



Re-Enchanting the Text

DISCOVERING THE BIBLE AS SACRED,
DANGEROUS, AND MYSTERIOUS

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CHAPTER 3

Longing for Enchantment

Much of the material in this presentation was taken verbatim or almost verbatim from *Re-Enchanting the Text* by Cheryl Bridges Johns.

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Chapter 1: The Strange Silence of the Bible

- “In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, the silence of the Bible is deafening.”
- Gary Burge: Americans “are in danger of losing the imaginative and linguistic world of the Bible.”
- George Gallup: United States has become a “nation of biblical illiterates.”
- The basic issue is disinterest. It is a strange and disconcerting irony that in the midst of a wealth of biblical information, we live in the Dark Age of biblical illiteracy.
- Johns traces the root of this process from the Enlightenment through Modernism

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Chapter 2: The Search for a Way Ahead

- “After years of adapting the Bible to modern sensibilities, Christians find themselves alienated from one another and, even worse, strangers to the biblical text.”
- Most Christians feel guilty about not reading the Bible, but can’t fit it into their schedule
- Christians should have a Christian world view but not a biblical world view
- Eugene Peterson: “The Scriptures are the primary text for Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is, in its entirety, rooted in and shaped by scriptural text.”

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- Middle Ages sometime called Dark Ages, a time when the consequences of biblical illiteracy became apparent.
- The Bible was lost to the people of God.
- It was for mostly inaccessible, even to those who could read.
- However, those who lived in the Middle Ages inhabited a world that was “Scripture-soaked”

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- More recently, Phyllis Tickle writes: biblical illiteracy is pushing them in one of two directions. “Either innocence of scriptural experience is propelling them to seek ever more eagerly for structural engagement with it, or else a total lack of prior exposure is propelling Scripture itself farther and farther into the attics of life where all antiques are stored for a respectful period of time before being thrown completely away.”

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- According to Barna, “People do not act like Jesus because they do not think like Jesus”
- This reductionist vision of humankind, which is as old as Plato, sees people as primarily thinking, rational beings. It leaves out the deep core affections that center the heart and drive our behavior in ways we cannot explain.
- Johns believes that “most people hunger for a different Bible than what is currently being offered by those advocating either foundationalist or postfoundationalist readings of the text.”

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Chapter 3: Longing for Enchantment

- Despite general disenchantment, people “hunger for mystery and a greater openness to things once dismissed as naive and superstitious.”
- Johns proceeds with a list of evidences that people are longing for enchantment
- “there seems to be a lot of enchantment growing through the cracks in the paved-over world of modernity”
- Her first example was in 2006, when she took part in a two day meeting of scientists and Evangelicals to discuss climate change. Organized by Richard Cizik (VP of NAE) and Eric Chivian (Nobel laureate, Harvard med school)

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- There was much anxiety on both sides
- ‘The leaders began the meeting by asking each of us to share our love for the creation. As we told our stories, the palatable tension began to melt. During the course of sharing our love for the earth and our concern for its future, our disparate lives—as atheists, Christians, theologians, and scientists—were mysteriously woven into a united tapestry of “deep, fundamental commitment to life on earth.”’
- From this meeting, the Scientists and Evangelicals Initiative for the care of creation was formed.

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- Signs of re-enchantment are everywhere:
- Francis Collins finding God as he mapped the human genome.
- The popularity of the Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter series of books and movies.
- The return to more ancient forms of spirituality.
- Yo-Yo Ma picking up his cello at home and recording “Songs of Comfort” for a world caught in the grip of a major pandemic, he gave us enchanted music that calmed our fears.

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- James K. A. Smith describes the contemporary longing for enchantment as a “haunting.”
- Julian Barnes: “I don’t believe in God, but I miss him.”
- Andrew Root, “We doubt that what we long for is sensible. Almost all of us yearn for poetry instead of prose, for mystery over cold transparency, and yet we need to face the facts.”

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Johns: The world is ripe for re-enchantment, yet I'm afraid too many Christians, especially the heirs of the Reformation, are missing this moment. After centuries of drinking the waters of disenchantment, Western Christians have become some of the most ardent defenders of the secularism that Charles Taylor describes as "excarnation": the "transfer of our religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship, practice, so that it comes more and more to reside 'in the head.'"

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- Taylor describes the present secular era as the "Age of Authenticity," a time when "the understandings of human life, agency, and the good" are found in expressive individualism.
- The modern carnival, places where people can, for a time, inhabit a world not governed by the dull routinization of modern living.
- Burning Man is one example of carnival in the Age of Authenticity.

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- Burning Man is one example of carnival in the Age of Authenticity.
- Carnival
- Burning the “Man”
- Silicon Valley
- “Burners are caught in the tension between their longing for deep connection and the hyperindividualism that characterizes the Age of Authenticity”

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- Taking their daughter to college – attended a Q&A session for parents.
- One parent asked “We brought our daughter here as an Evangelical. We want her to stay an Evangelical, yet we have concerns about the large number of students and faculty who attend a charismatic Anglican church in the area. What is this school going to do to stop its students and faculty from leaving our faith?”
- Over the past few years, young Evangelicals have steadily been moving toward the sacramental spirituality of liturgical churches.

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- Secularism: Over the years, many Pentecostals have made peace with secularism, little difference between seeker-friendly churches and in Evangelicalism.
- “Pentecostal light”, where the liturgy is more like a rock concert than the old-time religion.
- Rare: slain in the Spirit, prophecy, interpretation of tongues
- Most dramatic is the shift in the focus of worship from the anointed congregation to the stage, where a praise team takes the spotlight. Worshipers sit in darkened rooms. The spotlight is on the stage.

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- Musing about the future of the secular age, Taylor lays out two alternative futures. One future sees religion shrinking further and further into the background.
- The second scenario involves the awareness of transcendent reality achieving a broader consensus.
- Taylor questions the degree to which people of the future will be open to the transcendent.
- T. S. Eliot: “Human kind cannot bear much reality.”
- Too much reality is often destabilizing, and “openness to transcendence is fraught with peril.”

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- In her book *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*, Tara Isabella Burton describes “religious rituals of our so-called secular age: a place where faith and fantasy, art and irony, capitalism and creation converge.”
- Burton’s example: the wildly popular immersive experience *Sleep No More*, which takes place in the McKittrick Hotel, located in New York City’s Chelsea neighborhood.
- Interactive *Macbeth*

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- Whether they are open or closed to transcendence, many people in their hunger and searching will find themselves captive to destructive tendencies. They may be enticed by profane forms of antinomianism or by dangerous versions of nationalism.
- The modern Bible seems to be powerless to keep today’s religious seekers from falling under the spell of such dangers.

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