

Institution: University of Gloucestershire		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Painting the Bible as a Force for Cultural, Artistic and Theological Transformations		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Philip F. Esler Angus Pryor	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Portland Chair in NT Studies Head of the School of Arts	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1 September 2013- 1 May 2013-
Period when the claimed impact occurred: February 2015 and July-December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) The impact from the <i>still small voice</i> exhibition of British contemporary biblical art at the Wilson in Cheltenham in 2015 and the online <i>Enoch: Heaven's Messenger</i> exhibition of 2020 consisted of a transformation in visitors' cultural, artistic and theological understanding of art works on biblical themes as reflected in attitudinal change and in the consequential creation of works of art. The Wilson Gallery and the town of Cheltenham also derived economic benefit from the 10,000 visitors who attended <i>still small voice</i> .		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The research has been conducted by Philip Esler and Angus Pryor individually prior to 2014 and then collaboratively thereafter. Since the 1990s Esler has published on painters as biblical interpreters, including a 2004 monograph co-authored with artist Jane Boyd, <i>Visuality and Biblical Text: Interpreting Velázquez' Christ with Martha and Mary as a Test Case</i> (Florence: Casa Editrice Leo S. Olschki) and a 2014 article on the <i>Lignum Vitae</i> of Pacino di Bonaguida. Pryor has created Bible-based art (e.g. 'The Deluge', 2007). In 2014 they began collaborating on the exhibition of the Ahmanson collection of contemporary British biblical art held in the Wilson Gallery and Museum in Cheltenham from February to May 2015. For that exhibition (entitled <i>still small voice</i>) Pryor created his own work, a transcription of Stanley Spencer's painting <i>Angels of the Apocalypse</i> , installed in the Atrium space on the ground floor of The Wilson. Esler lectured in the exhibition's academic programme. In 2015 Esler was awarded a British Academy grant that funded meetings in Addis Ababa and Cheltenham involving scholars from Ethiopia, the UK, Europe and North America on '1 Enoch and Contemporary Theology'. Pryor, who had already developed an interest in 1 Enoch from Esler's inaugural lecture thereon, took part in both meetings. They both realised, when visiting Ethiopia together in February 2015 and again in March 2017, the significant role that refracting 1 Enoch (regarded as a biblical text in that country) through Ethiopian theological and, most importantly, visual traditions would have and that this would allow them to develop the collaboration begun with the <i>still small voice</i> exhibition.		

Impact case study (REF3)

Accordingly, Pryor, working with Esler on 1 Enoch, began creating a practice-based project of twelve 2 x 2 metre paintings depicting important incidents in 1 Enoch (Chapters 1-36 and 71) and a large-scale model of an Ethiopian church illuminated inside and out with Enochic and Ethiopian imagery. The two of them agreed the twelve aspects of the 1 Enoch text to feature in the paintings, while Esler made suggestions on some of the paintings and also as to the outward shape and decoration of the church model.

In 2017 *The Blessing of Enoch*, edited by Esler, as an output of the '1 Enoch and Contemporary Theology' project, was published. Both contributed essays to *The Blessing of Enoch*, with Pryor's setting out the art project.

As Pryor produced the paintings and model, he and Esler published a joint article on four of them elucidating the research process involved: 'Painting 1 Enoch: Biblical Interpretation, Theology, and Artistic Practice', which appeared in the US-based journal, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, in August 2020 (Volume 50, pp. 7-24), with five figures, four of them colour photos of Pryor's paintings. This is a highly innovative research method, possibly without parallel.

Their joint discussions of all twelve paintings and the church model appeared in their online exhibition held from July-December 2020 (entitled *Enoch: Heaven's Messenger*), which replaced actual exhibitions scheduled for Gloucester Cathedral (April-May 2020) and Canterbury Cathedral (September 2020) but cancelled because of the Covid crisis.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Philip F. Esler, 'Pacino de Bonaguida's *Tree of Life*: Interpreting the Bible in Paint in Early 14th Century Italy', 2014 *Biblical Reception* 3:3-29. (*Evidence of quality*: article in peer-reviewed journal edited by internationally renowned editors).
2. Philip F. Esler, *God's Court and Courtiers in the Book of the Watchers: Re-Interpreting Heaven in 1 Enoch 1-36* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017). (*Evidence of quality*: substantial monograph also in REF 2021 RE2 as a research output).
3. Philip F. Esler (ed) *The Blessing of Enoch: 1 Enoch and Contemporary Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017). (*Evidence of quality*: output from a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust funded conference with essays by an international group including world-leading 1 Enoch researchers).
4. Philip F. Esler and Angus Pryor, 'Painting 1 Enoch: Biblical Interpretation, Theology, and Artistic Practice', *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, August 2020, Volume 50, pp. 7-24. (*Evidence of quality*: peer-reviewed article in US-based journal with a strong international reputation).
5. Angus Pryor, 'The Deluge', 2007, oil on canvas, 2.4m x 2.4m
6. Angus Pryor, curator and exhibitor, *Still Small Voice: British Biblical Art in a Secular Age (1850-2014)*, Cheltenham Museum and Gallery (2015).
7. Angus Pryor, '1 Enoch: An Artist's Response', in Esler, *The Blessing of Enoch*, 191-195. (*Evidence of quality*: one of the essays in the output from a British Academy/Leverhulme Trust funded conference with essays by an international group including world-leading 1 Enoch researchers).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The 2015 exhibition *still small voice* showed 36 artworks from the Ahmanson Collection of contemporary British biblical art, its first exhibition in the UK, in the Wilson Museum and Gallery, Cheltenham. They included paintings, drawings, prints, and sculpture by major British artists, including Stanley Spencer, Eric Gill, Jacob Epstein, Barbara Hepworth, Graham Sutherland and

Craigie Aitchinson. Total visitor numbers were 10,859. A total of 261 people attended the accompanying five lectures.

Comments by those visiting the exhibition were overwhelmingly positive. One viewer said, 'I've lived here for 40 years and never came into the Museum. I'll never miss an exhibition now.' Another commented, 'The exhibition is very thought-provoking; I will meditate on it.' Another said, 'It is a wonderful exhibition and very prestigious for Cheltenham.' The Catalogue, although priced at £25, sold out. The accompanying lectures were also fully subscribed. The exhibition was also the starting point around a series of 'conversations' on the role of ecclesiastical art and architecture – particularly with reference to The Wilson's Designated Arts and Crafts Movement Collection.

Six schools sent groups of about twelve junior secondary students and teachers and (in the case of a learning difficulties school) teaching assistants. Each school had its own one-day workshop, starting with a guided tour of the exhibition and pupils' discussion of the paintings' contemporary significance (for example, linking suffering and sacrifice to the crucifixion) and of Pryor's transcription of Spencer's *Angels of the Apocalypse*. Each student produced a work of art, using their own drawings and following Pryor's post-conceptual practice, with objects affixed to the painting surface to produce, for example, transcriptions of Aitchison's *Pink Crucifixion* (2004). Over students forty left notes with positive responses.

The 2020 online exhibition *Enoch: Heaven's Messenger* was developed from hi-spec photography of the works in a University gallery in Cheltenham (otherwise closed due to Covid) to replace the actual exhibition. School workshops (as with *still small voice*) scheduled for April 2020 were cancelled due to Covid 19. The art consisted Pryor's twelve 2 x 2 metre paintings (on canvas) on 1 Enoch and his model of an Ethiopian church, 8 feet high and 6 x 6 feet in length and breadth. Each was accompanied by written material beginning with an introduction to the text. The paintings reflect Enoch's journey through the cosmos, to his ascension into Heaven and meeting with God in his palace.

The exhibition went live on 2 July 2020, attracting 1,800 visitors by 31 December 2020, with visits from numerous countries including:

UK	880 (46.6%)
USA	476 (25.5%)
Canada	79 (4.18%)
Germany	55 (2.9%)
Israel	31 (1.64%)
Netherlands	30 (1.59%)
South Africa	22 (1.17%)
Australia	20 (1.06%)

Aided by the University's (school) Outreach team, special focus was placed on ethics-cleared school pupils' involvement with the exhibition, but the planned in-person workshops were not possible. The exhibition led viewers to create artistic works. One, responding to the painting 'The Earth Cries Out' (1 Enoch 7.6) that made her 'dig deeper', created a detailed water colour and ink painting showing a huge semi-trailer (symbolising the Giants) demolishing city tenements, with human figures contorted in distress. Another by a young man produced a colour photo of

himself overlaid in part with downward colour bands on the basis the exhibition 'shows people's true colours' and the person 'search for purity moving from the dark to the light.' Another painting depicted in its central range a huge Enoch as an Ethiopian in a cosmic landscape bleeding over creation. A UK art postgraduate created a pencil drawing of woman with child, the woman with her back to the viewer as she contemplates scenes from 1 Enoch in the middle- and back-ground.

The exhibition produced notable advances in awareness and understanding. One PhD theology student at a Roman university, responding in writing to the exhibition, explained how, for him, the painting of Enoch's transformation before God (1 Enoch 71.1) illustrated Dante's statement 'To soar beyond the human cannot be described in words' (*Paradiso*) and showed the power of image over speech. Viewers expressed satisfaction with learning about 1 Enoch and Ethiopia. Another reaction was an awareness of knowing too little about Ethiopia and a desire to know more, including the place of Enoch in Ethiopian tradition and in Ethiopian church architecture. One commented, 'I feel I much better understand the different topics and perceptions surrounding religion and its perception, and how it can be expressed and influenced in and by different mediums after experiencing the exhibition.' Viewers reported being encouraged to be more creative and to consider going to university.

Another impact has been the joint supervision by Pryor and Esler of a doctoral student creating works on the Book of Ruth and contemporary migration.

Economic benefit accrued to the Wilson Gallery and the town of Cheltenham from revenue received from 10,000 visitors to the exhibition.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Statement by Ms Jane Lillystone, concerning the 2015 exhibition *still small voice* at the Wilson in Cheltenham.
2. Digital version of the Catalogue for the 2015 exhibition *still small voice*.
3. Review of *still small voice* by Jonathan Evans in the *Church Times*, 24th April 2015.
4. Statement by Professor Ben Quash, Kings College London, concerning the 2020 online exhibition, *Enoch: Heaven's Messenger*.