

Can England be Loved?

I have learned that the Scottish love Scotland.
And the Welsh love Wales. But do the
English love England?



As I've shared this observation with my English friends, and as it becomes clear what the final question is going to be, before I even ask it they are shaking their heads with a wry expression, "No, no we don't."

Love? It's as if it's a category mistake. I'm not sure what the prevailing sentiment actually is: Respect? Concern? Admiration? Affection? Options that have been volunteered to me range from the negative ("We *resent* our society.") to the self-deprecating ("We're a little bit embarrassed about England.") to the faux-humble ("We know we're good we don't need to flaunt it.") to the perplexed ("Well, we don't know who we are anymore.") Of course, support for cricket and rugby teams cannot be questioned, and is a common expression of loyalty. But *love*? What does that even *mean*?

As an "outsider" observer I can offer some musings about why this is the case: Perhaps England as a concept isn't "local" enough; we can speak of love much more readily for Yorkshire, or Cornwall, or Norfolk! Perhaps England doesn't have the experience of shared and common adversity that is present in the history of the other UK countries; there has been very little to knit the country together in it's own identity. If you're English, or you know England, I'd love to hear your thoughts and opinions!

The motivation for my thinking about this is missiological and prayerful. It was sparked by the opportunity Gill and I had

recently of spending time in retreat at Ffald-y-brenin in Wales. As part of the rhythm of prayer there they include a “Caleb prayer for Wales.” It’s a prayer for mercy and revival:

*O High King of Heaven,
Have mercy on our Land.
Revive your Church.
Send the Holy Spirit for the sake of the lost, the least, and
the broken.
May your Kingdom come to our nation.
in Jesus’ mighty name.
Amen*

Prayed by the Welsh, this prayer is gentle but fervent, and with deep deep roots. It recalls revivals of the past and yearns and longs for new things in the present.

It *imagines* life-giving restorative reconnection with God intermingling with the valleys and the hills, the families and the industrial cities. It looks to “Jesus’ mighty name” as a hope for the lost, the least, and the broken. It is prayed confidently in acknowledgement of God’s will, because they love their land, and they want God’s best for it. The prayer reveals a missiological heart.

But if “love for England” is an ungraspable concept, what do we have that can stir us for God’s mission? What is it that wells up (or *could* well up) within the English to pray this prayer for their land? What is the missiological heart for England?

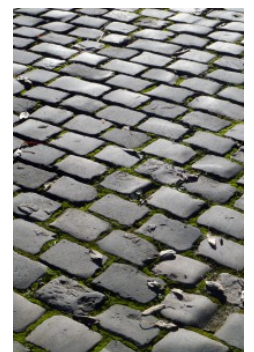
My conclusion is this: England is and can be *loved*. It can be loved with a missiological heart – even those big detached chunks of Southern England that are geographically defined more by their train line to London than their sense of “nationhood,” community, or place.

My prayer for myself, and for the church, is that we would

grow in this love. That we would be more and more *moved* with the heart of God. This means to be prayerfully weeping because of the sin we see, and the destructive things we know are hidden away to fester, and the roots of idolatry now writ large in the whole Western world. It means travailing for lives and communities to be convicted, awakened, and turned towards life-pertaining things. And above all it means hope – to be trusting in God’s mercy as we dare to believe that the villages and market-towns, the estates and seething throngs of commuters, can somehow encounter and embrace, together, a living experience with a risen Saviour.

Can England be loved? Yes. But it will take, as they say with a phrase now full of meaning, the “love of the Lord.”

Sustenance for the Plodding Pedestrian



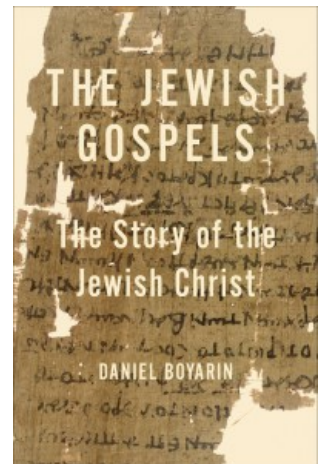
*When You don't move the mountains I'm needing You to move
When You don't part the waters I wish I could walk through
When You don't give the answers as I cry out to You
I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!*

*Truth is, You know what tomorrow brings
There's not a day ahead You have not seen*

*So, in all things be my life and breath
I want what You want Lord and nothing less*

Review: The Jewish Gospels

I have an ongoing interest in the interaction between first-century rabbinical Judaism and Christianity. On each exploration I find increased depth and colour to my reading of the New Testament. I picked up Boyarin's book *The Jewish Gospels* on something of a whim and for the title alone.



Boyarin's project is to reduce the divide between what are classically considered as the distinctives of Christianity over against Judaism: the *divinity* of Christ, and the necessity of *suffering* in the messianic expectation. He seeks to demonstrate that these distinctives are present (although not always widely accepted) within pre-Christian Jewish thought and expectation; they are not novelties invented in the light of Christ, but pre-existing understandings that are re-appraised in the light of a kosher, crucified and risen Messiah.

In this he is aiding the increasing mutual affirmation that is currently apparent in Judaeo-Christian relations. I follow Romans 11 enough to see this as a good thing: Gentile humility and Jewish messianic faith leaves my heart strangely warmed.

Boyarin's location of classic Christian theology in Jewish messianic expectation serves both.

Of particular interest, however, is Boyarin's hermeneutic. This informs exegesis more broadly and I have added it to my toolchest:

Firstly, the title "Son of Man" was not code, or a diminution of "Son of God" (a clearly messianic term, drawing on the image of the human Davidic kings); it is a deliberate connection with the one with the Ancient of Days in Daniel, and has always connoted *divinity*.

The occupant of one throne was an ancient, the occupant of the other a young figure in human form. The older one invests the younger one with His own authority on earth forever and ever, passing the scepter to him. What could be more natural, then, than to adopt the older usage "Son of God," already ascribed to the Messiah in his role as the Davidic king of Israel, and understanding it more literally as the sign of the equal divinity of the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man? Thus the Son of Man became the Son of God, and "Son of God" became the name of Jesus' divine nature – and all without any break with ancient of Jewish tradition.
(pp 46-47)

Secondly, much of the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees relates to the *Pharisee's* novel approach to the manifestation of their Jewish identity. Jesus represents a *conservative* and *traditional* view, resisting the legalistic and narrow innovations of the Pharisees.

Jesus' Judaism was a conservative reaction against some radical innovations in the Law stemming from the Pharisees and Scribes of Jerusalem. (p104)

Jesus... was fighting not against Judaism but within it – an entirely different matter. Far from being a marginal Jew, Jesus was a leader of one type of Judaism that was being marginalized by another group, the Pharisees, and he was fighting against them as dangerous innovators. (p105)

Thirdly, the messianic expectation of the Jews was not triumphalism, (vicarious) suffering was expected.

The notion of the humiliated and suffering Messiah was not at all alien within Judaism before Jesus' advent, and it remained current among Jews well into the future following that – indeed, well into the early modern period. The fascinating (and to some, no doubt, uncomfortable) fact is that this tradition was well documented by modern Messianic Jews, who are concerned to demonstrate that their belief in Jesus does not make them un-Jewish. (pp132-133)

I do not have the wherewithal to properly and academically test this framework. I can only consider the internal logic, and the sense in which they help me to tell the gospel story faithfully to Scripture. To that extent it is helpful.

I have a few concerned questions about his analytical framework. His redactional analysis of Daniel presupposes an “intra-Jewish controversy” in which “the author of the Book of Daniel, who had Daniel’s vision itself before him, wanted to suppress the ancient testimony of a more-than-singular God, using allegory to do so” (p43). He therefore doesn’t present to us an Old Testament witness to Triune thought as a clear proclamation of Scripture, but as a tension within Scripture, a rejection of one part in order to express the emphasis of another part.

This willingness to divide Scripture does not strengthen his argument. I don’t want him to stand outside and objectify Scripture, I want him to tell the covenant, gospel story. He gives the material for it, but doesn’t narrate it. This is a book of intriguing insights but it us readers who have the the task of assessing, applying and proclaiming them.