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Contents

The Levitical postpartum purity laws have had great religious significance in both Jewish and Christian tradition, up to the present day. For more than two thousand years, people have asked why, in Lev 12, a new mother's postpartum impurity is twice as long if she has a female baby. No hypothesis has achieved scholarly consensus. The first part of this article examines some of the various ways that the gender problem has been "solved," looking at the use of physiological and social explanations, as well as feminist approaches. The second part of the article focuses on the idea, proposed by Martin Noth, that the imbalance is due to the "cultic inferiority" of women. By examining other gender divisions in the Priestly source within Lev 15 and in relation to animals, creation, and genealogies, it will be demonstrated that, to the Priestly author, women occupy a lesser status in the religious realm and that this indeed is the most likely reason behind the post parturient gender imbalance.

Keywords: Leviticus, Feminism, Gender, Women cultic participation, Philo.

This article aims to scrutinize the hypothesis, proposed by some researchers, of Platonic or Platonizing influences in the Gospel of Thomas. The observations developed here are primarily stimulated by Ivan Miroshnikov's recent volume, *The Gospel of Thomas and Plato. A Study of the Impact of Platonism on the "Fifth Gospel"* (Leiden, Brill 2018). After summarizing Miroshnikov's theses, this article presents a series of observations in dialogue with them and other studies. The issue of the extent and character of possible Platonic influences on the Fifth Gospel will be examined, as well as the diffusion and reception of philosophical doctrines in a given cultural context (from the viewpoint of historical-religious trajectories), in particular in early Syriac Christian contexts.

Keywords: Gospel of Thomas, Platonism, Ivan Miroshnikov, Edessa, Syriac Christianity.

This two-part essay puts forth a new perspective on the pre-Johannine Signs Gospel. This first part presents reasons for thinking that the Signs Gospel knew the Gospel of Mark, and, to a lesser extent, the Sayings Source Q. It argues that the relationship between these texts should be conceived in terms of hypertextuality, i.e. as a *relecture* by which the author of the Signs Gospel accepted and reshaped only those parts that were suitable to the messianic propaganda he intended in his text. The second part of this essay, which will appear in the next issue, will offer a series of historical considerations on the post-70 context in which the Signs Gospel was written, its hope for the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, the Baptist matrix of the group that produced it, and the historical value of the (residual) non-synoptic tradition it conveys.

Keywords: Signs Gospel, Gospel of John, Gospel of Mark, Sayings Source Q, Hypertextuality.

The article reconstructs the history of the Jerusalem community from 30 to 50 CE. After Jesus's death, two groups of his disciples were active in Jerusalem. The first was composed of the Twelve, and the Greek-speaking Jews that Luke (or his source) calls "Hellenists." The second group, directed by James, the brother of Jesus, came to Jerusalem from Galilee sometime later. The two groups had different interpretations of Jesus's identity and function. The Twelve and their followers wrote an early passion narrative in which Jesus's last supper was not a Passover celebration. James' group introduced some modifications to this first version of the passion narrative following a more "orthodox" Jewish way of thinking. This second version was later included in Mark's Gospel.

Keywords: Jerusalem' early community, Resurrection narratives, Hellenists, James, Gospel of Mark.

Late-antique Christianity

This essay argues that the lists of pre-Constantinian persecuting emperors are characteristic of Christian chrono-historiography. The examples examined here concern the lists of two or seven emperors and extend from the early 4th century AD to the 5th century AD. Little attention has been given to the fact that these lists correspond to numeric models that highlight their canonical nature and function. These canonical lists perform the function of building and transmitting a public memory of the pre-Constantinian Church, following traditional models of memory such as the *damnatio memoriae*.

Keywords: Collective memory, *Damnatio memoriae*, Persecutions, Pre-Costantinian Church, 4th Century.

Arator's *Historia apostolica* reworks the content of the Acts of the Apostles into 2326 hexameters. This article argues that the poem's public reading in the spring of 544 fulfilled the function of celebrating the Church of the 6th century and the pontifical activities of Vigilius. At a time of great doctrinal and political controversy—both between Byzantine Catholics and Aryan Ostrogoths, and between Monophysites and Chalcedonians—Arator defended what he believed to be the apostolic faith represented by the Apostolic seat of Rome.

Keywords: Arator, *Historia apostolic*, Biblical paraphrastic poetry, Acts of Apostles, 6th Century.

Modern and contemporary impact on Early Christianity

Codex Vaticanus (Vat. gr. 1209) played two very distinct roles in Erasmus' work on the text of the New Testament. At first, it could confirm some sensitive readings for him and thus help him in defending the real or perceived radical nature of his New Testament text. Second and later, however, because of its textual closeness to the Greek text underlying the Vulgate, it became part of the opposition as he saw it: it came to represent a corrupt stream of the Greek transmission.

Keywords: Erasmus, Erasmus' Greek New Testament, Codex Vaticanus, Textual criticism, Greek New Testament.

During his long and prolific career as a scholar of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith has often found himself discussing questions of method and theory in the study of biblical texts, and his overall influence in shaping some of the major trends in the current field of biblical studies can certainly not be overestimated. The main goal of this paper is to show how Smith's theoretical and methodological reflection cannot even be properly understood without considering his keen interest in Bible materials and his frequent incursions into minefield of biblical scholarship. After sketching out a portrait of Smith as a reader, and then as a teacher, of the Bible, the analysis will focus on his methodological principle of "taking the Bible as an example." This will pave the way for a critical re-assessment of Smith's ideas about the academy, as well as for some general remarks on the place and role of biblical studies in the fragmented landscape of 21st-century higher education.

Keywords: Academy, Biblical studies, Higher education, History of Reading, Jonathan Z. Smith.

This paper is dedicated to Marcantonio Flaminio's *Paraphrasis in duo et triginta Psalmos (1538)*. The *Paraphrasis* depends on Erasmus' *De Immensa Dei Misericordia Concio,* 1524, and on Jacopo Sadoleto's *Interpretatio in Psalmum L [1525],* and *Interpretatio in Psalmum XCIII [1530]*. Flaminio's work is an example of the Italian anti-lutheran reception of Erasmu. The paper attempts a re-interpretation of the relationship between Flaminio's later Valdesian religiosity and his fist period in Verona. The paper is also a tentative and to deconstruct the categories of Heterodoxy, Lutheranism and dissent, commonly used to describe the position of Italian "Spirituali" within the first attempts of Catholic Reform.

Keywords: Marcantonio Flaminio, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Jacopo Sadoleto, Lutheranism, Catholic Reform,

Discussions of Books

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Luigi Walt

Is There a Bible in This Class? Rethinking Biblical Studies with Jonathan Z. Smith

ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν ἐν γράμμασι κήπους, ὡς ἔοικε,
παιδιᾶς χάριν σπερεῖ τε καὶ γράψει
(Plato, Phaedr. *276d)*

In the opening chapter of his acclaimed book *A History of Reading*, significantly entitled *The Last Page*, the Argentinian essayist Alberto Manguel points out that any history of reading, inasmuch as it accounts for "particular intuitions and private experiences, […] must be only one of many, however impersonal it may try to be. Ultimately, perhaps, the history of reading is the history of each of its readers."[1]

Such a statement might even prove to be literally true, were it not that, at least for the purposes of historical investigation, it will always be necessary to distinguish between a "nomothetic" and an "idiographic" approach to the issue,[2] that is to say, between the intention to trace a natural history of reading, understood as the human faculty of extracting information from a codified system of written signs, and the intention

[1] A. Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 35. For other attempts at writing a general history of reading (all moving from very different perspectives), see, e.g., H. Blumenberg, *Die Lesbarkeit der Welt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981); G. Cavallo and R. Chartier, eds., *Histoire de la lecture dans le monde occidental* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); S.R. Fischer, *A History of Reading* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003); and S. Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain: The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention* (New York: Penguin Viking, 2009). Cf. also the essays collected in R. Chartier, ed., *Pratiques de la lecture* (Paris and Marseille: Rivages, 1985); and J. Boyarin, ed., *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993).

[2] On the appropriateness of reflecting again on this classic distinction, worked out among the Neo-Kantian circles of the late 19th century, see most recently F. Vecoli, "La comparaison peut-elle servir à l'histoire? Réflexions méthodologiques à partir de 'Drudgery Divine' de Jonathan Z. Smith," in A. Destro, M. Pesce, et alii, eds., *Texts, Practices, and Groups: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the History of Jesus' Followers in the First Two Centuries* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 651–65.

to recover or describe specific reading practices of specific individual readers (or reading communities) against the background of specific historical contexts. If the latter is the task we aim to accomplish, this implies that the history of individual readers cannot be separated from the history of their reading environments, just as, in its turn, the history of reading environments cannot ignore the case of their individual readers, including their attempts to explore or imagine new ways of reading. In this regard, we might even venture to overturn Tolstoy's famous incipit, and solemnly declare that while bad readers are very often all alike (and thus definitely unhelpful to make up a good narrative), every good reader is always good in their own way—although the problem, at that point, would be to determine what can make a reader, or an act of reading, either good or bad, and with respect to what, for whom, and why.

Hence the idea behind this paper: to look at the landmark and eclectic work of Jonathan Z. Smith, one of the most representative figures in the history of religions of the last century, as closely tied to his peculiar reading habits and his being an exceptional (shall we say uncommon?) reader.[3] Without forgetting, of course, one of the speculative etymologies of the very term "religion," the one that makes it derive from the Latin verb *relegere*, meaning "to choose, to consider carefully" but also "to re-read, to read over (and over) again."[4] So, first of all, what kind of reader was Jonathan Z. Smith? What kind of relationship can we establish between Smith's "ethics of reading" and the interest he

[3] See G. Steiner, "The Uncommon Reader," in *No Passion Spent: Essays 1978-1996* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 1–19 (firstly published as *The Uncommon Reader* [Bennington: Bennington College Bookstore, 1978]).

[4] The Ciceronian hypothesis of *religio* deriving from *relegere* (following the explanation found in Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.28.72) was notably advocated by É. Benveniste, *Le Vocabulaire des institutions indoeuropéens*, vol. 2: *Pouvoir, droit, religion* (Paris: Minuit, 1969), 267–73. On the long-debated question of the etymology of "religion," see esp. M. Despland, *La Religion en Occident. Évolution des idées et du vécu* (Montreal: Fides, 1979); E. Feil, *Religio I. Die Geschichte eines neuzeitlichen Grundbegriffs vom Frühchristentum bis zur Reformation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); M. Sachot, "'Religio/Superstitio.' Historique d'une subversion et d'un retournement," *RHR* 208 (1991): 355–94; Id., *L'invention du Christ. Genèse d'une religion* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998), part III; R. Gothóni, "Religio and Superstitio Reconsidered," *Archiv für Religionspsychologie* 21/1 (1994): 37–46; A. Bergmann, *Die "Grundbedeutung" des lateinischen Wortes Religion* (Marburg: Diagonal, 1998); J.N. Bremmer, "'Religion,' 'Ritual' and the Opposition 'Sacred vs. Profane': Notes towards a Terminological 'Genealogy,'" in F. Graf, ed., *Ansichten griechischer Rituale. Geburtstags-Symposium für Walter Burkert* (Stuttgart and Leipzig: Teubner, 1998), 9–32, esp. 10–14; J.Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in M.C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269–84 (repr. in J.Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004], 179–96); P. Borgeaud, *Aux origins de l'histoire des religions* (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 203–6; Id., *L'Histoire des religions* (Gollion: Infolio, 2013), 13–32. Cf. also the fresh insights in D. MacRae, *Legible Religion: Books, Gods, and Rituals in Roman Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016); C.A. Barton and D. Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

continuously showed in what is regarded, at least in the West, as the book *par excellence*, namely the Bible? And to what extent can Smith's theoretical and methodological insights help us rethink, if not reimagine, the place and role of biblical studies in the fragmented landscape of 21st-century higher education? Indeed, while Smith's general contribution as a theorist of religion is now widely recognized worldwide, no less significant has been his *topical* contribution to different subfields in the study of religion, particularly to biblical studies and especially, but not exclusively, in North American scholarship: suffice it to think of the research produced over the last thirty years by the session on "Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins" that has been regularly held at the annual meetings of the American Society of Biblical Literature, in the presence of Smith as a tutelary numen. The session—which saw the participation of some of the most prominent North-American scholars of early Christianity—has contributed not only to redefine the contours of the historical problem of Christian origins, but also to reshape an entire topography of scholarly issues that are still awaiting to be explored in depth.[5]

My purpose, however, is to take a small step backwards, and try to reassess Smith's engagement in religious studies, as well as his frequent incursions into the minefield of biblical studies, moving from a portrait of Smith as a reader, and then as a teacher, of "the Bible." To make my argument clearer, I will follow the same three-part outline set out by Smith in *When the Chips Are Down*, his iconoclastic bio-bibliographical self-portrait: (1) "Student"; (2) "Teacher"; and (3) "Persistent Preoccupations."[6] In the first part of the paper, I will therefore seek to sketch out a sort of genealogical account of Smith's reading habits, which led him to constantly engage with Bible materials during his long and prolific career as a scholar of religion. In the second part, I will briefly dwell upon Smith's teaching philosophy, as it can be reconstructed from his methodological principle of "taking the Bible as an example" and his

[5] Work produced by the session includes a programmatic round table (see R.P. Miller, ed., "Ancient Myths and Modern Theories of Christian Origins: A Discussion," *MTSR* 8/3 [1996]: 229–89) and three collections of essays: R. Cameron and M.P. Miller, eds., *Redescribing Christian Origins* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004); Iid., eds., *Redescribing Paul and the Corinthians* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011); M.P. Miller and B. Crawford, eds., *Redescribing the Gospel of Mark* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017). For an introduction to Smith and his intellectual legacy, a good starting point is offered by the contributions collected in R.T. McCutcheon, ed., *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith* (London: Equinox Press, 2008); E.D. Crews and R.T. McCutcheon, eds., *Remembering J.Z. Smith: A Career and its Consequence* (Sheffield: Equinox Press, forthcoming); cf. also D. Barbu and N. Meylan, eds., "Imaginer la religion: autour de Jonathan Z. Smith," *Asdiwal* 13 (2018): 9–40; A.W. Hughes, ed., "Roundtable on Jonathan Z. Smith: Whence and whither the Study of Religion?," *JAAR* 87/1 (2018): 18–56; and the special issue of *MTSR* 31/1 (2019) entirely devoted to Smith.

[6] J.Z. Smith, "When the Chips Are Down," in Id., *Relating Religion*, 1–60.

direct experience as a tenure at the University of Chicago. In the third part, I will conclude with some general remarks on Smith's vision of the academy, in the hope that this may ignite reflection on the present and future of biblical studies as a distinct field of inquiry.

I. The Reading Habits of Mr. Smith

Taking a cue from Alberto Manguel's statement quoted above, one might be tempted to start an account of Smith's reading habits from about nine centuries ago, when the seeds of the Western model of university were first cast into the soil of Europe. These seeds have been identified, on the one hand, in the emergence of scholasticism within the Christian monastic schools, and on the other in the foundation of the earliest *studia generalia* in Bologna, Paris, and Oxford. However, as Ivan Illich reminded us of in one of his most inspired works, such a turning point in the history of civilization would never have occurred without a series of technological changes in the material format of the book, with the introduction of graphic conventions such as captions, marginal notes, tables of contents, and alphabetized subject indexes—all predating by centuries the invention of movable type printing.[7] According to Illich, it was the advent of these new reading and writing devices that marked the dawn of scholastic reading, leading to the rise of that bookish approach to education and knowledge that would end up legitimating "the establishment of Western scholastic institutions," while providing them with "the ultimate reason for their existence."[8]

Illich, in particular, suggested looking at what is arguably the earliest Western treatise entirely devoted to the art of reading, Hugh of Saint Victor's *Didascalicon de studio legendi* (ca. 1130), as a formidable witness of that moment of transition, when the manuscript page converted "from a score for pious mumblers into an optically organized text for logical thinkers."[9] Hugh's treatise was conceived primarily as an introductory handbook to the liberal arts and the interpretation of Scripture, addressed to the sort of reader we would define today as "non-specialized." Yet Illich's treatment went much further, and suggested interpreting *our* own present, our own moment of technological transition, "in the mirror of Hugh's past." After all, if we assume with

[7] On this, see esp. P. Stoicheff and A. Taylor, eds., *The Future of the Page* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004).

[8] I. Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's "Didascalicon"* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.

[9] *Ibidem*, 2.

Illich that the rise of the Western model of university was co-determined by the emergence of a new way of reading, we should also be ready to assume that such a way of reading may have influenced its subsequent historical evolution as well. The next step, therefore, would be to ponder the hypothesis that the appearance on the scene of new reading and writing technologies, like what we have been experiencing since the advent of the digital age, may lead to "genetic mutations" in the Western system of higher education, including the possibility of its eventual extinction. Hence Illich's warning: since bookish reading and readers have both a historical beginning, then it follows that their very survival is to be recognized as an urgent "moral task […] intellectually based on understanding the historical fragility of the bookish text."[10]

It is not that difficult to imagine Jonathan Z. Smith, himself a bookish reader, approving such a warning. We have only to think of his proverbial distrust of computing technology ("I take Marx very seriously, I think [the computer] alienates the worker from his production," as he declared amusingly in an oft-quoted interview),[11] or to recall another memorable dictum, when he claimed he had "no interest in the continued existence of our species, [but] a deep interest in the continuing existence of the academy."[12] Was it mere provocation? Not really, if we

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[10] *Ibidem*, 119. Illich's approach has often been mistaken as nostalgic, but this is an aspect I cannot dwell on here: see L. Hoinacki and C. Mitcham, eds., *The Challenges of Ivan Illich: A Collective Reflection* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002). For a review of recent works by scholars who have been charged to share a program of this kind (e.g., Paul Griffiths, Catherine Pickstock, and Shlomo Bidderman), see D. Walsh Pasulka, "Premodern Scriptures in Postmodern Times," *Postscripts* 2 (2006/2008): 293–315.

[11] See S. Sinhababu, "Interview with Jonathan Z. Smith," *The Chicago Maroon*, June 2, 2008, <https://www.chicagomaroon.com/2008/06/02/full-j-z-smith-interview>; now in W. Braun and R.T. McCutcheon, eds., *Reading J.Z. Smith: Interviews and Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3–28: 4. In speaking of alienation with regard to computers, Smith proves to be a careful reader of Marx, going beyond the subjective understanding of alienation that has always been mainstream in American sociological thought (on this point, see M. Musto, "Revisiting Marx's Concept of Alienation," *Socialism and Democracy* 24/3 [2010]: 79–101; repr. in *Marx for Today* [London and New York: Routledge, 2012], 92–116). The alienation that Smith has in mind is first of all of an *objective* kind: it refers to the fact that workers can feel themselves alienated from both the means of their production and the product of their labour. In the course of the same interview at *The Chicago Maroon*, Smith also reported about his experience with typewriters, telling of how in the last years of his life, when his faithful Smith-Corona broke down, he had contentedly returned to handwriting: "So I'm very happy because I do everything by hand again. Because then it [i.e., the product] is mine!"—Apparently, Smith seems to suggest that in order not to be alienated, a worker equipped with a personal computer should be skilled in software engineering at the same level of a developer or a hacker.

[12] J.Z. Smith, "The Domestication of Sacrifice: Discussion," in R.G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 206–35: 222. The passage deserves a longer quotation: "What I'm interested in is the health of academic discourse. What I'm interested in is whether it is in fact possible […] to have academic discourse about religion. That's all I'm asking. As a private citizen, I have some concern for cultural survival, but the only thing that I address as I write and as I work is the health of the academy and the conditions

bear in mind what Smith himself identified as his personal set of "reading rules," five elementary rules he always tried to adhere to since his undergraduate years. In a footnote to *When the Chips Are Dawn*, we are told that Smith worked out his rules after coming across a description of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's reading habits.[13] The list went like this:

> [1.] always read the entire chapter of a book in which a reference you are looking for occurs, then read at least the first and last chapters;
> [2.] always skim the entire volume of a scholarly journal in which you are seeking an article, then read the tables of contents for the entire run of the journal;
> [3.] after locating a particular volume on the shelves, always skim five volumes to the left and to the right of it;
> [4.] always trace citations in a footnote back to their original sources. Later, I added: [5.] Do not discuss an author unless you have read the total corpus of their work as available to you.[14]

As one can easily see, none of these rules could be conceivable outside the physical space of a research library (and preferably a well-furnished one, one might add), not to say outside the conceptual space inaugurated by the book format invented at Hugh's times (with alphabetized indexes, marginal notes, and tables of contents). If only for that reason, to blame Smith for being snobbish when he denied having ever been able "to see the Internet," or, on the contrary, to soften his position by reducing it to a harmless sign of scholarly oddity, good at best for academic gossip, would mean missing a point of the utmost importance. As academics, we are fully aware that much of our scholarly work, especially in the human sciences, is based on a "slow" and disciplined reading of texts and sources, simple access to which is often precluded to most ordinary readers. Thus we should rather ask ourselves whether the practices described by Smith are still really pursuable, in an academic environment where close reading is seriously threatened by the increasing demand of fast publishing, or where the physical availability of books becomes more and more problematic, also due to scholarly overproduction. Moreover, in a research environment where library shelves are being replaced by the digital storage of data (by no means less precarious or more freely accessible), or where the main kind of browsing that students practice is related to online catalogues and webpages, even the challenging power of serendipity

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under which responsible discourse can go on in that context. Now, it's not exactly fair to say that the only thing I am interested in are things that other people have found interesting. It is certainly part of what I'm interested in, because I'm an archaeologist, too, but my archaeology is in the academy, not in the field." I will come back to Smith's view of the academy in the third part of the paper.

[13] Smith refers to J.L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (1st edition 1927; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 30–36.

[14] Cf. Smith, "When the Chips Are Down," 37 n. 27.

runs the risk of yielding to decisions "taken" by algorithms, no matter how sophisticated they can be.[15]

Yet this is not the only aspect that enables us to draw a *direct* line between Hugh's medieval scholarly practices and the modern reading habits of Smith. It is striking to notice, for example, how both Hugh and Smith looked at reading as a fundamental human activity, aimed at gaining self-reflexivity through an implicit strategy of intellectual estrangement. As underlined by Illich, Hugh's idea of reading was rooted in a complex doctrine of vision and light: "For Hugh the page radiates […]. Hugh asks the reader to expose himself to the light emanating from the page, *ut agnoscat se ipsum*, acknowledge his [*sic*] self. In the light of wisdom that brings the page to glow, the self of the reader will catch fire."[16] When Hugh states that the scholar must feel like an exile-in-spirit, he evidently refers to his ideal representation of monastic life as *peregrinatio in stabilitate*, as "a spiritual pilgrimage by those who have committed themselves to local stability within a religious community."[17] Nonetheless, his words also aim to promote a scholarly ethos according to which readers can discover and become aware of their own identity through the light that "comes out" of books. In order to make such a discovery, Hugh explains, it is necessary to "abandon the sweetness of one's native soil" and become like "a foreigner in all worlds," accepting to have for company only that of those who have likewise decided to become exiles.[18]

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[15] Of course, this does not mean that we have to close our eyes to the enormous opportunities opened up by information technology and mass digitization: what is necessary is just to keep them wide open before the scenarios, not always shiny, that they have contributed to start. For a first critical assessment see, e.g., R. Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009); U. Herb and J. Schöpfel, eds., *Open Divide: Critical Studies on Open Access* (Sacramento: Library Juice Press, 2018); C.E. Karkov, ed., *Slow Scholarship: Medieval Research and the Neoliberal University* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2019). On the power of serendipity in scholarship, see R.K. Merton and E. Barber, *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); cf. also the autobiographical notes of G.G. Stroumsa, "Le parcours d'un flâneur," in P. Gumplowicz, A. Rauwel, and P. Salvadori, eds., *Faiseurs d'histoire. Pour une histoire indisciplinée* (Paris: PUF, 2016), 233–55 (repr. in G.G. Stroumsa, *Religions d'Abraham. Histoires croisées* [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2017], 11–36).

[16] Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 21. The pages that Illich dedicates to Hugh's doctrine of light, the eye, and the manuscript page as mirror are among the most dense and evocative of the book (19–23); Illich relies upon the monumental research of G. Schleusener-Eichholz, *Das Auge im Mittelalter* (2 vols.; Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1985), 1: 129–87, 849–87 and 931–1010. On the background of Illich's reflections, cf. also I. Illich, "Guarding the Eye in the Age of Show," *RES* 28 (1995): 47–61; and Id., "The Scopic Past and the Ethics of the Gaze: A Plea for the Historical Study of Ocular Perception" (unpublished paper, 1998), online at the address: <http://www.davidtinapple.com/illich/1998_scopic_past.PDF>.

[17] Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, 24.

[18] Hugh of Saint Victor, *Didascalicon* 3.19 (quoting Ovid, *Pont.* 1.3.35). For Hugh's text, see the critical edition in C.H. Buttimer, ed., *Hugonis de Sancto Victore "Didascalicon, De Studio Legendi": A Critical Text* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1939); Engl. transl. in J.

This roughly corresponds to Smith's intellectual attitude towards religion and religious literature, according to a critical stance that the scholar developed precisely from his first encounters with the Bible and biblical scholarship. As we know, Smith grew up in Manhattan in a secular Jewish family: this was the background in which he settled his initial interests in philosophy, anthropology, and natural history (a passion, the latter, which he kept on cultivating for the rest of his life, as is shown by his constant preoccupation with classification and taxonomy matters).[19] As he writes in *When the Chips Are Down*:

> My interest in natural history was at once both moral and intellectual. The former goes back to an early acceptance of the categorical imperative, "do no harm." Whether expressed in public gestures such as vegetarianism, conscientious objection, and passive resistance activities, or in my vocational plans to become an agrostologist, a grass breeder, with the hope of an atoning reclamation of those deserts that were the products of human failures to take care—it seemed clear to me, as a preteen, that those western religious traditions with which I had some superficial acquaintance provided no intellectual resources for such an ethic of "do no harm," insofar as they appeared to claim that the earth was ours to "subdue" and exploit.[20]

Although Smith does not say so explicitly, we can infer from the last sentence that biblical writings were a full part, in his eyes, of those Western religious traditions with which he admits having had just some superficial acquaintance as a teen (Smith, indeed, goes on to recall his "excited reports of readings in Asian traditions, ranging from Buddhism and Jainism to Gandhi, as well as works on native religious traditions").

In 1956, after having abandoned his long-held plans to study agrostology, Smith decided to join the Haverford College, where he finally got to start his first systematic readings of religious texts of the Western tradition. Since the College had been founded as a Quaker institution, the imprint of the Society of Friends was still being noticeable, and this also explains why Smith's earliest interests broadened soon to mystical

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Taylor, ed., *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

[19] It is also worthy recalling that Smith's first publication ever was a scientific report, undertaken in support of a research project led by the Royal Ontario Museum of Natural Sciences, in 1954. For an assessment of Smith's taxonomic preoccupations, see now T.W. Cooper, "Taxonomy Construction and the Normative Turn in Religious Studies," *Religions* 8 (2017): 1–15.

[20] Smith, "When the Chips Are Down," 2. Smith remained a committed vegetarian for his whole life. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Hugh's *Didascalicon* ends with an invocation to the divine Wisdom, "that it may deign to shine in our hearts and to cast light upon its paths for us, that it may bring us to its pure vegetarian meal (*ad puram et sine animalibus cenam*)" (6.13; Engl. transl. in Taylor, ed., *The Didascalicon*, 151; here modified). The last words reproduce the closing lines of the Latin *Asclepius* (41), with their reference to the bloodless diet of Pythagoreans (cf. *Corpus Hermeticum. Tome II: Traités XIII-XVIII, Asclépius*, ed. and transl. by A.D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière [3rd edition; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973], 355).

literature, peacefully coexisting with a number of other philosophical and historical concerns. While Smith's encounter with Eliade and his comparative approach dates later, it is in this period that we can see his lifelong theoretical influences being firmly established: (1) Marxism, in particular the so-called Austro-Marxism, associated with the figure of Max Adler; (2) German Neo-Kantianism, especially in the variants expressed by Heinrich Rickert and Ernst Cassirer; (3) the biological morphology of Goethe, discovered thanks to Cassirer; (4) Russian formalism and the Geneva school of structural linguistics; and (5) the French tradition of social thought, ranging from Émile Durkheim to Claude Lévi-Strauss.[21]

After obtaining his B.A. and before deciding to focus on the work of James G. Frazer and the problem of comparison, Smith turned his attention to the notion of myth: the main result will be his M.A. thesis, *A Prolegomenon to a General Phenomenology of Myth* (1960). It is precisely having this problem in mind that the scholar first found himself confronted with the study of biblical literature, and more specifically of New Testament texts. In this respect, two other short passages from his autobiographical notes deserve to be quoted. Both offer a vivid example of his "Menippean" way of reasoning, of that spirited tone—in fact, the opposite of a tongue-in-cheek rhetorical move—that so often permeates his academic prose. The first vignette could be entitled "On how it happened that Mr. Smith decided to go to Yale":

> After some uncertainty, I ended up going to Yale Divinity School with the initial intention of working in the New Testament where, thanks to Bultmann and his demythologizing project, I thought myth would be a topic of conversation. [What follows is added in a footnote:] To be honest, it was a misunderstanding. I asked one of my Haverford teachers for advice as to where I could study myth. His answer, "Why don't you go to Yale and study the New Testament? It's the largest surviving collection of Greek myths," was, to his chagrin, taken seriously by me.[22]

This is then followed by a second vignette, "On Mr. Smith at Yale and his delightful adventures among the local tribes":

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[21] I follow here, with some minor modifications, the chronological-topographical order traced by Smith in "Conjectures on Conjunctures and Other Matters: Three Essays," in Miller and Crawford, eds., *Redescribing the Gospel of Mark*, 17–98, esp. 55–56 and n. 99. What connects all these loci of influence, Smith notes, is some form of Neo-Kantianism. Among the influences "not subsumable under the rubric of Neo-Kantianism," he only adds his "obligation to the 'Scottish Institutionalists' who first framed the Enlightenment project of reason in sociological terms" (56 n. 99). At any rate, the programmatic nature of this intellectual chart should not be overlooked. Besides the quite predictable absence of Eliade or of even more "problematic" figures such as Martin Heidegger, many other names could be added to Smith's theoretical constellation, from Ludwig Wittgenstein to Gregory Bateson.

[22] Smith, "When the Chips Are Down," 7 and 35 n. 20.

> Yale was for me both a complex and an exhilarating experience. In many ways, interacting on a daily basis with tribal Protestants was analogous to an anthropologist's fieldwork. I was, to a considerable degree, a participant-observer, making all the telling mistakes no native would, yet finding their indigenous quotidian practice and speech remarkable. (There was a set of friends who sometimes served as "native informants," willing to help me out on such awkward occasions as, for example, when I thought that the economic understanding of the Trinity might have something to do with Marx.)[23]

Here, jokes apart (or even included, for that matter), we find in a nutshell all the basic elements that concurred to shape Smith's personal reading ethos. First and foremost, there is an intellectual preoccupation, a problem which has directly to do with the scholar's self-reflexivity, the categories he deploys, his disciplinary patterns of thought: in the case of the early Smith, as said, this was the notion of myth and mythic thought. Second, we find a textual object (in that case, the New Testament) regarded as a terrain of exploration and discovery, or better as a kind of laboratory, if we intend laboratory as a space where experiments are conducted and scientific facts construed.[24] Third, there is a cognitive tension, expressed by a dialectical strategy of familiarization and defamiliarization that requires acts of translation alike to those of ethnographers or anthropologists when they are delving into their fieldwork. The point, for Smith, is not merely to recognize the difference between a "theological" and a "historical" approach in the study of religion: theology, for Smith, is a fully appropriate object of study—it is nothing but a "datum," for which theologians serve as "native informants." Smith's main goal is rather to make us reflect on the expediency of taking an experience-distant approach to religion, as well as on the enormous cognitive power implied in such a critical stance.[25] Smith clearly relies upon the lesson of Lévi-Strauss, with his definition of anthropology as the "science of culture as seen from outside."[26] On the other hand, we also have an original reworking of the principle of defamiliarization set forth by the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky,

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[23] *Ibidem*, 7–8.

[24] On this point, cf. the seminal work of B. Latour and S. Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979).

[25] In all likelihood, Smith developed his conception of experience-distant approach from the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz, who had adapted the opposition between "experience-near" and "experience-distant" concepts from the work of the psychoanalyst Hans Kohut: see esp. C. Geertz, "'From the Native Point of View': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 28/1 (1974): 26–45 (repr. in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* [New York: Basic Books, 1983], 55–70). On the theoretical background of this conception, cf. R.T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell Academic, 1999).

[26] C. Lévi-Strauss, "Anthropology: Its Achievements and Future," *Current Anthropology* 7/2 (1966): 124–27: 126.

which demands "making the familiar seem strange in order to enhance our perception of the familiar."[27] Altogether, these elements contribute to define Smith's ethics of reading, based on what we can aptly define as an anthropologically-based humanism.[28] As an Italian reader, I would be tempted to associate it to the "ethnographic humanism" theorized by Ernesto De Martino, one of the founding fathers of Italian anthropology:

> The ethnographer is called to practice an ethnographic *epoché* which consists in inaugurating, under the spur of the encounter with certain alien cultural behaviours, a systematic and explicit comparison between the history of which such behaviours are documents and the Western cultural history which is settled in the categories the ethnographer has deployed to observe, describe, and interpret them: this twofold thematization of one's own history and alien history is conducted in order to reach that universally human background where one's own (*il proprio*) and the alien (*l'alieno*) are caught as two historical ways of being human.[29]

In purely theoretical terms, this implies the need to move from a concept of difference that can be ductile enough to be applied to the interpretation of the most diverse historical and cultural settings. Hence Smith's insistence in speaking about "gaps," "incongruities," or "tensions," deploying metaphors that show inadequacy at work both from the viewpoint of the data observed and from the viewpoint of second-order models that scholars use to interpret them (which must be subject to a continuous process of revision and rectification).[30] This

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[27] J.Z. Smith, Introduction to Id., *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi–xiii: xiii. The principle was firstly introduced by Shklovsky in his 1917 essay *Iskusstvo kak priyem* ("Art as Technique"), later collected in *O teorii prozy* ("Theory of Prose"; 2nd edition; Moscow, 1929), 7–23; the first English translation appeared in L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis, eds., *Russian Formalist Criticism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3–24.

[28] On Smith's "humanism," see esp. J.Z. Smith, "The Devil in Mr. Jones," in Id., *Imagining Religion*, 102–20 and 162; and Id., "Nothing Human is Alien to Me," *Religion* 26 (1996): 297–309; cf. also N. Levene, "Courses and Canons in the Study of Religion (with continual reference to Jonathan Z. Smith)," *JAAR* 80/4 (2012): 998–1024, esp. 1016–23.

[29] E. De Martino, *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 391 (translation mine). For an introduction to De Martino in English, see now F.M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion: The Crisis and the Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2012); cf. also D.L. Zinn, "An Introduction to Ernesto de Martino's Relevance for the Study of Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 128/507 (2015): 3–17; and C. Ginzburg, "On Ernesto De Martino's *The End of the World* and its Genesis," *Chicago Review* 60/4 (2017): 77–91.

[30] On Smith's conception of difference and incongruity, see esp. J.Z. Smith, "A Pearl of Great Price and a Cargo of Yams: A Study in Situational Incongruity," *HR* 16/1 (1976): 1–19 (repr. and expanded in Id., *Imagining Religion*, 90–101 and 156–62); Id., "What a Difference a Difference Makes," in J. Neusner and E. Frerichs, eds., *To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 3–48 (repr. in Smith, *Relating Religion*, 251–302); and Id., *Differential Equations: On Constructing the 'Other'* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1992; repr. in Smith, *Relating Religion*, 230–50). Cf. also T. Roberts, "All Work and No Play: Chaos, Incongruity, and *Différance* in the Study of Religion," *JAAR*

is hilariously captured by another passage in *The Chicago Maroon*'s interview:

> [S. Sinhababu:] What got you interested in the religions that you study? [J.Z. Smith:] Because they're funny. They're interesting in and of themselves. They relate to the world in which I live, but it's like a fun house mirror: something's off. It's not quite the world I live in, yet it's recognizable. *So that gap interested me*. And so I specialized in religions that are dead, which has the great advantage that nobody talks back. No one says, "That's not what I heard last Sunday!" Everybody's dead. And I like that. Now, I sometimes have to deal with religions that keep going. And they're more problematic because then you deal with people who believe things. They also find their own beliefs puzzling or challenging or interesting—they're almost synonyms. *So they have not only their beliefs, but their interpretations of those beliefs. And I have my interpretations of their beliefs* […].[31]

Smith's suspicion of any discourse on religion founded on notions of incommensurability—e.g., appealing to the "other" or the "wholly Other" while describing a religious experience—is ultimately motivated by his realistic view of translation, where there is no way to obtain perfect equivalence between a source text and a target text. Here again, Smith relies upon the lesson of Lévi-Strauss, who defined scientific explanation consisting "not in a movement from the complex to the simplex but in the substitution of a more intelligible complexity for another which is less."[32] Translation, for Smith, is thus the linguistic model on which *both* human and natural sciences are based. One should be aware, however, that the cognitive advantage of such a proposal derives from the fact that "translation is, by its very nature, corrigible. Whether of a conceptual or natural language, whether intercultural or intracultural, *translation can never be fully adequate, it can never be complete*."[33] In addition, any model, any translation inevitably requires being different from what it models or translates. As Smith repeatedly stressed, even before an audience of biblical scholars and thereby with direct reference to their work:

77/1 (2009): 81–104 (revised as "Religion and Incongruity," in *Encountering Religion: Responsibility and Criticism after Secularism* [New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2013], 23–48); and Id., "Encountering Incongruity: On J.Z. Smith," *JAAR* 87/1 (2018): 37–40.

[31] Sinhababu, "Interview with Jonathan Z. Smith," 4 (italics added).

[32] C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966), 328 (or. *La Pensée sauvage*, Paris: Plon, 1962).

[33] J.Z. Smith, "The Topography of the Sacred," in Id., *Relating Religion*, 101–16: 106 (italics mine). As Gérard Genette put it: "The wisest thing for the translator would no doubt be to admit that he can only do badly, and to force himself nevertheless to do as well as he can, which often means doing something *different*" (G. Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* [Engl. transl. by C. Newman and C. Doubinsky; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997], 217; or. *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* [Paris: Seuil, 1982]; author's emphasis).

> [T]he cognitive power of any translation, model, map, or redescription […] is a result of its difference from the phenomena in question and not its congruence. A paraphrase, perhaps the commonest sort of weak translation in the human sciences, nowhere more so than in biblical studies, will usually be *insufficiently different* for purposes of thought. To summarize: a theory, a model, a conceptual category, *cannot be simply the data writ large*.[34]

"Nowhere more so than in biblical studies…" But how to *translate* this in procedural terms? To figure that out, we need to take a closer look at how these principles have found fruitful application in Smith's concrete approach to the Bible and biblical scholarship.

II. Jonathan Z. Smith as a Reader (and Teacher) of "the Bible"

The heart of Smith's comparative approach—best depicted in *Drudgery Divine* (1990), his methodological manifesto—has already been described many times and this is not the most appropriate place to discuss it in detail.[35] The point of departure is always offered by the discussion or definition of a problem, a model, a theory that has acquired a paradigmatic value in the study of religion. An analysis follows, divided into four distinct operations: (a) description, (b) comparison, (c) re-description, and (d) rectification. The first phase, that of the description, actually includes a double archaeological operation, which aims to reread a text, a ritual, or a cultural artefact paying attention to both its generative context and the context of those who interpreted it and made it "canonical," that is exemplary, for the elaboration of a specific analytical category. This double operation is later applied to a second example, and only at this point can one turn to the second phase of the process, that of comparison in the proper sense (an operation that Smith defines as a "disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge").[36] The purpose of comparison is the re-description of the

[34] J.Z. Smith, "Bible and Religion," in Id., *Relating Religion*, 197–214: 208–9; this text was delivered by Smith as the inaugural lecture for the 2008 annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

[35] See J.Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990); cf. also his retrospective reflections (with further bibliography) in Id., "Epilogue: The 'End' of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification," in K.C. Patton and B.C. Ray, eds., *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 237–41.

[36] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 52; to trace a genealogy of this idea, cf. Id., "Map Is Not Territory," in Id., *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 289–309: 308 ("this lecture was an attempt to achieve what one of my old professors used to term 'an exaggeration in the direction of the truth'"). On comparison as a "disciplined exaggeration" and its role in biblical studies, see recently J.S.

examples, thanks to which each of them can be reread in the light of the other. Then, and only then, we are finally ready for the last phase of the process, which consists in the rectification of the initial question, of the received model or theory that arose from the study of those same examples. One of the crucial points of the process described by Smith is that comparison, to be correctly conducted, must be based on relations of analogy instead of homology, that is to say on similarity in form and structure between phenomena that do not share a genealogical link, be it direct (concerning heredity and filiation) or indirect (entailing contact and contagion). This is because comparison, according to Smith, cannot be reduced to the mere account of *similarities* between two objects, as if to say that *x* resembles *y*. Its operation "is never dyadic, but always triadic; there is always an implicit 'more than,' and there is always a 'with respect to.'" Thus comparison "should be thought of as a 'multiterm' expression such as '*x* resembles *y* more than *z* with respect to…,' or '*x* resembles *y* more than *w* resembles *z* with respect to…'"[37] In other words, its ultimate goal is to seek out and highlight conceptual *differences*, dissimilarities in what is similar, and thereby contribute to "re-vision phenomena as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems."[38] Smith shows, once again, that he wants to move along the route traced by Lévi-Strauss, pursuing the same kind of theoretical analysis that the latter attributed to Rousseau and Marx: "to construct a model and to study its property and different reactions in laboratory conditions, in order later to apply the observations to the interpretation of empirical happenings, which may be far removed from what had been forecast."[39]

So it is not by chance that the earliest comparative experiments attempted by Smith, at the end of the 1960s, focused on traditions on the fringe of the biblical canon, whether in the apocrypha of the Hebrew Bible (like the Jewish text quoted by Origen under the title *The Prayer of Joseph*) or in early Christian writings such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Peter.[40] In all these cases, defamiliarization was somehow consequential to the "exotic" nature of the mate-

Kloppenborg, "Disciplined Exaggeration: The Heuristics of Comparison in Biblical Studies," *NovT* 59 (2017): 390–414.

[37] Cf. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 46–53; on the difference between homology and analogy, which goes back to the biologist Richard Owen, cf. *ibidem*, 47–48 n. 15.

[38] *Ibidem*, 51.

[39] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Plon, 1955), 60 (here I quote from *Tristes Tropiques*, Engl. transl. by J. and D. Weightman [London: Penguin Books, 1992], 50).

[40] See J.Z. Smith, "The Prayer of Joseph," in J. Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 253–94 (repr. in Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 24–66); "The Garments of Shame," *HR* 5/2 (1966): 217–38 (repr. in Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 1–23); and "Birth Upside Down or Rightside Up?," *HR* 9/4 (1970): 281–303 (repr. in Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 147–71).

rials scrutinized. Yet working on texts perceived as marginal never prevented Smith from recognizing "that a truly successful history of religions approach to Judaisms and Christianities [note the plural] must deal with central formations and not exotica."[41] Whence derives the relatively high number of Smith's contributions that bear more or less direct relevance to biblical studies. On the whole, we can count at least thirty publications, in a series that ideally opens and closes with two essays revolving around a "central" text like the Gospel of Mark: *Good News Is No News: Aretalogy and Gospel* (1975) and *The Markan Site* (2017).[42]

As I already pointed out elsewhere, Smith has always been a rhapsodic author, who preferred the lecture and short essay format to the monograph and the "big picture" writing.[43] The reason why he proceeded in this way is not difficult to grasp: "If one considers Smith to be involved in a long-term, and still developing, project that he tests at a number of sites, then the monograph is a rather unhelpful genre."[44] Most of his contributions can thus be found either in scholarly journals or within collections that do not exhibit—at least at a first glance—a coherent design.[45] We only have two collections of essays revolving around a single topic[46] and four major anthological collections.[47] To this, however, we must add what Smith defined, in a Wittgensteinian manner, as the most relevant part of his work—the one devoted to teaching: Smith always defended the idea that the core of the scholar's

[41] Smith, "When the Chips Are Down," 37 n. 25.

[42] I am referring to J.Z. Smith, "Good News Is No News: Aretalogy and Gospel," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty* (ed. J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1975), 21–39 (repr. in Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 190–207); and Id., "The Markan Site," in Miller and Crawford, eds., *Redescribing the Gospel of Mark*, 99–125. My counting, however, does not include book reviews, minor publications, as well as the essays cited above (at n. 40).

[43] Cf. L. Walt, "L'origine delle origini. Jonathan Z. Smith e la storia naturale del cristianesimo," *ASE* 32/1 (2015): 199–216, esp. 202–3.

[44] So R.T. McCutcheon, "Relating Smith," *JR* 86/2 (2006): 287–97, esp. 291 n. 13.

[45] Perhaps the only exception being his editorial commitment for *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995): Smith contributed to the volume by compiling more than four hundred entries (a full list is reported in the bibliography appended to Smith, *Relating Religion*, 397–400). He was also responsible for the general layout of the dictionary and its main introduction, as well as for the selection of its iconographical material and its internal references.

[46] These are *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) and the already quoted *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[47] That is, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*; *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*; *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*; and *On Teaching Religion: Essays by Jonathan Z. Smith* (ed. C.I. Lehrich; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Cf. also the posthumous collection of interviews and unpublished material in Braun and McCutcheon, eds., *Reading J.Z. Smith*: I recently reviewed this volume in *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 48/4 (2019): 698–700.

craft does not consist in the publication of articles and books, but in the planning and drafting of syllabi.[48]

It hardly comes as surprise, then, to discover that the Bible and biblical studies played a crucial role in Smith's teaching activity too, far beyond any other area of focus in the broader spectrum of his scientific interests. Considering his penchant for problems of method and theory, it is even less surprising that he devoted four programmatic articles to unfolding his own view of biblical studies: *Scriptures and Histories* (1992), *Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education* (1998), and the two inaugural lectures he delivered at the 1999 and 2008 annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, respectively entitled *Bible and Religion* (2000) and *Religion and Bible* (2009).[49] The first and third of these articles are particularly rich in autobiographical details, and offer us a privileged access point to explore the reasons behind Smith's constant engagement with the Bible.

In *Scriptures and Histories*, Smith starts relating that, as an academic child of the early Sixties, he used to look "with deepest suspicion on Bible courses." Once established as a historian of religions, he also clearly stated he could accept "neither the boundaries of canon nor of community in constituting his intellectual domain."[50] Nevertheless, he found himself giving courses on Bible materials throughout his whole career. For one thing, it is clear that Smith simply made a virtue out of necessity. At the time of his earliest academic appointments, "Bible" and "religion" were still largely interchangeable terms in common academic parlance, especially in the United States. The ancestor of what is today the American Academy of Religion was the National Association of Bible Instructors, bearing the acronym NABI, the Hebrew word for "prophet," while the official journal of the association would continue to be called *Journal of Bible and Religion* until 1967. As recalled by Smith, neither "Bible" nor "religion" was perceived as a problematic term, nor was there "any question as to their relationship, […] no discrepancy between the datum (the Bible) and its model ('religion'). The datum was coextensive with its model."[51] That is why reflection

[48] On the importance of teaching for Smith, see esp. the essays collected in Smith, *On Teaching Religion*; I will come back to this in the third part of the paper.

[49] See, respectively, J.Z. Smith, "Scriptures and Histories," *MTSR* 4/1–2 (1992): 98–105 (repr. in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 28–36); Id., "Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 1/2 (1998): 73–78; Id., "Bible and Religion," *BCSR* 29 (2000): 87–93 (repr. in Id., *Relating Religion*, 197–214); and Id., "Religion and Bible," *JBL* 128/1 (2009): 5–27. Cf. also Id., "Canons, Catalogues and Classics," in A.V. Van der Kooij and K. Van der Toorn, eds., *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR) held at Leiden 9–10 January 1997* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 295–311.

[50] Smith, Introduction to Id., *Imagining Religion*, xi.

[51] Id., "Bible and Religion," 201.

on one term could entail reflection on the other. Furthermore, Smith soon realized that

> theories, methods, approaches, when applied to people without clothes in "exotic" societies, seemed to leave the students cold; but, applied to the Bible, these theories, methods and approaches seemed suddenly and continually relevant. That is to say, there was no discernible interest in whether Durkheim was right about the Australian aborigines because no student had any immediate stake in the outcome, but apply Durkheim to the most arcane passages in Leviticus—and the interest became both palpable and universal.[52]

With such a strategic move, we are finally getting to the heart of Smith's approach to the Bible, which is also apparent from the title of one of his major collections of essays, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (1982). This title, indeed, does not limit itself to describing the broad chronological and geographical spectrum of the materials discussed by Smith, ranging from ancient Near Eastern inscriptions to the tapes recording the infamous collective suicide of Reverend Jim Jones and his 900 followers in Jonestown, Guyana. The two mentioned locales, Babylon and Jonestown, also form an ideal trajectory, which connects the two extreme points in the history of biblical interpretation, from the prehistory of the biblical text, viewed as an object of antiquarian interest, to its contemporary reception, even in its most radical forms.

The introduction to the volume makes everything even clearer. The German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig once satirized authors who write a foreword to their work, comparing them to chickens "cackling after the egg has been laid."[53] But this is certainly not the case with this little jewel of scholarship (just three pages in all), which is one of the most influential ever written by Smith. We can skip for the moment the provocative, and frequently ill-understood, statement in the opening paragraph of the text, "There is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. […] Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy."[54] This would force us to enter the heated debate on the concept of religion, reassessing Smith's proposal to consider it as a second-order abstraction and a disciplinary horizon: "religion," for Smith, is a concept that works more or less the way

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[52] Id., "Scriptures and Histories," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 29.

[53] F. Rosenzweig, "'The New Thinking': A Few Supplementary Remarks to *The Star [of Redemption]*," Engl. transl. in A. Udoff and B.E. Galli, eds., *Franz Rosenzweig's "The New Thinking"* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 67–102: 67 (or. "Das neue Denken. Eine nachträgliche Bemerkung zum 'Stern der Erlösung,'" *Der Morgen* 1/4 [1925]: 426–51, esp. 426).

[54] Smith, Introduction to Id., *Imagining Religion*, xi. For an insightful commentary on this statement, see M.Q. Gardiner and S. Engler, "Charting the Map Metaphor in Theories of Religion," *Religion* 40/1 (2010): 1–13; cf. also the critical remarks of G. Benavides, "There Is Data for Religion," *JAAR* 71/4 (2003): 895–903.

"language" or "culture" do in other domains of the human sciences, to be judged first for its theoretical utility.[55] Rather, let us concentrate on what the scholar writes in the lines that immediately follow:

> For the self-conscious student of religion, no datum possesses intrinsic interest. It is of value only insofar as it can serve as exempli gratia of some fundamental issue in the imagination of religion. The student of religion must be able to articulate clearly why 'this' rather than 'that' was chosen as an exemplum.

Three conditions, Smith notes, are implicit "in this effort at articulate choice." The first is the one that interests us more here, "that the exemplum has been well and fully understood. This requires a mastery of both the relevant primary material and the history and tradition of its interpretation."[56] The Bible provides the scholar of religion with a stunning repertoire of "exempla," and can be treated as an arsenal of test cases "for the academic imagination of religion" precisely because it has been the subject of a long tradition of scholarship.[57] So it is no coincidence that the observations that Smith reserves to Judaism, the focus of the first three essays in *Imagining Religion*, are perfectly overlapping with the Bible:

> [T]he interest in Judaism [here you can read: the Bible] for the imagination of religion cannot be merely because it is "there," because it has played some role in our collective invention of western civilization, or because some students of religion happen to be Jews [read: Jews or Christians]. Rather, it is because of the peculiar position of Judaism [read: the Bible] within the larger framework of the imagining of western religion: close, yet distant; similar, yet strange; "occidental," yet "oriental"; commonplace, yet exotic […].[58]

Smith has often been criticized for his intellectualistic approach to religion. Not surprisingly, he is also credited as one of the grey eminences behind the current explosion of "method and theory" courses within departments of religious studies.[59] In this regard, there is a telling

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[55] See esp. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious"; cf. also Id., "'Religion' and 'Religious Studies': No Difference at All," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 77–90 (firstly published in *Soundings* 61/2–3 [1988]: 231–44). For recent discussion on this problem, see at least B. Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); and J.S. Jensen, *What Is Religion?* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[56] Smith, Introduction to Id., *Imagining Religion*, xi.

[57] As we shall see in the third part of the paper, here the key term is "imagination," which is given by Smith a precise, though only partially explicitly stated, theoretical value: see J.Z. Smith, "Puzzlement," in T. March, ed., *Interpreting the Humanities* (Princeton: Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, 1986), 53–68 (repr. in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 119–35); an abridged version of this essay appeared under the title "Playful Acts of Imagination," *Liberal Education* 73 (1987): 14–20.

[58] Smith, Introduction to Id., *Imagining Religion*, xii.

[59] On "methodolatry and methodone addiction" in the field of biblical studies, see the provocative reflections of S.D. Moore and Y. Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

anecdote reported by the Indologist Wendy Doniger, a colleague of him in Chicago, at the end of a note where she distances herself from Smith's theoretical and methodological standpoint:

> Once, while David Shulman and I sat through a conference on methodology in the history of religions, he had a dream; he dreamed that we were in a restaurant, and the waiter brought the menu, which we perused hungrily; but when we began to order (I ordered fresh oysters and Peking duck and mangos), the waiter interrupted: "I'm sorry, Madam," he said, "but in this restaurant you can eat the menu."[60]

Yet Smith's caveat we have read above, in requiring scholars to dominate both their primary material and the history of its interpretation, demonstrates precisely the opposite: if it is true that we are always invited to start from the "menu," that is, from what results from the fact that someone else has decided to include some dishes in a list (and isn't that a matter of method and theory?), it is also true that the dishes, our data and our examples, are still made of "real food" to be tasted. An expert critic, in judging the quality of a restaurant, must be able to assess both the raw materials used in the kitchen and the degree of sophistication with which they have been "reworked" according to specific cuisine styles and standards of taste. Out of metaphor, if our exempla are to be fully understood, we should be able to master questions pertaining to both their meaning within the cultures that produced them and their meaning within the history of scholarship on them. Interviewed by the Swiss journal *Asdiwal*, it was Smith himself who complained that

> it is nowadays possible to get a PhD in critical theory of religion without studying a particular religion. […] We are beginning to see that showing [up] are people who are very good on the theory, but whose examples stink because of that. […] They are not doing a lot of comparison. It is just 'bla-bla-bla'. It is comparing theories, and not the real stuff.[61]

This brings up back to what we can identify as Smith's main methodological principle in the study of biblical texts and traditions, which lies in the assumption that "reception history is, at the very least, as significant a study as genetic history."[62] This means that the Bible and its reception history (broadly intended) run parallel: if you want to talk about the "origins" of the Bible, you must also be able to deal with issues pertaining to the history of its material transmission, textual interpretation, and intellectual appropriation. In this sense, we might also say

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[60] W. Doniger, *Other People's Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 168.

[61] "Interview with Jonathan Z. Smith (2010)," in Braun and McCutcheon, eds., *Reading J.Z. Smith*, 45–61: 57 (the interview was conducted by Philippe Bornet, University of Lausanne, and originally published as "Jonathan Z. Smith par lui-même," *Asdiwal* 6 [2011]: 23–37).

[62] Smith, "Scriptures and Histories," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 35–36.

that not only religion, but also the Bible has "no independent existence" apart from the academy, which is, by the way, a point that almost every textual critic might even accept as fairly obvious. In recent biblical scholarship, David Parker has sharply called attention to the challenges posed to New Testament studies by mass digitization of manuscripts and projects such as the Nestle-Aland online critical edition of the New Testament. Such challenges, Parker argues, profoundly alter the nature and purpose of textual research, relocating the work of New Testament scholars in the framework of a complex hierarchy of *documents*, *texts*, and *works* (respectively, the main subject of scrutiny for palaeographers, textual critics, and exegetes).[63] Parker suggests taking a look at the variety of documents listed in the critical apparatus of the Nestle-Aland edition of the New Testament: we will find papyri, parchment manuscripts, amulets, ostraca, lapidary inscriptions, glossaries, lectionaries, commentaries, and catena manuscripts—all documents showing that there is no such thing as a univocal "New Testament" manuscript. We should rather conceive of these documents in terms of the textual fragments, individual works, or collections of works that they preserve and transmit. Works, in turn, are not identical with the text of their critical edition, and the critical edition is best understood as a narrative, telling the history of texts. Each work, in this sense, also proves to be much less an "object" than the result of a textual process. And the "New Testament" turns out to be a conceptual entity made possible by editorial theory and practice, not something that self-evidently exists. But without losing ourselves into the maze of textual research, we can just recognize, with Smith, that "there is no omnipurpose, omnicompetent Bible" valid for all groups and denominations: "rather, there are varieties of Bibles" and groups that "exhibit varying degrees of 'fit'" to them.[64]

Is this another point of contact between Smith and a structuralist perspective? To some extent, we can say this is definitely the case, all the more so if we keep in mind the theory of the double dimension of artwork which was proposed by an early structuralist like Jan Mukařovský. The Czech linguist moved from a dynamic definition of structure, implying that any piece of art is characterized as an "unstable structure," as a "surface" that breaks and renews itself continuously. Despite the reproach often levelled at structuralism—that of "objectifying" the artwork—Mukařovský distinguished between the "artefact," that is, the artwork as it appears in its materiality (in the case of the Bible, the text as we read it in its various editions); and the "aesthetic object," that is, the artwork as it has been read, interpreted, and manipulated throughout

[63] See D.C. Parker, *Textual Scholarship and the Making of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[64] Smith, "Scriptures and Histories", in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 34.

history.[65] Such a double focus is evident in Smith as well. Suffice it to glance at the outline of a year-long introductory course that he recurrently offered in Chicago, "The Bible in Western Civilization," where the word "Bible" was used in both a metaphorical and metonymical sense (with reference to the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint Bible, the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Qur'an and the Book of Mormon):

> The first term was devoted to the history of literacy, the formation of biblical texts, and handwritten Bibles including the study of the effects of modes of production, not only technological processes but also economic factors (e.g., patronage) and entrepreneurial decisions that affect format, design, and the inclusion of supplementary matter; the second focused first on scripture in liturgies and lectionary systems as well as in iconographic programs thus considering the status of the material text as an icon, as a "holy thing" and a ritual object, then on printed Bibles and the development of textual and historical criticism; concluding, in the third term, with nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical approaches and twentieth-century fundamentalist Christianity as a reaction to that scholarship.[66]

In this course, Smith was seeking to apply the notion of reading the Bible "forward as well as backward," along the lines suggested by another illustrious Smith, Wilfred Cantwell, in his seminal article on "The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible" (1971) and later on in his path-breaking volume, *What Is Scripture?* (1994).[67] The main arguments advanced by W.C. Smith aimed to overcome the implied

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[65] See J. Mukařovský, *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts* (Engl. transl. by M.E. Suino; Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures / University of Michigan Press, 1970; or. "Estetická funkce a estetická norma jako sociální fakty," *Sociální problémy* 4 [1935]: 89–104, 197–213, 284–94; revised as *Estetická funkce, norma a hodnota jako sociální fakty*, Prague: F. Borový, 1936).

[66] Smith, "When the Chips Are Dawn,", 43–44 n. 40. For other descriptions of courses and research plans, cf. *ibidem*, 37–38 n. 28; 39–41 n. 33; 42–43 n. 38; 51–52 n. 75; cf. also Id., "Religion and Bible," 26 n. 34; and Id., "Basic Problems in the Study of Religion," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 20–27 (firstly published in L.T. Johnson, ed., *Teaching Religion to Undergraduates: Some Approaches and Ideas from Teachers to Teachers* [New Haven: Society for Religion in Higher Education, 1973], 47–53).

[67] W.C. Smith, "The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible," *JAAR* 39/2 (1971): 131–40 (repr. in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (ed. M. Levering; Albany: SUNY Press, 1989], 18–28); and Id., *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). The insights of both W.C. and J.Z. Smith have played a decisive role in the development of the Iconic Books Project launched in 2001 by James W. Watts and Dorina Miller Parmenter at Syracuse University (see <http://iconicbooks.net>), which also led to the foundation of the international Society for Comparative Research on Iconic and Performative Texts (see <http://script-site.net>); for an introduction to the project and its main objectives, see J.W. Watts, ed., *Iconic Books and Texts* (London: Equinox, 2013). On this, cf. also the observations of T. Nicklas, "Kanon und Geschichte: Eine Thesenreihe," *Sacra Scripta* 15/1–2 (2017) 90–114. Perhaps it is also worth noting that the idea of reading biblical texts "forward as well as backward," paying special attention to the history of their interpretation, is implicitly underlying the editorial project of the Italian journal among the assumptions behind the editorial project of *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* (1984–).

antiquarianism of much biblical scholarship of his day, which focused on the prehistory of the Bible (before the Bible ever was "the Bible") but just seldom on its subsequent history. Scholars were therefore invited to look at the Bible no longer as a mere collection of ancient texts, the object of an antiquarian or "atemporal" reading, but as a historical agent whose form, function, and meaning could change depending on the epochs and latitudes in which it was found to act: the point was to consider the Bible, from time to time, "as a third-century, and twelfth-century, and nineteenth-century and contemporary agent."[68] In J.Z. Smith's understanding, that meant introducing students, among other things, to approach biblical texts starting from their being located in academic discourse, for example by treating sources that scholars identify behind the text of the Pentateuch (such as "J" and "P") or at the basis of the Synoptic Gospels (such as "Q") not as tenth-century B.C.E. or first-century C.E. Palestinian artefacts, but rather as "artefacts of nineteenth and twentieth-century European thought."[69] Among other advantages, such a programme could also pave the way for a comparative reflection on interpretation, scripturalization, and canonization processes, as well as for an understanding of "the Bible" as a post-biblical formulation. Last but not least, the Bible could be finally seen for what it is, as a heterogeneous collection of writings—more a "library" than a "book"—interpreted and used in different ways by different interpretive communities, which very often, however, "understand themselves to be the 'same,' or […] understand themselves in some sense to be related." And these, for Smith, were exactly "the sorts of differences which most often lead to thought."[70]

III. The Bible and Biblical Studies: No Difference at All?

In a recent, penetrating article, Donald Bruce Woll has convincingly argued that Smith's work as a scholar of religion can only be properly understood if we bear in mind what he referred to as his "second career," his theorizing about the academy and the aims of liberal education.[71]

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[68] W.C. Smith, "The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible," 134.

[69] Smith, "Scriptures and Histories," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 30.

[70] *Ibidem*, 36.

[71] See D.B. Woll, "Locating the Study of Religion in a Theory of the Academy: The Unexamined Relationship between Jonathan Z. Smith's Two Careers," *MTSR* 31/4–5 (2019): 309–46. The case of Woll, an early pupil of Smith's when the latter had just moved to Chicago, is in itself exemplary for an evaluation of the intellectual legacy of Smith: as Woll himself recalled in a touching post which appeared in the blogging portal of the *Bulletin for the Study of Religion*, Smith was much more than a dissertation adviser to him (see D.B. Woll, "Something I Learned from J.Z. Smith," *Religion Bulletin*, February 28, 2018, <https://bulletin.equinoxpub.com/2018/02/something-i-learned-from-j-z-smith-bruce-woll>). After graduating with a work on the Gospel of

From this particular viewpoint, it is by no means an exaggeration to claim, as Woll does, that "the recently published selection of Smith's writings on education, *On Teaching Religion* (2013), could well be subtitled, *Essays toward a Theory of the Academy*."[72] This undoubtedly was one of Smith's "persistent preoccupations," as is shown not only by his tireless teaching activity as a tenure at the University of Chicago, but also by his work as a college administrator, his active membership on national commissions formed by the Association of American Colleges, and above all the impressive amount of invited lectures he gave on educational issues (in the prefatory note to *On Teaching Religion*, Smith reports he offered live presentations "at some hundred fifty colleges, universities, professional associations, and regional and national conferences"). As I will try to clarify in this last part of my paper, all this has directly to do with Smith's conception of biblical studies.

Let me briefly recap what are the salient points and the main implications of Smith's "theory of the academy." First, what Smith defines as "the academy" does not simply encompass the whole spectrum of higher education programmes, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, but refers more generally to what is usually defined in the Western world as liberal learning or liberal education, as an evolution of the Greco-Roman and then medieval system of the *artes liberales* and the *studia liberalia*. Although it is probably not necessary to recall it, these studies and these arts were labelled "liberal" for the simple reason that they were not aimed at material profit and, as such, could be qualified as the worthy occupation of a freeman.[73] In Smith's view, the academy actually coincides with the very idea of liberal learning, but such an idea, of course, is also rooted in the post-Renaissance and post-Enlightenment discourse of humanism, liberal democracy, and scientific endeavour.

John (later published as *Johannine Christianity in Conflict: Authority, Rank, and Succession in the First Farewell Discourse* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981]), Woll started a long career in the field of information technology, continuing his studies independently. This eventually led him to earn a D.Ed. at Northern Illinois University in 1997, with a dissertation on "The Internet, Societal Learning Technologies, and the Culture of Modernity," where he advanced an education theory based on a critique of technocracy and the "pathologies of the modern culture of rationality."

[72] Woll, "Locating the Study of Religion," 312.

[73] For a classic treatment, see P. Abelson, *The Seven Liberal Arts: A Study in Medieval Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1906); more recently, D.L. Wagner, ed., *The Seven Liberal Arts in the Middle Ages* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); and B.A. Kimball, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Documentary History* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010); on the transition from medieval to Renaissance and post-Renaissance understanding of the liberal arts, see A. Grafton and L. Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986); and Smith's own considerations in "Re-forming the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Retrospective," in J.W. Reed, ed., *Re-forming the Undergraduate Curriculum: Invitation to Dialogue. Inaugural Papers from the Academic Forum* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 1–21 (repr. in Smith, *On Teaching Religion*, 94–110).

As summarized by Woll, "liberal education means for him training in citizenship in a democratic polity, and […] this purpose legitimately should be accorded an overarching primacy for any educational institution. […] Smith uses the word 'academy', in other words, to refer to 'our standard exemplar of an epistemic institution.'"[74]

I have already proposed to define Smith's intellectual attitude as an anthropologically-based humanism. It is precisely on the ground of this humanism that Smith places the concept of translation and the goal of self-reflexivity at the heart of his idea of liberal learning. For this reason, it would be misleading to attribute to Smith's educational project a "kind of neo-Enlightenment, highly intellectual and rationalist view of human beings," or to maintain that it would rest upon a neutral, naively positivistic notion of reason.[75] After all, one of the great achievements of modern anthropology has been to enable scholars to cultivate a "view from afar," opening up to confrontation with different forms of rationality, and subjecting one's own categories to continuous critical review.[76] Where Smith's project reveals itself a genuine "Enlightenment" flavour is rather in the liberating character that education is given. The main purpose of education, in Smith's view, is that of empowering students by enhancing their cognitive power: in this regard, Woll's analysis has the merit of strongly emphasizing the central role played by the notion of cognitive power in all of Smith's pedagogical writings. Besides highlighting the fact that "cognition" often carries the technical meaning of "thinking through a 'situation,'" Woll points out how the term can encompass "a wide range of activities, including reasoning, criticism, argumentation, imagination, comparison, redescription, interpretation, translation."[77] We are very close, as one can see, to the cognitive processes that neuroscientists associate to the evolution of the "reading brain" and that appear to be fostered by deep reading: critical thinking, imagination, and empathy.[78] The development of these

[74] Woll, "Locating the Study of Religion," 311–12.

[75] Cf. the criticism raised by H. Urban, "Making a Place to Take a Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith and the Politics and Poetics of Comparison," *MTSR* 12/3 (2000): 339–78; and Levene, "Courses and Canons in the Study of Religion"; with Woll's objections to such criticism in "Locating the Study of Religion," 326 n. 18, and 331–33.

[76] See, e.g., S.J. Tambiah, *Magic, Science, and Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Engl. transl. by C. Porter; London: Simon & Schuster, 1993; revised and expanded edition of *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique* [Paris: La Decouverte, 1991]); and B. Shore, *Culture in Mind: Cognition, Culture, and the Problem of Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For those who read Italian, cf. also the splendid book of S. Consigliere, *Antropo-logiche. Mondi e modi dell'umano* (Paderno Dugnano: Colibrì, 2014).

[77] Woll, "Locating the Study of Religion," 310.

[78] See, e.g., M. Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (New York: Harper, 2007); and Ead., *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).

skills is liberating insofar as it allows individuals to achieve higher modes of thought and action, invigorating their power of inquiry and self-fulfilment. Echoing the well-known Talmudic anecdote on Rabbi Hillel, who was requested by a proselyte to teach him the "entire Torah" while standing on one leg (*b. Shabb.* 31a), Smith also stated that, if he had been asked to define liberal education in the same way, his answer would have been that it is "training in argument about interpretations."[79] Or, to express the same concept in more plain terms and with explicit reference to the task he assigned to higher education:

> In contradistinction to secondary education, college is not a learning experience. Planaria, bees, mice, perhaps even machines, can all learn. That is to say, they can process information and retain it. […] But no other being than humankind, as far as we known, can argue and, therefore, be educated in the sense I am using the term. For argument is not based on the world as it is, but rather on what the world implies. It is the world as refracted—a world of significance, of interpretation, of translation, and therefore, of argument.[80]

Another relevant aspect, closely related to this, concerns the collective character of the academic enterprise and how it necessarily results in civil and public improvement. As said above, the academy represents for Smith the "standard exemplar of an epistemic institution." That is to say that its function is exemplary. The academy is called upon to play an indispensable role in society—that of testing its capacity for self-analysis and self-criticism in making decisions that, whether potentially or actually, can affect arrangements in the world. All this can be summed up in recognizing that scholars, as educators, are "to double business bound." Following on from the epistemological reflection of Stephen Toulmin, whose volume *Human Understanding I: The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* is hailed by Smith as "the most searching discussion of intellectual disciplines and professions that I know,"[81] liberal education is described as an enculturation process and a two-way affair. On the one hand, it involves introducing students to a community, making them internalize its intellectual scopes and commitments, but also inviting them to become heirs of specific "genealogies of problems" which, often intertwining with each other, make up the ongoing history of the academy. Hence why Smith prefers to conceive the academy as

[79] Cf. J.Z. Smith, "The Introductory Course: Less Is Better," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 11–19: 14 (firstly published in M. Jurgensmeyer, ed., *Teaching the Introductory Course in Religious Studies: A Sourcebook* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991], 185–192); cf. also Id., "Puzzlement," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 128.

[80] Smith, "Puzzlement," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 124–25.

[81] Smith, "'Religion' and 'Religious Studies,'" 81. See S.E. Toulmin, *Human Understanding*, vol. I: *The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

a concert of "interpretive communities" or "discourse communities" rather than in terms of "disciplines":

> While *discipline* contains the notion of instruction and learning, it is the passive rather than the active sense that is to the fore, as its root *dek* (to accept) and the use of *discipline* as a transitive verb signify, and as its cognates *disciple*, *dogma*, and *docile* make plain. *Community* evokes a quite different politics. It carries the root connotation of exchange rather than subjugation. It suggests notions of common goods, reciprocity, and communication. Disciplines have students (that is, disciples); communities have colleagues. You can learn discipline; you must participate in a community.[82]

On the other hand, and this is no less important, enculturation requires responsibility towards those who are being enculturated, and vigilant awareness of what they are introduced to. The most fundamental goal of creating insiders is for the sake of outsiders: it is "the bringing of private percept into public, civil discourse."[83] At the same time, no specialization can be of value if it fails to engage in sustained conversation with other specializations, showing how its problems and tentative solutions reflect fundamental modes of human inquiry.

How does this apply, then, to the case of biblical studies and their ambiguous location in liberal arts curricula? And what is the role we could assign to the Bible and biblical scholarship in such an ideal vision of the academy? Both questions are directly addressed by Smith in his 1998 article, *Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education*. After discussing three different conceptions of "general education"—that is, *general* (i.e., common to all students, essential), *generalist* (referring to primary training, as opposed to specialization), and *generalizing* (giving emphasis on process rather than content)—Smith rapidly offers insights for the use of Bible materials in each one of these areas. His theoretical premise, however, is a reversal of perspective. Smith points out that the choice of the term "general" has ended up implying, as an "unintended consequence," the fixing of the term "specialized" as its antonym. This comes from the biological taxonomy of Aristotle, where the adjective "general" was used to qualify the level of the genera in contrast to the level of the species. But when colleges and universities decided to set themselves as their main mission to professionalize students, training them to specialized learning, "what was initially a term of relation, of reciprocal inclusion, became a term of opposition and exclusion."[84]

There are two important consequences in thinking about the Bible in general education: first, that the primary object of discussion should

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[82] J.Z. Smith, "To Double Business Bound," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 142–54: 143 (firstly published in *New Directions for Higher Education* 84 [1993]: 11–23).

[83] Smith, "The Introductory Course," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 16.

[84] Smith, "Teaching the Bible," 74.

not be "the Bible, but rather a corporate agreement regarding an educational project; and second, that the ways, in which the Bible might be taught will vary, appropriately, according to the ways in which that educational enterprise is understood."[85] If our aim is general education in the proper sense of the term, the focus should not be on the Bible itself, but rather on issues of content, method, and theory in the study of the Bible, presented as an "exempli gratia" of liberal learning. In that event, the role of biblical studies in undergraduate curricula would ultimately depend on the ability of Bible scholars to convey to students the general meaning of their work, putting their "genealogy of problems" at the service of broader intellectual and societal needs. It would really be a matter of "relation, of reciprocal inclusion," not of "opposition and exclusion."

The point could be easily grasped by comparing the actual location of biblical studies in some representative undergraduate programmes. For the sake of brevity, I simply take the case of three public universities, one in the United States and the other two in Europe, whose curricula obey significantly different criteria (in the case of the two European institutions, my choice is also due to direct knowledge of them). The first case is that of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Alabama, which is in fact a peculiar one because Smith's ideas are at home there (chair of the department is Russell T. McCutcheon). The curricular plan is arranged in three major fields of study, labelled Religion in Communication, Religion in Conflict, and Religion in Context. Biblical topics appear to be covered by courses in all three areas of focus: we can therefore find introductory courses on the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as upper-level classes such as Apocalypse in Popular Media or English Bible as Literature. Since the main purpose of the curriculum is to "study religion *in* culture," as effectively stated by the departmental motto, its official website presents religious studies as part of the human sciences, and describes its approach to religion as non-denominational, descriptive, and cross-culturally oriented. Students enrolling in religious studies courses will "acquire skills that enable them to describe, compare, interpret, and explain—skills that they will use long after leaving the religious studies classroom."[86]

A quite different scenario appears if we look at the current state of things in the first of the two European institutions I select, which is the University of Bologna in Italy. Here, within the school of Arts and Humanities, an undergraduate student can get acquainted with biblical issues only in a rather oblique way, either through courses offered at the Department of Classical Philology (where, at the moment, there

[85] *Ibidem*, 77.

[86] For the full program, see the Department website at <https://religion.ua.edu/>.

are classes activated in New Testament Philology, Ancient Christian Literature, and History of Religions) or, as an alternative, through the Department of History and Cultures, where disciplinary subdivisions include archaeology and cultures of the ancient world, anthropology and ethnology, history and geography, as well as religious studies and Oriental studies: Bible materials can thus be discussed in courses such as History of the Ancient Near East, History of Ancient Christianity, Cultural History, and so on; but there is no chair explicitly dedicated to biblical studies. We are clearly confronted with one of the peculiarities of the Italian university system, resulting from the suppression of public theological faculties that followed Italian unification in the 19th century. It is an interesting story, which is not widely known abroad. Smith himself seems to ignore it, for example when he refers to the 1877 Dutch Universities Act that separated the four theological faculties of the country from the control of the Dutch Reformed Church: "For the first time in Western academic history," Smith writes, "there were established two parallel possibilities for the study of religion: a humanistic mode within the secular academy […] and a theological course of study within the seminary largely devoted to one of the religions."[87] Indeed, the Dutch doubled their faculties in 1877, but the Italians had already thought well to eliminate them altogether, four years earlier (although the process of secularization of higher education began even earlier, at least in the Kingdom of Sardinia, the predecessor of the Kingdom of Italy). Among the outcomes of such a decision, there was the official disappearance of biblical studies (as well as any other form of theological study) from the State system of higher education, its monopoly being left to seminaries and pontifical universities. The suppression of public theological faculties was accompanied by intense debate, inside as well as outside the Italian Parliament,[88] and many complained that the decision would affect both the "progress of science" (with regard to the study of religious matters) and the "progress of the Catholic Church" (i.e., its modernization and secularization…).[89]

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[87] J.Z. Smith, "Here and Now: Prospects for Graduate Education," in Id., *On Teaching Religion*, 37–48: 42 (firstly published in J. Neusner, ed., *New Humanities and Academic Disciplines: The Case of Jewish Studies* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984], 33–45).

[88] For an overview, see L. Pazzaglia, "La soppressione delle facoltà teologiche nelle università dello Stato," in *Il Parlamento italiano. Storia parlamentare e politica dell'Italia 1861–1988*, vol. 3: *1870–1874. Il periodo della Destra da Lanza a Minghetti* (Rome: Nuova Cei, 1989), 193–94; and C. Sagliocco, "Il dibattito sulla soppressione delle facoltà teologiche universitarie in Italia (1859–1873) e i seminari vescovili," *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 87 (2007): 292–311.

[89] See, e.g., the intervention of Francesco Vachino, member of the Superior Council of Education, in the minutes of the Superior Council of the Italian Ministry of Education dated June 9, 1865 (§§ 885–912), quoted by Sagliocco, "Il dibattito sulla soppressione delle facoltà teologiche universitarie in Italia," 300.

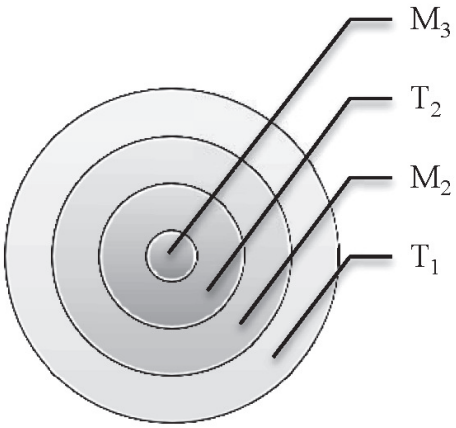
In many respects, this is the opposite of the situation we can find in the third and last of our cases, that of the University of Regensburg in Germany, where I am currently employed as a research fellow. The University hosts eleven faculties and has about 20,000 students: for German standards, it is a medium-sized university. As is usually the case in the German (and not only German) education system, biblical studies are part of theological curricula, which in Regensburg, for demographic reasons, are offered asymmetrically by a larger Catholic theology faculty and a smaller Protestant theology department. We can therefore have twin courses in biblical theology, although disciplinary subdivisions respond to differentiated educational objectives. While at the faculty of Catholic theology one can count on two chairs specifically dedicated to the Bible (Old Testament Studies and New Testament Studies) and historical disciplines are registered under the umbrella of historical theology, the department of Protestant theology offers independent courses in biblical topics within a programme basically aimed to train high school teachers. The latter is also the only context where we can find classes of introduction to religious studies, which in Regensburg are not present as an independent disciplinary field. This is consistent, however, with the general framework and the implied assumptions of the national system of higher education, which assigns religious studies (*Religionswissenschaften*) the task of covering any area of specialization in the study of religion except those pertaining to the various species of Judaism and Christianity. As a result, in order to get a full professorship in whatever branch of biblical studies, one is usually forced to apply for a *Habilitation* either as a Catholic or as a Protestant theologian. The system, in other words, does not seem to contemplate the possibility of someone wishing to specialize in (and thus be allowed to teach) Bible classes from a history of religions perspective or, more broadly, from a clearly non-theological stance. This might sound unexpected in the homeland of biblical higher criticism and the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*. And yet, if we look at the situation through Smithian lenses, the whole affair could be described as a textbook case of "situational incongruity."

We have seen that one of Smith's key proposals was to study religion in terms of "situation," "incongruity," and "thought." A "situation," as Smith defines it, is a "historical setting of 'incongruity' between cultural norms and expectations and historical reality, which calls forth thought."[90] Situations of incongruity, therefore, give rise to thought and result in thought because they represent a "condition" in which people find themselves and are stimulated to react with their entire intellectual arsenal. It is in this sense—and possibly only in this sense—that between religion and religious studies "there is no difference at all."

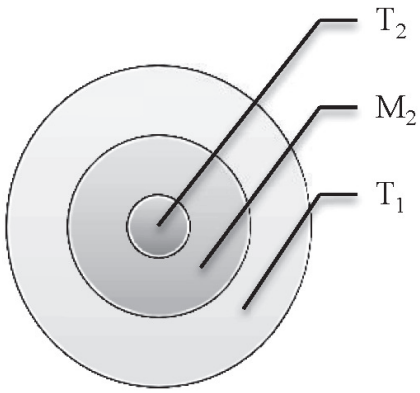
[90] Smith, "When the Chips Are Down," 48 n. 63.

Both religion and the academic study of religion are based on careful attention and rituals of interpretation.[91] In both cases, playing on the Latin etymology of *religio*, their proper antonym is none other than negligence. Their difference, however, lies in purpose and method. The study of religion, at least in public universities, should not be intended as instrumental to the transmission of religious identities or traditions, for the proper task of the scholar of religion, to paraphrase Smith, is to map and not to inhabit their territory.[92] Again, it is a matter of "relation, of reciprocal inclusion," not of "opposition and exclusion."

To put it in a geo-theoretical manner: without reducing biblical studies to a second-order map within the broader territory of human sciences (and therefore, without reducing our images of the Bible to third-order maps, made up in territories that are mapped by biblical studies: see Map 1 below), we simply run the risk of reducing the territory of biblical studies to a map whose boundaries coincide with those of a single, given image of "the Bible" (see Map 2 below).



Map 1. Key:
T^1: Territory of the humanities
M^2: Map of biblical studies
T^2: Territory of biblical contexts
M^3: The Bible(s)



Map 2. Key:
T^1: Territory of biblical studies
M^2: "The Bible"
T^2: Territory of biblical contexts

Reduction is always necessary if we want to map a territory, but not all reductions have the same cognitive power. And Smith would not have hesitated to consider just the first kind of these reductions as a reduction "in the service of knowledge": as he wrote, in most sciences

[91] On textual interpretation of the Bible as a form of ritual, and on the implications of ritualizing sacred scriptures by commentary (whether willingly or unwillingly reaffirming their special status), see J.W. Watts, "How Books Matter: The Three Dimensions of Scriptures," in *How and Why Books Matter: Essays on the Social Function of Iconic Texts* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2019), 7–29, esp. 16–18, where J.Z. Smith's definition of ritual is also briefly discussed.

[92] I am referring, of course, to J.Z. Smith, "Map Is Not Territory," in Id., *Map Is Not Territory*, 289–309.

reduction is "the explanation of a theory in one area of research by a theory used in another area. […] *Reduction does not falsify theories*. Reduction takes place when, given two theories, one of the theories is found to be more comprehensive and explains more than the reduced theory, *while including the data of the reduced theory*."[93]

If we now turn back to the point where this article started from, namely to the portrait of Jonathan Z. Smith as a reader, two further conclusions can be drawn, more of a political and mythopoetic kind. The first is related to Hugh of Saint Victor's idea of *studium legendi*, an expression we may render as "passion for reading," and which for Hugh implied to consider reading as a universal duty, a moral rather than a technical activity. In Hugh's mind, even "the lack of family wealth and a slender income" could not provide an excuse to avoid such a duty, although Hugh was honest enough to admit that both could "reduce the possibility of learning." According to Illich, this shows that Hugh was fully aware that the leisure (*otium*, σχολή) he was advocating depended upon material conditions too. The kind of reading that Hugh had in mind can be nevertheless described as a "way of life," to which everybody is summoned to dedicate body and soul. It is a reading qualified as "divine" because its ultimate purpose is "to be deified by leisure" (*deificari in otio*).[94] Contrary to what one might expect from a monastic author, Hugh did not subordinate this reading either to prayer and liturgy (as would happen in the *lectio spiritualis* of the later monastic tradition) or to the mere obtaining of information (which is in itself the result of a "clerical" activity, insofar as it implies the existence of monopolies of knowledge). Now, interestingly, Smith describes religion in terms of labour and human work, as part and parcel of the ways humans have of building their world(s). *Homo Religiosus* is nothing but a species of *Homo Faber*.[95] It has been observed that "to define religion in terms of human labour is to recognize that the outstanding characteristic of human beings, their distinguishing mark, is not their metaphysical or physical nature—but their work."[96] So, if religion is work, what on earth could be the study of religion? In this respect, the religious scholar Sam Gill has suggested looking at Smith's approach to religion *sub specie ludi*: "Play is an important element running through Jonathan Smith's study of religion; key both to appreciating and critically eval-

[93] Id., "The Study of Religion," in *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*, 909–17: 915 (italics mine).

[94] The formula is borrowed from Augustine, *Ep.* 10.2.

[95] See, e.g., J.Z. Smith, "The Unknown God: Myth in History," in Id., *Imagining Religion*, 66–89: conclusion. Giambattista Vico, a thinker whose influence on Smith should be carefully reconsidered, would speak of Homo Poeticus.

[96] Thus R. Cameron, "An Occasion for Thought," in McCutcheon, ed., *Introducing Religion*.

uating his work."[97] We can be sure that the definition of Homo Ludens fits Smith perfectly, for a variety of reasons. Some of these have been thoroughly discussed by Gill, starting from Smith's scholarly habit of "seriously taking a stance while acknowledging its absurdity." But the notion of play can also serve to capture another profound aspect of Smith's scholarship, something closely connected to his idea of the academy and of what does it mean to be an academic. I do not intend to quote again Lévi-Strauss and his famous distinction between "cold" and "hot" societies—the former being ritual-based, and the latter where the sphere of play tends to expand itself—, but it seems rather clear to me that Smith conceived the academy as a very hot society, very far from the cold rituals enacted by the most widespread "religion" today—a religion which imposes its "imperatives of competition, accumulation, profit-maximization, and increasing labour-productivity."[98]

The second conclusion is more related to the portrait of Smith as a reader of the Bible, and to his keen interest in the Bible and myth. We all know the biblical story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16). The two siblings have often been regarded as embodying two different souls of humankind: the sedentary, represented by the agrarian Cain, and the nomadic, represented by the shepherd Abel.[99] The text of Genesis portrays Cain as an ideal Homo Faber, as he is the one who subjugates nature in order to build civilization: it is from him that the founders of cities descend (cf. Gen 4:17). Abel, on the contrary, can be seen as an ideal Homo Ludens, as he plays to explore the world around him: while leading his flock—an action expressed by that powerful, resonant term, *transhumance*—Abel embarks on a free exploration and mapping of the territory. We do not need to recall how the story ends in the Bible: Cain will kill Abel. *Ceci tuera cela*. The good genius of Bruce Chatwin already reminded us of that version of the story which tells "that Cain lay in ambush for Abel and heaved a rock on to his head—in which case

[97] S. Gill, "No Place to Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith as *Homo Ludens*, the Academic Study of Religion *Sub Specie Ludi*," *JAAR* 66/2 (1998): 283–312, esp. 285.

[98] E. Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 7. On "capitalism" as religion, following Walter Benjamin's seminal insights, see M. Löwy, "Capitalism and Religion: Walter Benjamin and Max Weber," *Historical Materialism* 17/1 (2009): 60–73; cf. also the essays in D. Baecker, ed., *Kapitalismus als Religion* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2003); and D. Gentili, M. Ponzi, and E. Stimilli, eds., *Il culto del capitale. Walter Benjamin: capitalismo e religione* (Rome: Quodlibet, 2014). In today's academy, the same dictates manifest themselves in a number of detectable ways: "publish or perish," "funding or famine," citation and publication counting, journal impact ranking, and so on and so forth. On this point, with a focus on the present and future of biblical studies, cf. also the "irrelevant conclusion" of J.G. Crossley, *Jesus in the Chaos of History: Redirecting the Life of the Historical Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 163–69.

[99] For a systematic exploration of early Jewish and Christian interpretations of Cain and Abel's story, see now J. Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

the killing was the fruit of brewed-up bitterness and envy: the envy of the prisoner for the freedom of open spaces."[100] Of course, it would be too simplistic to read this moral as black-and-white thinking, if only because, if we rest upon the Genesis account, Abel had no descendants and all of us could have a hint of Cain in their blood. We should not forget, however, what punishment followed Cain's crime: he was condemned to a life of wandering. Someone has rightly pointed out that, in this way, Cain's *error* was turned into *errancy*.[101] The message was clear: erring, namely being errant, is human. But we may still wonder whether Cain really got the point.

Luigi Walt
Universität Regensburg
luigi.walt@gmail.com

[100] B. Chatwin, *The Songlines* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 192–93.

[101] See the first chapter of F. Careri, *Walkscapes: Walking as an Aesthetic Practice* (Engl. transl. by S. Piccolo; Ames: Culicidae Architectural Press, 2018); or. *Walk-scapes. El andar como práctica estética* (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 2002). Research for this article has been conducted at the University of Regensburg Centre for Advanced Studies "Beyond Canon," under the auspices of the project "Jenseits des Kanons: Heterotopien religiöser Autorität im spätantiken Christentum" (DFG-Kolleg-Forschungsgruppe 2770).