

The Future of the Biblical Past



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The Future of the Biblical Past:

Envisioning Biblical Studies on a Global Key

edited by

Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia

THE FUTURE OF THE BIBLICAL PAST
ENVISIONING BIBLICAL STUDIES ON A GLOBAL KEY

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Society of Biblical Literature
Atlanta

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABD: Anchor Bible Dictionary
ACHEI/UBCHEA: Asian Christian Higher Education Institute of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia
ADRA: Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AJT: Asia Journal of Theology
ANZABS: The Aotearoa-New Zealand Association of Biblical Studies
ANZATS: Australia and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools
ATF: Australian Theological Forum
AThR: Anglican Theological Review
BiBh: Bible Bhashyam
BibInt: Biblical Interpretation
BMRC: Biblical Manuscript Research Centre
BTESSC/CDSS: Board of Theological Education, Senate of Serampore College/
Centre for Dalit /Subaltern Studies
BThZ: Berliner Theologische Zeitschrift
CARICOM: Caribbean Community
CBS: Contextual Bible Study
CCC: Caribbean Council of Churches
CEBI: Centro de Estudios Biblicos
CELADEC: Comisión Ecueménica Latino Americana de Educación Cristiana
CEP Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, Perú
CETA: Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association
CEV: Contemporary English Version
CGST: Caribbean Graduate School of Theology
CLAR: Conferencia Latinoamericana de Religiosos
CMS: Christian Missionary Society
CTP-CMI: Centro de Teología Popular, Bolivia
CTQ: Concordia Theological Quarterly
CUPSA: Casa Unida de Publicaciones Sociedad Anónima
DEI: Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones
EST: Escola Superior de Teologia de São Leopoldo
ExpTim: Expository Times
FAT: Forschungen zum Alten Testament

FBBS: Facet Books Biblical Series
 HB: Hebrew Bible
 HB/OT: Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
 HSRC: Human Sciences Research Council (in South Africa)
HvTSt: Hervormde Teologiese Studies
 IDB: Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
IJT: Indian Journal of Theology
 ISEDET: Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos
JAAR: Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JBL: Journal of Biblical Literature
JRT: Journal of Religion and Theology
JSNT: Journal for the Study of the New Testament
 JSNTSup: Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
 JSOTSup: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
 JTS: Jamaica Theological Seminary
JTSA: Journal of Theology for South Africa
 LHBOTS: Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
 MAI: Multilateral Agreement on Investment
 NCU: Northern Caribbean University
Neot: Neotestamentica
 NIV: New International Version
 NT: New Testament
NTT: Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift
 NTSSA: New Testament Society of Southern Africa
 NZQA: New Zealand Qualifications Authority
 OECD: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OTE: Old Testament Essays
 PBRF: Performance Based Research Fund
PMLA: Proceedings of the Modern Language Association
 PUC: Pontificia Universidade Católica de Rio de Janeiro
 REBILAC: Rede Bíblica Latino-Americana e Caribenha
RIBLA: Revista de Interpretación Bíblica Latino Americana
 ROK: Republic of Korea
 SARS: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
 SBL: Society of Biblical Literature
 SDA: Seventh-day Adventist
SEÅ: Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok
 SEBILA: Seminario Bíblico Latino Americano
SJOT: Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament
 SNTS: Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas
 SNVAO: Skrifter/Norske videnskaps-akademi Oslo
 SPCK: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge

- SR: *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*
ST: *Studia Theologica*
STK: *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*
TEC: Tertiary Education Committee
TRu N.F.: *Theologische Rundschau, Neue Folge*
TS: *Theological Studies*
TZ: *Theologische Zeitung*
UBL: Universidad Biblica Latinoamericana
UBS: United Bible Societies
UMESP: Universidad Metodista de São Paulo
USAID: United States Agency of International Development
USAMGIK: United States Army Military Government in Korea
USQR: *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
UTC/ISPCK: United Theological College/International Society for the
Promotion of Christian Knowledge
UTCWI: United Theological College of the West Indies
UWI: University of the West Indies
WUNT: *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*
WW: *Word and World*
YDP-UIM: Yong Dong Po Urban Industrial Mission

INTRODUCTION: THE FUTURES OF BIBLICAL PASTS

Roland Boer and Fernando F. Segovia

This volume has been so long in the making that between the time when the book was first conceived and its eventual completion the world began one of its accelerated periods of irruptive change. However, given the significance of the mandate we have undertaken here, this collection of essays has required more energy than most. We asked contributors to answer the following twofold question: what does global biblical studies look like in the early decades of the twenty-first century, and what new directions may be espied? The last time such a comprehensive task was undertaken was well over twenty years ago. In 1985 *The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters* appeared, edited by Douglas Knight and Gene M. Tucker. A few years later, in 1989, it was followed by *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, now edited by E. Jay Epp and G. W. MacRae. The third volume of this series was *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (Kraft and Nickelsburg 1986). All three works soon become widely referenced and significant resources for students and scholars, so much so that they continue to be in print with SBL Publications. To find an earlier effort along the same lines, we must go back to 1951 and H. H. Rowley's *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, a staple of studies well into the 1970s. If the former volumes reflected the dominance of U.S. based biblical studies since the Second World War, then Rowley's was the last gasp of yet an earlier economic and intellectual empire.

Much has changed since these earlier and authoritative works were produced. Even though they appear different from one another, with Rowley's volume still assuming the dominance of historical criticism and those by Knight and Tucker, Epp and MacRae, and Kraft and Nickelsburg celebrating the host of new directions in biblical criticism from the 1970s, they have far more in common: the scholars writing are overwhelmingly white and male, and they assume the North Atlantic dominance of biblical scholarship. Since the late 1980s a good deal has changed, not least of which is the breakdown in the North Atlantic dominance of biblical scholarship or the severe downturn of those economies since 2008 and

the seismic economic shift to Asia. Voices from the majority of the globe have begun and continue to speak in ways that are reshaping biblical studies, relativizing the absolute claims that have been made and continue to be made by some of the discipline's practitioners. In the process, it has also become clear that biblical criticism does not have one agreed-upon past. It has multiple pasts, depending as much upon your conversation partner as her or his provenance. The futures that spring from these pasts are equally multiple.

How does this situation influence the organization of contributors to this volume and their essays? Instead of focusing on various slices of the Bible, (ancient) historical periods, or different methodologies, we have opted to differentiate in terms of geopolitics and culture. The reason: a concern with biblical books or methods obscures matters such as the global division of labor, patterns of exploitation, and issues related to gender and race. Thus we have gathered essays from all parts of the world, the contributors of which seek to map biblical studies in their area of expertise through a combination of retrospection, synopsis, and peering into the future. Coming from Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean and finally North America, the essayists offer a rich panoply of analyses and proposals, among which may be included: the relationship between traditional and innovative scholarship; the way study of the Bible is both tied to religious institutions and has a life of its own; the hindrances and promises of the institutional contexts of biblical studies; the effect of colonial histories of missions on study of the Bible; and the depth of engagement—culturally, politically, economically, and religiously—that global picture provides. Above all, the volume as a whole showcases the changing patterns and fascinating diversity of biblical scholarship throughout the world.

Of course, such divisions into global regions have their own limits, as they focus on identified and fixed regions that actually have their own myriad and fluid diversities. Notably, one ocean and one sea appear among the land masses that our species prefers to inhabit, and perhaps more fluid categories might have been used, enabling a greater sense of inbetweenness. However, the strength of the current format is that it seeks to highlight rather than conceal global patterns of political and economic power, especially in light of significant changes under way.

Two factors require additional comment. First, Western Europe is absent from the collection. This is not through want of trying; but because one contributor after another was unable to complete the task, we agreed in the end to leave Western Europe blank. Is this not a significant omission, given the crucial role that Western European and Protestant biblical scholarship has played in the development of modern biblical scholarship? We do not think so. For in many ways the point of imperial "origin" has long since lost its leadership role. Or rather, the only

contributor from Western Europe, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (born as an ethnic German in Romania), migrated many decades ago from Germany to the United States, because women were not allowed to teach in universities at the time (due to a concord between the Roman Catholic Church and the Third Reich). But what about the place to which she went, the United States? The reader will note that the United States is significantly represented in this volume. Yet the reader will note as well that nearly all contributors from the United States hail from diaspora minorities, a situation that illustrates both the fact that empires attract those from the margins and the fact that such minorities serve as thorns in the flesh in the heart of the beast.

Introductions such as this usually offer the obligatory survey of contributions. This one is no exception, for it offers readers the opportunity to gain a sense of the whole and dip in where interest may take them. The volume begins with Africa and the pieces by Israel Kamudzandu, Sarojini Nadar and Jeremy Punt. In the multitude of challenges within that context, Kamudzandu argues for a community-oriented and crosscultural approach to biblical criticism. As with so many contributions to the volume, this approach is deeply engaged, fully aware of the faith and spirituality of the millions who read the Bible in Africa, rather than arguing for a disengaged, objective or “scientific” approach so characteristic of those zones in the world that produced the era of massive colonial competition. Given that the Bible is neither a product of African culture nor, indeed, of Western culture, Kamudzandu suggests an approach that is characterized by full awareness of its specific conditioning in time and place and a profound sense of curiosity and humility when entering the world of the Bible as Africans. The reason: one encounters cultural, theological, and spiritual shock in that alien world, which enables one to engage across cultures in the sheer diversity of Africa and the rest of the world.

Sarojini Nadar draws on empirical data gathered at contextual Bible studies (a method of Bible study that attempts to work at the interface between faith communities and the academy around issues of social transformation) she facilitated in order to push the boundaries of what is meant by the roles of the “ordinary” reader and the intellectual. Nadar’s contribution draws on postcolonial and feminist theories to analyze the dynamics of contextual Bible studies in the South African context. Her essay argues that if transformation is the goal of contextual Bible studies, then the critical resources which the intellectual brings to the process will have to be far more nuanced than they have been in the past; that the effects of globalization, particularly as reflected in the ubiquitous term “biblical values,” which comes up often in contextual Bible studies, will have to be addressed; and the identity of the intellectual (particularly if the intellectual is not an organic scholar) will have to be unmasked. The paper argues that promoting

“community wisdom” or “hidden transcripts” on the one hand or promoting the “all-powerful” intellectual on the other are both unhelpful for understanding the dynamics of contextual Bible study. Rather, a more nuanced and honest unmasking of the identities and functions of the intellectual and the “ordinary” reader are needed.

With a synoptic reading that sweeps over past, present, and future, Jeremy Punt stresses the reality of transition in Africa, especially in South Africa, in light of the political, social, and cultural shifts associated with the move from white minority to black majority power. He urges a complex engagement between cultural and postcolonial approaches with specific focus on the way the Bible has been interwoven with disproportionate power relationships at all levels, ranging from global geopolitical levels to interpersonal relations. And like Kamudzandu and Nadar, Punt recognizes that his approach to biblical criticism is anything but disinvested, for it remains engaged, negatively and positively, in all manner of complex patterns.

A move eastward brings us to Asia, where Monica Melanchthon offers us the first of three contributions. Melanchthon focuses not on ruling class biblical interpretation, not on the discourse of the powerful, but on *Dalit* biblical interpretation. She argues that as India’s Dalits gain confidence, and as their experience of suffering and humiliation for millennia under the tyranny of caste is exposed, their reading of the Bible, using “pollution” and “untouchability” as key criteria, offers us alternative readings of the text. These readings, she suggests, unleash the power inherent in the Bible, subdued until now by casteist interpretations, and thereby empower those discriminated by the evil of caste. Biblical interpretation for Dalits is informed by the bodily experience of pain and prejudice, of being discriminated against, marginalized, and excluded. This approach may be described as a hermeneutical strategy from below, which is in many ways similar to and yet distinct from those inspired by sexism, racism, and classism. In particular, Dalits deploy their oral culture, their creative art forms, their religious rituals and expressions, the rich symbolism inherent in their culture, their holistic approach to life, their experiences, their strong will and resilience to survive amidst pain, and their faith in a God who will liberate. Melanchthon seeks to explore and utilize these gifts for the purposes of identifying new and effective methods of reading the Bible, especially those methods that aid in their struggle for liberation, for both men (who have dominated Dalit biblical and theological reflection until now) and women.

Next, Yong-Sung Ahn reflects on the nature of biblical criticism when its practitioner has moved from study in the United States back to Korea in order to teach—an extremely common pattern. Through his changing perspectives on Luke, empire, and the passion narrative (the topic of his doctoral work), Ahn has

found himself being recontextualized in a rapidly changing Korea. Before he left Korea some years before, Korean intellectuals still understood their country as “neo-colonized” or “peripherized” by the power nations, especially by the United States. Now, however, neither “empire” nor “colonialism” is a matter of concern to Koreans, who are self-confident enough to be actors in a globalized world. During the military regime that continued for more than thirty years until the early 1990s, the Korean church declared itself “apolitical.” In recent years, however, the church has become so political that conservative churches and pastors are on the frontline of anti-government demonstrations. Reconsidered in this context, neither the theme of empire nor the political dimension of the passion narrative appears effective or timely as a cultural discourse. Rather than imperial politics, it is the central role of the religious leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus that seems more relevant to biblical interpretation in present-day Korea, particularly because Korean churches wield tremendous power. Church membership is typically concentrated in urban, not rural, areas and predominates among the rich rather than the poor. Compared to the overall population, Christians are also overrepresented among politicians and entrepreneurs. That is, the Korean church is of the rich and the powerful. Church leaders possess political influence, just as the religious authorities did in the early first century. So Ahn sets out to analyze anew the text of the passion narrative in Luke with a focus on the political initiative of the religious leaders, concerned specifically with how the “conservative” discourse of the church has supported the church’s conservative politics.

Closing out the section on Asia, Philip Chia’s focus is a rising Asia, especially China, which has once again become a world power. Initially written before the Western economic crash of 2008, it now reads with even more relevance. Being the largest of the seven continents, Asia has long been “the East” (Far East and/or Middle East, depending where “the center” may be presumed to be), living under the shadow of “the West” and its “project of modernity.” Modern biblical criticism has been inextricably tied up with that project, expanding with that culture and gaining global reach. In response, Chia’s essay attempts to map out the role and relevance of biblical studies among Asian people within such a global context. The study consists of three parts. The first attempts to map out the highly diversified and pluralistic nature of Asia. The second traces the short history of biblical studies in Asia, focusing on issues of tradition, methodology, and community. The third part asks what the potential orientation of biblical studies will be within the living realities of Asian people, particularly in light of the juxtapositions of Chinese economic-political power and a Western-based political ideology of liberalism.

The third part of the collection moves to the source of the much-discussed Western culture. However, the contributions here—from Milena Kirova and

Hanna Stenström—come from the periphery of the Western European project, one from the east in Bulgaria and the other from the far north. And both are written by women, who were traditionally excluded from European biblical scholarship until relatively recently.

Milena Kirova points out that biblical studies has been problematic in Bulgaria since Christianity was violently imposed for political reasons upon a pagan population in the mid tenth century. The dominating proximity of the mighty Byzantine tradition, the bloom of heretical trends, five hundred years of Muslim oppression, and, finally, half a century of communist secularism have all impeded progress. In spite of (or perhaps also because of) that history, Bulgarian culture is experiencing a wave of interest in the Bible. This is particularly so since the beginning of the new century and has emerged in secular academic research and literature. Kirova surveys these fascinating, rather nontraditional developments, and analyzes their background and fruits with an eye for possible future developments. In many respects, her contribution may be seen as a microcosm of what is happening in Eastern Europe.

Hanna Stenström surveys biblical scholarship in Scandinavia (Iceland, Denmark, Greenland, the Faeroe Islands, Norway, Finland, and Sweden) from the beginning of the twentieth century and into the future. Due to the diversity of biblical scholarship in Scandinavia, she focuses on Swedish New Testament scholarship in the twentieth century. This enables her to analyze a specific case in depth, searching for similarities and points of contact between biblical scholars in those five countries. It also allows her to look at the whole landscape from this specific place, drawing parallels, showing similarities and differences. The key questions for Stenström include: 1) the relation of biblical scholarship with the churches (in practice often the Lutheran national or state churches), the academy at large (especially in terms of current ideals of scholarship), and the general public (biblical scholars write also for the general public and are they active in different debates in society); 2) the reception in Scandinavian countries of various new approaches that widen the understanding of historical-critical scholarship or challenge it, with a specific focus on feminist exegesis and other methods that raise issues concerning the ethical and political dimensions of biblical scholarship; 3) the place of exegesis in contemporary state universities, as well as the possible consequences of the establishing a number of university colleges that have a formal connection to a church; 4) which trends may prove to be more than temporary fads. Is there a new Scandinavian school in sight, or perhaps a number of Scandinavian schools?

In our zigzag path around the globe, we move to Latin America and the Caribbean. Pablo R. Andiñach arranges “Liberation in Latin American Biblical Hermeneutics” in four parts. First, he provides a brief overview of Latin Ameri-

can biblical hermeneutics from 1960 through 1990. Here he traces the path one may observe in the work of Jorge Pixley, J. Severino Croatto, Carlos Mesters, and others from their initial intuitions to their mature proposals. Second, he lays out a variety of contemporary models of Latin American hermeneutics (feminist, indigenist, ecological, and so forth), bringing out the distinctive characteristics of each but emphasizing their common elements. Third, he explores the theological grounds shared by all such models, as well as the differences among them. Lastly, he pursues the question of the future of present-day hermeneutics in Latin America, its perspectives and possibilities.

Nancy Cardoso Pereira follows with a judicious assessment of both the negative and positive dimensions of the Bible's checkered history in Latin America. It must be seen as both wound and salve, as instrument of colonization to be resisted and tool of resistance to appropriate. The key to moving from the former to the latter is allowing the absolute, conquering role of the Bible to give way to a profound sense of relativization: rather than a singular voice, the Bible becomes one voice among many. In the process, the Bible reveals its multitude of perspectives: "the peripheral peasantry, imperialism and its abuses of power, the daily character of poverty (hunger, insanity, illness), the marginality and abandonment of women and children, the reinvention of ways of living together and sharing."

Jorge Pixley follows by defining liberation-theological readings as the emancipation of the Bible from its entrapment in a dogmatic cage that is hurtful to real people of flesh and blood. His essay is a survey of the interface between the liberation theology pastoral movement and its academic allies and supporters. In particular, it focuses on the difficulties of the interface between popular and academic Bible study. Pixley also offers an overview of key moments in the history of liberation biblical interpretation, closing with a consideration of the major issues that face such interpretation in the future: the study of scriptures and texts beyond the Bible; alliances with sociologists in order to study the massive demographic changes taking place in Latin America; exploration of the option for the poor among the early church fathers, including Origen; the effect of changing patterns of biblical interpretation, especially those historical issues relating to the liberation from slavery in Egypt; and the tie between pastoral practice and academic biblical scholarship.

From the Caribbean (now living in South Africa) is Gosnell Yorke's study of this region with its kaleidoscope of linguistic, religious, and cultural traditions. Consciously focusing on the Anglo-Caribbean, Yorke sounds a note similar to that of Pereira. The Bible has been and remains profoundly ambivalent: on the one hand, it has enabled colonial powers to justify their conquest and genocide of the Caribbean (in the name of God, gold, and glory); on the other hand, it has provided deep incentives to resistance and revolt. Yorke traces in detail the

growth of academically trained biblical scholars, the fact that these scholars are invariably grounded in the denominational traditions (including but not limited to Anglican, Baptist, Church of God, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian, and Seventh-day Adventist), and come from different linguistic and postcolonial backgrounds (Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone, and Netherlanderphone. In light of this sheer diversity, the main challenge is working across and through these myriad patterns of difference within a postcolonial situation.

Now we sail out over the Pacific and find Jione Havea's contribution. He begins with the point that *Pasifika* (Pacific Islander) people continue to move away from the islands. As they do so, their sense of belonging and meaning is adrift. Pasifika people and customs are drifting, and the islands are eroding because of global warming. Reading the Bible in such situations requires one to confront the displacement of the Bible. In Pasifika, the Bible is in diaspora; because of the Bible, Pasifika is in diaspora. Havea's essay adds a Pasifika flag to those that call for the decolonization of the Bible and its interpretation. It focuses on some of the drifting-home stories that bob on the watery surface of the Bible...if you get his drift!

Still on the Pacific, Judith McKinlay's focus is Aotearoa/New Zealand. She begins by considering the arrival of the Bible within the colonial past, including its impact and subsequent reinterpretation within certain Maori groupings. Yet the gradual emergence of biblical studies as a discipline preserved its European roots, as McKinlay illustrates. The present state of biblical criticism in Aotearoa/New Zealand is diverse, with scholars variously looking for connections and inspiration to Europe, the United States, Asia, and Africa. One finds many Australian connections, with scholars sharing and collaborating in an Australasian perspective. The result is a plethora of different approaches and methodologies in a very small scholarly world. As for the future, the essay concludes by offering one view, seasoned with both hope and fear.

Roland Boer argues that biblical criticism in Australia has always been in a curious situation: it has hung on to the idea that it is an outpost of Western scholarship while it exists at the intersection between the Pacific and Asia. The complexities of this background, marked not least by the fact that more than two hundred languages are spoken in Australia (including more than sixty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages), have generated a range of responses in biblical scholarship: the past British and Irish influence (a mix of colonial overlords and deported political agitators) on biblical scholarship; the drive for "secular" universities that has led to biblical scholars finding room in all manner of strange places; the tension between former intellectual subservience first to "Great" Britain and then the United States on the one hand and the advantage of

being outside such contexts on the other; the history of Aboriginal missions and claiming of the Bible by indigenous peoples in their own ways; and the increasing awareness of Australia's fading "Western" identity and the reality of its context within Asia and the Pacific. The result has been a tenuous hold of traditional scholarship, whether theological or historical-critical, or both, and a far greater interest in all manner of new approaches. The future, Boer suggests, lies in pushing the advantages of the Pacific and Asian contexts and making the most of the current reality, in which biblical scholars are in conversation with a host of other disciplines.

Finally we turn to North America, including both Canada and the United States. From Canada, Fiona Black investigates the migrational realities of biblical studies in that part of the world. Black's paper explores the state of the discipline in Canada, which includes an investigation of the origins and developments of the Canadian Society for Biblical Studies, the discipline's eighty year old govern-ess. Canada is a New World country yet, like many similar nations, remains still firmly grounded in its Commonwealth identity. Consequently, Black investigates the interaction of critical study of the Bible with the country's colonial roots, its indigenous cultures, and its current self-identification as a secular nation (notwithstanding its reluctance officially to separate church and state). Of greater interest to the paper, however, is the presence of the Bible in a country that describes itself proudly as composite and multicultural, and that, on a popular level at least, seems united largely by its fixation to differentiate itself from its neighbor to the south. If, as the government maintains, a good many Canadians are immigrants or of immigrant extraction, the paper inquires as to the impact of national identity on the discipline when that identity seems impossible to pin down. Indeed, what is Canadian about biblical studies in Canada? Black explores this question by reflecting on what it might mean to do biblical studies under the auspices of her own hybrid identity as a Caribbean-Canadian.

Across the border lies the fading superpower from where five voices speak: George Aichele (postmodern), Tat-Siong Benny Liew (Asian American), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (feminist), Fernando Segovia (Cuban American), and Vincent Wimbush (African American). In "The Virtual Bible," George Aichele explores the impact of "electronic culture" and the "digital revolution" on the Bible, especially in relation to the question of whether "biblical studies" retains any meaning in a postmodern world where "the Bible" as a discrete object (the printed codex) no longer has any privilege of place. Just as the computer and internet dissolve the Bible into streams of binary code, so poststructuralism deconstructs the play of biblical intertextuality and semiosis. Meanwhile, popular culture rewrites and redistributes the canon. Yet, just as the World Wide Web finally transforms the Bible into a global phenomenon (and thereby liberates it

from the church), its inevitable virtuality keeps it local and partial, fragmentary, perpetually incomplete, and thus subversive. The Bible has always been virtual, but only now are we becoming aware of it, and thus we have not yet thoroughly or systematically examined the implications of that concept.

Tat-Siong Benny Liew explores the paradox of an imperial center that is increasingly defined by its racial/ethnic minorities. As with many of the other contributors to this volume, Liew stresses the way these readings are thoroughly engaged, deriving their impetus in the United States from theological movements (Black, liberation, story, *minjung*) that blow apart and reconfigure the (imperial) separations of theology and biblical criticism, let alone the relations between biblical criticism and other academic disciplines. Liew usefully points out that ethnic readings of the Bible began in conflict—between slaves and masters who read the Bible in opposing ways, or by those who sought answers to “ethnic” threats, such as the “yellow peril,” in the Bible itself. Very different eyes read the same common text, and ethnic readings function as a “thorn in the flesh” of dominant interpretations. In mapping three stages of scholarly minority readings since the 1970s, Liew espies the beginnings of a new stage in which inter-communal readings happen across minorities. Even more, he urges greater engagements between minorities and indigenous peoples in the United States, calling them to mine the tradition to locate sidelined voices, and a transglobal engagement with minority readers across national boundaries.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, having moved to the United States with a profound experience of post-Third Reich Germany, focuses on feminist biblical criticism. As an academic area of study, feminist criticism has its roots in the nineteenth and twentieth-century wo/men’s movements, but has become established as an academic field of research only in the past thirty years or so. Her essay reflects on the situation of mainstream biblical studies when this new field of study emerged, traces its beginnings and development, articulates the different theoretical and methodological approaches that characterize the field, looks at its relations to other areas of critical emancipatory studies, and articulates important questions for its future not only in the academy but also in wo/men’s movements for change and transformation. Fiorenza’s thesis is that the biblical past and biblical studies have no future if they continue to disregard wo/men, the majority of biblical readers, as subjects of interpretation.

The penultimate study of the collection comes from Fernando Segovia. He bases his contribution on earlier work that presents the path of biblical studies as an academic discipline, from its inception in the early nineteenth century to its position at the turn of the twentieth century, in terms of three paradigms of interpretation: an extended period of exclusive dominance by historical criticism through the 1970s; an irruption of rapid diversification in the mid 1970s, with the

emergence of literary criticism and sociocultural criticism from within, as well as feminist criticism and materialist criticism from without; and a subsequent period of competing paradigms, marked by the consolidation of the literary and sociocultural paradigms and the expansion of the ideological paradigm through minority, postcolonial, and queer criticisms. As Segovia notes, this earlier formulation is an archaeological narrative developed from within the discipline itself. In this study he advances this narrative of origins and development by bringing two discursive frameworks into dialogue with one another: biblical studies and cultural studies. In so doing, he proposes a vision for the future of the biblical past, not only in terms of conceptualization and practice but also in terms of pedagogical impartation and social-cultural pursuit. Toward this end, he addresses such issues as the incorporation of traditions of interpretation besides the academic/scholarly one; the interdisciplinary character of the enterprise as a whole in critical dialogue with any number of fields of studies; the responsibilities and aims of the critical task as such; and the vision of intersectionality in the pursuit of ideological criticism.

The final essay comes from Vincent Wimbush, who makes the case for a new and ongoing critical orientation that has as its focus not the content-meaning or aesthetic arrangements of texts but the social textures, gestures (or performances), and psychological and power dynamics that are found to be in complex relationships to texts—especially those texts (“scriptures”) accorded special status. As part of an ongoing project, Wimbush continues to arrogate to himself the right and privilege to think with that “fluid and haunting formation called the Black Atlantic,” with a specific concern with African Americans. In this essay, his point of entry is the figure Olaudah Equiano, notably his work from 1789, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself*. For Wimbush, this complex negotiation of the fetishizing of the dominant culture’s book, the Bible, becomes a means for reflecting on the need to engage with the structural power relations of the modern world by “placing focus not on texts but on the social textures of the peoples, their consciousness of and responses to such structures.”

This is a rich and full collection that points to ways biblical criticism negotiates its troubled past and highlights the creative subversions, redeployments, and reengagements with that past that generate distinctly new futures. One can only wonder what a book like this might look like in another twenty years.