

## EDITORIAL

### Four Articles on “Biblical Literacy”

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The question of biblical literacy—and the supposed lack of biblical literacy—is one that has a long history (Avalos 2009). But what exactly is “biblical literacy”? Typically, biblical literacy is discussed in terms of the level of detailed public knowledge of the contents of the Bible and, often tied in with questions of whether or how the Bible ought to be taught in schools, how to address the perceived problem of a lack of biblical literacy. For instance, in his discussion of a report by Durham University’s Centre for Biblical Literacy and Communication, Philip Davies noted the lack of biblical literacy (in the UK) in terms of stories such as the Good Samaritan or figures from the Bible such as Abraham or Joseph (Davies 2009). If debates at conferences and on blogs are anything to go by, Davies is reflecting a common academic understanding of what biblical literacy entails. There are also other ways in which “biblical literacy” has been understood which are not tied in with popular knowledge of the extended details and contents of biblical texts. For instance, a few stock images (e.g. Eve, Christ crucified) and phrases (especially King James Version-isms) remain prominent in cultural memory, and are used widely in advertising, particularly aimed at a younger generation (e.g. Edwards 2012), irrespective of whether people know chapter and verse, or indeed whether a given image is “biblical”.

In 2011, questions about “biblical literacy” were brought to the fore in British and English public debates because of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Bible. In the UK, numerous events were held, including a conference and cathedral exhibitions developed by the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield. Four essays in this edition of *Postscripts*, engage with these debates in light of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Bible. In the first essay, I.C. Hine, along with Nicky Hallett,

Carl Tighe and José Luis Lopez Calle, look at case studies of the use of the Bible in the classroom, particularly in secondary and higher education, and in the fields of English Literature, Economics, and Creative Writing. Hine further reflects on the different contexts of North American and British education. In the second article, James Crossley looks at some of the ways the Bible, and the King James Version in particular, has survived in the contexts of contemporary capitalism, postmodernity, nationalism and liberalism, noting that anything deemed too problematic or “intolerant” will typically get removed from party political or more official presentations of the Bible. In the third article, Philip Davies looks at ways in which the Bible might be used in schools and how teachers and students might engage “philosophically” with the ideas raised in biblical stories without them being taught as doctrine. In the fourth essay, David Chalcraft looks at the role of “biblical literacy” in his study of two classical sociologists (Max Weber and William Dubois), how biblical quotations and allusions are shaped to fit their respective audiences, and the influence of emancipatory uses of the Bible.

There is much more analysis needed to appreciate how “biblical literacy” is used and understood in a range of cultural contexts but it is hoped that these articles will provoke further discussion and open up different ways of understanding the constructions and receptions of the Bible in contemporary culture.

### References

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