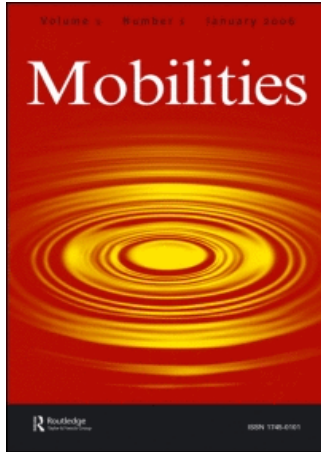


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Creating Ritual through Narrative, Place and Performance in Evangelical Protestant Pilgrimage in the Holy Land

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ABSTRACT *Evangelical Protestant pilgrims come to the Holy Land to be able to feel God's presence in the Land by feeling the presence of Christ in themselves. Their understanding of the Land as the living Word of God, their capacity for embodied spiritual experience, and their rejection of traditional Christian rites and places of worship – together with the theatrical potential of the Bible – open the Evangelical Protestant pilgrims to ritual experimentation in alternative places. I use the case of an organized pilgrimage group from the American Midwest to discuss how the pastor and the tour guide, each from their different but overlapping perspectives, create a context in which Jesus is encouraged to enter the pilgrims through the performance of the biblical battle between David and Goliath in a valley southwest of Jerusalem.*

KEY WORDS: Pilgrimage, Evangelical Protestant, ritual intervention, ritual experimentation, performance, Holy Land, tour group, tour guide, Valley of Elah, David and Goliath

There was a devout nun in the 15th century
who decided to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem
And she belonged to an order that wore bags over their heads
And the mother superior told the nun that if she walked through the country side
With the bag on her head she would scare people
But the nun insisted so the mother superior allowed her to walk
Around and around the cloister every day for three years
Until she covered the equivalent distance to the Holy City
At the end of her journey the nun was so exhausted that she collapsed
A doctor was called
After examining her he announced that she was too weak to make the return trip
The nun died shortly after

Laurie Anderson, *The Ugly One With the Jewels*

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The Bible as Dramatic Script

Performance artist Laurie Anderson powerfully draws our attention to the human capacity to conceive a different reality, the means of bringing the envisioned reality to existence, and the ability to exist within this reality in all its consequences. Be it individually or socially, a new reality is imagined through cognitive perception. Without this imagination there can be no alternative reality. For any reality to exist and be experienced as such, however, it must be practised. Through specific performative practices in particular place in real time, it becomes possible to bring this alternative reality to existence in such a way that it can be fully cognitively and sensually embodied by the imagining self. Indeed, so powerful is the nun's experience of her journey with the living Jesus that the nun's body collapses from exhaustion and so real is her lived reality that to return to the life of the convent, the nun would have to walk her way in time around the cloister back home.

In the Christian tradition, this ability to embody the life of Biblical characters is made easier through the dramatic structure of its holy text. As Levy (2000) demonstrates, the linear epic which underlies the Christian belief in redemption in Heaven is made up of individual stories that have an intrinsic theatrical quality with particularly dramatic components. They are written from an external viewpoint and focus on deed and word without much dwelling on the characters' feeling or thought process. The stories have their own rhythm, their own rise and fall and they resolve themselves so that a new story may begin. Through this theatricality of the Bible, the linear biblical reality is not simply described. The dramatic quality of the text, its dialogic forms, interplays between verbal and compositional patters, scenes and sequence of events, lend themselves easily to bringing this reality to life through performance.

Performance of biblical narratives has historically provided a medium through which believers have been able to embody the presence of God, inside as much as outside the church premises. The Christian Mass and its sacrament of the Lord's Supper during the Eucharist has been an established Christian rite since the early beginnings of Christianity. In the European Middle Ages, the biblical narratives started to be performed outside the space of the church in the form of mysteries, moralities, miracle plays, and the Easter Passion. With the development of the vernacular traditions, the passion play became the most popular type, particularly in Continental Europe. The Bible continues to serve as a script for street plays of all kinds. A famous staging of the passion play has taken place once every ten years since the seventeenth century in the Bavarian village of Oberammergau (Shapiro, 2000). This play, depicting the last week of Jesus Christ's life, has become a major event which draws thousands of pilgrims from all over the world, particularly the United States.¹ Most well known to the general public is, perhaps, the Hollywood version of this narrative reproduced by the director Mel Gibson in his 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*. In Jerusalem, performing the Passion along the Old City's Way of the Cross during Passover, photographs of which circulate globally through the mass media, is very popular among Evangelical Protestants.

This transition from performing biblical narratives in the form of Christian rite inside the church to biblical street (and now television) performances has long preoccupied the students of drama and ritual. This tends to be understood as an

element of modernity and its transition from a public ritual performance for the purpose of transformation of those involved to a mimetic enactment of some past activity for emotive viewing of a sympathetic audience.² Egginton (2003) suggests, however, that these are two different modes of experiencing reality. He argues that, in the European Middle Ages, people did not distinguish between ritual and representational activity. Rather, the place of the performance and the event unfolding were fused together to invoke in everyone involved a timeless present. In this way, all performances, religious and secular, were able to evoke in people an experience of different reality because in that particular place where they gathered for the performance, people felt the presence in its theological sense. For this reason, the medieval experience of bread and wine during the Mass could not have been signification of God's presence on Earth but necessarily must have been transubstantiation, that is, 'the Real Presence of the Body of God', an interconnection of place, words, performative gestures and bodies that produced a lived experience of Christ's presence for everyone who came to bear witness. Egginton argues that with the change in our modern perception of the performative space, our experience of presence in this sense has also changed, and its effects have become displaced and reincorporated in different forms. The notion of theatre introduces a spatial and temporal discontinuity between the event unfolding on the stage and the reality of the onlookers and brings about an awareness of separation between those on the stage and others who are merely spectators.

For the Evangelical Protestant pilgrims who come to the Holy Land it is precisely this transubstantive presence of Christ, this embodied awareness that seems to have come so easily to Christians in the Middle Ages, that these pilgrims seek to experience. The medium through which this experience is to be generated continues to be performance of biblical narratives in particular places. As Levy (2000) suggests, the dramatic structure of the biblical text holds the potentialities for bringing to life a new reality. To be efficacious for the pilgrims, this needs to be a reality of the presence in Egginton's (2003) sense, where the place, the event performed and the pilgrims involved connect in such a way that they are able to feel that Jesus is present within them in that place and at that moment. Liturgical rites practised in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem are examples of how, through tradition, Church dogma and ongoing liturgical practice, specific biblical texts were transformed into ritual scripts that underlie this liturgical practice today. Evangelical Protestants reject such rites as mediation between God and the believer. They seek, instead, alternative places at which they are able to engage in performative practices of the kind that enable them to establish a connection with God directly and in such a way that God's Will and Authority will dwell within them (Elisha, forthcoming).

Here I present a specific case where an Evangelical Protestant pilgrimage group from the American Midwest attempts to change the script of the Biblical narrative from its dramatic form into a ritual form through the practice of performance. The choice of the script is a story from the Old Testament, the biblical battle of David and Goliath which takes place in the Valley of Elah.³ The tour guide and the pastor jointly decide that this narrative would be performed somewhere in the valley southwest of Jerusalem, at a spot which is next to a brook and surrounded by hills. In the valley, the guide first provides biblical-historical information with which he empowers the pilgrims

into that landscape so that it becomes the place of the battle. In that place, the pastor rehearses the script with the pilgrims to prepare them for the performance of the act. As the pilgrims enter into the performance of a biblical event in the Holy Land, the pastor hopes that what starts as a theatrical activity will adjust, change and reshape itself as it goes along in such a way that the Land and the Word will conjoin to possibly make the pilgrims feel the presence of Christ within them. I first discuss the nature of group pilgrimage to show how group leaders encourage sociality among pilgrims to foster social conditions for individual spiritual experiences. Next, I show how the Evangelical Protestants' capacity for emotional experience of the kind needed for such spiritual transformation is a predisposition for such ritual experimentation. I detail the process of the performance and conclude with some preliminary remarks about pilgrimage and ritual in relation to place and mobility.

A Group Journey to Witness the Living Holy Land

Performative practices of all kinds are integral to pilgrimage as much as to tourism, in that they provide a medium through which narrative imaginaries and places visited are conjoined to generate particular emotional awareness and evoke intensification of experience of being in that place (Bajc, 2006a; Coleman & Crang, 2002; Edensor, 1998; Urry, 1990). In the context of organized Christian pilgrimage groups,⁴ performance of biblical narratives in particular places is intended to encourage in pilgrims the awareness of the presence of Jesus. This is part of a more complex process through which the tour guide and the spiritual leader actively seek to create the conditions – cognitive, bodily and inter-personal – within which they attempt to make it possible for the pilgrims to have this spiritual experience in the Land of Jesus (Bajc, 2006b). How such conditions are created and whether or not they are successful is contingent upon a number of factors. The group's reading of the Bible is closely related to the choice of sites with which the group wishes to engage. Particularities of specific sites can either stimulate or discourage different types of performances. To a large extent, pilgrims' experiences also depend on the personality and leadership skills of the spiritual leader and the tour guide and their ability to mediate between individual and group needs by encouraging sociality and developing in pilgrims a sense of a group.

When we met in 2000, Pastor Bill Dabney informed me that, every year, he brings about 50 people, most from his megachurch.⁵ These pilgrimages are important to his effort to 'expose [his congregation] to the truth of God's Word and encourage them in their journey of following the Lord'. In keeping with Evangelical Protestant traditions, the Pastor explained, this means 'not telling them how to think' – that would mean interfering between God and the believer – 'but give them a chance, through my own teaching, through their own Bible studies, through other people's teaching – with other words, [through] the culture of learning – [to] grow in their knowledge of the Word'. Bringing members of his congregation to the Holy Land is 'a significant contribution to that goal'. Organized tour groups are a particularly suitable form of social organization to achieve this aim. In a faith which is based not on simply accepting the sermons of the spiritual leader but on knowledge and learning of the Biblical text, the Pastor suggested, a group setting will enable the pilgrims to 'learn things about the Bible they didn't know' and 'go home with a

tremendous appetite to study more. Greater than they had when they came'. He emphasized that 'we are better together than we are alone. We will understand the Bible better together than any one of us can alone'.

Through this group learning of the Bible, Pastor Bill hopes to stimulate 'the joy that comes with being in the Land of Jesus', and encourage through these pilgrimages a 'spiritual impact on pilgrims' lives'. Pilgrims are also aware that tour groups to Jerusalem provide a particular social space that fosters personal spiritual enrichment in such a way that coming as a group produces an experience greater than that which each individual could experience alone. As the young flight attendant acknowledged, 'I wanted to be with this particular group of people, actually, from my church. I wanted to experience this with these people'. A couple, both law practitioners in Boston, joined the group because they knew Pastor Bill, 'our leader' who 'was encouraging us to go'. They acknowledged that on any other trip, 'we may have an interesting experience...but we wouldn't have the other realms of it, a spiritual experience'. For the pilgrims to have spiritual experiences on a tour with 50 other people, however, much more is needed than a stimulating learning environment. Pastor Bill puts much effort to ensure the pilgrims develop a sense of a group. This particular group had several meetings prior to the trip where they were preparing 'spiritually through scripture readings, prayer time, and map studying' so that they would have an understanding of what they will experience in the Holy Land. More importantly, as a man in his mid-forties who came with his wife related, the pastor 'clearly wanted to give us exposure to each other and start to form in us a sense of a closer-knit group. He often mentioned how other groups he had led to Israel had stuck together for years afterwards, and had even started small groups at church'. The pastor can more easily encourage and stimulate intensely emotional spiritual experiences if it is among people who are comfortable in each other's presence.

There is one other player who, as tour group providers in Jerusalem like to say, 'either makes or breaks the group', namely, the tour guide.⁶ The Israeli Ministry of Tourism explained to me in 2000 that all groups of ten or more visitors to Israel must have an Israeli-licensed tour guide.⁷ Unless otherwise arranged, the guides are assigned to tour groups by tour agencies in Jerusalem. But as one observer related, however, 'it's rolling the dice in a lot of ways for the tour groups what sort of guide you are gonna get'. 'Not any more for me', explained Pastor Bill. He has 'done this so many times' that he has learned the benefits of working with the same tour guide. The pastor has a close working relationship with an American-born Israeli Jew by the name of Jonah. 'Jonah and I have worked together for about six or seven years', the pastor related. 'I love Jonah so we always arrange to be working together.' In the Evangelical Protestant theology and its emphasis on learning about the Word, a Jewish Israeli guide is the living link between the Jewish and the Christian, the past and the present, and, through this, a legitimate source of knowledge about the Land.

The Evangelical Protestant Capacity for Dramatic Experience

To the people who are open and attuned to its experience, the dramatic structure of biblical narratives has the potential to bring the abstract to life, to make it concrete, observable and emotionally knowable. This capacity to live through biblical

characters is particularly present among the Evangelical Protestants who, unlike other Protestants, take the Bible as a Scripture in which God speaks incarnately.⁸ This stance means that the biblical narrative is the true, ever-living Word of God, which needs no interpretation.⁹ Membership into the ranks of the Evangelical Protestants is an important part of their capacity for dramatic experience in that one becomes a Christian through individual religious experience, rather than the act of Baptism by the virtue of being born into a Christian family. This point was best articulated for me by an official at the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem in December 2000. 'For most of our people, Evangelical Protestants, we say we were born again.' As Elisha (forthcoming) argues, re-birth is an experience of self-abnegation and humility through which God makes himself known. 'I have knelt to the foot of the cross, you know, and felt the guilt, the shame, you know,' this official expressed, 'I've had that moment when Jesus was real to me.' This is an emotionally powerful experience that tends to be life-changing. 'I've had an experience that no one can rob off me. He came into my heart and he's been there ever since.' In Chung's (2007) view, this re-birth is an eschatological event and for that reason it imposes drastic and dramatic beginnings on the converts. This event is also socially empowering in that, as the official emphasized, this 'is an experience that millions and millions and millions of people [have had]'

In Elisha's (forthcoming) terms, the virtue of humility provides continuous reassurance of one's faith and of God's grace and that virtue is epitomized in the life of Jesus. Therefore, the feeling of the grace of God is made possible through an awareness of carrying Jesus in one's heart. To have an awareness of Jesus is to experience the moments of his life. These experiences are most real and more intensive in His Land. One of the pilgrims on the tour in her mid-thirties 'had this picture walking hand in hand with him, you know, a kind of a journey'. One way to allow for this transubstantive connection to transpire is to imagine His life in all its details while being in His place. Performative practices correspond to different places associated with specific aspects of His life. Each combination of narrative, place and performance has the potential to generate corresponding types of emotional awareness. Another woman in her early forties said that, in the Galilee, She 'felt so pleased that Jesus had such a beautiful setting to grow in, and clean water, and when the sun came up and the birds were singing I felt so pleased that that's how he woke up'. At the Garden Tomb, his burial place,¹⁰ transubstantive awareness takes on a different emotional intensity: 'Just to think of his pain of being there alone. And why he did it – for the love of people...I just felt so sad that he had to'. At the site where the group performs the biblical narrative of betrayal on the night before his crucifixion, the woman in her mid-thirties was able to embody the pain of dying Jesus, 'It almost brings me to tears. The burden that he bore...that he was gonna take the cross for us and still tell people to go not my will but your own, take that burden for us. That was – I couldn't imagine that kind of a burden'. As the intensity of embodiment of Christ's Passion builds up, so does the reflexivity for why it was necessary for Jesus to live through this pain. Its highest intensity is reached at the place 'where he was scourged.'¹¹ That was so hard for me. So hard...I really found myself just weeping and imagining him scourged. The agony for something he never did. And yet he was willing to do it for us'. The site of crucifixion is located inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is shared by the Catholics and the Orthodox.

To this Evangelical Protestant, the site 'had all the decorations around it...it was hard to get beyond that'. That site, this pilgrim reflectively acknowledged, discouraged transformative experiences, it 'did not have as much impact. Not at all, actually'.

The experience of death so that eternal life can be possible is the essence of this eschatology. 'Jesus came as a man', the pilgrims explained, he 'left as our saviour, and now will come back as a messiah...It seems like it might be soon. That's what we think. We all certainly think that'. As an official of Christians for Israel explained in May 2006, according to their reading of the Old Testament, 'God still has the covenant with Israel...How can we be sure of his faithfulness to us [Christians]', he asked, referring to the redemption through Christ, 'if his covenant to the Jews is no longer valid?' There are signs that God will fulfil his promise of the final judgment: 'We see it as God's faith to Israel that Jews are returning to the Promised Land'. For some Evangelical Christians, particularly the so-called Zionist Christians, there is a different kind of emotional experience taking place which is not related to the life of Jesus but to the fate of God's chosen people. The official from the Christian Embassy is most articulate on this point. 'Beyond the experience [of being born again] you have another, separate, whether you call it an experience, a revelation, an understanding or whatever' where 'God touches your heart for Israel and the Jewish people'. This, too, is an intensely emotional experience which becomes particularly strong 'when Israel is being condemned...for defending itself...when Israel is isolated in the world, when they are being shot at, everywhere, and have that feeling once again, we are alone in the world'. All this pain and suffering has its ultimate purpose so that this is another sign to 'people who have had their eyes open to the biblical, prophetic significance for the modern gathering of the Jewish people back to the Land' – under these particular conditions – 'and how it relates to our redemption, to world redemption'.

For these pilgrims, the Holy Land is a living reality of the Word of God and His promise of redemption. Their expectation and aspiration is to be a part of this aliveness and to witness its becoming by being present in different places where it will be possible for God who is everywhere present to make His presence be felt in themselves through Jesus. When this connection transpires, it strengthens the believer's awareness of having established a personal relationship with Christ. In the words of a pilgrim in her early forties, 'I know him as a human being now, not just as a God, as my Lord, but as a man. I can know him as a friend now. He was revealed to me in my heart'. It is this revelation that Pastor Bill strives to encourage on his pilgrimage. Sites associated with the life of Jesus are important in this endeavour but they can be noisy and crowded, and they often reflect the intensity of the rhythms of cultural multiplicities that are present in Jerusalem. In contrast to this intensity, landscapes away from urban centres have a much more relaxed and soothing feel. For this reason, tour guides tend to encourage pilgrimage groups to perform biblical passages in such areas. There are practical reasons for this in that most sites associated with biblical events are located in urban areas and require prior scheduled appointments and entrance fees. Open landscapes, on the other hand, offer much more flexibility in that the group need not be rushed and the guide is able to find a private space where there are no other people present. This is particularly suitable for Evangelical Protestant pilgrims, in that the bareness of open landscapes and their

lack of liturgical structures, in the words of one of the pilgrims, also stimulate ‘the remembering [of] and the pondering of the Scripture’. As Malley (2004) suggests, for these pilgrims, meditating the Scripture means thinking about how a particular biblical narrative relates to them individually and how this Word of God applies to their own lives. Therefore, any narrative in the Scripture has a potential to generate the awareness of the presence of God.¹²

Emplacing the Pilgrims in the Valley of Elah

While pilgrimage itineraries are determined in advance, tour guides often propose changes to the schedule to add to group experience or improve the logistics of moving between different sites. This particular pilgrimage group had a full day for the Old Testament sites that were all located in an area southwest of Jerusalem.¹³ Jonah proposed to Pastor Bill that since the group would have a full day in the area known to the English Bible readers as the Valley of Elah, it would be a good place to perform the biblical battle between David and Goliath. This performance is a particular favourite of Mormon pilgrimage groups but was new to the pilgrimage itinerary of Pastor Bill. For the pastor, this was an opportunity to try a new performative practice – a different narrative in a different place. It offered itself with little consequences and required no prior commitment but could potentially lead to transformative experiences in the pilgrims. The story also resonated with the pilgrims as ‘one of the most popularised bible stories, from kids to adults’, a story of a lowly shepherd boy who defeats the mighty Philistine warrior and then grows up to be King of Israel and human ancestor of Jesus Christ.¹⁴

No less, the story is God’s telling about the enemies of the Lord attacking His people, a parable of how good wins over evil, how one should never be intimidated by an enemy, how a believer always faces the hateful unbelieving world, how one should choose the correct weapons to fight the enemy, and how the believer is never alone in his or her fight for God’s glory. It offers lessons for their spiritual life and their understanding of themselves in relation to the world around them.¹⁵

We are on the way to the Valley of Elah. By its very existence as a potential performance space, the valley will generate meaning in that anything within the performative space will be rendered meaningful to the performative act that will be unfolding (Issacharoff, 1981). For the pilgrims, this space is the bearer of the past unfolding itself in the present. To be able to embody this living reality, the guide creates a way for the pilgrims to enter within. As the landscape starts to appear unpopulated, the guide begins the process: ‘We are here at the Valley of Elah. Right ahead of us is the Goliath territory. On the opposite end you see the other hill, Azekah, with the valley down in between with a brook – very low and dry these days’. In Casey’s (1987) terms, to be situated in place is to be contained and held within its boundary in such a way that its familiar aesthetics embrace the people’s awareness rather than disperse it. The pastor’s intuition was that ‘to be by the brook would be far more authentic’ than being situated at any other spot in the valley.

The bus turns left onto what looks like a construction road and stops a safe distance from the main road next to a dry brook. Throughout the pilgrimage, the guide provides the knowledge of the Land and its history through which he transforms an undifferentiated space into a situated and bounded place. Within this

place it becomes possible to orient the pilgrims to specific aspects of life unfolding in front of them. To emplace the pilgrims within a specific lived temporal moment of the Biblical epic, the place, Ricoeur (1984) suggests, has to be emplotted with elements the pilgrims identify as the scenery and the dramatic props of a particular biblical narrative. In this way, the participants are able to transition from pre-act to post-act and move in time with the narrative. 'Ok, now', the guide proceeds, repeating again the elements of the narrative with an exerted effort to encourage the pilgrims to see the landscape. 'That is the hill of Socoh', pointing towards the hill in front of us, 'and the next hill over there', now moving his hand and with it, leading the pilgrims' gaze in the other direction, 'is the hill of Azekah...with Goliath at the top of Socoh and David and his men at the top of Azekah...' Through this act, the guide is transforming the landscape within the bounded horizon into what Schechner (1973) calls an 'environmental theatre', a space that unites everyone present within the same physical domain, enclosing the performers and the onlookers within the act by erasing the boundary between them. We are now all emplaced in the landscape and made a part of this process. 'This is the way that David would have come down from his home, tending the sheep in Bethlehem to the battle site that we'll hear about.' A few kilometres down the road are 'the foothills, rolling hills leading down to the coastal plane...There would be the town of Gath from which Goliath came'. The guide speaks not of the ancient past but of the near present. We are emplaced in the time of the Old Testament and the battle is about to happen.

Rehearsing the Biblical Script

At this point, the pastor takes over. 'Come down here, just a few steps', he points towards the creek. 'Take your Bibles out, please.' He introduces the performance: 'We want to commemorate, in a historical way, what happened here at the Valley of Elah, by performing the battle between David and Goliath'. This cultural phenomenon of living history has its precedents in the English and American pageant movements and emerged into re-enactments of historical events of all kinds (Carlson, 2004). Performing history has now become a major activity in heritage tourism worldwide where the past is imagined and acted out as perpetual present in the most literal detail and in which the tourists are invited to participate (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). This performance, therefore, resonates with the pilgrims not only at religious but also at cultural levels.

Since this is the first time his group will perform this biblical narrative in His Land, the pastor tries to set the process in motion through theatrical elements with which the pilgrims are familiar from their everyday life. 'Well. This is Dabney Productions here', the pastor pronounces, referring to his own last name. 'I am going to need to select certain ones of you to play certain roles in this battle.' This is a beginning of what Schechner (1982) considers a rehearsal process, an interactive dynamic between the pastor, the pilgrims, the script and its props. The pastor is using his intuition and his intimate familiarity of the personalities of his parishioners to stimulate the pilgrims to relate to each other and the different roles in the script. 'Now – we start with Goliath. And, as we think about a group', he pauses. 'I think you would all agree the best Goliath', the pastor looks around; the pilgrims begin to respond by pointing towards a tall middle-aged woman. The pastor is reciprocating,

'no, no, not Peg, no. The best Goliath would have to be Allen', he concludes and then reflects back to the pilgrims, 'don't you think?' The pilgrims nod. 'Now – Goliath needs a shield-bearer, a mighty warrior who would go into battle before Goliath and would hold Goliath's shield and when you think about a mighty warrior like that I think most of you would agree that's Tilly.' At this point, the pilgrims break out in loud laughter. The pastor is demonstrating his ability to speak to the pilgrims individually and do so in a group setting. Evangelical Protestant churches, McRoberts (2005) suggests, are flexible in their theology and their ritual practice and in this way are able to cater to an individual believer's personalities and tastes.

The rehearsal process, in Schechner's (1982) terms, is based on what he calls 'restored behaviour', performance that draws from some social or individual behaviour and memory from the past so that it recreates behaviour from within the performer rather than mimics some scripted role. King Saul 'would be someone, remember Saul is tall and handsome, and he just looks like a king'. The pilgrims make funny faces. 'Tall and handsome?', a woman mocks. 'Now we need a David in this story...someone who is a mighty warrior who will slay Goliath.' The pastor turns to Goliath and lowers his voice, 'sorry, big guy,' then raises his voice again, 'who will become, eventually,' his voice rising some more and spelling out the words with exclamation, 'the-king-of-Israel!' The group listens, their gaze fixed on the pastor. 'And so, when you think about someone who is able to take stones out of a sling shot and, you know, be valiant and gang like that', he enunciates, 'I think most of you agree that's Tracy'. The group gives a loud approving answer: 'Yay, Tracy!' A tiny woman in her mid-thirties steps forward. The pastor's choosing of specific roles on the basis of his understanding of the pilgrims' personalities is in line with Evangelical Protestant reading of the Bible where believers always look for the relevance the Scripture brings to their lives (Malley, 2004). In relating the roles to specific pilgrims, the pastor is testing out how the dramatic script could best work as a ritual script by trying to build up an atmosphere within which at least some of the pilgrims may feel the presence of God. The pastor assumes that all pilgrims are deeply familiar with the biblical texts. As Larsen (2007) notes, deep familiarity with the Bible is characteristic of these pilgrims' relationship to the Scripture in that regular small group Bible study meetings and memorization of portions of Scripture are integral to the way they practise their belief.

The pilgrims' familiarity with the Bible helps them identify with this rehearsal process because it resonates with their Bible study experiences. Schieffelin (2006) suggests that such deeply embodied knowledge shared by the participants helps create a sense of a situation and encourages everyone present to engage with the activity, and through this engagement become fully involved in a situational process. 'Jesse is the father for the eight sons. Someone who is dignified. And who is going to bless Israel with his son David and all that. So, when you think about Jesse', the pastor pauses, then proposes with a voice as if asking a question, 'wouldn't you agree that Dale comes to mind here?' He turns towards a man in his mid-fifties who came with his wife. Jesse steps forward, his wife looking on with a smile. 'Dale, we gotta pick your oldest son here.' Jesse smiles and nods approvingly. 'Probably, I think, Pete's gotta be Eliab', the pastor concludes, 'so Pete, you better get over there by your dad.' Pete is ready and jumps in excitement: 'Ok, dad, I am coming!' running over to Jesse, the father. The pilgrims burst out in laughter. They are becoming fully

involved in the performance. The pastor puts out a smile himself. 'We need one more person. This person is absolutely crucial to the performance. And it's the narrator of the account. And we need somebody with', his voice accents the next word, 'a booming voice, who can be heard by everybody.' He erects his body as if he himself is to play the next role, 'someone who's got the type A aggressive, you know, who can really keep this story moving', the excitement in the group rising, 'and that's gotta be Mary Edwards'. 'Yeay!' the group is exclaiming in laughter and bursts into cheering 'Mary! Mary!' as a woman in her late fifties steps out from the group and walks over to join the actors. The pilgrims are letting themselves be pulled into a kind of a flow of spontaneous joy, each supporting and encouraging the other playfully to blend the self with the biblical personality. In line with Schieffelin (2006), the pilgrims have become absorbed into their interaction with each other and with the Biblical text, reducing, if not erasing, the distance between themselves and the situation. 'By the way', the pastor reminds the group, 'this is First Samuel, Chapter 17.' The pilgrims open their Bibles.

Performing the Battle

Before the actual act is set in motion, the pastor gives final instructions: 'Everyone who's been identified as having a part, you need to come to me and all the rest of you', pointing in a direction behind the group, 'need to go over there and...divide yourself half and half. Half of you are the Israelites and the other half Philistines...try to divide yourself equally. And, everybody who is with me better have a Bible.' The pilgrims start walking to opposing heaps as if standing on the hills of Socoh and Azekah. The stage has just been fully set and in this process I find the audience to consist of one person, myself. All the pilgrims are in some ways engaged in the act. The bus driver has never left the bus. Jonah promptly removed himself after his role ended. I now notice that he has been sitting on the bus next to the driver, talking on the cell phone. I leave the scene and continue to observe the activity from an unobtrusive distance. The pilgrims' engagement, their sense of mutual participation and focus, and their shared embodied knowledge of the ways of interacting with the Bible, are emerging into a process that could potentially generate in pilgrims an awareness of the presence of Jesus (Schieffelin, 2006).

The plot unfolds as David, sent by his father to deliver food to the fighting Israelites, arrives at the moment the two armies shout 'the war cry' at each other. Mary Edwards reads the lines of chorus. Now it's time to hear David, 'Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?' David offers to fight Goliath, 'Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him'. King Saul doubts David's fighting abilities: 'you are only a boy'. David asserts his strength, assigning his power to the divine source: 'The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine'. The king is persuaded. He offers David his own armour but David refuses the standard war paraphernalia and resorts to his own. 'He took his staff in his hand', reads Mary Edwards, 'chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.' As the narrator reads on, David bends over looking for stones and grabs a wooden stick from the dry creek. The Valley of Elah is

quite noisy for this Biblical reality. The pilgrims, however, are consumed in their own performance with nothing to disturb them but trucks and cars that keep whizzing by, their noise sometimes taking with them the lines of the text.

The climax of the story is when Goliath comes out from his camp and sees that the Israelite who will fight him is 'only a boy'. 'Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?', storms Goliath. But then he becomes creative with the text: 'you look like an old man to me. Are – you – going to fight me?' The pilgrims are becoming louder and louder in their excitement, booing Goliath and encouraging and cheering David. At this point, the pastor interferes, 'OK – let's try to stay with the text'. But Goliath will not let himself be interrupted, 'You are just a shrimp', he tells David, waving the steel rod. David speaks out: 'You come against me with sword...but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel...the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands'. David grabs for one of the stones and throws it in the direction of Goliath. The stone falls behind the Philistine but he nevertheless lies down on the ground. David walks over, takes the steel rod from Goliath and touches the ground next to Goliath's neck. At this moment, the Philistines run off in fear. The Israelites rejoice and storm towards David and the dead Goliath's body. They skip the remaining lines in the chapter, and burst out in a song originally sung by the pop group Queen but today very much a popular melody: 'We are the champions, my friend. We'll keep on fighting till the end. We are the champions! We are the champions! There's no time for losers 'cause we are the champions – of the world!' Here, a musical element, appropriately drawn from the American popular culture, is spontaneously added to the resolution of the battle.

The pastor interferes again, this time to conclude the ritual: 'Ok, so we'll go back on the bus'. The pastor has tried to make everyone involved in their own ways in a performative process of a sacred text that has just been practised in the land of sacred resonance through the process of mutual sociality between the pilgrims. He gives the pilgrims a sign of encouragement that reflects the ambiguity of the outcome of the performance, 'Wo-nder-ful actors!' he exclaims. This was clearly a successful performance. At this point, however, it is difficult for the pastor to know whether there were moments when something other than theatrical came to the fore for any of the pilgrims, whether in this playful enactment any one of them felt something else that was closer to the sacred, closer to the feeling of the presence of God within them. Since these pilgrimage tours are integral to the way Pastor Bill envisions his role in leading his congregation towards their understanding of the Word, the pastor will likely engage with these pilgrims when they return home and ask them to share what they have just experienced. A pilgrimage itinerary of an experienced pastor is not simply a standardized version of what the tourist agency has to offer but a compilation of 'what has worked before'. If at least some of the pilgrims had a spiritual experience, the pastor may add this element to his pilgrimage itinerary for next year and rehearse the script again with a different group of pilgrims.

I am sitting on the front seat behind the bus driver, taking ethnographic notes. As the pilgrims are passing by my seat, one woman becomes reflective, 'What does Vida think? These are crazy pilgrims?' 'Well', replies a man behind her, 'this doesn't really add to our spiritual experience', and another jokes, 'Now we know how it all happened!' Performances associated with the life of Jesus are expected to lead to transformative experiences. What has just happened is new to the pilgrims and they

are trying to understand it. A woman in her mid-fifties takes the seat next to me. 'You know', she relates, 'I've seen things [on this pilgrimage] I have enjoyed from a small child. That was one of my favourite stories, you know, the story of David and Goliath. I don't know if it's the exact area, and that's not necessary for me, but it's the environment. It could have been here, it could have been on another hill, or it could have been further up the valley. But this is the general area where all these historic things happened. So it's brought the Old Testament alive.' For this pilgrim, the performance was clearly emotionally engaging. It brought her back to her childhood and reminded her of her longing to be in the sacred Land where this battle unfolded, where other events unfolded. There was also something special and meaningful about this performance in the way it was able to bring to life the biblical text. Her reflection encourages others to speak. 'The pastor spends a lot of time to elucidate and explain the messages of the Bible, what those words mean and what those words meant', says a man in his fifties. He has related his own experience of the performance of the battle to his overall experience on this pilgrimage. 'It's sort of a difference between two dimensional and three dimensional...When you go on this trip and you read the Bible – it becomes a sort of a pop-up book. When it writes about the events...well now we know what it's like. Now we can picture this. So it's not just some place in the Middle East. Now we know what it is and it gives it more richness.' The dry brook and its surrounding hills have provided a suitable space for this experience: 'We know it was somewhere around here. We know it must have been somewhere around here. The landscape has changed to some degree yet the landscape is still the same'.

Mapping the Performance into the Geopolitics

Any biblical performance is a means that makes possible the experience of the emergence of the biblical present in place from moment to moment. Like any strip of social activity, the biblical narrative of David and Goliath thrives with the rhythms of the Holy Land whose past and future is today. For this reason, whatever kind of spiritual experience it may have generated in the pilgrims, the ritual enactment of the battle is only one part of their witnessing of the aliveness of the Land. In a group which encourages knowledge in relation to belief, every biblical performance is grounded in historical and socio-cultural knowledge of the area. While the pastor provides spiritual guidance, the guide as the living link between the Land and its people supports their spiritual experiences and their search for the knowledge of the Word with authoritative knowledge about the Land.

On another biblical hill several kilometres down the road, the guide will emplace the pilgrims into the larger domain of life by mapping this particular battle into the ongoing geopolitics of the area. 'This face of the Valley of Elah is a traditional confrontation [spot] between the hill people and the valley people', the guide tells us, 'which here would be between the Israelites or Judeans who lived in the hills and the Philistines who were down on the coastal plane.' Speaking in the present tense, the guide explains that 'If an enemy from the coast, more powerful internationally, succeeds in conquering this valley they are still not home. They still have another step to get up to the hill country of Judea.'

The guide is extending that one strip of activity of the biblical present the pilgrims have just experienced through their performance of that specific biblical narrative into the entire biblical epic and emplacing that epic into the landscape in front of them. After a long list of battles mentioned in different books of the Bible the guide concludes that David confronting Goliath 'would be politically one of those battles that we find throughout the Hebrew Bible'. The biblical epic is now firmly imprinted into the landscape.

The macro scope of the geopolitics of this area is beyond the experience through the medium of ritual that enabled the experiencing of the battle of David and Goliath. The macro is to be experienced through a visual-panoramic view by orienting the pilgrims' spatial perception of the biblical epic, first by looking at the landscape and now by looking at a huge map of one and half square metres that the guide is unfolding on the ground in front of us. The map is a product of the Israeli state and nation building. As detailed by Abu el-Haj (2001), in this endeavour, the Bible became an important basis of the state's historical narrative and has provided a major source of forming a theory for the archaeological excavations and identification of artefacts in relation to the biblical landscape. The knowledge of the guide is based on these references. The map also reflects what she calls the 'work of linguistic reinscription' (Abu el-Haj, 2001, p. 93), a policy of the newly established State of Israel to change the proper names previously used for cities and parts of the landscape and rename them to match the Scriptural sources or to make them consistent with the Hebrew language. To a pilgrim looking at a map, published by Israeli map companies, names on that map sound identical or very similar to those they know from the Bible.¹⁶

We form a circle around the map while the guide is speaking, pointing now to the map, then to the landscape. 'If you look at the way this road runs', sliding his hand along the map, 'and the flatness here, and you compare it to the road that runs through Samaria', using the biblical word for what is today also called the West Bank, 'this road winds itself much more, has to go up one hill, and down the other...which made communication between people more difficult...whereas in Judea, it could be effective to unite people around one centre which is Jerusalem... At least you had good north-south communication along the Road of the Patriarchs.' Pointing back to the landscape, he concludes that, 'perhaps this is one of the reasons why in Judea, the various clans managed to stick together, better than the northern tribes'. After mapping the biblical epic onto the landscape and firmly establishing the connection between the biblical myth and the place, the Promised Land is now given the agency to shape the character, culture and history of its people. For the pilgrims, the knowledge provided by the guide, their panoramic views and their visualization of the map combine to strengthen their knowledge of the Word of God and their trans-formative experience in His Land.

Conclusion

In the tradition of Christian pilgrimage in the Holy Land, this interdependent relationship between narrative, place and performance has existed since the early Christian ages. As Smith (1992) demonstrates, it is possible to discern from the earliest detailed accounts by Christian pilgrims in the fourth century that these early

pilgrims followed the descriptions in the Bible to particular sites and, at these sites, the clergy would read corresponding biblical passages in ways, similar to performative practices on organized Christian tours today (see Bajc, 2006b). Through this process of emplacing the narrative onto the land, started in the early fourth century, Christians have built what Halbwachs (1992) has called 'the legendary topography of the Gospels', a landscape of churches, shrines, chapels and regular ritual practices over the sites associated with the life of Jesus. Evangelical Protestants are latecomers to this process in that almost every site associated with the Gospels is already under the jurisdiction of other denominations that also hold the right to perform ritual practices at those sites.

While the current custodians have the responsibility to make these sites available to all pilgrims, the aesthetics of Orthodoxy and Catholicism reflected at many of these sites discourage Evangelical Protestant pilgrims from feeling the presence of Jesus in these places. Since the purpose of the Evangelical Protestant pilgrimage is to witness the Word of God in the living Land, pastors leading these groups look for every opportunity to encourage Christ to dwell in the bodies of their pilgrims. In this endeavour, their theology allows these pastors the flexibility to try out new ways of doing so. For this reason, the pastor is able to seek alternative places at which the pilgrims can practise their own performative styles that are suitable to their own spiritual needs. From this perspective, innovative performative processes such as that of the battle of David and Goliath in the Valley of Elah discussed above are particularly interesting in that they provide the scholars of pilgrimage a context for studying how a new kind of ritual comes to life and how it becomes institutionalized at a particular pilgrimage site. In our culture of theatricality, as Egginton (2003) has termed it, its *ad hoc* form also provides a context to study how conditions are created for a ritual to potentially emerge from a theatre-like performance of a biblical narrative at an undifferentiated site.

We see from this performance discussed above that the pastor, upon the recommendation of the tour guide, decides to try out whether and how this particular narrative could be suitable for a performance that may encourage Christ to enter the pilgrims present. The pastor tries to ensure that the choice of the place closely resembles the biblical description familiar to the pilgrims. The place is given further scientific legitimacy by the tour guide who provides historical archaeological knowledge about the site. With this knowledge, the guide emplaces the pilgrims into this setting. This process of emplacement is also an entryway through which the pilgrims are able to open themselves to the possibility of feeling the presence of God in that particular place. The pastor prepares the pilgrims for the performance through a form with which the pilgrims are familiar, that of the theatrical script. When assigning the roles, he appeals to individual personalities of the pilgrims. This is in line with the pilgrims' understanding and reading of the Bible. He does encourage the pilgrims to relate to each other and to the text, but in this process he is not rigid. He leaves space for humour, entertainment and even individual modification of the text. They begin with a biblical text that lends itself to be read aloud among these pilgrims. The pastor utilizes these theatrical potentialities to turn the text into a script by assigning performative roles to the pilgrims. As the process unfolds, they let the form emerge through performance of the text. The outcome of this emergent process can not be known in advance. It may turn out to be theatrical

in the sense of the experience of an enactment of a biblical story most of these pilgrims have known from their childhood. But it could also potentially be full of power, and therefore, ritually effective in the trans-formative sense. Whatever each particular pilgrim experienced during that process will be legitimized by the guide who will map that event onto the larger scheme of life unfolding in the Holy Land. Through this experimental process of trial and error, afforded by the theology of Evangelical Protestantism and the social context of a pilgrimage group, we are offered an opportunity to study the emergence of new ritual forms and their trans-formative potentialities as they seek entry into the ritual topography of the Holy Land.

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Notes

1. Its last production was in the millennial year 2000 while I was conducting fieldwork in Jerusalem. I have encountered several groups that participated in the Oberammergau performance before coming to Jerusalem for the millennial pilgrimage.
2. This is a long-standing question of origin of Western drama and theatre and its relation to secularization. Some argue that modern theatre, which culminated with Shakespeare in the Renaissance, has pagan origins and that it emerged from Greek tragedy and its predecessor, Dionysiac festival (c.f. Else, 1965). Others emphasize that the Dionysiac performances were, in fact, designed to transform audiences and therefore had a ritual purpose (Handelman, 2004) and that the biblical street drama of the Middle Ages cannot be separated from the context of rites performed in the church at the time (Hardison, 1965). A genealogy of origins of the Western dramatic forms is an important step towards understanding the contemporary Western popular culture and its modes of religious practices as well as collective identity. On the latter see Alexander (2004).
3. I reference *The Holy Bible. New International Version; Containing The Old Testament and The New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House). This is the Bible used by believers at the Christ Church in Jerusalem. Different translations of the Biblical texts provide different interpretations and references of places and events.
4. Walking to a destination is still very much an important means to spiritual experience on many pilgrimages, most notably, perhaps, Santiago de Compostela (Frey, 1998).
5. In 2000, the group began in Jordan where they spent three full days at the sites associated with Moses and his leading of the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. On the fourth day they crossed the river Jordan, visited Jericho, and travelled north to the Sea of Galilee, the Golan Heights, Nazareth and the biblical Armageddon. They came to Jerusalem on their eighth day where they visited sites associated with the Temple and the Passion of Christ, went to the Holocaust Museum, Bethlehem, and the Judean wilderness. They concluded their pilgrimage with a day at the Dead Sea area before their return to Amman, a ride of some 90 kilometres via the Allenby Bridge which is the Israeli-Jordanian border-crossing point. The trip cost about \$3,500. This pastor no longer organizes the tours and has since left this church.
6. Bus drivers are instructed not to interfere with the group so their presence goes largely unnoticed. A good driver will know how to avoid traffic jams, how to circumvent road blocks that can be imposed by the Israeli military for whatever reason on any route at any moment, and how to manage the overall logistics so that the group arrives at every site on time. A good relationship between the bus driver and the tour guide is crucial to this end.
7. All licensed tour guides with some rare exceptions must be Israeli Jewish citizens. Catholic groups are exempt from this tour guide requirement through an agreement between Israel and the Holy See.

The rationale for this exemption is that Catholic (and Orthodox) pilgrims seek religious experiences that a Jewish guide can not provide. Spiritual leaders who have developed contacts with local institutions prefer their guides to be either Catholic clergy from the area or local Palestinian Christians. The former are licensed by the Holy See, the latter by the Palestinian Authority. Spiritual leaders who are novices in leading groups usually do not ask for particular guides and so are assigned an Israeli Jewish guide by a tourist agency in Jerusalem.

8. Evangelical Christians stem from the Protestant Christianity which split from the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century with Martin Luther. Evangelical Protestants differ from the so-called mainline Protestants such as Anglicans, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, or Calvinists in their reading of the Bible and their Sacraments. Evangelicalism itself is not a Church or denomination but a movement, which gained impetus in the eighteenth century. It is shaped by Protestant reading of the Gospels and rooted in classical Christian orthodoxy. Today, this is a broad movement including not only Protestants but also Catholics, Orthodox and other Christians committed to the task of proclaiming the Word of God to all people (see Sweeney, 2005).
9. In Evangelical theological terms, hermeneutics refers to the apostles' handling of the Old Testament as they were recording the Gospels. More broadly, hermeneutics in theology is the question of the significance of context for an understanding of the Bible (see Enns, 2005).
10. Two places are associated with the death of Jesus, for the Protestants it is the Garden Tomb while for the Catholics and the Orthodox it is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
11. This event, as described in *John* 18:28–19:16, is about the condemnation and flogging of Jesus before he was led out to be crucified.
12. Malley (2004) shows that during their Bible study meetings, the pilgrims do not approach the Scripture as a literary text where the meaning and nature of its characters are to be deciphered in terms of their possible intended messages and contents. Rather, already accepting the Bible as the source of true divine authority, the pilgrims approach the text with the expectation that it will speak to them on two levels, universally as the Word of God and individually as relating to their specific life circumstances. Malley suggests that this becomes a process of transitivity which oscillates between the text as given and the relevant connection between the text and the reader. Because the basic premises of the text were accepted, the believer continuously returns to the text to seek new relevance. This process, Malley suggests, ensures an ongoing relevance of the Bible even as the believer's life circumstances change.
13. For all Christian pilgrims, regardless of their reading of the Bible, the Holy Land is first and foremost 'the Land where Jesus walked'. For the Evangelical Protestants who see signs of the Second Coming, this is also the Land of David who was chosen to be the King of Israel and the Land of his son Solomon who built the first Jewish Temple on the grounds of what is today the Haram al-Sharif, the Muslim Noble Sanctuary also known as the Temple Mount that houses the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque.
14. For the Evangelical Protestants, the Old Testament anticipates the life, death and resurrection of Christ, that is, his First Coming (Enns, 2005).
15. Alan Morrison, *Spiritual Lessons from the Conflicts of David*. Diakrisis. Available online at: http://diakrisis.org/David_kills_Goliath.htm
16. Maps published by the Palestinian map companies, as well as copies of older maps from before 1948, are available in Palestinian-owned bookstores in Jerusalem and in other cities. Some are published in Arabic others use transliteration of Arabic geographic names into English.

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