The Editorial: The 70s *Bulletin*—When the Field was Disco

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Coming aboard as editor in 2020, I knew that familiarizing myself with the *Bulletin*'s history would be among the first things for me to do. I had some familiarity with the publication as a reader. The first issue I read was published under the editorship of Craig Martin (2007–2012). In 2015, my predecessor Phillip L. Tite (2012–2019) invited me to publish the essay "Signifying on the World Religions Paradigm: My Version of RELIGION 101" (2015, 35–37). All I knew of the *Bulletin* prior to those years was that it existed—apparently since 1971.

Like any new editor, I had all sorts of ideas about new-to-me places for the publication to explore. But retrospection can be just as invigorating as momentum. And what better time for a look back than the *Bulletin*'s semicentennial?

Thus I thought we'd start off this issue by taking a look at the *Bulletin* of the 1970s for some ideas about the places we've been and the places we might still go as we carry out the academic study of religion.

The *Bulletin of the Council of the Study of Religion* was the central print mechanism for carrying out the charter of a self-described

... federation of learned societies in religion interested in developing greater coordination of the field as a whole. It seeks to initiate, coordinate, and implement projects designed to strengthen and advance scholarship and teaching in the field of religion. (Wagner 1976, 2)

Among the CSR's constituent members were the American Academy of Religion, the American Society of Christian Ethics, the American Society of Church History, the American Theological Library Association, the Catholic Biblical Association, the Catholic theological Society of America, the College Theology Society, the Society of Biblical Literature, and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.

Walter H. Capps best summarized the *CSR Bulletin*'s purpose when articulating the charge of the CSR's Task Force on Professional

Development—which he chaired in 1975. Simply put, the *CSR Bulletin* was a publication designed to help "the discipline be enabled to take the future more into its own hands" (1975, 11). Long before many of the publications that we today take for granted, it published news, meeting reports, professional opportunities, obituaries, and advertisements to help keep scholars in North America abreast of the field's happenings in a way that had scarcely happened prior. And it played this role across an assortment of professional societies that, back then, each lacked a way of doing this individually and for themselves. From the start, then, the *Bulletin* was a site for collaboration.

Like today, the earliest issues of the *CSR Bulletin* also featured essays on hot button topics in scholarship. I'll admit that I shuttered when I read Hans H. Penner's and Robert A. Oden Jr.'s 1977 piece, "A New Introductory Course to the Study of Religion." The then-Dartmouth College professors set out to craft a course that, in their words, moved away from the "three basic approaches" of the time: "world religions... religious experience... [and] eclectic anthologies on religion for a new generation of students" (Penner and Oden Jr. 1977, 89). Little is more sobering than learning that your new ideas were around before you were even a thought—telling us something important about some of the enduring challenges of our field.

In 1975 (1, 27), F.N. Johnson and J.P. Clayton were working out ways to further a more sophisticated study of psychology and religion at the University of Lancaster and the field at large. In that same issue, systematic theologian Ronald A. Carson and historian of religions Rita M. Gross were mapping out the functional contours of the study of religion in light of their own training, students, and research (1975, 3–6). Were you to remove the dates from the bibliography, one might confuse these issues of yesterday with today's.

Of course there are some dead giveaways. Way before the *Bulletin* was bringing you The Download

on digital humanities, Ian Montagnes was getting you hip to “Microfiche and Scholarly Publishing” back in 1976. On this, *CSR Bulletin* editor (and *CSR* executive director of the time) Norman E. Wagner’s lead gave me pause. “Although microfiche technology has been around for some time, its potential for scholarly research and publication as well as in teaching is only gradually being realized” (Montagnes 1976, 1). I have no doubt that this is true, though for different reasons today. The more things change...

Leonard J. Biallas edited the *CSR Bulletin* in the latter part of that decade. At the beginning of his December 1979 editorial, he recalls how

[d]isco music from next door rocked the conference room during the afternoon session of the *CSR* annual meeting, causing the delegates to change rooms twice—sort of an electronic version of musical chairs. Perhaps many of the delegates would have preferred to remain with that rock group rather than listen to a dirge on ineffective solutions to the crisis in job opportunities for PhDs in religious studies. (Biallas 1979, 2)

For context, the growth of departments—especially in public settings—was then beginning to taper, with some units being collapsed into hybrid humanities departments (yet another tune that’s familiar to some contemporary ears).

In the United States, the 1967 Age Discrimination Employment Act—coupled with a large hiring wave of younger scholars during the 1960s—brought considerable consternation regarding the limits of PhD training and faculty positions. As Biallas put it:

Young PhDs, rather than being hemmed in by restricted job opportunities in the teaching profession, would seem to have to learn to listen to new beats, to “plug in” to new realities. Perhaps through a broad-based education they can successfully break through the conventional hierarchies of meaning and value (including market value) to new visions and new possibilities. (Biallas 1979, 2)

Not a few graduate students are rightly concerned with much the same issues today.

So part of what these 1970s issues have brought home for me is that we have a history worth knowing, because it is still relevant. Our times are not wholly unprecedented, just as the past is not self-important. But we would do well to remember the stories of colleagues, at a wide array of sites, who made the

field that we work in today. Returning to Capps’s earlier words, those scholars took a future into their own hands—and there is much to celebrate in that work.

I appreciate how, in 1976, this publication insisted that part of said future demands investigation into the field’s relative lack of “racial minority students in doctoral study,” even if in the same breath the gains of second-wave feminist efforts are celebrated perhaps a bit too easily: “There is reason to think that the relative exclusion of women from graduate work in religion has now eased markedly” (Wilson 1975, 6). And I am impressed by the *CSR Bulletin* leadership’s early collaboration with partners like the National Endowment for the Humanities (Cannon 1978, 93, 95–96) and the American Theological Libraries Association (a member of the *CSR* in those days). That sort of institutional synergy continues to hold promise and should be explored.

But now, with a great group of contributors and staff writers from a new generation of scholars, I think you will agree that we are primed to take hold of new futures and possibilities.

For this issue, the first in our 50th year, I had the pleasure of speaking with Krista Dalton, assistant professor of religious studies at Kenyon College. Dalton is the founding editor and executive editor of *Judaism* for the successful and now influential web journal, *Ancient Jew Review*. In this edition of *The Interview*, Dalton gives us her take on education and professionalization in the twenty-first century field.

After the 2020 annual meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Religion, I caught up with K. Merinda Simmons (University of Alabama) and Jeremy Posadas (Austin College). Both scholars were part of a working group that invited audience members to theorize about the interventions queer studies has and has yet to make in the academic study of religion. They agreed to continue their exchange in our regular feature *The Conversation*, with their collaborative piece, “From Essence to Queery: Puzzling Over the Persistence of Identity.”

Staff Writer Emma Welch (a student in the *Religion in Culture* MA program, University of Alabama) profiles Baker University professor and curator of the Quayle Bible Collection, Nicholas Pumphrey. He shares how his training in biblical studies led him into the world of museum studies and his ongoing efforts to critically exhibit the politics of data.

Russell Sandberg's recent anthology with Routledge, *Leading Works in Law and Religion* (2019) provoked Jacob Barrett (also enrolled in the Religion in Culture MA, University of Alabama) to consider what an anthology in the study of religion and law might look like. In *The Experiment*, Barrett develops a hypothetical volume in the style of Sandberg as a means of exploring (and transgressing) the constitution of a scholarly subfield.

Apart from preparing for this editorial we went into The Archive and retrieved a 1997 provocation from the historian Stephen Heathorn (McMaster University). Entitled "Underdogs and Englishmen: Diana and the Secular Worship of the Nation," it continues to challenge readers to examine how emotion can fuel myth, reify borders, and police social position.

And as this is a season when many take stock to retool, we reached out to friends of the *Bulletin* to help you prepare for the coming school year. We got The Buzz on "Graduate Education in the Time of COVID-19" and will fill you in on the outlook for programs going forward. Jeri Wieringa (University of Alabama) is back with her regular column, The Download, with some tips on evaluating digital research projects. And the one and only Sage D'Vice has some thoughts on everyone's favorite topic—grading.

Fifty years after it was founded, welcome to the first issue of 2021! The work and the *Bulletin* continue!

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