

Biblical Blood-Lines

From Foundational Corpus to Far Right Bible

Abstract

In this article I explore the way in which popular perceptions of the Bible have become drawn into the ideology of the contemporary far right. By examining the far right ideology that inspired Anders Behring Breivik's terrorist attacks in Norway 22 July 2011, I demonstrate how the Bible goes from operating as a foundational corpus for 'Western culture', to being employed as a militant mouthpiece calling for violent defence of this culture. Analysing the simultaneous recourse and resistance to Enlightenment interpretations of the Bible in this far right milieu allows for a better understanding of the connections between dominant discourses about the Bible and more marginal and extreme ideologies.

Key words

Far right, Breivik, terror, Cultural Bible, Liberal Bible

In the 'manifesto', *2083, A European Declaration of Independence*, Anders Behring Breivik claims to show the truth about the state of Europe today. The manifesto ostensibly offers up the explanation and legitimation of Breivik's killing of 77 people (and wounding many more) on 22 July 2011, after leaving a bomb to detonate in Oslo and going on a shooting spree on the island of Utøya where the Norwegian Youth Labour organisation (AUF) held their annual

summer camp. The manifesto is a patch-work composition, cobbled together from blogs, books, websites and Breivik's own writings. It argues that an "Islamic Imperialism" is taking hold in Europe, supported by a "totalitarian" political correctness embedded in the dominant forces in European politics, higher education, and media.¹ The manifesto is compiled in the name of a "Western European Resistance", "for all "European patriots", and "cultural conservatives".² What Breivik calls 'Western culture'³ is seen as radically threatened by multiculturalism.⁴ Multiculturalism is presented as profoundly anti-Christian,⁵ leading to "the ongoing Islamic colonisation of Europe through demographic warfare (facilitated by our own leaders)."⁶ The ultimate aim outlined in the manifesto is to repel the spread of Islam along

¹ Manifesto, pp. 20-21. I refer to the PDF version that can be found online at <https://publicintelligence.net/anders-behring-breiviks-complete-manifesto-2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence/> (last accessed 14/07/17). The page numbers correspond to those found on the PDF.

² Manifesto, p. 13.

³ It is usually left unclear what exactly the 'West' or 'Western culture' is. For Breivik and his ideologues it is often used interchangeably with Europe or Western Europe, as a way of including the U.S. Mostly it is used to denote simply what is considered not-Islam. As I am discussing American and European figures Breivik was inspired by, I refer throughout to the West, as it is used mostly interchangeably with Europe in this discourse and without any clear differentiation between them.

⁴ The Norwegian Labour Party were a target because they were perceived to represent values of multiculturalism, with former primminister Gro Harlem Brundtland (who had visited Utøya earlier that day) held up as a particular 'problem'.

⁵ Manifesto, p. 692.

⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

with “the cultural Marxist/multiculturalist hegemony in Western Europe”.⁷ The hope is that “Europe will once again be governed by patriots”⁸ in “a monocultural Christian Europe”.⁹

In the section “The Bible and Self-Defence” in Book Three of the manifesto,¹⁰ multiple biblical verses are cited and commented on – from Genesis to Revelation. Despite the miscellaneous range of biblical verses and the lack of sustained analysis or argumentation, the message of Breivik’s Bible is clear: the Judeo-Christian biblical God is not pacifist. The Bible encourages violence as defence of God and his exclusively European people. Proponents of an anti-multiculturalist and anti-Muslim position are effectively soldiers of Christ, following a biblical tradition of righteous warfare.¹¹ As the manifesto makes clear, Breivik is part of a loose ideological network that provides the *reasoning and*

⁷ Ibid., p. 1413.

⁸ Ibid., p. 1413.

⁹ Ibid., p. 1404.

¹⁰ Manifesto, Section 3.149, pp. 1328-1334. This section is situated within a larger part entitled “Christian Justification of the Struggle”, which is in Book 3 of the manifesto, “A Declaration of Pre-Emptive War”.

¹¹ In this article I am interested in teasing out the wider assumptions about the Bible in the ideological network Breivik was inspired and radicalised by. I have focused more closely on the biblical themes that appear in the manifesto itself in a previous article, see Hannah Strømme, ‘Christian Terror in Europe? The Bible in Anders Behring Breivik’s Manifesto’, *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 4 (2017), pp. 147-169.

rationale behind his terrorist action – a network less characterised by organisation and clear leadership than by inspiration and motivation.¹²

The three most prominent ideologues appearing in the manifesto are Robert Spencer, Bat Ye'or, and 'Fjordman' (Peder Nøstvold Jensen). While their views of religion differ, they unite in an understanding of the Bible as a foundational corpus for Western civilization, superior to Islam and the Qur'an. It is by now commonplace to affirm that whether or not secularism has been successful, the Judeo-Christian tradition – often exemplified in the scriptural corpus equivocally known as 'the Bible' – is a foundation of Western civilization (regardless of how 'Western' is defined). This foundation points to a particular cultural heritage (what Jonathan Sheehan has called the "Cultural Bible"¹³) and a particular liberal-democratic heritage (what Yvonne Sherwood has called the "Liberal Bible"¹⁴). In this article, I will argue that a 'Far Right Bible' has emerged from the idea of the 'Cultural-Liberal Bible'. In the ideological world of Breivik, a Bible is invoked that takes on the role of superior Judeo-Christian and counter-Islamic, foundational corpus – a Bible which is then used as motivation for violent terrorism to combat the so-called 'Islamization' of the Western

¹² In *Inside Terrorism* Bruce Hoffman comments on this new type of terrorist 'organisation', suggesting that although there may be a leadership of sorts in such networks, its role is less (if at all) that of direct command and control and rather has an inspirational and motivational function. B. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998), p. 39.

¹³ J. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ Y. Sherwood, 'Bush's Bible as a Liberal Bible (Strange Though That Might Seem)', *Postscripts* 2.1, 2006. See also her *Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 321-329.

world. This Bible goes from operating as a foundational icon for what is commonly conceived of as the West to being employed as a militant mouthpiece calling for violent defence of ‘Western culture’. Neither particularly new nor niche, this idea of a Judeo-Christian ‘West’ and its biblical heritage versus an Islamic ‘East’ and its Qur’anic heritage is pervasive, although not always accompanied by qualitative judgements.¹⁵ Breivik’s case makes clear how such stark distinctions and clear-cut notions of inheritance can become part of a glorified myth of religio-cultural identity with lethal consequences, in the name of a Judeo-Christian God.¹⁶

It is imperative for biblical scholars to grapple not only with the internal dynamics of biblical texts or their ancient contexts, but also with the contexts in which biblical texts become significant. It is a matter of critically examining, as Timothy Beal emphasises, “how biblical texts, themes and even the idea of ‘the Bible’ itself are handled in cultural terms”¹⁷ – how they inform and inflect particular practices, institutions and ideologies. These practices,

¹⁵ Y. Sherwood discusses this point in her chapter, ‘On the genesis of the alliance between the Bible and rights’, in *Biblical Blaspheming*, pp. 303-332.

¹⁶ I am not suggesting that Breivik did kill *because* of this ideology; he may well have found other ideological justifications for his acts of terror had he not become embroiled in the discourse of the far right. But in the end this *is* the justification he gave, this was the discourse he immersed himself in, seemingly for years before the 22 July 2011. A ‘reasoning’ was set out that he avowed also throughout his trial, tied to the ideology of the far right.

¹⁷ Timothy Beal makes this case in relation to the Bible in U.S. white supremacist culture. T.K. Beal, ‘The White Supremacist Bible and the Phineas Priesthood’, in J. Bekkenkamp and Y. Sherwood (eds) *Sanctified Aggression: Legacies of Biblical and Post-Biblical Vocabularies of Violence* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2003), p. 131.

institutions and ideologies do not arise in a vacuum; they are frequently tied to acts of collective remembering, or collective interpretive legacies, that “enable later communities to constitute and sustain themselves”.¹⁸ As I try to show in this article, taking account of the political lives of the Bible in its many guises is crucial for understanding the interplay of mainstream and marginal discourses about the status of scripture and constructions of religious and cultural identity.

The Cultural and Liberal Bible

One way of understanding Breivik’s Bible is as a hyper-realised version of the ‘Cultural Bible’ and, odd as it might sound, the ‘Liberal Bible’. In *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, Sheehan has persuasively shown that the Enlightenment period produced a dominant conception of the Bible as an icon of cultural heritage rather than, first and foremost, a theological authority. Philologists, pedagogues, poets, and historians “invented a distributed, ramified, diverse Bible, but one independent of theology, one that could survive embedded within the matrix of ‘culture’.”¹⁹ In the face of uncertainties about the theological authority of the Bible as a result of critical debate and scholarship in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the Bible became reinvested with *cultural* authority as a marker of ‘our’ Western heritage. Sheehan suggests that the near-universal admittance of the cultural relevance of the Bible – from academics to jurists, from the devout to doubters – is a sign of the prevalence of this Enlightenment legacy.²⁰ Because it is first and foremost as a

¹⁸ E. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 5.

¹⁹ Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, p. 220.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

cultural icon that the Bible survived in the modern age he labels this dominant attitude to the Bible the ‘Cultural Bible’.

Building on Sheehan, Sherwood has argued that, politically, attitudes to the Bible have been similarly inflected in the public sphere. Sherwood, in turn, calls the dominant understanding of the Bible in political discourse the ‘Liberal Bible’. Tracing the lineage of the ‘Liberal Bible’ back to English seventeenth-century debates, she demonstrates how complex and competing debates about biblical authority and interpretation gave way to a ‘liberal’ understanding of the Bible, promoted especially by John Locke. Countering the ‘Absolute-Monarchist Bible’, which was used to show that monarchical decisions were divinely decreed, Locke employs the Bible to show that God has given authority over to human government.²¹ Whether wittingly or unwittingly, the legacy of this latter understanding of the Bible has been part of the assumptions in most modern liberal-democracies and is tied, as James Crossley explains, to “an understanding of the Bible as supportive of freedom of conscience, rights, law, government, and consensus”.²² In contemporary political discourse, the ‘Bible’ that is referred to usually functions as a repository of universal principles such as democracy, justice and freedom, while avoiding any too specific citations of, or commentaries on, biblical texts.²³ Vaguely subsumed under a

²¹ Ibid.

²² J. Crossley, *Harnessing Chaos: The Bible in English Political Discourse since 1968*, (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2nd edn, 2016), p. 12.

²³ Sherwood, ‘Bush’s Bible’, p. 50. Jacques Berlinerblau has convincingly demonstrated that even the most conservative, right-wing “Bible thumping” of candidates in U.S. politics adhere to this general practice, albeit with sometimes different agendas and formulations. References to “biblical worldview” or “biblical values” are relatively common, but

‘Liberal’ banner – or perhaps a little less vaguely, under a liberal-democratic banner – this is a Bible that has little to do with formal or party-political definitions of liberalism, and more to do with a deliberately imprecise set of values tied to an equally imprecise notion of a ‘Western’ political tradition. Freedom and justice (à la George W. Bush), care for the underprivileged (à la Barack Obama), democracy and equality (à la David Cameron) can all be ascribed, by sleight of hand, to a ‘Bible’ that comfortably fits a modern agenda while simultaneously embodying an authoritative point of origin.²⁴

As Sherwood points out, the Liberal Bible is in many ways a positive modern achievement.²⁵ There are, however, at least two problematic issues. The origins of the Liberal Bible are often obscured: the assumption is that this understanding of the Bible reflects its natural transparent state – *the Bible* – rather than simply one dominant understanding of the Bible. The second is the perception that “the Bible is the foundation of Western democracies (and entirely consonant with their principles)”.²⁶ Similarly, the idea that the Bible is a foundation for Western culture – that is, the Cultural Bible – is frequently assumed or simply

pronounced without recourse to argumentation or exegesis. J. Berlinerblau, *Thumpin’it: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today’s Presidential Politics* (Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), p. 21. Usage of the Bible in the American political context is thus “light not heavy, theatrical not substantive, and rhetorical as opposed to policy oriented”, *ibid.*

²⁴ See Sherwood, ‘Bush’s Bible’, p. 49; Berlinerblau, *Thumpin’it*, p. 106; J. G. Crossley, ‘What the Bible Really Means: Biblical Literacy in English Political Discourse’, in Katie Edwards (ed), *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), p. 27.

²⁵ Sherwood, ‘Bush’s Bible’, p. 54.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

stated, without analysis or explanation as to how the relationship between these motley monikers functions. Sherwood suggests that the idea of the Bible as a foundation for Western culture, and the myth of a foundational-democratic Bible, has fuelled the belief that the Bible is inherently more democratic than the Qur'an as well as becoming a mode of articulating cultural superiority.²⁷ Concomitantly, the Judeo-Christian tradition becomes metonymic with universal principles of justice and freedom *in contrast to* the Islamic tradition.²⁸ What, Sherwood asks, is there to prevent anyone taking these foundational statements too literally, especially where resentment against secularity has taken hold?²⁹

While the Cultural Bible and the Liberal Bible are shorthand for interpretive strategies that should not be conflated, they nonetheless overlap regarding their association with the identity of 'the West'. In other words, the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible, as it could be called, is a way of styling an imagined Western identity emerging out of a cultural and political tradition that is seen to be inherited from the Bible. Together, invocations of a Cultural Bible and Liberal Bible are able to sketch the opaque contours of 'Western civilization' – supplying shades according to necessity.

A Far Right Bible

It is from the vantage point of the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible that Breivik and his ideological network might be understood. The two major features of the far-right that Breivik draws on in his manifesto are the Eurabia theory and Counter-jihadism. Briefly put, the Eurabia theory

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 54-55.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

consists of the view that political leaders in Europe, especially the European Union, are part of a conspiracy to turn Europe into an Islamic colony.³⁰ Counter-jihadism is characterised by the view that Islam and the West are at war, that Islam is not a religion but a totalitarian political ideology. The duty of counter-jihadists is to stop a supposed “Islamization”, contain Islam in countries that already have a Muslim majority, and to establish an anti-multicultural political network to replace the current political classes that enable the purported Islamic imperialism.³¹

Central proponents of these ideologically connected theories, such as American writer Robert Spencer, Egyptian-British writer Bat Ye’or, and Norwegian blogger ‘Fjordman’ are cited multiple times in Breivik’s manifesto. Breivik draws on and develops their attitudes to the Bible. By examining the attitudes to, and uses of, the Bible in Ye’or, Spencer and Fjordman’s writings, I identify a Bible that emerges out of the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible. This ‘Far Right Bible’ is characterised by its emphasis on the incompatibility with Islam, signifying the superiority of what is referred to as the Judeo-Christian West, and highlighting Islam as an acute threat to so-called biblical values of Western civilization. As I will go on to show, Breivik feeds on the Far-Right Bible, but goes even further, by turning to the biblical corpus as a militant mouthpiece for terror.

Spencer is a prominent figure in the Counter-Jihad scene. An American author and blogger, he founded the blog *Jihad Watch* and co-founded the *Stop the Islamization of America* organization. He is cited frequently and favourably in Breivik’s manifesto. In *Not Peace but a Sword* (2013) Robert Spencer calls for Christians – and in particular Catholics –

³⁰ See Øyvind Strømme’s *I Hatets Fotspor* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2014). and *Det Mørke Nettet: Om Høyreekstremisme, kontrajihadisme og terror i Europa* (Cappelen Damm, 2012).

³¹ Strømme, *I Hatets Fotspor*, pp. 102-103.

to “take up a sword”.³² Citing Jesus’ call for a sword (Matt., 10:34), and Paul’s ‘sword of the Spirit’ (Eph., 6:17), Spencer encourages a battle against the rise of Islam and the Islamization of the West. His argument hinges on the claim that Christianity and its Scriptures do not encourage violence, while Islam and the Qur’an have always done so, and continue to do so today. Spencer’s “sword” is, as he states, “not the sword of conquest and subjugation” but a spiritual sword, namely, Paul’s “word of God” (Eph., 6:17). Comparing the violence in the Bible with the violent passages in the Qur’an, Spencer puts forward the “simple fact” that

there is simply no group anywhere in the world today that is committing violent acts and justifying them by quoting the Bible and invoking Christianity. But there are many, many groups committing violent acts and justifying them by quoting the Qur’an and invoking Islam.³³

In his discussion about whether the Bible is as violent as the Qur’an, Spencer emphasises that violent biblical passages are descriptive rather than prescriptive; they “are not commands for all generations to follow, and if they have any applicability, it is only in a spiritualized, parabolic sense.”³⁴ While stating that biblical texts do not contain “a call to action for Christians to commit acts of violence”³⁵, Spencer’s insistence on a “defence of the West

³² Robert Spencer, *Not Peace but a Sword: the Great Chasm Between Christianity and Islam* (San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2013), p.186.

³³ Robert Spencer, *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn’t* (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2007), pp. 64, 109. Of course – setting aside other examples for the moment – Breivik had done precisely that, and done so as an avid follower of Spencer.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

against today's global jihad", described as a "wake-up call",³⁶ is saturated with a fearmongering rhetoric, such as stories about Muslims killing their Christian neighbours with their bare hands.³⁷ The epigraph to *Not Peace but a Sword* is a paean to "Christian martyrs" of Islamic jihad – imagery Breivik adopted in militarised form in his manifesto. Spencer emphasises the irreconcilability and impossibility of Islamic and Christian cooperation, the insurmountable differences between the two faiths, and relentlessly sets out the systematic victimization and victimhood of Christians by Muslims.

Egyptian-British Bat Ye'or (originally Gisèle Littman) describes herself as a historian of religious minorities under Muslim rule. Her writings have popularized the term 'dhimmitude' (a state of Jewish and Christian submission, subordination and humiliation to Muslims) as well as the term 'Eurabia' (a state of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism in the West in conspiracy with Arabs and radical Islam).³⁸ *Understanding Dhimmitude: Twenty-One Lectures and Talks on the Position of Non-Muslims in Islamic Societies* is a collection of her essays written between 1984 and 2004 in which Bat Ye'or confesses a dream for "a peaceful world where the lamb would sleep next to the lion".³⁹ It quickly becomes clear who is who in the world-view she presents. Jews and Christians, according to Ye'or, have historically suffered at the hands of Muslims in a struggle that – she states – is a forbidden history.⁴⁰ Like Spencer, she sees herself as a truth-teller. But Jews and Christians as

³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁷ Spencer, *Not Peace but a Sword*, p. 24.

³⁸ Bat Ye'or, *Understanding Dhimmitude: Twenty-One Lectures and Talks on the Position of Non-Muslims in Islamic Societies* (New York: RVP Press, 2013), p.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁰ See for instance, 'Christians and Jews: The Forbidden History', in *Understanding Dhimmitude*, pp. 46-55.

persecuted lambs is not only history for Ye'or. The 'truth' she speaks of is particularly pertinent because, she ceaselessly repeats, it is being reactivated in the present by Islamic jihad.⁴¹ Ye'or only intermittently evokes particular biblical texts, but she continuously makes use of the phrase 'People of the Book' to signify the joint condition of Jews and Christians as proponents of "Biblical values".⁴² She uses the term to cement the 'Judeo-Christian' as a strong category with a shared 'Book' set apart from Muslims with their separate scripture. While "biblical values" remains an obscure but omnipresent phrase, these values are taken to be uniquely compatible with and even constitutive of Western culture. Western culture, in turn, is starkly contrasted with Islam and Muslim countries.

Like Spencer, Ye'or argues for the non-violence of the Bible compared to the Qur'an. She admits there are violent elements, but qualifies them by suggesting that "the prophetic texts allow different interpretations from the old, legalistic one".⁴³ Ye'or cites Ezek., 33:11: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live".⁴⁴ Building on this citation, she explains the need for testimony and responsibility decreed by the Bible. The Bible "testifies to a supra-human and an immanent order of values or, more simply, to a divine presence within the universe and humanity."⁴⁵ Gen., 1:27

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 126, 219. Ye'or refers to 'People of the Book' throughout the book because it is the term used of Christians and Jews under Islamic law (also referred to as 'dhimmis'). In Islamic law, of course, the status as 'People of the Book' signifies the protection rather than the persecution of Christians and Jews.

⁴³ Ye'or, *Understanding Dhimmitude*, p. 123.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 185.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 185-6.

demonstrates the “partnership between God and man” which is “a dual responsibility freely accepted by man, for keeping or testifying to these supreme ethical norms based on the sanctity of all humans”.⁴⁶ Extrapolating on the Liberal Bible legacy on Gen., 1:27,⁴⁷ Ye’or shifts the focus from divine power given over to humans to a divine-human partnership in which humans are obliged to stand up for certain norms. The role of testifier – a role Ye’or clearly casts herself in – is in her view for the ‘People of Israel’ due to their history of victimhood.⁴⁸ For Ye’or, the Bible “illustrates the constant struggle between the testifier and the destroyer of life or the hater of man.”⁴⁹ Such a testimony involves “standing up against a tyrant, denouncing injustice, proclaiming the dignity of all humanity”, in the hope that the “heart of the tyrant will change”.⁵⁰ Using the words of the Psalms, she writes: “‘I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed’ (119:46).”⁵¹ The tyrannical injustice here is clearly intended to be read as Islam. The Bible, then, is what unites Christians and Jews, both in a scriptural sense and in the sense of their persecution as ‘People of the Book’. It is also a driver for testimonial “truth-telling”, in which Ye’or appears as a pseudo-prophetic figure “on an explosive, dangerous, and lonely path”, in a “fight for truth”, a message driven home repeatedly in *Understanding Dhimmitude*.⁵² Both Spencer and Ye’or, then, are rehearsing what Sherwood has called the alleged alliance between Bible,

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 186.

⁴⁷ See Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming*, particularly pp. 325-326

⁴⁸ Ye’or, *Understanding Dhimmitude*, p. 186.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ye’or, *Understanding Dhimmitude*, p. 18.

Christianity and rights, a well-entrenched idea in the self-understanding of the democratic West.⁵³

While tightly interwoven in the same ideological networks as Spencer and Ye'or, the Norwegian blogger known as Fjordman is a somewhat different case when it comes to religion. Whereas Spencer takes a Catholic stance, and Ye'or promotes a Jewish or rather a Judeo-Christian alliance, Fjordman does not own a religious affiliation in the same way. Nor does he refer extensively to the Bible in the way Spencer and Ye'or do. He does, however, buy into the idea of a superior Christian cultural tradition underpinning Western civilization in antithesis to the Islamic world. He explicitly endorses Spencer and his *Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn't*, and allies Western Christianity with scientific progress and reason against Islamic civilization.⁵⁴ In the essay 'Christianity, pros and cons', Fjordman argues that Christianity is in many ways part of the problem. The problem, he states, lies in the idea of a "shared community of monotheists worshiping the God of Abraham. As long as this myth is maintained, Christianity can actually in certain situations be a bridge for Islam to enter the West, rather than a bulwark against it".⁵⁵ Fjordman states that although "not a religious person myself, I am usually in favor of a revitalisation of Christianity in Europe".⁵⁶

⁵³ Sherwood, *Biblical Blaspheming*, p. 305.

⁵⁴ Cited by Breivik, 1.23 'Western vs. Islamic science and religion'. Because many of Fjordman's writings are in the form of blog-posts that have since 2011 been removed, I draw here on the passages in Breivik's manifesto where texts attributed to Fjordman are cited. Although Fjordman has attempted to distance himself from Breivik, it is useful to analyse the actual interpretations and potential implications of this ideology as taken up by Breivik.

⁵⁵ Manifesto, p. 684.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 686.

Echoing the clichés of the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible as endemic of Western civilization, he asserts that Western morality is profoundly influenced by “Judeo-Christian thinking”.⁵⁷

“Reason”, for instance, is seen as compatible with Christianity and inimical to the Qur’an and Islam.⁵⁸

With some trepidation Fjordman asks whether Western democracy, openness and Christian compassion are “incapable of withstanding Jihad?”⁵⁹ He expresses concern that the biblical heritage might in fact form a weakness, citing the commandment to turn the other cheek (Matt., 5:39; Luke 6:29) and to love your enemies (Matt., 5:44; Luke 6: 27). He deplores church leaders’ promoting a compassionate immigration policy.⁶⁰ But he also finds examples of Christian figures “defending” the West from Islam.⁶¹ In deference to the equivocal nature of Christianity, he writes, “the Church must decide whether, in the defence of civilisation, it wants to be a part of the problem or a part of the solution.”⁶² A third text, ‘Thou Shalt Hate Christianity and Judaism’, also allegedly by Fjordman, again declares the author to be a non-religious person who nonetheless affirms “the impact of Judeo-Christian thinking on Western culture”.⁶³ In this text Fjordman accuses non-religious secular establishments of being prime allies with Muslims against “Western civilization”.⁶⁴ Like

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 689.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 693.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 689.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 690.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 691.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Spencer, he is resentful of secularism,⁶⁵ deeming this secular “Multiculturalist” force to be profoundly anti-Christian.⁶⁶ For Fjordman, the “First Commandment of multiculturalism is: Thou shalt hate Christianity and Judaism”.⁶⁷ Accordingly, he affirms that religion provides a cohesive core to Western culture.⁶⁸

Overall, Spencer’s contrast between a ‘good’ Christian scripture and a ‘bad’ Islamic scripture solidifies a binary relationship between one scripture-culture and another. By repeatedly emphasising the alleged victimhood of Christians in the face of the allegedly extreme violence of Islam, calling for battles, defence and sacrifice, his paean to peace is at best extremely fatuous and at worst disingenuous and inciting. Ye’or bolsters Spencer’s claims by offering countless stories of Judeo-Christian victimhood and Islamic violence. While she does not utilise violent passages in the Bible for rhetorical purposes, her use of Scripture to call for further ‘truth-telling’ and ‘witness’ against tyrannical forces models the way the Bible comes to serve the Eurabia and Counter-Jihad cause. Fjordman in turn embraces a formal and pragmatic approach to Christianity and the Bible. Formally, they are significant as scaffolding for the ‘Judeo-Christian West’. Pragmatically, Christianity and the Bible are *potentially* useful for the cause, if read through the right lens – with the Eurabia theory and Contra-Jihadism in mind. Fjordman bolsters the idea of a non-religious claim to the ‘Judeo-Christian’ as a marker for cultural identity, glibly accepting the Cultural-Liberal Bible as a significant and superior heritage.

⁶⁵ Spencer, *Not Peace but a Sword*, e.g. pp. 185, 187.

⁶⁶ Manifesto, p. 692.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 693.

Spencer, Ye'or and Fjordman, then, are united in their concern about the state of Judeo-Christian culture. Spencer states it is not enough to be *against* jihadists or terrorists, “[w]e must be contending *for* something”.⁶⁹ While he speaks from a Catholic vantage point, Ye'or uses the term ‘People of the Book’ to argue for a Judeo-Christian coalition, and Fjordman is rooted in a Christian cultural position; all three are *for* a conception of the West tied to the idea of the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible in the form of a superior, stable and essentialized heritage.

Breivik’s Bible

Breivik reproduces the claims of Spencer, Ye'or and Fjordman in his manifesto both directly and indirectly. He too seemingly endorses the view that the Bible is a foundational corpus for the ‘Judeo-Christian West’ – vaguely designating a geographical area, but more importantly a superior religio-cultural locus. The biblical foundation is treated as that which has inspired a Western culture based on reason, peace, as well as moral and cultural superiority. As such, it is an iconic signifier for what Western civilization *is* and for what the Islamic world *is not*.

As if he were directly responding to Spencer’s calls for defence against Islamic tyranny and Ye'or’s so-called truth-telling about Jewish-Christian suffering, Breivik urges that Christians are called upon to take responsibility: “You can either choose to learn how to rise up in the power of your Lord and Saviour and learn how to become a true warrior in the Lord, or you can continue to keep your head in the sand and oppressor after oppressor keep beating you down.”(sic)⁷⁰ If Spencer, Ye'or and Fjordman provide a narrative of the West

⁶⁹ Spencer, *Religion of Peace*, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Manifesto, p. 1329.

under attack from its enemy Islam, then the Bible emerges in Breivik's manifesto as a militant mouthpiece capable of "telling you that God can anoint you with His power whenever that power is going to be needed to take on any kind of enemy or challenge".⁷¹ Every Christian fighter will need "courage and boldness to step out with His power to use it to directly engage with your enemy."⁷²

In the manifesto, Breivik cites multiple biblical verses to affirm a Christian justification of the struggle against Islam. He announces: "We should recall Nehemiah, who rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem."⁷³ He asserts that many passages "talk about war and violence that God approves of, such as David slaying Goliath (1 Samuel 17). Not to mention the fact that God commanded the Israelites to completely destroy everyone and everything in the Promised Land!"⁷⁴ By identifying his struggle with the struggle of the 'underdog' David against Goliath, he uses biblical texts to legitimate violence in the face of a 'bigger' evil – adding to the biblical repertoire of Ye'or's worthy 'lamb' against the tyrannous 'lion'.

For Breivik, then, the Bible is far more than a foundational corpus for Western civilization, far more than a symbolic signifier of the so-called abyssal difference between Western civilization and the Islamic world. It has become additionally a motivational corpus, one that 'speaks' to the present in its passages about wars, walls and enemies. What Breivik works with, then, could be called a split Bible. On the one hand, it is a Bible built on the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible, standing for all that is good about the West in opposition to a supposedly tyrannical Islamic culture. But on the other hand, it is a Bible that can harness its

⁷¹ Manifesto, p. 1331.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Manifesto, p. 1329, quoting Neh. 4:17-18.

⁷⁴ Manifesto, p. 1329.

powers to promote violent action against old and new enemies. The turn to violence is not merely a strange anomaly forged in the crazed mind of a terrorist. Ironically, it arises out of the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible. What Sherwood writes about ‘Bush’s Bible’ can be applied to Breivik: “Precisely because it is the repository of all our modern goods, with capital letters (not least, a vague and plastic Liberalism), the Liberal Bible can lend its support to the argument that no sacrifice is too great for democracy – least of all the temporary sacrifice of democracy itself.”⁷⁵ Naturally, Breivik cannot easily be compared with Bush. Breivik is no believer in democracy, but the idea that no sacrifice is too great to protect what he conceives of as ‘Western civilization’ and ‘Western culture’ is palpably present. As an icon of this culture and civilization, the Bible becomes an unquestionably ‘good’ source, justified as a foundation and authority to stand for the principles and virtues of ‘the West’. In this sense, the battle-verses cited in the manifesto are merely further means to save a culture under threat.

Breivik calls for a pre-modern Bible, untouched by the ‘evils’ of the modern period, although his call is paradoxically based on the modern legacies of the Enlightenment Bible.⁷⁶ Breivik’s stance on a pre-modern Bible fits neatly within characterisations of religious fundamentalism in the rejection of modernity and secularity as negative forces that have robbed religion of its power and authority.⁷⁷ The Church has been “castrated”, made impotent

⁷⁵ Sherwood, ‘Bush’s Bible’, p. 57.

⁷⁶ Manifesto, p. 1140.

⁷⁷ See G.A. Almond, R. S. Appleby, and E. Sivan (eds), *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

and irrelevant; the Bible has been “perverted”.⁷⁸ Yet the Bible he utilises is a product of that very modernity he decries. As with Fjordman, a “cultural Christendom” is espoused, founded not in belief but in belonging⁷⁹:

If you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God then you are a religious Christian. Myself and many more like me do not necessarily have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God. We do however believe in Christianity as a cultural, social, identity and moral platform. This makes us Christian.⁸⁰

Breivik ostensibly butts against modern attitudes to the Bible, while clambering to its post-Enlightenment incarnation. He calls for a return to a pre-modern Bible, replete with interpretive authorities, but stands nonetheless firmly within the shadow of the Enlightenment – deeming the Bible Western cultural heritage and a pillar of Western civilization. From there, however, he turns to what Frank Kermode has called “embarrassing literalism”.⁸¹ Rather than a contradictory turn away from the Enlightenment we might see this as a hyper-realization of the valorisation of the Bible as icon of ‘our’ Western culture.

Overall, Breivik’s militarisation of Spencer’s defence of Christianity in a battle against Islam feeds off a rhetoric that is ostensibly metaphorical but nonetheless urging for

⁷⁸ Manifesto, p. 1308.

⁷⁹ Of course it is debatable what sort of belonging, if any, Breivik had. The desire for belonging, and belief in its importance, could be understood in Benedict Anderson’s terms as ‘imagined community’. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso: 2006 [1983]).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ F. Kermode, ‘Millennium and Apocalypse’, in F. Carey (ed), *The Apocalypse and The Shape of Things to Come* (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 19.

battle in the name of a good biblical civilization. It is perhaps not as straightforward as Spencer seems to think to starkly uphold the violent passages in the Qur'an as prescriptive and the biblical ones as merely descriptive. In Breivik's manifesto these analytical distinctions are blurred and the Bible becomes a prestigious *and* prescriptive corpus. Held up as a marker of prestige, signifying a superior Western culture in need of defence, it justifies the fight against the "enemy" of Western "biblical values".⁸² Secure in the knowledge of its superiority, this Bible also becomes a prescriptive resource for terror against the enemy. It would seem that where the Bible is essentialized and idealised as a corpus that is uncritically conflated with a Judeo-Christian Western culture, rhetoric about the defence of this culture against its perceived other ceases to be distinguishable as real *or* rhetorical. Violence – sanctioned by the Bible – is necessary against an Islamic other whose religion and scriptures are seen as dangerous, to save a culture based on biblical values. Or, to put it the other way around, the 'good' Judeo-Christian culture – based on peace-loving, democratic biblical values – is threatened by the 'bad' Islamic culture – based on the Qur'an, Hadith and Sharia – and therefore any means available are justified in combatting this threat, including violence. One of these means is the Bible itself.

In his step further, Breivik is, essentially, only guilty of opening the pages of this 'icon' and picking out verses that appear to suit his cause. If the Bible is uncritically taken as the pillar of Western culture and civilization, it is perhaps not so strange that it might be opened up, read, and pillaged, to further serve the so-called cause of the West. In other words, as well as treating it as a foundational corpus, Breivik treats the Bible like he does his ideological heroes, Spencer, Ye'or and Fjordman – as motivational, inspirational, and legitimating his own acts of terror. Having accepted the tenets of Spencer's, Ye'or's and

⁸² Manifesto, p. 1146.

Fjordman's writings about the superior biblically founded Western civilization against a tyrannous and imperialistic Islam, the Bible is thus read – or rather rummaged through – uncritically, because it functions metonymically for 'Western civilization' as a stable source of identity *against* a determined enemy. Selective reading is endorsed. Through far-right inflections of the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible – emphasised as the unequivocal and repressed truth – the Bible is read with an interpretive lens that legitimates xenophobic ideas of cultural-religious belonging and identity. From a foundational corpus, then, the Bible is turned into an authoritative mouthpiece that is cited as inspiration, motivation and legitimation for terrorist action.

Contortions and Complexities

In this article I have outlined the way in which popular perceptions of the Bible – as Western cultural heritage and liberal-democratic corpus – have become drawn into the ideology of the contemporary far right. In the Eurabia and Counter-Jihad milieu, the Bible is part of the 'we' constructed against an Islamic other – a 'we' that is understood as under threat, in need of defence. What is at stake according to this far-right rhetoric is 'the' Judeo-Christian civilization and culture. Breivik drew on this ideology to explain the 'reasoning' behind his acts of terror in Norway on the 22 of July 2011. As I have discussed, his manifesto uses the writings of Spencer, Ye'or and Fjordman to posit a Bible that motivates for warfare against God's enemies, a God of Christian-cultural-conservative patriots, a God who is a man of war and can thereby legitimate the human men of war who self-style as crusaders and martyrs against Islam.

Although the dominant Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible of the Western world seems antithetical to Breivik's Bibles (and in most ways it is), I have argued that two aspects fuel

Breivik's Far Right Bible. The first is the way in which the Liberal Bible masks its histories and its contingencies. Second, the Cultural Bible is easily tied to 'our' heritage in a way that lends itself to binary distinctions between one scripture-culture and another scripture-culture, where dichotomies between 'good' and 'evil', superiority and inferiority, are close at hand, and where defence can become terror. I am not suggesting that the Cultural-cum-Liberal Bible is a *cause* of Breivik's Far-Right Bible or of his acts of violence. However, in conclusion, I am suggesting that a more critical attention to particular, popular and politicized Scriptures and their history, public image and potential, is necessary to avoid playing into a far-right rhetoric that feeds off discourses of cultural superiority and religious and civilizational antitheses, rooted in popular and unsustainable conceptions of the biblical archive. If there has been a 'deprivatisation' of religion going on, as José Casanova posited in the 90s, then it is expedient to examine how "struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public spheres, between system and life-world, between legality and morality, between individual and society, between family, civil society, and state, between nations, states, civilizations" are couched in biblical rhetoric and informed by ideas about the Bible.⁸³ In what ways are "citations from religious traditions fundamental to the structure of language and experience",⁸⁴ at times obscured while at other times made intensely visible?

It is not of course the first time that violent passages in the Bible have been used as political currency. Is this simply a case of a "terrorist hermeneutics", in which the devil cites

⁸³ J. Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 6.

⁸⁴ H. de Vries, *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 2.

Scripture for his purpose, as John Collins puts it?⁸⁵ Perhaps terrorism will occur with or without the legitimization of sacred scriptures. But this fails to take account of how “specific books are invested with new auras of legitimacy”⁸⁶ and how ideological trends might be constructed from a specifically “biblical culture”.⁸⁷ A particular and pervasive conception of a Judeo-Christian West in opposition to Islam might *spawn* a recourse to scriptural looting that does not simply function as legitimization of violence after the fact, or as empty interchangeable rhetoric. Rather, such scriptural looting might in fact reinforce and radicalise the sense of ‘us’ versus ‘them’. There is, arguably, no benign or innocent locus in the myth of a good biblical-West and a bad Qur’anic-Islam that can be wholly cut off from a *radicalised* belief in the same myth.

It does not help, however, to simply reaffirm that the Bible contains violent passages, as if a concession to the violence in ‘our’ scriptures could render scriptural currency altogether void – to be disregarded along with medieval torture instruments as incongruous for modern taste. Scriptural heritage is not simply something we can choose to disregard because it appears unpalatable. For one, a statement like ‘the Bible is violent’ is almost as misleading as its opposite. Secondly, the “arsenal of symbolic forms, the ‘imaginary’ of myths and images, of the ‘great stories,’ sagas and legends, scenes and constellations”⁸⁸

⁸⁵ J. J. Collins, ‘The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003), 3-21 (3). Collins admits that ‘the devil’ does not have to work very hard to find biblical precedents for the legitimization of violence.

⁸⁶ Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, p. xi.

⁸⁷ Beal, ‘The White Supremacist Bible and the Phineas Priesthood’, 130.

⁸⁸ J. Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory* (trans. R. Livingstone; California: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 7-8.

found in Scripture is part of a collective and cultural memory that is not always – or even often – conscious. As Hugh Pyper has shown, the Bible has proven itself to be peculiarly given to survival.⁸⁹ It is perhaps not surprising, then, if the Bible has been part of anti-slavery as well as pro-slavery campaigns, equality agendas as well as racist, misogynistic and homophobic agendas, interreligious cooperation and interreligious combat. Is Breivik's Far-Right Bible simply something to be expected, then, as a dark underside to the more aesthetically pleasing, ethically palatable and mainstream Bibles?

Whether that is or is not the case, I suggest – perhaps in predictable scholarly fashion – that what is needed is greater attention to the contortions of this chameleon-like corpus. It is crucial that the Bible is seen as varied in terms of its content, and changeable in terms of its interpretation and signification. Attention must be given to its powers, potencies and possibilities as well as its past incarnations and particular local and global histories. A more nuanced public image of the Bible is crucial to display it as a complex archive full of ethical precepts and edifying narratives as well as horrific violence.

Above all, a binary understanding of the Bible must be countered. If the Bible is held up as an alien in the modern, secular world, it becomes an easily appropriated device by those resentful of modernity and secularity: a corpus that 'we' must 'return to' in order to restore a good moral order, a golden age where so-called biblical values reigned. If, however, it is held up as supremely compatible with the Western world, its culture and politics, it all too easily becomes an unread icon used uncritically against whatever enemy is posited as other to the West. The histories of the Bible, its influences on culture and politics, then, must be recognised as continuously negotiated, resisted, adopted, affirmed and negated.

⁸⁹ H. Pyper, *An Unsuitable Book: The Bible as Scandalous Text* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

Bibliography

Almond, G.A; R. S Appleby, and E. Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006 [1983].

Assmann, J. *Religion and Cultural Memory*. Translated by R. Livingstone. California: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Beal, T.K. 'The White Supremacist Bible and the Phineas Priesthood', in J. Bekkenkamp and Y. Sherwood (eds), *Sanctified Aggression: Legacies of Biblical and Post-Biblical Vocabularies of Violence*. London/New York: T&T Clark, 2003.

Berlinerblau, J. *Thumpin' it: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today's Presidential Politics*. Louisville/London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Casanova, J. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Castelli, E. *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Collins, J. J. 'The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, 2003.

Crossley, J. G. *Harnessing Chaos: The Bible in English Political Discourse since 1968*. Second edition. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016.

‘What the Bible Really Means: Biblical Literacy in English Political Discourse’, in K. Edwards (ed), *Rethinking Biblical Literacy*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015.

De Vries, H. *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999.

Kermode, F. ‘Millennium and Apocalypse’, in F. Carey (ed), *The Apocalypse and The Shape of Things to Come*. Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

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

Sheehan, J. *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Sherwood, Y. ‘Bush’s Bible as a Liberal Bible (Strange Though That Might Seem)’, *Postscripts* 2.1, 2006. Pp. 47-58.

Biblical Blaspheming: Trials of the Sacred for a Secular Age. Cambridge: CUP, 2012.

Spencer, R. *Not Peace but a Sword: the Great Chasm Between Christianity and Islam*. San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2013.

Religion of Peace? Why Christianity Is and Islam Isn’t. Washington DC: Regnery Publishing, 2007.

Strømme, Øyvind. *I Hatets Fotspor*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2014.

Det Mørke Nettet: Om Høyreekstremisme, kontrajihadisme og terror i Europa. Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2012.

Ye'or, Bat. *Understanding Dhimmitude: Twenty-One Lectures and Talks on the Position of Non-Muslims in Islamic Societies*. New York: RVP Press, 2013.