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On the Past and Future of New Testament Studies

A Response to Larry Hurtado

The particularity of the dominant is that they are in a position to ensure that their particular way of being is recognized as universal.

Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (2001) [1998]

I WRITE AS a young scholar who is hoping to find a career in biblical studies, assuming—perhaps optimistically—that I will find a permanent post (or even one that lasts longer than one semester) before universities stop employing biblical scholars altogether. From where I stand, it has therefore been very interesting to read Larry Hurtado’s recent articles on his ideas about the future of New Testament studies. I earned my undergraduate degree and doctorate in the field of biblical studies, and my research and teaching since

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has fallen broadly within the same field. What Hurtado has described in his most recent article “Fashions, Fallacies and Future Prospects in New Testament Studies,” published in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*,¹ looks to me like a bleak and quite frankly dull future for the discipline. It was all the more interesting to read Hurtado’s most recent article in the light of his more promising contribution in *Relegere* just a few months prior.

I remain hopeful that the future will not be as Hurtado predicts. For, first and foremost, Hurtado’s most recent piece on the future of NT studies represents a non-engagement with many of the interesting and significant developments that are happening within the field. Although Hurtado does not claim to present an exhaustive analysis of the field, his opening line “I have always been interested in the history of [the] field,” and his stated intention to “look toward the future of the field” suggest that the article is going to speak to questions about the overall shape of the field. Unfortunately, the article does not live up to the relatively modest aims stated in the abstract, and ultimately seems to serve as little more than a summary of what he *desires* the discipline to look like in the future based on his academic experiences and interests, irrespective of what it might actually look like in reality.

Intriguingly, Hurtado’s article functions to rhetorically side-line as irrelevant or “faddish” those areas of the field about which he admits he is personally under-informed. As even a superficial reading makes clear, Hurtado effectively bypasses almost the entire field of NT studies outside of historical criticism in an apparent attempt to assert the importance of his expertise over and against the skills of the next generation of scholars who are utilising a variety of newer methods and critical approaches. For example, of the nineteen pages that comprise the article, four are dedicated to the “Pre-Christian Gnostic Redeemer Myth” and six to the “Son of Man” problem. By contrast, the article includes just over three pages on “fashions” (structuralist and “Marxist exegesis”), concluding with five pages on “futures.”

In Hurtado’s *JSNT* article, there are, broadly speaking, four levels on which he engages different strands of NT scholarship: (1) there is the scholarship that he engages at the level of argument; (2) there is the scholarship that he flags up but does not engage in any depth; (3) there is the scholarship which he dismisses off-hand; and (4) there is the scholarship that he ignores altogether. As a cursory glance makes clear, the scholarship that Hurtado

¹ Larry W. Hurtado, “Fashions, Fallacies and Future Prospects in New Testament Studies,” *JSNT* 36, no. 4 (2014): 299–324.

engages with in any meaningful depth is exclusively (sub-fields of) historical-critical work. The scholarship that Hurtado flags up but does not engage in any meaningful depth includes “reception history” and “‘postcolonialist’ [*sic*] interpretation.” The scholarship which he dismisses off-hand includes structuralist, and so-called “Marxist exegesis.” Established scholarship that Hurtado ignores altogether includes work on Christian anti-Judaism, feminist biblical criticism, and other engagements with the NT that relate to a plethora of ideological questions about religion, culture, and politics. That such vast areas of scholarship should be pushed to the margins by a senior scholar should immediately raise suspicions. To be absolutely clear, I have no issue with Hurtado focusing his personal research on highly specific historical-critical questions; but when Hurtado begins his article by positioning himself as a highly experienced scholar with a keen interest in the history of the field, the omissions are somewhat surprising.

I begin my analysis with a concession. With only one notable monograph ever being written explicitly on the subject of structuralist exegesis, at least according to Hurtado, he is not incorrect in his observation that structuralist exegesis never became a hot topic in the field in its own right. (The extent to which structuralism might have *indirectly* influenced the field is another question.) It is curious, however, that Hurtado should choose to discuss it at all, when he neglects so many more significant areas of scholarship. For example, Hurtado’s dealings with the far larger field of Marxist biblical criticism are simply bolted haphazardly on to the end of the structuralist exegesis discussion. In the first place, it is remarkable that Hurtado seems to place Marxist criticism on the same level as structuralist exegesis (indeed, he could be said to be placing it on an even a lower level of significance, for he devotes just a single paragraph to it). Even more remarkable is that Hurtado does not cite *a single work* that has been influenced by Marxist criticism, but, rather bizarrely, bases his whole off-handed dismissal of the subject on an N-Gram search of Google Books. Would the use of N-Grams be acceptable if presented by a younger scholar or a PhD student in a doctoral thesis? Why does Hurtado not simply offer a literature review of the substantial field of enquiry that he regards as a “fashion”? At the very least, such a review might have consulted Roland Boer’s 2007 *Currents in Biblical Research* article on “Twenty-five Years of Marxist Biblical Criticism.”² Such a litera-

² Roland Boer, “Twenty-five Years of Marxist Biblical Criticism,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 5, no. 3 (2007): 298–321.

ture review might also have mentioned some of the fundamental works of Latin American Liberation Theology (Gustavo Gutiérrez's *A Theology of Liberation* being the first obvious example).³ Such a review could have further mentioned Roland Boer and Jorunn Økland's volume on *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible*,⁴ or Randall Reed's *A Clash of Ideologies: Marxism, Liberation Theology, and Apocalypticism in New Testament Studies*.⁵ Indeed, such a review might mention the important article by Steven Friesen on "class" and avoidance of "class" in scholarship that appeared in *JSNT* a few years ago,⁶ or James Crossley's work on the ideological reasons why Marxism was largely avoided in post-War NT scholarship just as it began to thrive in the discipline of History.⁷ Moreover, it could have mentioned work on the historical Jesus by scholars such as Richard Horsley or Halvor Moxnes who have acknowledged their debt to Marxist historians.⁸ Since then, Neil Elliott has repeatedly highlighted the relevance of Marxist criticism for NT studies, and indeed NT studies' indebtedness to Marxist criticism.⁹ This is just a *partial* survey of some scholars who *explicitly* discuss Marxist criticism, to say nothing of the "implicit Marxism" that has been absorbed into the discipline, as Robert Myles has noted.¹⁰ Implicit Marxism is evident in the work of, for example, Ched Myers's *Binding the Strong Man*,¹¹ Justin Meggitt's *Paul, Poverty*

³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (London: SCM, 1973).

⁴ Roland Boer and Jorunn Økland, ed., *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008).

⁵ Randall Reed, *A Clash of Ideologies: Marxism, Liberation Theology, and Apocalypticism in New Testament Studies* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010).

⁶ Steven Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26, no. 3 (2004): 323–61.

⁷ See James G. Crossley, *Why Christianity Happened: A Sociohistorical Account of Christian Origins (26–50 CE)* (Edinburgh: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), especially 9–18.

⁸ In particular, see Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Roman Palestine* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); and Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

⁹ Note, especially, Neil Elliot, "Diagnosing an Allergic Reaction: The Avoidance of Marx in Pauline Scholarship," *Bible and Critical Theory* 8, no. 2 (2012): 3–15.

¹⁰ Robert J. Myles, "What is the next big thing in biblical studies?," *The Bible & Class Struggle*, August 1, 2014, <https://bibleandclassstruggle.wordpress.com/2014/08/01/what-is-the-next-big-thing-in-biblical-studies/>.

¹¹ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988).

and *Survival*,¹² and even John Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*.¹³ Social scientific critics of the Bible also regularly cite Marxist literature, even if not explicitly labelling their work as Marxist. Very recently two monographs which utilize Marxist exegesis have been published, one by Robert Myles,¹⁴ and one by me.¹⁵ If anything (and in direct contradiction to Hurtado's assertions) Marxist criticism might actually appear to be a potential *growth* area in the field. Given this outline, it might be suggested that Hurtado's article (almost certainly unintentionally) has an ideological function shared with much of Cold War-era scholarship in that it attempts to marginalise "problematic" challenges.

Turning to those strands of scholarship that Hurtado mentions, but does not deal with in any depth, let us begin with "reception history." In the closing paragraphs of the piece, Hurtado begins to address reception history, stating that "[i]t is also likely that 'reception history' will have a future in NT studies."¹⁶ Hurtado notes the existence of *Relegere*, and a single article by William John Lyons.¹⁷ But even while paying lip service to reception history, it appears that the extent to which Hurtado endorses such an approach is very narrow. For instance, he states that it should be

of great interest in the field to note how the NT writings were transmitted, read and used, perhaps *especially in early centuries*. Certainly, in my view the historical period that NT studies focuses on should include *at least the first three centuries CE*.¹⁸

A reader of Hurtado's article who was not already aware of the developments in reception history could be forgiven for thinking that it has nothing to do with the reception of biblical texts in non-ecclesiastical contexts like contemporary popular and political cultures. *Relegere*, as it happens, is just one example of the growing place of reception history in the field. Another

¹² Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

¹³ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

¹⁴ Robert J. Myles, *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014).

¹⁵ Michael J. Sandford, *Poverty, Wealth, and Empire: Jesus and Postcolonial Criticism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014).

¹⁶ Hurtado, "Fashions," 316.

¹⁷ W. John Lyons, "Hope for a Troubled Discipline? Contributions to New Testament Studies from Reception History," *JSNT* 33, no. 2 (2010): 207–20.

¹⁸ Hurtado, "Fashions," 316, my emphasis.

significant journal, *Biblical Interpretation*, has been publishing articles on reception history for a number of years, and Sheffield Phoenix Press and de Gruyter have recently launched the journals *Biblical Reception* and *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* respectively, both of which are dedicated to the topic. In 2013, Oxford published a *Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*.¹⁹ In recent years there has been a substantial increase in both monographs and edited volumes on the reception of the Bible in the arts and popular culture, and the use of biblical texts in contemporary political contexts. Given Hurtado's critique, it is perhaps fitting that Roland Boer has published a number of monographs on the use and influence of the Bible amongst key Marxist thinkers in the twentieth and twenty-first century,²⁰ as well as an article on Lenin and the Gospels in a recent edition of *Biblical Interpretation*.²¹ The above survey is really just scratching the surface. We might also note the recent creation of scholarly centres for reception history including the Oxford Centre for Reception History of the Bible, and the Bible, Critical Theory, and Reception Seminar, not to mention the proliferation of relevant groups at the annual SBL meeting. There is also that strand of reception history that Hurtado has discussed elsewhere, but unfortunately neglects in his *JSNT* piece: the resurgence of interest in Paul in (largely Marxist) Continental Philosophy. A number of NT scholars are now responding to this, including Hurtado who has in fact previously engaged with such writing on his blog.²² Why not mention it here?

Continuing with those strands of scholarship that Hurtado mentions but does not engage at any meaningful depth, I turn to Hurtado's treatment of what he calls "postcolonialist" interpretation. (I am not sure why he uses the term "postcolonialist," rather than "postcolonial," which is generally the preferred label.) Some scholars located outside of the Anglo-Euro-American centre of scholarship might find it rather patronizing when Hurtado commends "scholars in various countries outside of Europe and North America developing expertise and making contributions."²³ This comment is made

¹⁹ Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁰ Note especially Roland Boer, *Criticism of Heaven: On Marxism and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

²¹ Roland Boer, "Lenin's Gospels," *BibInt* 22, no. 3 (2014): 325–45.

²² "Paul and the (Continental) Philosophers," *Larry Hurtado's Blog*, February 29, 2012, <http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2012/02/29/paul-and-the-continental-philosophers/>.

²³ Hurtado, "Fashions," 317.

worse by his subsequent dismissal of postcolonial criticism as apparently insignificant. Hurtado goes on to claim that “based on my own experience with postgraduate students from various countries and cultures, I doubt that postcolonialist interpretation of the NT will prove to be the typical, or at least not the dominant, approach taken by scholars in ‘non-Western’ settings.”²⁴ If anecdotal evidence is to be employed, my own experience as a PhD student was influenced, and continues to be influenced, in no small part by engagement with PhD students and academics from non-western contexts who are profoundly influenced by postcolonialism; that includes the influence of postcolonial biblical critics, *as well as* broader debates in the field of postcolonial studies. But anecdotal evidence is not enough to make major claims about the field, particularly when effectively generalizing about scholarship in whole continents and countries. Given that there are conflicting experiences and anecdotes, only an expansive social survey could give us any serious indication of preferences in different countries and continents. We would do better to avoid anecdotal evidence, as we would N-Grams, and appreciate that evidence applies as much to mapping the discourse of the field as it does to historical criticism.

Hurtado’s sidelining of postcolonial criticism is baffling for a number of other reasons. The explanation he offers that “most of these emerging scholars identify themselves strongly as Christian and associate with churches in their own countries, and for them NT writings continue to be regarded as scriptures”²⁵ betrays either a failure to grasp the essentially political nature of postcolonial criticism, or a wilful misunderstanding of what postcolonial NT criticism actually looks like. Hurtado’s argument is difficult to misconstrue: he thinks that postcolonial interpretation will remain marginal because non-Western biblical scholars typically identify as Christian, associate with a church, and regard the NT as “scripture”—much like the vast majority of Western biblical scholars. I am curious as to Hurtado’s explanation for why these attributes prevent a person from practicing postcolonial criticism, particularly given its prevalence in Christian scholarship in, for instance, India, Southern Africa, and the South Pacific islands. Such a statement is more than remarkable considering the burgeoning literature on postcolonial criticism of the NT, as well as related literature on empire and imperialism that is not explicitly identified as postcolonial but clearly complements it, as Stephen

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

Moore has shown.²⁶ A survey of the literature suggests that postcolonial biblical criticism and related discourses about empire are an area of NT studies that has been growing for three decades, and is not particularly showing any signs of slowing down. Again, this suggests that postcolonial criticism is being absorbed into the fabric of the discourse of NT studies, rather than showing it to be an easily dismissible “fad.”

Finally, I turn to the scholarship which Hurtado fails to mention at all. To begin, there is the vast body of literature and vital developments in our understanding of the NT and Christian anti-Judaism, and the related views of a racialized and nationalistic discourse inherited in contemporary scholarship. Major contributions in this debate have come from Amy-Jill Levine,²⁷ Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz,²⁸ Shawn Kelley,²⁹ and Halvor Moxnes.³⁰ Other significant works include *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel*,³¹ edited by Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, and John Dominic Crossan’s *Who Killed Jesus?*³² British-based NT scholars such as James Dunn, James Crossley, and N.T. Wright have also frequently addressed the topic. I note Hurtado’s reference to Susannah Heschel’s work on the *Aryan Jesus* in a footnote, but this hardly represents an adequate acknowledgement of the scale or importance of the debate in the field. As the recent debate in *Marginalia* demonstrates, this remains a vitally important topic in NT studies.³³

Probably more embarrassing is Hurtado’s omission of feminist criticism of the NT, which has had a profound and long-lasting effect on the disci-

²⁶ See Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

²⁷ Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

²⁸ Paula Fredriksen and Adele Reinhartz, ed., *Jesus, Judaism, and Anti-Judaism: Reading the New Testament After the Holocaust* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

²⁹ Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

³⁰ Halvor Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth Century Historical Jesus* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

³¹ Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, ed., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

³² John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995).

³³ Adele Reinhartz, et al, “Jew and Judean: A Forum on Politics and Historiography in the Translation of Ancient Texts,” *Marginalia*, August 26, 2014, <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/jew-judean-forum/>.

pline. The point of this current piece is not to serve as a bibliography for all the scholarship that Hurtado has overlooked—which would be a formidable task—but some fundamental work needs to be mentioned here. Perhaps the first scholar to mention is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, whose work in this area over the past three decades has been massively influential. Indeed, the concept of *kyriarchy*, coined by Schüssler Fiorenza, has spread far beyond the discourse of biblical studies.³⁴ One would also do well to mention significant multi-authored volumes from the past decade or so, such as Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner's, *Her Master's Tools*,³⁵ or Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, Musa W. Dube, and Althea Spencer-Miller's *Feminist New Testament Studies*.³⁶ We might also mention the ongoing work and numerous contributions from Amy-Jill Levine (especially her *Feminist Companion* volumes),³⁷ Janice Capel Anderson,³⁸ Elizabeth Castelli,³⁹ Mary Ann Tolbert,⁴⁰ and Jorunn Økland,⁴¹ as well as significant feminist work from scholars located outside of the Anglo-Euro-American centre of scholarship like, for ex-

³⁴ Some of her notable works include *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Early Christian Beginnings* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: SCM Press, 1995); *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000).

³⁵ Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, ed., *Her Master's Tools? Feminist and Post-colonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

³⁶ Kathleen O'Brien Wicker, Musa W. Dube, and Althea Spencer-Miller, ed., *Feminist New Testament Studies: Global and Future Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

³⁷ Amy-Jill Levine's *Feminist Companions* comprise some fourteen books relating to New Testament-related issues.

³⁸ Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, ed., *New Testament Masculinities* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003; Leiden: Brill, 2004); "Mark and Matthew in Feminist Perspective: Reading Matthew's Genealogy," in E. M. Becker and A. Runesson, ed., *Mark and Matthew II. Comparative Readings: Reception, History, Cultural Hermeneutics, and Theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 271–88; "Reading Tabitha: A Feminist Reception History," in Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff (eds), *Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004): 22–48.

³⁹ Elizabeth Castelli, *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); "Globalization, Transnational Feminisms, and the Future of Biblical Critique," in Dube, Spencer-Miller and O'Brien Wicker, *Feminist New Testament Studies*, 63–78.

⁴⁰ Mary Ann Tolbert, ed., *The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics*, *Semeia* 28 (1983) Chico: Scholars Press.

⁴¹ Økland and Boer, *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible*.

ample, Hisako Kinukawa,⁴² Seong Hee Kim,⁴³ and Musa Dube.⁴⁴ This list of names is hardly exhaustive, given the massive influence that feminist thought has had and continues to have in the field. NT feminist criticism also feeds into the burgeoning fields of gender and masculinity studies, even if these discussions are being ignored too often in British mainstream Jesus and Paul scholarship.

In 1987 (as it happens, the year that I was born), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was president of the Society of Biblical Literature, and delivered her Presidential address on “The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship.” She argued,

The responsibility of the biblical scholar cannot be restricted to giving “the readers of our time clear access to the original intentions” of the biblical writers. It must also include the elucidation of the ethical consequences and political functions of biblical texts in their historical as well as in their contemporary sociopolitical contexts.⁴⁵

Fiorenza stated the need for biblical scholarship to “continue its descriptive-analytical work... for understanding of ancient texts and their historical location” but also for “exploring the power/ knowledge relations inscribed in contemporary biblical discourse and in the biblical texts themselves.”⁴⁶ Twenty years on, Katharine Doob Sakenfield in her Presidential address stated that she wished to “further this [Schüssler Fiorenza’s] call for a shift in our self-understanding of our scholarly work. We have made progress in the past twenty years,” she states, “but work remains to be done.”⁴⁷ From the very centre of the guild, and for nearly three decades, leading scholars have been warning against exclusively focusing on historical-critical scholarship. It is unfortunate that this point still needs to be repeated.

⁴² Hisako Kinukawa, *Women and Jesus in Mark: A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).

⁴³ Seong Hee Kim, *Mark, Women and Empire: A Korean Postcolonial Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2000).

⁴⁵ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: Decentering Biblical Scholarship,” *JBL* 107, no. 1 (1988), 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Katharine Doob Sakenfield, “Whose Text Is It?” *JBL* 127, no. 1 (2008), 5.

The Future of New Testament Studies

Hurtado's lacklustre engagement with vital strands of NT studies fails to offer an accurate description of the state of the field, which therefore casts serious doubts on his forecast for its future. Indeed, near the end of his article, he claims that "it is a safe bet that intense historical investigation of the NT writings (along with the early Christian texts) will continue and... will likely remain the most characteristic type of scholarly work in NT studies." But given that the article arguably functions to assert rhetorically the primacy of such scholarship, while simultaneously sidelining alternative approaches that he actually admits not to having "the time or inclination" to discuss, can we really trust his analysis? It seems more likely that Hurtado writes these predictions more as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.

I expect that my own vision for the future of NT studies is coloured by my experience of underemployment within the academic guild. My first-hand exposure to the employment market in an age of austerity gives the impression that biblical studies is being eradicated from universities in the UK and elsewhere at an alarming rate. The pressure on humanities academics to justify their existence and to demonstrate the "value" and "impact" of their work should accordingly be part of any meaningful discussion on the future directions of the field. In the aforementioned exchange between Hurtado and Crossley which took place in *Relegere*, James Crossley argued that an insistence on economic value is a potential danger for almost all biblical scholars, whatever their preferred method.⁴⁸ It is therefore all the more frustrating to see entire strands of NT scholarship which are potentially valuable for showing the intellectual and cultural value of the field, like feminist and reception work for instance, being marginalized (whether implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously) by senior scholars.

I am hopeful that whatever direction NT studies takes in the future, scholars will make the effort to speak about the discipline in a responsible and inclusive way, without having to undermine entire streams of scholarship that lie outside of one's immediate expertise. There is a tendency in academia to overestimate the importance of one's own niche area of research; I am probably guilty of this myself on occasion. I have learnt that a little modesty can go a long way. My greatest concern in this respect is that predictions from senior scholars can too often turn into prescriptions, even if this was not their

⁴⁸ James G. Crossley, "An Immodest Proposal for Biblical Studies," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 2, no.1 (2012): 171.

original intention. The future of NT studies is not and should not be predestined. It can be changed. My sense is that the discipline is actually in very capable hands. The next generation of scholars is strongly equipped with a variety of critical tools, languages and expertise that has been passed on to them from previous generations. But the field also needs imagination and to be able to think beyond the apparent constraints of much mainstream scholarship. The next generation of scholars will forge their own paths. Perhaps best to leave them to it.