# *Introduction*

*Andrew W. Hass*

As this new millennium began to take root, three texts emerged from a single author that marked out a very different way to consider the sacred: David Jasper's *The Sacred Desert* (2004), *The Sacred Body* (2009) and *The Sacred Community* (2012).[1] These at first glance appear to be theological texts – the author is himself a practising theologian, both within the Academy and the Church – but soon into the pages of any one of these volumes the reader quickly realises that the author is not presenting theology in any conventional sense. Theology is being reworked. At the end of the last millennium, the theological stratagems of tradition, handed down through the long and august history of Christianity, had gone through the rollers and wringers of a critical apparatus designated in a varied manner by sometimes loosely, sometimes vigorously applied 'post-' adjectives (poststructuralist, postmodern, postmetaphysical, post-human, post-Christian, etc.). As a result, theology in this young millennium is having a reckoning. How do its remaining practitioners account for any theological enterprise in a world where the very foundations of theological assumption struggle to find any solid grounds for legitimacy, whether philosophically or culturally? Many have given up the task. Others have tried to reclaim orthodoxy. Still others continue to test new definitions or permutations, now under a banner that, in consolidating the previous decades of 'post-' labels, allows the question of *theos* to remain open: the postsecular. Jasper, for his part, and as one who helps to define this postsecular, seizes upon the sacred.

The following collection of essays position themselves, either explicitly or implicitly, over against Jasper's three texts, in an attempt to advance their exploration into what the sacred might mean within today's world.

[1] David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); *The Sacred Body: Asceticism in Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009); *The Sacred Community: Art, Sacrament, and the People of God* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).

We might say the *mode* of this exploration is postsecular; or, we might say the nature of the sacred is now postsecular. What we would mean by this term is what, even if tacitly, these essays seek to express, namely, that the old antagonism between 'the religious' and 'the secular', so strongly characteristic of the last century, has given way, under the precarity of both sides, to a certain mutual reliance, in which neither side can afford to ignore the other if it is to survive. That they should survive, as categories, is a question of immense and ongoing debate. For the secular, however defined, is not a world that operates, or has ever operated, outside the religious, and by the same token the religious, however defined, is not a world that operates, or has ever operated, outside the secular. If the earlier 'post-' strategies revealed anything, it was just such co-implication. Might the idea of the sacred be the very place at which these two sides now converge in their mutuality? Or, as Jasper suggests, are enacted? And is that enactment as much artistic as it is theological or liturgical, as it is philosophical or theoretical, as it is ideological or political, as it is social or cultural? The necessary interdisciplinary space in which this question must be asked shapes the contours of each essay to follow.

It also shapes theology's reckoning. This means theology, as a cultural practice, not only must reckon with the secular, but, and perhaps less obviously, must also reckon with the religious. Here too the sacred comes into its own anew.

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The concept of the 'sacred' is no stranger to the forensics of modern academic study. Examinations have steadily appeared since the advent of cultural anthropology, or at least since William Robertson Smith who, as Durkheim reminded us, was the first to shed light on the ambiguity inherent within the notion of the sacred.[2] In fact, it was the field of Religious Studies where the sacred as a *sui generis* concept properly developed. And it was that field that transformed the Latin *sacer* into something flushed of any theological import: the 'sacral', and then, later, in its substantive form, 'sacrality' became a central religious phenomenon. Studies of this phenomenon have been plentiful, and continue apace. Of course, theology has always had its say. But what Christian theology has

[2] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2008), p. 409. Durkheim was referring to Smith's *Lectures on the Religions of the Semites* (1889). For a discussion of Robertson Smith and Durkheim's sense of ambiguity, see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 75–8.

meant by the sacred has been very different from the prohibitory structures and taboos, the cultic rites and sacrificial performances, the totemism and nature worship, the sanctified modalities and sacrosanct spaces of the *homo religiosus*. Christian sacredness has been largely understood within the aura of sacramentalism or, especially for the Scholastics and Reformers, as the marker of revelation. Theology, by these accounts, is by nature itself sacred, for God's very reason, and the laws by which His created world is structured and revealed to us, function as manifestation of the sacred order. Aquinas speaks of a science separate from philosophical science, 'a sacred science [sacra doctrina] learned through revelation ... a sacred science established on principles revealed by God'.[3] To theologise the sacred is, in this context, a circular, redundant exercise.

It is precisely at the time when a distinct science of religion was emerging in the late nineteenth century that theology, and in particular Protestant theology, felt the need to qualify its sacred enterprise. In 1890s, the renowned Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Free University of Amsterdam and later Prime Minister of the Netherlands, was compelled to distinguish a clearly Reformed theology from those that were draining theology of its sacred character. In his *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, he justifies returning the epithet *Sancta* to *Theologia* on the grounds that theology had lost its special status through recent 'secularisation', by which he meant through those who reduce theology to a general revelation, and thereby invite 'profane literature' into its purview. 'By inserting *Sancta* before *Theologia* we desire it to be understood, that we take no part in the secularization of Theology, but maintain that it has a sphere of its own.'[4]

That sphere, however conceived, theology has not been able to maintain. The twentieth century was a long succession of battering against the sacred bulwark Kuyper had tried to erect in front of theology, already weakened by a science different to any Aquinas could have imagined. But theology has given way not because secularisation has proven the stronger, nor because science has vanquished religion. Theology has had to give way because of its own sacred character, which binds it inherently to that which

[3] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, i, 1–2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. edition, 1947), found at www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FP_Q1_A1.html, and www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.FP_Q1_A2.html; *Textum Leoninum Romae 1888 editum*, found at www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth1001.html. The entire *Summa* begins with this question of the *sacra doctrina*.

[4] Abraham Kuyper, *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology: Its Principles*, trans. J. Hendrik de Vries (Norwood, MA: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898; rev. ed. Benjamin C. Richards, 2008), p. 234.

is not its own proper sphere, at least in the sense that Kuyper had wished to maintain. It binds it to 'religion' in the differentiation that the young Karl Barth had already begun to see in his *Epistle to the Romans*, for whom revelation was paramount: the sacred is on par with religion as a human endeavour, that is, with the relationship of God and humanity seen from the vantage of the human, striving towards a righteousness it can never attain. Religion is of the flesh, not the Spirit, thus it 'neither overcomes human worldliness nor transfigures it'.[5] This is why the 'Church – if it be aware of itself and is serious – sets fire to a charge which blows up every sacred edifice which men have ever erected or can ever erect in its vicinity'.[6] The difference between Kuyper's Reformed position and Barth's Reformed position is that, though only separated by a few decades, the young Barth had clearly seen the 'Krisis' that marked the early twentieth century, with which theology, running from Luther all the way through to Dostoevsky, had finally and inexorably to reckon, the crisis of the existential self separated from the God who grounds it. That separation Barth would turn into a virtue, but only once we can find the means, dialectically, to overcome the divisions inherent to it, what Barth in the Preface to the Second Edition (1921) called 'a creative straining of the sinews' towards 'a relentless, elastic application' of a method still, by that time, strongly associated with Hegel.[7] That way, as instructed by Paul's letter to the Romans, is a move beyond the law of righteousness and towards *faith*. And thus it is for this reason Barth can write: 'Faith is neither religion nor irreligion, neither sacred nor profane; it is always both together.'[8]

Barth's sense of the sacred here already shows theology outside of itself. It continues, we might say, a line already started by Hegel and furthered by Ernst Troeltsch, and one that will reach its end point only once 'secularisation' had run its course and expired in the late twentieth century: a merger between religion and theology. In this merger we might see the sacred coming fully into its own. Here what we deem sacred as a phenomenon is that in which and through which 'sacredness' (under any definition) can also be undone, dismantled, or, in Barth's analogy, self-combusted. If the old sense of the sacred designated that which is set apart for, or marked by, divine activity, this new sense is more than a mere unification with its opposite, or what Tillich in *A Theology of Culture* (1957) would deem 'the disappearance of the gap between the sacred and the

[5] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 276. Cf. Romans 8:3–4.
[6] Ibid., p. 375. [7] Ibid., p. 8. [8] Ibid., p. 128.

secular realm'.[9] Divine activity rather becomes that marked by its own internal difference. Barth might have seen that difference in the gulf that separated human religious striving and God's revelatory Word. And the second half of the twentieth century might have seen that difference yet more radically, beyond Tillich, in a God who is internally riven, and whose transcendent self eventually abrogates itself, leaving only an immanent self consigned to the materiality, sociality and culturality of the world. In both cases, the sacred carries its own profane experience.

Another way to construe this new sacred reality was offered, with no minor influence, by René Girard. His *Violence and the Sacred* (1972) conceptualises this internal division differently: the more we try to master the strongest forces within ourselves, the more those forces get the better of us, and exceed us. 'The sacred consists of all those forces whose dominance over man increases or seems to increase in proportion to man's effort to master them.'[10] Violence is the paragon force here. And human violence outranks all others, even external forces in nature (tempests, forest fires, plagues and the like), because humans have managed to externalise their own violence as if it is independent of them, to see it 'as something exterior to man and henceforth as part of all the other outside forces that threaten man'. For this reason, Girard says, violence 'is the heart and secret soul of the sacred'.[11] This understanding of the sacred, with its 'generative violence', revives the duality of the pre-Christian *sacer* understood so well by Durkheim, whereby an accursed nature accompanies the consecrated nature. This is why Girard will argue later in his text that the sacred erases all differences.[12] For just as violence moves between victim and perpetrator, between individual and the collective, between humans and nature in a holistic, impartial manner, collapsing their distinction – what is external is really internal, and vice versa – so the sacred blends indistinguishably both human ordering and disordering, both divine construction and destruction, and thus ultimately both human endeavour and divine retribution. This allows Girard to make an audacious claim: 'As long as meaning is healthy, the sacred is absent.'[13] When differences are categorically clear, we can readily discern meaning, since meaning arises only within established differential systems (whether linguistic, social, legal, etc.). It is only when differences begin to blur – when, for example, the violence of

[9] Paul Tillich, *A Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 41.
[10] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 31.
[11] Ibid. [12] Ibid., p. 241. [13] Ibid.

nature's forces becomes sublimated as human need and intention – that we begin to speak of something that exceeds our capacity to master and control it, and therefore not to speak of it easily at all. This Girard calls the 'sacred'. And thus: 'We now know that the sacred reigns supreme wherever a cultural order has not yet taken hold, has only begun to take hold, or has lost its hold entirely.'[14] Following this dictum, we might then say that when the differences between religion and theology can no longer be easily discerned, when the cultural order that has kept these two spheres of operation distinct – the Academy and the Church – has finally disintegrated, and we struggle to find meaning in either, separately or jointly, the sacred reigns supreme.

Giorgio Agamben has taken the contradiction inherent in Girard's sense of the sacred – thriving most when it does violence to its own very meaning – and expanded it against the backdrop of violence in twentieth-century politics. Those in the ancient pre-Christian (Roman) world, Agamben informs us, worked from an understanding of the sacred in which either there was no separation between religious law and penal law, so that capital punishment could function in the same instance as a sacrifice to the gods, or there was no separation between the cursed and the venerated, so that what was seen as off limits and taboo was both something to be feared and something to be held in awe ('fear' in the biblical sense). *Homo sacer* became the epitome of these opposing directions in a single individual: the *homo sacer* could be killed with impunity, but could not be sacrificed. That is, it was an exception both to human law and to divine law.[15] Following Girard, Agamben's *homo sacer* thus confounds meaning: 'An enigmatic archaic Roman legal figure that seems to embody contradictory traits and therefore had to be explained thus begins to resonate with the religious category of the sacred when this category loses its significance and comes to assume contradictory meanings.'[16] It is from this contradiction that Agamben draws his conception of sovereignty and sovereign power: sovereignty originates from an exclusion to both human and divine law, a double exclusion that involves, necessarily, inclusion, or 'an excrescence of the profane in the religious and of the religious in the profane'.[17] And the life caught in this paradox is the original sacred life, even now if its sacredness expresses subjection to a power over its life. Agamben's sense of biopolitics converts the sacred into a life whose

[14] Ibid., p. 242. [15] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 72–3. [16] Ibid., p. 80. [17] Ibid., p. 83.

very exclusion (as 'bare life', Lear's 'unaccommodated man . . . a poor, bare, forked animal'[18]) is included in the political sphere, so that the sacred becomes the inclusion of the excluded.

Agamben's politico-philosophical enquiry suggests to us that there is a sacred mode of being, a mode with archaic origins, contradictory from the outset, yet one that finds its deepest and most disturbing distortion in the twentieth-century politics of National Socialist ideology. But we might also say it is precisely those politics, and the atrocities they led to, that unravelled sacred meaning comprehensively, or that promoted the breakdown in cultural order that Girard suggests has allowed, paradoxically, the sacred to reign supreme. In an earlier text, *The Coming Community*, Agamben speaks of 'the experience of being-*within* an *outside*', the 'being' here very much in reference to a mode, perhaps even a communal mode, but one that is not yet available.[19] If that mode is sacred, and it continues to reign, even in its unavailability, it is neither the ethnology/sociology of Girard nor the philosophy/politics of Agamben that has granted us full insight into its elusive characteristics, any more than it is the discipline of Religious Studies or the systems of theology. In other words, that mode exists outside traditional, established structures, whether they be mythical, political, metaphysical or ecclesiastical.

How then do we locate this outside, and what would it mean to dwell there? How can one dwell in the unavailable, either in Nietzschean terms, in what is still to be made, or in Heideggerian terms, in what by default fails to arrive, or in Derridean terms, in what is coming or still to come? How does one enter into this outside as a sovereign sacred mode, if it is outside anything we might have understood as sacred in any of our systems? How does one establish the *being* of the within that is without?

In his *Book of Hours*, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, still in his youth, gives us the image of a chorus of dancing angels whose music consumes the heavenly space in which God is to dwell. This image is one of both potency and unease. The poem (I, 18 – *The Book of a Monastic Life*) begins with the poet's admission: when he tries to paint God, God hardly takes notice. It first suggests what the iconoclasts have said for centuries, that the divine exceeds all art, all human rendition. But it suggests something further – God is not interested. And yet, as the poem proceeds, we see any disinterest is not because God is too far removed from human creation and creativity,

[18] William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, III, iv.
[19] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 68.

or that God represents a total freedom that is the wellspring of human creation and creativity (disinterested in the Kantian sense), but because God is displaced from His own dwelling. 'You are no longer in the midst of your splendour.'[20] The chorus of angels has dislocated God. These are, as Heidegger says, destitute times. God is living in His 'last house'. But where now is that dwelling, the divine displacement outside? The poet tells us that he himself has become the space or the 'room' in the eyes of God. And if the whole heavens are to listen for that God, they must listen now through the poet, but not the poet painting, not even the poet speaking or writing, but the poet meditating, and meditating in silence. Here the young Rilke gives us a sense of the sacred that is both within and without. His poem's lines are dense, evasive of clear meaning, but that is their power – they speak when they do not, consumed by their own music.

It is here, then, that a sense of a sacred reality might exist in a world for which God has been evicted from heaven, but still lingers, somewhere. In Rilke's poetic world, it is not science, or politics, or even theology that has issued the eviction. It is a chorus of dancing angels, God's own emissaries, singing His own praise. It is their very music that has pushed God to the outside of His own dwelling, as if that heaven is no longer worthy, and in doing so they have kept things sacred, even if it is a silent sacrality, in the same manner of what St John of the Cross calls a *musica callada*, a silent music.

In this sense Heidegger makes a correlation between Rilke's angels and Nietzsche's Zarathustra. It is the prophet who announces God's death (not merely His eviction) who also preserves God's sacredness. The retired last pope in the Fourth Part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* remarks on this paradox as he sees it in Zarathustra, the disbelieving one who is most pious, the godless one who dispenses sacred blessings. And to this Zarathustra can only say, with measured irony, 'Amen!'[21] But it is Zarathustra's earlier images in 'On the Three Metamorphoses' of the First Part that reveals to us the more precise nature of this paradox: in the last two metamorphoses (from camel to lion and from lion to child), the creation of freedom and the freedom of creation are found respectively in the lion who offers a sacred 'No' to duty and compulsion ('thou shalt') and in the child who offers a sacred 'Yes' to 'a new beginning' and 'the game of creation'.[22] Like

[20] 'Du bist nicht mehr inmitten deines Glanzes' – Rainer Maria Rilke, *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt: Insel-Verlag, 1962), p. 19.
[21] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954; Viking Penguin 1982), p. 374.
[22] Ibid., p. 139.

God's most supreme ecclesiastical representative on earth, the pope who now acknowledges deicide and praises the messenger who annunciates the news, the angels' very singing becomes the expiration of God's divine tenancy. In Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy's much freer translation of Rilke: 'The choruses of angels use up all of heaven. / There's no more room for you / In all that glory.'[23] But also like the child, who in innocence and forgetting creates the space for something new to arise, the chorus of dancing angels clears the space for 'a first movement'.[24] In Rilke's words, 'At the fringes of my senses / You, in hesitation, begin.'[25]

Heidegger points to Rilke's own description of his angels that were later to populate his *Duino Elegies*:

> The Angel of the *Elegies* is that creature in whom the transmutation of the visible into the invisible, which we achieve, seems already accomplished. The Angel of the *Elegies* is that being who assures the recognition of the higher order of reality in the invisible.[26]

Heidegger then suggests a metaphysical correlation between this Angel and Zarathustra: the *completion* of metaphysics is taking place in both, and that very completion opens up a space for Heidegger's Being of beings to emerge, a venturing forth that is now the poet's prerogative.[27]

But the earlier angels of *The Book of Hours* already saw this opening – indeed, they enacted it. And not so much in the invisible but in the silent. The silent poet. What differs from Heidegger, and even from Nietzsche, is that language and word are not integral to the transmutation (or the transvaluation) involved here. In fact, they might even hinder it. The entirety of the poems that make up both parts of *The Book of Hours* is imbued with a retreat from the spoken and the written. But of course it is a withdrawal from words by means of words.

The point we want to draw out here is that, in these apophatic gestures that the poet performs for us, where the very movement of withdrawal involves a dwelling, where the retreat outside returns us inside, we see the displacement of one incommensurate realm within another – heaven within earth, godly angels within godless prophets, poetry within prose,

[23] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God*, trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), p. 65.
[24] Nietzsche, 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', p. 139.
[25] 'An meiner Sinne Saum / Beginnst du zögernd' – Rilke, *Gesammelte Gedichte*, p. 19.
[26] A letter of November 13 1925, as quoted by Martin Heidegger, 'What Are Poets For?', *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 134.
[27] See all of the essay 'What Are Poets For?' (ibid.), written in 1946 – a long philosophical appropriation of Rilke as a 'poet in a destitute time' (p. 142).

muteness within language, the sacred within the profane. This displacement goes both ways – earth within heaven, the godless within the godly, and so on. The mode of the one necessitates the mode of the other. And it is in this sense we can speak of a renewed understanding of theology within religion and religion within theology. We mean this less methodologically, where two disciplines borrow each other's scholarly methods, or even inform each other's content, and more in the sense now of a sacred space from which both can emerge anew, if at the expense of their own distinguishing features. Theology has a cultural mode of the sacred, while culture has a theological mode of the sacred. Both modes call out with a sacred 'no' and a sacred 'yes', the one a critical call to clear the ground for something new, the other a creative call to let the new come forth. Together both modes, in their full and at times contrary unity, allow for a new kind of being sacred, and a new kind of sacred being.

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The following essays offer an opening into what this being sacred might look like, and what its mode might entail. In taking, decidedly, their departure point from Jasper's Sacred Trilogy, they bear testimony to the sacred 'no' and sacred 'yes' we have just suggested, in that those texts first clear the ground for something new – the desert is nothing if not a clearing, a desertion – and then call the new to materialise in body and community. The absence of the book becomes the book, St Antony the desert-dweller reminds us.[28] Religion, Literature, Art and Culture are Jasper's key terms, as they appear in his first two subtitles, and as they emerge from the *désert absolu* through asceticism towards sacrament. They cannot be disassociated from one another, these spheres of activity, for they interpenetrate. And so too Jasper's three texts. As a trilogy, they may seem unlikely harbingers, in that they are not, in any way, programmatic. But therein lies their significance. They do not issue a system, a theory, a strategy or even a theology, despite Jasper himself positioned firmly as a theologian and academic. Rather, they issue a call. A sacred call, we might say, the critical 'no' merging with the creative 'yes', but a call predicated upon an abiding silence. Each essay is a response to this call and to this silence, each out of its own freedom, each with its own voice.

Part I interrogates this call more closely. If Religion, Literature, Art and Culture constitute indissolubly a certain mode of theology, a theology now situated outside its traditional home of ecclesiastical purpose – of

[28] Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*, p. 37.

a historically *Christian* ecclesiastical dwelling, we must stress – what then might that theology look like as Jasper draws it across his three broad and variegated canvases? What mode of being might accompany it, or be necessitated by it? How might Jasper's call to this mode set a tone, or a series of tones, around which other tones, consonant and dissonant, might be set, blended and counterpointed, in the end silencing as much as they themselves are silenced? The three essays here (Hass, Fiddes, Martinson) provide their own 'yes' and 'no' to Jasper's sacred sense in exploring his liturgical mode (Hass), his sacramental mode (Fiddes) and his textual mode (Martinson).

Part II offers to rethink theology repositioned within a broadly cultural mode. Three theological voices (Ward, Jeanrond, Altizer), highly divergent each from the other, offer ways through which the sacred character might be reconceived and glimpsed, whether as a certain rhythmic density and attunement made manifest by a theology that is at once a cultural anthropology (Ward), or as a pure hope that can only reach its purity when it is an inter-hope, a hope dispersed across multiple faiths and cultural voices (Jeanrond), or as a primordial Nothing that, as the ground of all sacred belief, Christian and non-Christian alike, nevertheless emerges most powerfully within the Eucharistic expressions of literature from Sophocles to Joyce (Altizer).

Part III inverts the starting point and rethinks cultural *poesis* within a broadly theological mode. Here four essays (Yang, Rowland, Bal, Pattison) explore how our cultural endeavours of literature, art, film and philosophy engender a sacred sense when they go outside their own prescribed boundaries or frames of reference and engage in intermodal expression. This movement outside, as productive displacement, can manifest itself variously: interdisciplinary and intercultural – as when literature and theology help to bridge China and the West and their respective religious traditions (Yang); interpolaric – as when Blake combines the Contraries of Reason and Energy, constraint and genius, public servant and private artist, religion and politics (Rowland); intermedial – as when cinematic images draw their power from religious symbolism in other media to ensure that death becomes life (Bal); and intertextual – as when the philosophical thought of Heidegger and Arendt interconnect language, science and politics in a manner that demotes 'plastic words' and promotes poetic utterance, even as theopoetic (Pattison).

Collectively, these essays trace out the *modus operandi* of Jasper's sacred iterations. They concatenate multiple and disparate voices – voices not comprehensively representative, to be sure; they are one kind of

ensemble – as they elide theology and religion, but in a manner that abjures the systematic. Yet that very manner is essential to exposing a central feature of our postsecular condition: our acknowledgement, whether in apology or culpability or accusation, that systematisation has passed on a crippled and crippling legacy, that the strict systems of religion, of politics, of all social and cultural regimes, belie their own fragility, and at times their own violence, as Girard and Agamben convey to us, and that the very Western shift away from organised religious expression is a result of having over-determined the divine through unyielding assertions of dogma and, as Ward suggests, the institutionalisation of ideology, even Christian ideology. The sacred then says 'no' as much as it says 'yes'. It calls us to be otherwise, to dwell elsewhere. It does not demand that we abandon conventional religious traditions, and their established practices, so much as it asks us to dwell outside, even while inside. *Homo religiosus*, *homo faber*, *homo sacer* – none, and yet somehow all, revised and revisioned. To do this requires a different manner of being, so that what is being traced here in the modes of existing, thinking, imagining and creating marked out across each of the volume's contributions is in truth a *modus vivendi*.

This living mode inheres in silence. But it is no accident that the final essay calls us back to a revivifying language. To live the silence that is sacred is also to give it words that honour it. This is our 'personal, societal, and political task'. But it also our theological task, which is our religious activity. To live and dwell in the sacred is to rebuild the space for that voluble silence, a room, a house, a home for contemplative action that is both within and without.

'At the fringes of my senses / You, in hesitation, begin.'