

creativity impregnates the culture as a whole, and is not linked to a specific myth.

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GRAHAM, WILLIAM A. *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in History of Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. xiv+306 pages. Bibliography, Index. Hardcover; ISBN 0-521-33176-5.

Beyond the Written Word is like a teacher's pointer, a pointer focusing attention on an important but usually neglected dimension of Biblical hermeneutics. The immediate oral and aural experience which precedes and yet generates scripture is such an obvious phenomenon that Biblical scholars often gloss beyond this in textual-analysis. One result is that our "holy books" become texts to be deciphered rather than dynamic "words" to challenge. By concentrating on the oral and aural dimension of scriptural experience framed against the backdrop of a variety of scriptural traditions, William A. Graham suggests new light for appreciating our "holy books." Within this wider context, common human skills of recitation, memorization, chanting and internally "hearing" the WORD acquire more profound dimensions. Similarly, the "sacredness" of "orality" (ix) is appreciated anew.

Part One calls attention to the actual oral experience which precedes the formation of books and texts; Part Two concentrates on the words which precede "the Word" in Scriptural traditions. Special consideration is given to the Indian tradi-

tion which always evaluates the Spoken Word far more highly than written texts. Several case studies from various Islamic and Christian traditions in Parts Three and Four detail actual examples of dynamic living oral traditions.

To begin to realize our Western cultural bias concerning the superiority of the written over the oral tradition is simultaneously eye-opening and humbling. Adoption of a modern "typographic attitude" neglects the original understanding of a "text" as "that which is woven, a living tissue"; consequently, something dynamic and vital seems to die when words are set and fixed in type or print (21). Yet contemporary printing technology and computerization promise even greater "knowledge-explosions"; encyclopedic knowledge now seems a real possibility. Yet Graham questions whether a shift from "primary orality" to functional "alphabetic literacy" is necessarily progress. A concert by Ravi Shankar is never locked into a particular score or text; rather living music invites to a discovery of ever new possibilities and new understandings. Is something precious lost when an oral tradition is set in type? Why did the classical wisdom of both Greece and China revere music, poetry, recitation, oral learning, and memory? Could recitation and especially *internalization* be the key to the wisdom of the Medieval West as well as to contemporary Muslim and Hindu learning?

"As the Gutenberg typography filled the world, the human voice closed down" (39). Rhetoric fell from its pinnacle as the communicative art capable of moving all hearts. As the human voice diminished and books evolved into fixed standards, something sacred was lost. The new art of "silent reading" only widened the gulf between the reader and the author. Passivity and silence became acceptable responses to ideas originally creative, dynamic, challenging, and seminal.

As the Bible became a "tangible book," scriptures and Biblical study slowly became objectified (47). Gradually "Holy Writ" became an object worthy of veneration. Is this perhaps "bibliolatry" (61)? Do not preaching, oral proclamation, and chanting seek internal experience of that very WORD which precedes the formation of the Book?

Perhaps India attests most clearly to real reverence for *Vac*, the living Word. The *Vedas* ponder the sacred mystery of the origin of speech, our ability to communicate which has the potential of creating genuine communion, sharing, and even community. Oral transmission is the key to both the special *guru*-disciple relationship which developed within Hinduism as well as to the tradition of the spiritual guide or "beautiful friend" which shaped Buddhism. Direct, oral and aural transmission of that which is most sacred is the heart of the matter. For Hindus and Buddhists, knowing a text means "to place it within one's heart" (69). "Scripture is . . . spoken word rather than holy writ" (77).

Yet when listening to an Arabic recitation of the *Qur'an* in Cairo, such *viva voce* experience re-creates more vividly "the transcendent focus of the Muslim faith than does the Christian Bible or even the Jewish Tanakh" (87). To chant is to "chant God Himself" (87). The *Qur'an* is primarily an orally transmitted text; the spoken has spoken has clear precedence over the written in this Islamic Religion of the Book. Chanting re-creates the very revelatory act itself; to voice and hear the *Qur'an* matters *ultimately* (100). "The interaction of the faithful with the living text" (111) forms the "twigs of the burning bush, aflame with God" (109). Hence the sacredness of recitation within Islam.

Reflecting from this broader perspective, Graham challenges common ideas on the function of scriptures in contemporary religions. The Word of God was living Gospel message long before such proclamation became a Gospel book. Liturgy,

Biblical story-telling, Christian art, recitation, and internalization seek direct contact with the Word of God. Jerome reports that in the third century many lay-persons knew "major portions of scripture by heart" (124). Records of the earliest monks tell of explicit exercises to "breathe the scriptures" (130), to internalize so as to live the Word. Meditation and memorization are oral; some monks even speak of "eating the Word of God."

As time marched on, Martin Luther sought to open to the Word of God more faithfully. A Christian goal became not only to hear externally with one's ears but far more importantly to experience "the internal work of the Holy Spirit within the human heart" (150). A typical Christian synthesis assumes the "interpenetration of the oral and the written" (153) will find verification or "echoes" within the human heart. Yet this Christian inner quest seems one step removed from the direct oral and aural *Qur'an* and *Vedas* experienced by Muslims and Hindus.

At this point, Graham steps back to draw some challenging conclusions. #1. From the broader perspective of world scriptural traditions, recent Western emphasis on objectified Biblical textual study seems a historical anomaly, even an aberration which moves away from the far more common effort of traditions to preserve the *total* visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory experience of the Word. From this perspective, Westerners may even be accused of a deadening imprisonment of the Word in the Book (Bibliolatry—157). #2. If this charge rings even partially true, major efforts must be made to recapture what Graham terms the "sensual dimension of religion" (162). To recapture this oral dimension is to make more vivid the intense personal *engagement* of a community with its sacred text; such a "synaesthetic experience of communal worship" (163) challenges our sensual as well as intellectual spheres of consciousness.

Beyond the Written Word is far more than a teacher's pointer drawing attention to the oral and aural dimensions of the "holy books." It is rather a catalyst, an explicit invitation to probe this fertile field of "orality" ever more fully. More than 65 pages of excellent notes and 40 pages of focused bibliography are suggested as guides for such further search. While I looked in vain for a thorough discussion of the key Biblical questions of "inspiration" and "revelation" in Graham's work, excellent sources on these topics are identified in the notes and bibliography. *Beyond the Written Word* then is a stimulating catalyst; it invites to serious study of the multiple facets of oral tradition.

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LYLE, EMILY, editor. *Duality*. Cosmos, The Yearbook of the Traditional Cosmology Society, Volume 1, 1985. Edinburgh: Traditional Cosmology Society, 1986. 100 pages. Paper, no price. ISBN 1-869960-009; ISSN 0269-8773.

This slim volume is a concatenation of six papers written by persons with backgrounds as various as English literature, geography, (comparative) religious studies, Scottish studies and anthropology, focussing on various aspects of dual organization. Lacking an introductory statement by the editor, only the title of the book, *Duality*, indicates the unifying theme behind these rather different efforts. Such an introductory state-