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Essay

An Immodest Proposal for Biblical Studies

In September 2011, Larry Hurtado outlined what he thought ought to be the essential features of a British doctorate in New Testament studies on his personal blog:

> I emphasize languages. It is indispensable to be able to read Koine Greek well. That means a good knowledge of grammar, a decent working vocabulary, and as much experience reading different texts as one can develop. Also Hebrew. Latin is highly desirable too, but not as essential for biblical studies.… Every PhD student should be able to consult and engage relevant scholarly publications in English, German, and French (which are the main languages of NT scholarship). I also insist that every PhD student should be familiar with the Nestle-Aland Greek NT, including its apparatus, and show awareness

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> of any significant textual variants in passages studied.… But I now think that we probably need to ensure things. And perhaps the simplest way to do this is that examiners should regularly bring to the thesis-examination a relevant publication in German and French and ask the student to read a paragraph or so. Likewise, I suggest that in every NT thesis examination we should ask the student to read a bit of some relevant passage from the Greek NT, and ask also for intelligent comments about any variants in the Nestle-Aland apparatus.[1]

While Hurtado was arguing about a *British* doctorate, this also reflects his broader views on "the discipline" of New Testament studies which he had outlined in his inaugural address to the University of Edinburgh in 1997.[2] For Hurtado, as we will see, "the discipline" is effectively a historical-critical one which has its focus on ancient history and the texts in ancient cultural contexts. This came out further in the reactions to Hurtado's blog post, including a debate between myself and Hurtado over the nature of the field and the role reception history should—or should not—play in it.[3]

Some further background might illuminate the discussion and the origins of my concerns. Much of the debate involving Hurtado on the nature of Biblical Studies arose from the often polarising discussions that have been bubbling away under the surface of the British New Testament Society for several years and which came to the surface in the aftermath of the

[1] Larry W. Hurtado, "Tools of the Trade," *Larry Hurtado's Blog*, September 4, 2011, http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/04/tools-of-the-trade/.

[2] Larry W. Hurtado, "New Testament Studies at the Turn of the Millennium: Questions for the Discipline," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52, no. 2 (1999): 158–78.

[3] James G. Crossley, "Languages, Humanities and a New Testament PhD," *Sheffield Biblical Studies*, September 7, 2011, http://sheffieldbiblicalstudies.wordpress.com/2011/09/07/languages-humanities-ntphd/; Larry W. Hurtado, "Tools of the Trade … Encore," *Larry Hurtado's Blog*, September 5, 2011, http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/05/tools-of-the-trade-encore/; "Languages, Theories, Approaches," *Larry Hurtado's Blog*, September 8, 2011, http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/languages-theories-approaches/; James G. Crossley, "More on Widening the Definition of NT Studies," *Sheffield Biblical Studies*, September 8, 2011, http://sheffieldbiblicalstudies.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/more-on-widening-the-definition-of-nt-studies/. In some crucial ways this debate reflects an article on two different approaches which has caused a wider stir in the field: George Aichele, Peter D. Miscall, and Richard Walsh, "An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 2 (2009): 383–404.

2011 British New Testament Conference in Nottingham. Curiously, however, most of the people vocal in their opinions were not present at the same sessions and were thus largely vocal in independent contexts. Hurtado was concerned with a lack of language and text-critical skills, particularly on the part of those completing, or who had recently completed, PhDs. Not for a moment wanting to downplay Hurtado's concerns, my worries were that too many British New Testament scholars, including some established figures, were completely unaware of basic ideas in the Humanities—not that we could measure this from the confidence levels with which these opinions were voiced. In particular, I became frustrated—and I was not alone—with the questions levelled at a PhD student giving a paper on postcolonialism. The paper was premised on the straightforward claim that we can see different, often unintentional, reactions to social and economic circumstances, even if the people and groups reacting are not themselves aware of what they have in common. The complete lack of awareness of wider basic issues in the Humanities from scholars deeply skilled in exegesis but with no basic understanding of social processes effectively stalled any fruitful discussion, which is most unfortunate for a PhD student looking for feedback at an academic conference.[4] The fallout from the British New Testament Conference soon developed into a discussion about the nature of the field itself, including some heated online discussion—particularly Hurtado's debates with the pseudonymous blogger BW16 and with Roland Boer—that has continuing resonance among British academics.[5]

[4] This is not to argue, of course, that Hurtado himself would disagree with this concern, any more than I would disagree with his concerns about languages. While I would be more forceful still, Hurtado also argues as follows: "The wider integrative questions must be addressed as well, however, and this will require some scholars to venture beyond their own more comfortable and assured areas of competence to learn from, interact with, draw upon and assess as best they can the work of other specialists in other relevant areas. Many of the larger questions in fact require the New Testament scholar to conduct 'interdisciplinary' research, and may draw upon literary theory, historiography, social scientific theory, linguistics, classics, archaeology, and a range of other disciplines… the wide range of material, evidence, approaches, and questions involved in the field of New Testament studies should not obscure the central historical importance of the New Testament itself and its validity as a university subject in its own right" (Hurtado, "Questions for the Discipline," 168–69).

[5] For a selection see e.g., BW16, "The Victorian Straight-Jacket of 'Subjective' Empiricism in British New Testament Studies," *BW16*, September 4, 2011, http://bwsixteen.wordpress.com/2011/09/04/the-victorian-straight-jacket-of-subjective-empiricism-in-british-new-testament-studies/; "An Objective Queer Marxist Rejoinder to Larry Hurtado's Hegemonic Essentialisms," *BW16*, September 5, 2011, http://bwsixteen.wordpress.com/

This essay presents an immodest proposal for (roughly) what Biblical Studies can be as a field of study. I use Hurtado as a debating partner and largely, but not entirely, as a point of contrast. I think Hurtado's view of the field of study is too narrow and that Biblical Studies has much more to offer the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences than might be understood from his approach. The eagle-eyed reader will by now have noticed that there is a certain localism to all this. Both Hurtado and I are New Testament scholars located on a small island that long ago gave up running the world. However, while I will inevitably betray my New Testament background and small-island provincialism, what follows applies more broadly, I think, to Biblical Studies as a whole and to Biblical Studies beyond the United Kingdom. Indeed, what I describe is the kind of Biblical Studies being carried out by many, many scholars elsewhere on the globe (though perhaps not so many in the UK). A great deal of critical thinking warns about universal claims masquerading as local or particular and vice versa. If we add to this the totalising feel of what follows, don't say you haven't been warned.

In Defence of Historical Criticism

Much of the online debate revolved around Hurtado's arguments concerning language skills and his demand for a good working knowledge of the relevant manuscript traditions. Much of this is more or less unchanged from Hurtado's inaugural address on the role of New Testament studies in the university where, in addition to the emphasis on linguistic training, he places strong emphasis on familiarity with the earliest relevant contexts, such as: Hebrew "Old Testament" and Greek "Old Testament"; early Jewish com-

2011/09/05/an-objective-queer-marxist-rejoinder-to-larry-hurtados-hegemonic-essentialisms/; Anonymous, "#ranthill: i cudda been somebody," *reallyquitetired*, September 6, 2011, http://reallyquitetired.com/2011/09/06/ranthill-i-cudda-been-somebody/; Larry W. Hurtado, "Fair Comment and Personal Abuse," *Larry Hurtado's Blog*, September 7, 2011, http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/07/fair-comment-and-personal-abuse/;"Languages, Theories, Approaches"; Roland Boer, "The Closing of Larry Hurtado's Mind," *Stalin's Moustache*, September 9, 2011, http://stalinsmoustache.wordpress.com/2011/09/09/the-closing-of-larry-hurtados-mind/; Larry W. Hurtado, "Invective and Matters of Substance," *Larry Hurtado's Blog*, September 9, 2011, http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/09/invective-and-issues-of-substance/; BW16, "An Objective Queer Reflection on the Past Week in Biblioblogging," *BW16*, September 10, 2011, http://bwsixteen.wordpress.com/2011/09/10/an-objective-queer-reflection-on-the-past-week-in-biblioblogging/; Larry W. Hurtado, "NT Research Languages: Encore," *Larry Hurtado's Blog*, September 27, 2011, http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/27/nt-research-languages-encore/.

mentaries and early Jewish literature; Roman-era history; Roman-era literary and rhetorical conventions; Graeco-Roman philosophical traditions and religious movements; cultural values and social structures; material culture; and broader interdisciplinary research.[6] This may well work within the boundaries of how "New Testament Studies" and, by extension, "Biblical Studies" are defined, with analogous historical and cultural contexts for the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament texts in their earliest historical contexts. So, for Hurtado, "New Testament Studies" clearly involves the historical origins of the New Testament, perhaps ending (roughly) with the turn of the third century CE, and stretching back several centuries if we incorporate an analogous argument for the critical study of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. There are obviously limits as to what most individuals can do, but the general point about what constitutes the field of study should be clear enough.[7]

While it is difficult to disagree with the specific points of this argument as generalisations concerning the validity of a certain kind of historical criticism, and even the quest for the very origins of biblical texts, I am still not convinced Hurtado has explicitly shown the potential significance of historical criticism in full. I think we can go further still (and Hurtado may well with me agree on this point). Biblical Studies has not really generated unique methods and ought rather to be conceived as a field of study which utilises methods from different disciplines. So we should perhaps begin by foregrounding interdisciplinary learning as standard (and not necessarily in the sense of absorbing everything into the tradition of Biblical Studies methods).[8] We could also be making bigger claims about the kinds of things historical critics can do, or perhaps should do. New Testament Studies has historically tackled some major issues in the Humanities with considerable success and should be a little more out and proud about this. The obvious contenders include: who the historical Jesus may or may not have been; why Christianity emerged as a movement in its own right; Paul and his influence on major Western theological and philosophical traditions; and the canonisation pro-

[6] Hurtado, "Questions for the Discipline," 166–68.

[7] Throughout this article, the issue of how much can possibly be learned by one scholar is an ongoing issue but, happily, an issue I leave aside for another day, not least because I think there is a problem with imposing what should and should not be done, that there needs to be a certain flexibility depending on what topic is being chosen, and that it is more helpful to be thinking in more general terms for the purposes of this article.

[8] See the critique in Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 2–43.

cess which led to the inclusion and exclusion of texts in "the Bible." Again, it is probably worth broadening this still further to areas where New Testament studies has often been less comfortable, such as material explanations for the origins of Christianity, including a critical assessment of the degree of influence figures such as Jesus or Paul had (or did not have) on the emergence of the new movement in relation to socio-economic developments over the short, medium, and long term.

In terms of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, we face major issues such as the origins and development of "Israel," the beginnings of Judaism, readings of influential literature in their original languages (and earliest contexts), undermining of readings of influential literature, key developments in the Hebrew language, and so on. Thinking of the Bible more generally, we could go on: the biblical texts tell us how people understood (perhaps modern questions, if that matters) gender, ethnicity, class, life, and death; how people reacted to political circumstances, not least under major imperial powers; what the implications of the developments surrounding biblical texts were on human culture and history over the short, medium, or long term. Finally, what I would stress is that this rhetorically broader approach should emphatically include the more "obscure" aspects of ancient cultural contexts (and philological pedantry would be the obvious strength for historic Biblical Studies), even if some biblical scholars positively revel in their small intellectual ghettos. This is not only because the details are necessary for the bigger picture or that the details regularly provide correctives to some dubious generalisations about ancient cultures, but also for reasons of "value" I will outline below.

While Hurtado may (or may not) have some sympathy with the above, I am concerned that such an influential senior scholar may have a potentially negative impact on British New Testament studies, and perhaps beyond. If his model of what the "British doctorate" (and presumably "the discipline" more generally) should be becomes too obsessed with language and exegetical study, we may get to the point where we see a stifling of creative and original research (it is clear enough that some disgruntled people present at the British New Testament Conference think we are effectively at that point).[9]

[9] See also the following from a blog by a scholar who completed a PhD on the Bible and "contemporary ecological ethics": "the implicit message seems to represent an attempt to clip the wings of those who are expanding the discipline in various new directions… this issue pertains to me too, given that while i can work with both Hebrew and Greek texts (with a lexicon and some time), i would almost certainly have failed "The Hurtado Test" if handed something to translate on the spot in my viva. likewise, i cannot read German

Indeed, one concern I have with Hurtado's argument has been its reception. People—including some who thrive on knowing nothing more about the study of humanity than detailed exegesis of selected biblical passages—were and remain vocal in their uncritical acceptance of what he says and writes, perhaps encouraged by Hurtado's concluding statement: "There are other things that ought to characterize the PhD in the field, but these are essential tools. I presume that all fellow scholars will agree."[10] While some again may argue we are already there in the UK, my worry is that if we follow Hurtado's argument (and this is not necessarily his intention) we are potentially setting ourselves up as assessors who will privilege exegesis and will provide little awareness of other ways of doing history and studying humanity which will presumably be deemed inferior if not done the traditional Biblical Studies way.[11] If we follow Hurtado's argument, there is potentially little scope (certainly within the time constraints of a PhD) for intellectual risk-taking and invention but plenty of scope for reinforcing consensus,[12] more paraphrasing of the Gospels, Acts, Paul, and Josephus (sometimes known as "New Testament history"), and longer footnotes with more reference to French and German scholarship (irrespective of intellectual relevance, it would often seem, though Hurtado is much more careful than some about this).[13]

particularly well… the point here is that my thesis did not really require these skills given that i was explicitly writing from a particular location, and using a particular set of hermeneutical apparatus… these arguments about legitimacy… are deeply troubling and the rhetoric seems to be escalating… the reality appears to be that unless you are made in the image of the gods, you will not be considered 'legitimate' and will not move up within the discipline (or at least you will get only as far as they allow)" (Anonymous, "#ranthill: i cudda been somebody").

[10] Hurtado, "Tools of the Trade."

[11] This argument is worth turning on its head: what if there was a drive for a more nuanced and creative notion of history and historical explanation over against exegesis and languages? What if there was some more vigorous testing on wider *historical* methods for *historical*-critical scholars-in-the-making? In the UK, plenty of historical-critical scholars, for all their self-confidence, may well struggle. I suspect Hurtado and his supporters would not be happy, and perhaps rightly so. I would also follow the claims made by BW16: "I never disagreed with Hurtado regarding the importance of languages, especially ancient languages (I restated this in almost every post). Nor was I suggesting that knowledge of critical theories was in any way more important than acquisition of languages, simply that we need to think more carefully about the balance" (BW16, "Reflection on the Past Week").

[12] At least methodologically speaking, cf. Moore and Sherwood, *Biblical Scholar*, 31–41.

[13] Hurtado rightly stresses "relevance" in "Tools of the Trade." Several biblical scholars in the UK have expressed in personal conversations a concern that there have been examples of imposing German scholarship on students without mentioning *what* German scholarship should be discussed.

As part of an intellectual exercise, it might be worth considering the work of Rodney Stark. Stark came to the study of Christian origins as a sociologist and without traditional training in the field. He produced a provocative book called *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*.[14] It was certainly flawed; there were mistakes and the lack of training did show at times, but his contributions on, for instance, social networks, conversion, and the growth of the Christian movement consituted an argument that some scholars of Christian origins have found to be compelling.[15] Stark's work also illuminates what happens when Biblical Studies becomes too insular and too detached from the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences: it misses out on different ways of thinking which might actually be of some benefit.[16] Stark is not the only non-specialist to get involved in the field (we might think of literary critics like Frank Kermode getting involved in the 1970s and 1980s) and hopefully there will be others. I don't have an answer to this but I think the following questions are worth discussing: would it be wrong for a PhD student with training in a different discipline or field of study to have produced this kind of argument? Would the thesis have failed?

In Defence of Reception History

My implied "agenda" for Biblical Studies (or, indeed, "New Testament Studies" with Hurtado's arguments in mind), should already suggest that the concerns with ancient history and culture are too limited for understanding the field. There is now a long-established tradition of reception-historical approaches and of various approaches relating to critical theory, poststructuralism, and cultural studies.[17] Some of these approaches have involved

[14] Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

[15] James T. Sanders, *Charisma, Converts, Competitors: Societal and Sociological Factors in the Success of Early Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2000); James G. Crossley, *Why Christianity Happened: A Sociohistorical Account of Christian Origins, 26–50* CE (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006). Cf. Harry Maier, review of *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* by Rodney Stark, *The Journal of Theological Studies* 49, no. 1 (1998): 328–35.

[16] See Crossley, *Why Christianity Happened*, chapter 1, for further detail on certain interdisciplinary omissions in twentieth century New Testament scholarship.

[17] I am, of course, aware of the problems in distinguishing reception history from what is deemed to come before, not to mention the problems of assuming methodological differences between reception history and (say) historical criticism. I use the (artificial) distinction between "reception history" and "historical criticism" as a way of framing the debate with Hurtado who seems to be working with a rough chronological end point for New Testament studies. On the difficulties with a distinctive "reception history" see e.g., William

ancient cultural contexts and "the original languages" but often this is not the case. Some applications of, for instance, postcolonialism, gender studies, and queer theory can require as much language skill as a form-critical investigation of a Gospel passage or an engagement with Pauline theology, although perhaps less so in the more contemporary reception variants of critical theory. Other major areas in contemporary Biblical Studies likewise show that drawing a boundary around the ancient cultural context is problematic. The use of Paul by various thinkers outside conventional Biblical Studies (e.g., Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek), although increasingly discussed by scholars who might reasonably be perceived to be biblical scholars,[18] have some discussion of language and show an appreciation of ancient contexts, but they are also at least as much about contemporary understandings of secularity, religion, universality, and Marxism.

As this in turn implies, there are also practical reasons why Hurtado's limited approach does not do justice to the field or, more narrowly, "the British doctorate." The study of the use, influence, and reception of the Bible and biblical texts is now a deeply embedded part of the field, with a clear presence at conferences and societies such as the Society of Biblical Literature, the European Association of Biblical Studies, Oceania Biblical Studies Association, and even the Society for Old Testament Study, not to mention a number of other conferences and societies around the world. Even the more conservative British New Testament Conference (BNTC) has a section on the use and influence of the New Testament. One of its key figures, John Lyons, has published a major article promoting reception history as potential "hope for a troubled discipline," while another BNTC regular, Markus Bockmuehl, has been calling for, among other things, "effective history" in New Testament studies, though his explicit theological concerns suggest a different agenda to that of Lyons.[19] In the UK, certain institutions—perhaps most—are associated with a more traditional historical approach to the biblical texts. Major British universities have departments of religion, theol-

John Lyons, "Hope for a Troubled Discipline? Contributions to New Testament Studies from Reception History," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 2 (2010): 207–20; Roland Boer, "Against 'Reception History'," *Bible and Interpretation*, May 2011, http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/boe358008.shtml.

[18] (Notably Ward Blanton of the University of Glasgow. See his *Displacing Christian Origins: Philosophy, Secularity, and the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[19] Lyons, "Hope for a Troubled Discipline?"; Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

ogy, and/or Biblical Studies where reception and related approaches play, or have played, a significant role (e.g., Glasgow, Sheffield, Leeds, Bristol, Birmingham, and Exeter), to the extent of being the dominant approach in certain places with numerous biblical scholars in post (including, for what it is worth, a number of senior positions) because of their work in reception history and interdisciplinary study. Even Oxford—not normally associated with the less traditional approaches—has a Centre for Reception History of the Bible headed by Christine Joynes and Christopher Rowland. There are now peer-reviewed international journals dedicated to these and related issues (e.g., *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception*, *The Bible & Critical Theory*, *Biblical Reception*, *Postscripts*, and *Biblical Interpretation*). Reception is also listed as one of the areas of significance for submissions to the relatively traditional *New Testament Studies*.

We might even suggest that reception is a hegemonic norm in the field. If training people for jobs is what PhDs are all about (let us just assume this for one moment) then avoiding reception history would not be wise *as a blanket decision*. Recently advertised jobs in the UK (e.g., Sheffield, Leeds, Bristol) have explicitly shown concern for more contemporary understandings of the Bible. If we were to "measure" what Biblical Studies is *for*, a doctorate in terms of dominant discourses in (say) the UK and North America—reception, critical theory, and the like—would have to be part of the definition for simple, practical reasons. If reception is not to be part of the British doctorate (and by extension the field of Biblical Studies), what should be done with the students with, or doing, PhDs in such areas? Do we refuse to have them in Biblical Studies from the start? What should we do with university departments and staff where reception plays a significant role?

But we can, of course, say something more positive about reception history than its mere embedded nature in the field. In one sense it is an obviously diverse subject requiring different skills for different questions. Clearly, if looking at the Bible in medieval France, certain specific language skills will be required. But what should we do about the use of the Bible in contemporary American politics, a significant area of contemporary reception-historical research? Methodological and theoretical literature notwithstanding, English is more or less the only language required, together with various interdisciplinary skills. PhD theses on the Bible and/in art, cinema, literature, pop music, etc. will all require specific skills but obviously not necessarily much in the way of the ancient languages so integral to Hurtado's model. My Sheffield colleague Katie Edwards works almost exclusively on the role of the

Bible in advertising, fashion, and popular culture, and its intersection with race, nationalism, and global capitalism. Understanding such uses of the Bible is central to all her work and she obviously fits within the constructed boundaries of "Biblical Studies," yet dead languages are of no real use for her research and teaching. The key thing for this sort of reception is the use of relevant interdisciplinary skills from film studies, literary studies, critical theory, cultural studies, etc., each of which has a disciplinary language of its own.[20] There are many untapped original topics available to be researched, so the all-important "originality" might be a lot easier to achieve here than in a traditional historical critical-thesis, which may even give the field a certain legitimate longevity.

But, if we stop there and stay in our individual comfort zones, there is a real danger of the field being so fragmented and unconnected that there is little point in defending it as a whole. We might even put people in different departments and faculties across the university. This is echoed by Hurtado:

> I would also suggest that there is a difference between gearing up to take part in a discipline and simply pursuing a given research project. So, e.g., one could trace the influence and reception of the Beowulf story in, e.g., modern English-language film and fiction, without acquiring the original language of the poem. But, to my mind, that wouldn't make one a scholar in the field of Beowulf and Norse poetry. Still a scholar, mind you, but not in that field.… But I would think still that someone gearing up to be a NT scholar (as distinguished from a cultural historian of modern life or an analyst of religious life and developments in contemporary societies, or religion-in-media studies), i.e., someone who wishes to engage the NT and early Christianity needs, at a minimum, the languages complement that I've talked about.[21]

[20] One anonymous senior Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholar cited by Hurtado argued that "It all depends on the thesis" and that sounds about right to me ("Fair Comment"). It might be worth adding that we should not, of course, be expected to test a "Biblical Studies" doctoral candidate for their knowledge of Greek when they have been working on New Testament texts in twentieth-century pop culture. Otherwise, as John Lyons has pointed out to me in private conversation, we might not unreasonably face appeals or more, especially if we are not careful with what is imposed by scholars on PhD examinations at universities with their own specific criteria.

[21] Hurtado, "Languages, Theories, Approaches."

Hurtado's point on the hypothetical Beowulf scholar is well taken, though Hurtado does not say what he would have done about those scholars and students working on reception histories in Biblical Studies contexts nor does he address the fact that reception has long been an established area in literary studies. But I think the Beowulf example is partly misleading. While not wanting to prevent the establishment of departments of Beowulf Studies, it is not comparable to the Bible in terms of use, influence, and frequency. An area of reception history which has been much discussed, and is to my mind central to the enterprise, is the very nature of biblical reception and its wider significance. And it is precisely this sort of approach that provides not only the coherence for a broader agenda for reception history but also something that can contribute towards a powerful defence of Biblical Studies as a whole.

Whether we like it nor not, then, the Bible is probably the most high-profile literary collection in Western culture (and perhaps beyond), turning up in all sorts of unexpected places. So understanding its reception and influence is a significant task for understanding humanity. Furthermore, the reception of the Bible opens up important areas of research, such as how the Bible and biblical texts have shaped, or become embedded in, for instance, gender, ethnicity, and politics—in other words, and somewhat dramatically put, understandings of what it has meant to be human. A particularly important example is Yvonne Sherwood's work on the "Liberal Bible" (a dominant mode of popular exegesis since the early modern period that continues to influence ways in which the Bible is understood in Western culture), which is both explicitly "Biblical Studies" and of value across disciplines and fields of study, showing just how significant, malleable, and resolute the Bible has been.[22] Indeed, we might want to follow Timothy Beal's suggestion that reception history should turn its attention more to the cultural production of *scripture* as a means of interpreting culture more widely and thus bring Biblical Studies still more firmly into the Humanities and Social Sciences.[23] In this vein, we might also develop Hugh Pyper's suggestion that, by way of analogies from memetics, the multiple manifestations of biblical books, versions, translations, and so on have facilitated the Bible's own survival.[24]

[22] Yvonne Sherwood, "Bush's Bible as a Liberal Bible (Strange though that Might Seem)," *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts and Contemporary Worlds* 2, no. 1 (2006): 47–58.

[23] Timothy Beal, "Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures," *Biblical Interpretation* 19, nos. 4–5 (2011): 357–72.

[24] Hugh S. Pyper, *An Unsuitable Book: The Bible as Scandalous Text* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

But as well as this biologically influenced reading, we might also think more economically and see how the Bible has survived with reference to capitalism's relentless quest for new markets. We might think of how the Bible has survived in overtly "secular" contexts, including the masking of its language, with recognition possible only for those in the know, or for intrepid hunters of biblical texts working to uncover these uses.[25]

Thinking more specifically of biblical texts, we might want to follow the approach taken in David Gunn's book on Judges, viewing the specific text as a way to understand the history of ideas and the role biblical texts have played in that history.[26] Paul and the philosophers have had a long history of interaction (itself raising the question of the resonance of Pauline themes in Western thought), so why not emulate people like Ward Blanton, operating both *within* the field and comfortably interacting with critical theorists *across* other fields of study? These sorts of works are of significance to a distinctive "Biblical Studies" because if there is one thing some of us have learned about our esteemed colleagues in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, it is that there is a certain lack of awareness about the ways in which biblical texts have been at the heart of the history of ideas and in and around an array of cultural developments, including the most high-profile. Biblical scholars can illuminate these kinds of things because they are trained to do so. These bigger-picture approaches (and there are, of course, many more) allow us to move beyond lip service to the "importance of the Bible for however many people" argument as a standard defence of the field and to show how and why it has been so influential, how and why it has survived, and how and why it continues to survive in the most surprising of environments.[27]

There is an echo of this sort of reasoning in Hurtado's inaugural lecture:

> A final reason why the New Testament is a valid university subject is that scholars in other disciplines of the modern university need the resources of New Testament scholars. Given the influence and relevance of the New Testament in subjects such as his-

[25] As happens, for instance, in pop music. See e.g., Deane Galbraith, "Drawing Our Fish in the Sand: Secret Biblical Allusions in the Music of U2," *Biblical Interpretation* 19, no. 2 (2011): 181–222.

[26] David M. Gunn, *Judges*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

[27] Cf. Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 66: "On a more practical political note, effective history would at least enable New Testament scholars to give some substance to the rather hackneyed claim that their discipline matters because the New Testament is a canonical document of great influence."

> tory, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, sociology, politics, art, literature, music, and other fields, even if it is not a university subject the New Testament will be referred to in university courses in a variety of disciplines, and claims will be made about what it has to say, but probably by people not really qualified to do so. The academically responsible alternative is reflected in the University of Edinburgh: The New Testament included among the university subjects vital to humane learning.[28]

This would seem to tally with a more ambitious vision for Biblical Studies. However, this is not quite the direction of Hurtado's argument. Almost by definition, if we go by the skills Hurtado demands of New Testament scholars (and again presumably, by implication, a Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scholar), the discipline remains largely limited to the ancient world. Where Hurtado does try to make connections across time, it seems he reins himself back in by keeping the focus firmly on the ancient ("the religious impetus that generated and initially shaped the tradition, and the founding ideas"):

> There is an academic field of New Testament studies precisely on account of religious and theological interests in the these writings… it is precisely Christian beliefs of hundreds of millions of people and the Christian attempt to base these beliefs on the New Testament, or at least relate them to the New Testament, that makes the study of the New Testament an important university discipline.… The study of the theological affirmations in the New Testament is of obvious relevance to the continuing theological reflection within the Christian confessions, but this study also has relevance for the wider society as well. If New Testament studies is to contribute to society's need to understand Christian tradition, the religious impetus that generated and initially shaped the tradition, and the founding ideas that have been taken up in Christian history, then the modern university discipline of New Testament studies must give due attention to the religious/theological ideas of these writings.[29]

It seems, then, that this is indeed an implicit version of Hurtado's more explicit blog statement. This means, then, that there remains a disconnect be-

[28] Hurtado, "Questions for the Discipline," 163.
[29] Ibid., 170.

tween Hurtado's vision of New Testament (and, presumably, Biblical) Studies and the use of the Bible in "history, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, sociology, politics, art, literature, music, and other fields" with which biblical scholars might engage. I am not convinced that it is enough simply to utilise scholarship on the biblical texts in their ancient cultural contexts and then to assume that this will sufficiently contribute to an understanding of the Bible for different disciplines and fields and in different historical and cultural contexts. After all, knowledge of the use, influence, and reception of the Bible and biblical texts would typically be more important than the results of historical or standard literary criticism for any study on (say) seventeenth-century England, Søren Kierkegaard, military anthropology, William Blake, Sigmund Freud, Max Weber, American party politics, Caravaggio, pop music, or advertising. There will be complications, of course, e.g., the idea of "strong" and influential biblical narratives, but history is so littered with all sorts of weird and wonderful readings of texts that we should not put too much faith in the power of the idea of the "original" narrative. Presumably, then, experts in the use and influence of the Bible will generally be the people more qualified to engage with colleagues in other disciplines and fields than experts in the source-critical analysis of the Pentateuch or the Synoptic Problem.

Internationalism

Hurtado's position as presented on his blog was criticised as being "Eurocentric" with a continuing bias towards Western scholarship to the exclusion of non-Western scholarship[30] and, more broadly, as a manifestation of the "closing of the Western mind," a manifestation of a more strident defence of Western culture with greater securitising of its borders and, ultimately, "a reactionary defence [of] a perceived golden age that has passed."[31] Hurtado responded by arguing that European languages "have been, and remain, considerably more important in the field, because far more important work is published in them across a far wider spectrum of matters. (By 'important,' I mean intended to have impact and relevance for the field as a whole.)"[32] However, there is something to the criticisms levelled by Boer and BW16,

[30] BW16, "Victorian Straight-Jacket."

[31] Boer, "The Closing of Larry Hurtado's Mind." More generally, see Moore and Sherwood, *Biblical Scholar*, e.g., 122–23.

[32] Hurtado, "Encore."

because the problems Hurtado faces are partly a result of his narrow definition of "the field," which has the effect of perpetuating the dominance of historical-critical approaches. This is not, of course, to dismiss the importance of certain European languages on different debates (again, "It all depends on the thesis") but making such languages "essential" again limits what a PhD student can do and means that certain potentially creative and innovative scholarship with a distinct flavour of internationalism—not to mention sheer intellectual curiosity—is downplayed or even excluded by default.[33] The Bible is obviously present well beyond the walls of Western academia and there remains so much scope for greater interaction with a range of cultural and geographical contexts.

A more explicit internationalism has, historically, provided different insights and collaborations, even if some of these have not always penetrated into mainstream historical criticism. There are plenty of examples of success, but, historically, probably the most obvious success of a more internationalist agenda in Biblical Studies has been postcolonial criticism. While postcolonial studies remain fairly common in relatively mainstream Western scholarship, they owe much to greater collaboration away from comfort zones of historical criticism, even if they have become, in certain manifestations, the staple of the liberal academic in the English-speaking world. Again, does not greater collaboration open more intellectual doors? Another area of scholarship associated with postcolonialism has been a kind of metacritical approach to the Orientalist assumptions of Western scholarship pioneered by major thinkers such as Edward Said which has benefited greatly from interaction with ideas "beyond" the traditional boundaries. Yet, despite this being published by mainstream *biblical scholars* and generating academic discussion,[34]

[33] There is, in fact, an echo of this intellectual curiosity in Hurtado's argument, even if limited to a European example: "In my own PhD work, it proved very handy that I had Spanish, as two major articles in Spanish had been highly infulential [*sic*] but had not been subjected to adequate critical scrutiny" (Hurtado, "Encore"). Again, I would emphasise that wider engagement and greater curiosity can only enrich intellectual development without imposing (too many) restrictions on PhD students and scholars.

[34] For example, R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting the Interpretations* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998); Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000); Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002); William E. Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (London: Equinox, 2005); Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, eds., *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical*

it is noticeable (but not surprising) that the manifestations of such scholarship continue to be ignored in mainstream (historical-critical) scholarship, despite profound criticisms of issues such as "Jewishness" and the historical-critical method itself. This is all the more worrying given the grand claims of self-awareness regularly found in Biblical Studies (often under the banal cliché, "we all have presuppositions"). This alone might suggest that the more insular historical-critical model advocated by Hurtado means the field is not sufficiently engaging with scholarship which has come from "outside" and which challenges its very assumptions. Whether this was or is intended by Hurtado or not, it has been and remains a serious consequence of this sort of thinking.[35]

There is a danger of lapsing into a cosy liberal multiculturalism and simply listing all the wonderful things people do in different contexts even while being largely ignored by, say, major historical Jesus works or the endless tomes of Pauline theology and thereby perpetuating the credible centre by tolerating the existence of a range of exotic Others (who may not necessarily be deemed fully qualified).[36] For now, we might tentatively turn to the ways in which internationalist scholarship ought to be promoted. There are what should be obvious ways of fostering this sort of internationalism, such as actively encouraging regular collaborations between seemingly different perspectives and locations. But there are ways academics can act more locally for the greater Biblical Studies good. Many academics in higher education still actually have some control of the modes of production in universities, even if some are barely aware of it. Obviously, with more and more market-driven forces in universities, there may well be increasing pressures on the content of the service provided. In cases relating to, for instance, challenging corporate influence or engaging anything concerning Israel-Palestine head-on,

Discourse (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005); Blanton, *Displacing Christian Origins*; James G. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Terror: Scholarly Projects for a New American Century* (London: Equinox, 2008); Laura Nasrallah and Elisabeth S. Fiorenza, eds., *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, and Ethnicity in Early Christian Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

[35] As comes through strongly in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years after the Voices from the Margin* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

[36] Cf., e.g., Tat-siong Benny Liew, "When Margins Become Common Ground: Questions of and for Biblical Studies," in ibid.; Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner, *Contextualizing Gender in Early Christian Discourse: Thinking beyond Thecla* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 168–69.

there will be tough battles to be fought.[37] But bringing a greater internationalism firmly to the fore in the field of Biblical Studies means that academics must get such an agenda on the curriculum, into departmental agendas, into research, and so on. It really is not *that* difficult. The system might be evil but that doesn't mean we can't have some fun with it.

"Value"

This brings us to perhaps the crux of the issue: the "value" of the field of study. Hurtado frames his argument in terms of the initial question posed to him at his interview for his professorial chair: "Why should the New Testament be a subject taught in a modern tax-supported university?"[38] One way to answer this has been to make a connection between the field (and Arts and Humanities more generally) and employment, and I am sure many successful cases have been made. But one problem with pursuing this line of defence is that disciplines and fields of study are deemed increasingly relevant in term of market demand and their economic value. We might recall Stewart Lee's story about Margaret Thatcher's visit to St Hilda's College, Oxford. When the student said she studied Norse Literature, Thatcher was said to have replied, "What a luxury."[39] And this gets to the heart of the current issue on the value of Humanities subjects, subjects often deemed lacking in economic value (as indeed are some of the sciences), and the nature of universities more generally.[40] In the UK, this concern for value has been recently influenced by the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (for English universities, published 2010), headed by Lord Browne, former Group Chief Executive of BP.[41] This report had a significant influence on the introduction of increased tuition fees in the UK. The language of the market and the "common sense" notion of education

[37] Cf. Clare Dyer, "Aubrey Blumsohn: Academic Who Took on Industry," *British Medical Journal* (2009): 339:b5293.

[38] Hurtado, "Questions for the Discipline," 158.

[39] Stewart Lee, "Will Cameron's recipe for 'successful' films result in a glut of silent comedies?" *Observer*, January 22, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/22/stewart-lee-david-cameron-pinewood-film.

[40] See now Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For?* (London: Penguin, 2012). If there were a 'must read' for anyone needing to defend Humanities subjects in the modern university, this would probably be it.

[41] John Browne et al., *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: An Independent Review of Higher Education and Funding and Student Finance* (12 October, 2010), http://hereview.independent.gov.uk/.

as a commodity are clear enough: "The money will follow the student" (6); "genuine competition for students" (10); "the increase in employed university graduates accounted for 6% of growth in the private sector… Employing graduates creates innovation, enabling firms to identify and make more effective use of knowledge, ideas and technologies" (16); "demand led competition" (36); and "institutions will face increased competition. They will compete for students" (51).

We need to resist this if we want to promote Biblical Studies as an Arts and Humanities subject as outlined here, or indeed as outlined by Hurtado. As Peter Thompson put it, the hypothetical street cleaners who are believed to be resentful that their taxes are being wasted—and hence justify this move towards a more neoliberal model of university education—is an "ideological cloud" put out by the dominant ruling class to gather more of the surplus to itself and that value to this class is only measured in pounds, euros, and dollars.[42] From the perspective of the ruling classes, or at least the dominant neoliberal perspective, education has to be the exploitation of human intellectual labour. Here, commodity value becomes the *only* value. There are some very simple reasons for celebrating an alternative understanding of the value of the Arts and Humanities. Without Arts and Humanities we would lack in knowledge about no less than what it has meant to be human.[43] As Peter Thompson argues, much of humanity has been about seeking patterns out of chaos, establishing the multiple contingent events that got us to where we are (and possibly where we might be going), and unravelling the assumptions of the end point. It is precisely the absence of value (economically understood), Thompson suggests, that guarantees another kind of value for human beings in our understanding of how we fit into the world. It is not

[42] Sam Ladkin, et al., "Against Value in the Arts and Humanities," University of Sheffield (February 23, 2012), http://www.shef.ac.uk/faculty/arts-and-humanities/research-innovation/events-activities/againstvalueinaandh. A podcast, including Peter Thompson's lecture, is available at http://uecho.shef.ac.uk:8080/ess/echo/presentation/2490a955-7c12-4b64-bf31-c2a4e8c65bd8/media.mp3.

[43] We might also argue along these lines: if something is not deemed of "value" in terms of the market then is there not something potentially subversive about certain topics that do not meet market demand? Cf. e.g., Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 39–40; Eric Repphun, "Dysenchanted Worlds: Rationalisation, Dystopia, and Therapy Culture in Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit*," *Dunedin School*, September 25, 2009, http://dunedinschool.wordpress.com/2009/09/25/dysenchanted-worlds-rationalisation-dystopia-and-therapy-culture-in-ninni-holmqvist's-the-unit/; Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, revised edition (London: Verso, 2011), 411–12.

without reason that it is often remarked (as Thompson himself does) that the intellectual function of universities can be viewed in a similar way to another institution from the feudal era; the universities become a kind of monastery, working to preserve learning through the ages.

And does not the bigger picture vision of what Biblical Studies I am arguing for here become a part of an alternate definition of value? Whether that definition also has commodity value can be debated, but it certainly has value in helping us to understand how and why the Bible originated, how and why it developed and survived, how and why biblical texts got to the multiple places they are today, why people felt the need to engage with biblical texts en route, why there is loathing, despising, love, and indifference—all the while adding something to our understanding of what it has meant and means to be human.[44] Certainly we need the indispensible experts in the different manuscript traditions, in Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and so on, but we need so much more to explain how we got to where we are today with a collection of texts that have remained with us. The Bible is not simply the preserve of the pious; it is, in fear of being rebuked by Moore and Sherwood, a window to understanding humanity over hundreds, even thousands of years.[45]

[44] But despite all this, I still think we should be wary of getting too close to, or retaining, an aristocratic model of scholarship where well-paid senior academics sit around, presumably untouched because they are very clever and worthy of thinking about obscure things. This is partly why I think certain forms of external engagement are important. I may well regret writing this, but I also have some sympathy with Roland Boer's "University of Utopia" which "does not overpay its staff in return for overwork" but provides a comfortable but not excessive salary with the savings going towards "paying adequate administrative staff, more teaching positions, multiple PhD scholarships, and a world-class library." ("University of Utopia," *Stalin's Moustache*, September 25, 2009, http://stalinsmoustache.wordpress.com/2009/09/25/the-university-of-utopia/.)

[45] Again, I stress that this defence applies equally to Hurtado's definition of "the discipline," although I would suggest that if we accept the wider, more ambitious definition, the field would contribute much more to the Humanities. It might be possible to read the above as more of a critique of Hurtado's liberal position on the importance of critical New Testament studies for pluralist democracies. Compare here Markus Bockmuehl's criticism of Hurtado cited above as an example of what he called "the rather hackneyed claim that their discipline matters because the New Testament is a canonical document of great influence" (*Seeing the Word*, 66): "So the largely phenomenological and descriptive account of New Testament studies developed in the Edinburgh inaugural lecture of Hurtado, 1999: additional justification for tax-funded teaching of the New Testament at public universities is somewhat optimistically sought in the tolerance that such study fosters in a religiously pluralistic world. In early-twenty-first-century Britain at least, it is difficult to see evidence that nonconfessional study of the New Testament in departments of religious studies and theology has noticeably

The reductive understanding of value as economic exchange or use value is one very good reason to be nervous about those who believe that academia should unquestioningly serve the ruling classes and dominant ideologies. The journalist and trained religious studies scholar, Nathan Schneider, recalls his American Academy of Religion experience and accompanying epiphany:

> The AAR was at the enormous new Washington, DC convention center. Fittingly, one of the plenary speakers was Madeleine Albright, the former secretary of state who had just written a book about why religion is so important.
>
> What I remember her saying, which stuck with me and probably a lot of the other graduate students in the hall, were things like this: "Our diplomats need to be trained to know the religions of the countries where they're going." And: "I think the Secretary of State needs to have religion advisors." I hadn't really thought of it that way before, but it made great sense, especially with someone like Albright saying it. Religion is everywhere. It does matter. The ongoing sectarian violence in occupied Iraq had turned the headlines into daily reminders about the consequences of not taking religion seriously—to say nothing of politics in DC back then. Yes—sounds like a job for a religion scholar.
>
> Here, I stand with Madeleine Albright: the world can't afford to wait for religious studies to grow up. It has come of age. It's time to be more confident about what the field has to offer. I've come to think that it imparts skills more valuable than most of those who teach and learn them even know.[46]

Schneider continues by drawing on ideas of engagement with "the world" in the language of commerce and, unsurprisingly given his interests, buys into the humanities-as-commodity rhetoric.[47] But he also has a critique of a certain type of religious studies scholar:

enhanced tolerance for biblical beliefs and practices in society at large. There are better justifications for university-based religious study as appropriately pursued from either a purely phenomenological or a faith perspective, whether Christian or otherwise" (Ibid., 66–67n54).

[46] Nathan Schneider, "Why the World Needs Religious Studies," *Religion Dispatches*, November 20, 2011, http : / / www . religiondispatches . org / archive / culture / 4636/why_the_world_needs_religious_studies_/.

[47] "Traders have to know how to temporarily avoid inconvenient subjects long enough to get what they're looking for. They learn to be careful around the sensitivities of others.

> To make matters worse, the field faces critics from within: well-meaning but destabilizing attempts by religion scholars to re-think and reinvent the whole enterprise from the ground up, even to the point of unsettling its foundations. (Fitzgerald's *The Ideology of Religious Studies* and McCutcheon's *The Discipline of Religion* come to mind.) These are important exercises, but they exact a cost. When religion scholars forget how much the world outside the academy needs them, they can be prone to theorize their own field into oblivion.

By the logic of Schneider's own argument, this makes sense. Quite simply, he is asserting that academic religious studies should be a willing handmaiden to state and private power. He even thinks that this might make the world a better place. And, of course, historically, it has—at least implicitly—been the case that scholars of religion and the Bible (and, of course, well beyond) have bought into the dominant interests of state and private power.[48] Yet, it is noticeable that it is precisely when Fitzgerald and McCutcheon are presented as challenging the outward-facing discipline as described by Schneider that they lose their "value" as scholars of religion. But it is precisely the uselessness, or rather destructiveness, of Fitzgerald and McCutcheon that provides their very value in the sense I have advocated above.[49] Even if the record of challenging the prevailing ideologies in universities has been patchy, challenging the established (often glorious) narratives of how we got here as scholars and arguing at odds with dominant ideological positions within and without disciplines and fields of studies might nevertheless actually be a way of making the case for the Arts and Humanities as something that again tries to understand what it has meant to be human, at least in the sense that it helps us

Scholars of religion learn to do the same thing. Both, it could be said, are *on the lookout for value*. Business tends to look for financial value, and religion scholars tend to look for social value, but it's a pretty similar task in either case. I think it's time that religious studies does more to prep its students and faculty for a more direct engagement with what I've been calling 'the world.' The field is ready for it."

[48] There is a parallel in the militarised form of anthropology which has made a comeback in recent years. See e.g., David H. Price, "Lessons from Second World War Anthropology: Peripheral, Persuasive and Ignored Contributions," *Anthropology Today* 18, no. 3 (2002): 14–20; David H. Price, *Weaponizing Anthropology: Social Science in Service of the Militarized State* (Oakland: AK/CounterPunch, 2011).

[49] A comparable work from Biblical Studies might be Moore and Sherwood, *Biblical Scholar*.

unravel the ways in which certain manifestations of power have got us where we now are.

If we think more concretely with direct reference to Biblical Studies, one of the obvious ways the "common sense" assumptions of contemporary forms of capitalism manifest themselves is in the intense emphasis on individualism (certainly in New Testament Studies), where Jesus, Paul, and to a lesser extent all the others are, it would seem, the real reasons why Christianity happened. Similarly, the increasing obsession in New Testament scholarship with contrasting the individualised West with the collective Mediterranean may tell us much about the collective influence of dominant capitalist (including neoliberal) trends underlying scholarship, not to mention the profound influence or embeddedness of theological history and Orientalism. Clearly, the reception of biblical *scholarship* is of as much importance for understanding humanity as the object of study (i.e., the Bible) itself, if indeed we should be separating the two at all. While the language of "no alternative" may be common, neoliberalism—probably *the* dominant contemporary ideological frame—is not a reflection of eternal laws. Perhaps market demands should not, after all, be an indicator of what matters for the understanding of humanity, even if universities are ever more drifting toward a free-market model.

What the above examples also show is how Biblical Studies (along with the Arts and Humanities more generally) can unravel the "common sense" assumptions of what it apparently "must" mean to be human—or indeed a biblical scholar.[50] What Biblical Studies can do, and what other academic subjects can do, is to challenge this façade of immutability and the ways in which dominant assumptions frame the ways we think and are a threat to the places where we think, including the university (whether or not we currently know it and whether or not we like it). Thinking more broadly suggests, further, that Hurtado has not gone far enough when he makes the following claims:

> In dealing with any subject as unavoidably theological as the New Testament, the only alternatives are to do so with unacknowledged theological assumptions and convictions, often insufficiently thought out and uncritically held, or else to recognise openly that we are engaged with matters of theological import, and then attempt to bring to the task a self-critical, humble and candid awareness of one's own theological preferences

[50] Cf. ibid., 127–31.

> and phobias. Thereby, one may better be able to describe more authentically the religious concerns of the New Testament authors and reduce the degree to which one subtly and perhaps unconsciously suppresses those ideas with which one is uncomfortable, and anachronistically foists onto the New Testament writings the ideas and values of one's own time and preference.[51]

But I think we ought not to rely too heavily on ourselves as individuals to carry out this task on ourselves, or indeed to restrict the relevant influences to "theological" influence, because ideology is far broader than individuals often assume,[52] which again brings us back to the importance of having a field as thoroughly internationalist and open-minded as possible. Again, I think Hurtado's concerns are too narrow and an ongoing critique of the field's assumptions ought to be as central to Biblical Studies as anything else.

What Biblical Studies Might Be

I have made a case for why a bigger vision for Biblical Studies is needed. Against Hurtado, I do not think it is right to dictate too much of what does and does not count as "essential" for a career in the field, at least if this is as narrowly understood as Hurtado's definition, and I do think that the right tools for the job in hand are what we ought to stress. Throughout all this, we should never forget that the boundaries of the field of study are somewhat arbitrary and constantly shifting. New developments have happened because the field has opened up beyond its traditional boundaries, encouraging intellectual curiosity over strict demands on what is and is not a Biblical Studies or New Testament doctorate. This may well lead to scholarship of the sort some of us hate, love, are indifferent towards, think ridiculous, and so on, but such is the price of free thinking and freedom of speech.

But Hurtado's model is obviously not entirely without merit. It is clear that the historical critic of (say) New Testament texts does, roughly speaking, need a range of philological, historical, literary, and text-critical skills—again, the right tools for the job in hand. We might expand this (and, in general terms, I am emphatic that we should) to include a range of interdisciplinary skills for understanding human interactions with, and reactions to, cultural

[51] Hurtado, "Questions for the Discipline," 172.

[52] For discussion see, e.g., James G. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship and Ideology* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2012).

conditions, as well as longer-term material explanations. But historical criticism as traditionally understood is no longer the only approach to Biblical Studies (and never was if we include theology as a form of reception). We cannot justify the importance of Biblical Studies by claiming that it is hugely important today and then largely bypass the connection between now and then. If we want to justify Biblical Studies by the contemporary relevance of the Bible, then it might reasonably be expected that we explain *why* and also *how* it remains relevant.

This is why a more unified picture of what Biblical Studies is so important. Of course, no one is going to be able to know everything about the details of biblical reception, just as no one is going to be able to know everything about the details of the history of English literature. People with precise skills on precise topics remain crucial to building up the bigger picture, not to mention preserving knowledge and ideas. But we will need to have some awareness of what this bigger picture actually is in order to explain Biblical Studies as a field of study in its own right. If we frame this debate, as Hurtado did, in terms of what a PhD student should be expected to know to be ready for a career in Biblical Studies (jobs permitting), then presumably Biblical Studies will only remain a niche area within Theology and Religion Departments.[53] If we frame the field more broadly, instead of simply surviving, Biblical Studies could be at the heart of, and a driving force for, theoretical discussions in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

[53] The difference between my wider view of Biblical Studies and Hurtado's narrower view of New Testament Studies (with the difference between Biblical Studies and New Testament Studies perhaps now worth emphasising) may well reflect our working environments: I work in a Biblical Studies department and Hurtado recently retired from a School of Divinity.