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Chapter 9

THE GOVE BIBLE VERSUS THE OCCUPY BIBLE

1. 1611 after 2008: The Bible in an Age of Coalition

The 2008 recession – itself a result of longer-term issues in neoliberal deregulation – made its near inevitable impact on British party-politics. A strong case is often made that it cost Gordon Brown and Labour the 2010 election, though the new Coalition government showed that there was not a strong alternative for an outright winner. Tellingly, the Thatcherite and neoliberal rhetoric was intensified, particularly in the form of public sector cuts, alongside a decreasing popular respect for welfare, as the key tenets of Thatcherism became increasingly embedded in younger generations (see Chapter 4). However, political and public discourse also witnessed an increasing social liberalism on issues such as gender equality and gay rights.¹ As some vocal and sizeable Tory opposition to same-sex marriage continued to show (more Tories voted against the bill than for it), such social liberalism is not typically part of traditional Conservatism but it was, nevertheless, brought in by David Cameron and gained degrees of support from leading Tories touted as future Prime Ministers, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove. Alongside broader cultural changes over the past thirty years, the New Labour government (which introduced civil partnerships) had injected greater social liberalism into Thatcherism and just as Blair became known as the heir to Thatcher so Blair now had his own heirs in Cameron and Gove. Cameron was believed to have coined the phrase ‘heir to Blair’ while in 2013 Gove would repeat his unambiguous admiration for Blair proclaimed in a 2003 *Times* article entitled, ‘I can’t fight my feelings any more: I love Tony’:

You could call it the Elizabeth Bennett moment. It’s what Isolde felt when she fell into Tristan’s arms... By God, it’s still hard to write this, but I’m afraid I’ve got to be honest. Tony Blair is proving an outstanding

1. Harris, ‘Generation Y; Ipsos-MORI, ‘Generations’.

Prime Minister at the moment... I just look at who's enraged by the Thatcherite stance that Mr Blair has adopted towards Iraq... And Mr Blair's policy has more than just the right critics. It has the merit of genuine moral force. As the Prime Minister has pointed out, all those opposed to him have no solution to the problem of proliferating weapons of mass destruction, they offer no hope to the people of Iraq... My admiration for the Prime Minister's bravery in making this case is, I have to add, only increased when I listen to the sneering condescension with which broadcasters treat Government policy on Iraq. Jeremy Paxman is just one of several who seem determined never to give the elected head of our Government the benefit of any doubt, cheerily mocking Mr Blair's Christian beliefs and brazenly maintaining that the last inspections regime failed because of Western, not Iraqi, bad faith.²

But this sort of praise and mimicking of Blair was not simply because of Blair's right-of-centre politics; as we will see, both Cameron and Gove would, if anything, be more explicit in their use of the Bible in public discourse than the man they apparently want to emulate.

But the Age of Coalition brought the Liberal Democrats back to a position of power and in many ways they were perfectly suited to a post-Thatcher and post-Blair fusion of economic and social liberalism, both in their political message and their use of the Bible. In 2013, Jo Latham and Claire Mathys published a collection of essays with the notable title, *Liberal Democrats Do God*, bringing together a number of prominent Liberal Democrat politicians.³ This was a potentially important moment for the Liberal Democrats because despite their Nonconformist history and Gladstone himself, they have gained a reputation as a 'secular' party with an openly atheist leader in Nick Clegg and recently having one of Parliament's most active atheists in Evan Harris. While a number of other participants also raised the issue of 'secularism' and the Liberal Democrats, Greg Mulholland's essay in particular addressed such issues head-on and polemically.⁴ Nevertheless, *Liberal Democrats Do God* provides the clearest contemporary use of the Bible by leading

2. M. Gove, 'I can't fight my feelings any more: I love Tony', *Times* (25 February, 2003). See also A. Pierce, 'Horror as Cameron brandishes the B-word', *Times* (October 5, 2005); T. Shipman, 'I should never have called myself "the heir to Blair"', admits Cameron', *Daily Mail* (May 5, 2010); T. Ross, 'Michael Gove aims to be the heir to Tony Blair', *Telegraph* (May 15, 2013).

3. J. Latham and C. Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God* (Kindle edn; London: LDCF, 2013).

4. G. Mulholland, 'Liberalism, the Liberal Democrats and the Dangerous Drift towards Moral Conformity', in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 3.

Liberal Democrats. Unsurprisingly, the Liberal Bible features prominently, often paralleling the Blairite spin on social liberalism. While his views on same-sex marriage may differ in nuance from Blair and his followers, Greg Mulholland used the examples of persecution and 'Christ's teaching' (as well as a personal story of abuse while campaigning) to illustrate the classic liberal concern for the experience of others: 'As a Christian, if I am to follow Christ's teaching, I must be grateful to those who abuse me in his name... [I]t has given me a much better understanding of what it is like to face hatred as a result of what you are, and an appreciation of the experiences of others who face racial, sexist, homophobic or nationalist hatred.'⁵ It is notable that when issues of discrimination and poverty emerge, the confrontational edge of the Radical Bible is again not present in these uses of the Liberal Bible. For Sarah Teather, Christianity demands particular attention 'to the most vulnerable members of society' and asks that Christians 'seek and find the face of Christ in the poor, the hungry, the sick, the imprisoned and the stranger', based on the 'idea of Jesus identifying himself with the least amongst people'. But 'what follows logically', Teather added, 'is a perspective on policy-making which is inclusive and not exclusive'.⁶

Indeed, there are a number of readings of the Bible which closely resemble policies popularly associated with the Liberal Democrats and which are implicitly based on a (politically) liberal interpretation of all human beings created in the image of God and equally deserving of respect, as some of the participants point out.⁷ Alan Beith claimed that 'the concept of forgiveness, properly examined, offers insights into what we need to do with our criminal justice system'. Beith was more precise still, claiming that 'restorative justice [is] an approach which is firmly rooted in New Testament thinking' and that restorative justice processes 'work to bring offenders and victims into communication, allowing victims to express the impact an offence has had upon them, as well as getting answers to their unanswered questions about the crime. It also gives the offender the opportunity to make amends'.⁸ Another favourite Liberal Democratic theme likewise gets some attention. According to Duncan Hames, and using a passage which we have seen used a number

5. Mulholland, 'Liberalism', Chapter 3.

6. S. Teather, 'Liberal Language and the Christian Calling', in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 11.

7. J. Pugh, '"Doing God" in the Liberal Democrat Party', in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 1; Teather, 'Liberal Language'.

8. A. Beith, 'Should the State Forgive?', in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 5.

of times by politicians, ‘Jesus’ appeal to “love your neighbour as yourself” has clear applications for any Christian’s approach to the environment’. Hames wanted to challenge, through exegesis, potentially problematic interpretations of Genesis 1.28 (‘God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”’) in relation to environmentalism. He argued that for him and probably ‘most Christians’, the term ‘dominion’ should be ‘interpreted as responsible stewardship rather than exploitative tyranny’, before adding that further evidence of ‘man’s duty to protect the earth abounds throughout the Bible, from God’s order to Adam and Eve to work and keep the garden to the instruction in the Leviticus that “you shall not strip your vineyard bare”, to Jesus’s observation of the Father’s care for even the smallest sparrow’.⁹ Completing the Liberal Democrat bingo-card, Baroness Brinton, looked at Deuteronomy 10.18, Leviticus 19.33-34, and Hebrews 13.2 to defend certain voices on immigration, as well as attacking others: ‘...our modern world has become increasingly xenophobic, and it can be hard for the biblical voice to be heard. How many of us have heard the shrill voice on the doorstep, complaining that all the best jobs are taken by immigrants, or that “they” are getting free health services and welfare despite not contributing to the tax system.’¹⁰

But, at some point, someone was bound to note that it is not always so easy to equate the contents of the Bible with liberalism and modern sensibilities and so – as we saw when Blair confronted socially illiberal biblical passages in the Bible – hermeneutical guidelines are required for separating the wheat from the chaff. Lord Tyler made the common move of having the seemingly liberal Jesus overrule anything illiberal or anachronistic, including the liberal bogeyman, Paul: ‘Above all, I hope those of us who remain Anglicans can soon find a way to return to Christ’s own teaching, and stop agonising over the dated views of my namesake Paul of Tarsus, let alone the washing up requirements of the Book of Leviticus.’¹¹ However, Andrew Stunell went further still and effectively downplayed the Liberal Bible in favour of what might be called the Liberal Holy Spirit which allows illiberal biblical verses to be

9. D. Hames, ‘It’s Good to be Green’, in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 10.

10. Baroness Brinton, ‘Immigration: “...I was a stranger and you took me in”’, Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 8.

11. Lord Tyler, ‘Faith, Society and the State’, in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 6.

overturned. For Stunell, the ‘biggest challenge’ is to explain ‘why Wilberforce was right about slavery, and St Paul was wrong’. Paul, in this and the role of women, ‘hadn’t fully discerned the Spirit’ and ‘the Holy Spirit did not stop work when the Book of Revelation was sealed’. Indeed, Stunell, in arguably the most direct challenge to conventional political readings of the Bible, went even further still and claimed that:

No Christian should have as their goal the recreation of some mythical olden days society where Christian values were understood and universally acknowledged, where lambs and lions sat down together, and harmony reigned supreme. It never existed. Neither the first Century in Judea nor the 19th Century in England provides that model.

Instead, ‘thanks to the vigorous and continuing work of God’s Holy Spirit, we know better than they did’, including how to understand issues of children’s rights, care of the disabled, respect for differences, being a lot more relaxed about women wearing hats and veils in church. The Holy Spirit, Stunell added, continues to show ‘how God wants our society, nationally and internationally to be shaped’, with ‘full rights’ for gay people, disabled people, and women worldwide. As with Blair (and indeed Obama), Stunell also used problematic biblical verses against others: if Christians want to oppose rights for homosexuals, why not oppose rights for people committing adultery? However, despite all the concerns about the Bible being outdated, Stunell’s views ultimately remain grounded in the Bible and, at least on the basis of *Liberal Democrats Do God*, a favoured Lib Dem biblical passage, ‘the recognition that if all six billion of us are made in God’s image, we must all be treated equally and honestly by each other’.¹²

However, one essay received particular media mockery: the Introduction by Steve Webb (Minister of State for Pensions) and its claim that God is a liberal.¹³ Webb acknowledged how Labour and Conservatives can corner the market on political engagement and Christianity but now wants to see the Liberal Democrats as having an important role:

The most fundamental reason why a Christians should feel at home in the Liberal Democrats is that the character of God, as revealed in the Christian Gospel, would suggest that God must be a liberal! This assertion will

12. A. Stunell, ‘Three Reasons to Thank God – and Not the Usual Ones’, in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 4.

13. E.g. P. Dominiczak, ‘Pray consider: would God be a Lib Dem or a Somerset Tory?’, *Sunday Telegraph* (August 25, 2013); J. Groves, ‘God? He’s a Liberal, says (Lib Dem) minister who claims party has support of the Almighty despite languishing in the polls’, *Daily Mail* (August 26, 2013); N. Lezard, ‘In the beginning God said – Let there be Lib Dems’, *Independent* (August 26, 2013).

shock or offend some, but I believe that there is no other conclusion that can be drawn from a reading of the New Testament. The Gospel makes it clear that human beings have freedom. Jesus makes it clear that God does not seek slaves, but sons and daughters. And God gave us the most extraordinary freedom – the freedom to reject and crucify his Son. There must be something very precious about freedom, a value dear to the heart of every liberal.¹⁴

Yet, this is not distinctively Liberal Democrat, even if it is entirely compatible with the Liberal tradition. Party-political name-dropping aside, Webb's formulation, intended or not, is close to how Thatcher understood the Bible. Even if Webb's assertion will 'shock or offend' the political and media establishment, perhaps it should not. As we saw with Thatcher (and Blair), fundamental to the Bible were ideas of personal moral responsibility, freedom, and individualism. Furthermore, like Webb, Thatcher even saw the crucifixion, and the idea that Jesus *chose* to die, as part of her take on individualism. Indeed, Thatcher's Bible is present elsewhere in Webb's Introduction:

If the Almighty Creator of the universe does not impose his will on his creation, then we flawed individuals who are involved in the political process should be deeply cautious about using the power of the state to impose our will on others. Clearly there have to be frameworks and boundaries, and the state is right to impose those. But beyond this, our faith surely teaches us that we should be very wary of anything more coercive. Those who recognise in the Gospel a deep reverence for human freedom and self-determination will find a natural home in the Liberal Democrats.¹⁵

These ideas also echo Thatcher's interpretation of the Bible framed in terms of her opposition to socialism, Marxism, and Soviet Communism. Unlike some of the figures from the Radical Bible tradition (e.g. Tony Benn), but in common with a Tory tradition, original sin was important, as indeed it is elsewhere in *Liberal Democrats Do God*.¹⁶ For Thatcher

14. S. Webb, 'Introduction', in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*. See also Mulholland, 'Liberalism', Chapter 3: '... anyone who denies me my right to believe in Jesus Christ is denying me of my right to believe in liberalism. That philosophical path is the road to intolerance, to undermining freedom of conscience, a road no true liberal would proceed along.'

15. Webb, 'Introduction'.

16. E.g. Tim Farron, 'What Is Christianity, Do I Need to Take It Seriously, and Can I Be a Liberal Democrat and a Christian?', in Latham and Mathys (eds.), *Liberal Democrats Do God*, Chapter 2: 'The Bible says many things that society will feel uncomfortable about with regards to personal morality. Given that Christians accept that the Bible is the word of the perfect God and that we are extremely

original sin and human imperfection were important, if only because of her dislike of the assumed opposite: the idea that human beings were able to achieve perfection. It is significant that for Thatcher that this sort of discussion was generated in the context of a criticism of socialism and state interventionism which, she argued, could not improve the 'moral condition' of the human being. This was not just part of Thatcher's attack on the role of the state but also her perception of utopian thinking that, she argued, marked socialism and which she thought inevitably led to the suppression of the individual and, ultimately, to the Gulag. For Thatcher, the Bible (or 'the Gospel'), and its apparent concerns for freedom and individualism, were part of the antidote to state-heavy thinking, even if, like Webb and other Liberal Democrats in the collection, she still saw a role for the state, albeit limited.

Among the louder echoes of Thatcher's Bible are comments about free trade and wealth, as might be expected from those grounded in the nineteenth-century Liberal tradition. John Pugh, for instance, claimed that 'all Liberals are passionate about free trade' and 'sceptical but supportive of state action'. But, like Thatcher, there is the issue of wealth which might be used irresponsibly. For Pugh, 'Liberals to a man and woman bemoan the unfairness of wealth distribution in our country and indeed the world' before noting two different types of Liberals: 'those reconciled to appreciable wealth inequality' and 'those who...remain unhappy about the wide distribution of wealth – extremes of wealth and poverty'. Blunt biblical verses may seem to attack inequality of wealth harder still by condemning wealth and the wealthy outright. However, as with Thatcher, and indeed Powell, these have to be interpreted differently. Pugh suggested that 'Christian Liberals of whatever hue have traditionally seen "wealth" itself as morally problematic' and in support cites arguably the most difficult passages but in a notably vague manner: 'the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the eye of the needle proverb etc.'. Echoing Powell, Pugh suggests that 'Christians are taught to be sceptical and indeed humble about any clear link between worldly achievement and genuine personal merit', adding that 'this isn't a simple matter' and that 'it doesn't necessarily follow that Christian Liberals would favour higher tax rates for the wealthy rather than the encouragement of philanthropy, or disown utterly any concept of "undeserving poor"'.¹⁷

imperfect human beings, then we should not be surprised if the Bible doesn't make us uncomfortable! But I also believe that we must never seek to legislate to force people who are not Christians to live as if they were.'

17. Pugh, 'Doing God'.

For all the mockery received at the hands of the press, the Liberal Democrat Bible, at least as presented in *Liberal Democrats Do God* and certainly in Webb's Introduction, is largely in line with Thatcher's Bible after the Blairite socially liberal qualification, and with occasional Liberal Democrat twists. Cameron likewise did not escape the gaze of the British press for his use of the Bible, though he has, as yet, failed to receive the mockery that Steve Webb did for *Liberal Democrats Do God*. Two of Cameron's most high-profile uses of the Bible were in his messages at Easter 2011 and Christmas 2012. These were a surprise to the British press, provoking comments such as 'an unusually Christian tone' (*New Statesman*), 'a little pious' (*Guardian*), and 'rare in British politics' (*Telegraph*). The *Daily Mail* claimed that Cameron has 'regularly ignored advice that politicians in the modern age should not "do God"' but 'went further than ever...when he quoted from the Bible'.¹⁸ Perhaps such direct mention of the Gospels and Jesus were in contrast to what might have happened with Blair but Cameron's use of the Bible should by now be familiar in its general vagueness and broad consensual sentiment in that the Christmas story is about 'hope', that John's Gospel preaches grace, truth, love, and peace, that Easter is about God's mercy, and that Jesus' teaching on love remains relevant today:

But Christmas also gives us the opportunity to remember the Christmas story – the story about the birth of Jesus Christ and the hope that he brings to the countless millions who follow him. The Gospel of John tells us that in this man was life, and that his life was the light of all mankind, and that he came with grace, truth and love. Indeed, God's word reminds us that Jesus was the Prince of Peace.¹⁹

Easter is a time when Christians are reminded of God's mercy and celebrate the life of Christ. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus taught us to love God and love our neighbour. He led by example and for millions of us his teachings are just as relevant now as they were in his lifetime.²⁰

18. N. Watt, 'David Cameron ignores Alastair Campbell's advice as he does God', *Guardian* (April 27, 2011); J. Bingham, 'Cameron's olive branch to the Church in Christian Christmas message', *Telegraph* (December 24, 2012); C. Crampton, 'David Cameron's Christmas message', *New Statesman* (December 24, 2012); T. Shipman, 'PM's Christmas bid to calm Christian anger at gay marriage: David Cameron quotes Gospel of St John in annual message', *Daily Mail* (December 24, 2012).

19. Text available at: 'A Christmas message from David Cameron (December 25, 2012)', http://www.conservatives.com/News/News_stories/2012/12/A_Christmas_message_from_David_Cameron.aspx.

20. D. Cameron, 'David Cameron's Easter Message (April 24, 2011)', <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/david-camerons-easter-message>.

Cameron's premiership also coincided with a significant celebration that would take place on his watch: the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible in 2011. At the closing of the anniversary Cameron gave a speech where the major features of the Liberal Bible and the exegetical emphases of politicians such as Thatcher and Blair were present. Cameron suggested that Britain can still be understood as a *Christian* nation. What Cameron did not mean was equally important. He did not mean that Britain is, or should become, a theocracy nor that the British people should all be going to church, singing hymns, praying to God, fasting, dealing with heretics appropriately, vigorously converting non-believers, and so on. It would be a great surprise if Cameron did advocate such things given that he described his 'religious faith' as a 'typical member of the Church of England': it 'is a bit like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns: it sort of comes and goes'.²¹ Instead, Cameron's vision of a Christian nation with the King James Bible at its heart is, as with Blair and Thatcher, a thoroughly liberalised notion of what a multicultural and multi-faith 'Christian country' ought to be, with anything unpalatable to this idea of the nation-state removed:

[From] human rights and equality to our constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy...the first forms of welfare provision... language and culture... [T]he Judeo-Christian roots of the Bible also provide the foundations for protest and for the evolution of our freedom and democracy... [They form] the irrepressible foundation for equality and human rights, a foundation that has seen the Bible at the forefront of the emergence of democracy, the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of women... Responsibility, hard work, charity, compassion, humility, self-sacrifice, love, pride in working for the common good and honouring the social obligations we have to one another, to our families and our communities...these are the values we treasure. Yes, they are Christian values. And we should not be afraid to acknowledge that. But they are also values that speak to us all – to people of every faith and none.²²

21. The full quotation is: 'I believe, you know. I am a sort of typical member of the Church of England. As Boris Johnson once said, his religious faith is a bit like the reception for Magic FM in the Chilterns: it sort of comes and goes. That sums up a lot of people in the Church of England. We are racked with doubts, but sort of fundamentally believe, but don't sort of wear it on our sleeves or make too much of it. I think that is sort of where I am.' See N. Watt and P. Wintour, 'Interview: How David Cameron is trying to reinvent the Tories', *Guardian* (July 16, 2008).

22. D. Cameron, 'Prime Minister's King James Bible Speech (December 16, 2010)', Number 10 Downing Street, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/king-james-bible/>. Cameron has since been more vocal in his more explicit Thatcherite use of the Bible to support the downplaying state provision and the promotion of charitable acts in their place, including his claim that 'Jesus invented the Big Society 2,000

Again, it would, presumably, be pointless asking what Cameron would have made of the details about Abishag the Shunammite keeping the ageing David warm in his bed, Joshua's conquest, posting parts of a chopped-up concubine, the cave of Adullam, smashing babies heads against rocks, labelling Gentiles 'dogs', condemning the rich to Hades, destroying idols, the weeping and gnashing of teeth, or, perhaps more pertinent still, using the King James Bible itself to convert heathens. Instead, the King James Bible and Christian values have to be understood in terms of liberal parliamentary democracy.

In the Age of Coalition, the King James Bible has also continued to survive through an emphasis on the Cultural Bible which was brought to the fore in the 400th anniversary celebrations. The following are the main aims of the King James Bible Trust, as found in their Mission Statement:

Reflect the global importance of the King James Bible and the role it has played in spreading the English language around the world.
Promote events and celebrations throughout 2011 to ensure that as many people as possible can encounter the King James Bible by the year's end.

The Mission Statement concludes:

The Trust, an education and arts Trust, will highlight and debate the significant contribution that the King James Bible continues to make. Fundamentally the Trust is here to leave a lasting legacy for future generations, by ensuring that this great work of literature and learning is still read and taught in years to come.²³

Developing her own views on the Liberal Bible, Yvonne Sherwood has noted the lack of concern in this Mission Statement for the historic role of the King James Bible in the combination of evangelism and empire.²⁴ And when the King James Bible Trust mention the King James Bible (and 'religion'), it is not about altars, blood, or sacrifice but a very contemporary form of liberal multiculturalism in the form of Liberal or Cultural Holy Scripture: 'The Trust is hard at work developing projects which will include...[d]iscussions about similar values in the texts of the world's major religions'.²⁵ The aesthetic and heritage angle was the position taken up by Richard Dawkins (a contributor to the promotional

years ago; I just want to see more of it'. I have discussed this in more detail at <http://sheffieldbiblicalstudies.wordpress.com/2014/04/17/david-camerons-latest-bible/>.

23. Available at <http://www.kingjamesbibletrust.org/about-us/mission-statement>.

24. Y. Sherwood, 'This Is Not a Bible/Ceçi n'est pas une Bible', unpublished paper delivered to the Biblical Literacy and the Curriculum Conference, University of Sheffield, May 25–28, 2011.

25. Available at <http://www.kingjamesbibletrust.org/about-us>.

material of the Trust). Whereas the decaffeinating of the Bible – the King James Bible in this instance – is culturally implicit, Dawkins, following a standard New Atheist line, remained happy to be explicit in wanting to highlight any problematic moral elements in the Bible and ‘religion’. But once this can be accepted, Dawkins argued:

I must admit that even I am a little taken aback at the biblical ignorance commonly displayed by people educated in more recent decades than I was... The King James Bible of 1611 – the Authorized Version – includes passages of outstanding literary merit in its own right... But the main reason the English Bible needs to be part of our education is that it is a major sourcebook for literary culture... Surely ignorance of the Bible is bound to impoverish one’s appreciation of English literature... We can give up belief in God while not losing touch with a treasured heritage.²⁶

The present and the immediate, coupled with culturally short attention spans, and mapped on to a rapidly changing yet increasingly standardised world, may indeed be a distinctive feature of our postmodern and neo-liberal age.²⁷ However, and probably because of this combination of unsettling, fragmentation, and homogenization, it is also an age of individual and collective nostalgia; or, as Mark Fisher put it, ‘an age given over to retrospection, incapable of generating any authentic novelty’.²⁸ Such uses of the King James Bible are clearly present in Cameron’s speech, the Mission Statement of the King James Bible Trust, and Dawkins’ fight against what he perceives to be cultural ignorance.

Such fragmented memories, simultaneously nostalgic whilst forgetting other seemingly important, uncomfortable, and even dangerous issues, have a ready-made cultural icon in the King James Bible with its antiquated language and gold lettering on a leather-bound cover, not to mention numerous cultured supporters of its historic and aesthetic qualities. In May 2012, Gove, in his role as Education Secretary, and with the backing of private donors, took advantage of this cultural icon when he sent out copies of the King James Bible to English state schools with the following printed in gold on the spine: PRESENTED BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION. Following the typical endorsements of the King James Bible in the 400th anniversary celebrations and beyond, Gove explained that he wanted this sent to schools because ‘The King James Bible has had a profound impact on our

26. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, pp. 340–41, 343, 344.

27. Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 201–323; F. Jameson, *Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

28. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 59; Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, pp. 85–87.

culture... Every school pupil should have the opportunity to learn about this book and the impact it has had on our history, language, literature and democracy.’²⁹ It is worth noting that the Gove Bible neatly complements one of the most controversial aspects of Gove’s time at the Department for Education, namely his early draft proposals for the History curriculum, which placed a strong emphasis on a patriotic narrative history of Britain and the importance of this history for national (effectively English) identity.³⁰

The Gove Bible gained some weighty support. Once again Dawkins got partly in the mood by declaring his double-edged support for the Gove Bible. ‘A native speaker of English who has never read a word of the King James Bible is verging on the barbarian,’ proclaimed Dawkins, even if adding that his ‘ulterior motive’ was to expose the Bible for what it is: ‘not a moral book and young people need to learn that important fact because they are very frequently told the opposite’.³¹ The Gove Bible gained further endorsement in a 2012 Westminster discussion on Religion in Public Life featuring Tony Blair and Rowan Williams and chaired by the leading *Telegraph* journalist, Charles Moore.³² Once again, all the familiar positions from the Liberal Bible and Cultural Bible were present. Moore (who also mentioned the 400th anniversary) called the Gove Bible ‘a good politicised gesture’ and added that the King James Bible represented a ‘vital political act that helped unite the kingdom of Scotland and the kingdom of England and it helped to forge the United Kingdom and became the key text of our social order... [T]his is an essential part of how we come to be, what we are, and why we believe what we believe.’ Williams acknowledged that the Gove Bible was an ‘iconic gesture’ but wanted to go further and see such a ‘big, complicated text’ in the hands of young people be given the support of wider investment in ‘resources and energy in the whole educational establishment to

29. ‘Schools get King James Bible to mark 400th anniversary’, *BBC News*.

30. See e.g. A. Philipson, ‘Leading historians back reforms to history curriculum’, *Telegraph* (February 15, 2013); R.J. Evans, ‘The Wonderfulness of Us (the Tory Interpretation of History)’, *London Review of Books* 33 (March 17, 2011), pp. 9-12; R.J. Evans, ‘Michael Gove’s history curriculum is a pub quiz not an education’, *New Statesman* (March 21, 2013); R. Garner, ‘“Jingoistic and illegal” – what teachers think of Michael Gove’s national curriculum reforms’, *Independent* (June 12, 2013); W. Mansell, ‘Michael Gove redrafts new history curriculum after outcry’, *Guardian* (June 21, 2013).

31. R. Dawkins, ‘Why I want all our children to read the King James Bible’, *Observer* (May 19, 2012).

32. The full debate (from which I have transcribed) is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jE5z8UC_nk_

make it possible for the imagination of a child to respond fully to all that that means'. He wondered, 'What are the conditions that will make this work in a really constructive way, a really educating way?' Blair denied that the Gove Bible was 'an act of proselytization... [W]e're not trying to convert anyone by doing it'. Rather, he claimed that it's 'part of our tradition and history as a country... It's good that people understand it.'

2. Surviving Cynicism and the Noble Big Other

Such then, I said, are our principles of theology—some tales are to be told, and others are not to be told to our disciples from their youth upwards, if we mean them to honour the gods and their parents, and to value friendship with one another.

Yes; and I think that our principles are right, he said.

But if they are to be courageous, must they not learn other lessons besides these, and lessons of such a kind as will take away the fear of death? Can any man be courageous who has the fear of death in him?

Certainly not, he said.

And can he be fearless of death, or will he choose death in battle rather than defeat and slavery, who believes the world below to be real and terrible?

Impossible.

Then we must assume a control over the narrators of this class of tales as well as over the others, and beg them not simply to revile but rather to commend the world below, intimating to them that their descriptions are untrue, and will do harm to our future warriors.

That will be our duty, he said.

Then, I said, we shall have to obliterate many obnoxious passages, beginning with the verses,

'I would rather be a serf on the land of a poor and portionless man than rule over all the dead who have come to nought.'

...And we must beg Homer and the other poets not to be angry if we strike out these and similar passages, not because they are unpoetical, or unattractive to the popular ear, but because the greater the poetical charm of them, the less are they meet for the ears of boys and men who are meant to be free, and who should fear slavery more than death. (Plato, *Republic*, Book 3)

And yet...do plenty of schools not already have King James Bibles? Does or will anyone actually read them at those schools where Gove's Bible is present? Was not Rowan Williams being implicitly cynical in arguing for the need for wider educational resources to understand such a complicated text? Would it be overly cynical to suggest that donating King James Bibles to schools is an exercise in PR, or a further exercise in promoting Govian history? In fact, comments of sceptical inner-city teachers who will not be using the Bible or those who see through the

apparent PR purposes of the exercise are (predictably?) found in the same newspaper reports as Gove's plan, as well as among sceptical liberal journalists and comedians, all providing outlets of cynicism in the same newspaper as the reports.³³ It would probably not be a great surprise if Cameron or Gove did not privately believe that the King James Bible would be taken up and read by even a handful of children in a given school. There is indeed a touch of scepticism when Dawkins wrote, 'I am a little shocked at the implication that not every school library already possesses a copy. Can that be true? What do they have, then? Harry Potter? Vampires?... But does anybody, even Gove, seriously think they will [read it]?'³⁴ Gove or Cameron would hardly write or speak openly like this at present but if one day they were able to speak openly, who knows? Yet all the while the official narrative of a grand, democratic, cultured English civilization associated with the King James Bible continues comparatively unchallenged despite the popular cynicism over readership. Presumably this is the real ideological function of this story.

Broadly speaking, this perpetuation of the official story despite the cynicism can be tied in with the unconscious fiction of the Big Other, which we can in turn tie in with the more overtly cynical tradition of the Noble Lie, associated (rightly or wrongly) with figures from Plato through Machiavelli to Leo Strauss. Much of the Lacanian work on the Big Other has been carried out by Slavoj Žižek and others and applied

33. J. Shepherd, 'Michael Gove's King James Bible plan rescued by millionaire Tory donors', *Guardian* (May 15, 2012); D. Mitchell, 'Michael Gove's biblical zeal is a ruse', *Observer* (May 20, 2012). A more dangerous level of exposing the emperor's nakedness is when it moves beyond the legitimate channels for holding power to account (e.g. liberal media). This was particularly clear in the WikiLeaks controversies. Here Žižek wrote of the 'shameless cynicism of the existing global order whose agents *only imagine that they believe in their ideas of democracy, human rights, etc.*, and, through moves like the WikiLeaks disclosures, *the shame (our shame for tolerating such power over us) is made more shameful by publicizing it*' (S. Žižek, *Living in the End Times* [rev. edn; London: Verso, 2011], p. 410, italics original). WikiLeaks did not really reveal what was previously unknown ('The only truly surprising thing about the revelations is that there was no surprise in them: didn't we learn *exactly* what we expected to learn?' [Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, p. 408, italics original]). If there is any doubt about the potential dangers involved, if the revealing of the emperor's nakedness is not done through the correct channels and by the correct people, just recall what has since happened to Julian Assange, Bradley Manning, and Edward Snowden, all of whom have, in different ways, found their very lives threatened.

34. Dawkins, 'Why I want all our children'.

to contexts of postmodern capitalism (as well as Soviet Russia). We can think of this Big Other symbolically functioning as a figure who ‘believes’ the official, expected, or accepted public narratives, even if individuals really do not. Cynicism towards, disintegration and fragmentation of, and belief in, this Big Other have been a hallmark of postmodernity for Žižek.³⁵ Another feature of a reliance on the Big Other who ‘really believes’ involves a definition and function of ‘culture’, something particularly relevant to the King-James-Bible-as-heritage arguments. Žižek has argued that ‘culture’ has emerged as ‘the central life-world category’. What this means is that when we deal with the topic of religion (or the public presentation of the Bible), people do not necessarily ‘really believe’ but rather ‘just follow (some) religious rituals and mores as part of respect for the “lifestyle” of the community to which we belong (nonbelieving Jews obeying kosher rules “out of respect for tradition”, etc.)’. As Žižek has suggested,

‘I don’t really believe in it, it’s just part of my culture’ effectively seems to be the predominant mode of the disavowed/displaced belief characteristic of our times. What is a cultural lifestyle, if not the fact that, although we don’t believe in Santa Claus, there is a Christmas tree in every house, and even in public places, every December? ... [C]ulture’ is the name for all those things we practice without really believing in them, without ‘taking them seriously’ ... Today, we ultimately perceive as a threat to culture those who live their culture immediately, those who lack a distance toward it. Recall the outrage when, two years ago, the Taliban forces in Afghanistan destroyed the ancient Buddhist statues at Bamiyan: although none of us enlightened Westerners believe in the divinity of the Buddha, we were outraged because the Taliban Muslims did not show the appropriate respect for the ‘cultural heritage’ of their own country and the entire world. Instead of believing through the other, like all people of culture, they really believed in their own religion, and thus had no great sensitivity toward the cultural value of the monuments of other religions – to them, the Buddha statues were just fake idols, not ‘cultural treasures’.³⁶

A distanced concern for ‘our culture’ and the cynical keeping up of appearances helps explain in part the function of Gove’s Bible in schools and without, of course, recourse to anything too problematic like weighing up the merits of casting out Girgashites, debating whether ageing rulers should be warmed in bed by young women, discussing the impor-

35. E.g. S. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999); S. Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (2nd edn; London: Verso, 2008); Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, pp. 44-50.

36. Žižek, *Puppet and the Dwarf*, pp. 7-8.

tance of speaking in tongues, or using the King James Bible to convert and colonise. After all, if a politician is deemed to believe *too much* it might, as Steve Webb found out, lead to the idea that a politician really believes in all the illiberal and alien material we all really know is in the Bible, and sometimes even practiced privately behind closed doors on a Sunday. The tension between enough God/Bible and too much God/Bible – indeed a public God/Bible versus private God/Bible – is what a politician must negotiate and with no guarantee they will be represented fairly. Recall Gove's explanation of the need for the King James Bible in schools: 'Every school pupil should have the opportunity to learn about this book and the impact it has had on our history, language, literature and democracy'. Recall too Cameron's vocal support for the cultural heritage of the King James Bible. Fortunately for Gove and Cameron, their views tally with Dawkins' worries about the barbarianism of a life apart from the King James Bible and are an important indicator that they will not be ridiculed for believing in the more peculiar bits of the Bible we all know really exist, even if a politician can ill afford to admit it.

There is an assumption, then, that the King James Bible is, or should be, or must be, an obvious part of British and English cultural heritage. But in the case of both Dawkins and Gove there is clearly a fear that the ideological hinterland of the King James Bible could be under threat or even lost. In one sense, after going centuries unchallenged, the ongoing survival of the King James Bible is hardly a given and it could be seen as an unlikely survival story. The King James Bible is, after all, problematic in terms of its underlying Greek text-critical history, it is written in antiquated English, and it could potentially evoke scare stories of KJV-only 'fundamentalism'. Indeed, the standard explanation for the loss of its near monopoly in the English-speaking world is not particularly conducive to longer-term survival: by the turn of the twentieth century there was an increasing concern that the language of the King James Bible was too archaic for congregations and new Greek manuscript discoveries called into question *Textus Receptus*, thereby resulting in the King James Bible becoming one Bible among many by the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, the idea of the King James Bible as *the* Bible – or indeed *the* Book – of the British Empire may have left its mark on the colonies, but the decline of the Empire might be another reason to think that its days of influence in Britain were always going to be numbered.

And yet the King James Bible has continued to survive, even if in radically different ways from its pre-twentieth-century dominance. There are a number of general ideological reasons for its survival in Britain and in an era of postmodernity, commercialisation, and neoliberalism. As we

saw in Chapter 1, the postmodern era has seen an explosion in different types of Bible with an accompanying fetish for the (re-)packaging of already existing biblical translations for a target audience or market, neatly replicating the relentless postmodern interest in multiple identities and a relentless quest for more markets. As we further saw in Chapter 1, image has played a crucial role in the survival or perpetuation of the Neoliberal Bible. As Katie Edwards has shown, the Bible in advertising only needs a split-second image to convey a range of ‘common sense’ meanings involving the intersection of (among other things) branding, gender, and nationalism.³⁷ As an embedded cultural icon, the King James Bible was ready to survive the numerous different Bibles on the market and in one sense it can take its place among, or alongside, the *Queen James Bible*, *The Soldiers’ Bible*, *The Teen Bible for Girls*, or any number of the Zondervan specialised Bibles whose true meaning is instantly understood on sight. The distinctively branded King James Bible has managed to stand out and is instantly recognisable as a leather-bound text, with two columns, and a gold-coloured typesetting of ‘Holy Bible’ – possibly understood as *the* Bible – that might be bought for Christenings. Whether we know precisely that it was a Bible published in 1611 is another issue – its branding and image retains a certain ancient and nostalgic mystique while, explicitly or implicitly, remaining the authoritative Bible of English or British nationalism.

Throughout this book we have seen that the actual content of the Bible is not always significant for understanding what it ‘really means’ and in a world of instant imaging the content might be thought especially irrelevant. But we should qualify this, at least in terms of the survival of the King James Bible, as such well known, albeit isolated, verses continue to survive. Perhaps as much as anything it is the language of the King James Bible that has allowed it to survive and it has done so, in no small part, by a removal or downplaying of anything perceived to be too ‘religious’. A major feature of David Crystal’s book on the continued uses of King James Bible idioms is a relentless perpetuation of ‘secularizing’ and playful use of that which might be deemed ‘religious’ language.³⁸ Crystal has provided a wide range of famous phrases from the King James Bible (or King James ‘sounding’ phrases), from low and high culture, including those which have had a ‘permanent influence on the development of the English language’ (*Let there be light*, *My brother’s keeper*, *Begat*, *Bread alone*, *Heal thyself*, and so on). He has

37. Edwards, *Ad Men and Eve*.

38. D. Crystal, *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

shown that idioms are adapted, often with comical intent, with all sorts of unexpected language play (e.g. *Am I my brothel's keeper?*).³⁹ All these points are central to his analysis of the extent to which King James Bible idioms have 'permeated genres of modern spoken or written English', such as, for instance, marketing, journalism, sport, theatre, punk music, computing, and so on.⁴⁰ Likewise, one of the key reasons for survival of idioms (and not necessarily in the same form found in the King James Bible) is a range of phonetic properties, such as iambic rhythms (e.g. *...how the mighty have fallen!*) and rhyme, or indeed words which lend themselves to rhyme and thus adaptation (e.g. 'grave' as in *From the cradle to the grave*).⁴¹ Crystal simultaneously pointed out that there is little evidence for lexical innovation and grammatical innovation and so, in this sense, the King James Bible is little more than a book of witty or useful idioms.

3. Surviving Postcolonialism

A dominant and important result from the analysis of Crystal's collection of idioms is that 'the items discussed...are not quotations: they are everyday expressions used by speakers and writers of modern English, most of whom will have no religious motivation for their use'.⁴² Being so embedded in a wide range of cultural contexts should alert us to ways in which the Bible continues to survive in Western cultural contexts, striving to come to terms with secularism, nationalism, and global capitalism. However, using a selection of texts from the King James Bible in the contemporary British media, R.S. Sugirtharajah argued that 'From the use of these quotations it is sometimes difficult to assess whether the sacred text of Christians is held in veneration or being mocked... [O]ne is often baffled as to whether the Sacred Word is held in reverence or taken for its comic value'.⁴³ Indeed; and yet playful or cynical irony is one way of maintaining and repackaging a dominant ideological position for our postmodern times whilst seemingly transgressing the traditional narratives and assumptions.⁴⁴ Sugirtharajah referred to the use of the

39. Crystal, *Begat*, p. 2.

40. Crystal, *Begat*, p. 261.

41. Crystal, *Begat*, pp. 75, 85, 261.

42. Crystal, *Begat*, p. 257.

43. R.S. Sugirtharajah, 'Loitering with Intent: Biblical Texts in Public Places', *BibInt* 11 (2003), pp. 567-78 (572-73).

44. S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989); S. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*

King James Bible in sports reports and one example he gave comes from the *Guardian* and concerns the ‘ritualized form of football results aired after the matches’. This example illustrates how the cultural capital of the King James Bible is maintained through playfulness and witty quasi-intellectual allusion:

And these are the kings of the land whom Joshua and the children of Israel smote beyond Jordan westwards...

King of Jericho, one; the king of Ai, which is beside Beth-el, one.

The king of Jerusalem, one, the king of Hebron, one;

The king of Jarmuth, one; the king of Lachish, one;

The king of Eglon, one; the king of Gezer, one.

The king of Debir, one; the king of Geder, one⁴⁵

We might note an even more irreverent example (among others) of the Bible in the British tabloids: the *Sun* (September 17, 2010) and its topless ‘page three girl’, Hollie, 22, from Manchester. Hollie, we are informed, ‘was intrigued to see the Pope downing Fanta yesterday. She said: “Pontiffs have traditionally favoured fine wines. In fact, appellations were first mentioned in the Bible, and Pope John XXII was key in developing the renowned Châteauneuf-du-Pape in the 1300s.”’⁴⁶ There may well be a comical element: a topless women explaining papal history is not, to my admittedly limited knowledge of such matters, common in traditional accounts. This Bible is not (necessarily) the King James Bible but it still implicitly suggests the Bible is part of our heritage and tradition. With such thoughts in mind, it is significant that in a study of the construction of ‘religion’ and the use of the Bible in the contemporary British press there was plenty of comedy, plenty on the Bible and Christianity as part of our cultural heritage, but very little in the way of directly attacking the Bible or even ‘religion’.⁴⁷

After reading a sample of examples from the British Press, Sugirtharajah suggested that ‘the founding totem of the western world has now ended up in the popular press as “an erratic” and “an eccentric” cultural artifact sans religious authority or theological clout’.⁴⁸ Yet is this not

(London: Verso, 2002), p. 71 (‘When we think we are making fun of the ruling ideology, we are merely strengthening its hold over us’); Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism*, pp. 32-34.

45. Sugirtharajah, ‘Loitering with Intent’, p. 570, quoting Matthew Engel, ‘Dark Angel’, *Guardian*. Sugirtharajah was unable to supply the date of the *Guardian* article but estimated that it is from the ‘middle 1990s’.

46. I owe this reference to Sarah Hussell.

47. Crossley and Harrison, ‘Mediation’.

48. Sugirtharajah, ‘Loitering with Intent’, p. 577.

precisely the point? It *should* have lost its theological clout and religious authority *as traditionally understood*. The King James Bible, and the Bible and 'religion' more generally, still serve nationalism but have modified as capitalist liberal democracy has changed. This background should make us particularly aware of the nuanced ways in which biblical literacy might have functioned in a postmodern age. Dawkins' symbolic older generation (real or imaginary) may bemoan the lack of biblical literacy in the sense that people do not understand our 'treasured heritage' or have a detailed knowledge of its contents but on another level biblical literacy continues to function in such ways supportive of heritage whether individuals know it or not and whether they like it or not. Biblical literacy and/or the survival of the Bible work in part thanks to fast-paced recognition of certain biblical types and pithy sayings. The Bible has been marketed in endless ways and this has, to some extent, provided a means for its potential medium-term future. It has been adapted and adopted nostalgically as the text of liberty, freedom, democracy, gender equality. Of course, everyone knows that the King James Bible is not *really* going to be read chapter-by-chapter and cover-to-cover and that, for all the concerns about heritage, it is not without reason that it is precisely the book we might proverbially expect to prop up a table leg or gather dust. But the discourse of 'our heritage' retains its symbolic and nostalgic power, despite all the accompanying cynicism. Outside the realm of 'fundamentalist' readers, a dominant form of biblical literacy may now be said to reflect this decaffeinated Bible.

Yet, the seriousness of the imperial and globalising significance of the English Bible, sometimes assumed to be the King James Bible, was shown in the recent controversies over the announcement of the Patois Bible. The Patois Bible is part of a translation project that has been overseen by the Bible Society and designed to provide a translation for five million patois speakers in Jamaica and Britain.⁴⁹ Some of the reactions have been significant because there is the assumption that (a certain form of) English is the only language for worship and understanding. Prudence Dailey, chair of the Prayer Book Society, was reported to have claimed that 'I can see that a translation of this type could be useful, but I'd have reservations about its use in the context of public worship... I would want to encourage a style of worship which elevated people above the everyday and my fear with this is it might lose some of the sense of awe that we should have.' Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe was

49. J. Wynne-Jones, 'Bible to be turned into patois', *Telegraph* (October 11, 2008).

reported to have said that 'It's one thing to turn the Bible into modern vernacular, but to turn it into patois is utterly ridiculous. When you dumb down you take away any meaning it might have.'⁵⁰ God, it would seem, really does speak English but additionally, as Tim Footman put it, sports an MCC tie with the word of God enunciated in the cut-glass accent of Tonbridge Wells.⁵¹

Yet one critic was perhaps more of a surprise. Diane Abbott, the Labour MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and on the left of the party, claimed that in a British context the Patois Bible would imply that 'Jamaicans are not literate enough to understand the Bible in Standard English' despite the 'one book ordinary Jamaicans are brought up to read...is the Bible'. Abbott argued that it is an insult to 'ordinary Jamaicans' to claim that 'of all books, they cannot understand the Bible'. Abbott added further reasons against the Patois Bible. Patois, she claimed, 'is not essentially a written language', that translation of an English text 'loses half the vigour and charm of attempting to relate a Bible story in patois', and that for those who take 'the Bible and its theological meaning seriously' patois is unsatisfactory because it is 'a style of speaking which was never meant to be set out on paper and convey precise theological concepts'. However, Abbott added an argument based on the global economic significance of the English Bible:

I also think that Jamaicans, whilst they should cherish patois, should also value Standard English. In economic terms, the fact that Jamaicans speak English as their first language is enormously important. English is the language of world commerce. In India, millions of dollars are poured into making sure educated Indians can speak good English, in order that they can compete in the call centre market. Jamaicans already speak English. But sometimes they seem to take this huge asset for granted. Patois is charming, but it will not help Jamaica compete in the international marketplace. Standard English will.⁵²

In response to Abbott, Paul Williams made a number of counter-arguments. He pointed out that the majority of Jamaicans do not speak English and claimed that the implicit suggestion that the 'sanctity' of the Bible can only be upheld in Standard English downgrades Jamaican Creole. In one sense, Williams shares a similar assumption to Abbott on

50. Wynne-Jones, 'Bible to be turned into patois'.

51. T. Footman, 'The gospel according to Widdecombe', *Guardian* (October 14, 2008).

52. D. Abbott, 'Cherish J'can dialect, but please, no Patois Bible', *Jamaica Observer* (January 16, 2011).

the more global significance of translation for a standardised language (in this case the potential for Jamaican Creole). He noted, for instance, how widespread use of the mass media will perpetuate Jamaican Creole. In addition to Williams' claim that Abbott's views are 'tantamount to language discrimination', this sentiment brings Williams' Patois Bible also into line with the Liberal Bible or even the Neoliberal Bible. As Williams put it, 'discrimination in any way or form is not what we are striving for in this age of globalisation'.⁵³

However, for all the movement towards the Neoliberal Bible, there is something ambiguous implicit in these turns to standardised and globalised language that faintly echoes a more radical tradition in relation to colonisation and resistance. In her argument about the importance of the English Bible for global capitalism, Abbott's argument tacitly assumes the Patois Bible has a potentially counter-cultural function. Williams argued (citing R. Anthony Lewis) that European Christian colonisation primarily involved biblical texts and Bible translation and that all the talk about the Bible and Standard English is problematic because what is really at stake is the King James Bible and its antiquated language:

Yes, many ordinary Jamaicans cannot read the Bible, especially the English of the King James Version, which is not Standard British English, much less Standard Jamaican English. There are problems with many of the words and phrasings, but even more important, many people are at a loss with the metaphoric and poetic language in which it is written.⁵⁴

Williams did not explicitly connect the King James Bible with imperialism but it was, and is, the King James Bible that is the Bible of both the coloniser and the colonised. This tension was picked up by the Jamaican-born poet Linton Kwesi Johnson who, on the occasion of its 400th anniversary, noted that the King James Bible is simultaneously 'a most effective tool of colonisation' and '[was] the only [book] in my illiterate grandmother's house when I was a child in Jamaica'.⁵⁵

As a poet, Johnson's recollections of the King James Bible are unsurprisingly in the tradition of the Cultural Bible. He pointed out, for instance, its influence on Jamaican popular music and oral culture. 'Used

53. P.H. Williams, 'Abbott, Patois Bible and language discrimination', *The Gleaner* (March 27, 2011).

54. Williams, 'Abbott, Patois Bible and language discrimination'.

55. L.K. Johnson, 'The King James Bible's language lessons', *Guardian* (February 19, 2011). See also B. Caesar, 'Interview: Linton Kwesi Johnson talks to Burt Caesar at Sparkside Studios, Brixton, London, 11 June 1996', *Critical Quarterly* 38 (1996), pp. 64-77.

with dexterity and wit', he added, 'biblical sayings are very powerful tools in the rhetoric of everyday discourse, and a rich repository of metaphor, simile, aphorism and imagery'. He recalled 'the language' of the Old Testament and the Psalms, some of which he could recite from memory, as his 'first real introduction to written verse' and so, he argued, 'it's not at all surprising that my verse has some biblical references'.⁵⁶ But when we turn to Johnson's poetry we see that he has used the Cultural Bible in line with the Radical Bible. 'Di Great Insohreckshan' and 'Mekkin Histri' both pick up on a long tradition, found in reggae, dub, and the Radical Bible tradition more generally, of a demonised power labelled 'Babylon'.⁵⁷ Both poems contain strongly confrontational anti-Babylon, anti-establishment sentiments, set up in dramatic 'apocalyptic' contexts and language use that comes close to the politically revolutionary. Both poems were written in the aftermath of the 1981 Brixton riots and explicitly contain settings in contemporary England. Furthermore, 'the tone', he argued, 'is celebratory because I wanted to capture the mood of exhilaration felt by black people at the time'. However, Johnson made further connections with the 2011 riots which began in Tottenham after Mark Duggan was killed by the police. When the riots began, Johnson was performing in Belgium with the Dennis Bovell Dub Band and recalled two particular performances, of 'Di Great Insohreckshan' and 'Mekkin Histri'. Bovell, a Tottenham resident, called Johnson on the night of August 6, 2011, to inform him of what was happening. Johnson reflected that if anything had changed some of the problems had worsened since the days of 'Di Great Insohreckshan' and 'Mekkin Histri':

I was not at all surprised that the riots began in Tottenham in the light of the killing of Mark Duggan by a police officer and the history of conflict between the police and the black community in that part of London... It is clear to me that the causes of the riots are racial oppression and racial injustice, as well as class oppression and social injustice. The most widespread expression of discontent that I have ever witnessed in this country has to be seen in the context of the marginalisation of sections of the working class and the ideologically driven austerity measures of the Tory-led government.⁵⁸

56. Johnson, 'King James Bible's language lessons'.

57. On Babylon and the Radical Bible, see e.g. C. Rowland and J. Roberts, *The Bible for Sinners: Interpretation in the Present Time* (London: SPCK, 2008).

58. L.K. Johnson, 'Trust between the police and the black community is still broken', *Guardian* (March 28, 2012).

Clearly, Johnson's ideological position is firmly in opposition to the political status quo, particularly on issues of race, class, and economics ('the Thatcher decade, was one of class struggle and racial conflict'⁵⁹) and he has long identified with radical politics (he had joined the Black Panthers while at school). He is reported to have claimed that there 'doesn't seem to be a radical left anymore', that politics is now 'at the centre or right of centre', and that he does not vote in national elections.⁶⁰ When Thatcher died, he called her 'a ruthless class warrior for the ruling class' whose 'ignominious achievement was the tearing up of the post-World War Two "settlement", clawing back the gains the working class had won'. But he saw Thatcher as epitomising the political establishment: 'Her cross-party admiration stems from the fact that she is regarded as the architect of the neo-liberal orthodoxy to which they all subscribe, notwithstanding the dire straits in which the free market dogma has taken the British economy'.⁶¹ Elsewhere he has reportedly gone further still, arguing that 'I think this government is the most extreme I have experienced in the nearly 50 years that I've lived in this country', and that they are 'using the financial crisis as a way of implementing neoliberal policies that even Mrs Thatcher in her heyday would not have contemplated'.⁶² On issues of race, he claimed that 'Thatcher will be remembered by many black people of my generation as a bigot and a xenophobe who fanned the flames of racial hatred, giving succour to the fascists who were emboldened to carry out terrorist attacks against black and Asian people'.⁶³ The language Johnson used to explain advances in black integration since the 1980s in his reflections on the 2011 inner city riots is significant because it is openly that of the radical tradition: 'We had to resort to insurrection to integrate ourselves into British society'.⁶⁴

Johnson has also located himself in distinction from black leaders in the political establishment, notably in the context of recalling the 2011 riots. Against the former chair of Equality, and Human Rights Commission and former chair of the London Assembly for the Labour Party, Trevor Phillips, Johnson argued that on the issue of policing and

59. L.K. Johnson, 'Thatcher and the inner city riots', *Huffington Post* (April 16, 2013), http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/linton-kwesi-johnson/margaret-thatcher-inner-city-riots_b_3081167.html.

60. S. Morrison, 'Linton Kwesi Johnson: "Class-ridden? Yes, but this is still home"', *Independent on Sunday* (December 2, 2012).

61. Johnson, 'Thatcher and the inner city riots'.

62. Morrison, 'Linton Kwesi Johnson'.

63. Johnson, 'Thatcher and the inner city riots'.

64. Johnson, 'Trust between the police and the black community is still broken'.

young black people nothing has changed since the uprisings of 1981, adding, 'Never mind what Trevor Phillips says'. He also endorsed comments by Joseph Harker, further commenting that 'the dozen or so black members of parliament are one step removed from their communities'.⁶⁵ Harker had previously claimed that,

Today we have a dozen black MPs, including some in the Conservative party, but their backgrounds are a million miles from the community activism of their predecessors. Today's crop, well groomed in spin, ensure they remain on message. 'I'm not a black MP, just an MP who happens to be black', is their common refrain. Aside from Diane Abbott (also of the class of 87), can anyone imagine them speaking with the passion of a Grant or Boateng?⁶⁶

Johnson's ideological position is significant in terms of the Radical Bible because, as his endorsement of Harker and his dismissal of Phillips further show, he is firmly outside Parliamentary and party-political discourse. While the King James Bible is so widely spread that it can still be utilised in a range of ideological positions and not so easily tied down to the political establishment alone, the Radical Bible, at least in this instance, would have no place in contemporary party-political discourse. Indeed, Johnson's Radical Bible is one example among others of the marginalisation of the Radical Bible which was once so central to the origins of the Labour movement.

4. What Ever Happened to the Radical Bible?

Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths'. For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Isa. 2.3-4)

Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears; let the weakling say, 'I am a warrior'. (Joel 3.10)

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. (Mic. 4.3)

65. Johnson, 'Trust between the police and the black community is still broken'.

66. J. Harker, 'For black Britons, this is not the 80s revisited. It's worse', *Guardian* (August 11, 2011).

In Labour Party politics, the Radical Bible lost its power once the Bennite Left lost any serious influence with its defeat ultimately confirmed by the symbolic removal of Clause 4 and the rise of Blair. The Radical Bible was effectively pushed outside Parliament and party-politics, only retaining some connections on the fringes of the Labour Party, or its language brought into the fold of the Liberal Bible (see Chapter 8). However, just as radical politics survived outside Parliament and mainstream party politics, most notably the high-profile ‘anti-globalisation’ protests associated with, for instance, Seattle in 1999 or Genoa in 2001, so the Radical Bible was able to re-emerge in different, often independent and non-affiliated groups, albeit with more typical postmodern fragmentation than it had been when associated with the Labour and Communist parties. While 2008 may have brought about the Coalition it also generated a global movement in many ways at odds with dominant understandings of liberal democracy, at least in its relationship to capitalism: Occupy. In the post-2008 era, the Occupy movement provided an outlet for sustained, high-profile radical politics (as well as more liberal-reformist politics). The Occupy movement in the UK became geographically associated not only with the world of finance but also the Church: Occupy London Stock Exchange was located at St Paul’s cathedral on land co-owned with the City of London Corporation. The presentation of the Anglican Church agonising about who to support was presented in terms of the radical tradition versus the establishment tradition, Giles Fraser versus the Bishop of London Richard Chartres, and ultimately picking up on what Roland Boer has argued is a political tension at the heart of Christianity and the Bible.⁶⁷ Or, as Marina Hyde put it with tongue partly in cheek, Fraser might imagine Jesus born in the camp but ‘I could imagine St Paul siding with health and safety’.⁶⁸

In addition to his claims that he ‘could imagine Jesus being born in the camp’,⁶⁹ Fraser, who resigned as canon chancellor of the cathedral after a vote to seek out possible legal advice on the eviction of the protestors, wanted to stress that St Paul’s is ‘not the parish church of the city, with

67. In addition to Boer’s multi-volume project, *Criticism of Heaven and Earth* (2007–13), see e.g. Boer, *Rescuing the Bible*; R. Boer, *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: WJK, 2009); R. Boer, *Political Myth: On the Use and Abuse of Biblical Themes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

68. M. Hyde, ‘Jesus may be with Occupy London, but St Paul would have sided with health and safety’, *Guardian* (October 28, 2011).

69. A. Rusbridger, ‘Canon of St Paul’s “unable to reconcile conscience with evicting protest camp”’, *Guardian* (October 27, 2011).

its banks and livery companies' but rather 'the cathedral church for the whole of London... Its constituency includes some of the most deprived inner city estates in the whole of Europe.' He even framed this in language which became synonymous with Occupy: 'It does not exist as a gilded dressing-up box for the 1%, nor simply as a place of protest for the 99%, but a place of prayer for the 100%'. Fraser further inverted ownership of the biblical stories in making the comparison between the 'middle-class Englishmen' who wanted 'to address the financial crisis with well-meaning seminars and reports' and the 'nonviolent direct action...angry...scruffy...loud' Occupy camps who were 'much more like John the Baptist than your average Anglican cleric, who can be too easily conscripted within the bosom of the establishment'.⁷⁰ But for all the portrayal of the Occupy events in the media, Fraser (a former Trotskyite) tried to stress that he was not in fact an anti-capitalist campaigner and he remained on the liberal reformist wing of those sympathetic with Occupy. He has even been reported to have claimed that Jesus would have taken a more extreme position on modern capitalism; for Jesus, he claimed, 'the love of money is the root of all evil'.⁷¹

As it turned out, the Radical Jesus was indeed present in the protests. One of the enduring images from Occupy London Stock Exchange was a protester dressed up as Jesus (complete with white robe, beard, long hair, and crown of thorns) with a sign bearing an allusion to a favourite story from the Radical Bible tradition: I THREW OUT THE MONEY-CHANGERS FOR A REASON.⁷² The story of Jesus and the money-changers (Matt. 21.12-13; Mark 11.15-17; Luke 19.45-46; John 2.13-22) was repeated throughout the reporting on Occupy London, particularly in the left-leaning *Guardian*. Terry Eagleton, for instance, picked up on Jesus' actions in the Temple as a point of comparison to Occupy London, adding that cathedral staff were lucky that the demonstrators did not behave as badly as their master. Jesus would have probably 'understood what those currently shivering outside St Paul's are up to' and by throwing the 'ruling caste of a holy place into an unholy panic, just as he did', the protestors are, to that extent, followers of Jesus, even if they 'despise religion'. In fact, Eagleton went as far as claiming that Jesus' actions in the Temple showed that he 'was at one with a later Jewish prophet, Karl Marx, whose concept of alienation involves just such a

70. G. Fraser, 'Occupy London's eviction is a failure for the church, not the camp', *Guardian* (January 31, 2012).

71. Rusbridger, 'Canon of St Paul's'.

72. S. Hill, 'Would Jesus kick the Occupy London protesters off St Paul's grounds?', *Guardian* (October 20, 2011).

break between the product and the producer'.⁷³ Worth comparing here is one Liberal Democrat use of the story of Jesus and the moneychangers which is given a more reformist spin: 'All Liberals are passionate about free trade... Christians, perhaps following the example of Christ in the Temple, are more prone to question the scope and place of market behaviour and to encourage the state to do likewise.'⁷⁴

And Jesus was not just in London. On the main outward-facing tent at Occupy Sheffield (located on the forecourt of Sheffield Cathedral) the words FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES were visible in large letters, topped only in size by OCCUPY SHEFFIELD and with the notable (and popular) variant of 'trespasses' over 'debts' or 'sins' (cf. Matt. 6.12; Luke 11.4) which may sound like a KJVism (and which may be the point) but was in fact made famous from the version in the Book of Common Prayer and the Tyndale Bible before it. A curious aside on Occupy Sheffield is worth mentioning. I spoke to some of those camped outside Sheffield Cathedral and asked them about the significance of using the Bible and locating themselves in front of a cathedral. The constant answer was that the biblical references simply appeared appropriate given the location and that the location was only significant because it was one of the few places that provided ample space in the city centre and emphatically not because of any symbolism involved in a cathedral. Of course, this may not have been the view of all those at Occupy Sheffield but there is a potentially significant issue concerning the lack of intentionality among those participants I had spoken to. It is precisely because the *cathedral* (rather than any number of privately owned shops and spaces) has the symbolic advantage of such city central, publicly accessible space that arguably gave Occupy Sheffield its high-profile locally and presumably facilitated or generated, to some degree, the prominent use of the Bible in its visual protests.

Of course, Occupy has its precursors and has grown out of a range of significant leftist movements which had come to, or gained further, prominence post-1968. As we saw in Chapter 2, in their English and British manifestations such groups did not necessarily (though some, of course, did) have strong ties to the Communist Party or even to Marxist groups (e.g. direct action, anarchism, environmentalism, feminism, animal rights activism, CND, Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, various radical leftist religious movements, McLibel, Stop the War Coalition). One of the most high-profile English examples of the past

73. T. Eagleton, 'Occupy London are true followers of Jesus, even if they despise religion', *Guardian* (November 3, 2011).

74. Pugh, 'Doing God'.

twenty-five years was when Andrea Needham, Joanna Wilson, and Lotta Kronlid broke into a British Aerospace factory at Warton, Lancashire, in January 1996. They caused an estimated £1.7 million damage to a Hawk jet destined to be used by the Indonesian government against East Timor after a deal signed by the British government in 1993. Another colleague, Angie Zelter, was later arrested after she claimed she would continue the actions of the others.⁷⁵ The group were known as ‘Seeds of Hope – East Timor Ploughshares’ which invoked the prophetic language of Isaiah 2.3-4, Joel 3.10, and Micah 4.3 in support of their aims and which was further emphasised when a ‘Swords into Ploughshares’ banner was unfurled on the jet. The case was brought to Liverpool Crown Court where, due to legal planning of their actions, the Ploughshares Four were acquitted. During the protests and support surrounding the trial at Liverpool Crown Court, a Bible was placed outside on a mini-altar-like small box with Father Fitzgerald from St Michael’s Church, Liverpool, praying, and with the protests and support visually dominated by a procession of crosses.⁷⁶

With inspiration from the Catholic Worker Movement, the largely American-based Plowshares Movement which began in 1980 became a non-violent, direct action group typically associated with issues relating to the nuclear arms race and nuclear war. It grew out of direct action and protests against the Vietnam War in the late 1960s by the Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan and his brother and former Catholic priest, Philip Berrigan. This Catholic tradition is not only ecumenical but also includes figures, including British Ploughshares members, who do not identify as Christian. This is significant because an assumption has remained that the (Radical) Bible still has some cultural power for political engagement. For instance, one of the Ploughshares Four claimed, ‘I’m not a Christian myself and many other people who’ve done ploughshares aren’t Christians or any other spiritual or political [background] or any other sort of background so it’s more taking this beautiful vision [of swords into ploughshares] seriously and taking inspiration from it’.⁷⁷ We

75. For summaries see e.g. ‘Seeds of Hope – East Timor Ploughshares’, *Catholic Social Teaching*, <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/themes/peace/stories/seeds-hope-east-timor-ploughshares/>; H. O’Shaughnessy and M. Brace, ‘Campaigners face jail for raid on military jet’, *Independent* (July 21, 1996).

76. The documentary, from which I have transcribed, ‘SEEDS OF HOPE - Women Disarming for Life and Justice’, is available at <http://tinyurl.com/og2nou9>.

77. ‘Women Disarming for Life and Justice’. Cf. ‘Not all of the women were Christian but because they needed the support of other like-minded people, they joined the Ploughshares Movement, a predominantly Christian movement, whose

might further add that in some ways this could be seen as a leftist equivalent of the ‘respect for culture’ without ‘really believing’ argument we saw above in the reception of the King James or Cultural Bible.

5. Same-sex Marriage or Subversive Love? The Case of Peter Tatchell

Another helpful example of seeing how the Radical Bible can differ from the Liberal Bible and how it functions in relation to parliamentary politics is the issue of civil partnerships and parliamentary discussion of same-sex marriage in 2013. We saw in Chapter 8 how on such issues Labour MPs David Lammy and Toby Perkins, like Tony Blair before them, could draw on radical rhetoric about Jesus and bring it in line with the Liberal Bible tradition more ideologically suited to the contemporary Labour Party. Taken alone, their comments on what they perceived to be the inclusive message of Jesus could potentially belong to either the Radical Bible or the Liberal Bible but when analysed in the wider context of their politics, it is clear that both belong firmly in the tradition of the Liberal Bible. By way of contrast we might turn to the gay rights campaigner and atheist Peter Tatchell. Tatchell is perhaps an unlikely torchbearer for the perpetuation of the Bible but as he claimed: ‘To paraphrase my Christian upbringing, my own conscience won’t allow me to walk by on the other side of the street. I ditched my faith a long time ago, but I think we’ve all got a duty to be good Samaritans towards other human beings who are suffering.’⁷⁸ Throughout his career, Tatchell has been alongside the Radical Bible on the fringes of parliamentary politics, from the notorious homophobic campaign against him in the 1983 Bermondsey by-election to his attempt to become a Green Party MP for Oxford East. Tatchell’s position in relation to the centre of political power reveals some notably different emphases on Jesus and same-sex marriage from Lammy, Perkins, and Blair but again it involves looking at the bigger ideological picture.

One notable use of Jesus and the Bible by Tatchell ultimately relates to his ideological position in relation to love, sexuality, and same-sex marriage: his discussion of the (alleged) discovery by Morton Smith of a fragment of manuscript claimed to have been found at the Mar Saba

members do not hesitate to take direct action to create a more peaceful world once all other means have failed’ (‘Seeds of Hope – East Timor Ploughshares’).

78. ‘Coming Out as Atheist: Peter Tatchell, Grayson Perry’, *National Secular Society* (December 2, 2005), <http://www.secularism.org.uk/comingoutasatheist/petertatchellg.html>.

monastery near Jerusalem in 1958 which was meant to be part of the text of Mark's Gospel (Mark 10, between vv. 34-35). The Secret Gospel of Mark, as it has become known, contained some potentially saucy verses:

And the youth, looking upon him (Jesus), loved him and beseeched that he might remain with him. And going out of the tomb, they went into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days, Jesus instructed him and, at evening, the youth came to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the Kingdom of God.⁷⁹

For those unfamiliar with scholarship on Christian origins, there is a fierce debate over whether we are dealing with a genuine discovery of a genuinely ancient text or whether it was a hoax by Morton Smith, thereby making him second only to N.T. Wright as the greater prankster in modern biblical studies. Tatchell, however, had a different take on the controversy which has received less attention in critical biblical studies:

The veracity of this manuscript is hotly contested by other Biblical scholars. This comes as no surprise. The revelation of a gay Jesus would undermine some of the most fundamental tenets of orthodox Christianity, including its rampant homophobia.

If genuine, Tatchell wondered what this text might tell us about Jesus and homosexuality. His answer was that it remains difficult to know anything for certain because the 'precise nature of the relationship between Christ and the youth is not spelled out'. As Tatchell argued that the Bible has nothing to say on the matter then that would leave us with no real information. However, he added the following qualification:

This absence of firm information does not, of course, mean that we can take it for granted that Christ was heterosexual. Far from it! The lack of information about his erotic inclinations begs more questions than it answers.

The truth is that we simply don't know whether Jesus was straight, gay, bisexual or celibate. There is certainly no evidence for the Church's unspoken presumption that he was either heterosexual or devoid of carnal desires. Since nothing in the Bible points to Christ having erotic feelings for women, or relationships with the female sex, the possibility of him being gay cannot be discounted.

In the absence of any evidence – let alone proof – that Jesus was heterosexual, the theological basis of Church homophobia is all the more shaky and indefensible. How can established religion dare denounce homosexuality when the founder of its faith was himself a man of mysterious, unknown sexuality who could, for all we know, have been homosexual?

79. P. Tatchell, 'Was Jesus Gay?', *Peter Tatchell* (March 18, 1996), <http://www.petertatchell.net/religion/jesus.htm>.

The Bible tells us that Jesus was born a man and therefore presumably had male sexual feelings. It would have been more or less impossible, biologically, for him not to have an element of erotic arousal – even if only having the normal male response of waking with an erection.⁸⁰

While there are undoubtedly provocative elements in Tatchell's suggestion – and more so if they were to be uttered in Parliament – they could still be part of a more provocative Liberal Bible tradition; it is easy enough to find contemporary writers of a liberal persuasion talking about erections and erotic arousal in relation to canonical texts such as the Bible. This is why it is important to contextualise Tatchell ideologically, just as it was Lammy, Perkins, and Blair. We might, for instance, turn to other uses of the Bible by Tatchell. For example, Tatchell received a standing ovation at the Greenbelt Christian festival for attacking church leaders who condone homophobia but praised 'brave, heroic Christians who refuse to go along with the persecution of people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual'. But Tatchell's presence at Greenbelt was condemned by Anglican Mainstream who had even claimed that Greenbelt had put children at risk by including Tatchell on the programme. Tatchell's response was to insist that 'I'm a great believer in free speech; that includes people criticising me' and added that he had been misquoted. He then accused his detractors of bearing false witness: 'I would urge Anglican Mainstream to re-read their ten commandments'.⁸¹ As we saw in Chapter 1, the Ten Commandments recur in the Liberal Bible tradition, regularly deemed integral to western law and democracy, despite their contents. This, of course, means that Tatchell could still be seen within the Liberal Bible tradition but there were hints of a more radical ideological position, particularly in his emphasis on challenging the establishment status quo. In his otherwise popular Greenbelt speech, he more uncomfortably accused Rowan Williams (then Archbishop of Canterbury) of 'colluding' in the persecution of LGBT people: 'The Anglican Church and Archbishop Rowan Williams have a lot to answer for, because they have put church unity before human rights'.⁸²

But it is when we turn to Tatchell on same-sex marriage that we see his position on Jesus as being part of the Radical Bible tradition. It is significant that there is no mention of marriage in Tatchell's speculations about Jesus in relation to Secret Mark but there was plenty of speculation about sex and relationships. And in his speculations there was *nothing*

80. Tatchell, 'Was Jesus Gay?'

81. Staff writers, 'Tatchell given standing ovation at Christian festival', *Ekklesia* (August 30, 2010), <http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/12977>.

82. Staff writers, 'Tatchell given standing ovation'.

about whether Jesus may or may not have been married, unlike so much contemporary popular speculation about Jesus. This sentiment of a more anarchic free-love clearly has much more in common with Christopher Hill's radicals of *World Turned Upside Down* than it does with the endorsement of and respect for the institute of marriage we find with Lammy or Perkins. This is consistent with Tatchell's own views on same-sex marriage which is not as positive as might initially be thought for someone known to have campaigned in favour of them. This is because his reasons for campaigning for same-sex marriage, as well as opposite-sex civil partnerships, are about non-discrimination and full equality before the law.⁸³ Tatchell has even called same-sex marriage a Conservative value and something Tories would deem alongside family as vital for social stability.⁸⁴ Tatchell has further claimed that he is not premising his arguments on a 'support for marriage per se' and is 'no great fan of wedlock'. Indeed, he has proposed what he calls a 'radical alternative' to marriage: a 'civil commitment pact' where 'a person can nominate as next-of-kin and beneficiary any "significant other" in their life.'⁸⁵ But Tatchell wants to be able to refuse as well as to uphold the 'right of same-sex couples to marry and be just as happy – or miserable – as married heterosexuals.' Perhaps here we have the same sentiment as that found in a reworded form of the old Bill Hicks joke on whether homosexuals should be allowed in the American military: anyone stupid enough to want to get married should be allowed to do so.

However, in an article discussing Tatchell's ideological position, Jin Haritaworn with Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem controversially presented him as a kind of white, liberal imperialist and an Islamophobe in the context of liberal Orientalism in the 'war on terror'.⁸⁶ While Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem acknowledged Tatchell's place on the British Left, if their assessment of Tatchell is correct then this could bring Tatchell closer to the Blair agenda we saw in Chapter 8. Of course,

83. See e.g. P. Tatchell, 'Ban on same-sex marriage must be lifted', *Independent* (June 15, 2010); P. Tatchell, 'A marriage of equals', *Guardian* (September 18, 2011); P. Tatchell, 'The same-sex marriage bill does not live up to its aspiration of equality', *Guardian* (May 20, 2013).

84. P. Tatchell, 'Gay marriage is a Conservative value', *Peter Tatchell* (October 13, 2011), http://www.petertatchell.net/lgbt_rights/partnerships/how-the-tories-were-won-to-marriage-equality.htm.

85. Tatchell, 'The same-sex marriage bill'.

86. J. Haritaworn with T. Tauqir and E. Erdem, 'Gay Imperialism: Gender and Sexuality Discourse in the "War on Terror"', in A. Kuntsman and E. Miyake (eds.), *Out of Place: Silencing Voices on Queerness/Racality* (York: Raw Nerve Books, 2008), pp. 71-95.

matters might be more complex still. Tatchell may be perceived to be part of, or even taken up by, an Orientalising construction of the liberal West; as he has pointed out himself, Tatchell has been accused of being anti-Palestinian, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, an agent of Mossad, a far-right racist, and an all-round gay imperialist.⁸⁷ While wider cultural invocation of gender and sexuality in support for the 'war on terror' is clear enough,⁸⁸ this is not obvious in the case of Tatchell. Indeed, Tatchell gained an apology from the publishers for his representation as a gay imperialist, though this provoked further debate over issues of censorship.⁸⁹ Moreover, a good case can be made for Tatchell's own words and actions being ideologically understood as something like a democratic radicalism and he is clearly different from liberal figures surrounding the Euston Manifesto and related pro-Iraq War liberals such as David Aaranovitch, Julie Burchill, Christopher Hitchens, and Nick Cohen, or indeed a long tradition of liberal interventionism.⁹⁰ If Lammy ticks off a checklist of New Labour concerns, then Tatchell ticks off a checklist of contemporary radical leftist concerns (as the apology to Tatchell made clear): he is a defender of Palestinian rights, a critic of anti-Semitism, an anti-war campaigner (including those on Iraq and Afghanistan), an outspoken anti-fascist, hostile to Islamophobia, advocate and practitioner of direct action (which has brought him in conflict with the parliamentary Labour Party), and has taken a few beatings in his time for holding such views.⁹¹ What unites Tatchell's different interests is his insistence on tying these agendas in with his agenda of combating homophobia. Indeed, he argued as part of his case for being critical of homophobia in African countries that it is not imposing colonial attitudes and that he is not advocating benign imperialism; on the contrary, he claimed, homophobic laws are 'not genuinely African laws. They're laws that were

87. P. Tatchell, 'Academics smear Peter Tatchell', Peter Tatchell (n.d.) <http://www.petertatchell.net/politics/academics-smear-peter-tatchell.htm>; staff writers, 'Peter Tatchell accuses academics of smearing him', *Pink News* (November 3, 2009), <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2009/11/03/peter-tatchell-accuses-academics-of-smearing-him/>.

88. See also J. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

89. E.g. U. Erel and C. Klesse, 'Out of Place: Silencing Voices on Queerness/Racality', *MR Zine* (October 24, 2009), <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/ek241009.html>; Tatchell, 'Academics smear Peter Tatchell'. The apology to Tatchell is available at http://www.rawnervebooks.co.uk/Peter_Tatchell.pdf.

90. E.g. Seymour, *Liberal Defence of Murder*; Dillon and Reid, *Liberal Way of War*.

91. See the range of articles at <http://www.petertatchell.net/politics/>.

inspired by a conquering imperial power.’⁹² Of course, we might legitimately dispute the argument about what constitutes ‘genuine African’ and ‘imperial’ in this context, but the evidence is clear on Tatchell’s ideological position: Tatchell’s gay activism and, implicitly, his understanding of Jesus and sexuality, are part of radical leftist thinking and serve as a transmitter of the Radical Bible tradition. Indeed, it might be said that Tatchell and his Bible have something in common with the famous comments of Raoul Vaneigem from 1967: ‘Anyone who talks about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life – without understanding what is subversive about love and positive in the refusal of constraints – has a corpse in their mouth’.⁹³

92. Staff writers, ‘Tatchell given standing ovation’.

93. R. Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (London: Rebel Press, 1983 [orig. 1967]), p. 11.