

The background is a dark blue gradient with a starry texture. On the left side, there are several overlapping circular diagrams. One large circle has a scale around its perimeter with numbers from 140 to 260 in increments of 10. Other circles contain curved lines and arrows, suggesting a process or cycle. The text is centered on the right side of the image.

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN BIBLE AND SCRIPTURE

MOTIVATIONS FOR IRRIGATING A LIMINAL FIELD

EMMANUEL NATHAN





QUAERENS

- Questing (Faith \leftrightarrow Understanding)
- Journeying
- Going away (to come back?) *exitus et reditus*

TWO OPPOSITE APPROACHES TO THE BIBLE

- **Philip Davies: “Confessional vs. Non-Confessional”**

“I shall be arguing that while both 'confessional' and 'nonconfessional' approaches to the academic study of the biblical literature may be deemed, in their own way, 'critical', they are nevertheless fundamentally quite different types of behaviour, and they ought not to be confused either in theory or practice. Indeed, the two approaches imply different definitions of the subject matter, and create two different kinds of discourses on biblical matters, and these discourses are so fundamentally divergent as to require and to imply separate disciplines.”

Whose Bible Is It Anyway?, 1995, p. 13

TWO OPPOSITE APPROACHES TO THE BIBLE

- **Joseph Fitzmyer: “The Church’s Bible”**

“ Although Davies says he recognizes a confessional approach, he is nevertheless more concerned to advance ‘nonconfessional scholarship,’ and that is the purpose of his book. The answer to Davies' question for the normal Christian would be, "The Church's Bible," because the Bible belongs to the Christian Church, Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. The obvious reason for saying this is that there was no "Bible" before a faith-community decided what writings passed on an authoritative message to its constituent members and to successive generations of them.

[...]

“Such an answer, however, to the question posed by Davies is a confessional answer. It is not the answer that he, as a humanist or an agnostic, would like to hear; but if it were not for such subsequent acts of recognition and acknowledgment by Jewish and Christian faith communities, there would be no Bible for "nonconfessional scholarship" to study. Even though the Bible may rightly belong to world literature and may be esteemed by humanists and agnostics as well as by committed Jews and Christians, it is not so esteemed or classified merely because of its humanist or literary merits. It has been given that status, because it has been recognized as the written Word of God, who is not just a "character" in the narrative tales of the ‘biblical storytellers.’”

The Interpretation of Scripture: In Defense of the Historical Critical Method, 2008, pp. 75-76

RESIDUAL OPPOSITIONS IN APPROACHING THE BIBLE/SACRED TEXTS

- Historical-critical vs. theological
- Academic vs. spiritual
- Scientific vs. fideist

RESIDUAL OPPOSITIONS AND THEIR PROBLEMS

- Historical-critical/academic/scientific: problem of *disenchantment*

Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.

John Keats, *Lamia*

- Theological/spiritual/fideist: problem of *fundamentalism*

AND YET...

“Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again.”

Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 1969, p. 349.



TRANSLATION

“Translation brings forth a creative encounter between *two worlds* and makes meaning move. It develops new semantic resonances, makes unexpected allusions, and points to surprising new possibilities. It expands the horizon of meaning of the translated text. In this sense, a fecund exchange occurs. Certainly, in the context of interreligious translation, this is important. Believers who are prepared to see the alienating process of translation through, and are thus prepared to dress their own religious language in the ‘clothes’ of a strange religious language, can discover new unexpected layers of meaning. It also means giving oxygen to one’s own religious tradition. Traditions, Ricoeur argues, can only stay alive if they constantly create themselves anew. As soon as traditions are no longer recreated and renewed, they die. From this perspective, it would seem that only those traditions capable of welcoming difference in some practice of linguistic hospitality will be able to survive and and maintain their identity.”

Marianne Moyaert, “Ricoeur, Interreligious Literacy, and Scriptural Reasoning,” 2017, pp. 12-13.

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN

- Liminality
- Hybridity
- Dual belonging

(see accompanying text)

CONTEMPORARY JEWISH PERSPECTIVES

God says to Moses “make two tablets like the first and I will write upon them” (Ex. 34:1). Who wrote on the second set of tablets: God or Moses? “[A]nd he wrote upon the Tablets” (Ex. 34:4). Whether the 'he' is Moses or God is disputed among Jewish commentators. From the text it could have been God or Moses. Given the mystical union, Moses was so close to God that **Moses himself wrote the second set of tablets** which, included the aspect of mercy. Under Jewish lore this is accomplished by including the oral law whose purpose was to be the intermediary between the people and God, when Moses was gone. Thus the Sages of the Talmud say that **the Law is not in heaven, but on earth; that they the Sages have the right to interpret the Torah. This is inherent in the tablets Moses wrote, but not in God's tablets.** This is what Moses realized when he saw the Golden Calf. Thus **Moses' second tablets allow for the creativity in the Torah and for 'arguments for the sake of heaven' to take place.** The first Tablets are part of the God-centered Bible, while the second are part of the Human-centered Bible. Both Tablets lie in the holy Ark.

- Rabbi Moshe Reiss

CONTEMPORARY JEWISH PERSPECTIVES

So Jews studied it [the Torah] and wrote commentaries to it. In the *shtetl*, the small township of Eastern Europe, when Jews met, one would say to the other: '**Zog mir a *shtickl Torah*** – Tell me a little Torah.' Its words were their intimations of infinity, its letters the solid shapes of mysteries to be decoded. They would stay up long into the night arguing over its meaning, each hoping to hear a ***chiddush***, a 'new' interpretation, 'new' in inverted commas because all true interpretations had already been revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai. [...] Those who study Torah become part of an **unbroken conversation** that has continued throughout the centuries in which all Israel's prophets and sages participated. **To become a sentence in that conversation, a letter in the scroll**, is what we and our ancestors understood as everlasting life.

- Jonathan Sacks, *Faith in the Future* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995) 149.



CHAVRUTA



A QUESTION (OR TWO)

Why is the practice of rabbinic midrash so different from historical-critical biblical studies?

Why is it so hard to incorporate constructive theology into biblical studies?

A possible answer:

Because the historical-critical method looks backwards, not forwards.

Scientific biblical studies are about reconstructing the past, not about building a future.

AND MIDRASH?

- Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Chanina:
“Torah scholars increase peace in the world,” as it is said, “And all your children will be taught by the Lord, and great will be the peace of your children” (Isa 54:13).
Do not read “your children” (*banayich*), but “your builders” (*bonayich*).”
- BT, *Berakhot* 64a.
- Resh Lakish said in the name of R. Judah the Prince:
“The world endures only for the sake of the breath of school children.”
Resh Lakish also said in the name of R. Judah the Prince:
“School children may not be made to neglect [their studies] even for the building of the Temple.”
- BT, *Shabbat* 119b

CHARTING NEW FRONTIERS DOWN UNDER

(Comparing)

THSR302 Comparing Texts and Traditions in the Abrahamic Faiths:

This unit explores interreligious understanding and learning as essential for navigating today's pluralistic society. It introduces students to the comparative study of sacred texts and their theologies, concentrating on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students will explore various ways of reading these sacred texts, both from within the religious tradition, and respectfully, from the perspective of another faith tradition. This unit will allow students to engage with the methodologies of comparative theology, interreligious learning, and 'scriptural reasoning', and apply them to interreligious encounters, especially in the Australian context.

CHARTING NEW FRONTIERS DOWN UNDER

(Transforming: capacity building)

CT Study Tour to VU Amsterdam (partnership with CEM and ACU)

The ten days academic program "Learning from Each Other: Theologies of Religious Pluralism, Comparative Theology and Scriptural Reasoning" is an intensive program made available through a partnership with the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and The Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU).

This particular program is a residential program of ten days duration, developed for Australian students that takes place at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

CONFRONTING MECHANISMS OF CHRISTIAN EXCLUSION AND OTHERING IN HISTORICAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

"People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors"

(Edmund Burke)

Catholic schools, certainly in Melbourne, are commendably forward-looking in developing new horizons for school curricula and encouraging a welcoming of the other. Yet these initiatives currently lack a historical awareness of the systems of exclusion and othering that RE has been party to in the past. As such, the potential danger of such mechanisms unintentionally resurfacing (even in benign forms) is always present.

What is then needed is a historical project that both *confronts* the troubling past of Christian religious education and *formulates a critical theological response* that is ethically responsible and future-oriented.

CONFRONTING MECHANISMS OF CHRISTIAN EXCLUSION AND OTHERING IN HISTORICAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The project will revolve around two discrete moments:

(1) *Locating and identifying* clear examples of Christian exclusion and othering within historical children's literature housed by the two collections (Nolan and Culican). The emphasis here will not be on creating an exhaustive inventory, but rather a variety of forms of this exclusion and othering (from the overt to the subtle) within literature specifically aimed at building, or instructing, moral (Christian) character. Given the vast time period under consideration (potentially 1830 to 2000), this stage will also attempt to discern any cultural shifts impacting such forms (genre, style, language, themes).

(2) *Formulating a critical theological response* to such identified literature that will be done first in collaboration with colleagues within the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy (biblical scholars, theologians, philosophers, religious educators and historians, and interested institute researchers). The fruits of such internal collaboration will then be shared with the wider university community and general public.

CONFRONTING MECHANISMS OF CHRISTIAN EXCLUSION AND OTHERING IN HISTORICAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The ACU Historical Children's Book Collections Fellowship offers a unique opportunity to study two collections of historical children's literature that was available to Australian children (and their educators) across two centuries (19th and 20th). This project will set out to clearly identify historical children's literature where othering and Christian exceptionalism has been employed, e.g., "waif" books and related literature that were printed by missionary societies and devoted to children's religious instruction. It is proposed that focus will be given to books classified as religious (of which 200 titles are classed as such under the Nolan Collection). It is also helpful that the problem of othering has already been [noted](#) and [studied](#) by Prof Margot Hillel in her extensive scholarship on children's literature and the historical constructions of childhood. For instance, consider the following incisive observation from Prof Hillel: "Goodness and ignorance are powerful images in this type of literature. Goodness and Christianity are depicted as mutually constitutive. Ignorance is linked with non-Christian religions" ([Hillel 2011: 187](#)). What has been lacking up to this point is a mature theological reckoning with the burden of this legacy.

CONFRONTING MECHANISMS OF CHRISTIAN EXCLUSION AND OTHERING IN HISTORICAL CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The contemporary urgency of such a project cannot be underestimated. We live in a world that is becoming increasingly more binary and polarized on the geopolitical level. Coupled with this, we have witnessed a visible rise in attacks upon religious sites of worship on a global scale (Pittsburgh and Poway, Christchurch and Sri Lanka, to name but a few of the most striking in recent months). In the wake of Christchurch, to take just one example, it has been particularly disturbing the way in which one Australian senator very publicly cited a Gospel verse out of context in justification of the Christchurch mosque attacks. Both the senator and the shooter's own manifesto succumbed to deep-seated mechanisms of exclusion and othering that they linked to a distorted form of Christian (white) supremacy. Unfortunately, Christianity has also been susceptible to mechanisms of exclusion and othering in less overt ways, particularly in the way it has historically instructed the formation of Christian moral character. The frank [assessment](#) that John and Grace Nolan have given of their historical children's literature collection equally holds true of Christianity's role within it: "They also illustrate why those attitudes caused so much damage, how prevalent such misguided attitudes were and why we, as a society, must guard against them still."

CHARTING NEW FRONTIERS DOWN UNDER

- Comparing
- Transforming
- Transgressing



MOON LANDSCAPE (EARTH SEEN FROM THE MOON)

- Petr Ginz
- b. 1 February 1928 (Prague)
- d. 28 September 1944 (Auschwitz)



