to remind me of those qualities that are most important in public life' before citing the hymn.⁵⁹ Not everyone had Daniel's good fortune however. Individuals, Benn argued, may always rebel against systems of power and think for themselves but such people have been 'generally excommunicated or even killed'. Yet, Benn has added, the importance of 'teachers who explained the world without wanting to control it themselves' is of great importance in the development of ideas.⁶⁰

Benn's mother continued to have an influence in reading biblical stories to Benn's children, as well as in Benn's remembering of her continued presence in his own radical politics, notably in standing up to power. He recalled:

I was brought up on the Bible by my mother who told me about the age-old conflict between the kings who had power and the prophets who preached righteousness. She taught me to support the prophets against the kings, meaning that each of us had the responsibility for learning to differentiate between good and evil and make that our guide for action.⁶¹

57. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 5.

58. Benn, *Levellers*, p. 7.

59. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, pp. ix, 11.

60. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, pp. 4-5.

61. T. Benn, *Free Radical: New Century Essays* (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 226.

The prophets-versus-kings model may sound an abstracted kind of radicalism but Benn immediately gave it contemporary application with specific reference to well-known and precise causes most readily associated with the contemporary political Left:

She was right, we should all have the confidence to think things out for ourselves, and if we do it must be clear that Bush's plan to make war on Iraq is wrong, as is the conduct of Sharon in oppressing the Palestinians, or whipping up of hostility against asylum-seekers, or accepting the present grossly unfair division between rich and poor in a world dominated by globalization.

This application of the Radical Bible also reflects deeply rooted ideas about the nature of political power and democratic ideals which can often implicate the established church on the side of the 'kings'. A good example of this is found in Benn's diary entry for April 25, 1991, when Benn recalled a 'crowded meeting' at Hartlebury Castle, the home of the Bishop of Worcester. After giving a speech, Benn engaged in questions of democracy, which included the following incident:

Then two Evangelicals got up and said, 'Do you accept that Jesus is our Lord?'

I said, 'I don't like the word Lord. I don't believe in Lords'. This brought us on to the whole question of the Kingdom of God, and I did describe my Constitutional Reform Bill. What you realise is that an authoritarian Church, where power comes from the Creator mediated through the bishops to the clergy to the laity, can't really take on board democracy at all because everything is done from the top.⁶²

But individual conscience did not, of course, lead to a Thatcherite reading of the Bible. Indeed, Benn contrasted Thatcher's Nonconformist roots and individualism as freedom from the State with his mother's Congregationalism which 'was interpreted quite differently. She was a very devoted and serious Christian and gave me a grounding in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.'⁶³ More specifically, the idea of individual conscience transferred into more collective justice. Indeed, in this respect Benn took the significant example of Marx whom he came to believe 'was the last of the Old Testament prophets, a wise old Jew...'⁶⁴

62. T. Benn, *Free at Last! Diaries 1991–2001* (London: Hutchinson, 2002), p. 17. Cf. T. Benn, 'The Power of the Bible Today', in *Sheffield Academic Press Occasional Papers: The Twelfth Annual Sheffield Academic Press Lecture, University of Sheffield, March 17, 1995* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 1–13 (4).

63. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 10.

64. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 14; Benn, 'Power of the Bible Today', pp. 7–8.

Applying ideas of eschatological judgement and justice familiar to both the Radical Bible tradition and the Labour movement (see also Chapter 8), as well as elsewhere in Benn's thinking on the Bible,⁶⁵ he further argued that the idea of Heaven on Earth ('or justice in practice') is not only 'an integral part of the dissenting tradition' but also of 'the trade-union movement, which recognised that you could only improve conditions by your own collective efforts'.⁶⁶ This integration of individual dissent and collectivism can, he claimed, be found throughout history. In a House of Commons debate on 'Socialism', Benn suggested:

The Bible has led to many revolutionary ideas – for instance, that we were and are all equal in the sight of God – which is why, in 1401, the House of Commons passed the Heresy Act, which condemned any lay person reading the Bible to be burned at the stake for heresy. The Bible has always been a controversial document. At the time of the Peasants' Revolt and the English revolution, people started thinking of common ownership, based on the life of the apostles. (House of Commons debate on Socialism, May 16, 2000)⁶⁷

What is also notable in this respect is that Benn rejected a famous view that, as we saw, has been associated with Conservative understandings of the Bible and taken up by Thatcher but which has a long history of being questioned in radical theological thinking: Original Sin. Whereas Conservatives such as Thatcher saw the rejection of Original Sin as leading to misguided ideas of social utopianism and the perfectibility of humanity (see Chapter 4), for Benn the very idea of Original Sin 'is deeply offensive' because 'I cannot imagine that any God could possibly have created the human race and marked it at birth with evil that could only be expiated by confession, devotion and obedience'. Whereas Thatcher could associate the rejection of Original Sin with totalitarianism, Benn took the opposite view. This 'use of Christianity to keep people down was...destructive of any hope that we might succeed together in building a better world'.⁶⁸

65. 'Whether you believe that you are accountable on the Day of Judgement for the way you have spent your life, or have to account to your fellow men and women for what you have done during your life, accountability is a strong and democratic idea' (Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 17).

66. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 7. See also Benn, 'Power of the Bible Today', p. 3.

67. Cited in Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, pp. 268-78 (269).

68. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 13.

The idea of later corruptions of an original purer message is common to all the major traditions of reading the Bible discussed in this book but Benn, of course, followed the standard rhetorical move of the Radical Bible. He saw Jesus (notably labelled ‘the Carpenter of Nazareth’) as ‘one of the greatest teachers, along with Moses and Mohammed’ and that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam teach ‘that we are brothers and sisters with a responsibility to each other’.⁶⁹ But these religions can distort the message of the great leader. While rejecting the ‘implicit atheism’ in Marx, Benn believed it was possible to accept the argument that religion is the opium of the people ‘without in any way demeaning the importance of the teachings of Jesus’.⁷⁰ Benn’s views of the Bible and faith may have changed over the years but, he claimed, such changes were not ‘influenced by atheistic arguments, which were extreme and threw doubt on the value of the Bible and the historical truth of Jesus’ life’. Rather, the real challenge for Benn was ‘the nature of the Church and the way in which it sought to use the teachings of the Bible to justify its power structures in order to build up its own authority’.⁷¹ Benn, typically, has provided concrete examples of ‘the one characteristic of most religions when they become established...the entrenchment of authority at their heart’, whether the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope, ‘each in their time having great power over their respective churches and enforcing Christian doctrine, sometimes ruthlessly, as at the time of the Inquisition and on other occasions when heretics were burned at the stake’.⁷² Benn also believed that this characteristic was part of the political arena, and perhaps not surprising given his views on Marx as Old Testament prophet, and Stalinism (‘supposedly the teachings of Marx’), to the ‘Labour Party itself, which was inspired by men and women of principle, [who] became corrupted by the same power structures, leading to the expulsion of different people on the grounds that they were not prepared to accept orders from the Party hierarchy’.⁷³

Benn saw the Bible and biblical interpretation as part of a specifically English or British (he has used both terms) radical tradition. This English or British tradition can be seen with particular reference not only to the

69. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 15. The title ‘Jesus Christ the Carpenter of Nazareth’ and the ‘revolutionary’ nature of monotheism turn up elsewhere in Benn’s reflections on the Bible. See e.g. Benn, *Levellers*, pp. 5-6.

70. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 14.

71. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 13.

72. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 4. Cf. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, p. 39.

73. Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel*, p. 4. Cf. Benn, ‘Power of the Bible Today’, pp. 3-5, 7-8.

Labour movement, but also to the Levellers, a common point of reference in the English Radical Bible tradition, and one to which we will return in Chapter 2. For Benn, the Levellers 'won wide public support among the people as a whole' and 'their ideas still retain a special place in the political traditions of the people of England'.⁷⁴ These 'political traditions', Benn argued, were very much socialist, though he acknowledged that the democratic ideals of the Levellers were also picked up by liberals, and that such ideals have a lineage stretching back further still:

The Levellers can now be seen...as speaking for a popular liberation movement that can be traced right back to the teachings of the Bible, and which has retained its vitality over the intervening centuries to speak to us here with undiminished force... [T]o understand what the Levellers said, and why, we must delve back far into our own history. For the Levellers drew many of their ideas, and much of their inspiration, from the Bible, with its rich Jewish and Christian teaching.⁷⁵

The Bible was the 'basic text' for Benn's Levellers and, 'as now in many parts of the world', it was seen as a 'revolutionary book', partly because it was 'not to be trusted to the common people to read and interpret for themselves'.⁷⁶

Benn went further still in placing the Bible prominently in the origins of British or English socialism. In his 1979 book, *Arguments for Socialism*, which sold over 75,000 copies,⁷⁷ Benn attempted to counter the suggestions that the origins of the Labour party did not justify shifts to the Left by foregrounding the Bible, along with the Levellers, Marx, and the Labour Party's Constitution, as some of the most important influences.⁷⁸ Again, the Bible, and Jesus, through the Levellers, were a crucial part of 'democratic socialism', which 'is very much a home-grown British product which has been slowly fashioned over the centuries'. Benn added that its 'roots are deep in our history and have been nourished by the Bible, the teachings of Christ, the Peasants' Revolt, the Levellers, Tom Paine, the Chartists, Robert Owen, the Webbs and Bernard Shaw...'⁷⁹ The Bible also had another important aspect for Benn's socialism: to counter criticisms of atheism being integral to socialism. While socialism may be criticised for its atheistic element, Benn further added that this is 'not true as far as British Socialism is

74. Benn, *Levellers*, p. 7.

75. Benn, *Levellers*, pp. 5, 7.

76. Benn, *Levellers*, p. 9.

77. Dale, *God's Politicians*, p. 194.

78. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, p. 23.

79. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, p. 146.

concerned' because 'the Bible has always been, and remains, a major element in our national political – as well as our religious – education', which Benn contextualised in terms of his regular refrain of Kings versus Prophets.⁸⁰

Benn would narrowly lose the Labour Party Deputy Leadership election in 1981 and this would mark the decline of the Bennite Left in the Labour Party, and such radicalism was eventually pushed to the fringes of the party. By the end of the 1980s, the centrist ideas of Neil Kinnock were dominating the Labour Party and were pushed further to the right by Tony Blair in the 1990s. As Blair was removing Clause 4 (a commitment to common/public ownership or nationalisation) from the Labour Party Constitution, Benn was claiming that 'anyone who really thinks that Clause 4 and common ownership was invented by Karl Marx, and I think there are some people quite high up in the Labour Party who think that, might go back to the Acts of the Apostles for the idea of all things in common'.⁸¹ But any serious influence Benn had on the Labour Party had now gone and with it the Radical Bible was no longer the force it once was. Indeed, leading Labour users of the Bible slowly began embracing some of the rhetoric of Thatcherism which, as we will see in Chapter 8, was most fully developed in Blair's hermeneutics.

A significant moment came in 1993 in a Christian Socialist Movement (CSM) publication edited by Christopher Bryant (then press officer for the Christian Socialist Movement, later its chair) called *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism*, largely a collection of then recent Tawney Lectures.⁸² The book foregrounded the role of then Labour leader John Smith and included a foreword by Blair. As might be expected, Smith's article contained anti-Thatcher polemics but the ideas of individual freedom ('our ultimate moral goal'⁸³) and their relationship with collectivism is the dominant theme. Smith turned to the Christian socialism of the anti-Marxist of the lecture series, R.H. Tawney, and advocated a 'democratic socialism' which was 'ethical, individualistic, parliamentary and pragmatic' and would seek to enhance 'individual freedom in a framework of collective common purpose'.⁸⁴ Smith made a rhetorically surprising move by also turning to Adam Smith who, he pointed out,

80. Benn, *Levellers*, p. 5. Cf. Benn, *Arguments for Socialism*, pp. 23-24.

81. Benn, 'Power of the Bible Today', p. 7.

82. C. Bryant (ed.), *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

83. J. Smith, 'Reclaiming the Ground – Freedom and the Value of Society', in Bryant (ed.), *Reclaiming the Ground*, pp. 127-42 (130).

84. Smith, 'Reclaiming the Ground', p. 127.

balanced 'support for public investment in infrastructure, in education and the arts...the hidden gems of intervention that can be found alongside his thesis of the invisible hand'.⁸⁵ This allowed (John) Smith to place some significance on the market which, he argued, remained a 'useful means of enabling choice and distribution of myriad goods and services'.⁸⁶ Smith, via Tawney, constructed this democratic socialism between the constructed extremes of *laissez-faire* capitalism and 'Marxist collectivism', 'the *laissez-faire* Right' and the 'Marxist Left'.⁸⁷ Smith was, of course, preparing the way for the rise of New Labour under Blair and Gordon Brown.

Reclaiming the Ground still featured more radical traditions, including the Tawney Lecture by John Vincent. However, it is clear that the signs of the decline of the Radical Bible are found in other key places, as well as being notable that Vincent is a voice from outside Parliament. Bryant's editorial essay certainly picked up on themes from the Radical Bible tradition, including the abolition of poverty and collectivism, as well as discussing biblical passages in relation to radical themes. But what is also clear is that Bryant does not push the potentially radical conclusions too hard and would often leave the ramifications sufficiently general that they could be embraced by a centre-leftist politician, or in several instances, even Conservative or Liberal politicians. Moreover, whereas Tony Benn was always keen to give precise contemporary application to major leftist causes, Bryant remained general and largely non-committal. Reviewing the history of influences on Christian socialism, Bryant noted that the 'inspired prophets of the Old and New Testament recognised that there is something "unfair" in human society'.⁸⁸ William Blake may have wanted a 'New Jerusalem' and Keir Hardie may have 'asserted that a society could and should be built on the precepts of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, with its emphasis on the poor, the hungry and those who thirst for justice' but we do not discover much more in terms of detail.⁸⁹ Indeed, Christian socialism was said to have witnessed 'the rediscovery of the Bible' and a much-neglected biblical theme which is likewise general: 'enjoining Christians to practise justice'.⁹⁰ Even when it seems more details of 'justice' are forthcoming,

85. Smith, 'Reclaiming the Ground', p. 133.

86. Smith, 'Reclaiming the Ground', p. 133.

87. Smith, 'Reclaiming the Ground', pp. 135, 37.

88. C. Bryant, 'Introduction', in Bryant (ed.), *Reclaiming the Ground*, pp. 13-28 (16).

89. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 17.

90. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 18.

conclusions are left open. For instance, 'justice' in the Sermon on the Mount was applied in 'many different directions', including collectivism. Yet while co-operative movements may have 'believed in a society far more akin to the early Church where all things were held in common' the 'extension of common ownership to State socialism...was a more contentious matter'.⁹¹

Bryant's handling of wealth and inequality is particularly significant because he refrained from a more fully blown rejection of wealth inequality and edged more towards lack of fairness and mistreatment of 'the poor'. Bryant even referenced Liberation Theology and the 'biblical understanding of poverty...as a sign that society has turned its back on God'. From this perspective, 'the poor' are those who 'lack food, water and a home' or are 'oppressed by the wealthy, denied their rights, their wages or their land'. God, in this tradition, has a 'preferential option for the poor'.⁹² In addition to such generalisations, there are other hints of more relativised thinking. The Old Testament prophets may have 'rounded on the rich' but only the rich 'who abused their privilege and bore scant regard for the poor'.⁹³ A particularly notable example of the treatment of wealth and the Bible is Bryant's handling of the rich man and the eye of the needle. Bryant made the interpretative decision to read something which could be deemed, as certain disciples thought, impossible (a camel passing through the eye of a needle) as something less stark: '[Jesus] clearly asserts that it will be more difficult for the rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle'.⁹⁴ Bryant likewise recognised the importance of working-class education, which has a long history in the radical tradition, but this too was ultimately believed to be about relative fairness. The 'Old Testament Wisdom tradition' and 'Jesus' own emphasis on teaching' meant that for Christian socialists 'the wider dissemination of knowledge and education' had previously left them 'to organise against unfair pay and working conditions'.⁹⁵ Notably, their educational interests are summarised with a vague generalisation. The Socialist Sunday School (founded in 1892) with its 'Socialist Ten Commandments' tried to 'both teach and build solidarity'.⁹⁶

91. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 19.

92. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 22.

93. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 18.

94. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 22.

95. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 20.

96. Bryant, 'Introduction', p. 21.

Within ten years of *Reclaiming the Ground*, Bryant had become a fairly conventional New Labour MP, even if on occasion there is a hint of the old radicalism. He voted 'very strongly' in favour of the Iraq War, 'very strongly' against an investigation into the Iraq War, 'strongly' for a stricter asylum system, and 'very strongly' for introducing ID cards, while still voting 'very strongly' for the removal of hereditary peers from the House of Lords and for a wholly elected House of Lords.⁹⁷ As the example of Bryant shows, the Radical Bible has not disappeared entirely from English political discourse, but it has had its sting removed from party politics and has been largely pushed out of Parliament (see Chapter 9). In Chapter 8 we will also look in more detail at how the rhetoric of the Radical Bible became absorbed into the Liberal Bible under Blair, particularly in his interventionist policies.

5. 'The Good Man Jesus'

We should finally turn to a recurring issue relating to the Radical Bible and the Liberal Bible which involves singling out Jesus as a particularly inspirational figure, typically misunderstood by the church, and even by the New Testament writers. This singling out of 'the good man Jesus' in distinction from his ecclesiastical interpretations has proven to be a notable way for certain atheists, or those generally hostile to anything associated with 'organised religion', to embrace the Bible in some form and has been used by figures as diverse as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Oscar Wilde, H.G. Wells, John Lennon, and Bill Hicks. To take a typical example, in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the openly atheist Douglas Adams wrote about a girl in a café in Rickmansworth who realised how the world could be a decent place, echoing the views of a man who was nailed to a tree nearly two-thousand years earlier for advocating people being pleasant to each other for once. This rescuing or singling out of 'the good man Jesus' also has a long history which also relates to the tradition of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment critical biblical scholarship and the quest for the (typically heroic) historical figure of Jesus.⁹⁸ Indeed, as Diarmaid MacCulloch wrote concerning (former Lib-Dem supporter) Philip Pullman and his novel with the relatively self-explanatory title, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (2010), 'Pullman knows his biblical scholarship. Virtually everything in

97. Details are available at http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/chris_bryant/rhondda.

98. On nineteenth-century quests for the historical Jesus, see H. Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Historical Jesus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

his novella, except for the storyteller's brilliant restructuring of the tale as of two brothers, is foreshadowed in what Protestant professors have been saying in Tübingen and Berlin over the last two centuries.⁹⁹ While Pullman was emphatic in claiming that the novel really was fiction, he did claim that 'I think my version is much closer to what Jesus would have said. The version in the Gospels is so different from what he said usually.'¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the Afterword to *The Good Man Jesus* tries to explain precisely this, as well as laying down a challenge to Christians.

There are also plenty of examples of Jesus as a positive figure in traditions which might otherwise be potentially hostile or indifferent to the Christian Bible. Jacob Taubes noted the long Jewish tradition of reclaiming Jesus: 'There's a literary corpus about Jesus, a nice guy, about the rabbi in Galilee, and about the Sermon on the Mount; it's all in the Talmud and so on... a sort of pride in this son of Israel. But when it comes to Paul, that's a borderline that's hard to cross.'¹⁰¹ However, this was written in the context of his attempted reclamation of Paul for Judaism ('the Jewish study of Paul is in a very sad state', he claimed).¹⁰² Taubes was himself anticipating the return of the radically political Paul singled out in Marxist philosophy and where both Jesus and Paul have received supreme compliments by way of analogy:

I am not the first to risk the comparison that makes of him [Paul] a Lenin for whom Christ will have been the equivocal Marx.¹⁰³

Paul goes on to his true Leninist business, that of organizing the new party called the Christian community. Paul as a Leninist: was not Paul, like Lenin, the great 'institutionalizer,' and, as such, reviled by the partisans of 'original' Marxism-Christianity? Does not the Pauline temporality 'already, but not yet' also designate Lenin's situation in between two revolutions, between February and October 1917? Revolution is already behind us, the old regime is out, freedom is here – *but* the hard work still lies ahead.¹⁰⁴

99. D. MacCulloch, 'All Too Human', *Literary Review* (April 2010), http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/macculloch_04_10.html.

100. C. Higgins, 'Philip Pullman creates a darker Christ in new assault on the church', *Guardian* (March 26, 2010).

101. J. Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 5.

102. On Paul and contemporary Judaism, see D.R. Langton, *The Apostle Paul in the Jewish Imagination: A Study in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

103. A. Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 2.

104. S. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), p. 9.

Of course, singling out Jesus (or even Paul) is hardly restricted to atheistic, Marxist, or Jewish traditions, as the centrality of Jesus in Christian theology obviously implies. Variants of this singling out of Jesus are seemingly endless. Stephen Prothero was no doubt scratching the surface in his popular book, *American Jesus*, where he looked at different appropriations of Jesus in American culture (Jesus as rabbi, Jesus as enlightened sage, oriental Christs, the superstar, the fighter, and so on).¹⁰⁵ The cultural context of the Jesuses collected by Prothero is, unsurprisingly, American, but an American context which, for all its religious pluralism, retains a strongly Christian overlay and influence and also a context wherein religious pluralism, Christianity, and understandings of secularism play their role in shaping the culture and portrayals of Jesus.

As the mention of Pullman, Adams, and even Lennon already implies, the Radical Bible does not have a monopoly on singling out Jesus. The familiar theme of Jesus being tolerant, inclusive, and an all-round decent person equally lends itself as much to the Liberal Bible as it does to radical democracy, and the tensions and overlaps between the Liberal Jesus and the Radical Jesus emerge in some of the studies in this book. This means that when looking at the different Jesuses and different Bibles, there will need to be some concern with broader ideological tendencies at work in an individual or group. For instance, the scathing comments by Bill Hicks – the American comedian who found greater popularity in the UK – could, theoretically, come from someone sympathetic to the Liberal Jesus/Bible or the Radical Jesus/Bible. Hicks denounced Christians such as George Bush Sr and Pat Robertson for their support for nuclear armament and sarcastically commented that their Jesus would come back with an Uzi shooting Pilate and everyone else.¹⁰⁶ However, we know from Hicks' generally consistent ideas that this Jesus takes his place in a more politically radical tradition which, at least in terms of American foreign policy, is broadly in line with Chomsky's critiques and, more generally, is hostile to and critical of anyone in power (whether Republican or Democrat, church or media), wealthy comedians advertising whatever products, and any possible government or corporate conspiracies. But Jesus, like Hicks, figures as part of the resistance that has to be killed (Hicks sometimes performed mock-executions of himself at the end of his act). Hicks' Jesus was

105. S. Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2003).

106. B. Hicks, 'Relentless' (Centaur Theatre, Montreal, 1991), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIA5dL7VJxg>.

brought into such an overall system of thought. In a performance at the Oxford Playhouse in 1992, he made some of his more well-known claims about the world being ‘just a ride’. Hicks’ visionary figures who proclaimed that ‘it’s just a ride’ have been murdered, in contrast with Reagan who was merely wounded and the ‘demons’ that run riot on the planet. Jesus takes his place among Martin Luther King, Gandhi, and Malcolm X as Hicks’ ‘good guys’.¹⁰⁷ A variant addition given at the Dominion Theatre in London only heightened the radical Jesus (and, of course, Gandhi, Malcolm X, etc.). Hicks did this by emphasising a choice between ‘fear and love’, between those who want weapons and insularity and those who want a better ride, that is, a world where money is not relentlessly spent on defence but on education, food, and clothing for all humanity, who could then be released to explore inner and outer space.¹⁰⁸ This version did not mention Jesus by name but when pieced together we can see Jesus take place in a system of radical political thought. It may be an obvious point, but it is still worth stressing that we sometimes have to do some detective work to establish the ideological position underpinning the understanding of Jesus. This point is particularly important when dealing with figures in the Labour Party where both the language of radicalism and liberalism has been historically present.¹⁰⁹

6. Concluding Remarks

Given these summaries of the Cultural Bible, Liberal Bible, Neoliberal Bible, and Radical Bible, as well as the ongoing significance of a singling out of Jesus, it may be less surprising than might be thought that

107. B. Hicks, ‘Shock and Awe’ (Oxford Playhouse, November 11, 1992), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTwgoaYC3U>.

108. B. Hicks, ‘Revelations’ (Dominion Theatre, London, September 14, 1993), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7bcxBf2vK4>.

109. To confuse matters further, Labour MP Stephen Pound advocated an early day motion to the House of Commons on the ten-year anniversary of Bill Hicks’ death. It read: ‘That this House notes with sadness the 10th anniversary of the death of Bill Hicks, on 26th February 1994, at the age of 33; recalls his assertion that his words would be a bullet in the heart of consumerism, capitalism and the American Dream; and mourns the passing of one of the few people who may be mentioned as being worth of inclusion with Lenny Bruce in any list of unflinching and painfully honest political philosophers’ (‘Early day motion 678 [2003–4]: Anniversary of the Death of Bill Hicks’, <http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2003-04/678>). This did not stop Pound voting in favour of the Iraq war which the Chomsky-inspired Hicks would have bitterly opposed, as he did the first Gulf War. See http://www.theyworkforyou.com/mp/10484/stephen_pound/ealing_north.

the Bible has been used in contemporary English politics during a period of 'believing without belonging' and apparent 'secularisation'. Of course, using the above labels for understanding what the Bible 'really means' does not mean that a range of readers with a range of different interests are not in existence. Some might like rediscovering the Otherness of the ancient world, some might rely on biblical texts for converting non-believers to an opening of the heart, and some may know the whole lot off by heart. Some readers may laugh at or even hate the Bible, believing that using the Bible for politics is entirely anachronistic, though such readings might complement the assumptions outlined above (e.g. if the Bible is not compatible with liberalism then it should ideally be removed from any political debate working with liberal assumptions).¹¹⁰ Some readers may enthusiastically see the Bible as profoundly anti-liberal, anti-Marxist, and supportive of theocratic political thinking, though it is difficult to see how this might influence mainstream party-politics.¹¹¹ Nor is any of the above meant to imply that the Liberal Bible, Cultural Bible, Neoliberal Bible, or Radical Bible are unchanging traditions sealed off from one another or any other ways of reading the Bible. Rather, the emphasis is on how these understandings are major trends and dictate some of the ways in which the Bible is understood, whether users know it or not or like it or not.

What we are also dealing with in this book is a localised and historically situated example of what Roland Boer described as 'the tension between reaction and revolution that one so often finds with Christianity', which, he added, is also found in the Bible and its various uses.¹¹² This sort of tension, as Filby has shown, was being debated in overlapping contexts of Church and State, just prior to and during Thatcher's premiership.¹¹³ The rest of this book is in many ways about the decline of the Radical Bible in parliamentary politics and the victory of (a modified form of) Thatcher's re-reading of the Liberal Bible tradition, and the normalisation of (a modified form of) Thatcherism more generally. The

110. See further Sherwood, 'On the Genesis between the Bible and Rights'.

111. John Milbank and Phillip Blond, along with the associated Radical Orthodoxy and Red Toryism, come to mind and might even challenge the idea that such theocratic thinking cannot influence party-politics. However, it is striking that whenever Milbank, Blond, and associated Red Tory and Radical Orthodox thinkers engage in party-political debate and in the mainstream media, they invariably conform to standard mainstream political rhetoric and drop much of their theological language. For discussion with bibliography see Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism*, pp. 189-209.

112. Boer, 'Apocalyptic and Apocalypticism', pp. 45, 50.

113. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 29-45.

following two chapters will look at how the Bible features in political discourses which paved the way for the Thatcher revolution. After Thatcher, we will then turn to how her ideas were becoming embedded in wider culture as well as in mainstream political power. The book will then finish by looking at the place of the Radical Bible in political discourse and, briefly, at why any politician is using the Bible at all. But first we turn to events at the beginning of the period which help explain the fall of the Radical Bible as well as the seeds of its survival outside Parliament and against the backdrop of emerging Thatcherism and neoliberalism.