



The leadership of God

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This article explores the theme of God's leadership in the Bible and its interpretation for today. Two major themes will be explored: the humble, non-coercive nature of divine leadership and its corollary, wrath and judgement (themes all too often misunderstood). Finally, the question, 'Where is God taking us?' involves revisiting the biblical understanding of the parousia, the 'second coming' of Jesus.

LEADERSHIP • CROSS • JUDGEMENT • WRATH • PAROUSIA • NON-COERCIVE
LEADERSHIP • DIVINE INTERVENTION

Introduction

In a fast-changing world we find ourselves in the throes of theological change – even a theological revolution. Old models and concepts of God which served previous generations well are increasingly seen to be more problematic and questionable for us. This should neither surprise nor dismay us. The Bible itself reflects a process of continuity and change – a constant interaction between revelation and context. How we are to understand the leadership of God today is an important example of this interaction.

We do not normally speak of God's leadership. The concept is, I think, largely absent from theological reflection and Christian discussion – except when we speak of individual Christians or local churches being 'led'. I am not questioning such language here – it is important. But the *nature* of God's leadership requires some theological exploration, and, equally important, so do the *consequences* for the world of rejecting that leadership. I turn first to some of the biblical material.

Old Testament foundations

What does the Bible say about the leadership of God? The first books of the Old Testament – Genesis to Joshua – are suggestive yet question-begging. God leads his people Israel to the Promised Land – that much, at least, seems clear: 'And all the time the LORD went before them, by day a pillar of cloud to guide them on their journey, by night a pillar of fire to give them light; so they could travel both by day and by night' (Exodus 13:21¹). This verse follows the story of the Exodus, including the plagues visited on Egypt; it precedes Israel's wanderings in the wilderness and the subsequent conquest or part-conquest² of Canaan.

Here a major interpretative question needs to be faced – and, in my experience, rarely is. If we take Old Testament stories such as the Exodus and the Conquest as fundamentally historical, then we have to reckon with an overwhelmingly coercive God who, among many other coercive actions, inflicts plagues on Egypt and annihilates entire Canaanite cities. The Christian interpreter must surely say: a Christlike God does not do such things.³

But what are we to say of God's action in human history, God's providence and guidance, God's 'answers' to prayer? In short, how coercive – if coercive at all –

is the leadership of God? Does God, for example, ever *intervene*? This word, widely used among Christians, needs to be re-examined, and its implications for the leadership of God more thoroughly explored.

There is a stark contrast between biblical and modern ways of thinking of God's relationship to the world. In the Bible there is no concept of secondary causation – God does everything:

I make the light, I create the darkness;
author alike of wellbeing and woe,
I, the LORD, do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

By contrast, in contemporary secular thought God hardly features at all: the 'God-hypothesis' is, apparently, unnecessary. But we need to do justice to the biblical view in a way that is faithful to the non-coercive nature of God (on this, see below), and that also takes into account contemporary cosmology and physics.

The language and imagery of the psalms is important here. The poetry of the psalter is problematic for many today; perhaps contemporary neglect of poetry makes it harder for us to appropriate the psalms in our prayers and worship. With reference to our theme here, their imagery of God as Lord, Shepherd and King testifies to a continuing belief in God's leadership and sovereignty of the world – even in the presence of other gods. (Among many examples, see especially Psalms 82, 90, 93 and 138.)

The psalms and the prophetic writings show that Israel continued to believe in God's leadership of Israel, even if it was ignored for some or much of the time. The question of a British MP recently, 'How can you be a leader if you haven't any followers?' raises a very important question when applied to the world's Creator: since God can hardly abdicate, how does the Creator 'react' to marginalisation and rejection?

In the later history of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Assyrian and Babylonian aggression led to the destruction of Samaria and Israel in the north, and, in the south, to the devastation of Jerusalem and exile in Babylon. The latter events led to a theological crisis: where was God in all this? The prophets attributed the disasters to God; they were his punishments for Israel's and Judah's apostasy. Modern commentators and interpreters have tended to elide history and theology, implying that these events were, indeed, divine punishments. But, as I have argued above, a Christlike God does not act in

history in this violent, direct way.⁴ We must rethink what I am calling God's 'leadership' of the world.

After the Babylonian exile, in what direction was God leading his people? Was permanent, uncontested occupation of the Promised Land the sum total of God's aims? Or was there more? There are hints in the Old Testament (eg, Isaiah 19:18–25; 49:6) of wider and deeper divine intentions. We turn, then, to the person of Jesus, who is to be thought of as not only a role model for human leadership but also as an icon of God's own leadership.

New Testament teaching

I begin with the Synoptic Gospels, and the explicit teaching of Jesus about leadership in two almost identical passages in Mark and Matthew:

Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that among the Gentiles the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and the great make their authority felt. It shall not be so with you; among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'⁵

In the interpretation of these texts, we tend to focus on their implications for the life of the Church. John 13:1–17, for example, is rightly cited as an icon of diaconal and presbyteral ministry. But what do they tell us about the leadership of God? What is the nature of divine authority and power, and how does God exercise them?

Word counts on the subject of God's leadership are not helpful. Explicit words for 'leader' in the New Testament are few and far between, and portraits of political leaders, especially the Herods, Pilate, Felix and Festus, contrast sharply with the teaching of Jesus: 'It shall not be so among you.'

Another saying of Jesus is relevant here: 'The first shall be last, and the last shall be first' (Matthew 19:30; 20:16; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30). The contexts of this recurring saying are not identical, but they shed light both on human discipleship and on what I am calling divine leadership. In Matthew, for example, the saying forms a literary *inclusio* around the preceding parable of the labourers in the vineyard and the subsequent third prediction of Jesus' Passion.

The Gospel of John is similar yet different from the Synoptics. In his book *Is Scripture Still Holy?* A. E. Harvey writes of the question addressed in John's Gospel of 'how an essentially *noncoercive* God can make himself known to an indifferent and unresponsive world'.⁶ One verse, above all others, gives us this Gospel's distinctive perspective on the nature and aim of God's leadership: 'And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself' (John 12:32). The word 'draw' here (Greek *helkō*) is used in the New Testament of physical effort and even of violent action: the dragging of fishing nets to shore (eg, John 21:6, 11) and of dragging apostles before the authorities (Acts 16:19). But it is also used to denote 'the pull on a person's inner life',⁷ and in Jeremiah the 'pull' of Yahweh's compassion.⁸ This is a vital concept in our attempt to understand the nature of God's leadership. There is a parallel to this biblical image in twentieth-century process theology, particularly in the concept of the divine 'lure' expressed in the writings of A. E. Whitehead.

John 12:32 reflects John's distinctive perspective on the cross and resurrection: the crucifixion *was* the exaltation of Jesus, his 'finest hour'. That does not mean that the resurrection did not 'happen'. The quotation marks here indicate that 'historical event' doesn't do justice to the mysterious, elusive – *yet utterly real* – nature of the resurrection. While John's own resurrection narratives (John 20—21) show that the resurrection cannot be simply equated with the crucifixion, even so, many details in John's Passion narrative show that the crucifixion is to be understood *also* as his exaltation: especially John 19.30, with its *double entendre* in the final clause: 'Having received the wine, he said, "It is accomplished [*tetelestai*]!" Then he bowed his head and gave up [handed over] his spirit [the Spirit].'

The writer probably intended the Greek word *tetelestai* to recall an earlier verse: 'He had always loved his own who were in the world, and he loved them to the end [*eis telos*]' (John 13:1b). If this is so, then the resurrection was not so much the reversal of the cross as the revelation of the cross's meaning. Of course, the divine 'verdict' implied in the resurrection reverses the human verdicts of Caiaphas and Pilate, but the cross and resurrection *together* are the ultimate revelation of God's love and power and, therefore, of the leadership of God. This is how God leads (and rules); this is how God saves (and judges). It transforms our understanding of the doxology added to the Lord's Prayer by the early Church: 'Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.'

There are hints in the parables of Jesus about the paradoxical (ie, contrary to expectations) nature of God's leadership and authority – notably, the unpatriarchal patriarch of Luke 15:11–32, the unreasonable remuneration practice of the vineyard owner in Matthew 20:1–16, and even perhaps the portrait of the employer in the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14–30.⁹ In the first parable the behaviour of both the younger son and the father is a *skandalon* to the elder son; in the second, the generosity of the vineyard owner is, similarly, a *skandalon* to the workers who had toiled all day in the vineyard. *Skandalon* is St Paul's word for the preaching of the cross (1 Corinthians 1:23): by all reasonable 'religious' and moral standards it is an 'offence'. The apostle's conclusion summarises all that is wrong, from the world's point of view, with the leadership of God: it is weak and foolish (1 Corinthians 1:25).

It is the extraordinary claim of Christian faith that the cross of Jesus epitomises the nature of the leadership of God: 'I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself.' The end of Jesus' life was the climax and summary of his life and teaching: the cross, for example, was both his final definitive statement about the kingdom of God and his ultimate act of healing. The imagery of the Passion narratives hints that the 'weakness' of God is stronger than it appears to be: note, for example, the darkness over the whole earth, the rending of the Temple veil, and the testimony of the centurion at the foot of the cross.

If the testimony of the Gospel writers and of St Paul points to the fundamentally non-coercive leadership of God, what are we to say of God's authority? Perhaps it suffices here to quote a definition of 'authority' that seems to describe well the kind of authority to which the New Testament points: it is *the source of life, truth and growth*.¹⁰ (See especially Matthew 7:29.)

The cross of Jesus, therefore, is the supreme, definitive example of what I am calling the non-coercive leadership of God. Theologian Keith Ward writes:

Those who take the life of Jesus to be a revelation of the character of God may well be disposed to think that a vulnerable love is the best exercise of a power which works through love and not compulsion.¹¹

The cruciform leadership of God

A distinguished Jewish leader and scholar has recently written of ‘the self-effacement of God’.¹² No Christian need question or dissent from those words, but would want to add ‘... and the cross of Christ is the definitive revelation of the divine self-effacement’. But when we speak more precisely of God’s *cruciform* leadership, it is St Paul, of all the New Testament writers, who has most to say about this. His profoundly theological passages are largely overlooked, though, because they are ‘disguised’ as apostolic self-portraits.

These self-portraits – mostly in the Corinthian letters – have been called ‘catalogues of hardships’, and such they are. But that is why they have been described as ‘near the heart of Paul’s understanding of God’.¹³ The sequence is simple: first, Christ the image of God (eg, 2 Corinthians 4:4); second, Paul the ‘imitator’ of Christ (eg, 1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul reflects the lowliness and suffering of Jesus, Jesus reflects the lowliness and sufferings of God.

These apostolic self-portraits deserve a section to themselves, but it must suffice here to quote from one of them, and draw some conclusions. The language of all of them is vivid – even iconoclastic – and especially the language of 2 Corinthians 4:7–12:

But we have only earthenware jars to hold this treasure, and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us; it is God’s alone. We are hard pressed, but never cornered; bewildered, but never at our wits’ end; hunted, but never abandoned to our fate; struck down, but never killed. Wherever we go we carry with us in our body the death that Jesus died, so that in this body also the life that Jesus lives may be revealed. For Jesus’s sake we are all our life being handed over to death, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in this mortal body of ours. *Thus death is at work in us, but life in you.*

I italicise the last sentence in order to illustrate the creative nature of this cruciform leadership: it leads others to life. It has been well said that Pauline passages like these constitute essential, regular reading for all in ordained ministry – and, indeed, all Christian ministry.¹⁴ They should be part of every core curriculum in ministerial training programmes.

Why do we find it so hard to believe in a fully, consistently Christlike God? Behind this theological shortcoming (as I would call it) lies a spiritual failure.

We may assent with our minds to the belief that God is love; to know and feel it in our hearts is another matter, while to live by it means a kind of dying – a crucifixion. Cruciform leadership, reflecting God’s own leadership, is demanding and costly. There is much else that could be said. Religious bullying is not uncommon in the churches, and the prayers of all of us can easily degenerate into ego-centred petitions.

The Declaration of Chalcedon in 451, the classical expression of the mystery of the humanity and divinity of Christ, maintains that the human and the divine co-exist in Christ ‘without confusion, change, division or separation’. Paul’s description of Jesus as ‘the image of God’ (eg, 2 Corinthians 4:4) has a twofold significance: Christ is the ‘image of God’ like every human, male and female, made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) – ‘yet without sin’ (Hebrews 4:15) – and also the image of God in the Johannine sense: ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14:9). This is why we must say: the life and death of Jesus image divine as well as human leadership.

God’s leadership and God’s judgement

The revelation in the cross of Jesus that God *is* love (1 John 3:16; 4:8, 16) is therefore the hermeneutical key to Scripture.¹⁵ It is not possible to offer a consistent hermeneutic of the Bible unless these texts are given their due weight. Our understanding of God’s holiness, wrath and judgement (for example) must not compromise the clear meaning of the first epistle of John that God *is* (100 per cent) love. As Archbishop Michael Ramsey once remarked, ‘God is Christlike and in him there is no unChristlikeness at all.’¹⁶ We have a long way still to go, I suggest, in explicating – let alone living – the full implications of belief in a Christlike God.

But now we must turn to our second major theme: what are the consequences, according to the Bible, of rejecting the leadership of God? I turn to the widely neglected and misunderstood biblical themes of wrath and judgement.

‘How can you be a leader if you haven’t any followers?’ That question, natural enough in human contexts, hardly applies, I suggested earlier, to the Creator of the universe. ‘Non-coercive’ expresses an essential dimension of the Christian understanding of God. God compels no one to believe in him. Yet God is still God, and, according to the Bible, there are consequences if we do not follow the leadership of God.

Here we must note two seriously defective theologies, all too prevalent in the churches. One champions the authority of Scripture at the expense of the Christlike character of God. Put simply, 'If the Bible says God annihilated Canaanite cities, then God must have done.' The other emphasises the kenotic, non-coercive nature of God at the expense of God's 'wrath' and judgement. On this view, the love of God precludes both wrath and judgement. 'Judge not ...' has become one of the leading mantras – though selectively employed – in our contemporary world.

The theme of divine judgement – and even punishment – is too prevalent in the Bible to be ignored or explained away. The Old Testament image of God 'hiding his face' is especially suggestive in helping us to explore this theme. God hiding his face means that God 'withdraws', and lets human beings experience the consequences of their own wrongdoing, as in Isaiah:

you have hidden your face from us
and left us in the grip of our iniquities. (Isaiah 64:7b)

This is the opposite of 'the light' of God's face: 'may the LORD make his shine on you and be gracious to you' (Numbers 6:25).

But what does this image, and other language in the Bible about God's wrath and judgement, say about God's leadership? Is that leadership coercive after all?

The consequences of ignoring the leadership of God are expressed in many places in Old and New Testament alike. Here I can only offer a sketch. First, evil has a tendency to self-destruct. Time and again the Psalmist insists that the wicked fall into their own traps, (eg, Psalm 57:6). People reap what they sow, (eg, Galatians 6:7). That, of course, does not always seem to happen – at least, not in this life or in this world. And yet great wealth selfishly hoarded, ruthless ambition and cruelty to others can and often do wreak terrible damage on people's souls – that is, their deepest, truest selves. Charles Marsh's fine biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *A Strange Glory*, notes the depraved enjoyment taken by Nazis who volunteered to torture prisoners: what damage were they doing to themselves?¹⁷

Yet for all the biblical emphasis on the self-destructive nature of evil, behind it lies the conviction that 'God is not mocked' (Galatians 6:7 again). There is a divine 'reaction' to human idolatries and sin. St Paul, in Romans 1:18–32, sets out clearly the downward spiral from idolatry to the dehumanisation that leads

to the distortion and destruction of relationships and communities. In this process, minds are 'darkened' and human hearts hardened. God does not intervene to save us from the consequences of our wrongdoing.

In this passage, two verbs are key. Three times Paul says humankind 'exchanged' (*metellaxan*) its divine birthright for what a contemporary politician might call 'fake' glory: 'they boast of their wisdom ... exchanging the glory of the immortal God for an image shaped like mortal man' (Romans 1:22–23); 'They have exchanged the truth of God for a lie' (1:25; cf verse 26).

The divine response, like the human 'exchange', is threefold: God 'gave them up' (*paredōken*) to experience the consequences of their wrongdoing (1:24, 26, 28). That is, *God did not intervene*. That is how, in response to human disobedience, God's leadership of the world is expressed. Worship what is less than God, and we become less than human (Psalms 115; 135). As playwright and theologian Dorothy Sayers trenchantly put it, 'you get what you want'.¹⁸

And yet God has not left humankind bereft of his presence. There is a parallel revelation or *apocalypse* here in Romans: not only God's *orgē*, but also God's saving goodness (lit. 'righteousness' – *dikaioSunē*) is being revealed (*apocalyptetai*) (Romans 1:17–18).

According to the Bible, where humankind declines to follow the leading of God, human beings lose the capacity to distinguish right from wrong and truth from falsehood; societies fall apart into division and injustice; human relationships grow shallow and manipulative; trust and fidelity decline.¹⁹ The law and the prophets point ominously to ecological consequences (eg, Jeremiah 4:23–28). 'This is the judgement': the light has come, and we have preferred the darkness to the light (John 3:19).

These biblical themes of wrath and judgement may indicate the limitations of the image of the leadership of God. God's leadership is indeed non-coercive – perhaps frighteningly so. For, unlike human leaders, whose leadership ends or fades away when no one follows, God still 'leads' – period. Some of the models and images of God inherited from the Enlightenment are inadequate here. God is not simply 'up there' or 'out there', as if God were *a* Being greater than all others. God is Being Itself or, as earlier centuries put it, the *ens realissimum*. The doctrine of creation is not so much about how the world began, but that the world *is a creation* – utterly dependent on its Creator. God is the reality in which or in whom 'we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28, NIV). The breath or spirit of God animates creation (eg, Genesis 1:2; 2:7; cf Psalm 104:29–30).

Bonhoeffer's haunting words from his prison cell – 'God allows himself to be edged out of his world on to a cross'²⁰ – are powerfully true, and yet not the whole truth. For God is closer to us all than we are to ourselves, and if humankind rejects God's leadership, we experience our Creator not as love but as 'wrath'. When that happens the divine image in us begins to fade, and communities and creation itself begin to disintegrate.²¹ Whether as love or as wrath, God is inescapable.

The 'second coming' of Jesus

So where is God leading us? What the Church has traditionally called 'the second coming' of Jesus needs to be treasured as an essential article of faith – and reinterpreted. We can no longer hold a literalist view of a figure coming on the clouds of heaven (Mark 14:62 etc).²² Other biblical themes can help us towards a reinterpretation.

The covenant theme in the Bible indicates that cooperation with humankind is the Creator's chosen way of fulfilling his creative purposes. In the early chapters of Genesis, the Creator, exasperated at humankind's disobedience, destroys the world he has made, and starts all over again with the fourfold assertion 'Never again ...' (Genesis 8:21; 9:11). That is, never again will the Creator destroy his creation (though that is what we humans are now increasingly capable of doing).

There is another theme, not sufficiently noticed in biblical interpretation. The Son of Man does not 'return'²³ alone. It might appear to be so in the Danielic quotations in Mark 14:62 and Matthew 26:64. But one 'like a son of man' in the original Danielic context is actually plural, not singular: 'the holy ones of the Most High' (Daniel 7:18; cf verse 27). St Paul expresses more than once the corporate nature of the parousia; Jesus will not 'return' alone (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:10). Paul's clearest (and perhaps last) reference to the parousia is uniquely expressed in Romans: 'The created universe is waiting with eager expectation for God's sons [*sic*] to be revealed' (Romans 8:19). Rowan Williams writes:

By the time we get to Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians ... there's relatively little about the end of the world ... I don't think that Paul changed his mind about the future hope of Christ returning in glory. But his interest seems to be more and more to be

in how we experience now the life that Christ will give in fullness at the end of time. And in such a perspective, the end is something like the world blossoming into its fullness under the hand of Christ, until finally the history of the world and the presence of Christ come together at the end of all things.²⁴

What then of the final book of the Bible, where there appears to be divine destruction and violence in plenty? That is to be expected, given the nature of the Roman Empire and, indeed, all empires. Love and wrath are two sides of the same coin. But the covenant with Noah in Genesis 8 and 9, 'Never again', will not be abrogated, as the image of the rainbow (Revelation 4:3) suggests, and 'the Lamb' upon the throne of God endures as an eternal testimony to the cruciform leadership of God. 'The final victory of truth over illusion lies not in overwhelming force but in the power of sacrifice.'²⁵

Conclusion

God leads from the cross: that is the startling claim of Christian faith, and from that cross God will draw all people to himself (John 12:32). That is his leadership and his reign. What a book on prayer calls 'the magnetism of God' is never far away.²⁶ The universal Creator 'draws' people all over the world in unexpected ways and in surprising places. The dark biblical themes of wrath and judgement do not contradict this, for love *is* the judgement (eg, Matthew 25:31–46). Wrath and judgement are the consequences of rejecting a passionate Love that is as constant and unconditional as it is almighty and invincible.

This twofold understanding of God's leadership can only serve to enrich biblical interpretation, Christian theology and, not least, leadership in the Church and Christian action in the world. For example, prayer is not so much asking God to adjust life and the world to our specifications as opening our hearts to the love of a non-coercive God and going with the flow. Believing in Providence means recognising, in the words of the Psalmist so beloved by Karl Barth, that 'all things serve you' (Psalm 119:91b). Paul's doxology in Romans expresses well the transcendent leadership of God:

How deep are the wealth
and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!
How inscrutable his judgements,
how unsearchable his ways!

'Who knows the mind of the Lord?
Who has been his counsellor? ...
From him and through him and for him all things exist –
to him be glory for ever! Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the Bible in this article are from *The Revised English Bible*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
2. Compare, for example, Joshua 10:40 with 11:19 and Judges 3:5.
3. On this crucial hermeneutical question, see my *Who on Earth is God?*, London: Bloomsbury 2014.
4. Richardson, *Who on Earth is God?*, ch. 3.
5. Mark 10:42–45; compare Matthew 20:25–28. Luke 22:25–27 is similar in content, though less so in vocabulary; it has some resonances with the foot-washing story in John 13:1–17.
6. A. E. Harvey, *Is Scripture Still Holy?*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012, p. 16. Italics mine.
7. Plato's *Phaedrus*, 238A, cited in W. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (eds), *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
8. Jeremiah 38:3 (LXX): 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you in [lit. into] compassion.'
9. Verse 26 – the response of the employer to the third servant is best translated as a question: in effect, 'So this is the kind of man you think I am?'
10. N. Lash, *Voices of Authority*, London: Sheed & Ward, 1976, p. 4.
11. K. Ward, *Religion and Creation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 259.
12. Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2011, p. 94.
13. N. Richardson, *Paul's Language about God*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994, p. 121.
14. In addition to 2 Corinthians 4:7–12, see especially 1 Corinthians 4:9–13, 2 Corinthians 6:1–10 and 12:7b–10.
15. Richardson, *Who on Earth is God?*, pp. 211–213.
16. A. M. Ramsey, *God, Christ and the World: A Study in Contemporary Theology*, London: SCM Press, 1969, p. 99.
17. C. Marsh, *A Strange Glory: A Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, London: SPCK, 2014, p. 383.
18. D. Sayers, *Dante: The Divine Comedy*, Baltimore, MD: Penguin, Introduction, p. 16.
19. On this, see the eerily prophetic words of W. Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality and Sacramental Community*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982, pp. 90–91.
20. D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, London: Fontana, 1959, p. 122.

21. On this, see also my *God in the New Testament*, London: Epworth Press, 1999, ch. 3, 'When the Image Fades'.
22. The debate rumbles on about whether the ambiguous Greek word *erchetai* means 'coming' or 'going'. In Daniel 7:13, one 'like a son of man' was presented to 'the Ancient of Days'.
23. The quotation marks here serve to indicate the tentative nature of all our words about 'the coming again' of Jesus; there are other ways of imaging 'the End', as I go on to illustrate.
24. Rowan Williams, *Meeting God in Paul*, London: SPCK, 2015, pp. 80–81.
25. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (eds), *Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997, p. x.
26. A. Ryrie, *The Prayer of Silence*, Oxford: Fairacres Publications, 2012.