



I

Introduction

Meeting Points

Near the beginning of Book 5 of *The Prelude*, which is entitled “Books,” William Wordsworth describes a dream of the desert.

Sleep seiz'd him, and he pass'd into a dream.
He saw before him an Arabian Waste,
A Desert; and he fancied that himself
Was sitting there in the wide wilderness,
Alone, upon the sands. Distress of mind
Was growing in him, when, behold! at once
To his great joy a Man was at his side,
Upon a dromedary, mounted high.
He seem'd an Arab of the Bedouin Tribes,
A lance he bore, and underneath one arm
A Stone; and, in the opposite hand, a Shell
Of a surpassing brightness. Much rejoic'd
The dreaming Man that he should have a Guide

To lead him through the Desert . . .
My friend continued . . .
. . . On he pass'd
Not heeding me; I follow'd, and took note
That he look'd often backward with wild look,
Grasping his twofold treasure to his side.
– Upon a Dromedary, Lance in rest,
He rode, I keeping pace with him, and now
I fancied he was the very Knight
Whose Tale Cervantes tells, yet not the Knight,
But was an Arab of the Desert too;
Of these was neither, and was both at once.¹

I start with this passage, which was used also by W. H. Auden to begin his brief book *The Enchafèd Flood* (1951), though with a very different purpose. Auden's concern was with the psychology of poetic symbols, with the desert as symbol and with the stone of abstract geometry and the shell of imagination which the desert rider carries. My concern, however, is in the first instance with the desert as a real place, experienced not in a dream but as a harsh actuality to be entered into and which gives rise to literature, art, and a deep sense of the sacred. Almost all of the texts and art with which this book will be concerned begin, in some sense, in a physical encounter with the desert. Yet to begin with Wordsworth and Auden is not irrelevant, since the desert encounter gives rise to poetic symbols and associations which meet in the imagination of the poet or novelist, as also in the spirit of the Desert Fathers² or later mystics, and in this dialectic they thereby become profoundly significant for us. We will become familiar with the themes of Wordsworth's dream – the desert as a place of solitariness and meeting; a place of fear and shifting identity. It is also, as Auden points out,³ a place where the water of life is lacking, as in Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37: 1–14). It is “a place where nobody desires by nature to be,” a place of criminality or scapegoating, yet also a place where people escape from the evil city in order to become good. It is a place of purgation and temptation, “the place or displace where nothing occurs or almost occurs,”⁴ not to be lived in but to be entered into and crossed and traveled through. It is place where meetings occur, and identities are lost and discovered in a silence that speaks. As the poet Edmond Jabès says:

You do not go into the desert to find identity but to lose it, to lose your personality, to become anonymous. You make yourself void. You *become* silence. It is very hard to live with silence. The real silence is death and this is terrible. It is very hard in the desert. You must become more silent than the silence around you. And then something extraordinary happens: you hear silence speak.⁵

Wordsworth and Auden *begin* with the words and language of the poetic image and the dream, while we shall largely, though not entirely, be concerned with the men and women who have actually traversed the desert in both body and spirit, and endured its silences, from the Bible to the present day. Yet “from the desert to the book”⁶ has never been a long journey. As the poet and philosopher Edmond Jabès remarks in one of his poems, through the lips of Reb Sullam, “What is a book but a bit of fine sand taken from the desert one day and returned a few steps further on?”⁷ The desert sands of Arabia are saturated with poetry, and with good reason. For if in English, to “desert” means to leave or abandon a place, the Arabic word *ashara* means to enter the desert, for there, if one knows where to look, there are springs and wells of water and places of life. Furthermore, the Arabic language is intrinsically attuned to the life of the desert and shares its nature.

It is impossible to find a word in the dictionary without knowing its etymology. Hence, an Arabic word can disappear because of its fixed roots and can fall into disuse, but can always be revived through its root . . .

I will not dwell on the plasticity of the sign in the Arabic language, or on the intimate correlation between the sign and signification . . . It is like the grain of sand, eternally containing the memory of a language, an alphabet of sand.⁸

Although we shall be considering the visual arts and film in this book, it has been argued that the experience of the desert is primarily auditory rather than visual. For in a landscape where the eye is often blinded or confused by shifting sands and the distortions of heat, it is the ear that is most acutely attuned to the voice of the wind – Elijah’s “still, small voice” – which is, perhaps, the voice of God. Perhaps it was no accident, therefore, that the Israelites, emerging from the desert where God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, became the people of the book.⁹

Language and the desert sands, wherein dried but living roots are buried waiting for the rain, share a common life, and it is that which we shall be exploring through a wide and varied literature, from the Hebrew Bible, to the lives and sayings of the Christian Desert Fathers, the words of poets and of travelers and soldiers, the narratives of modern novelists as they meditate upon the desert from the Judean wilderness of the New Testament to the desert of the Gulf War, from musical libretti into film and to the images, and beyond, of contemporary art. My purpose is not systematic, and by its very nature the task cannot be completed. There will always be more texts and texts I have omitted, for they are as many as the grains of sand. Rather, my intention is to draw together a deliberately heterogeneous collection of

writings and pictures in order to discern the thread that runs through them, ultimately a theological thread, though contained by no single tradition or confession. The desert, then, provides a focus for something which we are in danger of losing sight of. At the deepest level, this book is in often silent dialogue with the work of other theologians and scholars of religion who express concern and anxiety for the place of religion and the voice of theology in Western culture after postmodernity. These are people for whom it is not enough that theology speaks merely to itself in the dusty sanctuaries of those churches which Nietzsche's madman in *The Gay Science* proclaimed "the tombs and sepulchers of God." Like Graham Ward in his book *True Religion* (2003), I see "religion" as a defining characteristic of postmodernity, yet risking liquidation through its commodification. Unlike Ward, however, I see its future in the paradoxical turn which it has ever taken since Jesus or St. Antony took refuge in the desert. For some, as we shall see, that journey is a mystical one, but no less a turn to the wilderness for that, and only on that path and its crossings can theology and its language find new life.

People sometimes go out into the desert to find new beginnings and a new place from which theological articulation can be found and recovered. In chapter 2 this may take us with Arnold Schoenberg in a musical, verbal, and dramatic quest for his "inconceivable God" in his great "desert" opera *Moses und Aron*, or with Heidegger in his reflections on the origin of the work of art, both wanderers in the intermediary space between presence and absence that alone bears the key to that pure presence that the theologian Tom Altizer names the "self-embodiment of God." This will be the theme of chapter 10. But at the heart of the argument is a much simpler claim – simple, but never easy. It was well described many years ago by David Jenkins in a paragraph that continues to energize and provoke me, both because it seems so obvious and yet is still not often taken wholly seriously:

The dreadful thing about so much theology is that, in relation to the reality of the human situation, it is so superficial. Theological categories (really mere theological formulae) are "aimed" without sufficient depth of understanding at life insensitively misunderstood. Theologians need therefore to stand *under* the judgments of the insights of literature before they can speak with true theological force of, and to, the world this literature reflects and illuminates.¹⁰

Without the acknowledgment of this judgment, theology becomes isolated from the life of the spirit and is eventually rendered voiceless. Even more, as we shall see in chapters 4 and 5, at the heart of this life of the spirit is a mysticism which, once its utterance ceases to be heard or given our attention,

becomes estranged from theology and that is the first step in the death of the spirit. Only in the purity and the silence of the desert can this still small voice be heard and that is what the desert wanderer seeks to recover. There, as a place outside the law where nothing superficial can be tolerated, we stand under judgment, and theology stands under the judgments of its literature and art. This modern isolation of theology is the theme of Mark A. McIntosh's book *Mystical Theology* (1998) (to which we shall return in due course), while the dangers of this estrangement have been described by the Dutch Carmelite Kees Waaijman:

It [modernity] had to eliminate mysticism – precisely to the degree that mysticism lays bare man's inner powerlessness – as an unproductive element, often falsely labeled as quietistic, irrational and occult. In reaction, mysticism – a living indictment against every form of self-interest, self-will, and technicalism – developed a language and a logic of its own which in turn rendered it unintelligible to cultural rationality.¹¹

Theologians have paid little heed to this language,¹² and its recovery is what is traced in the texts explored in this book. Many of them are far from being theological, or even dismissed as the voices of fools and madmen, and that, in a way, is precisely the point, for only in the *space* of literature (to use Maurice Blanchot's term)¹³ can be entertained a genuinely theological humanism precisely when literature is not “doing theology” – and *it must not do so*, or it will cease to be what it is within the broader reaches of culture. Only such literature has the potential to reconfigure theological discourse after that discourse has been rendered almost impossible in anything like its own terms.

In the space of the desert, where life itself becomes almost impossible and unbearable, language is transfigured and the impossible necessity of theology may be rediscovered. The truth of this is acknowledged in one of the texts we shall be considering in chapter 3, the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (*The Lives of the Desert Fathers*) of the late fourth century CE, where the Prologue speaks thus of the Fathers:

Indeed, it is clear to all who dwell there that through them *the world is kept in being*, and that through them too human life is preserved and honored by God.¹⁴

In a pattern of retreat remarkably similar to the Fathers, though in quite different cultural circumstances, Henry David Thoreau gave a lecture before the Concord Lyceum on April 23, 1851, which contained the words:

Let me live where I will . . . on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness. . . *in Wilderness is the preservation of the World.*¹⁵

The Fathers, while dwelling on earth, “live as true citizens of heaven”: Thoreau speaks for the “absolute freedom” of Nature. In both, the opposition to the “city” represents the very preservation of the world, a claim both explored and sustained in the texts and art that emerge from the desert. Their difference exemplifies another theme of this book. The desert entertains and nurtures religion and its languages beyond the limits of any specific confession. As Theodore Roszak, with the eclectic fervor of the late 1960s, put it in his book *Where the Wasteland Ends*:

The religion I refer to is not that of the churches; not the religion of Belief and Doctrine, which is, I think, the last fitful flicker of the divine fire before it sinks into darkness. Rather, I mean religion in its perennial sense. The Old Gnosis. Vision born of transcendent knowledge. Mysticism if you will.¹⁶

But we need to go beyond Roszak’s broad and rather dated rhetoric. For, although the religious experiences we shall be examining may or may not be specifically Christian, what can often emerge from the desert is a deepening of a particular faith through a spirituality that is also universal, and profoundly so. There is in the sands a true ecumenism, human experience drawn into a unity through the universal encounter with the basic demands of life felt at the edge. That is why art and literature can offer an authentic response to the desert, since they too are universal, beyond all confessional limitation. There may, for some of us, be an ancient and deep interaction between art and Christianity, the former both provoking and illuminating the latter, but there is no such thing as “Christian art”: there is only art which is universal though some, perhaps, is by Christians.

Among the great triumphs of modern art, the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, which will be discussed further in chapter 8, functions as a “spiritual sanctuary, open to all religious faiths and nonbelievers alike.”¹⁷ What the dense monochrome paintings of the chapel offer is an internal desert, taking us, as this book will do continually, from external to internal, from physical to spiritual. For in the desert the categories of human experience, as of time and space, are disintegrated and extremes meet. At the very edge of physical possibility, the mind turns inward and the oppositions which we create between physical and spiritual, body and soul, collapse into a *coincidentia oppositorum* that is a Total Presence. Yet this is not the solipsistic experience which is so often wrongly ascribed to mystical souls, but a

universal and potentially shared moment of utter sociability, a true meeting of the one and the many. The Rothko Chapel provokes an experience of seeing which is also a physical action, a moment of the reductive sublime, which is finally one with the ascetic world of the Desert Fathers. Being becomes seeing and seeing becomes being. Mark Rothko and the New York School of artists where nothing if not physical.

That first experience of the Chapel paintings was – in the light of what I had known before – staggering . . . Before monochromatic painting can function outside itself, as it does in the greater scheme of the Chapel, it must hold its shape – i.e., work in itself – by stimulating and conducting eye movement up, down, across the surface, so that the painting is not merely seen but continuously and vividly experienced . . . The extraordinary variegated and breathing surfaces of Rothko’s monochromes . . . accomplished this and more.¹⁸

Not simply the chapel, but the paintings themselves are a “place” of extraordinary experience. Neither inside nor outside, but both at once, the desert is a place of terror and hauntings, a place of miracles and visions, a hell and a utopia. There the Fathers lived as “true citizens of heaven” in a utopia which was truly “no place” on earth. From their solitariness and eremitical isolation emerged, quite naturally, the greatest of affirmations of community in the great monasteries that lived under the rule of St. Benedict, and the “ideal” life envisioned by St. Francis, whose Rule required that “the brothers shall possess nothing, neither a house, nor a place, nor anything. But as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving God in poverty and humility . . . Let this be ‘your portion,’ which leads you to ‘the land of the living’ (Ps. 142:5).”¹⁹ This link between the desert and the traditions of utopia will be explored further in chapter 5. For now, we may do well to reflect on the irony of that modern wilderness of the spirit that has been constructed in the desert of southern Nevada, the dangerous illusion that is Las Vegas, where at the hotel called the Mirage, the chairman has promised, with a grim echo of Christ’s words from the Cross, that “Our guests will be in paradise.”²⁰ We shall also have occasion to return to the theme of the desert mirage.

Theology, it has recently been affirmed (by a literary critic), has never not dealt in the desert experience, the aporetic and the *via negativa*.²¹ Much has been said and written in recent years about Jacques Derrida, postmodernism, the aporetic and the negative way. Graham Ward, as we have seen, claims “religion” as a defining characteristic of postmodernity “testifying to the implosion of both secularism and liberalism and the re-enchantment of the world.”²² I hope this may be so, although I am not entirely clear what it means. Although we are children of the Enlightenment in the West, we

have indeed begun to lose faith in the reason which sets the self at the center of all things or to believe in the truth of Descartes' dictum, *cogito ergo sum*. Indubitably, we have been formed by, and yet now begin to doubt, Kant's exhortation in his essay "What is Enlightenment?" (1784) "*Sapere aude!*" – "Dare to know," or perhaps "Think for yourself."²³ Kant claims this as the "motto of the Enlightenment," which he goes on to describe as

the exodus of human beings from their self-induced minority. Minority is the inability to make use of one's reason without calling on the leadership of another.²⁴

The image is significant, if not ironic, in the context of the present book. For the biblical Exodus, though a flight from bondage in Egypt, was also a journey into the desert, a school in which the Israelites learned by hard knocks the lessons of leadership under God. Kant's exodus into the freedom of reason has also become for us a journey across what Paul Ricoeur has described as the "desert of criticism" beyond which we hear another calling.²⁵

I am deliberately mixing my images here. We are indeed (or most of us, at least) heirs to the Enlightenment and have been called to cross its deserts in which we have both grown and fallen far short of our ambitions. Yet, and most particularly in recent years, these deserts have only led us deeper into other wildernesses, more ancient deserts that are even more harsh and demanding, though they have a mysterious fertility that we had almost forgotten. Daphne Hampson begins her book *After Christianity* – which is the story of her own odyssey both out of and into the desert – with a reminder of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German pastor imprisoned in Nazi Germany in 1945. He, too, in his way, was a "desert father," and we shall return to him in due course. In his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Bonhoeffer returns us to Kant's words *sapere aude*, and reflects upon the consequences of a human daring that assumes a power which the desert reminds us is claimed illegitimately and must finally be relinquished in the self-forgetting and "kenosis" of a more ancient and humbler understanding.²⁶ That understanding acknowledges not the courage of *knowing*, but in Paul Tillich's phrase the courage *to be* – the courage of being. This is our true majority, the opposite of our self-induced minority, for which men and women have dared to lose themselves in the desert.

It may be that all such journeys are profoundly "postmodern." That term itself, representing an inevitable and proper critique of modernism, without which it could not exist, has now, like a river at its estuary mouth, become so broad as to be indefinable. It has certainly changed its temper considerably since we wielded it with such abandon in the 1970s and 1980s. And yet it

retains some value and Graham Ward has a legitimate point about the “re-enchantment of the world” (although I am uneasy about his specific claims for “religion”). For postmodernity, it may be, is not to be temporally restricted to the late twentieth century, but it has always been there, a hidden move in human affairs, when someone, perhaps for no definable reason, recklessly walks into the desert armed only with the courage “to be” and a vision barely articulated. It is the moment when, along with Buber and Levinas, the over-riding claims of the “other” are acknowledged as supreme.

Yet, somehow, we have remained, positively or negatively, dazzled by the glamor, the complexities, and the intellectual acrobatics of “the post-modern,” and very few have been prepared to take up seriously the third term, the desert – and even fewer theologians (there is not very much of any substance in print in English by or even on Charles de Foucauld, the French monk and hermit who died in the French North African desert in 1916, and to whom we shall return in chapter 5). The desert has largely remained a resource for biblical archeologists and not what it most truly is, a place of profound religious experience. Its surface has been scratched in the popular imagination from Lawrence of Arabia to *The English Patient*, inhabited at one remove in the cushioned comfort of the cinema, but even these scratches, as we shall see, may have their value as tiny fissures allowing us to glimpse something of the vast interiority of St. Antony’s mountain.

Travelers from the West, since the nineteenth century, have visited and romanticized the desert, while novels and films have realized the desert in our imaginations, and in their grainy photographs and sweaty journals, they have tended to see the desert with the eyes of Wordsworth’s dreamer. But what has been missed is that, once the veneer of romanticism has been rubbed off by the abrasions of sand and rock and burned off by the sun (physicalities unknown to *The Prelude*), these texts and pictures bear remarkable similarities to the literature of all those men and women, pious, mad, or mystic, who have “gone out” into the desert and found something there which we have missed in our cities and civilizations. It has been described by Edward Said in an essay on T. E. Lawrence (to whom we shall return later), as found in “a special but extreme form of life: the decentered one.”²⁷ Art, too, saw something of that in its mysterious turn to abstraction, a turn which led Wassily Kandinsky to write about the “spiritual” in art, and the coming together of all arts in the figure which, perhaps above all, symbolizes for us the desert – the pyramid, yet a spiritual pyramid that is the very antithesis of the vaunting human ambition and reckless daring of the Tower of Babel.

And so the arts are encroaching one upon another, and from a proper use of this encroachment will rise the art that is truly monumental. Every man who

steeps himself in the spiritual possibilities of his art is a valuable helper in the building of the *spiritual pyramid* which will some day reach to heaven.²⁸

This spiritual pyramid is realized in Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, when he is summoned into the clouds to meet the Lord who *descends* to the top of the mountain (Exodus 19:20). It is realized again in the climbing of Antony's "interior mountain," and the "ascent" of Mount Carmel by St. John of the Cross. And yet again in Thomas Merton's climb from his monastery in Kentucky to his simple hermitage. All of these journeys we shall follow in due course.

The spirituality of these journeys, their decenteredness, which is a losing of the self (for good or ill), will finally take us back to the theology of the last two chapters of this book, from meeting points to a meeting point arrived at when all "centeredness" has been shed and scorched away and the soul, as John Cassian once described it, has found its fertile places. T. E. Lawrence, as a "decentered" person, is an unlikely and finally tragic companion for the religious souls who preceded him into the sands of Egypt and Arabia, or the deserts of mystical spirituality. Nevertheless, it is perhaps not *finally* an accident, that two literary monuments to the "desert" experience in the twentieth century – by men different in almost every respect imaginable – bear closely similar titles: Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935), and Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1952).²⁹ This unlikely, and certainly accidental, resonance oddly contributes to the harmony of this book.

The word "harmony" is deliberately chosen here, for some people may find this an odd and dissonant book to read. It does not progress through an obvious and consecutive narrative based on either chronology or thematic development. Neither is it one of those books that is a series of separate essays sewn together to form some kind of a whole. As is made clear in the notes, it is not intended to form an introduction to college courses on the Desert Fathers and their theology or spirituality, and the standard textbooks are referred to if that is what you want. Rather, the chapters are in the form of a series of meditations on the place (rather than the literary idea) of the desert, as an environment in which theological reflection is uniquely possible, its echoes and resonances perceptible not merely in the work of theologians or "religiously" inclined people, but in the whole variety of people who have gone out into the desert and written about their experience, or painted pictures or made films.

It is important for the harmony that the chapters are read in order, forming as they do a link from the Bible to the present day. Each, in a sense, revisits the same space and builds upon the reflections of the chapters that have gone before, while at the same time each circles around and is a whole

unto itself. Why the Bible, Schoenberg, and Heidegger? It is because Schoenberg, in his unfinished opera *Moses und Aron*, takes us again on the biblical wilderness wanderings – reenacting that which is first enacted in the Book of Exodus, while at the same time the composer shares with the philosopher Martin Heidegger the desert vision of Total Presence, a vision that will haunt each chapter until the final two chapters form a meditation – a space – upon that which has been present all along in writing and image. This early chapter, then, beginning with the Bible, binds all together. In the last of the *Four Quartets*, “Little Gidding,” the poet T. S. Eliot reminds us that visiting the place Little Gidding (and reading the poem) is an action pursued not simply to verify, to instruct, to inform curiosity, or to carry report. It is to enact what he calls “prayer” in the physical act of kneeling. I do not wish to claim that this book should have the same effect. That is not my purpose, and I hope that the reading of it will be instructive and informative. But its primary concern is to make something possible – possible only in that most impossible and remotest of places, the desert, through literature and art and the lives of certain extraordinary men and women, so that a genuine theological reflection becomes the essence of the reader’s response. This might come as a surprise, for its manner will be neither “churchy” nor even particularly pious, but profoundly real and ultimately, I believe, inescapable if we are to remain human in the profundity of our being.

It has often been noted that the desert is a place of purity and cleanness. Looking at a map of the Sahara we might be tempted to say “there is nothing there.” It is a place of absorption and scouring, where bones are bleached white until they are absorbed into the very sand itself by the action of the wind. In *The Lausiaca History* written by Bishop Palladius, a pupil of the great Evagrius of Pontus and a colleague of St. John Chrysostom, in about 417 CE, we read of the story of a mad scullery maid in a convent who is the recipient of scorn and abuse from the whole community of sisters. She eats only the scourings and scraps which are left over, never even chewing her food, and drinking only dishwater. She is dressed in rags and sleeps on the kitchen floor. She is, in a word, disgusting. When finally, under God’s direction, the saintly Piteroum recognizes her as a holy person and actually the spiritual center of the convent, she vanishes into the desert and is never heard of again. Though regarded by all as an idiot, her self-effacement makes actual idiots of all her sisters in the convent, for they have failed to see her true worth. She becomes as nothing. It is only then, in her final absence, that the community recognizes that she has been, in fact, the true and necessary heart of the convent who has made the community possible – the sponge and the empty desert who has absorbed its dross and excess. Her

very “being” is “to be nothing” and she is the quiet, unrecognized wisdom who is perceived only as a negation.³⁰

Let us begin our travels with her.

Notes

- 1 William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805) Book 5: “Books,” lines 70–83, 110, 117–26.
- 2 I will use the term Desert Fathers throughout as a shorthand for the early Christian wanderers, men and women, who followed St. Antony into the deserts of Egypt and Judea in the fourth and fifth centuries.
- 3 W. H. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood, or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (London: Faber, 1951), pp. 22–3.
- 4 Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 270.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *From the Desert to the Book* (1980) is the title of a collection of dialogues with Edmond Jabès, and will be discussed in chapter 6.
- 7 Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Resemblances 2. Intimations: The Desert*, translated by Rosemarie Waldrop (1991), quoted in Jim Harold (ed.), *Desert* (Southampton: John Hansard Gallery, 1996), p. 47.
- 8 Mounira Khemir, “The Infinite Image of the Desert and its Representations,” in *The Desert*. Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000), pp. 58–9.
- 9 I am particularly indebted to David E. Klemm for this observation.
- 10 David Jenkins, “Literature and the Theologian,” in John Coulson (ed.), *Theology and the University: An Ecumenical Investigation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), p. 219.
- 11 Kees Waaijman, “Towards a Phenomenological Definition of Spirituality,” *Studies in Spirituality*, 3, 1993: 5–57, p. 35.
- 12 See, for example, William Johnston, *The Inner Eye of Love: Mysticism and Religion* (London: Collins, 1978).
- 13 Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, translated by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).
- 14 *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, translated by Borman Russell, with an introduction by Benedicta Ward SLG (Oxford: A. R. Mowbray, 1981), Prologue, 9, p. 50 (emphasis added).
- 15 Henry David Thoreau, “Walking,” in *Excursions: The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, Riverside edn., 11 vols. (Boston, 1893), vol. 9, pp. 267, 275 (emphasis added). See also Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd edn. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), ch. 5, pp. 84–95.
- 16 Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Post-industrial Society* (London: Faber, 1974), p. xx.

- 17 Walter Hopps, "The Rothko Chapel," in *The Menil Collection* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), p. 314.
- 18 Harris Rosenstein, in Hopps, *The Menil Collection*.
- 19 "The Rule of St. Francis," in Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent (eds.), *The Utopia Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), p. 70.
- 20 Quoted in Taylor, *Disfiguring*, p. 187.
- 21 Valentine Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 402.
- 22 Graham Ward, *True Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. viii.
- 23 See also Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity*, 2nd edn. (London: SCM, 2002), p. 1.
- 24 Quoted in Hampson, *After Christianity*, p. 1. I have followed Hampson's own translation.
- 25 Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, translated by Emerson Buchanan (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 349.
- 26 See Hampson, *After Christianity*, p. 1. The word "kenosis" will recur throughout this book. It is used by St. Paul in Philippians 2:7 to describe the "emptying" of God, by himself, so that he takes on the form of humanity in Christ.
- 27 Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), p. 32.
- 28 Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1914), translated by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, 1977), p. 20.
- 29 The point is all the more odd when we remember that Lawrence gave this title to his history of the Arab Revolt only because he transferred it from an earlier book which he wrote but never published, and he used its title "as a memento." It refers to the verse in Proverbs 9:1: "Wisdom hath builded a house: she hath hewn out her seven pillars." Merton's title is born of an equally literary passion – his love of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.
- 30 Palladius, *The Lausiatic History*, translated by Robert T. Meyer (New York: Newman Press, 1964), p. 110. See also Michael de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable, Vol. I: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, translated by Michael B. Smith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 32–4.