



## A Royal Priesthood

Following the Coronation, we look at how the pulling apart of Christianity and Judaism shaped this week's readings

Martin Luther (1483 - 1546) claimed that the first letter of Peter is "*one of the noblest books in the New Testament*" and believed that it contained all that it is necessary for a Christian to know. Peter's letters are, however, often given less attention than Paul's celebrated epistles, shuffled away as they are at the back of the New Testament.

In the context of the Coronation, my sermon focused upon Peter's words of assurance to the Christian communities in Asia Minor (now Turkey): "*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people...*" (1 Peter 2:9). I did not get a chance to discuss how this echoes God's words to Moses: "*Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the people. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.*" (Exodus 19:5-6) The allusion is perhaps to encourage non-Jewish Christians with the good news that they too had been grafted *into* the nation of Israel as a result of Jesus's resurrection.

On this basis perhaps we could say that Christianity was, from its outset, a multi-faith project.

It is often assumed that there was a clean break between the new Christian believers and Jews shortly after the events recorded in the Book of Acts, but the reality is muddier. For much of the first century, followers of Jesus were made up of a sect within Judaism along with non-Jewish Gentiles. Following the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE attitudes hardened. The history is difficult to fathom, but a series of fractures opened up leading to the separation.

It is clear that the parting of the ways was a painful one and did much to shape the anti-Jewish rhetoric which marks much of John's gospel. The horrors of anti-Semitism continue to this day. Christians therefore need to read their Bibles with care, particularly given the shared histories of the two faiths.

## Reflections

- How have you seen the Gospel at work in the Coronation?
- What does Jesus's claim that *"No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6) mean to you?
- How might the shared history between Jews and Christians shape how we look to engage with other faiths and traditions?
- Christian thinker Michael F. Bird recently wrote, *"Secularism is a good thing. Secularism is about creating space for people of all faiths and none. Secularism means that there are some places where religion is not allowed to matter like in government. And there are places that are immune from government interference in religion."* Do you agree or disagree?

## Resources

The focus of the sermon was inter-faith dialogue, a crucial subject for believers and non-believers alike. A good place to start thinking about this knotty topic is Alan Race's [Making Sense of Religious Pluralism](#) (London: SPCK, 2013).

If you are looking for good primer on the Monarchy and the Church, I'd recommend Catherine Pepinster's [Defenders of the Faith](#) (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2022). It sets out a readable history from Henry VIII to Charles III.

I'll confess to occasionally struggling with John's gospel, particularly its more strident passages. I found David F Ford's [The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021) deeply liberating, as it provides a rich, prayerful reading. Ford's recent appearance on the Talking Theology podcast is a nice sampler of his approach: [Why Should we Continually Reread the Gospel of John?](#)

Given the anti-Judaism of John's gospel, I also found Adele Reinhartz's [Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John](#) (London: Continuum, 2001) a helpful book. Reinhartz offers a refreshing, open-minded and deeply loving reflection on a text that is obviously close to her heart.

In the same spirit, it is often helpful to reflect on passages of Scripture through both Christian and Jewish lenses. Episode 154 of the Bible for Normal People podcast - [How Jews and Christians Read the Bible Differently](#) - is one of my favourites. Guests Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Brettler discuss how Christians and Jews approach Scripture differently.

If you also want to take a deep dive into Peter's first letter, you might consider spending some time reading [Peter 1](#) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), the commentary by my namesake, Karen Jobes (no relation, as far as I am aware).

**Links to these resources are imbedded into the electronic copy. Just click on the underlined words.**