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# Editorial

This issue of *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* showcases articles which originated as papers presented at reception history conferences or at conferences where reception history formed a significant component. Bill Goodman's article derives from a paper presented at the Bible, Critical Theory and Reception Seminar, University of Sheffield, September 14–15, 2011. The article by Philip R. Davies was prepared for the same occasion, although not presented in person due to a conflicting engagement. One of the co-organisers of that seminar, James G. Crossley, has in addition prepared an essay for this issue on what he views as the central role reception history should play within biblical studies. Articles by Gregory W. Dawes and Zoe Alderton were presented in earlier forms at the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions Conference, Queenstown, December 7–9, 2011, the theme of which was religion and reception history. The article by Sean Durbin began life at the Bible and Critical Theory Seminar, Brisbane, November 5–6, 2011. The co-organiser of the latter conference, Roland Boer, also contributes a paper to the current issue. The next issue will continue in like vein by featuring a collection of papers from a symposium held at Virginia Tech in 2011, "Revisiting the 'Judeo-Christian' tradition."

The first article in this issue, Zoe Alderton's "Cliffs as Crosses: The Problematic Symbology of Colin McCahon," examines the Necessary Protection artworks by this prominent twentieth-century New Zealand artist. Alderton argues that, due to "the complexity and obscurity of the symbolic lexicon he employs," McCahon generally fails to communicate his environmental inflection of Christian symbols and traditions to viewers. Alderton's detailed explanations of the significance of the symbols McCahon employed not only

provides a valuable commentary on these works, but exposes "the schism between intended and actual response," which she analyses with reference to Erwin Panofsky's Iconology/Iconography framework.

Gregory W. Dawes's "Evolution and the Bible: The Hermeneutical Question" examines some of the hermeneutical implications conveniently forgotten in Christian attempts to argue that evolutionary theory and biblical teaching are not necessarily in conflict. With reference to the hermeneutical guidelines for resolving such conflicts set down by Augustine and followed by most subsequent pre-modern Christian interpreters, Dawes begins by maintaining that "a Christian cannot accept evolutionary theory without abandoning at least aspects of this traditional way of interpreting the Bible." Later in the paper, Dawes turns to three alternatives, arguing that the most defensible of these entails the requirement that Christians elevate human reason to the status of their ultimate "judge and guide."

Sean Durbin reappraises Christian Zionism's employment of the Bible in "'For Such a Time as This': Reading (and Becoming) Esther with Christians United for Israel." In contrast to the prevalent tendency of critics to emphasise the eschatological concerns of Christian Zionism and judge their hermeneutic as a "misreading" of the Bible, Durbin takes a step back in order to consider "the cultural and political context in which they live, and … how this context is brought to bear on the text." In particular, by closely examining Robert Stearns's sermon on the book of Esther, not a major source for Christian Zionist eschatology by any means, Durbin identifies dimensions of the Christian Zionist hermeneutic and habitus which are routinely overlooked in analyses.

Philip R. Davies attempts to recode Northrop Frye's *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (1982) from a less Romantic perspective, in "The Bible: Utopian, Dystopian, or Neither? Or: Northrop Frye Meets Monty Python." Davies's recoding is undertaken from the perspective of "the modern Western zeitgeist," rejecting both "naïve optimism and tragic vision" and instead adopting "a dark comic or Pythonesque view of life, recognizing the absurdity of human ambition and pointlessness of human existence, while laughing in the face of it." A postscript to the paper expresses some provocative opinions about the worth or otherwise of critical theory—that "path of synchrony, where history and chronology can be ignored"—and in particular recent theorisations of utopia.

Bill Goodman's "Assured Lament: U2 Sing the Psalms" traces the influences of the Psalms through the career of Irish band U2. Just as the Psalms do

not attempt to resolve the dissonance between conflicting elements of praise and lament, Goodman argues that U2's songs "express trust in the goodness of God along with experience which seems to negate that trust." Instead of attempting to resolve the tension, U2 choose a dialogical approach "which acknowledges and embraces the tension, or perhaps simply surrenders to it."

Roland Boer's "Orientalist Camp: The Case of Allen Edwardes" provides a stimulating first foray into the reception of the Bible and rabbinics within the works written under the pen-name of "Allen Edwardes," in particular *Erotica Judaica: A Sexual History of the Jews* (1967). In so doing, Boer makes note both of his bodily responses and his intellectual responses as a trained biblical scholar upon reading Edwardes's adventurous biblical interpretations—"round-robin sodomy" in Exodus, unsatisfiable clitorises in Proverbs, and the prophet Jeremiah's chronic masturbation. But as Boer argues, if Edwardes's work is a form of intellectual pornography, it does not merely parade a succession of "massive cocks and hungry cunts" within a minimal narrative framework, for the titillation of readers; its over-the-top form also "shows up the pretensions of 'conventional' scholarship."

James G. Crossley's essay in this issue, "An Immodest Proposal for Biblical Studies" engages with the opinion expressed by Larry Hurtado in his inaugural address to the University of Edinburgh in 1997, and more recently on his personal blog, that certain language and historical-critical skills should be the sine qua non for any British doctorate in New Testament studies. In reply, Crossley argues that "Hurtado's view of the field of study is too narrow" and that "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." Crossley's broader conception of the field of biblical studies emphasises "the use, influence, and reception of the Bible and biblical texts," in particular, as an important part (even "hegemonic norm") of biblical studies which Hurtado's narrower conception would seem to curtail.

In addition to these articles and essay, the issue again includes a number of very useful reviews of recent works in reception history and religion.

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