

Prophecy, Polemics, and Spiritual Exegesis: Interpretive Warrants for Ruptures in American Anglicanism

KIRSTEN LAUREL GUIDERO*

Spiritual exegesis of Hebrew Bible texts fuels the divide between two ecclesial instantiations of Anglicanism in the United States. This exegesis, engaged in strikingly similar manners by both organizations, remains bereft of its traditional controls that, if followed, would allow it to more productively shape ecclesial life. A look at four of these controls sets the stage for a detailed analysis of representative texts, which demonstrates how leaders in both organizations fail to properly hold their interpretive strategies accountable to the larger Christian narrative. In conclusion, brief consideration is given to how adherence to these controls could reshape the conflicts at hand by the exegesis of a Hebrew Bible text of liturgical significance to Anglicanism.

From the very beginning of their movement, Christians have assimilated Hebrew scripture through the practice of spiritual exegesis.¹ As John Barton and others note, however, the diversity of spiritual exegesis's interpretive grids can render texts particularly vulnerable to use as ammunition for ecclesial polemics.² So Stephen Fowl also

* Kirsten Laurel Guidero is a Ph.D. candidate in systematic theology at Marquette University. She holds degrees from the University of Chicago and Wheaton College's Graduate School. Her research interests include pneumatology, ecumenism, and theological anthropology.

¹ For a discussion of how early on in Christianity this approach occurs, see Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 128–160, as well as John Barton's *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Hans Boersma's introduction to the *Modern Theology* issue devoted to spiritual exegesis, "Heaven on Earth? The Future of Spiritual Interpretation," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (October 2012): 587–596, especially 587–580.

² See Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 107–8, 123–131; see also Barton, *Oracles of God*, 95, 177–178.

points out in a recent paper on “The Literal Sense in Thomas Aquinas”:

Because they depend on the discernment of similarities between things, similarities which may change over time and may not be easy to discern in the first place, there is an inherent instability in the Spiritual senses of Scripture. This instability makes the Spiritual senses unsuitable as the basis for theology or theological argument.³

Particularly within one corner of modern Christianity, spiritual exegesis of Hebrew Bible texts currently sponsors a bitter, highly publicized ecclesial disagreement involving two leaders of Anglicanism in the United States, Robert William Duncan and Katharine Jefferts Schori. Duncan, formerly bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, was from 2009 to 2014 archbishop of the largest alternative movement of Anglicans in the United States, the Anglican Church in North America (hereafter ACNA); Jefferts Schori is the current primate of the Episcopal Church. Duncan’s shift in ecclesial affiliation can be clearly glimpsed through the evolution of his exegesis of Hebrew texts, while Jefferts Schori makes her own theological commitments clear in her interpretive moves.

In what follows, I examine three texts each from Duncan and Jefferts Schori in order to understand and evaluate the impact of this use of Hebrew Bible texts on a large-scale rift in American Anglicanism.⁴ Already in 2004, the *Windsor Report* stressed the interpretive difficulties facing the Communion, pointing out that

the purpose of scripture is not simply to supply true information, nor just to prescribe in matters of belief and conduct, nor merely to act as a court of appeal, but to be part of the dynamic life of the Spirit through which God the Father is making the victory

³ Stephen E. Fowl, “The Literal Sense in Thomas Aquinas,” unpublished paper given at the Society for Biblical Literature’s 2012 meeting, Chicago, Illinois, page 5.

⁴ In this essay, “Anglican” and “Anglicanism” refers both to those who self-identify as “Episcopal” or “Episcopalian” and to those who have dissociated from the Episcopal Church and now call themselves “Anglican.” The use of such terms as “conservative” and “liberal” in order to delineate the rival factions of Anglicanism in the United States is both unfortunate and inaccurate. Nevertheless, such terms suffice as general identifiers.

which was won by Jesus' death and resurrection operative within the world and in and through human beings.⁵

The report warned the Communion that it could "no longer be content to drop random texts into arguments, imagining that the point is thereby proved, or indeed to sweep away sections of the New Testament as irrelevant to today's world, imagining that problems are thereby solved."⁶

As I demonstrate in this essay, American Anglicanism, by pressing biblical texts into fodder for polemics, has failed to heed this warning. In particular, both Duncan and Jefferts Schori have relied upon dubious spiritual exegesis of "prophetic" texts in order to make their cases. First, then, a brief look at spiritual exegesis as a field is in order. With the help of four key scholars, I propose a framework by which to construct my second move: the analysis of Duncan's and Jefferts Schori's claims. In my third move, this framework produces a non-polemical exegesis of Isaiah 58:12 that provides an alternative interpretive model for the Anglican reading of Hebrew Bible texts. By way of conclusion, I give special reference to how such a model fulfills the suggestions of the 2004 *Windsor Report* and offers a way forward.

*What is Spiritual Exegesis and What are its Limits?*⁹

I begin with John Barton, who challenges modern assumptions that the "prophetic" can be identified by a set of distinguishing features made apparent by historical criticism. It is not that certain books can bear the label "prophetic" because of their placement in the Christian canon, their classification as apocalyptic, or their predictive or challenging tone; to the contrary, one best learns how to read these books by reading them as they were first read in the postexilic era: as secondary literature to the Torah.⁷ Barton sums up a complication of this approach: "When post-exilic Judaism in its many varieties (including the Christian one) peered into the well of Israel's past and thought that it was looking at these great figures, it was seeing only its own reflection at the bottom."⁸

⁵ Anglican Consultative Council, *The Windsor Report 2004*, §55; <http://anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/index.cfm..>

⁶ *Windsor Report*, §61.

⁷ Barton, *Oracles of God*, 94–95.

⁸ Barton, *Oracles of God*, 273.

If we grant Barton his thesis, not only are we challenged to reconsider how the notion of prophecy has historically worked, we are also enjoined to grapple with the impact of the ways of reading prophecy within the Christian tradition. The four modes of postexilic reading of the prophets which Barton explicates constitute spiritual exegesis, not biblical criticism. And Barton's worry that such exegesis can render prophetic texts mere mirrors of unscrupulous readers is, I contend, precisely the danger facing contemporary Anglicans engaging in spiritual exegesis. Reading "prophecy" in the same manner as the earliest Christians out of the expectation that one's context can directly correspond to that of the original author often facilitates polemical use. According to Barton, this kind of contemporary fundamentalism is more dangerous than that of its predecessors, whose naïveté was pre-critical rather than post-critical.⁹

Fortunately, Barton's concerns here do not comprise the last word. From the outset, Christian theologians developed complex controls to help direct spiritual exegesis's self-reflective nature. I will briefly summarize three of these controls, one ancient and two modern. The first can be found in Origen's *De Principiis*.¹⁰ As the deeper, preeminent truth permeating scripture remains "the doctrines concerning God and His only-begotten Son," Origen's take offers a crucial way in which spiritual exegesis can discipline itself: by asking whether and how the teachings it derives from a passage are concerned with the doctrine of God and with the salvation narrative of Christianity discernible in scriptures and the world.¹¹ The historical context or details of a passage do not need to be ignored, but they are meant to illuminate who God is, who people are as God's creatures, and how God interacts with humanity.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer helps sharpen the issue in a recent article discussing how scripture can be taken as revelatory of Christ.¹² Based on the premise that allegory or spiritual exegesis should serve a "transfiguring" purpose rather than become mere exercises in theological agility, Vanhoozer argues that problems facing modern exegesis can be resolved by discerning and following an exegetical trajectory. This

⁹ Barton, *Oracles of God*, 95.

¹⁰ Origen, *De Principiis*, IV.2.1; trans. G.W. Butterworth (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1973), 269.

¹¹ See Origen, *De Principiis*, IV.2.7; Butterworth, 283–284.

¹² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "'Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock': Biblical Interpretation Earthed, Typed, and Transfigured," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (October 2012): 782–803.

trajectory is less a matter of finding multiple and sophisticated hidden meanings within the original stories and more about discerning a spiritual truth that appropriately extends the literal meaning of the text.¹³ This extension of meaning remains christologically focused, creating “a different and higher (i.e., Christological) *realization* of the same semantic content” as the original.¹⁴ In this way, the original meaning finds a purposeful extension. Here, the guidelines for spiritual exegesis develop further: beyond Origen’s concern that exegesis concern itself with retelling the narrative of God’s dealings with the world, it now stands under the imperative to locate itself within the trajectory of Christian thought as grounded within the original text’s details and as disciplined by Christ’s witness.

Finally, Stephen Fowl offers one additional insight. In the introduction to his book on the subject, Fowl argues that interpretation of scripture involves the mutual interaction of the text with convictions and practices: “Moreover, Christians need to manifest a certain form of common life if this interaction is to serve faithful life and worship. Further, because there is no theoretical way to determine how these interactions must work in any particular context, Christians will need to manifest a form of practical reasoning.”¹⁵ Fowl’s approach offers the distinct advantage of assuming that difficulties, such as the impasse between Anglicans in the United States, will often arise among Christians. Tensions are to be expected. He thus does not prescribe a one-size-fits-all method but instead stresses the way of life and the ecclesial bonds that allow Christians to fruitfully disagree with one another.¹⁶ The continuance of the church can only arise out of a willingness to embrace underdetermined interpretation in recognizing a plurality of meanings for any given text and to engage in difficult debates over those possibilities.¹⁷ The only way to address the critique that underdeterminate approaches tend to justify sin is for Christians to “exercise a particular sort of vigilance over themselves and their interpretation” and to continually practice repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation, as the church’s structure discloses in baptism, eucharist, and confession.¹⁸ This enables them to bear witness to the life

¹³ Vanhoozer, “‘Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock,’” 790. See also Fowl, “The Literal Sense in Thomas Aquinas,” 5–6, 11–12.

¹⁴ Vanhoozer, “‘Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock,’” 792.

¹⁵ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 8.

¹⁶ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 155–163, 200–202.

¹⁷ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 10, 32–33, 204.

¹⁸ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 162–163, 200–202.

of the Holy Spirit in those around them.¹⁹ In other words, Fowl recommends the additional control of waiting for one's fellow Christians, refusing to grow so impatient with other viewpoints that one allows disagreements to create divisions.

This overview offers four controls for spiritual exegesis. First, is material at hand given a special "prophetic" status that isolates it from other Christian texts? Second, is the work placed within the larger scope of the Christian narrative of God's character or is it allowed to effect unchecked interpretations? Third, how well is a text evaluated by its original context as linked to the witness of Christ? Fourth, does the text function as fodder for judgment of others or is it seen as a resource for reconciliation and forgiveness within the church? These controls become concrete tools with which to analyze whether or how recent addresses by Robert Duncan and Katharine Jefferts Schori fall into Barton's descriptions of irresponsible reading. Each text will be discussed according to how well it allows these major controls of spiritual exegesis to shape its scriptural interpretation.

Robert Duncan's Spiritual Exegesis of Prophecy: Three Instances

"Patient Exiles": Hope and a Future, 2005

I begin with Duncan's remarks at the opening of the Anglican Communion Network's (ACN) Hope and a Future Conference of 2005.²⁰ The conference sought to unite conservative Americans with like-minded Anglicans from around the world. One Hebrew Bible text plays a brief but pivotal role in this address. Duncan refers almost in passing to Jeremiah 29:11, a passage declaring that God knows the plans for God's people. This slice of scripture gives the entire meeting its title and purpose. Though the text is only referred to once and is not linked to the applications Duncan encourages his hearers to make, nevertheless the notion of God's plans for prospering the faithful as that has historically been linked to the person, message, and call of Christ underpins the entire talk. Duncan relies upon spiritual exegesis to anchor these points, applying this phrase from Jeremiah

¹⁹ Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 11.

²⁰ Robert W. Duncan, "Opening Remarks at Hope and a Future," Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 11, 2005; <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=3231#.UaYdarvLjxd>.

directly to the 2005 context of conservative Anglicans. He draws loosely upon a sense of the historical situation of the text when he references the exile of Israel, Jeremiah's ostensible backdrop, as analogous to the spiritual exile conservative American Anglicans felt in 2005.

Connected to this location of the text, Duncan offers dramatic images of conquest and exile: "The beautiful city of classical Anglicanism, in which we were raised or to which we had found our way, now lies in ruins. We have been taken captive, against our will, to a place we did not wish to go." He then moves the frame of reference outward, noting how the conference attendees long for nothing less than a "united, biblical, and missionary Anglicanism" along the way to the ultimate goal of the heavenly city. He places Jeremiah within "the wider Biblical witness about exiles and pilgrims" in order to caution his listeners against over-hasty action, against trusting anyone other than God for exile's resolution, and against believing that they alone are the righteous ones.

Duncan's address exemplifies several important controls governing his application of Jeremiah to the contemporary state of conservative Anglicans. First, he treats the text as part of a whole body of Christian literature. Second, he forges a brief connection of the passage to its historical setting, tying his spiritual interpretation to the original events. Third, he links Jeremiah's promise directly to the person and promises of Christ, the Christian fulfillment of Hebrew scripture. Finally, he reminds his listeners that to claim a connection to Christ entails personal reformation. In Duncan's approach, then, a notion of the prophetic does not overtake other types of scriptural literature or narrative. He subjects his reading of Jeremiah to Origen's overarching concern that Christology set the parameters for retrieval of the passage. In addition, he demonstrates adherence to Vanhoozer's controls: he roots his use of Jeremiah in an understanding that the Christ who fulfills Jeremiah as the ultimate plan of God also sets the bar for his followers' virtue. Duncan's repeated calls for patience with Christ meet Fowl's criteria as well, stressing that a concern for ecclesial unity will eventually win out as long as the conservatives remain holy in their wait.

"The Union Created by Righteousness": ACN, 2006

The Anglican Communion Network met again in Pittsburgh in 2006. At this point, though some had already left its oversight, the

group still largely saw itself as a movement *within* the Episcopal Church.²¹ Duncan anchors his welcoming remarks with material from another Hebrew text, 2 Isaiah. The verses from the 43rd chapter, speaking of God making a way in the wilderness so that God's people may escape imprisonment and embody their call to praise God, are read only once as the address's opening inspiration. Duncan refers back to this text at a few points, when he roots the work of the ACN within Isaiah's description of return from exile.²²

As before, a strong emphasis on a spiritual interpretation of the text, imported directly into ACN's 2006 setting, undergirds the entire talk. Duncan jumps immediately into isolating a spiritual sense of the text, which he then claims as descriptive of the ACN's self-understanding. He is willing to claim that the ACN are "the orthodox" Anglican presence in the United States and that their previous prayers for guidance and clarity have already been answered, since the "repentance and return" of the Episcopal Church is no longer a possibility after the General Convention of June 2005.

No longer focusing on what it means to be faithful in exile, Duncan's choice of the passage from Isaiah 43 demonstrates his belief that conservatives' struggles will soon be over. His emphasis on reformation of behavior among his listeners is meant to qualify them to be led by God into the new thing close at hand. His theology of spiritual exile has turned a corner of sorts from 2005, because now he can state that "in the longer run, there is no question that these congregations [withdrawing from the Episcopal Church] will form the nucleus of new missionary dioceses in union with the Network Dioceses ('enduring ECUSA') and in partnership with the jurisdictions of Common Cause, as the vision of a biblical, missionary and united Anglicanism in North America—in God's time—becomes a reality, and as 'innovating ECUSA' fades away."

²¹ Those who took positions under other provinces as missions to the United States could remain involved with the ACN but not in an official capacity; Duncan makes reference to this when he announces that one board member would step down to take up a bishopric in the United States under Nigerian authority. See Miranda K. Hassett's discussion of the wider context: *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and Their African Allies Are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 71–166.

²² Robert W. Duncan, "Opening Address at Third ACN Council," Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, July 31, 2006; <http://www.virtueonline.org/portal/modules/news/article.php?storyid=4551#.UG4W09CXTxd>.

Duncan's exegesis of this text demonstrates fewer interpretive controls than his 2005 Hope and a Future address. He reads the passage from Isaiah more strongly as a special part of scripture warranting its own type of interpretation—a manner that moves more in the direction of the preconceived notions of “the prophetic” that Barton criticizes. In this talk, reading for a sense of God's overarching plans has become constricted, as the passage is taken only in reference to the localized plight of conservative Anglicans. In addition, Duncan bypasses any reference to the historical context of Isaiah 43 in favor of directly connecting the plight of conservatives in American Anglicanism with the audience of 2 Isaiah.

What steadies this address, however lightly it is spelled out, is a sense of how virtues in the line of Christ fulfill the original passage under consideration. Duncan's strong sense of the general call to Christians to faithfulness, repentance, and patience in practical theological terms provides ballast to his exegesis, even where he fails to make the connection between his chosen scripture text and the exhortations he gives. Though he does not forge the links between Christ and these verses in a manner Vanhoozer would support, the righteousness he exhorts of his listeners fits Fowl's criteria. Duncan's stress on the personal requirements placed on all followers of Christ keeps his exegesis from tilting into full-blown polemics, but his trajectory of reading has definitely begun to list. Once he has identified the Episcopal Church as a group no longer being used by God, and the Anglican Communion Network as God's chosen people, a narrowing of scriptures into polemic ammunition becomes inevitable. By 2008 and our next text, Duncan's initially irenic posture shifts even further.

“Break Through the Gate”: ACNA's Beginnings, 2008

This final piece is an inclusion of what Duncan termed “a prophecy” in a 2008 diocesan newsletter.²³ The prophecy originated from Mark Stibbe, a clergyman in England who had long been a friend of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, so attributing it to Duncan is a bit problematic; nevertheless, Duncan's identification of the text as prophecy, his decision to run it in place of his usual front-page update, and the

²³ Robert W. Duncan, “The Year of the Gate,” *Trinity: The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh* 29, no. 1 (February/March 2008): 2; http://www.pitanglican.org/media/Trinity_1-08_v5.pdf.

weight he places on the text as revelatory of God's direction for conservatives remain significant.

Here, the texts of Isaiah 62:10 ("Pass through, pass through the gates! Prepare the way for the people. Build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations") and Micah 2:13 ("One who breaks open the way will go up before them; they will break through the gate and go out. Their king will pass through before them, the LORD at their head") function as the warrant for exhortations to leave the Episcopal Church and predictions that doing so will win God's favor. Stibbe uses a defining feature (the number 8 in the calendar year), searches for its possible linguistic significance, and finds two—very short, isolated—passages in Hebrew scripture that seem to address that significance. Both the texts chosen for the piece have to do with the idea of a gate, which Stibbe, ostensibly using midrashic practices, has determined is the spiritual significance of the year 2008. The term-concept "gate" becomes in this spiritual sense the previous hindrances that must now be passed through or actively triumphed over. As Stibbe expounds on the original texts, the struggles inherent to remaining within the Episcopal Church are rebranded as slavery, as impediments to God's plans. With this reframing of conflict, Duncan and his diocese are empowered to finally break from whatever has bound them.

But many other passages in the Hebrew Bible deal with the notion of gates and would give rise to a very different exegesis! In this case, passages consonant with an *already chosen* interpretation were clearly selected. This text, then, depicts Stibbe and Duncan entering uncharted territory, as they permit no outside controls to shape their spiritual exegesis. Hebrew texts are now read in a special manner isolating them from the overarching messages of the rest of Christian scripture. No links are forged between these passages and other scriptures. Contra Origen, no mention is made of salvation history or Christology in order to ground the interpretation taken. God's overarching plans are not referenced or acknowledged in any scope beyond that of the immediate needs facing the Pittsburgh diocese. God's character is not addressed in any sense beyond that as affirmer of whatever the diocese decides.

In addition, Duncan and Stibbe's approach does not touch any data derived from historical-critical study of the passages used as support for Stibbe's injunctions; rather, they treat the selections from Isaiah and Micah as offering most importantly a spiritual meaning held

in common and intended for later amplification. The historical setting of the passages in question is thus not allowed to make any appearance in their interpretation, giving rise to a polemical interpretation which violates Vanhoozer's call for continuity between the historical and the ethical-spiritual. Perhaps most damaging of all, in violation of Fowl's control the character formation Duncan previously stressed has completely dropped away. A mode of reading for prediction of the future within this narrow context sets the bar for immediate ethical instruction. In short, a specific argument has been prepackaged with these two scripture passages, with the rationale for this approach given quite clearly: "And I sensed the Holy Spirit saying simply this."

It is perhaps not surprising that Duncan placed so much weight on Stibbe's words. Here was a clergyperson offering an approving perspective on disassociating from within the heart of the Anglican establishment. Since Stibbe's prophecy identifies the conservative Americans as "the true church," Pittsburgh could rest assured that just by hearing these words, they could enjoy divine sanction for their actions. By offering this text to his diocese, Duncan teaches that breaking out of existing gates, existing structures, has now become necessary in order to obey God. And such a rupture is, of course, exactly what happened, eventually resulting in the creation of the ACNA.²⁴

While Duncan's later practices appear questionable, as I said above, difficulties with exegesis are not so easily confined within one stream of American Anglicanism. When we examine three of Katharine Jefferts Schori's uses of "the prophets," we see how widespread such practices do in fact run.

Katharine Jefferts Schori and the Prophetic Way: Three Examples

"Prophetic Work Brings Abundant Life": London, 2010

The first example of Jefferts Schori's exegesis is her homily at St. Paul's Cathedral in London in 2010. This selection was preached on July 25, the Feast of St. James, drawing on the readings from

²⁴ Many complicated and difficult factors were involved in the eventual decision, among them the fact that at this point, Duncan was also being charged with abandoning his duties as a bishop. Nevertheless, my understanding is that the charge appeared after the initial vote by the diocese to break away, and it was only upheld by the Episcopal Church after the diocese finalized this vote.

Jeremiah 45:1–5, Psalm 7, Acts 11:27–12:3, and Matthew 20:20–28.²⁵ In this sermon, Jefferts Schori expounds on the passage from Matthew, where James and John ask to be seated at the right hand of Christ and receive instead the injunction to serve as Christ himself will exemplify. In her take, the work of God's kingdom that Christ describes in this passage can be defined as "prophetic" along a trajectory stemming from Jeremiah: it comprises advancing the commonweal of God, in which "dignity for all is a deeply divine warrant" and in which is realized the "more abundant life for the whole world" that marks God's mission. This work, she admits, remains "often deeply unpopular and challenging" and can lead to danger. Yet such work responds to the call of the Spirit by rising to whatever current need faces God's people: "Prophetic work helps to restore the dignity of creation, and acknowledges that creation reflects the utter dignity of the creator." For Jefferts Schori, "prophetic work is about challenging human systems that ignore or deny the innate dignity of all of God's creation"; she cites Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Bishop Senyonjo as key examples of the prophetic fight for dignity for all God's people.

Here, Jefferts Schori's exegetical practices certainly fall into the category of spiritual interpretation; the substance of the entire homily relies upon the idea that the listener can enter into the world of "the prophetic" as discerned in the scripture readings. However, this presupposition runs the risk of violating Barton's control: though she does not overtly privilege the lectionary's Old Testament reading, she has clearly determined that there is such a thing as a "prophetic" genre which has its roots in the Hebrew Bible and can be traced through Christian literature. By making this claim and by connecting it to Christology, Jefferts Schori builds an exegetical foundation for the "prophetic" as a concept upon which Christ's actions are seen to rest. Though she does not call out specific examples other than the positive list she offers, the sense remains that people can now be classified on the basis of this homily as either "prophetic" or as not validly engaged Christians. She walks a fine line in relation to Origen's controls: she does connect the lectionary texts to each other and to a sense of

²⁵ Katharine Jefferts Schori, sermon given at the Cathedral of St. Paul, London, England, on July 25, 2010; <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/notice/episcopal-church-presiding-bishop-katharine-jefferts-schori-st-paul%C2%92s-cathedral-london>.

the Christian salvation narrative, but her homily focuses less on God's character and more on what persons achieve.

In a similar manner, her methods do not quite meet Vanhoozer's criteria. Despite the sense of Christian history and development here, the standard which she uses to engage the Hebrew text's relation to other scriptures is an abstract ideal of "the prophetic," not the actual text itself. Even as the primary Christian mission work is distilled as honoring the dignity of all people, this task is linked to the notion of being "prophetic," not to the person of Christ or the trajectory of Christian theology. This decision means that "the prophetic" can be redefined as the primary hallmark of Christian identity, even if the link to Christian texts to warrant such definitions withers. As to Fowl's criteria, this homily does display a strong sense of the need to wait for and work with other Christians across a wide variety of issues. Jefferts Schori's citation of multiple exemplars of Christian goodness from across denominational lines, geographic locations, and methods of working for justice makes that aspect of this homily a strong example of how to read Hebrew texts for Christian unity and mission. The next text, however, misses this important control and as a result, loses sight of the others.

"A Community of Prophets": General Convention, 2012

My second instance of Jefferts Schori's spiritual exegesis comes in her address to the Episcopal Church's 77th General Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 2012. This homily centers on Ezekiel 2:1–5, Psalm 123, 2 Corinthians 12:2–10, and Mark 6:1–13.²⁶ In this text, Jefferts Schori bases her remarks primarily on the passages from Ezekiel and Mark. She calls her listeners to identify with the message of Ezekiel as descriptive of what it means to be a Christian. Once again, the mission of Jesus is presented as a primary example of this prophetic identity: "When Jesus is called a prophet, it has to do with erasing the boundary between God and human flesh. Prophetic words of comfort or challenge urge a kind of frontier work—getting across the fence between fear and possibility, reconciling division, transforming injustice, urging the lost onto the road home." Jefferts Schori encourages

²⁶ Katharine Jefferts Schori, sermon given at the UTO Ingathering and Festival Eucharist for the 77th General Convention of the Episcopal Church, Indianapolis, Indiana, on July 8, 2012; <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/notice/general-convention-july-8-sermon-presiding-bishop-katharine-jefferts-schori>.

her audience to see their hands as prophetic hands, as a “sacrament of God’s mission” to impart prophetic communication across five areas: announcing God’s reign, teaching, healing, challenging injustice, and tending creation. “Those five marks of mission are the work and mark of prophets, of all Jesus’ friends and their partners.” As she closes her sermon, she tells the gathering—the clergy and lay leaders of the Episcopal Church—that as they fulfill this calling, the world will know them to be “a whole community of prophets.”

This homily showcases a significant extension of Jefferts Schori’s theology of “the prophetic” by subsuming the Christian mission as a whole into this sense of prophecy. The link between the texts and Episcopalians can be forged through participation in practices assumed to be capable of being lifted straight out of Ezekiel into today because they belong to the same category. More than this, demonstrating the gaps between what is and what ought to be, while termed the work “so characteristic of prophets,” is given no parameters. Left unarticulated are the steps that would enable the audience to discern the contours of “what ought to be” in whatever arena may come up for consideration. In addition, no boundaries to “the prophetic” are given, simply assurances that prophetic work can be glimpsed just as much in corrections given to political discourse by concerned persons of faith as in the Episcopal Church Women projects. While neither of these particular venues offers cause for alarm, the lack of explanation as to what markers would define such work means that prophetic action becomes a slippery notion. As an attempt to qualify the characteristics of such work, Jefferts Schori references “God’s dream” for the world multiple times in this sermon, but the full outlines of what that dream entails beyond the five mission markers are left unspecified.

In this sermon, the earlier sense of “the prophetic” as a separate genre, calling, and vocation burgeons further, violating Barton’s control of exegesis. Jesus Christ’s mission receives more attention than in the 2010 homily, but in this analysis, his entire existence falls under the separate “prophetic” category. By designating his life and mission a subset of the wider “prophetic” category, Jefferts Schori’s exegesis risks subsuming the person of Christ under an abstract category. Therefore, detailed probing into what Christ chooses to do or to refrain from doing remains unexplored. As a result, in this take the control from Origen fades from view.

Thirdly, Vanhoozer’s sense of reading a text in its original location and allowing that to chasten subsequent ecclesial discussion has

likewise lessened. A particular notion of “the prophetic” becomes the plumb line for exegesis and ethical guidelines, but the notion itself remains fuzzy and therefore susceptible to polemical use. Laying claim to “the prophetic” stance as a potential justification for a wide range of actions—perhaps even incorrect ones—becomes more probable, and carefully discerned restrictions as to appropriate Christian behavior are overlooked. Finally, then, adherence to Fowl’s control of waiting for others, of seeking reconciliation, and of subjecting oneself to the demands one reads in the text also appears to slip. Self-critique appears impossible once one group has been termed a “community of prophets”—if this is the case for the Episcopal Church’s own self-understanding, any sense of needing chastening from those who might hold differing views or of discerning with those others has been vanquished. Once this prophetic identity has been claimed *carte blanche* for an entire ecclesial community, as this homily appears to do in its characterization of the Episcopal Church, that community’s righteousness becomes a matter of presumption.

“To be a Prophet is to Navigate Differently”: Spokane, 2012

The final selection from Jefferts Schori is her December 2012 homily on a visit to Spokane, Washington. This sermon, given on Advent 2 in Year C, was based mostly on the Luke 3:1–6 passage, although the other readings for the day include Baruch or Malachi selections as options.²⁷ Although Jefferts Schori references “prophetic work” multiple times in her text, her only mention of scripture comes with a nod to the Lukan selection chronicling the beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry. The sermon spends a great deal of time discussing the nature of prophets as “edgy,” “liminal, borderline,” or “crazy” in their quest to change society. She terms the work this time as that which “shows every creature of God [is] equally close to the divine heart” and which ensures that “all flesh shall see the salvation of God—all flesh, not just you or me or the folks we think are like us.” She refers to addiction treatment, a local shelter, and a local farm as instances where “prophetic work, building a road for the prince of peace” can be seen taking place. She uses vivid imagery as guiding

²⁷ Katharine Jefferts Schori, sermon given at the Cathedral of St. John, Spokane, Washington, on December 9, 2012; <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/pb/cathedral-st-john-advent-2c>.

metaphors for prophetic work: leveling highways, finding the right map, navigating differently.

Here, Jefferts Schori's emphasis on the central role of "prophetic" work continues to set the tone and content of her teachings. Once again, an abstract notion of "the prophetic" ostensibly derived from Hebrew texts anchors how she handles the rest of the lectionary. More strongly than before, this special role receives most of her attention, a practice that unhinges her exegesis from that of the earliest Christians as well as from the bulk of Christian tradition. Furthermore, very little material ties the lectionary or her sermon into discussion of who God is, although the scriptures for the day would certainly have allowed such reflection.

Additionally, no grounding of the texts for the day in their original context shapes the direction of the sermon as a whole. In fact, the abstract sense of "the prophetic" as summary of what all scripture is about has so thoroughly taken over the texts in question that only a few brief references to Luke are offered as warrant for her claims. Baruch/Malachi's emphasis on repentance, the Psalm for the day, and the passage from Philippians are not mentioned at all. As John Barton points out, any success of movements such as liberation theology rests in large part not upon their being a "totally new thing" but upon carefully demonstrating that these positions were evident in the scriptural texts *all along*.²⁸ Without a commitment to those scriptures within their contexts, Christian theology languishes. But here, Jefferts Schori's earlier habit of reading selections from the Hebrew Bible as "prophetic" opens the door to conceive of all scripture and the whole of Christian teaching as a special mode of behavior discernible only by a particular type of exegesis.

Finally, though some positive asides mention exemplars of "prophetic" work, no discussion ensues of how the church as an entity concerned with justice is to shape or govern itself in line with a Christocentric fulfillment of Baruch, Malachi, Luke, or Philippians. The most that can be said are exhortations to get involved with other, certainly worthwhile but extra-ecclesial organizations. This ellipsis means that the church, as driving motivator to its members to make ready the kingdom of God, might nevertheless escape the "prophetic" injunctions to accept those who disagree. If the church's sole focus is to

²⁸ John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 158–164.

push its people into prophetic work, and if prophetic work is primarily found in particular socio-political organizations, the church as a whole may disband, or at least cease to sit under its own ethical standards. The theological content here paves the way for polemics against dissenting Anglicans, and these kinds of behaviors have indeed begun to be documented.²⁹

In other words, “prophecy” as polemics is alive and well in both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in North America: the one employs the concept to justify overriding or punishing dissenting opinions, and the other utilizes the notion to rationalize a break in relationship. In both instances, judgments as to the other’s unsatisfactory status as Christian have been made, with prophetic texts pressed into service as warrant for such labels.

Prophecy without Polemics? Evaluation and Conclusion

The analyses above depict how pressures and disappointments can lessen the reliance of spiritual interpretation upon its necessary underpinnings. It would be difficult to attempt to isolate one of the four spiritual exegesis controls as the most crucial element upon which the other three hinge. Loss of any one control tends to cascade into removal of the other three; their relationship is mutually informing and sets a multi-pronged goal for exegesis. The jettisoning of these controls by both Duncan and Jefferts Schori entails the corruption of exegesis along very similar lines through two quite different narratives. The results are polemics, closed systems of exegesis, and the hardening of disagreements into division.

Nevertheless, one last word remains. As of this writing, both the Anglican Church in North America and the Episcopal Church use the same readings for Ash Wednesday services, one of which is Isaiah 58:1–12. Here, by way of conclusion, I offer a counter-exegesis that follows the four controls set out above and seeks to address the contemporary situation facing Anglicanism.

²⁹ See Jefferts Schori’s January 2013 sermon characterizing a dissenting bishop’s behavior as “not terribly far from the state of mind evidenced in school shootings”: <http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2013/01/26/presiding-bishops-preaches-to-episcopalians-in-south-carolina/>. In early spring 2013, the Anglican Communion Institute reported intimidation tactics used against those who disagreed with certain interpretations the Episcopal Church has given canon law as well as copyright infringement in the South Carolina case; see the reports at their website, www.anglicancommunioninstitute.com.

In the context of difficulties arising from harmonizing the returned wealthy with the poor who had remained in the lands around Jerusalem, Isaiah 58 notes that God does not listen to fasting because “on your fast days you pursue your own interests, you oppress all your workers. Look, your fasting leads only to disputes and quarrels and striking with vicious fists. The fast you are keeping today will not give you a hearing on high” (58:3–4).³⁰ Joseph Blenkinsopp’s investigations highlight the context: Isaiah 58 is a piece written in Judah, most likely in the first century of Persian rule, and it appears to be an interweaving of several homiletic texts or an extension of one original piece.³¹ Blenkinsopp remarks:

The reader of 56–66 soon becomes aware that the dominant frame of mind of the people being addressed is one of disorientation and disillusionment. . . . Even if we make all due allowance for homiletic hyperbole, the message is that engagement in traditional religious practices—fasting, sacrifice, Sabbath—remains at the level of mere formality. . . . There are few if any signs of moral regeneration. Religious leaders are self-indulgent and neglect their responsibilities.³²

Furthermore, the fact that divine kingship takes the place of aspirations for the restoration of the native dynasty reveals that the successors to the traditions of Isaiah 40–55 “were looking for transformation beyond the more or less calculable or imaginable course of political movements and events.”³³ Instead, the driving impetus of Isaiah 56–66 remains the fact that salvation is dependent upon moral regeneration; nevertheless, this process is hampered by the religious leaders’ exploitations of the poor and marginalization of others.³⁴

The passage selected for the observance of Ash Wednesday begins with the reference to the sounding of the trumpet just as in Hosea 8, Ezekiel 33, and Amos 3; this signifies the confrontation of the people with their social sin by the prophet.³⁵ Yet this prophet is a preacher,

³⁰ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, Volume 19B (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 7.

³¹ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 43, 73, 176.

³² Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 77.

³³ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 81.

³⁴ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 86–88.

³⁵ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 177.

Blenkinsopp stresses, and the text demonstrates this transformation as well as the inauguration of ecclesiastical literature. As the text confronts the use of fasting in self-interest, true religious observance is revealed: that which alleviates the needs of those suffering.³⁶

In the first step for interpreting this selection in light of the four controls developed above, the church must disavow placing a lens of “prophetic” over this material. Instead, Isaiah 58:1–12 should be read as one piece of the complicated sets of texts and historical occasions that make up the Christian narrative. By reclaiming the text as a piece of literature that remains subject to interpretive guidelines, rather than as part of a special genre that makes its own rules, the church can more faithfully read Isaiah 58.

Next, consonant with Origen’s discussion of exegesis, this passage can be interpreted as a warning to the people of God: possession of the markers of God’s gifted salvation can still become an avenue of sin, just as oppression plagues those who dwell in the promised land. God’s true character is revealed as care for those who suffer and fairness and generosity in all dealings. God’s salvation is so comprehensive in scope that it encompasses the afflicted and calls those who wish to participate in such redemption to act in accordance with God’s preferences. In addition, the true fasting in line with God’s character is that which Christ exemplifies in his ministry. Only Christ fulfills the demands of Isaiah 58, and he becomes the ultimate model for Christian readers of this passage.

Reading with Vanhoozer’s control in extension of Origen’s exegetical boundaries, an allegorical take on this passage could extend it to the contemporary Anglican situation, but only in line with the original historical context. Therefore, the church’s reading of this passage must take stock of the failure the people of God experienced even when they returned to the place God prepared for them and were engaged in what they thought was God’s work. In addition, neither the Episcopal Church nor the Anglican Church in North America can read this passage as warrant to cast themselves as the only true inheritors of rightful fasting. Instead, in the wake of Christ’s ministry as the ultimate fulfillment of this passage, the church should see itself as the people of God in Judah who struggle with enacting reconciliation and justice. Just as Isaiah 58’s audience needed to set aside their hopes for a king of their own dynasty and face the fact that their attempts to

³⁶ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 178–180.

rebuild the temple would not be blessed when they ignored injustice, the church today must grapple with its inability to provide God's presence a resting place when it remains divided and unjust to its own members.

Anglicans can also acknowledge polemical uses of this passage against Judaism and Catholicism as instances where a limited frame of reference occluded God's scope of salvation and produced abhorrent behavior among those who called themselves followers of Christ. Rather than casting the Anglican Church in North America as a homophobic oppressor of sexual minorities or the Episcopal Church as a godless destroyer of ecclesial tradition, the two "halves" of Anglicanism in the United States can read this passage as a reminder that their divisive behavior negates their witness to God.³⁷

Finally, then, we come to Fowl's sets of controls. Acknowledging the uses to which this passage has been put in the past, both positive and polemic, American Anglicans can strive to determine what manners of reading would best build up the church as the community of Christ. As the text appears in the Ash Wednesday liturgy, the two factions of Anglicanism in the United States could reclaim this text as a guide to repentance for the disputes, quarrels, slanders, and "striking with wicked fists" that have so characterized their dealings over the past ten years. In line with Fowl's suggestions, Anglicans can encounter this text as a call to admit where they have gone astray in their treatment of each other and of the worldwide Anglican Communion, as a goad to ask for forgiveness from those whom they have wronged, and as a guide for reframing ecclesial unity. As long as more than one Anglican jurisdiction remains in the United States, and as long as this text is read by those factions, Isaiah 58 persists as an instrument of God's call to true fasting, accessible through the bounded reading of scripture and capable of being fostered by the common liturgical practices that characterize the Anglican Communion.

The *Windsor Report* called for just this type of thoughtful and prayerful study of scripture to be undertaken by all people within the Communion, with special emphasis given to the task of those in ordained ministry to engage scripture through historical interpretation,

³⁷ For a summary of Isaiah 58's use in Christian tradition, see Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 56–66, 73–88. For contemporary application, see §28 of the *Windsor Report*, where the situations wracking the Anglican Communion are briefly evaluated in light of their impact on ecumenical relations.

exploration of different meanings, and loyalty to the community of the church across time and space.³⁸ Finally, the report enjoined Anglicans to read and learn together from scripture by listening carefully, testing everything, and preparing to change positions if convincing cases are made for new interpretations.³⁹ As this essay has detailed, Anglicans in general, and particularly those in the United States, demonstrate an increasing inability to undertake this work of patient and sustained reading.

In an important sense, it has been the task of this essay to propose that the practice of spiritual exegesis, as bounded by its traditional multifaceted controls, can fulfill the *Windsor Report's* directive when it is retrieved as an instrument of patience, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Even with recent ecclesial divisions becoming solidified in the United States, a fair amount of flexibility remains in the worldwide Anglican Communion due to its current widespread instability. This less than desirable state of affairs offers a surprising opportunity for union to be forged in even the unlikeliest of places, across ideological and jurisdictional boundaries. It should be stressed that the union capable of being forged through a renewal of this kind of interpretation of Scripture does not ignore serious difficulties and differences or even demand total consensual agreement, but rather works along the lines Ephraim Radner describes in *A Brutal Unity*, where, in imitation of Jesus Christ, we embrace those with whom we do not agree, neither ignoring sin and enmity nor allowing that sin and enmity to curtail our embracing.⁴⁰ As spiritual exegesis is rightly retained and exercised, new walls between the Anglican Church in North America and the Episcopal Church, between “liberal North” and “conservative South,” may prove more permeable than they now appear, and new potentials for unity may arise.

³⁸ *Windsor Report*, §57–60.

³⁹ *Windsor Report*, §60–61.

⁴⁰ Ephraim Radner, *A Brutal Unity: The Spiritual Politics of the Christian Church* (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2012), 428–429 and 443–447.

