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Chapter 4

‘YOUR ARMS ARE JUST TOO SHORT TO BOX WITH GOD’: MARGARET THATCHER’S NEOLIBERAL BIBLE

1. Margaret Thatcher: Cultural Phenomenon and Nonconformist

The chaos of the individualism, nostalgia, counter-culture, radicalism, internationalism, consumerism, patriotism, and conservatism generated or intensified by the 1960s would appear to have been harnessed and controlled, at least temporarily, by Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013) and the movement bearing her name, Thatcherism. After the Conservative defeat in 1974, she would soon re-emerge with a distinctive monetarist vision, challenging the consensual nature of post-war, old-Etonian Conservative politics and the dominance of Keynesianism. Unlike Christopher Hill, Thatcher had less inhibition about unleashing the power of the morally righteous individual and was furiously hostile to all things Communist; unlike Enoch Powell, Thatcher was less tied to a nostalgic vision of the Church and ‘Englishness’ grounded in the age of Empire, even if inspired by his then political eccentricities. Of course, Thatcher shared a similar nostalgic vision but it was a nostalgia partly designed to support a shift to a new form of Conservatism and a new vision for Britain. As Jonathan Raban wrote towards the end of her time in office:

Mrs Thatcher uses two of her most cherished words, ‘history’ and ‘roots’. Her own break with the past has been radical to the point of revolutionary, yet, like those scriptural annotators for whom every verse of the New Testament can be grounded in the foretext of the Old, she continually employs ‘history’ as a great licensing authority, to validate each new departure from historical practice.¹

1. J. Raban, *God, Man and Mrs Thatcher: A Critique of Mrs Thatcher’s Address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 23.

The dramatic story of Thatcher's new Britain is now well known. This was a new Britain of privatising national industries, private ownership of council houses, the Falklands War, mass unemployment, close ties with Reagan's America and NATO, increased fears of a nuclear holocaust, the end of the Cold War, a year-long Miners' Strike, the end of any serious union influence, inner-city and Poll Tax riots, entrepreneurs, celebrity entrepreneurs, new money, yuppies, identity politics, the sharp decline of Old Labour, garish colours, and all the other familiar things television documentaries play to the music of The Specials, Wham!, and Duran Duran.

When Thatcher died on April 8, 2013, there was something distinctively odd about the public re-emergence of old battles from the 1980s. On the one hand, some protesters were paying for their effectively privatised protest by downloading 'Ding Dong! The Witch is Dead' from the *Wizard of Oz*, while, on the other, hardened Thatcherite publications like the *Daily Mail* were calling for a state funeral to be paid for with public money.² It is perhaps the greatest victory of something as divisive as Thatcherism (and neoliberalism) broadly understood to have its negative affects attributed and diverted to one person while at the same time being so widely accepted (no doubt at times unconsciously) even by those who denounced her so strongly.³ What Žižek wrote of the reception of Fukuyama (which applies in practice to the Left and the Right) could equally be said of Thatcher and Thatcherism in the UK: 'It is easy to make fun of Fukuyama's notion of the "End of History", but most people today are Fukuyamean, accepting liberal-democratic capitalism as the finally found formula of the best possible society, such that all one can do is try to make it more just, more tolerant, and so on'.⁴ Indeed, it now appears that Thatcherite views on work, free-market, collectivism, and welfare are more prominent among the younger the generation, and effectively the norm among those born between 1980 and 2000

2. We might add that, unlike the *Daily Mail*, Ken Loach (albeit jokingly) called for a privatised funeral ('Put it out to competitive tender and accept the cheapest bid. It's what she would have wanted'). On such ironies surrounding Thatcher's funeral, see e.g. S. Jeffries, 'The old lefties are back – and so are all the old insults', *Guardian* (April 14, 2013).

3. We might recall the classic arguments associated with Stuart Hall and the hegemony of Thatcherism. See e.g. S. Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Marxism Today* (January, 1979), pp. 14-20; S. Hall and M. Jaques (eds.), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983); S. Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988).

4. S. Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 88.

('Generation Y'), and perhaps this comes as no surprise with the decline of unionism and as a more atomistic culture has become more embedded, even if the evidence has been over-exaggerated at times.⁵ As John Harris remarked, such Thatcherism is 'seemingly as ordinary and immovable as the weather' and that 'the up-by-the-bootstraps Conservatism of Norman Tebbit and Margaret Thatcher' is 'now built into millions of young lives as a simple matter of fact'.⁶ David Cameron may have been more right than even he thought when on the occasion of Thatcher's funeral he claimed that we are all Thatcherites now.⁷

The confusions about Thatcher's legacy (and her death and funeral are only the tip of the iceberg, of course) highlight a key point in understanding Thatcher and Thatcherism: Thatcher herself remains a 'toxic' brand (especially for Conservative Party electioneering) while at the same time Thatcherism in one guise or other became the economic, political, and, arguably, though obviously to a lesser extent, even the cultural norm across the political spectrum, if we understand Thatcherism as Nigel Lawson did. 'Thatcherism', Lawson recognised in his oft-cited definition, should not be everything Margaret Thatcher said and did but rather more generally it 'involves a mixture of free markets, financial discipline, firm control over public expenditure, tax cuts, nationalism, "Victorian values" (of the Samuel Smiles self-help variety), privatisation and a dash of populism'.⁸ In fact, Thatcherism still remains the idealised economic norm (arguably in an intensified form) even after the 2008 recession which was widely claimed to be a failure of the financial deregulation her government instigated in the 1980s and taken up by subsequent governments. Of course, we might make the repeated claims against a coherent phenomenon called 'Thatcherism' by pointing

5. J. Ball and T. Clark, 'Generation Self: what do young people really care about?', *Guardian* (March 11, 2013); J. Harris, 'Generation Y: why young voters are backing the Conservatives', *Guardian* (June 26, 2013); Anonymous, 'Generation Boris', *Economist* (June 1, 2013); D. Stuckler and A. Reeves, 'We are told Generation Y is hard-hearted, but it's a lie', *Guardian* (July 30, 2013). For the reports see Ipsos-MORI, 'Generations', http://ipsos-mori-generations.com/Assets/Docs/ipsos-mori-the-generation-frame.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=generationsreport; British Social Attitudes, '29th British Social Attitudes Report: Anxiety Britain', <http://www.bsa-29.natcen.ac.uk/>.

6. Harris, 'Generation Y'.

7. 'Margaret Thatcher funeral: Cameron speaks of personal debt to former PM', *BBC News* (April 17, 2013), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22180610>.

8. N. Lawson, *The View from No. 11: Memoirs of a Tory Radical* (London: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 64.

to Thatcher's pragmatism, a range of party-political perspectives, or her hope for charitable giving and social responsibility generated by wealth and standing in contrast to amoral, deregulated casino-banking. But in many ways this would miss the bigger picture. It is sometimes helpful to think less about the person and personalities and more about Thatcherism as a phenomenon generated by her intellectual circle of the 1970s and government of the 1980s, irrespective of whether Thatcher personally intended or wanted all the results that have come with these changes. While there will no doubt be more discussion over precisely what 'Thatcherism' is or is not, in broad terms, then, it is reasonable to think of it as a general Anglicised manifestation of neoliberalism and the economic successor to Keynesianism.

As Thatcherism was beginning to gain momentum in the 1970s, Keith Joseph made the distinction from the economic past rhetorically stark and in ways which would leave their mark on Thatcher's ideas and speeches: Thatcherism was the alternative to Socialism. Indeed, Joseph even claimed that public spending in the UK meant that, in many ways, it was more socialist than any other country outside the Eastern Bloc.⁹ Joseph, along with, for instance, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, Alan Walters, and Enoch Powell, were among the most profound influences on Thatcher and the development of Thatcherism and were, as we saw in Chapter 1, part of the wider developing neoliberal trend.¹⁰

But this does not mean, of course, that we should downplay the influence of Thatcher herself, even if some commentators have bought into the rhetoric of Thatcherism by hugely over-emphasising her individual significance. In particular we should not neglect her Methodist upbringing, or at least her memory of it. When looking at the role of the Bible and religion in the thinking of political figures, political commentators and historians have tended to provide cursory accounts at best, but this is probably less so in the case of Thatcher, if only because of the sheer volume of literature on her life and premiership. Indeed, she even

9. H. Young, *One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 84.

10. Compare the recollections of John Ranelagh, *Thatcher's People: An Insider's Account of the Politics, the Power, and the Personalities* (London: Fontana, 1992), p. ix: 'On the occasion of Thatcher's only visit to the Research Department, in the summer of 1975, a friend and colleague, Michael Jones and I prepared a paper for her meeting with us... Another colleague also prepared a paper... Before he had finished speaking to his paper, the new Party leader reached into her briefcase and took out a book. It was Friedrich von Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*. Interrupting our pragmatist, she held up the book for all of us to see. "This", she said sternly, "is what we believe", and banged Hayek down on the table.'

claimed that 'I believe in what are often referred to as "Judaeo-Christian" values: indeed my whole political philosophy is based on them'.¹¹ Her Methodist upbringing in particular has been well documented and some of Thatcher's own Christianised rhetoric has long been noted. But this type of analysis of Thatcher's career appears to be increasing recently, with Graeme Smith and Eliza Filby particularly showing in a more thoroughgoing way how Thatcher's Nonconformism had a significant influence on her politics.¹²

Thatcher described her parents as 'staunch Methodists' and recalled that her childhood home was 'practical, serious and intensely religious... Our lives revolved around Methodism.' On Sundays she had morning Sunday school, followed by the 11am Morning Service, more Sunday school in the afternoon and, from the age of 12, piano playing for children to sing hymns.¹³ Methodism made up much of her social and cultural life. Thatcher reminisced about her enjoyment of the musical side of Methodism, particularly piano playing and her love of poetry with Methodism and Wesley's hymns providing 'some really fine religious poetry' alongside Kipling and Milton.¹⁴ Tellingly, John O'Sullivan, a Thatcher speechwriter, claimed that one of her favourite sayings of Wesley was 'Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can'.¹⁵

Thatcher's father, Alfred Roberts, was a local councillor and town Alderman in Grantham, as well as being a local lay preacher. In terms of politics, seeds of Thatcherism can be found here too, as commentators typically point out. Though he stood as an independent, Thatcher described her father's politics as 'old-fashioned liberal', though she never remembered him 'as anything other than a staunch Conservative'.¹⁶

11. M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper Press, 1993), p. 510.

12. G. Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith: A Case Study in Political Theology', *JRE* 35 (2007), pp. 233-57; Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 176-211; Eliza Filby, 'Margaret Thatcher: her unswerving faith shaped by her father', *Telegraph* (April 14, 2013). Cf. P. Riddell, *The Thatcher Era and its Legacy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). Although not a conventional historical account, Raban, *God, Man and Mrs Thatcher*, is still well worth reading.

13. M. Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London: Harper Press, 1995), pp. 5-6.

14. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, pp. 8-9, 17. Cf. C. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography. Vol. 1, Not for Turning* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), p. 6.

15. J. Kirkchick, 'A friendship without prejudice: Thatcher's kinship with Jews and Israel', *Haaretz* (April 10, 2013).

16. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 21. Cf. J. Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher. Vol. 1, The Grocer's Daughter* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000), pp. 11-14; Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 15-16.

John Campbell similarly summed up Alfred Roberts' Methodism as one of 'personal salvation' and his preaching as 'fundamentalist, Bible-based, concerned with the individual's responsibility to God for his own behaviour', with 'an uncompromisingly individualistic moral code which underpinned an individualistic approach to politics and commerce'.¹⁷ We have seen in previous chapters, including that on Christopher Hill, that Methodism and Nonconformism provided important influences and ideas for twentieth-century leftist thought. This was not quite the case for Thatcher's upbringing, which was a result of the split in Methodism between the Methodist Free Churches and the Wesleyans. The Methodist Free Churches became more in line with the emerging Labour Party and the political radicalism found in Nonconformism. The Wesleyans claimed greater affinity with the teaching of John Wesley himself and a social and theological conservatism, including a Conservative tendency following the split in the Liberal vote in the 1920s.¹⁸ The Roberts family belonged firmly to the Wesleyans. Grantham had churches of both Methodist types and in inter-war Grantham the differences were not reconciled as they were elsewhere in the reunifications under the Methodist Union in 1932.¹⁹ Thatcher, of course, knew that the 'general political tendency' among Methodists and other Nonconformists in Grantham was 'somewhat to the left wing and even pacifist'.²⁰ Her memory of Methodists in Grantham included those prominent in organising the 'Peace Ballot' of 1935: 'we had our own views about that in the Roberts household... On this question and others, being staunchly Conservative, we were the odd family out.'²¹ If we were going to push the influence on Thatcherism perhaps a little too far, we might further note that Thatcher claimed that 'Religious life in Grantham was very active and, in the days before Christian ecumenism, competitive and fuelled by a spirit of rivalry'.²²

But in her Methodism and the 'religious life' of Grantham we certainly can find further influences on Thatcherism, particularly in ways which would run counter to some ideas about the role of state support. There were networks of private charity and church events in Grantham for 'elderly folk living alone or who were sick' and 'children who needed help', or just 'either to keep young people happy or to raise funds for one

17. Campbell, *Grocer's Daughter*, p. 16.

18. Filby, 'Margaret Thatcher'.

19. See further Campbell, *Grocer's Daughter*, pp. 15-16.

20. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 10.

21. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 11.

22. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 8.

purpose or another',²³ though Alfred Roberts did not, significantly, appear to stretch such charity to the Jarrow Marchers.²⁴ The importance of family support played a distinctive role in Thatcher's memory of her Methodist upbringing. She remembered a debate between her father and a church-goer about the 'prodigal son' of a friend who had spent his parents' savings and returned with a young family. The church-goer had insisted that the son was always going to be a problem and should be turned away. Thatcher's father gave a reply which remained 'vivid in my mind': 'A son is a son, and he must be greeted with all the love and warmth of his family when he turned to them. Whatever happens, you must always be able to come home.'²⁵ Among the values 'instilled in church...faithfully reflected in my home' was the 'emphasis on hard work... [W]e were never idle – partly because idleness was a sin.'²⁶ More generally, the social side of Methodism, such as meals with fellow church-goers, would anticipate her later career: she found herself enjoying the conversation as it moved from religion to national and international politics.²⁷

Thatcher preached as a Methodist while at Oxford²⁸ and she married the divorcee Denis Thatcher (1951) and christened her children (1953) in John Wesley's Chapel in London but her church affiliation would change, perhaps superficially, when she shifted to Anglicanism in the 1950s. However, her retrospective reasoning tried to keep the Methodist and Wesleyan link and betrayed no particularly strong yearning for the Church of England, suggesting, perhaps, that establishment assimilation, political ambition, and convenience could have been as good reasons as any for her new home.²⁹ In an interview with the *Catholic Herald* in 1978 she is reported to have said:

You know, John Wesley would of course say that he was a member of the Church of England, and the service he believed in was the Church of England service; but it was too high for the kind of evangelical work he was doing. Methodism is the most marvellous evangelical faith and there is the most marvellous love and feeling for music in the Methodist Church which I think is greater than in the Anglican Church. But you sometimes feel the need for a slightly more formal service and perhaps a

23. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, pp. 9, 13, 17.

24. Campbell, *Grocer's Daughter*, pp. 16-17.

25. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 6.

26. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 11.

27. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 9.

28. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 49.

29. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 182-83.

little bit more formality in the underlying theology too. So throughout my life I have felt the need for both things, to some extent for the informality, for the works you do; but always I found myself groping out for more of the actual teaching of the religious basis...but not the real High Church.³⁰

As Campbell argued, despite Thatcher's own romantic spin on her childhood, there still remains evidence of a yearning for a life beyond Grantham and provincial Methodism.³¹ In this respect, it is notable too that Thatcher did not wish to force her children into attending church and have the strict Christian upbringing she had.³² Nevertheless, Thatcher continued to talk to different church groups in the 1950s and 1960s typically covering themes of patriotism, public service, Christian decency, and even the provision of welfare. Indeed, none of this particularly marks her out from standard Tory Christianity of the time.³³ However, along with her political conversion to monetarism, the 1970s saw her return to the Nonconformism of her earlier life which she believed provided answers to perceived social permissiveness and helped her answer some of the questions raised by the collapsing dominance of Keynesianism. As Filby has shown in more detail, 'Mrs Thatcher deliberately evoked Nonconformist ideas such as self reliance, hard work and moral restraint as the only true path for a nation overwhelmed by the excesses of bureaucratic welfare, union militancy and immoral conduct... Thatcher's Nonconformist religious ethos and specifically that of her father, provided the means, language and motifs through which she articulated the neo-Conservative agenda.'³⁴ It is from this time onwards, with her Nonconformism always in the background, that we will contextualise Thatcher's Bible. But first we need to look at another important and related contextual issue: Thatcher on Communism.

30. R. Dowden, 'The Thatcher Philosophy', *Catholic Herald* (December 22, 1978).

31. Campbell, *Grocer's Daughter*, p. 25.

32. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', p. 182.

33. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', p. 182.

34. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', p. 184. Filby provides further contextualisation of Thatcher's Christianity in strands of 1970s English Christianity concerned with individual salvation, moral conservatism, and various 'middle-class values', and wider debates on the interaction between politics and religion in the Anglican Church and the Conservative Party (pp. 138-75). Compare Thatcher's memories in e.g. M. Thatcher, 'I Believe: A Speech on Christianity and Politics (St Lawrence Jewry)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* (March 31, 1978), <http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/103522>, and M. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* (March 4, 1981), <http://www.margareththatcher.org/document/104587>.

2. Thatcherite Anthropology: Thatcherism versus Communism

From the days of her first seeking a parliamentary seat to her time as Prime Minister, Thatcher's thinking about the priority of the individual and freedom over the State was intertwined with her sharply negative attitude towards Communism and shaped by the Cold War.³⁵ Her fierce rhetoric of the 1980s is well known but it was already an important part of her thinking in the 1970s in the run-up to her becoming Prime Minister.³⁶ It was a speech she gave at Kensington Town Hall in January 1976 that would lead to the Soviet media describing her as the 'Iron Lady', a title that would not only stay with her but one she happily accepted. The speech was about the importance of defence expenditure to counter Soviet Russia which she claimed was 'bent on world dominance, and they are rapidly acquiring the means to become the most powerful imperial nation the world has seen... The advance of Communist power threatens our whole way of life.'³⁷ Soviet world domination would obviously put its interests at odds with British national interests but Thatcher's profound dislike for Communism was based on a number of factors related to her thinking on human freedom and State control, as well as the influence of her father's thinking on religious affiliation and membership.³⁸ Not only did she attack the human rights record of the Soviet Union, but she believed that this was a direct consequence of Marxist thinking which, she argued, placed economics (and State-controlled economics at that) at the heart of human existence. For Thatcher, the boundless capabilities of the individual are what make a society or country great and from which economic growth would flourish. In her first party conference speech as Tory leader in 1975 she outlined her vision of the new Conservatism: 'Our capitalist system produces a far higher standard of prosperity and happiness because it believes in incentive and opportunity, and because it is founded on human dignity and freedom'. A free economy 'guarantees our liberties'

35. For summaries see e.g. Young, *One of Us*, pp. 31, 169-70, 389-90; Campbell, *Grocer's Daughter*, pp. 150, 338-42, 353-76; R. Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (London: Pocket Books, 2009), pp. 236-46; Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 51-56, 306, 310-11, 320, 330-31, 552-86; R. Harris, *Not for Turning: The Life of Margaret Thatcher* (London: Bantam Press, 2013), pp. 40-41, 133-36, 252-78.

36. Thatcher, *Path to Power*, pp. 340-93.

37. M. Thatcher, 'Britain Awake: Speech at Kensington Town Hall', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* (January 19, 1976), <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102939>.

38. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 181-82.

and is 'the best way of creating wealth and prosperity for the whole country'. In turn, the greater the private enterprise, the more money people will have to spend as they choose, which will include more money for charitable giving, 'to help the old and the sick and the handicapped'.³⁹

She further put a distinctive nationalist spin on her understanding of Socialism, claiming it is 'bad for Britain' and that 'Britain and Socialism are not the same thing'. The rights to work and spend what is earned on personal property, while having the State as servant rather than master, 'are the British inheritance'.⁴⁰ This British emphasis was expanded further and would partly underpin her international allies. She proclaimed that the Conservative Party believe that foreign policy should involve a close relationship with America ('our traditional ally') because this is 'part of our Anglo-Saxon tradition...and it adds to our contribution to the European Community'. Similarly, this Anglo-Saxon slant would mean embracing 'the countries of the Old Commonwealth' who are 'always close to the hearts of British people': Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Indeed, she suggested that Australians and New Zealanders had concluded, as had she, that Socialism had failed and that Australasian thinking is 'part of a wider reawakening' to the 'need to provide a more positive defence of the values and traditions on which Western civilisation, and prosperity, are based'.⁴¹

Thatcher extended this sort of nationalist and anti-Socialist thinking to her criticism of the Labour Party and post-war economic thinking more generally. In her criticism of the lack of spending on defence before she was Prime Minister, she argued that Britain was 'poorer than more of our NATO allies' which was 'part of the disastrous economic legacy of Socialism'.⁴² However, she would even claim that there were 'voices', including a 'sizeable chorus' from the Labour Party, who wanted to exploit British economic problems of the 1970s and 'put a Marxist system' in place of a 'free enterprise society'.⁴³ This sort of language was possible because of her hostility to nationalisation and State control. Thatcher claimed that it would be more beneficial to the country if the Labour Party would act more like West German Social Democrats and 'stop trying to prove their Socialist virility by relentlessly nationalising

39. M. Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference, Blackpool', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* (October 10, 1975), <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102777>.

40. Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference'.

41. Thatcher, 'Britain Awake'.

42. Thatcher, 'Britain Awake'.

43. Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference'.

one industry after another'.⁴⁴ In her memoirs she recalled that she was never in doubt that the 'true aim' of the 'hard Left' was revolutionary in that it 'sought to impose a Marxist system on Britain' and for whom 'the institutions of democracy' were little more than 'tiresome obstacles on the long march to a Marxist Utopia'.⁴⁵

But it was not just the Labour Party, or even the post-war British economy more generally, which faced being contaminated by the labels 'Marxist' or 'Communist'. A number of 'enemies within' were described as 'Marxist' or 'Communist', some plausibly so (e.g. Arthur Scargill), others less so, including the institution formerly known as the Tory Party at Prayer.⁴⁶ Forming another important context for Thatcher's exegesis (see below), Thatcherite economics and individualism brought her government into conflict with the Church of England, epitomised by the report, *Faith in the City*.⁴⁷ While the Church would move more towards critiquing the amorality of the market and the dangers of greed and consumerism in the late 1980s, *Faith in the City* (published in 1985) represented a response to the early years of the Thatcher government, particularly high unemployment and the inner-city riots of 1981.⁴⁸ What brought *Faith in the City*, and some high-profile Anglican clergy, in direct ideological conflict with the Thatcher government was that the report advocated the importance of State interventionism and welfare support in the prevention or alleviation of poverty and unemployment, as well as condemning the morality and negative impact of Thatcherite economics. While the dominant Anglican position (including *Faith in the City*) in relation to 1980s Thatcherism is probably best described as centre-left or social democratic, this did not stop the Thatcher government placing *Faith in the City* firmly into the camp of the enemy. Before it was even published it was infamously labelled by one unnamed member of Thatcher's government (thought to be Norman Tebbit) as 'pure Marxist theology' while another MP claimed it was proof that a 'load of Communist clerics' were running the Church of England.⁴⁹

44. Thatcher, 'Speech to Conservative Party Conference'.

45. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, p. 339.

46. See e.g. H.B. Clark, *The Church under Thatcher* (London: SPCK, 1993); J. Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher. Vol. 2, The Iron Lady* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2003), pp. 389-95; Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher'.

47. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas, *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation* (London: Church House Publishing, 1985).

48. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 64-99.

49. Staff Reporters, 'Thatcher clashed with Church, despite her faith', *Church Times* (April 12, 2013); Young, *One of Us*, p. 417; Campbell, *Iron Lady*, p. 390.

3. From the Evil Empire to the Axis of Evil

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Thatcher's economic and political Manichean outlook did not disappear. Indeed, it could be similarly applied to her Orientalist (and arguably theologically unorthodox, though with echoes of an anti-Calvinist Methodism/Wesleyan Arminianism) understanding of religion East and West. She distinguished between attitudes which make a society more enterprising (e.g. curiosity, imagination, ingenuity, application, and risk taking) and those that do not, adding that these attitudes reflect different religious and philosophical traditions. These different traditions and societies are further marked by those, on the one hand, who promote creativity and individual uniqueness (i.e. the 'Judaean-Christian tradition' of the West) and those, on the other, who limit free will and stress the importance of fate (i.e. 'the great Asian religious traditions' of the East and African religious traditions). Thatcher's Jews and Christians respect the value of work and accept that the human is master of their environment rather than an offshoot of environment, a view Thatcher attributed to pantheists. Thatcher was aware of qualifications but ultimately believed that these distinct traditions were reflected in differences in economic progress and living standards.⁵⁰

Her binary thinking, like so much of the dominant Anglo-American high-political thinking, could, of course, be transferred to Islam or tailored accordingly; indeed her handling of binary opposites in relation to her constructions of religion and politics was already being developed in her handling of the *Satanic Verses* controversy and in her justification of western support for the Afghan Mujahidin and Zia's Pakistan over against Soviet Russia.⁵¹ We will look at the contexts for these sorts of ideas in more detail in the chapter on Tony Blair because Thatcher's major statements on Islam were given over ten years after she had been ousted from power. And, after all, if Thatcher was to be marked by the Cold War, Blair was to be marked by the 'war on terror' and all the implications concerning 'religion' that have accompanied it. Nonetheless, it is worth discussing Thatcher's views on Islam because they are understood in very similar terms to her Cold War thinking and, as we will see in the chapter on Blair, the key Blairite positions are all implicit in the logic of Thatcher's assessment of 'religion' and Islam after the Cold War.

50. M. Thatcher, *Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), pp. 418-19.

51. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 200-201; Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 563-64.

Indeed, Thatcher was able to make the transition from the Evil Empire to the Axis of Evil and the War on Terror with relative ease through categorising Communism as a pseudo-religion and the development of 'Marxist-Leninist ideology...as a kind of substitute for faith' and comparing them with Islam which, she claimed, is definitely a 'real' religion.⁵² She made the common claim that there is a 'disturbing' connection between Islam and violence and noted that apart from the Cold War remnant that is North Korea, 'all of the states classed as "rogues" – Iraq, Syria, Libya, Iran and Sudan – are mainly, and in some cases militantly, Muslim', as are those listed by the US State Departments as state sponsors of terrorism.⁵³ In one sense, then, we might wonder if the more things change, the more they really do stay the same. However, there was something different in Thatcher's thinking on religion and terror. For a start, Thatcher claimed that much of 'the Muslim world' after the end of the Cold War has shown that 'secular ideology...shrivels in the face of religious belief'.⁵⁴ But also recall her distinction between 'pseudo-religion' and 'real' religion when comparing Communism and Islam. This seemingly small distinction is important because in Thatcher's thinking 'religion' almost always had some redeeming feature.

So, for instance, she would also leave the door open, or at least unlocked, to an idea that would get more emphatically taken up by Blair: the idea that there is a purer (and potentially democratic) strand in Islam which can be traced back to its origins in the Qur'an. In the same context as writing about Osama bin Laden and what 'appears to many' (and nothing more definitive than that) to be a close connection between 'Islamic extremism' and 'terrorist violence', she could also suggest that 'Islamic scholars and Western experts will continue to argue about what the Koran says and means on the subject'.⁵⁵ There are further hints that there was, for Thatcher, something inherently positive in 'religion', no matter how negative it may seem at a given time. Indeed, she followed the common rhetorical move, again pushed more vigorously by Blair, that when 'religion' has often played a role in terrorism it is 'a twisted justification', obviously implying that there is a purer or untwisted form of religion. Indeed, note the subtle rhetorical move Thatcher made when listing examples of terrorism, particularly in her treatment of 'Marxism' and 'religion':

52. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 216.

53. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 220.

54. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, pp. 216-17.

55. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 220.

From the Assassins of the twelfth century through to their successors, the suicide bombers of Hamas, Hizbollah and Islamic Jihad in the twenty-first century, professed Muslims have certainly been involved. But the Tamil extremists...claim to be Hindus. ETA...and the murderous Shining Path guerrillas in Peru are both Marxist. Even where religion appears to be at the core of violence, appearances can deceive. Most Irish Republican terrorists long ago stopped considering themselves – and stopped being treated by the Church – as Catholics.⁵⁶

‘Professed’ Muslims have certainly been involved, Tamil extremists ‘claim’ to be Hindus, the IRA long stopped being ‘considered’ Catholics but ETA and Shining Path *are* Marxists! This distinction may be subtle but it is important: Thatcher was prepared to claim openly the philosophical incompatibility of her politics and her Christianity with Marxism and Communism; in ‘religion’ there was something which could still be salvaged. The reason for this was her intense interest in individualism which she thought was probably present in ‘religion’. ‘The idea that an individual human being has a moral value in his or her own right’, is something she suspected is present to some extent in what she saw as the major religions. She reasoned that this was because once there is acceptance of the concept of a unique and eternal human ‘soul’, there is the beginnings of recognition of someone as a person who must therefore be given dignity and rights.⁵⁷

This sort of elevation of the individual, she would often argue, was alien to Marxism and Communism and it is instructive to compare Thatcher’s thinking on the previous Great Enemy: the Soviet Union. Of the Cold War, she claimed to have ‘never forgot’ that it was ‘a conflict of one system against another’ where ‘ultimately, our two opposing systems were incompatible’ and that the West would inevitably win ‘because it rested on the unique, almost limitless, creativity and vitality of individuals’.⁵⁸ Moreover, in contrast to her thinking on religion and Islam, the idea that there was a glimmer of hope in the system of Soviet Communism was ruled out by Thatcher. She disagreed with ‘the optimists’ whom she claimed appeared regularly on television analysing the Soviet Union ‘in terms borrowed from liberal democracies’ and were ‘in search of light at the end of even the longest tunnel, confident that somehow, somewhere, within the Soviet totalitarian system rationality and compromise were about to break out’. Thatcher’s own thinking was ‘much closer’ to those ‘who grasped that totalitarian systems are different

56. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 221.

57. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, pp. 250-51. Cf. Smith, ‘Margaret Thatcher’s Christian Faith’, pp. 251-55.

58. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, pp. 450-52.

in kind, not just degree, from liberal democracies and that approaches relevant to the one are irrelevant to the other'. But did not Thatcher end up 'doing business' with Gorbachev? Thatcher recalled that contrary to those with whom she would normally agree, she did not accept that a totalitarian system was 'more-or-less unable to produce an individual to that system'. But this was not due to an inherent goodness of Communism; on the contrary, she argued that 'even a system like that of the Soviets, which set out to crush the individual' could not totally succeed in doing so and, by the same logic, 'at some time the right individual could challenge even the system which he had used to attain power'. This is why Thatcher could claim that she sought out a figure like Gorbachev: 'I was confident that such a person could exist, even within a totalitarian structure, because I believed that the spirit of the individual could never ultimately be crushed in the Kremlin any more than in the Gulag'.⁵⁹

Even when editing her book *Statecraft* in the aftermath of September 11 – an attack she believed was aimed at the heart of American culture and values⁶⁰ – Thatcher could still claim to find positive values in a religion like Islam that she did not in Soviet Communism. For instance, she claimed that, as a conservative and a Christian, she could appreciate a great deal of what she saw when visiting the Middle East and claimed to appreciate the opinions of 'sophisticated' Muslim writers. She further claimed to admire strong family ties, dislike of anti-social behaviour, generally low levels of crime, and an obligation to help the poor.⁶¹ However, Thatcher also argued that there was another side to Muslim society exemplified in corruption and hypocrisy of certain people in power, including the oppression of women, cruelty in punishments, and a certain 'seediness' and 'backwardness' seen in 'many' Middle Eastern cities.⁶² As this would imply, and would be made much more explicit by Blair, the measurement for the validity of Islam was its compatibility with liberal democracy and a certain Anglo-American vision of the world. Although bin Laden's view 'is shared by few' and his actions have been widely condemned by 'devout Muslims', this condemnation was not, she pointed out, universal. Moreover, she claimed, Muslim leaders who denounce Israel regularly and promote an anti-American

59. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, pp. 452-53.

60. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 60. *Statecraft* was published in 2002 but the first draft was completed before September 11, 2001 (Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. xxiii). The final form of the book contains a number of references to the attacks as well as to bin Laden, al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

61. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 217.

62. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, pp. 217, 220.

struggle should not be surprised when some of their audience and followers begin to act on such sentiments.⁶³ But there was also another, more instantly recognisable, Thatcherite problem; she would claim that, so far, it appears that predominantly Muslim states are unable to develop liberal political institutions. For Thatcher, this meant that such political problems are connected to economic underdevelopment which was only made harder because her construction of the values of Islamic society are described in terms in which she would describe Communism, in that there is less emphasis placed on the individual and greater on the community than there is outside Muslim societies. However, unlike much of her rhetoric on Communism, she could still see a glimmer of goodness, claiming it is still too early to state that Islam is compatible with democracy.⁶⁴

4. Let My People Go! Margaret Thatcher's Bible

One of the most well-known uses of the Bible by Thatcher came in 1988 when she resolved to read the entirety of the Old Testament. She would update and quiz her staff and, no doubt partly due to her long history as an exegete and speaker, believed parts of the Old Testament should not be left in the hand of those untutored.⁶⁵ The choice of, what was to her, the Old Testament was particularly fitting because Thatcher had, as we have already seen in passing, a distinctive interest in Jews and Judaism, firmly putting the 'Judeo' back into 'Judeo-Christian'.⁶⁶ There are a number of reasons for this. Politically, she was a strong (though not uncritical) supporter of Israel and its role in the Middle East and, more locally, her Finchley constituency was around twenty percent Jewish when she was elected in 1959.⁶⁷ Unlike some of those we might euphemistically label 'traditional Tories', including those in her Finchley constituency, she felt an affinity with Jews and Judaism.⁶⁸ Not against

63. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 221.

64. Thatcher, *Statecraft*, p. 222.

65. Young, *One of Us*, pp. 425-26; Campbell, *Iron Lady*, p. 389; Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith', p. 233. Thatcher seemed to prefer quoting the Old Testament more than the New Testament (Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', p. 189).

66. Young, *One of Us*, pp. 422-26; Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 199-201; Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 136-37.

67. Young, *One of Us*, p. 422; Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 137.

68. For a range of retrospectives see e.g. C.C. Johnson, 'Thatcher and the Jews', *Tablet* (December 28, 2001), <http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/87027/thatcher-and-the-jews>; T. Lazaroff, G.F. Cashman, and J. Pau,

working with stereotypes herself, she claimed that Jews and Judaism (as well as her Old Testament) effectively encapsulated Thatcherite ideals in terms of individualism, self-help, entrepreneurship, and community support which in part reflected her promotion of Jewish Tory politicians:

I have enormous respect for the Jewish people, inside or outside Israel. There have always been Jewish members of my staff and indeed my Cabinet. In fact I just wanted a Cabinet of clever, energetic people – and frequently that turned out to be the same thing... In the thirty-three years I have represented it I never had a Jew come in poverty and desperation to one of my constituency surgeries. They had always been looked after by their own community... But I often wished that Christian leaders would take a leaf out of the teaching of Britain's wonderful former Chief Rabbi, Immanuel Jakobovits, and indeed that Christians themselves would take closer note of the Jewish emphasis on self-help and acceptance of personal responsibility.

Thatcher was 'wary of falling into the trap of equating in some way the Jewish and Christian faiths' and believed that the Old Testament can only be fully understood with the New Testament.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, it was indeed the former Chief Rabbi, Immanuel Jakobovits, who became the closest ally of Thatcher from the religious establishment, not only in terms of support for Thatcherite Conservatism but also in his criticisms of Anglican clergy and theologians who openly attacked the impact of Thatcherite economics in the controversies surrounding *Faith in the City*.⁷⁰

'PM: Thatcher a true friend of Jewish People, Israel', *Jerusalem Post* (April 8, 2013); Kirchick, 'A friendship without prejudice'; J. Lipman, 'Margaret Thatcher: One of Us', *Jewish Chronicle Online* (April 11, 2013), <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/105333/margaret-thatcher-one-us>; C. Shindler, 'In her fury, I saw values alien to us', *Jewish Chronicle Online* (April 11, 2013), <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/analysis/105329/in-her-fury-i-saw-values-alien-us>; A. Bermant, 'Don't believe the hype: Thatcher's "friendship" with Israel based on pragmatism not love', *Haaretz* (April 17, 2013); J. Cummings, 'How British Jews built Thatcherism', *Haaretz* (April 17, 2013).

69. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, pp. 509-10. Cf. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 137.

70. Young, *One of Us*, pp. 423-25; Campbell, *Iron Lady*, pp. 394-95; Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 199-200; Harris, *Not for Turning*, p. 21. See further I. Jakobovits, *From Doom to Hope: A Jewish View on 'Faith in the City', the Report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas* (London: Office of the Chief Rabbi, 1986).

This understanding of Thatcherism through the Old Testament, Jews, and Judaism is typical of Thatcher's understanding of the Bible more generally and an, or perhaps the, ideal of what she thought Christianity should be. Yet throughout her career as a Front Bench politician her exegesis would be delivered to audiences who were not always as welcoming as Jakobovits. She gave exegetically grounded addresses to St Lawrence Jewry (the official Church of the Corporation of London), to the Greater London Young Conservatives (the Iain Macleod Memorial Lecture),⁷¹ and most famously – and controversially – to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1988, the so-called 'Sermon on the Mound', which in many ways functioned as a response to criticism such as that found in *Faith in the City*.⁷² It is from these speeches in particular that we can piece together the tenets of Thatcherite exegesis.

Having said that, for Thatcher, the Bible ('as well as the tradition of the Church') was more about general principles and tells us 'very little directly about political systems or social programmes'; the nearest it got was 'Christ telling his disciples to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's'. While political judgments could rest on moral assumptions, they owed more to pragmatic decisions about what was right for the country in the here and now rather than to rigidly applied universal truths.⁷³ Thatcher further noted that 'nowhere in the Bible is the word democracy mentioned' and, ideally, when Christians meet, the purpose should not be 'to ascertain the mind of the majority' but 'the mind of the Holy Spirit'. However, this did not stop Thatcher from using the Bible as a reference point for her key ideas. Indeed, she claimed she was 'an enthusiast for democracy' because it 'most effectively safeguards the value of the individual, and, more than any other system, restrains the abuse of power by the few. And that is a Christian concept.'⁷⁴

The idea of safeguarding the individual was central to Thatcher's exegesis and so it should be no surprise that the Liberal Bible is consistently present. Thatcher claimed that Britain had gradually adopted a 'system of government and a way of living together which reflected the

71. M. Thatcher, 'Dimensions of Conservatism: Iain Macleod Memorial Lecture: Speech to Greater London Young Conservatives', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* (July 4, 1977), <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103411>.

72. M. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation* (May 21, 1988), <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107246>.

73. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

74. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'.

values implicit in that Book [the Bible]' and that 'the teachings of Christ applied to our national as well as personal life'. Thatcher acknowledged that there were 'considerable blotches' in British history but, thanks to the patience and vision of people like Lord Shaftesbury and William Wilberforce, Parliament could be convinced that 'it was inconsistent for a nation whose life was based on Christ's teachings, to countenance slave labour, children and women working in the mines and criminals locked up in degrading conditions'.⁷⁵ Thatcher was, of course, aware that non-Christians were part of British history, particularly in more recent history, even in her own party and among her own supporters.⁷⁶ But this too could be reconciled with the idea of Britain as a country that 'most people would accept' as having a national 'way of life...founded on Biblical principles'.⁷⁷ In the Sermon on the Mound, she argued that 'one of the great principles of our Judaic-Christian heritage is tolerance'. People 'with other faiths and cultures' have 'always been welcomed' and 'assured of equality under the law, of proper respect and of open friendship... There is no place for racial or religious intolerance in our creed.'⁷⁸

If we cut through Thatcher's rhetoric here, we find that it aligns to the developing notions of neoliberal multiculturalism discussed in the previous chapter. We can see that her Bible re-inscribed the primacy and paternalism of a white, Anglo-Saxon history, an acceptance of the Other who accepts the rules of this history and who, presumably, supports the right national cricket team, as well as, perhaps, an implicit or perceived 'Englishness'; Thatcher's government did, after all, provoke Scottish and Welsh nationalism.⁷⁹ This comes through stronger still in Thatcher's

75. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry'.

76. E.g. 'Today, we live in what the academics call "a pluralist society". My Party, like most others, is not only drawn from all Christian denominations and from other religions, but also contains some who would hotly deny that religion has anything at all to do with politics or even with morality' (Thatcher, 'I Believe'). Or again: 'Today we live in what is called a "plural society", one in which many different traditions of belief exist alongside each other and also alongside other more recent fashions – those of total disbelief or even nihilism' (Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland').

77. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry'.

78. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'.

79. Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith', refers to Thatcher's theology as 'Anglo-Saxon Nonconformity'. On the contextualisation of the discussions, and contradictions, of race, ethnicity, nationalism, and 'Englishness' of Thatcher's Christianity see Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 21, 56-62, 139, 174, 195-99, 219-31. For a summary of Thatcher's government on race, religion, and nationalism,

inevitable endorsement of what we have called the Cultural Bible (see Chapter 1). Thatcher believed that Britain is 'a nation whose ideals are founded on the Bible' and that this has been 'our very life blood'. This, she claimed, was a heritage which should be 'preserved and fostered'. She made the familiar claim that without such an understanding 'it is quite impossible to understand our history and literature' and that there is a 'strong practical case' for 'ensuring that children at school are given adequate instruction in the part which the Judaic-Christian tradition has played in moulding our laws, manners and institutions'. How else, she asked, can we make sense of Shakespeare or Walter Scott, or seventeenth-century history in England and Scotland, without knowledge of the Bible?⁸⁰ She would also recall the story of Mary and Martha through one of her favourite poets, Kipling, as a means of explaining the apparent practicality of her mother.⁸¹ This Cultural Bible was, Thatcher argued, tied up with the political heritage of her own party. Thatcher explained that the Tory Party was not just a British party but *primarily* a Church party whose concerns for Church then State were then expanded to other fields such as economics.⁸² In this context, Thatcher argued that the values that have driven this tradition were historically rooted in the Bible:

For through the Old Testament our spiritual roots go back to the early days of civilisation and man's search for God. The New Testament takes us on through Greek philosophy, Roman law, the Church Fathers and the great flowering of a specifically Christian civilisation in the middle ages from which our own characteristic way of life emerged.⁸³

This is not simply deference to tradition or an embrace of the importance of 'culture'. Thatcher believed that Tories have 'always believed' in the primacy of the Church 'because it was concerned with those things which matter fundamentally to the destiny of mankind'.⁸⁴

see e.g. Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain*, pp. 225-29. Cf. Raban, *God, Man and Mrs Thatcher*, p. 58, on Thatcher's claim to 'tolerance' and loving your neighbour as yourself in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Immigrants must, of course, live up to our standards'.

80. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'.

81. M. Stoppard and M. Thatcher, 'TV Interview for Yorkshire Television, *Woman to Woman* (November 19, 1985)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105830>. On the significance of using the Kipling version, see Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 9.

82. Thatcher, 'Dimensions of Conservatism'; Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

83. Thatcher, 'Dimensions of Conservatism'.

84. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

But even with the paternalistic Tory spin, there is little so far that we have not already seen in other manifestations of the Liberal or Cultural Bible. Yet, as Graeme Smith has shown, running throughout Thatcher's speeches on religion, Christianity, and the Bible is the theological idea of renewing the spirit of the nation for the present.⁸⁵ And renewal, of course, meant a more distinctively Thatcherite vision for Britain and it is here that we get something closer to what we might identify as the Neoliberal Bible and her dismissal of post-war alternatives which she believed were too state-heavy and functioned at the expense of the individual. For Thatcher, 'men of good will must be concerned with the relief of poverty and suffering' without reliance on the State, and a renewal of 'the spirit of the nation' for the here and now was needed. Again, Thatcher looked to the past and the Bible for inspiration and those 'few' individuals 'who see visions and dream dreams'. The individuals who revived such values come from a 'predominantly Christian culture' and were 'the prophets in the Old Testament, the Apostles in the New, and the reformers in both church and state'.⁸⁶ And we can overlook (in terms of exclusive access to such illustrious leadership) the gendered language of Thatcher's time – such visionaries no doubt implicitly included Thatcher herself.⁸⁷ In a barb aimed at Jim Callaghan during the 1979 General Election, she tacitly outlined her leadership credentials in elevated and biblical terms of the prophetic outsider bringing change: 'The Old Testament prophets did not say, "Brothers, I want a consensus". They said, "This is my faith. This is what I passionately believe. If you believe it, too, then come with me."' ⁸⁸ Commentators such as Filby have further noted a strong streak of charismatic, evangelical, and missionary zeal in her political rhetoric, influenced by her father the lay preacher and now part of her vision of leading Britain into the new

85. Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith', pp. 248-51. See also Filby ('God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 195-99) on Thatcher's broader model of a 'Christian Nation'.

86. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

87. On Thatcher's general 'sense of destiny' see Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 291, 302, 536.

88. Quoted in B. Särilvik and I. Crewe, *Decade of Dealignment: The Conservative Victory of 1979 and Electoral Trends in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 29. It is too tempting not to make a comparison with her recollections of the religious life of Grantham: 'In a sermon just after the Battle of Britain, 'the preacher told us that it is "always the few who save the many": so it was with Christ and the apostles' (Thatcher, *Path to Power*, p. 11).

neoliberal era.⁸⁹ Here Filby was building on the work of Heather Nunn on the construction of the Thatcher persona and the interaction between gender, nationalism, and power, including a sustained use of the language and imagery of militarism and conflict, all functioning against the forces of chaos.⁹⁰ As part of this public construction, Nunn showed how Thatcher saw herself as a lay preacher whose political leadership was an extension of her religious values, and that her speeches contain the specific imagery of the Egyptian exile, wilderness and tablets of stone, Babylon, and the battle with Satan.⁹¹

Much use of biblical language in liberal democratic tradition is, at least in terms of domestic policy, unlike that of Thatcher's Old Testament prophets in that it is typically consensual.⁹² But Thatcher-the-visionary, in her own way, as her own speeches and rhetoric suggest, was attacking a consensus and leading her own neo-Conservative revolution in political thinking which marks her out from most major politicians who have used the Bible. And such revolutionary thinking almost inevitably needs the Devil, or a battle of Good versus Evil. This sort of quasi-biblical, 'apocalyptic' thinking is, of course, classic Thatcher,⁹³ and something we have already seen in her views of the Evil Empire and implicit in her thinking about the enemies within. Thatcher certainly claimed that there is 'always a temptation, not easily resisted, to identify our opponents with the Devil' and the suggestion that politics can be presented as 'clear and simple choices between good and evil' was likewise tempting. But she dismissed such ideas as 'dangerous and evil tendencies' which 'embitter politics' and 'trivialise religion and morality'.⁹⁴ However, note that she constructs even this dismissal of the language of evil in nothing less than the language of evil. She also claimed more fundamentally that 'there is some evil in everyone and that it cannot be banished by sound policies and institutional reforms' and in basic terms, Thatcher believed that 'to most ordinary people, heaven and hell, right and wrong, good and bad, matter'.⁹⁵

89. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 186-88. Cf. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, p. 7.

90. H. Nunn, *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy: The Political Culture of Gender and Nation* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2002).

91. Nunn, *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy*, pp. 88-89.

92. Sherwood, 'Bush's Bible'; Berlinerblau, *Thumpin' It*. See also Chapter 1.

93. E.g. Campbell, *Iron Lady*, p. 391; Nunn, *Thatcher, Politics and Fantasy*, pp. 88-90; Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 186, 201-205.

94. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

95. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

The function of evil worked on two levels for Thatcher: the personal level of individual duty and the level of the State, particularly the impact the State can have on the individual:

...it is one thing to say that the relief of poverty and suffering is a duty and quite another to say that this duty can always be most efficiently and humanely performed by the State. Indeed, there are grave moral dangers and serious practical ones in letting people get away with the idea that they can delegate all their responsibilities to public officials and institutions.⁹⁶

Thatcher did not believe that 'Socialist theory and Socialist practice *as we know them*' (my italics) were 'contrary to the New Testament' and she did not claim to believe that 'you can't be a good and sincere Christian and a dedicated Social Democrat'.⁹⁷ However, the qualifications 'as we know them' and 'Social Democrat' are important because, for Thatcher, the most extreme manifestation of the intrusion of the State was Soviet or Soviet-inspired Communism – the Evil Empire. Yet Thatcher's thinking on such matters was not simply a practical reaction to the Cold War and her hostility to Soviet Communism, but a fundamental philosophical disagreement with Marxism and Socialism more generally. For Thatcher, 'whereas socialists begin with society, and how people can be fitted in, we start with Man' and because 'we see man as a spiritual being, we utterly reject the Marxist view, which gives pride of place to economics'.⁹⁸ Tyranny was, she argued, inherent in, or at least a consequence of, socialist thinking and its downplaying of the role of the individual. The Gulag 'only happened because socialism demoralised the whole nation, replaced the individual conscience by the party, right and wrong by what was good for the revolution'.⁹⁹ And these radically different philosophical assumptions were, for Thatcher, rooted in the Bible: 'Totalitarian Marxists will disagree with me in principle. They make no bones about rejecting all the assumptions from which I begin. I believe that their philosophy is utterly inconsistent with the Gospel.'¹⁰⁰

As we saw, Thatcher did not stop with the placement of Communism in a Manichean framework and, despite her qualifications about Social Democrats, was prepared to extend her view of darkness to what was happening at home. 'What I believe is an evil', she argued in 1981, was

96. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

97. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

98. Thatcher, 'Dimensions of Conservatism'. Cf. Moore, *Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 348-50.

99. Thatcher, 'Dimensions of Conservatism'.

100. Thatcher, 'I Believe'. Cf. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 201-205.

sustained inflation.¹⁰¹ It is worth contextualising this argument: it was made in the face of anxieties and criticisms over high unemployment and high unemployment was deemed an unfortunate by-product of combating high inflation in the emerging neoliberal thinking of the Thatcherite intellectual circle. Thatcher's response was to insist that her attack on inflation was both a moral and economic issue which required an alternative vision:

For over thirty years the value of our currency has been eroding. It is an insidious evil because its effects are slow to be seen and relatively painless in the short run. Yet it has a morally debilitating influence on all aspects of our national life. It reduces the value of savings and therefore thrift, it undermines financial agreements, it stimulates hostility between workers and employers over matters of pay, it encourages debt and it diminishes the prospects of jobs. And that's why I put its demise at the top of my list of economic priorities. It is, in my view, a moral issue not just an economic one.¹⁰²

On becoming leader of the Conservative Party it was statements similar to these that began to mark a more radical break with the economic past. She could be more emphatic still. 'The post-war Keynesian recipe of endless growth and full employment through high demand levels', she claimed to the Young Conservatives in 1977, had gone 'sour'.¹⁰³ While she still saw a role for the State in law, education, and protection of those most vulnerable, Thatcher argued that if people believe that the State is the answer to everything, they 'hand over' personal responsibility and charity becomes 'second-best'; in sum, 'the milk of human kindness' will dry up. In fact, Thatcher argued more dramatically (and 'biblically') that 'the time will come – indeed it is close at hand' (cf. John 4.21-23) when 'what the taxpayer is willing to provide for the good of humanity will be seen to be far less than what the individual used to be willing to give from love of his neighbour'. With an allusion to Luke 10.25-37 in place, Thatcher could prophetically warn: 'So do not be tempted to identify virtue with collectivism. I wonder whether the State services would have done as much for the man who fell among thieves as the Good Samaritan did for him?'¹⁰⁴ A long-standing favourite parable for Thatcher,¹⁰⁵ this foreshadowed Thatcher's more famous exposition of the

101. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry'. Cf. Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith', p. 243.

102. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry'.

103. Thatcher, 'Dimensions of Conservatism'.

104. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

105. Campbell, *Grocer's Daughter*, p. 17.

Good Samaritan in an interview with Brian Walden in 1980 when she argued that 'no-one would remember the Good Samaritan if he'd only had good intentions; he had money as well'.¹⁰⁶

The lack of concern for the rights of the individual and downplaying of self-help was in sharp distinction, Thatcher claimed, from a major emphasis of the Bible, and the New Testament in particular.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, even more fundamental to the Bible than the concept of the nation was 'the idea of personal moral responsibility'.¹⁰⁸ Further emphasising the point of contrast, she could likewise turn to an individualised notion of salvation: 'Our religion teaches us that every human being is unique and must play his part in working out his own salvation'.¹⁰⁹ Thatcher expressed such ideas (and not for the first time) in what we might generally label 'Pauline' language. 'What mattered fundamentally', she claimed, 'was Man's relationship to God, and in the last resort this depended on the response of the individual soul to God's Grace'.¹¹⁰ The New Testament may be 'preoccupied with the individual' and 'his need for forgiveness and for the Divine strength which comes to those who sincerely accept it' but this was not alien to her Old Testament. The Ten Commandments (a passage, we might recall, aimed at the Israelites) were addressed 'to individuals': 'In the statements, "honour thy father and thy mother", "thou shalt not steal", "though shalt not bear false witness", and so on, the "thou" to whom these resounding imperatives are addressed is you and me'. Thatcher was also aware that 'we can deduce from the teachings of the Bible principles of public as well as private morality' but ultimately 'all these principles refer back to the individual in his relationships to others'. Again, this was dressed up in what would become classic Thatcherism: 'we must always beware of supposing that

106. Transcript available at M. Thatcher and B. Walden, 'TV Interview for London Weekend Television *Weekend World* (1980)', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/speeches/displaydocument.asp?docid=104210>. Thatcher had a distinctive take on 'loving your neighbour': 'You will note that it does not denigrate self, or elevate love of others above it. On the contrary, it sees concern for self and responsibility for self as something to be expected, and asks only that this be extended to others' ('Dimensions of Conservatism'). Filby ('God and Mrs Thatcher', p. 91) comments: 'The aim here was to counter the supposition that Christian duty to others should supplant or suppress personal responsibility, while the underlying political intention was to disprove the often-quoted Biblical basis for state socialism.' See also Raban, *God, Man and Mrs Thatcher*, p. 48.

107. Cf. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 190-94.

108. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry'.

109. Thatcher, 'Dimensions of Conservatism'.

110. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

somehow we can get rid of our own moral duties by handing them over to the community; that somehow we can get rid of our own guilt by talking about “national” or “social” guilt. We are called on to repent our own sins, not each others’ sins.’ Notably the primary social needs in this Thatcherite take on Christianity and the Bible are not to be found in the State as she understood it but ‘the family, the neighbourhood and the nation’.¹¹¹ ‘You recall that Timothy was warned by St. Paul’, she noted, ‘that anyone who neglects to provide for his own house (meaning his own family) has disowned the faith and is “worse than an infidel”’ (1 Tim. 5.8).¹¹²

Thatcher also believed that the solution to the tension between individual and society (‘the whole of political wisdom consists in getting these two ideas in the right relationship to each other’) was to be found in the New Testament. Her take on corporate thinking was (not for the first time) expressed in Pauline language: ‘There is that great Christian doctrine that we are all members one of another expressed in the concept of the Church on earth as the Body of Christ. From this we learn our interdependence, and the great truth that we do not achieve happiness or salvation in isolation from each other but as members of Society.’ This was ‘one of the great Christian truths’ which influenced her political thinking; the other was that ‘we are all responsible moral beings with a choice between good and evil’.¹¹³ Moreover, her individualism was, of course, part of that renewed spirit of the corporate entity of the nation, a combination which she also defended with reference to the Bible. Freedom, she argued, requires self-discipline and great responsibility which is not only tied in with ‘glory and salvation’ but also with ‘our national greatness’. She looked to the book of Proverbs to provide support: ‘Righteousness Exalteth a Nation’ (Prov. 14.34).¹¹⁴

Some Church responses to Thatcher’s individualist emphasis on choice and freedom and her take on the Protestant Work Ethic were effectively making claims that a Thatcherite Gospel was a false Gospel which enslaved as much as it freed.¹¹⁵ If we were feeling theologically minded we might go further. There are times when Thatcher’s rhetoric on individual *choice* might appear to be so strongly influenced by her

111. Thatcher, ‘Speech at St Lawrence Jewry’.

112. Thatcher, ‘Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland’. In the choice of the more archaic ‘infidel’, there may also be an echo of Thatcher’s Orientalising contrast between West/Christianity/Judaism and East/Islam, as Raban suggested (Raban, *God, Man and Mrs Thatcher*, p. 54).

113. Thatcher, ‘I Believe’.

114. Thatcher, ‘I Believe’.

115. Filby, ‘God and Mrs Thatcher’, p. 84, cf. pp. 206-11.

free-market philosophy that she came close to ideas of works-righteousness which would, of course, run clean contrary to some of the most famous ideas to emerge from the Reformation, though it could be argued that she retained the influence of the comparable importance of free will in anti-Calvinist Methodism and Wesleyan Arminianism from her own Protestant background. We already saw something of this in her Orientalising generalisations about religion East and West which were contrasted in terms of a 'limited role for free will and a very large role for fate' (East/non-Western) versus 'the creativity of man', the 'uniqueness of the individual', and 'respect for the value of work' (West). It naturally follows that Thatcher's exegesis would reveal the same sorts of emphases. For instance, the following claims are typical, if not memorable, for the connection made between the free-market and the crucifixion:

from the beginning man has been endowed by God with the fundamental right to choose between good and evil... [W]e were made in God's own image and, therefore, we are expected to use all our own power of thought and judgement in exercising that choice... Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, when faced with His terrible choice and lonely vigil chose to lay down His life.¹¹⁶

She even hinted at earning eschatological salvation in her politicised use of Christian language: 'Christianity...also taught me that, in the final analysis, politics is about personal relations, about establishing the conditions in which men and women can best use their fleeting lives in this world to prepare themselves for the next'.¹¹⁷

Yet mixed in with these ideas are those of divine grace ('if we open our hearts to God, He has promised to work within us') and she did ultimately believe in Christianity over Judaism because, as she claimed, 'I do not, as a Christian, believe that the Old Testament – the history of Law – can be fully understood without the New Testament – the history of Mercy'.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Thatcher did emphatically claim in a way long-familiar to Tory Christians that 'there is one heresy which it seems to me

116. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland' (*italics original*). Cf. Raban, *God, Man and Mrs Thatcher*, p. 33: 'Christ dying on the Cross joins those folk who have exercised their right to choose – to buy their own council houses, to send their children to private schools, to occupy "paybeds" in NHS-funded hospitals'.

117. Thatcher, 'I Believe'. On Thatcher's emphasis on works over grace and its political connotations see R. Samuel, 'Tory Party at Prayer', *New Statesman* (January 28, 1983), pp. 8-10.

118. Thatcher, *Downing Street Years*, p. 510.

that some political doctrines embrace...the belief that Man is perfectable'.¹¹⁹ It is notable that this discussion was in the context of a criticism of Socialism and the idea that if education, health, and social welfare were correctly administered then 'we shall have exorcised the Devil'. This, she claimed, is 'bad theology' and, in her then recent past, a failure: 'we have expended vast efforts and huge sums of money on policies designed to make people better and happier. Have we really brought about a fundamental improvement in Man's moral condition?'¹²⁰ The Devil 'is still with us, recording his successes in the crime figures and in all the other maladies of this society, in spite of its relative material comfort'.¹²¹ It is worth pointing out that this is from a speech given a year before she came to power and it again presumably functioned partly as an implicit criticism of Callaghan's Labour government.

But if Thatcher thought human perfection was heretical then the same logic had to apply equally to herself and free-market thinking. 'You must never be like the parable of the Pharisees as it were', she claimed while recalling her Christian upbringing in an interview with Miriam Stoppard in 1985, 'because you just really know how far you fall short of your ideal' (Luke 18.9-14).¹²² Thatcher could therefore claim elsewhere that 'as a Christian' she was 'bound to shun Utopias on this earth and to recognise that there is no change in Man's social arrangements which will make him perfectly good and perfectly happy'. The 'free-enterprise system of itself' would not 'automatically...have these effects'. Of course, Thatcher believed in the necessity of the free market but it remained one aspect – a very important aspect – of *national recovery and prosperity* rather than leading to utopia. Indeed, the lack of utopia meant that she could likewise emphasise the need for charity and claim that the moral dimension of her vision for the recovery of the nation (a people with 'a purpose and an ethic') 'can only come from the teachings of a Faith'.¹²³ 'Remember the woman with the alabaster jar of ointment', she later warned.¹²⁴

119. Thatcher, 'I Believe'. See also Filby's discussion of Thatcher and Original Sin ('God and Mrs Thatcher', pp. 194-95).

120. Thatcher, 'I Believe'. Or again in the Sermon on the Mound: 'To assert absolute moral values is not to claim perfection for ourselves. No true Christian could do that' (Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland').

121. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

122. Stoppard and Thatcher, 'TV Interview'.

123. Thatcher, 'I Believe'.

124. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'.

Thatcher's individualist vision was also designed to generate 'wealth, well-being and freedom', while the State, as well as charitable individuals and organisations, could still provide a safety net for the more defenceless members of society. Thatcher believed that collectively the Ten Commandments, loving our neighbour as ourselves, the 'importance of observing a strict code of law', the New Testament 'record of the Incarnation', the 'teachings of Christ, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God', all provide 'a proper attitude to work' and 'principles to shape economic and social life'. In her Sermon on the Mound, she infamously used the example of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3.10 ('If a man will not work he shall not eat') as justification of the view that 'we must work and use our talents to create wealth... Indeed, abundance rather than poverty has a legitimacy which derives from the very nature of Creation.'¹²⁵ This meant that the creation of wealth was, for Thatcher, a 'Christian obligation' and a fulfilment of 'our role as stewards of the resources and talents the Creator has provided for us'.¹²⁶ Here Thatcher turned to the seemingly lost idea that is 'inherent in Christ's parable of the talents'. Thatcherite exegesis would have it that the steward who 'simply did not use the resources entrusted to him' was 'roundly condemned' while the 'two who used them to produce more wealth were congratulated and given more'. She qualified this by immediately adding that to endorse the mediocre, to 'flinch from the challenge', or to complain that the government ought to be doing something, 'is not the way to rekindle the spirit of the nation'.¹²⁷

But, if the Bible is to be part of wealth creation, it runs into one obvious difficulty: those biblical passages which appear to suggest an outright hostility to wealth (e.g. Mark 10.17-31; Luke 6.24-25; 16.19-31; Matt. 6.24//Luke 16.13; Matt. 11.8//Luke 7.25). Harking back to her father's exegetical views,¹²⁸ Thatcher dealt with such difficulties by interpreting them in a relative sense. 'Christ did not condemn riches as such', she argued, 'only the way in which they were used and those

125. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'.

126. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry'.

127. Thatcher, 'Speech at St Lawrence Jewry'. See further the helpful discussion in Campbell, *Iron Lady*, pp. 391-93. On the Parable of the Talents, compare Raban, *God, Man and Mrs Thatcher*, p. 39: 'the Parable of the Talents is a fine example of His style at its most teasingly playful and paradoxical... [H]ere Mrs Thatcher appears to regard it simply as a divine sanction for the bond-broker and the arbitrageur.'

128. Filby, 'God and Mrs Thatcher', p. 181. Cf. Smith, 'Margaret Thatcher's Christian Faith', pp. 245-47.

who put their trust in them'.¹²⁹ What the Church needs to do, she later added, is to guide us about our use of this world's wealth ('the spiritual dimension comes in deciding what one does with the wealth').¹³⁰ Again, Thatcher did argue that charity and social responsibility are ways in which wealth can be used in favour of good. But Thatcher was still aware of what might be seen as the selfish excesses of a neoliberal way of thinking and putting too much trust in money. The 'Tenth Commandment – Thou shalt not covet – recognises that making money and owning things could become selfish activities', she said. With her brand of Nonconformism coming through, she even claimed that adopting a 'philosophy' of 'eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die' (cf. Isa. 22.13; Eccl. 8.15; 1 Cor. 15.32), 'can result' in a 'grasping for wealth for its own sake and the pursuit of selfish pleasure'. Note that there is a degree of tension here. We get the less definitive 'can result' not 'does result' which contrasts sharply with her denunciations of collectivism. We also get the negative implications of this selfish attitude labelled a 'philosophy' with the implicit suggestion that it is not really quite biblical or Christian; indeed, the Bible is referenced to show that those who live for the moment are very much in the wrong.¹³¹ Yet this would simultaneously overrule Ecclesiastes 8.15: 'So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun'. It is as if implicit exegetical tension were unconsciously reflecting the political tension of her individualism.

129. Thatcher, 'I Believe'. Or again, 'it is not the creation of wealth that is wrong but love of money for its own sake (Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'). It might be worth pointing out that Thatcher's interpretation of difficult texts concerning wealth is hardly new. Early Christian scribes also felt the need to alter biblical texts such as Mark 10.23-25 where there is a stark denunciation of wealth to imply, like the Thatcherite addition, that trusting in wealth rather than wealth per se was problematic. See J.G. Crossley, 'The Damned Rich (Mark 10.17-31)', *ExpTim* 116 (2005), pp. 397-401.

130. Thatcher, 'Speech to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'.

131. 'On that day the Lord God of hosts called to weeping and mourning, to baldness and putting on sackcloth; but instead there was joy and festivity, killing oxen and slaughtering sheep, eating meat and drinking wine. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die". The Lord of hosts has revealed himself in my ears: Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord God of hosts' (Isa. 22.12-14); 'If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die"' (1 Cor. 15.32).

In fact it is at these points of tension that we find those disjunctions between ideals and reality, and even between Thatcher and certain manifestations of Thatcherism. She did not seriously impose the moral agenda of the outraged Christian right of the 1970s and 1980s, despite the perceptions of connections and similarity of public image. For whether she liked it or not, the Gekkoized and powerful subculture of self-centred, champagne-guzzling yuppies was quickly linked with the rise of Thatcherism.¹³² As Filby has pointed out, Thatcher may have come from an austere Methodist background where her father sought the preservation of the Sabbath in Grantham, but she nevertheless aimed to put through the Shops Bill in 1986 and the deregulation of Sunday trading. Filby adds: 'she never reconciled the conflicting priorities of freedom of choice with the preservation of tradition. Over time, consumption became religion, the Sabbath like any other day, and the shopping centres the new churches and chapels.'¹³³ In retrospect, it seems that Thatcher herself was partly aware of such contradictions. Indeed, Frank Field recalled that Thatcher told him of the greatest disappointment of her premiership: 'I cut taxes as I thought it would generate a giving society. It didn't.'¹³⁴ Human charity may of course be imperfect and some of those with wealth may indeed feel social responsibility but Thatcher's decade was, as we all know, divisive. Social responsibility did not curb inner-city rioting, getting on bikes and looking for jobs was never a realistic solution to unemployment,¹³⁵ and thrift, personal creativity, and the safety net of charity did not make Poll Tax protestors feel particularly secure. And a good case could be made for healthy bonuses rather than social responsibility being the underlying motive for the Metropolitan Police to venture north and help Thatcher crush the miners who were, after all, defending a traditional community and close

132. Campbell, *Grocer's Daughter*, p. 30: 'Alf Roberts would have been appalled by "Thatcherism"'.
 133. Filby, 'Margaret Thatcher'.

134. F. Field, 'What would Thatcher do today about...the rich', *Times* (April 18, 2013). Field also mentioned this anecdote in the House of Commons tributes to Thatcher after her death.

135. The Tebbitism was picked up in *Faith in the City*, p. 205: 'It is unrealistic to assume that even the skilled and mobile residents of our cities can all "get on their bikes" and move to the small towns and rural areas which are the focal points of economic growth to get a job – even if there were sufficient jobs (and housing) available for all. Certainly a middle-aged redundant shipyard worker in Gateshead cannot be expected to compete with a young school leaver in the South-East for a new service sector job.'

family relations and who received help from church support groups. This was a way of life that in another time Thatcher might have at least partly admired. Harmony, truth, and faith her reign did not always bring.¹³⁶

But this brings us back to the beginning of this chapter: ‘Thatcher’ and ‘Thatcherism’ are labels that remain confrontational and ‘toxic’ while the key features of Thatcherism have been absorbed and taken up by all Prime Ministers since. As we will see, post-Thatcher readings of the Bible in the circles of the political elite and in parts of popular culture are not dramatically removed in the abstract, even if rhetorically they have had to be very careful not to become too closely associated with the Thatcher brand. Her exegesis, and her divisive and Manichean approach, might have since been softened and presented as far more inclusive, but she still crystallised a dominant understanding of the Bible in English politics and culture. Before we see how Thatcherism and Thatcherite exegesis became so embedded in popular biblical interpretation, we must first look at how the way was paved for Thatcher’s Bible and its competitors, some influences, and failed alternatives in the light of the cultural changes of the 1960s.

136. Compare the comments of Filby, ‘Margaret Thatcher’: ‘Where critics go wrong with Thatcherism is to assume that there was no moral thinking behind the economics. Where admirers go wrong is to appreciate the moral underpinnings of Thatcherism without admitting that these often conflicted with its economic aims... Therein lies the great conflict within Thatcherism.’