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Presidential Address

by

JONATHAN Z. SMITH

President of the Society of Biblical Literature 2008
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November 22, 2008
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*Introduction given by David J. A. Clines
Vice President, Society of Biblical Literature*

Jonathan Z. Smith

A fable: Once upon a time there were two tribes, seeking their separate but parallel destinies. Every year they would meet together for a gigantic pow-wow, until Tribe A decided their fair name was being besmirched by association with Tribe B, and canceled the pow-wows. Tribe B was hurt, but decided to heap coals of fire on the heads of Tribe A by inviting one of their most distinguished elders to become the leader of Tribe B for a year. So shamed was Tribe A by this selfless act that before too long they repented of their unfriendly action, and desired of Tribe B that they should once again meet together for their pow-wows in the same place and at the same time.

That is not entirely the true background of the election of Jonathan Z. Smith, the distinguished historian of religion, as president of the Society of Biblical Literature, though it may well be how future generations remember the events of our own times. From the SBL's point of view, Jonathan Smith is a brilliant choice for president, whether or not he has anything to do with the AAR.

Jonathan Z. Smith's title is Robert O. Anderson Distinguished Service Professor of the Humanities at the University of Chicago. His scholarly reputation rests on the corpus of his unique contributions to the study of religion in general and religions in particular, and not everyone knows that he is also by training and by seasoning a regular New Testament scholar, albeit with the fisheye lens of a scholar of religion rather than, shall we say, the microscope of a student of the Synoptic Problem. One New Testament-oriented study was *Drudgery Divine* (1990), in which he subversively compared early forms of Christianity with the mystery religions, proving himself, as one canny reviewer said, "the greatest pathologist in the history of religions."

He almost didn't do his Ph.D. at Yale because there was no one to mentor a bright and no doubt wayward young student who wanted to challenge the parallelomania of the *Golden Bough* of J. G. Frazer; Smith had to develop his own tools for the comparison of one religion, or one religious practice, with another—tools that would prevent easy conflation of one set of data with another, and that would always respect the individuality of the particular case. Proper methods of comparison were to remain a running theme through almost all his work from that time, through *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (1978), *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (1982), *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (1987), and *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (2004).

Not long after Yale, in 1968, he was appointed to the University of Chicago, where he has spent the last forty years. These days, he takes a special pride in teaching only at “the College,” the undergraduate component of the University of Chicago. There he shapes the minds of the more or less impressionable youth of today with his RLST 10100 Introduction to Religious Studies, the most important and most formative class in religion they will take. “Introducing,” he says, “is an old person's game; it's not a young person's game. A young person has just spent years becoming the world's expert on some itty-bitty little thing. And that's the last person in the world you suddenly give the overview [to].”

Unlike those religion scholars who apparently believe that religion is a good thing and the more of it you can get the better, Jonathan Z. Smith gives off an air of detachment from his subject matter, as if, forsooth, in a day of advocacy scholarship and self-serving critical thinking, he were a disinterested, academic historian of religion. Religion in all its manifestations fascinates him—but it does not seduce him. It is enough for him to bring disparate sets of data together, the Qur'an with the Book of Mormon, nineteenth-century Maori cults with religiously inspired mass suicide in Jonestown—“dropping one in the other's pond to see what happens,” as he puts it.

Jonathan Smith celebrated his seventieth birthday yesterday [November 21, 2008]. Like myself, born on the same day, he finds that his birthday always falls during the SBL annual meeting. I give you the president for 2008, not so much *homo religiosus* as *anima naturaliter SBLiensis*.

Religion and Bible

JONATHAN Z. SMITH

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When we last convened our annual meeting in Boston, nine years ago, I was invited to present a plenary lecture to the Society. I chose, then, as my topic, “Bible and Religion.”¹ Among other matters, I chided, in a fairly gentle manner, biblical scholars, especially students of the literatures of early Christianities, for resisting the social category ‘religion’ in their work, and for markedly preferring the personal and experiential term ‘faith.’ In so doing, I was mindful of the compound composition of my audience, and so began by acknowledging the significant number of scholars then gathered in Boston who “held joint membership in the Society of Biblical Literature [SBL] and the American Academy of Religion [AAR].” I went on to recognize a smaller, but no less significant segment of my audience, by

I should like to acknowledge the assistance of Professor Ron Cameron, Wesleyan University, in preparing this address for print.

I have given the names of the various canonical texts as they appear in print in works intended for the ‘common reader,’ and in general lexica, unless badly dated: thus Qur’an not Koran, but also not Qur’ān or Qur’ān. That is to say, I have omitted all diacritical and other specialist markings (most frequently, Rīg Veda not R̥g Veda). As with Bible, the titles of these books or collections are capitalized but not italicized. In the case of Chinese titles, I follow the now dominant Pinyin system of romanization, officially adopted by the government of the People’s Republic of China (1979) and followed by most contemporary Sinologists, rather than the older, more familiar Wade-Giles system, thus: the Daodejing of Laozi, not the Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu; when citing Sinological titles in the notes, I have reproduced whichever system they follow. In the case of Tibetan titles, the common English form of a collection, when used by the cited author, is given along with the preferred Anglo-American romanization in brackets at its first occurrence: Kanjur [Bka’-gyur]; I use the latter in my own formulations, rather than the preferred European, bKa’gyur. When citing or quoting other scholars, I follow whatever forms they employ; in a few nineteenth-century instances, I have added a parenthetical clarification when the usage is now obsolete (e.g., “Zend [Avestan]”).

¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Bible and Religion,” *Bulletin: Council of Societies for the Study of Religion* 29 (2000): 87–93; repr. in idem, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 197–214.

reminding those present that “in the past decade, the North American Association for the Study of Religion [NAASR],” an organization that regularly met concurrently with the SBL/AAR, had “devoted four full sessions” at its annual meetings “to theoretical questions” in the study of religion “raised by New Testament research.” These sorts of affinal relations, I suggested, constitute “a massive syncretism, uncommon outside of North America, which holds out hope for the development of different practices, and for experiments in reconceptualizations of both religious and biblical studies.” Rehearsing these remarks before you, nine years later, gives rise to no little sense of irony. (A prophet, I clearly am not!) Since then we have experienced our own version of the Millerite ‘Great Disappointment,’ a rupture more recently eased, although surely not healed, by signs and portents of a ‘New’ [post-2011] ‘Dispensation.’

Indeed, had we met together with the AAR in Chicago this year, I would have begun by referring not to one of my own past appearances before this Society but rather to the 1936 publication, in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, of a brief article, “The Interpretation of Sacred Books,” by the intellectual founder of the History of Religions field at the University of Chicago, Joachim Wach, in order to stress the deep interrelations of the two enterprises, the study of religion and biblical studies.²

It is, no doubt, a reflection of our recent ‘time of troubles’ that I find it, now, necessary to state at the outset that nothing in that lecture—or in this one, for that matter—was (or is) intended to imply that the sorts of biblical scholarship represented by the SBL were alien to the sorts of study of religion represented by the AAR. Taken together, the separate and shared scholarly interests of both associations reflect and inform elements of our ‘normal science’ of religion.

This is no new synergy. To pick only one strand out of a complex weave of intellectual, academic histories: in pre-Ugarit days, Arabic was the chief cognate language of Biblical Hebrew and therefore was a competence of many OT scholars. Towering figures such as Julius Wellhausen and Johannes Pedersen used their skills in comparative Semitic philology to make important contributions *both* to biblical studies *and* to the study of Islam, thereby becoming immediately involved in the wider Continental discussions and debates characteristic of the formative period of Comparative Religions as an academic field. By way of an aside, I would call attention, as well, to Pedersen’s remarkable 1914 comparisons of the Book of Mormon to the Qur’an, a project that remains the focus of a series of learned conferences sponsored by Brigham Young University. Other scholars—William Robertson Smith is, perhaps, the most familiar example—used the same philological learning to write classic theoretical works that are still influential on contemporary students of religion.

While other European scholars readily come to mind, the same pattern was equally characteristic of North America. Here, the most influential example

² Joachim Wach, “The Interpretation of Sacred Books,” *JBL* 55 (1936): 59–63.

remains Morris Jastrow, Jr., son of a prominent rabbi and talmudic scholar, Morris Jastrow (Sr.), himself an early member of the SBL, joining in 1886. As was characteristic of the time, Morris Jastrow, Jr., went to Germany for his graduate studies in comparative Semitic philology, receiving his doctorate in 1884 from the University of Leipzig with a dissertation on the Arabic text of a treatise on Hebrew verbal forms by the tenth-century Cordoban Jewish grammarian Judah ben David Hayyuj. After printing his inaugural dissertation, Jastrow edited Hayyuj's text both in its original Arabic and in its later Hebrew translation, providing English translations of both. Influenced by the emergent, rapidly growing field of Akkadian studies, Jastrow shifted his area of research to Babylonian and Assyrian materials, which led to his career-long position as professor of Semitics and of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania, editing cuneiform texts; authoring major handbooks on the religions of Babylonia and Assyria; writing technical treatments of particular phenomena such as liver omens; producing comparative studies of Babylonian and Israelitic traditions; as well as editing the Bible section of the classic 1916 *Jewish Encyclopedia* and writing commentaries on Job, Qoheleth, and Song of Songs. His contributions to these areas of specialized research were equaled, if not surpassed, by those to the general field of the study of religion—a discipline, in North America, of which he was a founding figure. (Not at all accidentally, in my judgment, his chief rival, in this respect, would be George Foot Moore, the first to hold a North American chair in the history of religions [Harvard, 1891]. While best known for his work on rabbinic Judaism, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* [3 vols.; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1927–30], he also authored the widely used text *History of Religions* [2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913–18] and *The Birth and Growth of Religion* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923]. Among many other offices, Moore was the ninth president of the SBL).

In 1863, Morris Jastrow, Jr., wrote the first important survey of comparative religion programs in North American colleges, universities, and seminaries (his preferred term was 'the historical study of religions'); in 1891, he organized the distinguished, and still continuing, American Lectures in the History of Religions (administered, since 1995, by the AAR); he founded and edited an early learned series, *Handbooks on the History of Religions* (1895–1914); and, of greatest importance, he published, in 1901, what is widely recognized as the first North American comprehensive work on the general study of religion, simply titled *The Study of Religion*. This book surveyed the history, theories, and methods of the emergent Euro-American academic discipline, along with its allied fields, and provided a census of programs in the study of religion in North American institutions of higher learning and museums. In 1981, Jastrow's *The Study of Religion* was reprinted as the inaugural volume in the AAR's series "Classics in Religious Studies." Morris Jastrow, Jr., joined the SBL in 1891 and became its twenty-sixth pres-

ident in 1916, having just completed a term as president of the American Oriental Society.³

The question of the recognition of biblical studies, as both a past ancestor of and a present partner within, religious studies, is *not* an issue that has its primary locus in scholarly discourse, methodological disputation, or the history of scholarship—rather it has been, to a considerable degree, an artifact of popular speech, generated by and reflected in linguistic ambiguities within common, lexical usage in Anglo-American speech. Thus, ‘Bible class,’ ‘Bible reading,’ ‘Bible study’ may signal either a private or ecclesiastical devotional practice or a public academic pur-

³ See the bibliography of Wellhausen’s publications by Alfred Rahlfs, “Verzeichnis der Schriften Julius Wellhausens” in the Festschrift edited by Karl Marti, *Studien zur semitischen Philologie und Religionsgeschichte Julius Wellhausen zum sechzigsten Geburtstag am 17. Mai 1914 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern* (BZAW 27; Giessen, Töpelmann, 1914), 351–68.

See Johannes P. E. Pedersen, review of Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen* (Halle, 1912), *Der Islam* 5 (1914): 110–15. W. D. Davies remains a rare example of a prominent biblical scholar venturing an interpretation of the Latter-day Saints’ canonical texts; see Davies, “Reflections on the Mormon Canon,” *HTR* 79 (1986): 44–66. I have often referred graduate students in the History of Religions at the University of Chicago to Pedersen’s massive work, in its English translation, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (2 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926–40; repr., University of South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 28; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), as being one of the better examples I know of that elusive term, a ‘phenomenological’ study of religious data. Pedersen was an important contributor to the classic *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (ed. M. T. Housma et al.; 1st ed., Leiden: Brill, 1913–36), including his still unsurpassed synthesis “masdjid,” in vol. 3 (1930): 316–80. See among Pedersen’s other Islamist publications his comparative study *Der Eid bei den Semiten in seinem Verhältnis zu verwandten Erscheinungen sowie die Stellung des Eides im Islam* (Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients 8; Strassburg: Trübner, 1914).

See the bibliography of the writings of Smith in John S. Black and George Chrystal, *The Life of William Robertson Smith* (London: Black, 1912), 617–28.

Another Hebrew Bible scholar who was an Arabist and a key figure in the development of European comparative religion was Abraham Kuenen; see my discussion in “Bible and Religion” (*Relating Religion*, 203–4; see n. 1).

See the bibliography of Jastrow by Albert T. Clay and James M. Montgomery, *A Bibliography of Morris Jastrow, Jr., 1885–1910* (Philadelphia: private printing, 1910); updated in the collective “In Memoriam: Morris Jastrow, Jr.,” *JAOS* 41 (1921): 322–44. For Jastrow’s role in the formation of American academic studies in religion, see William A. Clebsch, “Introduction” to the AAR Classics reprint of Jastrow’s *Study of Religion* (Classics in the Study of Religion 1; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 1–14; see also Harold S. Wechsler, “Pulpit or Professoriate: The Case of Morris Jastrow, Jr.,” *American Jewish History* 74 (1985): 338–55; and Robert S. Shepard, *God’s People in the Ivory Tower: Religion in the Early University* (New York: Carlson, 1991), 33–39.

For Moore’s publications, see Morton Smith, “The Work of George Foot Moore,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 15 (1967): 169–79.

The information on Cornelius Tiele (see p. 12 below), Jastrow, and Moore’s relations to SBL is from Ernest W. Saunders, *Searching the Scriptures: A History of the Society of Biblical Literature, 1880–1989* (SBLCP; SBLBSNA 8; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

suit (more commonly, the former); a 'Bible society' is usually an organization for the printing and dissemination of Bibles as part of a missions program; positive sectarian terms, such as 'Bible Christian' in the Wesleyan tradition, join with pejorative vernacular ones such as 'biblically,' 'biblicality,' 'biblicism,' 'biblicist,' 'biblist' that signal an uncritical acceptance of biblical authority, to continue the confusion. It is important, here, to recall that academic specialized usage is often designed to correct or replace common lexical usage, nowhere more so than in the field of the study of religion, with its continual revisionist efforts ranging from the word 'religion' itself, to central terms such as 'myth' and 'ritual.'

As I have come to know the practices of the SBL over the past forty-five years I've been a member, for this Society, biblical studies are *not* 'biblist' studies, in striking contrast, for example, to the 'biblicism' of the National Association of Biblical Instructors, the ancestor of the AAR (a fact that may provide a partial explanation for the AAR's recent suspicions). At the same time, I would insist with equal vigor that phenomena such as devotional practices of Bible study have a proper place within histories of biblical interpretation as well as in ethnographies of practices within Jewish and Christian religious communities—topics of appropriate study for both the SBL and the AAR.

This evening, I shall take a different tack than nine years ago, signaled by the reversal of the terms in my title. I want to focus on what might be termed *matters of 'style,'* an apparent set of differences within our common enterprise that has led some students of religion largely to ignore biblical studies.

I know of no principled dissent from the proposition that biblical studies are religious studies by virtue of their subject matter, a focus on an authoritative collection of texts that elicit and determine both beliefs and actions that are properly characterized as 'religious,' however that controverted term be understood. Both the study of religion (or, religions) and the study of biblical literatures, taken as wholes, exhibit a similar fundamental ambivalence toward their subject matters that is typical of the human sciences in general—to employ a distinction first developed within the Freudian tradition, a tension between "experience-near" and "experience-distant" approaches and goals.⁴ Both academic endeavors profit from

⁴ I prefer this distinction to the more common, somewhat parallel dualities insider/outsider, emic/etic, and so forth. On these latter terms, see the important anthology edited by Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (Controversies in the Study of Religion; London/New York: Cassell, 1999). The distinction 'experience-near'/'experience-distant' was developed by the psychoanalytic theorist Heinz Kohut (see, e.g., his "The Future of Psychoanalysis," *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 3 [1975]: 325–40; repr. in *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut, 1950–1978* [ed. Paul H. Ornstein; New York: International Universities Press, 1978], esp. 2:670). Clifford Geertz ("From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 28 [1974]; repr. in idem, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* [New York: Basic Books, 1983], 57) famously highlighted Kohut's distinction and translated it into

a perceived need for, and a widespread appropriation of, extraterritorial theories and methods from the wider human sciences. As a complement to this latter process, there has been a reciprocal exchange of categories and, at times, of roles between religious and biblical studies—on occasion with insufficient reflection on the intellectual costs and implications of such transfers. As an example of the latter, the analogical use of the term ‘bible’ to denote scriptures (at times, even sacred oral traditions) of other religions, as in the often-reprinted *The Bible of the World* or *The World Bible*—where the singular is even more inappropriate than when it is applied to this Society’s primary object of study. With more recognition of plurality, general introductions to the religions of the world are frequently taught to college students under titles such as “Introduction to Sacred Texts” or “Scriptures,” often by either biblical or religious studies faculty, generating a growing number of textbooks and anthologies.⁵ In a parallel movement, biblical scholars have taken up structural categories initially formulated within generic studies of religion, such as sacred space or place, testing, applying, modifying, and, thereby, enriching them in relation to their particular data.

In service of this agendum, I propose, this evening, first, to *reinsert* biblical and other canonical scriptures into the general history of the study of religion. Then I shall make a beginning at a *redescription* of biblical studies with the aim of reduc-

anthropological terms. See further the subtle discussion of Geertz’s usage in relation to emic/etic by George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 30–31 and 180–81 n. 6. They usefully revise the second term as “experience-far.”

⁵ Robert Oleson Ballou, ed., *The Bible of the World* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1940, frequently reprinted); idem, ed., *The Pocket World Bible* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948, frequently reprinted); Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *The Bible of Mankind* (New York: Universal Press, 1939). For ‘bible’ as a generic term divorced from Jewish and Christian scriptures, see, among others, G. M. Ram, *The Bible of Hinduism* (Bombay: Allied India-South Asian Books, 1985); cf., as a parallel formulation, R. E. Sanjana, *The Parsi Book of Books: The Zend Avesta* (Bombay: privately published, 1924); for the stunningly inappropriate use of ‘bible’ for oral texts (particularly in the case of African traditions), see, among others, Prince Birinda de Boudieguy, *La Bible secrète des noirs* (Paris: Omnium Littéraire, 1952); Dika Akwa, *La Bible de la sagesse Bantoue: Choix d’aphorismes, divinettes et mots d’esprits de Cameroon et du Gabon* (New York: Kraus Reprints, 1955); and, for ‘scripture(s),’ Christian Gaba, *Scriptures of an African People: Ritual Utterances of the Anlo* (New York: NOK, 1973).

Perhaps the most sophisticated anthology designed for use in introductory college courses remains that edited by Ninian Smart and Richard D. Hecht, *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); the most widely used textbook, Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

I should note that such ‘scriptural’ introductory courses are most often located in Roman Catholic colleges. A recent AAR survey reports a “steep decline” in the number of such courses offered, a 27.3 percent decline between 1999–2000 and 2004–2005; see David V. Brewington, “AAR Undergraduate Departments Survey, Comparative Analysis of Wave I and Wave II,” *Religious Studies News* 23, no. 3 (May 2008): 14–15.

ing the tensions as to style by emphasizing that more attention needs be paid to matters of *comparison* as well as to what Jonathan Boyarin usefully terms the “*ethnography* of reading.”⁶ This latter suggests that between the characteristic preoccupation of biblical scholars with an archaeology of origins and formations and the already mentioned ethnography of contemporary usage of sacred texts in var-

⁶ Jonathan Boyarin, ed., *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); though scarcely ethnographic in any sense, there is much of interest as to reading, text, and commentary in Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Taking ethnography in its more traditional sense in relation to the reading of biblical texts, I call attention to the highly influential work by the anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff, most especially, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (2 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, 1997). The Comaroffs’ focus, among other topics, is on South African native strategic readings of the Bible in a rich theoretical framework that has inspired a number of parallel investigations by other scholars. With less interest in the political dimension, there has been a recent spate of publications by younger scholars on local Bible readers in a variety of settings. For an outstanding example, see the works by Eva Keller, including, “Towards Complete Clarity: Bible Study among Seventh-Day Adventists in Madagascar,” *Ethnos* 69 (2004): 89–112; eadem, *The Road to Clarity: Seventh-Day Adventism in Madagascar* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); eadem, “Scripture Study as Normal Science: Seventh-Day Adventist Practice on the East Coast of Madagascar,” in *The Anthropology of Christianity* (ed. Fenella Cannell; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 273–94.

The anthropologist James Fernandez has long analyzed sermons from various African ‘revivalistic’/‘reformatory’ movements, especially the Fang Bwiti movement (Gabon) and The Church of God in Christ (Durham, South Africa); see his general typology of such movements, “African Religious Movements: Types and Dynamics,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 2 (1964): 531–49. His model rhetorical analyses of these sermons include idem, “Revitalized Words from the Parrot’s Egg, and the Bull Who Crashes in the Kraal: African Cult Sermons,” in *Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Association: Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts* (ed. June Helm; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), 45–63; idem, “Unbelievably Subtle Words: Representation and Integration in the Sermons of an African Reformatory Cult,” *HR* 6 (1966): 53–64; idem, “Edification by Puzzlement,” in *Explorations in African Systems of Thought* (ed. Ivan Karp and Edward Bruner; Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 44–59; repr. in idem, *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 172–87; and his culminating work as an Africanist, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), esp. 494–564.

Within biblical studies, there have been treatments of Bible reading in early Christianity, ranging from Adolf von Harnack (*Über den privaten Gebrauch der Heiligen Schriften in der alten Kirche* [Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Neue Testament 5; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1912]; idem, *Bible Reading in the Early Church: New Testament Studies* 5 [trans. J. H. Wilkinson; Crown Theological Library 36; London: Williams & Norgate, 1901]) and Ernst von Dobschütz (“Bible in the Church,” *ERE* 2:601–15) to Harry Y. Gamble (*Books and Readers in the Early Church* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995]), which mine textual sources for references to practice. While these remain important works, they are not intended to be “history in the ethnographic vein” (Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* [New York: Basic Books, 1984], 3).

ious religious contexts centered on the Bible, an endeavor becoming prominent in religious and anthropological scholarship while still scanted in biblical studies, there lies the middle-range expanse of *applications* and *traditions* in which the majority of students of religion comfortably dwell and which forms the focus of much of their research and teaching. For many biblical scholars, perhaps owing in part to the field's inheritance of early Reformation polemics, this middle range remains a zone of discomfort, typically assigning its study to allied fields of institutional and intellectual history, such as church history or historical theology. For myself, one of the more exciting recent developments, within the space of our annual meetings, has been the expansion of sessions that explore aspects of this middle range, bearing titles such as "Rethinking the Concept and Categories of 'Bible' in Antiquity," "History of Interpretation," along with particular foci, African, African American, Asian, Asian American, Latino/Latina and Latin American "Hermeneutics," the "Bible in Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Traditions," as well as sessions on the "Bible and Visual Art," the "Use, Influence, and Impact of the Bible," and "The Bible and Popular American Culture." The implications of studying such middle-range categories have been explored, quite differently, in our last two presidential addresses. The area has been, further, strongly marked by the nomination of Vincent Wimbush as our next vice-president. In one sense, I intend my remarks, tonight, to be a paracommentary on Robert Kraft's 2006 presidential address, especially the adverbs that dominate his subtitle: "Beside, Before, and Beyond Biblical Studies."⁷

I

Allow me to begin the body of my address with a snapshot, intended to record an originary moment in the modern enterprise of the study of religion. The German scholar Friedrich Max Müller, a resident of England for the bulk of his productive life, is one of three figures often labeled with the Herodotean-style epithet 'Father of the Study of Religion,' along with the Dutch scholar Cornelius P. Tiele, who, in addition to biblical languages, read Akkadian, Egyptian, and Avestan, and would be my choice for the accolade, if such a notion of paternity is even plausible. (He might well be your choice too, inasmuch as he was elected an honorary member of the SBL in 1892).⁸ Müller's priority was acknowledged in 1887 by the third

⁷ Robert A. Kraft, "Para-mania: Beside, Before, and Beyond Biblical Studies," *JBL* 126 (2007): 5–27.

⁸ Tiele's degree, after biblical and theological studies at the University of Amsterdam and the Remonstrant Seminary, Amsterdam, was conferred on the basis of his dissertation, "Het Evangelie van Joannes beschouwd als bron voor het leven van Jezus" (1855). He was self-taught in the ancient nonbiblical languages noted above. With respect to his interests as reflected in the latter, see especially his 1877 inaugural address on assuming the chair of History of Religions, Philosophy of Religions in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Leiden, "De vrucht der Assyri-

figure on whom the title is occasionally pressed, Pierre D. Chantepie de la Saussaye.⁹ Müller himself persisted in naming as “the first who ventured on a comparative study of the religions of the world,” the sixteenth-century, third Timurid, Mughal emperor of northern India, Akbar, a figure best known to the English speaking world through Tennyson’s poem, “Akbar’s Dream.”¹⁰

In the foreground of this evening’s snapshot stands Müller’s pioneering *Introduction to the Science of Religion*, initially delivered as four lectures to a lay audience at the Royal Institution in February and March 1870, particularly his untitled second lecture of February 26th. Consonant with his audience, Müller’s addresses were first printed serially in the popular journal *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, before being collected together (with supplements) and published in book form in 1873.¹¹

ologie voor de vergelijkende geschiedenis der godsdiensten” (non vidi), published in a German translation by K. F. [i.e., Carl Friederici], *Die Assyriologie und ihre Ergebnisse für die vergleichende Religionsgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1877). Tiele’s claim to ‘paternity’ largely rests on his 1896 and 1898 Gifford Lectures, *Elements of the Science of Religion*, part 1, *Morphological*; part 2, *Ontological* (2 vols.; Edinburgh/London: Blackwood & Sons; New York: Scribner’s, 1897, 1899). Given the focus, in this essay, on F. Max Müller’s lectures on the science of religion (see n. 10 below), see Tiele’s careful and critical review of them in idem, “Een problem der godsdienstwetenschap,” *De Gids* 35 (1871): 98–128. I have not seen the revised and enlarged German version in idem, *Max Müller und Fritz Schultze über ein Problem der Religionswissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1871).

On comparing Müller and Tiele, I accept the reasoned judgment of that pioneering American student of religion Morris Jastrow, Jr., *The Study of Religion* (Contemporary Science Series; London: Scott, 1901; New York: Scribner’s, 1902; repr., Classics in Religious Studies; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 47–48: “While Max Müller betrayed in all that he wrote the scholar who views religious thought from the point of view of the student of language, Tiele’s frame of mind is essentially that of the philosopher. Max Müller and Tiele thus complement each other.” Jastrow’s book was dedicated to Tiele.

⁹ Pierre D. Chantepie de la Saussaye, ed., *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (2 vols.; Sammlung Theologischer Lehrbücher; Freiburg i. Br: Mohr Siebeck, 1887, 1889); I cite the abridged English translation by Beatrice S. Colyer-Fergusson (Max Müller’s daughter), *Manual of the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), 6: “Nobody has a greater claim to be called the founder of that science [of religion] than F. Max Müller. . . .”

¹⁰ Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion: Four Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution; With Two Essays, On False Analogies and The Philosophy of Mythology* (London: Longmans, Green, 1873), 68. In an “Appendix” to the first lecture (pp. 68–100), Müller offers documentary support for his claim as to Akbar’s priority.

Unlike other works cited in these notes, Müller’s *Introduction* remains a ‘canonical text’ for students of religion. For that reason I cite ‘chapter and verse’ in parentheses in the body of the text.

Although we read him for somewhat different reasons, Tomoko Masuzawa has written an exceedingly important study of Müller’s *Introduction*; see Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. 206–44; see also her earlier survey in eadem, “Our Master’s Voice: F. Max Müller After a Hundred Years,” *MTSR* 15 (2003): 305–28.

¹¹ See preceding note.

Müller's exceptional confidence in the enterprise of what he terms, here, the 'science of religion' (pp. 34–35; his usual, preferred term was 'comparative theology' [pp. 23, 39, 219], more occasionally, 'the comparative study of religions' [pp. 11, 33])¹² grew out of the successes of comparative philology, the topic of his previous series of lectures to the Royal Institution on the science of language.¹³ Müller's chief intellectual project was the transfer of the methods of the one field, comparative philology, into those of the other, the science of religion, most especially, genealogical classification as the legitimation for comparison. Such genealogical comparisons (that is to say, homologies) were the foundation of the nineteenth-century discernment of the Indo-European language family and were widely considered, through the mid-twentieth century, to be a model of scientific method.

Beginning with Müller's second lecture, and continuing for the remainder of his work, *the comparative study of canonical scriptures is privileged as the first concern of the nascent science of religion*.

Müller's initial strategic move is the introduction of a new taxon to the study of religion, a subset of the category "book-religions," which, itself, would appear to be an extension, for comparative purposes, of the Islamic category, 'people(s) of the book.' Müller's coinage, "religions of canonical books" (p. 102), is more limited and suffers from Müller's failure to provide, here, a proper definition of 'canon.'¹⁴

It may, at first hearing, seem unsurprising that a comparative philologist

¹² See Müller's most explicit discussion of nomenclature in his contribution "Principles of the Science of Religion, or Comparative Theology," in *Universal Religion: A Course of Lessons, Historical and Scientific on the Various Faiths of the World* (ed. Edmund Buckley; Chicago: University Association, 1897), 17–29, esp. 21n. Müller's argument here is based on common usage. "The name of comparative religion should be avoided. We do not speak of comparative language but of comparative philology. No one would use comparative bones in the sense of comparative anatomy. If theology is the science of religion, comparative theology is the natural name for a comparative study of religions. If other names were wanted, [comparative] hierology . . . or pistology would answer our purpose." Compare the survey of nomenclature in Louis H. Jordan, *Comparative Religion: Its Genesis and Growth* (New York: Scribner's, 1905; repr., Classics in Religious Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 24–28.

For some, today as in the past, 'comparative religion' suggests, at one extreme, a syncretism and at the other, the making of invidious comparisons. For a striking polemic asserting the former, see the article by the biblical scholar, Owen Charles Waterhouse, "A Protest against that Chaotic Monstrosity 'Comparative Religion,'" *ExpTim* 23 (1913): 36–38. Waterhouse, when he accepts in place of the term 'comparative religion' the term 'comparative study of religion,' echoes an aspect of Müller's critique.

¹³ F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language, Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May, and June, 1861* (London: Longmans, Green, 1861). In subsequent editions, a subtitle is added, "First Series," as Müller delivered a second series of lectures on the science of language at the Royal Institution in 1864.

¹⁴ The history and development of the term 'book religion' has been sketched by Bernhard Lang, "Buch-religion," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (ed. Hubert Cancik et al.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988–), 2 (1990), 143–65.

whose life's work was the production of the first critical edition of the Rig Veda (1849–74, in six volumes), an enterprise that transformed a previously oral text “for the first time into a book, both in fact and theory,”¹⁵ should focus on religion's linguistic artifacts, on written texts. What distinguishes Müller's inquiries from those of his contemporaries, and remains exemplary for our discussion, is that, for the purpose of disciplined comparative studies, he added the qualification that the sacred books must be collected into a “sacred canon.” In that imperial style of language we have learned, over time, to find exceedingly discomfiting, Müller distinguishes between the “vulgar and nondescript crowd of bookless or illiterate religions,” and the “aristocracy of real book-religions,” before exclaiming over his third category: “how few are the religions which possess a sacred canon” (pp. 102–3). Deploying the then commonplace linguistic dualism of Aryan (i.e., Indo-European) and Semitic, Müller goes on to identify one ancestral canon for each religio-linguistic family, playing the same cognitive originary role as proto-Indo-European and proto-Semitic roots in comparative philological researches, with the advantage that the respective canonical ancestral books, the Rig Veda and the Hebrew Bible, are extant entities (although surely not now in their initial forms), while the linguistic roots remain hypothetical, although no less significant, scholarly reconstructions.

In Müller's genealogical classification, within the Indo-European family, the Iranian Avesta stands as an independent member; the Buddhist Tipitaka as a dependent member, formed in reaction to and rejection of the older Indic religion. Within the Semitic family, the two additional members, the NT and the Qur'an, stand in dependent relation to the Hebrew Bible analogous to that already described for the Buddhist. At a second level of comparison, the Tipitaka and the NT are comparable in that both relatively rapidly transferred their respective religious tra-

¹⁵ F. Max Müller, *Rig-Veda-Sanhita: The Sacred Hymns of the Brahmans, Together with the Commentary of Sayana* (6 vols.; London: Allen, 1849–74; 2nd ed., 4 vols.; London: Oxford University Press, 1890–92; repr., Varanasi: Chowkhambha Sanskrit Office, 1966). I have taken the descriptive quotation from Wilfred C. Smith, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 139. Smith and other scholars working on the influence of Müller's edition in India and on Hindu tradition note that his publication “in large measure” is responsible for “the great significance ascribed to the Rg Veda in modern India” (Thomas E. Coburn, “Scripture in India: Towards a Typology of the Word in Hindu Life,” *JAAR* 52 [1984]: 435–59; repr. in *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* [ed. Miriam Levering; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989], 122) and rely on the groundbreaking article by Ludo Rocher, “Max Müller and the Veda,” in *Mélanges d'Islamologie: Volume dédié à la mémoire de Armand Abel par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis* (3 vols.; ed. Pierre Salmon and A. Destrée; Leiden: Brill, 1974–78), 3:221–35; see also Ronald W. Neufeldt, *F. Max Müller and the Rg-Veda: A Study of Its Role in His Work and Thought* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1980).

The most important ethnography of memorized Veda recitation, the traditional mode of transmission prior to Müller's printed edition, remains J. Frits Staal, *Nambudiri Veda Recitation* (Disputationes Rheno-Trajectinae 5; The Hague: Mouton, 1961).

ditions to another language family: the NT, while Semitic in origin (Hebrew, Aramaic), became a document in Indo-European Greek; the Tipitaka, while originally formulated in India in Pali, flourished largely only when transferred and translated into a member of a third Asiatic linguistic family, into Chinese. Prompted by this latter, Müller adds to his dual classification of Indo-European/Semitic a third, independent Asiatic family—what we would now term the Sinitic branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family—with two important book-religions, each with a canonical collection serving as their “sacred code”: the nine Confucian classics (i.e., the Five Classics [Wujing] and the Four Books [Shishu]), and Laozi’s Daodejing. Müller concludes:

With these eight religions the library of the Sacred Books of the whole human race is complete . . . [texts] written in Sanskrit, Pali, and Zend [Avestan], in Hebrew, Greek and Arabic, lastly in Chinese. (p. 106)

As these three families of Asiatic religions of canonical books correspond to the three major Asiatic language families, Müller notes, with no little satisfaction, “we really have clear evidence of three independent settlements of religion . . . concomitantly with the three great settlements of language” (p. 155). Müller goes on to complicate usefully this discussion of original canonical “settlements” and secondary canons by introducing a tertiary level, later texts, dependent on the primary canonical books and most often, themselves, subsequently treated as canonical, for example, the three other Vedas and the Brahmanas, the enormous expansion of the Mahayana Buddhist canon, noting especially its two Tibetan forms, the Kanjur (in modern transliteration, the Bka’-gyur) and Tenjur (Bstan-gyur [pp. 108-14]).

In 1987, Carsten Colpe published a paper on textual sacralization and the filiation of canons that may be taken, in part, as a continuation and refinement of Müller’s taxonomic interests.¹⁶ Posing his questions in a quite different manner, Colpe explores the formation of canons on the basis of an already existing paradigmatic text. He focuses on two such filiations, one whose archetype was the Hebrew Scriptures; the other, the Buddhist Tipitaka (excluding, thereby, Müller’s beloved and exemplary Rig Veda). In the first family, that of the Hebrew Scriptures, Colpe lists the NT, the Mishnah and its Talmuds, the Qur’an, and the Book of Mormon; in the second family, that of the Tipitaka, he lists the Mahayana canon, the Jain canon (the Agama, ‘tradition’), the Bka’-gyur, the Bstan-gyur, and the Daozang. As an important complication, he proposes that the Sikh canon, the Adi Granth, depends, in varying degrees, on both paradigms.

¹⁶ Carsten Colpe, “Sakralisierung von Texten und Filiationen von Kanons,” in *Kanon und Zensur* (ed. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann; Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 2; Munich: Fink, 1987), 80–92. See also, from the same year, Colpe’s more general comparative article, “Heilige Schriften,” *RAC* 14 (1987), cols. 184–223.

As an aside, I would note that, following Colpe's lead, I taught for some years a year-long introductory course entitled "Bibles in Western Civilizations," with one friendly amendment—consonant, I believe, with Colpe's intent—reading and discussing as separate Bibles the Jewish scriptures (Tanak) and the Christian OT, before going on to the Mishnah, the NT, the Qur'an, and the Book of Mormon (adding other biblical texts from Joseph Smith's *The Pearl of Great Price*).

Given Müller's map of generative relationships, and its modification by Colpe, as well as its taxonomic implications (the latter, the subject of Müller's third lecture), the comparison of book-religions, Müller argued, was methodologically grounded, inasmuch as it was based on "the only scientific and truly genetic classification of religions," that which is "the same as the classification of languages" (p. 143). Even if we set this last claim aside, a biblical scholar can and ought to make *homological* comparisons *within* one or the other of Müller's or Colpe's two families, as well as *analogical* comparisons *between* the families.¹⁷ For example, one of the striking differences between the Hebrew Scriptures' canonical family, and the other family or families, is the relative economy of the library (the *bibliotheca*) of the former. One thinks, by way of contrast, of the Ming Daoist canon together with its 1607 supplement, which contains 1,487 separate texts,¹⁸ or the already noted Chinese Buddhist Canon (84,000 texts), and the distinctive Tibetan collections totaling 4,681 titles.¹⁹ A scholar interested in comparison might well ask: What are

¹⁷ For a discussion of homological and analogical comparisons within the context of biblical scholarship on the relations between and within early Christianities and religions of late antiquity, as well as the insistence on comparison requiring difference, see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion 14; London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990; Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 36–53.

¹⁸ See, now, Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang [= Dao zang tong kao]* (3 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), especially Schipper's brief introductory essay (1:1–52).

¹⁹ The estimation of the Chinese Buddhist canon as containing eighty-four thousand separate texts is already cited as a "tradition" in Müller, *Introduction*, 114 (see n. 10); it is given as fact in the brochure *English Translation Project of the Buddhist Canon in Chinese* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1985), 2. See further the comprehensive 480-page catalogue edited by Bunyin Nanjio, *A Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tipitaka . . . Compiled by Order of the Secretary of State for India* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1883). Bunyin Nanjio was a close collaborator with Müller; they co-edited two volumes of Sanskrit texts. On the processes of canon formation for the Chinese collection, see the important summary study by Jens Braarvig, "Den tidligste Systematiseringen av Mahayanabuddhismens Kanon," in *Kanon: Norsk-Dansk Symposium, Oslo 1992* (Dansk-Norsk Tidsskrift Religionshistoriske Studier 18; Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, 1992), 33–43.

For the two Tibetan collections, the Bka'-gyur and the Bstan-gyur, see Sandor Csoma de Körös, *Analyse de Kandjour, recueil de livres sacré au Tibet* (Annales du Musée Guimet 2; Paris/

the comparative advantages and disadvantages of size for interpretative endeavors? In ritual contexts, is there a 'canon within the canon'? What are the implications of a canon so large that it may not be readily possessed, in its entirety? With respect to the latter question, a recent ethnographic report on Lao religious culture finds no reason to challenge a predecessor's 1917 notice that there was no extant "complete edition" of the "Pali canonical texts in [all of] Laos."²⁰

Lyons: Musée Guimet, 1881), which contains, as well, an appendix by Léon Feer, "Abregé des matières du Tandjour."

Lewis Lancaster, along with editing *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), has authored three important general articles on Buddhist canons: idem, "Editing Buddhist Texts," in *Buddhist Thought and Asian Civilization: Essays in Honor of Herbert V. Guenther on His Sixtieth Birthday* (ed. Leslie S. Kawamura and Keith Scott; Emeryville, CA: Dharma, 1977), 141–51; idem, "Buddhist Literature: Its Canons, Scribes and Editors," in *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts* (ed. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty; Berkeley Religious Studies Series 2; Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1978), 215–29; idem, "Buddhist Literature: Canonization," *ER* 2:504–9.

²⁰ John C. Holt, "The Spirits of the Place: Buddhism and the Religious Culture of Laos," *Criterion: A Publication of the University of Chicago Divinity School* 46, no. 2 (2008): 22–32. The passage quoted reads, in part: "He [Finot] was unable to locate a complete edition of the complete Tipitaka at any one monastic library in the country. . . . [In a subsequent study Finot reports] he could not account for the presence of a complete Tipitaka throughout the entirety of the country" (ibid., 28). The scholar to whom Holt refers is Louis Finot, but Holt does not cite the source. I know only some of Finot's epigraphic work and cannot supply a further reference. Holt refers as well to a "recent work" by Steven Collins as providing further confirmation. I take it, here, that the reference is to Collins's important article "On the Very Idea of a Pali Canon," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 15 (1990): 89–126. Collins observes that the majority of Lao monastic libraries possess copies of only a fraction of the total Pali canon; that some of the canonical texts in their libraries are, in fact, 'apocryphal,' although regularly recited and used in rituals; and that an overwhelming majority of monks and laypersons have never seen a complete Pali canon and lack the means to do so.

While the specifically Christian coinage 'apocrypha/apocryphal' is widely used in Buddhist scholarship (e.g., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* [ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr.; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990]), there has been an increasing sentiment among Buddhist scholars for replacing the term with "allegedly noncanonical," recognizing both the negative connotations of the term 'apocryphal' and the fluidity of the boundaries of the Buddhist canon (see the citations and brief discussion in W. C. Smith, *What Is Scripture*, 315 n. 35), a move, to some degree, paralleled in contemporary biblical studies with the increasing use of the replacement term 'deutero-canonical.' See, among others, Morton Smith, "Terminological Boobytraps and Real Problems in Second-Temple Judaeo-Christian Studies," in *Traditions in Contact and Change: Selected Proceedings of the XIVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions* (ed. Peter Slater and Donald Wiebe; Corporation Canadienne des Sciences Religieuses Editions SR3; Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), 295–306, esp. 295–96, "'apocryphal' . . . is a term of abuse implying that the user disbelieves, or at least dislikes and wants to discredit, the document referred to. This common usage conceals the fact that there is no such thing as: 'the Bible'" (emphasis original).

For a classic treatment of one aspect of this issue within the Buddhist context, see the con-

In undertaking either homological or analogical comparisons of canons, collaborative research may be required for reasons of linguistic competence and specialized knowledge; *but the comparative enterprise itself may not be avoided*. The study of religion has been conceived from the outset as one that entails comparison, and biblical scholars ought not avoid that requirement, even if their sense of professional prerequisites confines their comparisons to Müller's and Colpe's first family. Müller, himself, calls attention, as a sort of preparation for his gospel, to the "position which Christianity from the very beginning took up with regard to Judaism, [that] serve[s] as the first lesson in comparative theology" (p. 39), along with the familiar contemporary practices of "some of our most learned divines" in employing a "limited . . . comparison of Judaism and Christianity with the religions of Greece and Rome" (pp. 40-41). In this account, academic irresponsibility would be a scholar's refusal of comparison in violation of Müller's oft-cited dictum, from the opening pages of the *Introduction*: "he who knows one [religion], knows none" (p. 16).

I should like neither Müller, nor myself, nor the assembly of students of religion to be misunderstood at this point. What Müller proposed, and I affirm, is *not* some division of labor between biblical scholars critically studying their chosen texts and making what Müller termed "limited comparisons" to antecedent and environing traditions, and students of religion undertaking more global interreligious comparisons. For Müller, the biblical scholar is a practitioner of what he termed the science of religion to the degree she sees her work as comparative. I would argue the same.

There is more. I have already had occasion to cite Müller's remark that, with his enumeration of the sacred textual traditions of the eight canonical book-religions "the library of the Sacred Books of the whole human race is complete" (p. 106); at a later point in the same lecture, he extends the collection's contents to include a "library of the sacred books of the world, with their indispensable commentaries" (p. 116). These two mentions of "library" appear to forecast what will shortly become one of the major undertakings of Müller's scholarly career, the proposal for, and the editing of, the fifty-volume series of translations into English, *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879-94), a collection that, to his deep frustration, failed to include the Old or New Testaments because of intense lobbying on behalf of Christian exceptionalism before the delegates of the University Press at Oxford,

tribution to the Instituut Kern (Leiden) celebratory volume by Etienne Lamotte, "La critique d'authenticité dans le bouddhisme," in *India Antiqua: A Volume of Oriental Studies Presented by His Friends and Pupils to Jean Philippe Vogel, C.I.E., on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of His Doctorate* (Leiden: Brill, 1947), 213-22; see also idem, "La critique d'interprétation dans le bouddhisme," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire orientales et slaves* 9 (1949): 341-61; and, further, R. M. Davidson, "An Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Buswell, 291-325.

by one of the delegates, the Reverend E. B. Pusey, Regius Professor of Hebrew, Canon of Christ Church, and one of the most influential High Church Anglican divines at the time. To Pusey's assertions of incomparability, Müller answered with the creed of a student of comparative religion: "these two, the most important Sacred Books of the East . . . could never have a better setting than in the frame formed by the other Sacred Books."²¹

In 1884, five years into the project, Müller reflected on the endeavor, offering, along the way, what he had not provided in the *Science of Religion*, some indication of what constitutes a 'sacred book.' He reports on editorial discussions:

It was suggested that those books only should be considered sacred which profess to be revealed, or to be directly communicated by the Deity to the great teachers of mankind. But it was soon found that very few, if any, of the books themselves put forth that claim. Such a claim was generally advanced and formulated by a later generation. . . . So we agreed to treat as Sacred Books all those which had been formally recognized by religious communities as constituting the highest authority in matters of religion . . . and might therefore be appealed to for deciding any disputed points of faith, morality, or ceremony.²²

Here, Müller adopts a functional, rather than a substantive, definition. It is based on comparison and proposes an extrinsic rather than an intrinsic criterion for classification. *It is the posterior usage of the book, not some anterior revelation, that marks it as sacred.*

This consequential shift raises the second issue with respect to 'style' that we may draw from this foundational work in the history of the study of religion.

²¹ F. Max Müller, *Auld Lang Syne, Second Series: My Indian Friends* (London: Longmans, Green, 1899), 85–88 (the passage quoted is from p. 87). (The third prominent member of Müller's Semitic canonical set, the Qur'an, was printed in a two-volume translation by Edward H. Parker, early on in the series *Sacred Books of the East* [vols. 6, 9; 1880]). Compare idem, *Chips from a German Workshop*, vol. 1, *Essays on the Science of Religion* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, 1873), xx: "In the Science of Religion, we can decline no comparisons, nor claim any immunity for Christianity."

²² F. Max Müller, "Forgotten Bibles" (1884), reprinted in idem, *Last Essays, Second Series: Essays on the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, 1901), 1–35; I have taken the quotation from Miriam Levering, "Introduction," in *Rethinking Scripture*, 16 n. 4 (see n. 15 above). I may add that, in accord with Müller's formulation, the editorial board of *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (ed. Jonathan Z. Smith; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), sponsored by the American Academy of Religion, chose the rubric 'authoritative books and their interpretation' in the articles on major religious traditions rather than the more common term 'canonical literature.' A similar formulation, defining 'sacred text,' is offered by Jon L. Berquist: "we may speak of the sociology of a text's use—i.e., what came *after* the text rather than what comes before it in the sacred text's own production" (review of *The Sociology of Sacred Texts*, ed. Jon Davies and Isabel Woollaston [1993], *MTSR* 7 (1995): 212–16, quotation from 214 (emphases in original)).

II

If, for Müller, the biblical scholar is a practitioner of the science of religion to the degree that she sees her work as comparative, what Müller proposes in his definition of sacred books—and I affirm—is that the object of study, in the case of sacred, canonical books, is not so much the text itself as it is its tradition, its trajectories. For Müller, you will recall, the data of a student of book-religions include not only the canonical texts, and their secondary and tertiary formations, but also what he terms the “indispensable” commentary literature these have generated. The *Nachleben*, the ‘afterlife,’ of a canonical text is as significant as the origins of the text—after all, the notion of ‘the Bible’ is, itself, a postbiblical phenomenon.

The implications of such an extension, for research and for teaching, were raised with particular force by the late Canadian student of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a specialist on Islam and an influential theorist on questions of the definition and study of religion. He was, as well, an informed scholar of what he terms, characteristically with innumerable qualifications, ‘scripture.’ His last major work, *What Is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (1993),²³ is, as its subtitle signals, a massive pioneering effort at comparison. While I differ with many of his premises and conclusions, his book remains the best demonstration I know that such a large-scale comparative undertaking is possible.

This evening, however, I want to direct your attention to an earlier, far shorter piece, Smith’s 1971 publication in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, “The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible.”²⁴ Smith begins by setting the educational context: the 1960s’ “emergence and flourishing of liberal arts departments of religion,” the “transition from the seminary to the liberal arts department as the locus of activity.” To describe the consequences of such a shift, Smith employs “the field of Bible as illustration,” challenging, in so doing, both biblical studies and its educational practices. He critiques what he perceives to be the antiquarianism of much biblical study, which focuses on the prehistory and early history of components of the Bible but rarely on its subsequent history. He imagines a course that

²³ See n. 15 above.

²⁴ Wilfred C. Smith, “The Study of Religion and the Study of the Bible,” *JAAR* 39 (1971): 131–40; repr., with minor alterations, in idem, *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* (ed. Willard G. Oxtoby; New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 41–56, which I quote above. I have written previously about this article on several occasions; see, especially, Jonathan Z. Smith, “Scriptures and Histories,” *MTSR* 4 (1992): 97–105 (a special issue devoted to “A Critical Appreciation of the Contribution of Wilfred Cantwell Smith”); idem, “Teaching the Bible in the Context of General Education,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 1 (1998): 73–78. I would note that, in some of his remarks, W. C. Smith parallels Dale B. Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), without sharing the latter’s interests or presuppositions. Martin does not cite W. C. Smith.

would begin with “some consideration of scripture as a generic phenomenon,”²⁵ where the “basic issue would be: scripture as a religious form,” before turning to the “bulk of the course,” described in his often repeated phrase, “the history of the Bible over the past 20 centuries.” For Smith, the Bible is not best taught as a set of ancient documents, nor even as a formation of the early centuries, but rather through the exploration of trajectories through the full range of its history, to read it, in his terms, “forwards” as well as “backwards.” He concludes his essay with the haunting question, Where could one find an individual “with doctoral training equipping him in this field?”

If we accept Müller’s implicit and Smith’s explicit agenda for the study of biblical literature and comparable texts as an intrinsic part of the science of religion, as biblical scholars we are called not only to comparisons between canons, comparative processes of canon formation and supplementation, but *also* to undertake comparative investigations of strategies for the interpretation of canonical collections, as well as comparative inquiries into their several ritual settings and employments.²⁶ These latter are not appendices to the former. For, as I argued in a 1978 comparative study of oral and written canons, the distinctive characteristic of canon, in contradistinction to its generic partners, the list and the catalogue, is its closure, that it is held to be complete, and that, therefore, a canon requires an interpreter, a practitioner of “exegetical ingenuity” to manipulate it in such a way that it ‘covers’ novel situations without adding new matter to the canon.²⁷

²⁵ There is a large bibliography on this topic from a comparative perspective. The first item, deservedly, is usually Johannes Leipoldt and Siegfried Morenz, *Heilige Schriften: Betrachtungen zur Religionsgeschichte der antiken Mittelmeerwelt* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1953). My general impression is that these works have been more influential for religious studies than for biblical studies, more central to Continental than to North American scholars. The generic category ‘scripture’ or ‘holy books’ is a regular component in European ‘phenomenological’ handbooks on the study of religion, for example, Geo Widengren, *Religionsphänomenologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), 546–93; Friedrich Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (ed. Christel Matthias Schröder; 2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1979), 1:266–364.

²⁶ For interreligious comparisons of interpretative strategies, see the important, although perhaps overambitious, study by John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). For intrareligious comparisons, see, most especially, Brian Stock’s instant classic, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Languages and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Laurie L. Patton’s massive *Myth as Argument: The Brhaddevata as Canonical Commentary* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 41; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996); Brannon M. Wheeler’s *Applying the Canon in Islam: The Authorization and Maintenance of Interpretive Reasoning in Hanafi Scholarship* (SUNY Series, Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religions; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); and John Makeham’s, *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects* (Harvard East Asian Monographs; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) remain exemplary.

²⁷ Jonathan Z. Smith, “Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon,” in *Approaches*

In recent years, spurred in part by new documentary recoveries—Qumran and Nag Hammadi, but also the Quranic manuscript finds in the Great Mosque of Sanaa, in Yemen (1972),²⁸ the Daoist tomb finds in southern China from Chang-

to *Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* (ed. William Scott Green; BJS 1; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 11–28; repr. in idem, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 36–52, 141–43. For a reconsideration of elements in this article and a further treatment of aspects of canon, see Jonathan Z. Smith, “Canons, Catalogues and Classics,” in *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* (ed. Arie van der Kooij and Karel van der Toorn; SHR 82; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 295–311; and idem, *Relating Religion*, 25–26, 55–56 nn. 92–95 (see n. 1 above). See further the studies of “Sacred Persistence,” by Burton Mack (“Sacred Persistence?”) and Tomoko Masuzawa (“Reader as Producer: Jonathan Z. Smith on Exegesis, Ingenuity and Elaboration”) in *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith* (ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon; London: Equinox, 2008), 296–310, 326–39, respectively.

Attention to the *Nachleben* of biblical traditions has been reinforced by the announcement of a major new reference work, *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception (EBR)* (ed. Hans-Josef Klauck, Bernard McGinn, Choon-Leong Seow, Eric Ziolkowski, et al.; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009–), vols. 1–30, as presently projected; and by a new series, announced by the University of Chicago Press, *Afterlives of the Bible*, edited by Timothy K. Beal and Tod Linafelt: “Books in the series will not simply read the Bible ‘backward’ toward its hypothetical origins but read it ‘forward’ invigorating the study of biblical literature by opening it towards issues, approaches, and literatures lying outside the current disciplinary confines of biblical scholarship” (“Announcing a New Series from The University of Chicago Press: *Afterlives of the Bible*” [Promotional Prospectus, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006]).

As ‘afterlife’ carries a spectral tone, I appreciate the paraphrastic translation of *Nachleben* by Karen Lang in *Chaos and Cosmos: On the Image in Aesthetics and Art History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 99 and 249 n. 9, as “continuing life,” the “survival . . . and potency” of classic works.

²⁸ Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, “Observations on Early Qur’an Manuscripts in San’a,” in *The Qur’an as Text* (ed. Stefan Wild; Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science 27; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 107–11; Hans Caspar Graf von Bothmer, Karl-Heinz Ohlig, and Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, “Neue Wege der Koranforschung,” *Magazin Forschung* 1 (1999): 33–46; Alfred-Louis de Prémare, *Aux Origines du Coran: Questions d’hier, approches d’aujourd’hui* (L’Islam en débats; Paris: Téraèdre, 2004), esp. 58–60. See also *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research into Its Early History* (ed. Karl-Heinz Ohlig and Gerd-Rüdiger Puin; Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2008).

Compare, as well, the earlier publications of variants in Quranic manuscripts as well as treatises listing and evaluating both textual variants (*masahif*) and variant readings (*qira’at*), largely recovered from Islamic libraries; especially Arthur Jeffery, ed., *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur’an: The Old Codices* (De Goeje Fonds 11, 11a; Leiden: Brill, 1937, 1951), text volume and index volume, which prints variants from twenty-eight named tradents, a collection of variants of unnamed tradents, and the *Kitab al-masahif* by the tenth-century Hanbali scholar Ibn Abi Dawud. See further the now-standard additional volume 3 of Theodore Nöldeke and Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorans* (vols. 1–2; Leipzig: Weicher, 1909, 1919), by Gotthelf Bergsträsser and Otto Pretzl, *Geschichte des Qorans*, vol. 3, *Die Geschichte des Korantexts* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1938; the three-volume work, with revisions of vols. 1–2, is now available in a reprint, Hildesheim:

sha (1973),²⁹ and, more recently, Guodian (1993)³⁰—there has been increased interest in questions concerning the formation, limits, and stability of the Jewish, Christian, Islamic, and Daoist canons, but rather little in the way of a renewal of comparative efforts. It still remains the case that scholars concerned with one or the other of the two chief canonical families, as delineated by Müller and Colpe, occasionally compare within their own lineage, but such discourse has rarely been extended to contemplate cross-lineage comparisons.

A striking exception is found in the writings of the tragically short-lived scholar of Jain religious tradition Kendall W. Folkert. He proposed a comparative classification of all known written canonical collections into two *ideal types*, naming them with deliberate neutrality, Canon I and Canon II traditions, with the prime variable being the texts' relationships, "the means or mode by which [the canon's authority] is carried," what he terms its "vector." Texts of the Canon I type are "carried by some other form of religious activity," most frequently ritual; texts of the Canon II variety are treated by their communities as self-authorizing—they are carried by a "vector of religious authority." In the Canon I type, Folkert focuses attention on ritual as well as on scholastic interpretative activity; it is the canon's employment, rather than its boundaries, that is definitive. Indeed, from a functional viewpoint, specific texts prove interchangeable. Texts of the Canon II type are "viewed as independently valid and powerful and, as such, as being absolutely closed and complete." As Folkert's dual classification was formulated in terms of

Olms, 1964); cf. Pretzl, "Die Wissenschaft der Koranlesung ('Ilm al-Qirā'a): Ihre literarischen Quellen und ihre Aussprachegrundlagen (Usul)," *Islamica* 6 (1933–34): 1–47, 230–46, 290–331; Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Veröffentlichungen der de Goeje-Stiftung 6; Leiden: Brill, 1920); and the recent instant classic, John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (London Oriental Series 31; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), esp. 202–7. For Wansbrough's influence on students both of Islam and of religion, see the special issue, "Islamic Origins Reconsidered: John Wansbrough and the Study of Early Islam," ed. Herbert Berg, *MTSR* 9 (1997): v–90.

For an important Muslim response to aspects of Western critical scholarship on the Qur'an, see Labib al-Sa'id, *al-Jam 'al-sawti al-awwal li-l-Qur'an al-Karim . . .* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1967), in English translation, Labib al-Said, *The Recited Koran: A History of the First Recorded Version* (trans. Bernard Weiss, M. A. Rauf, and Morroe Berger; Princeton: Darwin, 1975).

²⁹ Among accounts in the English language, see esp. Jan Yun-hua, "The Silk Manuscripts on Taoism," *Toung-Pao* 63 (1977): 65–84.

³⁰ See the conference volume *The Guodian Laozi: Proceedings of the International Conference, Dartmouth College, May 1998* (ed. Sarah Allen and Crispin Williams; Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2000); of special interest to biblical scholars is the article by Harold D. Roth, "Some Methodological Issues in the Study of the Guodian Laozi Parallels," 71–88; see also idem, "Redaction Criticism and the Early History of Taoism," *Early China* 19 (1994): 1–46; and further E. L. Shaughnessy, "The Guodian Manuscripts and Their Place in Twentieth Century Historiography on the Laozi," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 65 (2005): 417–58.

ideal types, he observes that “each form can and does occur within a single religious tradition, the two even existing simultaneously at times”—an example would be his assertion that “the Protestant Bible is a Canon II phenomenon, . . . [but] through most of Christian religious history, and even still at present, the Bible also functions . . . as a Canon I text.” This possibility of “simultaneity,” he cautions, forbids the presumption of “a causal and/or developmental relationship between Canons I and II.”³¹ John E. Cort, a scholar of South Asian religions, has usefully restated the difference between the two types in Folkert, without resorting to the latter’s term, “vectoring.” Canon I, Cort writes, “changes with time and place . . . authority flows from the accumulated tradition *into* the texts”; Canon II “is (more or less) fixed and closed, and authority is conveyed . . . *via* the texts.”³²

Folkert drew his most detailed comparisons from usages of the Jain and the Christian canons, attentive, most particularly, to providing ethnographic descriptions of the placement of the text within ritual space and the relations of ritual specialists to the texts. For example, within Christian usage, among other elements, he distinguished between those Christian groups which employ the Bible in a strict lectionary fashion (that is to say, the canon is vectored by ritual and the liturgical year), as would be characteristic for Canon I, and those Christian groups which use the Bible in a more random fashion, choosing texts for their relevance, a Canon II type of practice.

These observations parallel the sort of distinction elaborated by Miles Richardson in a 1993 work subtitled *An Anthropologist’s Account of Christian Performance in Spanish America and in the American South*.³³ Richardson compares

³¹ Kendall W. Folkert, “The ‘Canons’ of ‘Scripture,’” in *Rethinking Scripture*, ed. Levering, 170–79 (see n. 15 above). In my description of Folkert, I have incorporated elements from my previous discussion of his work in Smith, “Canons, Catalogues and Classics,” esp. 301–3 (see n. 27 above).

The Jain canon has been understood as a model of complexity in the history of scholarship. It has usually been taken as divided into two ‘rival’ canons, collected in the sixth to eighth centuries. Both Folkert and John E. Cort (“Svetambar Murtipujak: Jain Scripture in a Performative Context,” in *Texts in Contexts: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia* [ed. Jeffrey R. Timm; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], 171–94) have sharply challenged the adequacy of this conventional account in the works here cited. Cort’s formulation is the most suggestive. “The Jains themselves have multiple, often times loosely defined, canons. Which canon is operative in any given context will depend upon such factors as the precise form of ritual or other activity and the status (mendicant, lay) of the participants” (p. 186).

³² Cort, “Svetambar Murtipujak,” 175–76 (emphasis in original).

³³ Miles Richardson, *Being-in-Christ and Putting Death in Its Place: An Anthropologist’s Account of Christian Performance in Spanish America and the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993). Given Richardson’s distinction between visual and verbal, it should be noted that in Islamic studies, as well as in the generic study of religion, the Qur’an remains the model of a sacred text primarily transmitted in the oral-aural mode rather than in a written-visual mode. See the extraordinary comparative volume by William A. Graham, *Beyond*

the present-day ritual use of the Bible in two contexts, Spanish American Catholic and North American Southern Baptist. He characterizes the Spanish American Catholic as “sacramental,” with an emphasis on the “visual,” and the North American Baptist, less felicitously, given other associations of his term, as “literal” with an emphasis on the “verbal.” These rubrics, whatever their adequacy, allow him to compare and contrast, as paradigmatic examples, the (largely, pre-Vatican II) Catholic hieratic display of the large, highly decorated Gospel book to the congregation by the priest through an act of elevation (analogous to the raising of the eucharistic elements); the priest as the sole lector of the text; the congregants, by and large, lacking missals with their lectionary for the Mass, thereby being wholly dependent on the priest’s reading and subsequent homily, received in silence except for responsorial formulae, with the Baptist preacher’s holding close to his body an open Bible (which does not differ in appearance from his congregants’ copies), inviting the congregation to “read along in your Bibles with me,” the texts being woven into the preacher’s performative speech, with constant interjections from the congregation.

I have taken your time with Folkert and Richardson, not merely for their comparative and ethnographic endeavors as a necessary feature of biblical scholarship as part of the study of religion, but also to note a further issue that must be part of any redescription of biblical studies—that alongside a focus on ritual, on performance, equal to that given to myth, to sacred text, there be an equivalent concern for sacred texts as embodied material objects commensurate with interests in those texts as documents of faith and history. After all, canonization, in the case of the Bible, is inseparable from modes of production, being as much an affair of technology as theology. The perceived singularity of *the* Bible would have been impossible without the adoption of the codex form; the perceived uniformity of the Bible, impossible without the invention of print.³⁴

the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and, further, Frederick M. Denny, “Exegesis and Recitation: Their Development as Classical Forms of Qur’anic Piety,” in *Transitions and Transformations in the History of Religions: Essays in Honor of Joseph M. Kitagawa* (ed. Frank E. Reynolds and Theodore M. Ludwig; SHR 39; Leiden: Brill, 1980), 91–123; Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an* (Modern Middle East Series 1; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

³⁴ Without supplying either specific examples or supporting bibliography, the enterprise of studying sacred (canonical) texts as embodied material objects may be conceived in terms of five foci: (1) The study of the effects of modes of production should include not only technological processes but also economic factors (e.g., patronage) and entrepreneurial decisions that affect format, design, and the inclusion of supplementary matter. (2) One must consider the status of the material text as an icon, an element in what has come to be termed, by some scholars, “visible religion.” Here the text is not limited in its sacrality to its origin or referent, but is, itself, a ‘holy thing.’ (3) Closely related is the employment of the text as a ritual object. This is a different usage from (4) the lectionary use of a sacred text in a ritual context, or (5) the use of the text as a ritual handbook.

If the approaches I have emphasized this evening, the trajectories of traditions, comparisons, ethnographies, placed alongside more familiar aspects of biblical studies, appear at all imperative to you, as part of an enlarged redescription of biblical studies as religious studies, Wilfred Cantwell Smith's haunting question remains: Where would training in such endeavors lie? How would capacities in such approaches be evaluated as a part of our professional competencies? I can think of no association that I would trust more as being able to address both the plausibility of such proposals and their implications for the field with respect to both scholarship and education than this Society.³⁵

³⁵ Since delivering this presentation at the annual meeting, I received a communication from Professor James W. Watts, calling my attention to the "Iconic Book Project" he directs at Syracuse University (<http://iconicbooks.syr.edu>).