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Editorial

In a typically rollicking assault on the sociology of religion, Rodney Stark charges scholars in the field with "ancestor worship" in their continuing attempts at exegesis of the "classic" works of Weber, Durkheim, and Marx.[1] Their works are taken as scriptures, invested with authority, and read in the way the Church Fathers read the Bible. While this mode of reading is "entirely appropriate when devoted to texts invested with authority or with literary value … the 'authority' of science derives not from the *source* of any particular contribution, but from *performance*." Durkheim, according to Stark, conspicuously fails to perform: he made a major error in excluding the gods from his definition of religion, an error which has had "severe, widespread, and long-lasting consequences."[2] Why then, re-read Durkheim? The occasion for this special issue of *Relegere* is the centenary of the publication of *Les formes élémentaires* in 2012. Is this a commemorative ritual in which we engage in "the common exercise of reading and re-reading the holy text"?[3]

[1] Rodney Stark, "Putting an End to Ancestor Worship," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 4 (2004): 465–75. Almost four decades earlier, Clifford Geertz had laid a similar charge, arguing that anthropology of religion had made "no theoretical advances of major importance" since the second world war and was instead "living off the conceptual capital of its ancestors, adding very little, save a certain empirical enrichment to it." (Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (New York: Praeger, 1966), 1.)

[2] Stark, "Putting an End to Ancestor Worship," 473, 471, original emphasis.

[3] Werner Gephart's characterisation of a conference held to mark the centenary of Durkheim's "discovery" of the significance of religion in his reading of William Robertson Smith ("Memory and the Sacred: The Cult of Anniversaries and Commemorative Rituals in the Light of *The Elementary Forms*," in *On Durkheim's* Elementary Forms of Religious Life, ed. N. J. Allen, W. S. F. Pickering, and W. Watts Miller (London: Routledge, 1998), 127).

While not presuming to speak for the organisers of the events where some of these papers were originally delivered,[4] it is not our intent to read *Les formes élémentaires* as scripture. Durkheim demands attention, perhaps especially in this part of the world, precisely because of the "widespread and long-lasting consequences" of his work, erroneous or not.

In the first article in this issue, Marion Maddox addresses directly the problematic legacy of Durkheim's work for Indigenous Australians. She goes on to suggest that Durkheim's vision of the state as constituted by multiple layers of associations provides a model of citizenship in group terms which unmasks the claim to collective benefits on the basis of an assumed universal citizenship enjoyed by (some) individuals. Acknowledging that this in turn renders claims of universal human rights difficult to sustain, Maddox argues that Durkheim can help us here too, by broadening those group rights to the widest social group of all, the whole of humanity, through deliberate, collective cultivation of the bonds of sympathy which tie us to one another.

Durkheim's conception of a cult of humanity which is at the same time a cult of the individual is the starting point for Michael Hill's analysis of religious individualism in the thought of Durkheim and Ernst Troeltsch. Hill goes on to revisit his own earlier inventory—based on the predictions of Durkheim and Troeltsch—of six features of New Age spirituality in the light of subsequent research. Durkheim's and Troeltsch's predictions concerning the future of religion in complex societies are tested by examining three types of New Age religious practice in New Zealand.

Garry W. Trompf re-reads Durkheim alongside his contemporaries and some of his predecessors—notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau—on the thorny question of the origins of religion. Trompf argues that, despite Durkheim's critiques of origins theorists and his repeated denial of our capacity to know anything of origins, his insistence that we could discover what religion "always and essentially is" brought him to the brink of assertions about what it "first was." He concludes by considering Durkheim's work in the light of more recent research on Aboriginal religion, in particular in relation to the "high gods" debate.

[4] A panel on "Emile Durkheim and Australian Aboriginal Religions" at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, Atlanta, Georgia, October 30–November 1, 2010; and the New Zealand Association for the Study of Religions 2010 Conference: "A Century from Durkheim: Perspectives from the Pacific," Victoria University of Wellington, June 30–July 2, 2010.

In the final article re-reading Durkheim, Ivan Strenski enters into another contemporary debate, that which centres on the term "religion" and its imposition in contexts other than that in which the term developed, namely, the Christian West. He argues that Durkheim, too, imposes a culturally-specific view of religion on the data he analysed, but that culture from which Durkheim derived this view is Indian, not Western. Strenski uses Martin Reisebrodt's more recent theory of religion as a foil to reveal the Indian origins of Durkheim's non-interventionist conception of the sacred.

The editors of *Relegere* thank Paul Morris, Michael Radich, and Geoff Troughton—all in the Religious Studies programme at Victoria University of Wellington—for their work in bringing together these articles re-reading Durkheim. We hope to be able to devote space in future issues to similar collections re-reading classic works in the study of religion.

This issue also includes two other articles dealing with "afterlives" of the Bible in contemporary culture. Roland Boer reads Nick Cave's entire body of work through Ernst Bloch's philosophy of music. By attending closely to the reworking of biblical, or more broadly Christian, themes in the work of both Bloch and Cave—"hearing round corners"—Boer detects an interaction between the different forms of song in Cave's work which, he argues, constitute a search for redemption, albeit one which is never certain.

Finally, Robert Myles examines how the Terminator television series appropriates and adapts biblical material. By focussing on a single episode from the series—an adaptation of the story of Samson—he demonstrates how the afterlife of the biblical text re-contextualises and even supplants or "terminates" the original text. The relationship between a text and its afterlives has therefore to be seen as bi-directional.

Two review essays—by Jonathan Roberts and Christopher Rowland on the first volume of the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, and by Ibrahim Abraham on two works by James S. Bielo—and reviews of recent works on the reception history of various religious traditions conclude the issue.

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